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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

The

GOSPEL



GLEANER

Volume 28 / Number One

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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

Staff Writers

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David R. Pharr	John T. Polk II
Ivie Powell	Travis Quertermous
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Ernest Underwood	Mike Underwood
Robert L. Waggoner	Sam Willcut

Associate Editor

James R. McGill

Editor

Andy Erwin

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www.gospelgleaner.com

(256) 627-3215

The Church of the Bible

Andy Erwin

The basics of New Testament Christianity need to be thoroughly engrained in New Testament Christians. We simply cannot overlook the importance of understanding the truth concerning the Lord's church. Let us be grounded in this truth, defend it, and teach it to all.

In Matthew 16:18, the word "church" is used for the first time in the New Testament. From this text we learn at least three important facts:

- Christ is the builder of the church.
- The church belongs to Christ.
- The gates of hades ("gates of death," Psalm 9:13; Job 17:16; Job 38:17) would not prevail against His establishing His church. The word *hades* can also refer to *death*. Jesus knew He was going to die (Luke 9:22). He also knew that His death would not keep Him from building His church.

What Is the Church?

The church is the *ekklesia* or "the called out" of God. Some argue against this definition, preferring to refer to the church as an "assembly." However, *ekklesia* is a compound word from *klesis* "to call" and *ek* "out of." Thus, the word literally means

"the called out." How could there be an assembly without a calling?

The church has been called out of the darkness of sin and ignorance by God's word to form the spiritual body of Christ (Colossians 1:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10; 2 Timothy 1:9-10). The gospel is the calling to which the church has responded obediently (Romans 1:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Ephesians 3:6). The gospel is the very "voice" of Christ which compels men to follow as His disciples (John 10:27; John 8:31-32).

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An Assembly

However, the church is also an assembly. It is an assembly of the called, and into which we have been called by the gospel (Hebrews 12:23). *Ekklesia* is also translated "assembly" in Acts 19:32, 39, and 41.

Christians are not called out of homes and assembled into a theater or town hall, but are called out of the darkness of sin and assembled together in the spiritual body of Christ (Ephesians 1:20-23). The church is assembled together on earth in the spiritual body of Christ and will someday forever be assembled together with Christ in heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

The church is the called out assembly that belongs to the Lord. *Kuriakos* – "belonging to the Lord" – is the Greek word from which our English word "church" is derived.

The church is the house of the Lord (1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 3:1-6; 1 Peter 2:5). The church is the "household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). To belong to the house of the Lord is to belong to "the church of the Lord" (as Acts 20:28 is worded in the ASV).

The church is the temple of God (Ephesians 2:19-20). God does not dwell in temples made with hands (Acts 17:24), but He does dwell within the temple of the body of Christ collectively (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

and every Christian's body individually (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

A Kingdom

The church is God's kingdom upon earth. "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, Therefore since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 12:22-23, 28).

It has been advanced by some that because the words "kingdom" and "church" are not synonymous that they cannot refer to the same thing.

Let me give two examples of how words with different meanings can apply to the same thing. I am a husband, a father, a brother, a brother-in-law, a nephew, a grandson, a son, a son-in-law, a preacher, a writer, and an editor. Each of these words has a very different meaning and yet they all refer to the same person.

Let's do the same with Jesus. He is King, Son, Savior, Head, Brother, Word, God, Mediator, Prophet, Physician, Priest, and Author. Each one of these words has a different meaning, but they all refer to the same Person.

Now let us look at the church. In the New Testament, the church is

called the kingdom, body, family, house, household, nation, priesthood, temple, assembly, etc. Each of these words has a very different meaning, but every one of them refers to the same group of people. Each word simply presents a different aspect of the church. The word "kingdom" describes the government of the church. It is a kingdom and Christ is her King. Words do not have to be synonyms to refer to the same thing.

The Church of Christ

It is in this possessive sense that Paul speaks of the churches of Christ (Romans 16:16); i.e. churches *belonging to* Christ.

Two predominating uses of the word "church" include:

- 1.) A universal application to the church at large (Matthew 16:18).
- 2.) A local application to a particular congregation(s) (Galatians 1:2).

Wherever and whenever the church is spoken about in the New Testament, it belonged to Christ – it was a church of Christ. The church in its entirety belongs to Christ. He said it is "My church." And, the church individually – congregationally – belongs to Christ. These are "churches of Christ."

One cannot take the New Testament and read about Luther, Calvin, or any other. He cannot take the New

Testament and read about the churches they established. He cannot take the New Testament and read about the names that they wear or the creeds they accept.

However, if one will take the New Testament and the New Testament alone, he will read about the church of Christ – and that is all he will read about! Why belong to a church that you cannot read about in the Bible, when you can belong to the church you do read about in the Bible? Go back to the Bible, and there you will find the true religion of Christianity.

Conclusion

The church is the assembly of all those who have been called out of the darkness of sin and ignorance by obeying the gospel and are thus added by God to the spiritual body of Christ (Acts 2:42, 47).

The church is now assembled on earth and will someday forever be together with Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

One can be added to this sacred assembly and spiritual kingdom today by hearing the gospel preached (Romans 10:17); believing the facts concerning Christ as revealed in the gospel (John 8:24); repenting of sin (2 Peter 3:9); and being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3), having called upon His name in a good confession, to wash away one's sins (Acts 22:16).

THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

Robert L. Waggoner

Some people at Corinth thought that the gospel message should be proclaimed with words of human wisdom. However, Paul declared that although he was commanded to preach the gospel, it was not to be "with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect." More particularly he noted that "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:17-18).

The message of the cross needs to be understood. Also needing to be understood are reasons why some people considered the message of the cross to be either foolishness or a stumbling block while others considered it to be the power and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

All four Gospel writers describe historical events related to Jesus' crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 27:32-28:20, Mark 15:21-16:20, Luke 23:26-24:53, John 19:16-21:25). However, these authors do not provide background information regarding the origin of crucifixions, how such was characterized by ancient cultures, the painful experience of being crucified, nor the processes used in crucifying people. These matters seem to have been con-

sidered unimportant to Gospel writers in conveying the message of the cross to their contemporary audiences.

The Roman Cross

Modern audiences, however, may benefit from realizing that crucifixion was used by Romans for executing non-Roman criminals and wayward slaves. Neither Roman citizens nor good people were crucified. Romans hung people on crosses hoping to intimidate them and motivate them to obey their authority.

While the Old Testament does mention hangings (Deuteronomy 21:22-23; 2 Samuel 21:4-9; Esther 7:9-10), those were by impaling dead bodies on poles. During New Testament times, live people were placed on crosses to die. Death on the cross was considered very shameful and humiliating (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 12:2).

Christ and the Cross

Many admitted that Jesus was indeed the Son of God (Matthew 8:29; 14:33; 27:40, 43; Mark 3:11; 15:39; Luke 4:41; 22:70; John 9:35-38; 10:36; 11:27; 19:7; 20:31). As such, he was considered without fault, perfect, i.e., sinless (Luke 23:4, 14; John 18:38; 19:4, 6; 2 Corinthians 5:21;

Hebrews 2:10; 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5).

On the other hand, some people reasoned that since Jesus was indeed crucified, that was in itself evidence that He was not the person that He was claimed to be. Some discredited Jesus' claim to deity because they thought that if He is God and if God is all powerful then He could have overcome the forces that crucified him.

People sought signs that would prove to them that Jesus was the Son of God (Mark 8:11-12; Luke 11:16; John 2:18; 6:30; Matthew 27:40, 42; Mark 15 29-32; 1 Corinthians 1:22). But Jesus refused, declaring that no sign would be given except the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:38-40; 16:1-4; Luke 11:29-30).

As Jonah was passive in going into the belly of the whale, so also Jesus was passive in being put into the heart of the earth. By refusing to do signs to prove His deity, Jesus was demonstrating that performance of signs was inconsistent with the message of the cross. Hence, for Jews crucifixion was a stumbling block and for Greeks, it was foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 5:11).

The Message of the Cross

Just what is the message of the cross, and why is it to be considered the wisdom and power of God? The message of the cross can be stated in

many different ways. Briefly, the message of the cross is that Christ died for our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3; see also Romans 5:6, 8; 6:6). By dying on the cross, Jesus fulfilled the angel's statement to Joseph before Jesus was born that He would "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Everyone sins (Romans 3:10, 23) and because sin separates people from God (Isaiah 59:2), people need to be reconciled to God. Reconciliation is impossible without the shedding of blood because life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11). Under the Law of Moses, blood sacrifices were from animal life. However, those sacrifices could not take away sins although they were annual reminders of sin (Hebrews 10:3-4). Therefore, "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9:28).

A message portrayed by the cross is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5:19; Ephesians 2:13-16; Colossians 1:19-20). When Christ died on the cross He not only reconciled man to God but also reconciled Jew and Gentile to each other by abolishing the Law of Moses (Ephesians 2:13-16; Colossians 2:14).

If the Law had not needed to be abolished, then Christ died in vain (Galatians 2:21). The good news of the cross is that it is the power of God

unto salvation for both Jew and Gentile (Romans 1:16).

A message indicated by the cross is that God loved us enough to send His son to be the propitiation¹ for our sins" (1 John 4:10; see also John 3:16; Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2).

Jesus' death on the cross redeemed us from our sins (1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 5:9). Therefore, we should live for him.

As Jesus loved us and denied himself on the cross for us, so we are required to love one another (John 13:34; Romans 14:15; 1 Corinthians 8:11; 1 John 3:23; 4:11-12) and deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him (Matthew 10:38; Mark 8:34; Luke 14:27).

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if one died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).



¹ To propitiate means to appease, atone, placate, or satisfy the wrath of another by making an offering. Propitiation results in reconciliation.

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LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD

John T. Polk, II

It is problematic that people will listen to the Scriptures for promises of the Holy Spirit's work, but they will refuse to listen to anything else in the Scriptures wherein the Holy Spirit explains the fulfillment of His work!

The Apostles Were Guided Into All Truth

Before He was crucified, Jesus told the apostles: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:7-13).

Exactly when, where, and how do the Holy Spirit-inspired Scriptures tell us this was done, or was this Jesus' promise to everyone? If to everyone,

then there is no further need of any written New Testament Scripture, for the Holy Spirit will directly guide all individuals "into all truth."

If the Holy Spirit intended to fulfill this indirectly, through the written Scriptures, then whatever people may think they are following, it is not the Holy Spirit teaching them, if they are not listening to the apostles' writings.

Through Their Word

Jesus prayed over the eleven apostles in Gethsemane, and said, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20).

The miracles that followed them as the New Testament was being written were "the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen" (Mark 16:20).

Jesus expected people to follow Him through the "word" given through the apostles. Incidentally, no one today would know of Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit's work, except through the inspired, written word of John! Think of the irony of that!

Many people think the Holy Spirit

became a constant revealer of God's will to each individual. If that is the case, then God is a "respector of persons," for many live in ignorance of what they must do to be saved. However, according to the written Scriptures, with the Lord, "there is no partiality" (Colossians 3:25).

Direct Operation of the Holy Spirit

If the Holy Spirit would provide on-the-job instruction, then why did He inspire Paul to write "to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ" that "now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Colossians 1:2; 3:8-10), and that they should "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16)? Was that the directly-revealed or the written "word of Christ?"

If the Holy Spirit is to influence and guide a Christian's heart directly, did He fail with Ananias? "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?'" (Acts 5:3)

Was that a victory for Satan and failure for the Holy Spirit? The

answer is "Yes," if both were directly-revealing their doctrine into Ananias' heart!

Why Do We Have the Bible?

To those misguided people who think God speaks to the individual's heart, why do we have written Scripture?

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

What was/is the Holy Spirit to provide to the believer's heart that was not provided in "all Scripture?" Did the Holy Spirit leave out essentials from the Scriptures, or in some individual's heart?

If the Scriptures are inadequate, then 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is a false claim. But if the Scriptures "thoroughly" equip a Christian for service, then there can be no truth to the claim of people who wait for the Holy Spirit to guide them directly.

How Are We Led by the Spirit?

It is a misapplication and misunderstanding of the written word of God for people to listen to the promised work of the Holy Spirit, but not to listen to any other Scriptures on

that subject.

Why had not the Holy Spirit directly spoken to the Jews? The apostle Paul's sermon showed how those Jews who crucified Jesus Christ had not listened to God's Prophets: "For those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath, have fulfilled them in condemning Him" (Acts 13:27).

"Voices" can be "read?" Yes, that's what the Holy Spirit-inspired Scriptures are for – to speak as if God were saying it.

James said, "Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21). The only "voice" of God every heart today should hear is from the written word of God!

We know from the written Scriptures, that Jesus had said: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life" (John 6:63).

Since Jesus' words are "spirit," and "life," what does the Holy Spirit need to do but to preserve those words?

Jesus said: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no

means pass away" (Luke 21:33).

The Holy Spirit leads people when they accept His inspired Bible. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27). Everyone who listens to God's Word in the Bible is being led by the Spirit of God.



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Running Life's Race

Ron Thomas

If you competed in athletics in high school, college, or at some other level, it is likely you have come to understand the importance of preparation. Preparation in sports is directly connected to being victorious in the sporting events. An athlete who does not pay attention to his training regimen will falter when the contest begins.

Paul understood this when he wrote to the Corinthians: "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown" (1 Cor. 9:24-25, NKJV).

Without preparation, even for great athletes, their ability to compete at a high level will only last for a short time, if it lasts at all. For the wise, preparation and the endurance associated with that preparation is the normal and proper approach.

Paul used the illustration to make a larger point. The Christian is to prepare himself for the long distance endurance needed to achieve the goal. The goal is the victory one has in Jesus.

Again, the Holy Spirit said: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2).

The preparation needed in running this race is essential. We must understand that to neglect the necessary training is an invitation for drifting and disaster. In our spiritual walk there is not a single soul who can drift *toward* God. However, when one neglects that which is important for his or her spiritual well-being, and does not pay attention, that person drifts *away* from God.

Lay Aside

What are some of the preparations that must be made in order to prevent us from drifting? Without a clear line to our goal, obstacles (the weight of sin) will get in the way and prevent us from knowing the direction we desire to go.

Consequently, we need to lay aside those things that prevent us from reaching the goal that is ahead. We may have a desire to get there, but the obstacles will not allow us to move forward, for the weight is too heavy.

The weight (sin) is to be laid aside (ceased, stopped). An illustration of this is brought to our attention in the words of John the Baptist. He spoke to those in the Judean wilderness, telling them to bring fruit worthy of repentance. This involves a change of mind regarding the way life should be lived (Luke 3:8).

Endurance

Second, we are to endure the opposition that comes when we choose the right way of God. This is an obstacle that does not come from within, but from those who do not like what the Christian has embraced. Satan does not want us to lay aside the weight he has so easily laid on us. He did not leave Jesus alone, and he will not leave us alone.

When Satan tempted Jesus, the adversary knew well with whom he was dealing, that is, the Son of God. If he did not shy away from attacking Him, how much less will he shy away from us?

He knows well who he is dealing with when he schemes enticements against us (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:11). Let us put off, therefore, the weight;

and let us prepare with the endurance required when Satan attacks.

Attendance

Third, and of great importance, we are to have a desire to gather with the saints. This is not for the sake of the attendance board, but for the spiritual nourishment of the saint. Think of it along these lines. If you are in a work environment for fifty hours a week, what opportunity is there for that environment to influence you in a particular direction? To ask is to answer.

The Lord, knowing this, exhorts His saints to assemble on a regular basis. Jesus does not need fifty hours to negate Satan's influence, even though some struggle to make it for one hour, not to mention even more.

For the devoted saint, the desire to be present together is because it is good to be with those of a like mind. "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Note the Holy Spirit's emphasis in these two verses. There is emphasis on considering one another. This is what love does; it looks after the interests of another (Philippians 2:4).

We see a constant state of preparation; that is, there is no neglect of

those things that are important. One's spiritual walk is not outside the spiritual environment of the Lord's church (Ephesians 1:3, 22-23). If this is so, why would anyone want to dismiss gathering together as of little to no importance?

Also, there is encouragement given to others with one's presence. And, there is a clear understanding that there is coming a day of judgment when we all will stand before the throne of the Almighty, answering for those things we have done in this body.

Conclusion

One's preparation takes significant hold on the saint's life when there is a focus on those things that are important in life. Vocation and recreation are not the most important things of life. We enjoy them, and we even note their valuable place in life, but they are not important when compared with that which is.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

When Paul wrote these words, he understood well the "terror of the Lord" (5:11). Consequently, he made it his mission to persuade men.

Thus, brethren, let us run the race the Lord has set before us with patient perseverance, keeping our eyes on Him who already ran His race and was victorious as a result of His faithful run.

God Hates Sin

Owen. D. Olbricht

Some view God as a being who is all-loving, who hates nothing and no one. This is not the God the Bible reveals. He is both good (Romans 2:4), severe (Romans 11:22), and wrathful (John 3:36; Romans 1:18, 2:8, 5:9, Ephesians 5:6, Colossians 3:6; Revelation 14:10). He does not look kindly on evil practices.

GOD HATES SIN

God hates sinful practices. He hates "every abomination" practiced in idolatrous worship (Deuteronomy 12:31). There are seven things He hates, things that are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet swift to do evil, a false witness and one who sows discord among brethren (Proverbs 6:16-19). He hates "robbery for incense" (Isaiah 61:8); sacrifice to idols (Jeremiah 44:3-4); evil in a person's heart toward his neighbor

and a false oath (Zechariah 8:17); "divorce" (Malachi 2:16); and the deeds of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6). A prophecy concerning Jesus stated, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness" (Psalm 45:7; quoted in Hebrews 1:9).

God also hates the worship of the wicked. Isaiah wrote that God hated Israel's worship because they were sinful, "Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me. I am weary of bearing them" (Isaiah 1:14, NKJV). Amos echoed the same, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not savor your sacred assemblies" (Amos 5:21).

HATE SIN, BUT LOVE SINNERS

Does God also hate sinners? The saying, "God hates sin but loves sinners" is familiar to almost everyone, but is it true? Does God hate sinners?

He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die for their sins. He loves sinners, but does He love all sinners, those who defiantly turn their backs on Him because they do not love the truth and refuse to do His will?

God must hate wicked people who will not believe the truth. He will send strong delusions to cause them to believe a lie so that they will be damned (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). If

He loved them, He would not seek their damnation.

The Lord hates evil doers. "The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity" (Psalm 5:5). "The Lord tests the righteous. But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates" (Psalm 11:5).

Solomon listed seven things "the Lord hates. . . (which) are an abomination to Him" (Proverbs 6:16). Two in the list that He hates are people who do evil: "A false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:19). "My heritage is to Me like a lion in the forest; It cries out against Me; Therefore I have hated it" (Jeremiah 12:8).

LOVE NO MORE

Will God ever cease to love those who are wicked? Some preach that after God sends evil people to hell, He will continue to love them. Is this true?

Notice what God said (Hosea 9:13) to Ephraim (used in reference to the northern tribes of Israel, Hosea 7:1). "All their wickedness is in Gilgal, for there I hated them. Because of the evil of their deeds I will drive them from My house; I will love them no more" (Hosea 9:15b). Did you catch that? God will hate them and love them no more?

People can become so rebellious to the will of God that He will cease loving them. This will be the result of defiant disobedience. In order to understand the wickedness of Israel that led God to hate them, read Hosea chapter 4-9.

The love of God is conditional. He continues to love everyone unless and until they become hardened to Him. In order to remain in God's love, people must continue to obey Jesus. "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10). If we do not continue to keep His commandments, we will not remain in His love.

CONCLUSION

Even though God loves all people, they must obey Him in order to continue in His love. He will cease to love those who defiantly rebel against Him. He will love them no more.

The lesson for us is that we must continue to have obedient hearts that are receptive to God's Word. Living obedient lives is the basis of our hope of eternal life (John 12:49-50).

TRUE or FALSE: Salvation Is by Faith Alone?

Ernest S. Underwood

The greater segment of the denominational world believes and teaches that the alien sinner comes into possession of salvation, complete with eternal security, by faith alone. A casual examination of the creed books written by men will readily affirm this statement.

It is certainly scriptural to teach that one is saved by faith, but one is without any passage or principle from Scripture that claims salvation by faith only.

Many Kinds of Faith

The Scriptures, however, speak of many kinds and/or levels of faith.

- A weak faith (Romans 4:19; 14:1).
- Dead faith (James 2:20, 24).
- Genuine faith (2 Timothy 1:5).
- Effective faith (Philemon 1:6).
- Faith that grows (2 Thessalonians 1:3, 11).
- Sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5).
- Working faith (Galatians 5:6).
- Empty and futile faith (Romans 15:14, 17).

Faith In Action

In the same Scriptures, the Holy Bible speaks of:

- Faith itself being a work (John 6:29).
- The law of faith (Romans 3:27).
- Walking by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7).
- Living by faith (Galatians 2:20; 3:11).
- Being sound in the faith (Titus 1:13).
- Faith that must be kept (2 Timothy 4:7).

The faith mentioned in this last list would be utterly useless in a "faith only" doctrine. For instance, if one subscribes to this false doctrine he has no need to walk in faith, be sound in faith, keep the faith, or live by faith. Each of these statements has verb-action, a thing which "faith only" does not require.

Questions to be Answered

Let us ask two questions, to be followed by a third one: (1) Do the Scriptures teach that an accountable person can be, and actually is, saved by faith? (2) Do these same Scriptures teach that an accountable person can be, and is, saved by faith only?

Logic and common sense tell us that the same answer cannot be given to both questions. We have limited our questions to accountable persons because the Scriptures do not teach anywhere, as some doctrines of men teach, that infants are sinners at the

time of birth – a most unscriptural and despicable doctrine.

Question number three: If the answer to question number two is "yes" does it make any difference as to the kind of faith one may possess or proclaim, and what determines this point?

If this faith is the "faith alone" variety, this would naturally rule out those already mentioned above, i.e. a faith working through love, a law of faith, since a law always has requirements which must be followed or obeyed, a thing which "faith only" cannot allow; a faith that must be obeyed; a genuine faith, because such requires the showing and practicing of it.

One might claim a sincere belief in the doctrine of faith alone, believing that sincerity alone is sufficient for salvation. "It doesn't make any difference what you believe as long as you are sincere..." This may be a doctrine that is comforting to those who believe it, but no Scripture can be produced to defend it.

In many places in the world, men bow down to trees, cows, different insects, reptiles, and other animals. At no time when this writer has witnessed these things did he ever doubt the sincerity of those practicing them. Yet, no one who in any way believes in the Bible would claim that such sincerity saved them, or even benefit-

ted them. It should be noted, however, that in the Scriptures when one sincerely believes, he obeys.

"Faith only" requires no obedience whatsoever. In reality, the only definitions of a faith only position are those given by the apostle Paul and James, the author the epistle which bears his name.

The apostle Paul stated to those in Corinth, "And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty" (1 Corinthians 15:14). He also stated, "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"

One may say that he believes that Christ rose from the dead, but if he denies or refuses to obey the commands of the risen Christ his faith is vain, futile. Is there anyone who will make a plea for salvation by an empty or futile faith?

James stated concerning a certain kind of faith, "But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? . . . You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:20, 24).

An empty faith is useless and a dead faith is . . . well, it's dead! The faith that comes by hearing the word of God and obedience to the same is the only faith that saves.

Contrariwise, any faith that comes by hearing and obeying the creeds, doctrines, and opinions of men is a faith that is futile, empty, and dead. Such is the faith that is taught and practiced by those in the denominational churches of the world.

Brethren and friends, let us have that living, active, and genuine faith of those whom the Holy Spirit listed in the eleventh chapter of the Book of Hebrews. These all had a faith that caused them to act.

According the Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Do you have this kind of faith?

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DELIVER US FROM EVIL

Bill Brandstatter

Recently we have heard and seen the efforts of ISIS to create more terror and evil in the world. Such events remind us of our need to be delivered from the evil that exists today

Evil Defined

The word "evil" has been used to describe that which is against the will of God. The word is used in Deuteronomy 30:15 when God spoke through Moses and stated: "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil..." (NKJV)

Then God states: "Choose life, that both you and your descendants may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). God wants us to choose His will to be able to live with Him.

Sometimes the word "evil" is considered to be unkind or derogatory by some. Yet, it is a biblical word. Jesus used it in the Model Prayer as He prayed, "Deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13).

Evil Depicted

Evil does exist. If it didn't Jesus wouldn't have prayed that we be delivered from it.

Evil exists in different forms. There is evil that comes from acts of nature. There is evil that exists be-

cause man commits sin and lives contrary to the will of God. There is evil that comes because we live in a world where Satan is alive and well.

Delivered from Evil

What evil do we need to be delivered from and when will that deliverance happen?

First, we need to be delivered from sin and its guilt. Sin is evil. Paul warned, "He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption." (Galatians 6:7). The Bible tells us that no one is exempt from committing sin (Romans 3:23). Since man commits sin, God sent His Son so that man could be delivered from this evil (Romans 5:8; John 3:16).

Second, we need to be delivered from the world and all the allurements and attractions which pull us away from God. John cautioned, "Love not the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). The world tries to bring Christians into its way of thinking (Romans 12:2; Colossians 2:8). We need deliverance from worldly evils.

Someday, deliverance will come. For the Christian who is faithful to God, there is the wonderful promise

of a future deliverance. John writes: "And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes: there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Great deliverance will come from all the evil and pain of this world. But, to be delivered from this world, we must follow Jesus and do what He wants us to do.

The One who prayed, "Deliver us from evil" can help to deliver us if we do what He says. The words of Christ will meet us at the Judgment (John 12:48).

I am looking forward to the time when death will be no more, and sorrow and evil will vanish. How about you?

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"God Isn't Fixing This"

Our Reply

Andy Erwin

In the wake of the San Bernardino massacre of December 2, which left 14 dead and 22 wounded, the *New York Daily News* decided to run an article with the headline "God Isn't Fixing This."

The author brashly asserts "Prayer isn't working," in reply to presidential candidates who offered their prayers for the grieving victims' families. The author of the article believes that stricter gun laws will help to stop such acts of terrorism as the San Bernardino massacre.

Not with Prayer Alone

The article should have been titled, "Prayer *alone* isn't the answer." But that would not have been sensational enough for the headline.

Had the article been titled this way, we would accept the premise. Prayer alone is not the answer to this nation's problems. A nation can reach such a sinful point that prayers will not be heard in their behalf (Jeremiah 7:16).

Prayer alone is not the answer. America needs to repent *and* pray. Perhaps then, God will "fix this." After all, God is the only One who can "fix this."

America has wearied itself in doing evil. Atheism has become the

religion of our government. Evolution is its chief doctrine. Homosexuality is embraced by our lawmakers. The White House was even lit in a rainbow to celebrate their decision – profaning the covenant God made with Noah.

Every vile and evil thing imaginable is protected by our “freedom of speech.” Our nation lacks the necessary morals to use this freedom to glorify God. Instead, it is used to profane His holy name.

Moreover, our government has sanctioned the shedding of innocent blood to the tune of 50 million abortions since Roe v. Wade in 1973.

Shall God *not* visit us for these things (Jeremiah 9:9)?

Is America Being Punished?

God allows us to reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7 ff.). And while I hesitate to speak presumptuously for God, I feel confident to say that America is being punished by its actions. We are reaping what we have sown.

We have a society that lacks natural affection toward one another. Think how differently Americans would act if we loved our neighbors as ourselves; or if we treated one another the way we desire to be treated. Imagine if we could forgive the way Christ teaches – 70x 7! The divorce rate would surely plummet, if nothing else.

God Can Fix This

We know of no problems which our heavenly Father cannot “fix.” And we know of no problems our nation cannot “fix” through God’s help.

We ask: *Do we want God to fix this?* In order for God to fix our problems, we must turn to Him. “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12).

America needs to repent “in sackcloth and ashes” just as Nineveh did at the preaching of Jonah. Repent or perish!

God is the only One who can fix this; and the quicker we realize it, the better we will be. If we want Him to deliver us from evil, we must accept His terms. Until our sin problem is addressed as a nation, no amount of civil litigation and law will do. What good are laws to a rebellious person?

We must acknowledge our sins and return to the Lord (Jeremiah 3:11-16). Such is the true course of action for any problem we face personally, in our families, in the church, or in our nation.

The Lord’s instruction to Ephesus applies to America today – “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works” (Revelation 2:5). Remember, repent, and return.

“If I Am Baptized, I Will Condemn My Family!”

Douglas Hoff

A Frequent Scenario

When teaching God’s word to lost souls, some eventually understand they are not saved. The teacher can almost see the proverbial light bulb turn on as they begin to see the truth of God’s plan of salvation. However, at this point, such discussions can often take an unpleasant turn as students realize the implications of what they now know.

Up to this point in the study, the person most likely believed he was saved. Perhaps he held this belief with great certainty. For others though, the concept of personal salvation may have been merely assumed with little or no investigation to verify it.

Usually, those with a strong conviction about their salvation come from religious families. In such cases, the students will likely have strong beliefs that family members are also saved. This is especially true for parents and also grandparents, if these persons had close relationships with them.

Even people who never gave much serious thought to their salvation generally assume their family members are also “good people” who will go to heaven one day.

Religious polls consistently show that most Americans believe they will go to heaven when this life is over. Coming to the awareness that God’s word shows them to be lost is unsettling to say the least.

A Frequent Reaction

What happens next depends on the person’s heart. Some who are not honest with themselves will engage in a desperate attempt to justify themselves. The one who is taught will often say he was already baptized for the remission of sins.

This may be true, but in the majority of cases it is not. It is usually the mind rewriting or reinterpreting a distant memory to fit the facts.

If the Bible teacher is alert to these all too common pitfalls, it is possible to get the study back on track. However, it is not easy since the mind of man is very good at avoiding unpleasant truths.

If the person being taught can be shown that he was not actually baptized in a scriptural manner or for the scriptural reason, it is possible that the person will finally admit he is lost. But, the mind is not done with its bag of tricks.

At this point, many begin to throw out objections to obeying the gospel. One that is all too familiar is this: "If I am baptized, I will condemn my family!"

Answering this Concern

The first time I heard this statement many years ago. I thought, "How could this person actually believe what he just said?"

I tried pointing out that nothing a person does can directly affect the destiny of another soul. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible plainly teaches that each soul will be judged based on his actions, not the actions of anyone else.

A classic verse to prove this is Ezekiel 18:20, which states: "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."

I also reminded the person of what Jesus told his apostles: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

In other words, the worst thing a person can do to another is kill his physical body. He cannot destroy the other person's soul. Thus, it should

be obvious that nothing one person does can directly cause another soul to be lost in hell.

I thought this would convince the person that his being baptized would NOT condemn his family. It did not. Why? Well, what I failed to appreciate was what the person REALLY meant when he stated, "If I am baptized, I will condemn my family!"

After hearing other people make the exact same statement over the next few years, I realized the person most likely means that he does not want to admit or accept that his family is lost. If he were to be scripturally baptized, while his family members had not done so, it would be a plain admission they were in fact lost.

The Example of Noah

Not long ago, I recalled that the Bible employs similar language in this regard. Consider that "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, **by which he condemned the world** and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith" (Hebrews 11:7; NKJV).

Here is a Biblical example of one man's righteous action "condemning" others. As was already pointed out, Noah's obedience did not cause others to be lost. Clearly, they were already

lost in their sins (Genesis 6:5-7).

So, in what sense did Noah's faith condemn the world? To answer this, one must understand the word translated condemn in Hebrews 11:7 literally means "to judge against" in the sense of to give judgment against, to judge worthy of punishment, or to condemn.

One person's good example points out in stark contrast the wickedness of the sinner. Listen to the words of our Savior:

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God" (John 3:19-21).

The righteous life exposes or condemns the wickedness of the sinner.

Love God Most

While it is commendable to love our family members, we must realize that our love for God must exceed our love for them (Luke 14:26). If a person refuses to obey the gospel because it would mean having to admit his family members are lost,

then he will also be lost.

Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37).

We are reminded of the rich man's concern for his five brothers who were still alive. He did not want them to go to the place of torment (Luke 16:27-31). And, if a loved one is lost and has passed from this life, he would probably also want to warn us so that we could avoid the same condemnation.

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The Answer

Frank Chesser

It is God's will for elders to oversee the worship, work, and spiritual lives of local congregations of the church. The Lord wants qualified "elders in every church" (Acts 14:23). God requires them to function as "overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Elders will "give account" to God for each soul under their oversight (Hebrews 13:17). As Moses feared and trembled at Mount Sinai (Hebrews 12:21), so ought elders in light of their awesome responsibility before God.

Leadership

The greatest single problem facing the church today is in the leadership. The pulpit is literally killing the church in many places. The answer to an insipid pulpit is a qualified eldership. Godly, truth-loving elders will demand a strong, Bible-centered pulpit. Preachers majoring in philosophy, human interest stories, and current events will either shape up, move on, or be moved on.

A devout eldership is the answer to the great void of church discipline that is literally promoting sin and dulling the spiritual sensitiveness of the church. It takes elders with the cour-

age of David to face the Goliath of sin and lead the church in withdrawing "from every brother that walketh disorderly" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

A spiritual eldership is the answer to the loss of purpose characteristic of many congregations in the church today. Family-life centers to play in, fellowship rooms to eat in, social events for the youth, and pleasure trips for the aged have supplanted God's mission to seek and save the lost. There is a time and a place for fun and fellowship, but soul-conscious elders will lead the church in "converting the sinner from the error of his way" (James 5:20).

Every congregation is but the lengthened shadow of its leaders. Speaking collectively, no congregation can exceed the summit of its leadership.

An Imperative

Elders must lead. In matters of judgment, the concept of authority inheres within the eldership, but shepherding is more living and doing than decision making.

Elders must be "examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). The real power of an elder's influence is not the whip-like sound of his authority, but the Christ-like nature of his life.

David and His Harp

Amos 6:1-6

1. David was not the inventor of mechanical instruments of music.
2. Jubal was the father of those who use the lyre and pipe. Gen. 4:21
3. In Amos' day the people were living in luxury and indifferent to their spiritual condition.
 - a.) Why bring up what David did 250 years before to illustrate a point?
 - b.) The people of Amos' day were being self-indulgent and acting to please themselves.
 - c.) We shall see that David said he did it to praise the Lord, but did the Lord ever command it or say He was pleased with it? Could it have been called an act of faith even in David's day?
4. What of the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship today?

I. Who Introduced Instruments into O.T. Worship?

- A. To David goes this honor. 1 Chron. 15:16; 16:4, 5, 7; 1 Chron. 23:5. He claimed he commanded its use. Even later they are said to be David's instruments. 2 Chron. 29:25-27; Ezra 3:10.
- B. David did so 444 years after the giving of the Law of Moses.
- C. No commandment of God has ever been thus ascribed to man!
- D. So, why did it get to stay? There is a difference between something "tolerated" and something "commanded".
 1. Kings. 1 Sam. 18:22, 7-18. Hos. 8:3, 4; 13:10, 11.
 2. Divorce for many causes. Deut. 24:1; Matt. 19:7, 8.
 3. Polygamy. 2 Sam. 11; Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31.
 4. Instruments of music. Isa. 5:11, 12; Amos 5:23; 6:5
- E. The O.T. does not serve for our authority for what we are to do today. Rom. 7:4-6; Gal. 5:24; Heb. 13:9-15.

II. What Does The N.T. Say about Instruments in Worship?

- A. Not one word! Silence. How should we treat the silence of the scriptures? Heb. 7:14.
- B. The word is complete. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 3.
- C. The use is not and cannot be a matter of faith. Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7.
- D. The N. T. does speak of music in worship. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:12; 1 Cor. 14:15.

III. Why I Am Opposed to Their Use in Christian Worship!

- A. Unscriptural. No command, no example, no inference.
- B. It is an anti-scriptural. 1 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 22:18. The apostles declared the "whole counsel" and "kept back nothing that was profitable; yet they never mentioned it. Acts 20:20, 27. They were guided into all truth, which included matters of worship, yet they never mentioned it.

- John 14:26; 16:13; Jn. 4:24. We are to follow them. Acts 2:42; Phil. 4:9.
- C. It is a divisive thing and cannot be called an expedient. It must first be lawful to be an expedient. 1 Cor. 6:12. It must edify, not just one, but all. 1 Cor. 10:23. It must not cause offense. 1 Cor. 10:28; Rom. 16:17.
 - D. If it is not in the "book" (N.T.) then it does not have the blood of Christ sanctifying it? Is it "sacred" or "profane"? Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25. If it is not "in" the covenant is it covered by the blood of Christ?
 - E. It is a relic of the Roman Catholic apostasy. Matt. 15:1-9. It stands on the same ground as infant baptism, sprinkling, bead counting; confession to a priest; burning of incense. The apostasy did not develop toward simplicity, but innovations.

IV. Modern Arguments in Their Favor.

- A. "Playing is a talent." (There would be no limit to the exercise of acquired talents then in worship to God!) Biscuit making! Texting! The list of acquired talents could go on and on!
 - B. "There is no law against it; therefore it is not a transgression." But there is a law against going beyond what is written. 1 Cor. 4:6. We do have boundaries. 2 Jn. 9.
 - C. "We will have it in heaven." (see: Rev. 14:1-4). Key verse is 1:1. It cannot signify itself and be a sign. "As" signifies volume, rhythm, and melody.
 - D. "We have it at home". (Some things are morally right, but they are religiously wrong.)
 - E. "It is authorized by the Greek word 'psallo'". Meaning twitch, twang, pluck, determined by the context as to what. Instrument is the heart. Make it a command for everyone, not just one! Still would not include its use with "all" songs. It would be mandatory for we could not "psallo" without it. Jas. 5:13. It is not proper to assign an O.T. meaning to a N.T. word. Many Greek Orthodox churches still do not use it. Major denominations at first rejected it. (Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist) In fact, by the time the NT was written, and ever since then, the word "psallo" has only meant "to sing." (see *Instrumental Music in the Worship*, M.C. Kurfees)
1. Let us not abandon our plea for a thing we cannot prove by the Bible.
 2. Let us speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.

-Mike Kiser

Elva Simons Remembered

Elizabethton, TN: Elva May Simons, age 65, of Elizabethton, TN passed into eternity on October 28, 2015.

She was a faithful member of the Stoney Creek church of Christ. She loved God, her family, and all her friends. Her good Christian influence reached many.

She is survived by her loving husband of 48 years, Wesley Simons; her daughter, Karen Blevins and her husband, Travis; her granddaughter, Brandi Turner and her husband, James; two sisters, Betty Craft and her husband, Eddy; Nancy Cook; a son-in-law, Tim Phillips; her mother-in-law, Billie McGraw; a host of friends and loved ones.

In lieu of flowers, send donations to the Elva Simons Scholarship for the training of gospel preachers, C/O Tri-Cities School of Preaching, 1162 Highway 91, Elizabethton, TN 37643.

Northwest Florida Lectures

Catonment, FL: The Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies is set to host their annual lectureship February 21-25.

The theme for this year is "Remember and Forget Not."

MSOP CELEBRATES MILESTONE

Memphis, TN: The Memphis School of Preaching is celebrating their 50th year of operation.

The school began in 1966 at the Getwell congregation in Memphis, and was known as the "Getwell School of Preaching." Roy J. Hearn served as the school's first director until he retired in 1983. B.J. Clarke now serves as the school's director.

In 1969 the school moved to the Knight-Arnold congregation, which later became Forest Hills.

In 1967 the first lectureship was conducted. It began on the last Sunday in March, and still begins on that day each year.

The theme for this year's lectureship is "Preach the Word." The series of lectures is scheduled for March 27-31. A youth day is also planned for March 26.

New Book by E. Claude Gardner

Henderson, TN: Hester Publications is set to release a new book by E. Claude Gardner titled *An Exceptional Church*. The book is a compilation of articles written by brother Gardner on this subject through the years.

First Public Response

Elgin, AL – Jackson Erwin (16) has been preaching by appointment in recent weeks for the Courtland (AL) and Elgin (AL) congregations. His lessons have been exceptional. He has been preaching the following themes: The Church; The Works of the Flesh; Modern-Day Miracles; Was Peter the First Pope; and Instrumental Music in Worship.

On Sunday evening, December 27th, a sister was restored who had been out of the church for some considerable amount of time. This is the first public response to Jackson's preaching efforts, and we are very proud of him.

Jackson is a junior at Mars Hill Bible School in Florence, AL. He is also a student at the Middle Tennessee School of Preaching during the summer terms. He plans to attend a school of preaching full-time upon graduation.

Mission Work Planned for Owen D. Olbricht

Sherwood, AR: *Gospel Gleaner* staff writer Owen Olbricht has been involved in foreign and domestic missions for many years now. He has truly devoted his life to this cause.

He has currently scheduled the upcoming mission trips:

February 11-22: Chia, Neiva, and Zapaquia, Colombia.

March 30-April 11: Chelyabinsk and Miass, Russia.

We hope to have updates throughout the year of brother Olbricht's work. Please remember him in prayer.

Churches in Need of Preachers

Blanchard, OK: We are a congregation in the Lord's church, with a desire to worship and serve using Biblical standards. We seek to do the entire will of the Father as manifested in the Scriptures and deeply respect the silence thereof. We are non-instrumental and believe in God's plan of salvation including baptism. We are looking for a pulpit minister with these same values and a desire to reach out into our community with an enthusiasm for evangelism. We are a very loving and family-oriented congregation. We are a small to medium growing congregation. At least half of our congregation is made up of young families including many young children. Our ultimate goal is to grow in spirit and truth and a potential candidate should have the same passion.

Contact Info: Beau Landry at (405) 401-9935; Chuck Beard at (405) 414-3780

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Slater-Marietta, SC: We are a 40 year old very old fashioned conservative congregation. We speak where the Bible speaks and are silent where the Bible is silent. The word of God is to be preached, not opinions. We work hard to stay as close to the Bible as possible.

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The **GOSPEL GLEANER**

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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

The

GOSPEL



GLEANER

Volume 28 / Number Two

February, 2016

For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

Staff Writers

Stephen R. Bradd	Bill Brandstatter
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Raymond Elliott	Mel Futrell
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Grady Miller	Owen D. Olbricht
David R. Pharr	John T. Polk II
Ivie Powell	Travis Quertermous
Andy Robison	Ron Thomas
Ernest Underwood	Mike Underwood
Robert L. Waggoner	Sam Willcut

Associate Editors

Bill Dillon

James R. McGill

Editor

Andy Erwin

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Correspondences, news and notes, and article considerations can be sent electronically to andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com. Gospel Gleaner Publications reserves the right of discretion in deciding which correspondences, news, notes, and articles to publish.

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Killen, AL 35645

www.gospelgleaner.com

(256) 627-3215

The Spiritual Growth of the Church

Andy Erwin

The Scriptures teach church growth as a two-fold concept. God recognizes *spiritual growth* and *numerical growth*. God desires His church to grow both spiritually and numerically.

Spiritual and Numerical Growth

These two aspects of church growth complement one another. Where there is spiritual growth, there will be numerical growth. When a congregation stops growing spiritually, it will stop growing numerically. Numerical growth is a fruit produced only by Christians who have first grown spiritually.

Moreover, a church may grow numerically for a while, but without spiritually mature people to instruct and provide examples for the new converts, the growth will be short-lived.

While spiritually immature people seek to rule or ruin, spiritually mature people will seek the will and glory of God. Spiritually immature people will promote division and every evil work, while spiritually mature people have "wisdom from above" (James 3:13-18). Satan uses spiritually immature people to counteract the efforts of the spiritually mature.

Each member of the church has been placed together to work together in the cause of Christ (Ephesians 2:21). We are the Lord's temple and dwelling place (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). As members of the Lord's body, we must be strong in Him. Our strength must come from Christ. We must learn to live in His strength rather than our weakness.

To grow stronger we must grow and work together. By working together we not only help one another to grow spiritually, but we also help the congregation to grow numerically.

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Feed from the Word

We must recognize that the body of Christ must not merely feed from anything or any doctrine, but we must feed from the word of God. As there are some foods not fitting for men to eat, there are some doctrines not fitting, or wholesome (1 Timothy 3:6), to teach and spiritually ingest.

If our diet is from spiritually unhealthy and unwholesome words, and immature opinions, how shall we fare in our spiritual health and growth? We can neither grow spiritually or numerically without feeding upon the word of God (see 1 Peter 2:1-3).

A Lesson from Hebrews

A church that does not feed from the word regularly can never grow spiritually. The writer of Hebrews recognized brethren who did not grow in their knowledge of the word as they should have and thus their spiritual growth was stunted.

“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Hebrews 5:12).

The epistle to the Hebrews was received by brethren who had wavered and grown “dull of hearing” (Hebrews 5:11). Had these brethren been growing spiritually as they

should, they would not have been found dull of hearing. Had they not been dull of hearing, they most certainly would have stood a better chance of growing spiritually.

Spiritual Immaturity

Such dullness and density is a certain indication of spiritual immaturity. In this case, the brethren needed to be taught again, not because they had been taught incorrectly previously, but because they were spiritually immature and did not continue in the teachings they had received. They had failed to take advantage of the opportunity to learn.

Interestingly enough, we do not read one line of scripture in Hebrews which mentions any ongoing numerical growth. It proved impossible for these brethren to grow numerically as long as they were numb to the truth. Seeing that they had no interest in learning, how could they have had any interest in teaching others?

A Final Thought

If one is not excited to learn, how can he be excited to teach? Truly, if we desire to see our home congregation grow numerically, we must do everything we can to see that we grow spiritually.

At the heart of our spiritual growth is the study of the Scriptures. A church that loves to study the Bible will grow spiritually and numerically.

THE END OF THE WORLD

Robert L. Waggoner

Some people think that the earth will never come to an end. They may quote the scripture that says "the earth abides forever" (Ecclesiastes 2:4) without understanding the context in which the word "forever" is used.

The Earth Abides "Forever"

In that context (Ecclesiastes 1:4-8), Solomon is observing that some things change while other things remain constant. The sun rises and sets, the wind blows from the south, then from the north, seasons change, etc., but the earth remains "forever", i.e., constant.

Although the word "forever" is generally used in the Bible in an eternal sense, it is sometimes used in a temporal sense. Several examples will illustrate that the word "forever" is sometimes used temporally.

Under the Law of Moses, a servant might choose to serve his master "forever" (Exodus 21:6). Of course, in this instance "forever" would not be in an eternal sense, but only until the end of his lifetime.

Again, after Samuel was born, Hannah told her husband that after her child was weaned, then she would take him to Eli the priest, "that he may appear before the Lord, and remain

there forever" (1 Samuel 1:22). Of course, she did not mean for eternity.

Again, people have often expressed their desire that their ruler would live forever (Nehemiah 2:3), by which they meant a long time, not throughout eternity. The expression, "O King, live forever" (Daniel 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:21) is a sentiment still commonly expressed in some places.

In many other instances, the term "forever" is often used in contemporary cultural contexts to mean lengthy, but not necessarily eternally.

The World Will End

That the world will indeed come to an end was declared by the apostle Peter. He said:

"...that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Peter 3:5-7).

Moreover, he wrote that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall

pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).

Paul also noted that "the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3).

When Will These Things Occur?

Peter had been among the apostles when they were with Jesus on the Mount of Olives a short while before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus had informed his disciples that the temple stones would be destroyed.

Then the disciples asked, "When will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3; Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7).

This question about "when will these things be" actually consisted of two parts, both of which relate to the coming of the Lord. However, the coming of the Lord can be understood in two different ways.

One has to do with the coming of the Lord in judgment during the temporal existence of this world, and the other has to do with the coming of the Lord at the end of the age.

The question the disciples asked deals with both aspects of the coming of the Lord. The first aspect related to when "the sign of your coming," would occur in a temporal sense, that is, when the stones of the temple would be removed. Jesus' answer to that question is given in Matthew 24:4-35, Mark 13:5-31, and Luke 21:8-33. That event, i.e., the removal of stones from the temple, was fulfilled with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem by the Roman army which was completed in 70 AD.

The second part of the disciples' question about "when will these things be" related to when "the end of the age" would occur.

Only the Father In Heaven Knows

Jesus' answer to this part was "of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32; see also Matthew 24:36).

The "end of the age" about which the disciples were concerned was their present age. It was the age when Jesus lived on earth and the church was established. It is referred to as the "last days" (Hebrews 1:2; Acts 2:17, quoting Joel 2:28) or "latter days" (Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1; Daniel 2:28; 10:14; Hosea 3:5). It is the age in which we are presently living. Inasmuch as "the end of the age" is the last age, and inasmuch as the last age

comes to an end, then Jesus and his disciples are talking about the end of the world.

Watch and Be Ready

Because no one knows when the last age will come to an end, Jesus admonished his disciples to "Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming" (Matthew 24:42; see also Mark 13:33).

Jesus, by telling several parables, urged his disciples to be prepared. These were the parables of the faithful and wise servant (Matthew 24:43-51), the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), and the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

Parables Given

In the parable of the faithful and wise servant, Jesus noted that for the unprepared, there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:51).

In the parable of the ten virgins, the bridegroom tells the five who are unprepared that "I do not know you," and then Jesus again admonished his disciples to "watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matthew 25:12-13).

In the parable of the talents, the one who had but one talent and did nothing with it was declared to be a

"wicked and lazy servant." As an "unprofitable servant," he was to be cast "into outer darkness" where "there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:26, 30).

In the parable of the sheep and the goats, the king will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34), but to those on his left hand, he will say, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

In Conclusion

Several things will happen when the world comes to an end, all of which will occur within the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Jesus will return (John 14:3; Hebrews 10:37), the dead will be raised (John 5:28-29), all will be judged (Acts 17:31; Hebrews 9:27), and everyone will go to their eternal destiny (Matthew 25:41, 46).

For many the end of this world has already come, inasmuch as many have already died (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). We, too, may die before this world is destroyed by fire (2 Peter 3:10).

While we live we must prepare.
Are you ready?

Elders and the Eldership

Ivie Powell

The qualifications of those desiring the work of an elder are clearly set forth by the Holy Spirit in the Bible. (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5: Acts 20:28).

Male Leadership

In the very outset, the inspired Paul makes it very clear that only men (males) can serve in this capacity. 1 Timothy 3:1 states, "This is a true saying, if a man desire the office..."

Man in this case is the masculine (*aner*). Paul did not use the Greek word *anthropos* which includes male or female, but he specified males by using the Greek word *aner*.

In addition to this, the one desiring the work of an elder must be "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2).

Names of Description

There are three names designating those who are to serve as elders. These names have great significance and are indeed weighty and inherently set forth the attitude and motivation of those serving in this capacity.

An "Elder"

The first name is *presbuteros* that is presbyter or elder (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1, 1 Peter 5:1). He is one

that is advanced in life, an elder, a senior.

The church has suffered greatly by putting men in the eldership who were not seasoned. By the very definition elders are men who are advanced in years. Young men are not fitted to "perform the work" of an elder.

An "Overseer"

The second name is *episkopos*, bishop or overseer (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:7; Philippians 1:1). He is one that is charged with the duty of seeing that things are to be done by others: a curator, guardian or superintendent in carrying out the affairs of the Lord's church.

A "Shepherd"

The third name is *poimen* which means a pastor or shepherd (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2). He is a herdsman, a shepherd (Matthew 9:36; 25:32; John 10:2,12) to whose care and control others have committed themselves, and whose precepts they follow (John 10:11, 14). Thus, elders are pastors that shepherd the flock, the church.

All three of these words are used interchangeably (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5,7; 1 Peter 5:1-2) and apply to all of those occupying this esteemed po-

sition. The Bible does not set forth distinctions to rank elders.

Obey and Submit to Elders

In conjunction to the words (*presbuteros, episkopos, poimen*), please take note of the word “obey” (*peiitho*), “rule” (*hegeomai*), and “submit” (*hupaikeo*) in Hebrews 13:17.

To “obey” is to yield, to follow. Elders “rule,” that is, preside, over the flock; and members are to “submit” or to give way or yield to the authority of the elders. Regarding the authority of elders, brother Roy Deaver wrote the following:

“Elders are to oversee, rule, shepherd the flock. Their duties inherently involve the authority necessary in accomplishing that which is enjoined. Elders do not have the right to make laws in the sense that God makes laws. There is original authority. There is delegated authority. Elders do not have original authority. They do have that authority which God through His word has given them” (*The Authority of Elders*, Roy Deaver).

A Serious Responsibility

Godly elders take seriously their responsibility of shepherding the flock. They are God’s “watchmen” and they will receive opposition from those who “love not the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). They will be

accused of assuming too much authority as in Numbers 16:1-35.

As pointed out by brother Deaver, “Here is a vivid Old Testament incident involving rebellion against God’s delegated authority, and a clear illustration of what God thinks of such rebellion.”

Disagreement Does Not Always Involve a Rebellion

However, because someone disagrees with the elders over matters of judgment or makes suggestions does not necessarily mean they are being rebellious. When elders ignore or resent any and all input from the members, they will not be highly esteemed (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

If not careful, elders can become “thinned skinned” and quickly assume a reactionary posture. When this takes place, their “rule” can be perceived as that of being dictators, bullies and tyrants.

Peter addressed this very matter when he wrote: “Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3).

Lording Over the Flock

If one or more men serving as an elder becomes “intoxicated” with his power, he will be looked upon as a modern day Diotrephes (3 John 9)! Those of this disposition quickly esca-

late into micro-managers (bosses) and operate behind "closed doors".

The input of members is taken as "bossing the elders" or infringing upon their authority. One thing is for certain, when this takes place, those elders have forgotten or misunderstand their role and responsibility as shepherds.

Godly elders realize they, like all Christians, are servants of Christ, and will keep the lines of communication open, thus creating an atmosphere of being approachable. When this takes place, faithful brethren will uphold the hands of their shepherds, highly esteem them (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13), and lovingly submit to their rule.

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Are You Feeding Your Body While Starving Your Soul?

Hugh Fulford

If it is true that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (and undoubtedly it is, for Christ Himself said so) (Matthew 4:4), then there are multiplied millions of people who are feeding their bodies and starving their souls!

Malnourished Souls

While many Americans and citizens of other advanced nations are well fed physically, their souls are malnourished because they have neglected the reading and study of the Bible, God's inspired word to mankind.

Sadly, even many who call themselves Christians go for days, even weeks and months, without ever picking up the Bible and reading it in any systematic and informative manner. While they feed their bodies with three meals a day and various snacks, their souls are weak and sickly because of their neglect of spiritual nourishment.

Not Enough

The most faithful Christian who attends the services of the church Sunday morning for both Bible study and worship, Sunday night for worship, and Wednesday evening for Bi-

ble study is still not getting sufficient spiritual nourishment. Bible reading and Bible study need to be a part of a Christian's daily routine and discipline. We find time every day to feed our bodies. Let us make time every day to feed our souls!

Hunger and Thirst

In His Sermon on the Mount, our Lord declared, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matthew 5:6).

How hungry and thirsty are we for God's righteousness? "My tongue shall speak of your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness" (Psalm 119:172).

Paul said to the elders of the church at Ephesus, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:28).

Do we not all need to be built up spiritually by the word of God?

Know the Book!

It is alarming how little of the Bible some Christians know. They are familiar with and can generally quote (or at least paraphrase) maybe a half

dozen or so scriptures, but beyond these they are totally "lost" when it comes to knowing anything about the Bible.

Only shallow, superficial discussions of the Bible are possible with them because they know so little about what the Book actually says!

They know the "names" of every major sports team in America from the Oregon Ducks to the Florida Gators and from the Connecticut Huskies to the USC Trojans, but they cannot name or locate the books of the Bible, much less tell you what any one of the books is actually about! How sad!

James tells us that God's word is able to save our souls (James 1:21), but it is able to save us only as we read it, feed on it, ingest it, digest it, and assimilate it into our lives!

No Shortcuts

There are no Cliff's Notes on the Bible! There is no shortcut to acquiring knowledge of the Scriptures. The Bible has to be read and studied over and over again.

Cled E. Wallace, writing in the October 1941 issue of *The Bible Banner* made the following insightful observation:

"There is no way to really learn what is in the Bible without reading and studying the Bible itself. Few students are capable of pass-

ing an examination on any subject, history for instance, after only one casual reading of a text and listening to a few lectures. The text must be read, re-read and studied.

"So it is with the books that make up the Bible. And dealing with the Bible after such a fashion yields tremendous and pleasing results. A student should read the gospels until he knows the life of Christ. He should read the book of Acts until he knows the history of the early church. He should read the epistles until he knows what the Lord expects of His church and His people. If he reads these things often enough, he will know them just like he knows other things he is interested in enough to read about.

"Some brethren can tell us where Joe Louis landed every punch on Lou Nova and which fist he used, who can't quote a memory verse at a prayer-meeting . . . It isn't lack of ability, it is lack of interest.

"This is really a serious matter. 'Wherefore be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.' (Eph. 5:17) 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.' (Col. 3:16) The prevailing ignorance of the word of God on the part of large numbers in the church is both amazing and appalling.

"I still think we know more about the Bible than our religious neighbors do, but that just goes to show what I think about how little they know.

"It is my conviction that if an ignorant brother with a fairly good mind would pick out one book in the New Testament, start with a few interesting facts about it, and then read it over and over until he knew it, he would be so proud of himself and feel so good otherwise that he would keep up the good work and really find out what

growth in grace and knowledge means.

"Reading the Bible should not be viewed as a task or drudgery. The pleasure it affords is commensurate with the profit it yields. There is no short cut to knowledge of the Bible. The man who knows it was not born that way. He got that way by keeping company with the Book and behaving himself intelligently while he was at it."

So, what about it? Are you feeding your body but starving your soul?

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Stephen Bradd

With church buildings located every few blocks in some communities and with hundreds of different religious groups, one can easily live in an area and not know much about a particular church. What do you know about the church of Christ? Let's touch briefly on some of the basics in this study.

Man Will Disobey God

It is easy to see from history that men have a tendency to alter or disregard the message of God. It started in the Garden of Eden when God forbid

the fruit of a particular tree, and man violated the divine injunction.

Throughout the Israelites' history, they often changed the worship and mission that God had assigned.

Even in the New Testament, evidence of departure from God's will can be readily seen in those who tried to bind ancient rituals upon Christians.

In our day, many churches are burdened with man-made traditions which have no basis in the Bible and are not authorized by it.

How Can Man Obey?

Thus, the individual who desires to obey God fully and please Him faces a very real problem: how could he know what is pleasing to God with all of the religious confusion and man-made traditions that run rampant today?

The solution is to return to the Bible and to it alone! Amos once asked - "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

Go Back to the Bible

This passage points to the necessity of having a standard to resolve differences. The spirit of the church of Christ is to return to the Bible! It is our desire to go back beyond denominationalism to the simplicity and purity of first-century, New Testament Christianity.

We believe that the Bible--and the Bible only--will make Christians as God intended.

Unity can be achieved by following the Bible. This is the safe and reasonable approach to take (cf. Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18, 19). If God's desire for unity were fulfilled on Earth today, there would not be a multiplicity of churches in an area; there would just be one (John 17:20 ff)! This one congregation would do Bible things in Bible ways and would cling to the Scriptures for guidance--

not the wisdom or opinions of men which typically spur division.

New Testament Organization

The church of Christ does not have the trappings of many modern-day organizations. There are no official boards on any level. Each congregation is self-ruled and independent of all other congregations. There are no official conventions, publications, or policy-setting groups.

Each congregation is overseen by a group of elders (i.e., pastors or shepherds) who are selected from among the members and meet the qualifications outlined in the New Testament (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1).

New Testament Worship

Worship in the church of Christ is very simple and is set forth in the New Testament. It tends toward participation as opposed to one being a spectator for entertainment.

Christians meet to sing *a cappella*, as is clearly authorized (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:15).

The Lord's Supper (or communion) is observed upon the first day of every week, just as was done by the early church (Acts 20:7).

Christians also worship by giving as they have been prospered, studying the Bible, and praying.

New Testament Membership

How does one become a member of the church of Christ? The terms of membership are also outlined in the New Testament. They include: faith in God (Hebrews 11:6) and in His Son (John 8:24), repentance of one's sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), confession of belief that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9, 10), and baptism (i.e., immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16). When one meets these divine terms, he is added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

A Plea

Are you a member of the Lord's church? We encourage you to visit the church of Christ in your communi-

ty as one searching for God's truth and God's people.

In most cases, if the sign on the building says "Church of Christ," you will find a devoted group of people who are trying to be faithful to the Lord in all ways.

However, I would be remiss not to warn you that a sign on a building can be misleading. There are some who claim to be churches belonging to the Christ, but they are nothing more than man-made denominations!

Ultimately, any congregation will make its true nature known by its fruit, demonstrating whether it is faithful to the Lord or not in its practices and beliefs.



Free to Choose

Mel Futrell

Over the years I have been privileged to read a fair amount from the writings of the late economist Milton Friedman (1912-2006). A very popular book of his that I read decades ago as a college student is titled *Free To Choose*.

This is a classic volume dealing not only with the matter of Economics but also freedom and the relationship between the two. Although Economics is not our present focus, I would like to start with the eye-catching title

of the book and explore from the Bible the idea of being free to choose.

Made in the Image of God

According to the Scriptures all persons have been made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6). In other words, in a variety of ways we bear the image of our maker.

The Latin phrase *Imago Dei* expresses this exactly. Frankly I find the idea both mind-boggling and beautiful. Moses penned the follow-

ing. statement that emphasizes this fact:

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:26-27).

Freedom of Choice

It is our common belief that one of the many features of our being made in the image of God is that we are free to choose. Simply put, we are in possession of free will.

Men and women are free moral agents able to make choices. As human beings bearing God’s image we are not automatons. Mankind is not mechanically or robotically controlled by a puppeteer in the sky. The very notion smacks of some form of theological determinism at best and atheistic determinism at worst.

Of course if we have no free will, as per determinism, then neither are we morally responsible. And the thought of that should be frightening to all.

However, the fact and reality of man’s free will is stressed in Scripture

in many ways and passages. Let us consider just a few of these Biblical references that stress choice:

- ◆ “Behold I set before you this day both a blessing and a curse” (Deuteronomy 11:26).
- ◆ “Choose you this day whom ye will serve” (Joshua 24:15).
- ◆ “Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in there at” (Matthew 7:13).
- ◆ “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you...” (Matthew 11:28-29)
- ◆ “Search the scriptures...And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:39-40).
- ◆ “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God...” (Hebrews 11:24-25).

One, if truly free, may choose good or bad, wisely or unwisely, right or wrong. Admittedly sometimes we make wrong choices. But that is no less the exercise of free will. And this is exactly what is to be expected given free creatures created in the image of God. Thus, knowledge of free will is grounded in the reality of life and the revelation of Scripture. We are free to choose — so choose wisely.

Churches without Elders

Douglas Hoff

The New Testament shows God has a pattern for ruling individual congregations of the Lord's church. Since it is a divinely ordained pattern, God expects each church to follow it.

In Every Church

Each congregation should have a plurality of elders, also known as an eldership (1 Tim. 4:14; NKJV), to oversee the work. This pattern is revealed in a number of verses such as Acts 14:23 which in part says, "So when they had appointed elders in every church...."

Titus 1:5 states, "For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you."

Notice the universality of this pattern. It was applied to every church in every city where a church was found.

Limited Rule

Notice also that an eldership's rule is limited to the congregation of which the elders are members. In Peter's first epistle he identified himself as an elder but also gave instructions to his fellow elders. He wrote, "The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder

and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers..." (1 Pet. 5:1-2).

Notice elders are told to shepherd the flock. That means elders can also be called pastors since this is another word translated from the same Greek word for shepherd.

Nowhere in the Bible can we find an eldership ruling over another congregation. The biblical pattern eliminates having a group of elders ruling over several churches in one city or region.

Plurality of Elders

Another good point to observe is that an eldership always requires a plurality of elders. One elder does not an eldership make!

Elders Have Qualifications

However, regarding the eldership there is perhaps an even more important point to consider. That is that men who would serve as elders must meet certain qualifications.

These characteristics are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-11. Each man who would serve must possess these traits. This is not optional!

Listen to the word of God: "If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless ..." (1 Tim. 3:1-2).

Perhaps the most important qualification for an elder is the desire to do the work. If a man were to be appointed to the eldership without the desire for the work, how well would he perform?

When Such Men are Lacking

All of the foregoing points were brought up to show that each church needs to have at least two scripturally qualified men who can serve as elders before an eldership can be appointed for that congregation. But, what happens when a church does not have such men?

It is utterly foolish to appoint men to the eldership who are not qualified. If a particular church does not have qualified men, then that congregation will have to function, at least temporarily, without elders. Can a church be considered obedient to God under such circumstances?

Our answer depends on the motives of the men involved. Do they want to have qualified elders for the congregation? Sadly, in some churches today, there is no desire for elders of any kind and efforts to appoint some are met with rebuffs.

However, assuming the unqualified men want to have elders eventually, it

is probably true that church is obeying God's will at least in this matter.

An Overreaction

While some Christians know these facts, they still feel something is wrong with their elder-less congregation. This might explain why some congregations have rushed to create an eldership with unqualified men.

However, let us ponder the pages of God's word to see if there ever was a time when a church existed without elders and still had divine approval in this regard. When the Lord's church was first established, there were several congregations that were formed lacking elders. This we know from Paul's missionary endeavors recorded in the book of Acts.

Go back to Acts 13 & 14 and we find churches being planted in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. Sometime later, Paul and Barnabas returned to the churches and it was on the return leg of the journey they appointed elders in every church.

Obviously, churches can exist for some period of time without elders and not be guilty of disobeying God's will.

How Long?

Perhaps the crucial question then is, "How long?" That is a hard question to answer. It seems reasonable to think God would prefer

as little time as possible. Does it seem reasonable that a congregation could exist for several decades without elders and still be considered obedient?

Each congregation has its own unique situation so again this is a difficult question to answer. Perhaps there aren't any or many men in the church. If it is a congregation solely of women, they obviously would not have elders since an elder must be the husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2).

Maybe the better question to focus on would be "Why are there no qualified men who could eventually be appointed to form an eldership?" Even a church of only women could try to teach and convert their husbands, sons or other males.

New Christians are not qualified to become elders since they are not to be novices (1 Tim. 3:6). It takes time to develop spiritual qualities in new Christians.

Functioning without Elders

In the absence of an eldership, does the need for ruling the church disappear? Of course not! How then is the church to be ruled?

Though the word of God is silent on this situation, the principle of male leadership must be respected. While having a men's business committee is not mentioned in the Bible, it appears

this would be an acceptable condition provided it is only temporary.

A Final Thought

Every congregation should strive to develop qualified men who can one day be appointed to the eldership.

Christian men: What about you? Are you working on becoming the best Christian you can be? Do you desire to serve the Lord's church by providing scripturally qualified leadership? If so, maybe one day you may become an elder in your home congregation!

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AN ANCIENT EXAMPLE OF THE PROGRESSIVE AGENDA

Ronald D. Bryant

In a number of religious groups, the progressives, if that is the appropriate designation, seem to be carrying the day. The movement is varied, and it is apparently appealing.

The progressive agenda can be described as one of innovation and accommodation. Basically, the progressives are determined to adjust the teachings of the Christ, to the people and the culture of the present day. They posture as working to make the way of Christ more appealing to the "unchurched." Their watchwords are "contemporary" and "progressive."

An Ancient Agenda

Attempts to "adjust" the Christian faith are not new. Early in the second and into third century, the Gnostics aggressively sought to accomplish this very thing. History bears out the fact that they sought to adjust Christian thought and practice to the philosophies and practices of their day.

They thought to gain converts to Christ by refusing to draw the sharp distinctions which the New Covenant demanded. They viewed their philosophy and effort as a worthy program of compromise and accommodation

with pagan beliefs. Yet, no matter how sincere or skilled they were, Gnosticism failed. History bears out the fact that it failed! But, why did it fail? Why did Gnosticism not take the Christian faith captive?

At first glance the advantage seemed to lie with the Gnostics. By "adjusting" Christianity to the thought and the religious sentiment of the "contemporary" Hellenistic and Oriental world, by acclimatizing it to their cultural surroundings, the Gnostics seemed to possess a greater likelihood of gaining "converts" from among non-Christians, and of avoiding the hostility that Christianity often aroused. How is it that Gnosticism did not become dominant and successful?

No Objective Basis

It is not possible to give a definitive answer. Yet, it seems obvious that the many variations of thought which they advanced kept them from presenting a united front.

It is evident that they gave scant attention and gave no real place to objective history, and even less attention to the revealed will of God; consequently they had no real basis for

agreement. In contrast, the Christian faith, in its purity and simplicity, held fast to objective history, to the Scriptures; to that which the apostles whom Jesus chose and taught, and who proclaimed and wrote most of the New Testament.

From the day the church began objective history was respected, and the teachings of Christ was authenticated and advocated as the revelation of God, and was accepted as the basis for agreement and unity. The gospel of Christ was in fact the basis of identity for the disciples of Christ.

The Difference in True Faith

Unity of faith and practice stood as the basis of spiritual sense, stability, and strength. The early Christians steadfastly refused to compromise with non-Christian philosophies and religions, and that refusal proved to be an asset, not a liability. Their refusal to compromise the revealed will of God gave them unity and cohesion, as well as positive basis for conviction, confidence, and steadfastness.

Faithful to God, those early Christians had a profound influence upon their world (the cultures) in which they lived. In refusing to accommodate or compromise with the world they had a position of strength and a tremendous impact. While they displayed a capacity for openness and loving confrontation, they held stead-

fastly to the revealed will of God and to the New Covenant.

They refused to accept or participate in pagan ritual, or to embrace the popular religious practices of the world, even when that refusal brought persecution. Yet, it was by holding fast to objective history (the facts about Jesus set forth in the inspired Scriptures), that they advanced the gospel of Christ; in and by the life He lived and the message He authored.

They promoted the compelling truth of the gospel with a contagious enthusiasm. Deep, uncompromising devotion characterized their worship and service, their outreach and fellowship.

Why Did the Gnostics Fail?

What would have been the fate of the Christian faith had Gnosticism prevailed? Would the faith of the gospel have survived, if the majority of Christians had been caught up in Gnosticism?

It is not necessary to speculate, for the historical record is undeniably clear – Gnosticism failed! It failed and in an amazingly short time it disappeared!

It failed, but not because of persecution at the hands of those determined to hold fast to the gospel of Christ. Long before the day of public conflict and church counsels, Gnosticism had begun to decline.

Gnosticism, because of its willingness to accommodate the demands of human culture, only seemed to have the advantage. The seeming strength of Gnosticism was in fact its weakness. It perished because of its philosophy of assimilation and accommodation, which moved it into weaker and weaker forms!

It was "progressive," ever building upon weaker and weaker basis, and finally it had no basis. Gnosticism reduced every aspect of faith to nothing more than a system of ever changing and ever modifying human opinion.

No small part of the character of the Christian faith has been its capaci-

ty to outlive the ever changing tenets of the various cultures of people and nations that it confronts. Yet, its ability to win a place for itself in the hearts of sincere people, in the various nations and races, has been its true honor.

The abiding quality of the Christian faith has been its devotion to Christ as it is revealed in objective history, and in the infallible word – the Scriptures. The survivors are those who hold fast to the Lord and to His revealed will, and who live for Him refusing to compromise with the world.



Remembering L. L. Brigance

James R. McGill

In December 1948, the day I first entered Freed-Hardeman College, I met L. L. Brigance, along with two other senior faculty men, C. P. Roland and W. Claude Hall. They worked out my schedule in a couple of minutes. Brother Hall said, "Your first class is New Testament, starting right now, with brother Brigance. Just follow him up the steps!"

L. L. Brigance (1879-1950) was an outstanding college teacher and preacher. He preached his first sermon

in 1901 at his home congregation in Scotts Hill, a few miles east of Henderson, Tennessee.

Top Student

During five years as a student at Georgie Robertson Christian College in Henderson, he received his B.A. and M.A. degrees. He was valedictorian of his class and won the medal in oratory. He began teaching at the college even before he completed his Masters' Degree.

After that school closed, Brigrance began teaching at Freed-Hardeman, also in Henderson, in 1909, during its second year of operation. He continued teaching there until his death on February 4, 1950. He taught various subjects over the years, including Biblical languages, but his main emphasis was New Testament and church history, with particular emphasis on the Restoration Movement.

Brigrance's Preaching

Brigrance never lost his zeal for evangelism, devoting every summer to that work. He took two years off from his college teaching (1923-1925) to devote full-time to evangelistic meetings, with much success. One whom he baptized in 1923 became the noted evangelist, professor, and scholar Hugo McCord.

Brigrance's first wife, Mintie Turner, died after one year of marriage. He married Maude Hardeman in 1904. They had two daughters and a son.

Brigrance taught church history in a three-quarter sequence, with the fall and winter quarters devoted to the earlier church history and the spring quarter to the Restoration Movement.

The Restoration Movement

He was somewhat apologetic about the textbook we were to use. He said, "This is the best we can do right now, but there's a young fellow named Earl

West who's writing a real history of the Restoration Movement. Just as soon as his book is available, we'll be using it in this class." Sadly, he died before the next spring quarter and never got to use West's history.

Brigrance expressed his greatest excitement in class on the day when we came to the account of the great meeting in Lexington, Kentucky, at the Hill Street church of Christ, on New Year's Day of 1832, when John Smith, representing the Campbells, and Barton W. Stone realized they were preaching the same message and could "join hearts and hands."

Brigrance had his students answer the roll at the start of every class by quoting a verse of Scripture. Sometimes the verse quoted was brief, and sometimes a student would repeat a verse he had used only a couple of days earlier.

Brigrance and Hardeman

L. L. Brigrance and N. B. Hardeman were closely associated for almost fifty years, first as fellow college students and then for many years as teachers. While Hardeman always got more recognition, Brigrance was a very capable associate.

Hardeman was chosen to be the man to preach in the great 20-night area-wide gospel meeting in Nashville's Ryman Auditorium in 1922. He and Brigrance worked and studied

together night after night to prepare. The men lived near each other in Henderson. They would get together after supper, first in the home of one, then the next night in the other home, studying the Scriptures together and perusing the sermon books of such men as J. W. McGarvey, R. P. Meeks, and T. W. Brents.

Their teamwork helped make that historic meeting a great success. Four other Hardeman area-wide Nashville meetings followed in 1923, 1928, 1938, and 1942.

In the early 1930's Brigance developed diabetes. Though it was a problem for him for the remaining two decades of his life, he continued

to be a great influence for good in his preaching, his teaching, and his great example.

Brigance's Outlines

The year after L. L. Brigance died, E. Claude Gardner edited a book of Brigance's sermon outlines, provided by Mrs. Brigance and which was typed, when edited, by Brigance's daughter, Mary Frances McMackin.

Gardner had been first a student of L. L. Brigance, then a co-teacher, and later a long-time president of Freed-Hardeman College. Another former Brigance student, George W. DeHoff, published the book.



Musings from Benjamin Franklin

Gospel Preacher (1812-1878)

True Religion

There is one book in which the religion of Christ is set forth. That one book is the Bible. In that book the one religion, the only true religion, is set forth; set forth correctly by the unerring Spirit of all revelation and all divine wisdom. Not another religion is found in that book, now in force.

No man can go to that book to find an account of the Pope, a Cardinal, or an Archbishop of the Papal type.

No man of intelligence goes there to find an account of Mohammad, or the Koran.

No man of intelligence goes to the Bible to find an account of the Church of England, its origin, rise, or any part of its history.

No man goes to the Bible to find an account of Lutheranism, its origin, rise, or any part of its history. There never was a Lutheran before Martin Luther lived, in the sixteenth century.

No man goes to the Bible to find an account of the origin of Presbyterianism. There never was a Presbyterian before John Calvin.

No man goes to the Bible to find the origin, rise, or any part of the history of Methodism. There never was a Methodist before John Wesley.

We do not go to the Bible to find an account of George Fox, Ann Lee, Joe Smith, etc.; nor of Quakerism, Shakerism, or Mormonism. These persons are not Bible characters, and these religions are not Bible religions. They came not into existence till long ages after the last words of the Bible were written. The true religion had been in the world ages before these were born.

This ends all controversy about their claims to be the true religion. The true religion was already final. In its closing words it forbids any addition.

What the Church Needs Now

It is not *inventive* genius we need in the church, nor *explorers* to *invent* something new, or to *make discoveries*; but we need humble and honest men, who know and love the truth, and will press it on the world.

We know humble men, of but limited talent and information, who are building up churches, reforming men and women, and bringing them to

God. We also know men of considerable learning and talent, who do not turn a bare dozen to the Lord in a year, and who build up no churches nor anything else, but who are starting subtleties, speculations and questions to no profit, but only intend to subvert the hearer.

Why can men not be content with the plain truth, the precious truth that makes men wise to salvation through faith in Christ? It is easily learned, easily preached and readily believed and obeyed to the salvation of the soul. It is for the people, the whole people, and adapted to them.

The kind of greatness we need is that which manifests itself in preaching great truth in plain and easy terms, and bringing it to the comprehension of the people. The command is, and will be till the Lord comes, "Preach the word."

On the Local Church

A single congregation of the Lord in any community can administer and execute the work of the Lord in all its parts. This is true of every congregation.

When assembled it is a divinely-authorized body to act in the matters of the kingdom of God. There is no other divinely-authorized body on earth to act in the matters of the kingdom of God. This body is under the old commission from the Lord: "Ob-

serve all things whatsoever *I have commanded you.*"

The Preacher Didn't Suit

We visited a church some years since, and there was quite a general impression among the members that their preacher did not suit them – that he was not "the right man in the right place," etc.

Many fine things were said, as to the kind of man they needed, etc. and the idea prevailed that they had better turn their preacher off and get another.

We suggested to them in a circle one day that possibly they had not at all discovered the real malady; that possibly the main difficulty was not at all in reference to the kind of a preacher they needed, but to the kind of a church they needed; that possibly the change they needed could be effected by *turning off the church* and getting *another* and a *better one*.

The Testaments

Christ is the soul of the Bible, *the theme* of the revelation from God to man. Turn to the portions of revelation given at early periods, next to the eye and look down through the Bible, and through the ages to Christ, and then turn to the last part of revelation to the eye, and look up through it to Christ, and we thus find that it all centers in Him "who is head over all things to the church."

It is not right in the church, family, or anywhere, to teach the Old Scriptures *exclusively*, or the New, but *teach both*, in their relation to each other. The New cannot be thoroughly and successfully studied without the Old, nor the Old without the New.

(Adapted from: *A Book of Gems*, by Franklin and Headington)

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The Faith of the Faithful

Ephesians 1:3

1. Faith in Jesus is necessary to salvation. Acts 16:30, 31; John 8:32
2. We are saved 'by grace through faith'. Ephesians 2:8, 9
3. The Ephesians heard, believed, repented, and were baptized. How do we know that? Ephesians 1:13; Acts 19:3-5, 18, 19
4. That faith must stay alive and active. Revelation 2:10; Matthew 25:21, 23
5. What does our subject mean from the Christian's point of view?

I. His Death Was For Our Present Sins As Well.

- A. Our sinfulness cannot be denied. 1 John 1:7-10; James 5:16
- B. Our sins could bring us back to "spiritual death". James 5:19, 20.
- C. Our sins are still cleansed by His blood. 1 John 1:7; Psalms 65:3

II. His Life Was For Our Example To Follow.

- A. He lived a sinless life. 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 3:5
- B. He was thoroughly tested. Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 2:15-17
- C. He set an example for His followers. 1 Peter 2:21; John 13:15

III. His Ascension Was For Our Representation.

- A. He is the only way to the Father. John 14:6; Romans 5:1, 2
- B. He causes us to be accepted with the Father. Matthew 10:32
- C. He stands in our stead before the Father. 1 John 2:1; Romans 8:34

IV. His Coming Again Will Be For Our Redemption.

- A. From the grave. Hebrews 9:28; Psalms 49:15; John 6:40
- B. Out of the world. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Corinthians 15:24
- C. From the presence of evil. Revelation 21:27; 22:14, 15.

V. His Judgment Will Lead To Our Glorification.

- A. We will stand in the judgment. 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12
- B. We will not stand condemned there. Romans 8:1; John 5:24
- C. We will then and there receive our inheritance. Matthew 25:31-33

1. Let me remind you again, this is from the point of view of the faithful.
2. We call you to come into His house (1 Timothy 3:15), that one day you can enter the Father's (John 14:1-3)

- Mike Kiser

THAT IS ALL I KNOW ABOUT IT

David R. Pharr

The apostle Paul quoted from Isaiah 64:4, to show that we can never know the mind of God by our own abilities.

"Eye hath not seen, nor the ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

He reminds us that a man cannot know the things within another's mind, without being told. Only his own spirit can know his thoughts.

Likewise, a man cannot know what is in the mind of God. It is God's own Spirit that knows His mind. The point being emphasized by the apostle is that all we can possibly know about the will of the Lord is what has been revealed by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-13).

In a parallel passage, it is explained that the things which were not known in other ages are now revealed by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5). We learn the things of God through the inspired revelation of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Questions and Answers

Religious discussions may sometimes prompt speculative ques-

tions: "What if . . . Don't you think . . . Is it possible...?" Questions which seek a biblical answer are legitimate, but those which call for mere opinion may be useless.

In fact, opinions which suggest and encourage alternatives to what God has told us can cause great harm.

1 Timothy 6:4 cautions against "doting about questions and strifes of words." Again, Paul says, "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid" (2 Timothy 2:23).

Those who want to appear scholarly may be tempted to answer unanswerable questions. Some may even speculate on ways to avoid what "Thus saith the Lord."

A faithful teacher of the word, however, will be satisfied to point to the Scriptures and say, "That is all I know about it."

Controversial Questions

For example, numerous questions arise over divorce and remarriage. Admittedly there are sometimes difficult and complicated situations. But when all the "What ifs" and "It seems like" have been stated, the fact remains that what the Bible says is all I know about it.

The problem with what Jesus said in Matthew 19:9 is not that it cannot be understood. The problem is that people do not want to accept it.

In discussions about the plan of salvation, questions arise about the honest seeker who dies without obeying the gospel. Arguments may be made with both emotion and reason. But when I have read the commands, promises and warnings in the Bible, that's all I know about it.

We must be careful not to think of men "above that which is written" (1 Corinthians 4:6). There is much emphasis on education, intelligence and ability. These may help in the study and teaching of the word, but it must be remembered that all spiritual knowledge must still start and end at the same place--in the Bible.

Conclusion

One may know (or think he knows) a great many things about the material world. Such may be learned from many sources. But the only spiritual truth that I will ever know this side of eternity will be what I learn from the Bible. The bottom line is, "Here is what the Bible says. That is all I know about it!"

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Fundamental Truths Seminar

Bowling Green, KY: The Lehman Avenue church of Christ is scheduled to host their annual Fundamental Truths Seminar. The event will occur Saturday, April 2, from 9am- 3pm.

The theme for this year's program is "Congregational Fellowship, Cooperation, and Autonomy."

Speaking will be Jody Apple, Steven Hunter, Chad Ramsey, and Evelyn Apple will teach a ladies' class.

Leadership Workshop

Briensburg Church of Christ

Benton, KY: The Briensburg church of Christ will be hosting their annual workshop on March 26th. The theme will address the educational program of the local church. Registration will begin at 8:00 am. Lunch is also provided.

For more information call (270) 527-8691.

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Bill Dillon Returns to the *Gospel Gleaner*

Mountain Home, AR: One of the founding editors of the *Gospel Gleaner* has decided to return to the paper. We gladly welcome back brother Dillon.

Our readers will once again be able to enjoy the wit and be edified by the wisdom of brother Dillon.

Bill preaches for the Cotter church of Christ in Mountain Home, AR.

Bound Volumes of the *Gospel Gleaner*

Bound volumes of the *Gospel Gleaner* will soon be made available for our readers. We will be binding the years 2013-April, 2015 into one volume. You will recall that these are the years in which the paper appeared in a larger format.

Next year, we plan to bind May, 2015 – 2016 (the smaller format) into one volume. Contact us for details.



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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

The

GOSPEL



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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

Staff Writers

Stephen R. Bradd	Bill Brandstatter
Ronald D. Bryant	Gerald Cowan
Raymond Elliott	Mel Futrell
Ferrell Hester	Mike Kiser
Grady Miller	Owen D. Olbricht
David R. Pharr	John T. Polk II
Ivie Powell	Travis Quertermous
Andy Robison	Ron Thomas
Ernest Underwood	Mike Underwood
Robert L. Waggoner	Sam Willcut

Associate Editor

Bill Dillon
James R. McGill

Editor

Andy Erwin

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www.gospelgleaner.com
(256) 627-3215

Called to Preach

Andy Erwin

God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. With a heavenly vision He called Isaiah to prophesy. Christ appeared to Paul on the Damascus road. Are preachers called in the same miraculous way today?

A Sense of Urgency

Notice, we are not asking whether or not preachers feel a greater sense of urgency to preach the gospel than other Christians. We are not asking if preachers can feel the same sense of inadequacy as did Moses or Isaiah.

Indeed, every preacher should feel “undone” and as a “man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5) when faced with the tremendous responsibility of preaching the gospel of Christ. Every gospel preacher certainly should feel a great sense of urgency and also a sense of complete dependence upon God.

We are asking if the claims made by many evangelical and charismatic preachers of today are true. Is God speaking directly to these people in a supernatural way? Are they divinely called to preach? Are they worthy of the honor they covet?

Called to Preach False Doctrine?

It is interesting to observe that many of the people who claim such a call are preaching false doctrine in manmade churches. The Lord has

warned us repeatedly about such people, their claims, and how to detect them (see Matthew 7:15-20; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2:1-19; 2 John 9-11; Jude 4-21).

Perhaps the most definitive statement concerning such men was made by Paul when he said, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Anyone who claims to have a divine call, if they in fact had received such a call, should be the most faithful

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gospel preacher on earth. However, this is not the case. The most faithful gospel preachers among us were trained by faithful preachers, while those who are claiming to have received a miraculous call to ministry are found to be teaching false doctrines.

Called to Build Denominations?

Those who did receive a divine call to preach – such as the prophets and apostles – were called to preach *only* the word of God to the people. No apostle or prophet was ever called to preach the doctrines and commandments of men.

Could you imagine Peter believing he was called to establish a certain denomination and write its creed, while Paul was called to establish another denomination and write its creed?

The Holy Spirit gave these men spiritual words to perform the spiritual work they were to do (see 1 Corinthians 2). The congregations they established were all in the same body (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4). Not one of the apostles founded or belonged to a denomination. God did not call them to propagate denominationalism.

Test the “Called” Preachers

The Lord said, “You shall know them by their fruits.” The people of God must always remember: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but

test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

We test the spirits by comparing their words with the word of God. If they are not preaching the truth, they are not to be considered “of God.”

The next time you hear a preacher saying he is “called to preach” ask him *who* called him.

- ♦ Did God call him to preach another gospel than Paul preached (Galatians 1:6-9)?
- ♦ Did God call him to establish churches to rival the church His Son built (Matthew 16:18-19)?
- ♦ Did God call him to preach a different plan of salvation than the one preached on Pentecost (Acts 2:38)?
- ♦ Did God call him to lead worship services conducted according to the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9)?
- ♦ Did God call him to wear titles never found in the scriptures (Psalms 111:9; Matthew 23:9)?
- ♦ Did God call him to make outlandish and false prophecies which never come to pass (Deuteronomy 18:21-22)?

Again and again, the obvious answer is “No.”

Let us not confuse the call of man, the call of Satan, or personal emotions with the call of God.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST EVANGELIST

Hugh Fulford

The word "evangelist" literally means a messenger or bearer of good news. In the New Testament it refers to a preacher of the gospel. The gospel is the good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for the sins of all mankind. There is a sense in which every Christian is to be an evangelist. "Preach the gospel by all means; if necessary, use words," has been attributed to Francis of Assisi (c. 1182 – 1226), but without verification.

The World's Greatest Evangelist

The world's greatest evangelist is God Himself. He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

God also has given us His greatest evangelistic tool: the Bible. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

If one is eternally lost it will not be God's fault! He gave His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins and He

gave us His inspired word that we might know what to do to be saved.

The Bible is available in many languages and versions. One can read it on his computer, cell phone, or iPad. It is available in bookstores, at Wal-Mart, and other retail outlets. One is without excuse for not knowing what to do to be saved from eternal torment and to have eternal life in heaven.

Who Is At Fault?

- If one does not come to faith in God, whose fault is that? (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:18-20; Hebrews 11:6)
- If one does not come to faith in Christ as the Son of God, whose fault is that? (John 3:16; 8:24; 14:6; 20:30-31)
- If one does not repent of his or her sins, whose fault is that? (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 3:19; 17:30-31)
- If one does not confess faith in Christ, whose fault is that? (Matthew 10:32-33; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9-10)
- If one is not baptized for the remission of sins, whose fault is that? (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21)
- If one does not know that neither sprinkling nor pouring but only

immersion constitutes scriptural baptism, whose fault is that? (Acts 8:36-39; Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12)

- If one does not know that he is to worship God "in spirit and truth," whose fault is that? (John 4:24)
- If one does not know that Christians should eat the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, whose fault is that? (Acts 20:7)
- If one does not know that in our worship we are to sing and make melody in our heart to the Lord, whose fault is that? (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16)
- If one does not know that when he worships after the doctrines and commandments of men his worship is vain (empty, meaningless), whose fault is that? (Matthew 15:8-9)
- If one does not know that we are to abide in the doctrine of Christ and His inspired apostles and not go beyond what is written, whose fault is that? (2 John 9; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 4:6)
- If one does not know that Christ established His church and know when and where that church was established, whose fault is that? (Matthew 16:18; Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-4)
- If one does not know that the church is the spiritual body of Christ and that there is but one body (church), whose fault is that? (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:4)
- If one does not know that marriage is between a man and a woman, whose fault is that? (Genesis 2:18-25; Matthew 19:1-6; Romans 7:2-3)
- If one does not know that he is to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, whose fault is that? (Titus 2:11-14)
- If one does not know that after death, he will stand before God to be judged for the way he has lived, whose fault is that? (Hebrews 9:27; Acts 17:30-31; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- If one does not know that hell is real and eternal, whose fault is that? (Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:44, 46, 48; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)
- If one does not know that heaven is real and eternal, whose fault is that? (Matthew 25:46; John 14:1-3; 2 Cor. 5:1; 1 Peter 1:3-5)
- If one should be eternally lost, whose fault is that? (Matthew 7:21; Romans 6:16-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 2 Peter 1:5-11; Revelation 2:10)

Begin Today!

If you do not have a Bible, let me encourage you to obtain one today. If you do not know what God has said in His word, let me encourage you to

begin today to read the Bible and see what He has said.

You might begin with a serious reading and a sober reflection on the

biblical message proclaimed in the passages above by the world's greatest Evangelist!



The Only Begotten Son of God

Andy Erwin

The translation of the Greek word *monogenes* has been discussed for several years now. Should the word be translated “only begotten” pertaining to Jesus as the *only begotten* Son of God (cf. John 1:14; 1:18; 3:16; 3:18; 1 John 4:9).

We find another instance of the word *monogenes* being translated “only begotten” in the KJV, with regard to Abraham and his son Isaac, who was the “only begotten son” of Abraham through whom the promises would come (Hebrews 11:17).

In three instances *monogenes* is translated “only” in Luke’s Gospel (cf. Luke 7:12; 8:42; 9:38). In these cases perhaps Bible translators believed it was simply not necessary to stress the “only begotten” relationships of the children to the parents, and deferred to the lesser translation of “only” and “only one.”

Concerning Christ, modern translations of the New Testament will ren-

der *monogenes* as “a unique one” or the “unique Son.”

What Is the Issue?

Words convey ideas. The words we choose convey the ideas we desire. God chose certain words to express His truth concerning His Son. These are the words of God and they must be honored.

We must always look for the most accurate way to translate God’s words into any language. Such an effort will be a safeguard against any mistranslation and will honor the idea God originally intended to be expressed.

What Is the Meaning of the Word?

Monogenes is a compound word. *Mono* means one or only, and *genes* means born, or begotten. While it can convey the idea of being “one of a kind” the literal translation is “only begotten.”

Jesus is not simply the unique Son of God, for we are all unique. He is

the only begotten Son of God. He is the only Son of God that can lay claim to the relationship He had with the Father before the world began; and He is the only Son of God that can say He was born of the Spirit into this world. He is both Son of God and Son of Man.

Expert Testimony

I am thankful for the work that was done by Robert R. Taylor, Jr. and J. Noel Merideth in answering this question as it appeared before brethren in the 1980s. These brethren appeared on a television program sponsored by the Green Plain church of Christ in Hazel, Kentucky, titled *Searching the Scriptures*. Gilbert Gough was the host. (The transcript of this program may still be available by contacting the Green Plain congregation.)

The transcript contains a letter that was written to the Hellenic College of Brookline, Massachusetts. Brother David Amos asked them about the translation of *monogenes* and if “unique” or “beloved” are suitable translations.

Aristotle Michopoulos, the Greek Studies Director, replied by stating:

“Yes! The “only begotten” is indeed the translation of the word *monogenes*.

“*Unique*. No, I wouldn’t opt for the use of this word, because it carries a different “tone” than the original. “*Unique*” has a different connota-

tion in English. The meaning of “birth”, (i.e. *mono – genes* = only – born) is completely lost in *unique*; don’t you think so?

“*Beloved*. That is an extremely loose translation. Better than the “unique” above, but definitely not a close translation.

“The Greek *monogenes* carries within it the meaning of “precious”, “beloved”, “valuable”; all related to the “high value, price” of something (someone, in this case) that is *the only one*. As a matter of fact a translation of “the only one” is the second best after the present “only begotten”. All in all the “current” translation of “only begotten” is the most accurate one and the closest to the original. The “only born” might be another good alternative, but it lacks in “class”, compared to “only begotten”.

To the testimony of this native Greek scholar many preachers, commentators, word studies, and lexicons agree.

The Significance of the Issue

What then, might we say is the significance of this discussion? In my opinion, the translation of this word does not necessarily represent one’s conviction for the deity of Christ. The Jehovah’s Witnesses (so-called), who deny the deity of Christ vehemently, translate *monogenes* as “only begotten” in their New World Trans-

lation. If they believed the translation "only begotten" was a threat to their doctrine, and upheld the deity of Christ, they surely would have translated *monogenes* otherwise.

Again, in my opinion, the significance of this discussion is two-fold. In the first place, it is a matter of translating the Greek into English as accurately as possible. And those who have forgotten more Greek than many of us will ever know believe the word is best translated "only begotten."

In the second place, and just as important, by accurately translating the word, we preserve the preeminence of Christ as conveyed by His Father in the Holy Scriptures.

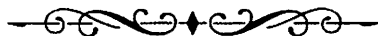
Jesus Christ is not the "only Son" of God (cf. Hebrews 2:10; 12:5). He is not the only "unique" Son of God. But, He is all of these things *plus*.

He is in this way the only One who can rightfully be called "only begotten." By using the word *monogenes* the Holy Spirit selected a word that speaks to the uniqueness, preciousness, beloved-ness, value, virgin birth, and preeminence of Christ.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created

through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:15-18).

Jesus is the "only begotten" Son of God.



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Saved by God's Grace

Robert L. Waggoner

When we speak about having been saved from sin we generally mean that we are no longer eternally condemned for our sins, that because God has forgiven our sins we have been reconciled to God, and that we may therefore enjoy companionship with God. This salvation is a gift from God because he is gracious (Psalm 84:11; 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8, 17; John 1:14). This salvation is specifically based upon what God has accomplished through Christ and our response to it (Romans 5:15, 17-18).

God's Plan of Salvation

Before Adam and Eve sinned they had close associations with God. Inasmuch as Adam was the representative head of all humanity, his sin caused all humanity to die and to be separated from God (Romans 5:12). But God had a plan whereby humanity could be reconciled to him. This plan was prepared before the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20) but not revealed until after Christ's death on the cross (Ephesians 3:8-11; 1 Peter 1:10).

If anyone could have kept God's commandments perfectly, then they

would have had continual association with God. However, since under the law "all sin and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) no one could have eternal life.

The righteousness of God requires that human sin be punished. That process may be likened to a debt that must be paid before reconciliation can occur. Inasmuch as life is in the blood (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:14), then life had to be sacrificed to pay for human sins. But the blood of animal sacrifices was insufficient (Hebrews 10:4).

God's Son and Salvation

God's plan was that his own Son would live a sinless life in the flesh, (which he did, John 8:7; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22), and then shed his blood on the cross in order to pay for the sins of humanity (1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1:4; Ephesians 1:6-7; 2 Timothy 1:9; Hebrews 2:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). This is how God made possible the reconciliation of humanity to himself (Romans 5:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Colossians 1:21). In this manner God's grace was extended to humanity (Acts 15:11; Romans 3:24; Ephesians 2:5; Titus 3:7).

God's Salvation is Conditional

However, God's grace in giving the possibility of salvation to humanity is conditional. God created people with freedom to choose whether or not they want to live according to his desires. Since an individual must choose whether or not to accept the grace of God, one may wonder just how God's grace may be acquired.

The simple answer is that God's grace is acquired through living by faith, i.e., by believing and obeying God (Romans 4:16; 5:2; Ephesians 2:7-8). Because some people, like Adam and Eve, choose not to believe and obey, their sins are not forgiven (John 3:18-21; 8:24), they are not reconciled to God, and therefore they have no hope for eternal fellowship with God (Ephesians 2:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Not of Works

Salvation by the grace of God is inconsistent with salvation by works. Paul declared that "to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (Romans 4:4).

More specifically, "if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work" (Romans 11:6).

Not of the Law

Salvation by the grace of God is also inconsistent with the keeping of law. "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14). For one to attempt to be justified by law is to fall from grace (Galatians 5:4).

"If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain" (Galatians 2:21). "The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Not a License to Sin

Salvation by the grace of God does not grant license to sin. Sin cannot continue in order that the grace of God may abound because those who are saved by the grace of God have, with Christ, died to sin.

As Christ died, was buried, and arose from the dead, so also those saved by God's grace have died to sin, been buried in baptism, and arisen to a new life, the old body of sin having passed away and a new body brought forth to live for God (Romans 6:1-12). This new body is now freed from sin (Romans 6:22).

As a result, believers are invigorated; they are "...made alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in

the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:5-10).

Peter admonished recipients of God's grace to "gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:13).

Recipients of God's grace "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9).

While the grace of God is free to the faithful, it cost God the blood of his Son (1 Peter 1:18-19). All who are saved must be careful to live by faith (Hebrews 3:12).

Never Lose Heart

Bill Dillon

How sound is the counsel Christ! In Luke 18:1, Jesus said that men ought "*not to faint*." To "*faint*" means to lose heart.

A young man once despaired of living and sought to leave this world at the end of a rope. However, the rope broke! A few months later, the young man was asked how things were going, to which he replied, "I'm on top of the world!"

A little boy was leading his sister up a mountain path, and the girl complained that the path was too rocky and bumpy. The brother replied, "Sure! The bumps are what you climb on."

Humanity is so designed that it takes trouble for our best to come out. If there is no hardship, there is no hardihood. If there is no fight, there is no fortitude. If there is no pain, there is no patience. We may not prefer or like that kind of world, but that is the kind of world we live in.

Such being the case, it is always too soon to quit. Jesus also said, "He that endures to the end shall be saved" Matthew 10:22).



Remembering R.L. Colley

Gary Colley

My father was born in Dresden, Tennessee, July 10, 1896, to Mr. and Mrs. W. H. [Bud] Colley, both faithful members of the church of Christ.

Bud Colley was a farmer who migrated from Scotland, and who with his wife homesteaded a large farm in Kentucky along with his five brothers. His interest in the Lord's church caused him to want his son to preach.

Since my father did not like the name Lester, he was known as R.L. Colley. On my older brother's birth certificate, his name was given as Robert L. [only] Colley. He also preached for years. Our father R.L. Colley passed from this life in 1967, in Memphis, Tennessee, after a long illness.

One of those five brothers of W.H. [Bud] Colley was A.O. Colley, who was also a widely known Gospel preacher, lecturer, and debater, along with his son Flavil L. Colley, who also was a great Gospel preacher.

Conversion and Early Preaching

R.L. Colley was baptized by F.O. Howell in July 1909, and he began his preaching work at the Oak Grove Church of Christ, close to Fulton, Kentucky, in 1918. That same year he entered the National Teachers' Normal and Business College, for the cost of

\$10.00 per month, later to be known as Freed-Hardeman College and now Freed-Hardeman University.

He studied under such great men as Arvy Glenn Freed, L.L. Brigance, W. Claude Hall, C.P. Roland, Hall Calhoun, and N.B. Hardeman. He remained close friends with these men until they passed on to their eternal rewards. I have in my files letters of commendation for my father's work from brothers Freed and Hardeman.

My father passed a part of brother Arvey Glenn Freed's name to me, Gary Glenn Colley, Sr., and my wife Maggie and I passed it on to our son, who presently preaches in Huntsville, Alabama, Gary Glenn Colley, Jr.

Five of our grandsons and grandsons-in-law continue to preach the Gospel today.

55 Years of Ministry

R.L. Colley and my mother Elgie worked continuously in local preaching work for some fifty-five years. His preaching in local work, debates, and meetings covered most of our United States. He had a print shop for many years, where many tracts and books were printed for his publications as well as those of many others. He bought and sold used books while living in Texarkana, Texas, and final-

ly sold four thousand volumes to our close friend and brother, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., which he used as a part of his library.

He planted churches in Camden, Arkansas, Houston, Texas, Grenada, Mississippi, Pleasant Valley, Arkansas, Bragg City, Missouri, Leedy, Mississippi, and Walcott, Arkansas. Most if not all of these churches continue faithfully to serve the Lord today.

He debated in many places. Among those whom he met in debate were Neal Parker, C.F. Parker, Joe Meece [all Primitive Baptist] J.W. Barber [twice], D.L. Welch, T.F. Morris [on Spiritual Gifts and the Oneness System], S.A. Owen and Mr. Isaac [Jehovah Witnesses] Mr. Harroes and W.H. Hopper [all Baptist, on the Plan of Salvation], Thomas M. Broadfoot and Mr. Lamberth [on Instrumental Music], L.W. Hayhurst [concerning Bible Classes and Women Teachers].

Brother Alan E. Highers, a great debater, often spoke of the debates my father conducted. All of his debates resulted in many coming to know the truth.

A Friend to Gospel Preachers

Many of the greatest Gospel preachers have been in my family's home for Gospel meetings and to prepare for debates. My mother a few years ago kept a calendar of those

who sat around our dinner table for one year, and it averaged three per day for the entire year.

I can recall many great men who were friends of R.L. and Elgie Colley who stayed briefly in our home as I was growing up, such as: A.O. and Flavil Colley, J.D. Tant, Basil Doran, M.C. Cuthbertson, C.R. Nichol, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., N.B. Hardeman, Perry B. Cotham, J. T. Marlin, George W. DeHoff, Homer Hailey, Austin Taylor, Palmer Wheeler, Cecil Wheeler, Horace W. Busby, Guy N. Woods, and many others who greatly influenced and left giant footprints in my life.

How grateful we should all be for our parents and other great people who have had such influence for good in our lives! My prayers should ascend daily in gratitude for those who have been our mentors and teachers.

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Temptation and How to Bear It

Genesis 39:7-9

1. I have chosen this story because it illustrates our subject well.
2. A wonderful epitaph is given to Joseph. Gen. 39:2; Acts 7:9
3. Some are troubled because temptations come after obeying the gospel.
4. Satan found out he could not overcome Joseph with troubles and frowns of the world. So he tries his hand with soft, charming pleasure.
5. From this story here are four principles to keep in mind:

I. Satan Is Responsible for Temptations.

- A. We cannot blame God- James 1:3; only Satan- 1 Corinthians. 7:5; Mark 1:13. He often uses evil people. 2 Peter 2:14, 18.
- B. Satan is the master of deception. 2 Corinthians 2:11
- C. The whole purpose of temptation is to mislead. Satan always gives out misleading information and misleading promises.

II. There Is A Difference Between Temptation and Sin.

- A. Jesus and Joseph, both tempted, neither sinned. Hebrews 4:15
- B. Temptation is the avenue that leads us into sin. James 1:14. It is the perversion of some legitimate thing (natural desire). 1 John 2:15-17.
- C. Temptations are not even a sign of weakness. 1 Corinthians 10:13

III. There Is A Reason Why Satan Tempts Us To Sin.

- A. Satan knows that sin will destroy our influence. Early on, Joseph had a good influence on others. Sin would have caused him to lose it.
- B. Satan knows that sin can ruin your life. John 10:10; 1 Peter 5:8
- C. Satan knows that sin will cost you your soul. Romans 6:23

IV. We Can Be Victorious Over Temptation.

- A. Satan is not omnipotent. Therefore he can be defeated. James 4:7
- B. Victory is through Christ. His death; His intercession- Hebrews 2:14, 18; and, His abiding presence. Matthew 28:20.
- C. We are provided the divine means by which we can overcome:
 1. The word of God. Matthew 4:4; Psalms 119:11
 2. Conviction of our own conscience. Psalms 119:104, Text.
 3. Exhortation from our brethren. Hebrews 3:13
 4. A full suit of armor. Ephesians 6:10-17
 5. Our Lord's admonition: "Watch and Pray". Mark 14:28
 6. The Divinely provided escape route. 1 Corinthians 10:13

1. Joseph was not a "superman," he overcame, and we can too.
2. A cowboy was advised not to hitch his horse in front of the saloon.

-Mike Kiser

Elders, Bishops, Pastors

Ronald D. Bryant

Several terms are used in the New Testament to designate those who lead a local congregation. An understanding of these terms and their connection is essential to an understanding of the nature and purpose of this office.

ELDERS

The word "elder" is a translation of the Greek word "*presbuteros*." It is found 67 times in the New Testament, and 62 times it is translated "elder." It was commonly used to designate "an aged person."

In 1 Timothy 5:1 it contrasts an older man to younger men. In such instances age is the only point of consideration.

In Acts 20:17 the term is official and refers to leaders; to those that guide. The elders guide the flock. Age is but one of the qualifications.

They are to be men not only of age, but men that are mature, respected; men of recognized faith and integrity. This point is established in a number of ways, including the fact that a novice [*neophytos*-a new plant, i.e., a new convert to the faith] is not qualified to serve as an elder (1 Timothy 3:6).

Only one recognized and respected, able to teach, and to guide can serve as an elder.

BISHOPS

The word "bishop" is found five times in the King James Version. In one instance it refers to Christ (1 Peter 2:25). In all the other passages it references those that are to serve as "overseers" (1 Timothy 3:1; Titus 1:7; Philippians 1:1).

The original word is "*episcopos*," from "*eph*" - "over" and "*skopos*" - "overseers" (Acts 20:28).

A bishop is defined as an overseer, a supervisor, an inspector, or a superintendent. "*Presbuteros*" (elder) sets forth the type of man; the word "*episcopos*" (bishop) denotes the governmental responsibility involved in the office - this position: "This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work" (1 Timothy 3:1).

Elders - bishops are to govern and lead. They are to "look diligently" and "take the oversight" willingly (1 Peter 5:2).

Oversight involves two specifics, guiding and directing. Of necessity it implies real connection with the

members of the body; it rests upon association and involvement.

One cannot lead or guide, or know the needs and dangers faced by the members of the church from a distance or by proxy. They cannot provide leadership; they cannot correct, equip, and nurture the members apart from actual first-hand knowledge.

Elders (bishops) are to lead; in fact, they are to lead well (1 Timothy 5:17). The members of the congregation are to submit and obey them. As regards to the message taught, elders do not originate doctrine; nor do they rule by their own decrees.

Elders are to abide by the revealed will of God, and lead by abiding in it, and being personally obedient to it. There is no place for arbitrary or despotic rule in the church. They do not have the authority to change the word.

SHEPHERDS – PASTORS

The term “shepherd” is not applied in direct statement, but is implied in a number of passages in the New Testament. For instance the directive given by Peter establishes this to be true. He wrote to the elders saying:

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly” (1 Peter 5:2).

Interestingly, the word “feed” is from the original word “*poimaino*,” which means to feed, or tend as does a shepherd (cf. Acts 20:17; 28). Contrast the KJV and the NKJV rendering of Acts 20:28:

Acts 20:28 – “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, **to feed** the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (KJV)

Acts 20:28 – “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, **to shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (NKJV)

The word “pastor” is found only in Ephesians 4:11 in the entire New Testament. It is from the word “*poimen*” which indicates to “feed” or “tend.” It literally means to tend as a shepherd. Thus, the pastor is one that functions as “a shepherd or feeder.”

The Hebrew equivalent of this word is rendered pastor or pastors eight times in the book of Jeremiah. In other parts of the Old Testament it is rendered “herdsman” seven times, and “shepherd” sixty-two times.

The pastors, the elders, and the bishops are not three distinct groups of leaders. The terms are used to des-

ignite the same servant-leaders of the local New Testament church.

TEACHERS

This is not a term used to define the office of elders, yet teaching is a central function of elders. In the New Testament a number of teachers are identified. Undeniably, the older women are to teach the younger women (Titus 2:3-5). Men and women (fathers and mothers) can and do teach children (Ephesians 6:1 ff).

In a real and undeniable sense, teaching is the life of the church. Each congregation is finally the product of the teaching that it is given, and that it receives.

Undeniably, elders are to teach. To qualify for the role, they are to be "apt to teach," (1 Timothy 3:2). Not only apt to teach, but committed and capable.

Paul wrote of elders, "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9).

Paul directed that certain of them are to receive double honor. Note, "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine" (1 Timothy 5:17).

They are to lead, not only by example, but by teaching; by instructing

and equipping those who look to them for leadership. They feed the flock by teaching the will of God.

It seems evident that they can and in fact must do the work stipulated by Paul to Timothy. They should be credible links in the process of the continuation of instruction — the teaching of "faithful men."

"You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:1-2).

WATCHMEN

The charge given in Hebrews chapter thirteen is full of implication. The charge is to the members of the local congregation, yet it is about the elders.

"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17).

Three obligations are implied in this text: (1) The members of the local congregation are to obey their overseers; (2) The overseers are to watch out for the souls of the members; (3) Both the overseers and the congregation shall give an account for their lives.

Since the brethren are to be subject to the leaders – the elders, these servant-leaders are duty bound to lead as did Christ, the chief Shepherd, and must never forget they are to protect and guide, they are to defend and help. They are never to act as a boss, nor as dictators.

Elders “watch for souls.” That is, they look to the spiritual well-being of those under their oversight. The role of elder is not one that is merely assumed. It is not a grant one gives to himself; it is a trust from the congregation to the elders.

SPIRITUALLY MATURE

It is to the benefit of the elders, and to the spiritual integrity, maturity, and security of the congregation under their oversight. An elder – the elders – must never lose sight of their spiritual calling (Acts 20:28).

The role of elder is formidable. Who, in fact, is worthy of this role? The Lord God does not demand the impossible. It is imperative that the man who desires the role of elder must give the most prayerful and conscientious attention to his life, his faith, his reverence for God, his love for the church, the quality of his devotion, his attitude, and his actions. This is to be thorough and ongoing.

For one to be casual or indifferent toward these things is to disqualify himself. For one to enter into this

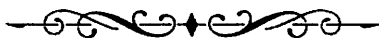
role, accept this appointment, and then function in a fashion that does not honor that which God requires, is to be a danger not only to the congregation that he is to serve, but endangers his soul.

PERSONALLY DEVOTED

To consider one's personal devotion is a constant exercise, to commit oneself to be one with God is essential not optional. God is worthy of honor, and is to be had in fear. Elders are to be men of honor who fear the Lord, and serve Him with joy and gladness.

“The elders who are among you I exhort...Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Elders watch for souls, or they have no right to be called by that worthy designation. “Good-ole-boys” know how to placate and accommodate, but elders have a holy calling. They have the God-given obligation to watch for souls, and to do so as those who will give an account to God.



In Love, Forgiving Others

Gerald Cowan

There are **four essential matters** in forgiveness, for which we often fail. We will discuss them. There are **two categorical essentials** in the matter of salvation – basic but general matters – which are not properly emphasized. We will also emphasize them. After the general discussion of the subject, we will add **three concluding considerations**.

FOUR DIFFICULT ESSENTIALS

(1) **Admitting we are wrong and asking forgiveness.** It is hard on our pride and self-esteem as well as the image others have of us. An inflated sense of our own importance requires us to protect our image and influence as much as possible, even when we know it is faulty and undeserved (Romans 12:3, Galatians 6:3).

(2) **Seeking and accepting forgiveness when we do not feel we deserve it, or when we do not intend to repent and make necessary changes.** The last part of the statement is valid. Hypocrisy is pointless. Pretending to repent and change is not enough – you will probably be found out and then your situation will be worse. But feeling one does not deserve and should not ask forgiveness is not a valid response.

Sometimes one may think he has not been punished enough and should suffer more before he can be forgiven. We may see ourselves as unworthy, but only because we see ourselves through our own or some other human's distorted senses, and not through God's eyes and desires for us.

No matter what one has done and no matter how often one has done it, the God of love and life desires to forgive and save and will do so for one who believes and obeys Him – one who genuinely repents and changes and stops doing the wrong thing.

The patient and loving God offers as many chances as one needs and rejoices when His offer is accepted (2 Peter 3:9 and 15, Luke 15:7 and 10).

(3) **Forgiving others when they admit wrong and ask forgiveness.** Some will not forgive until the guilty person has suffered enough and they themselves judge as to how much is enough. Some seem to have the idea that God will not forgive those who sin against us unless and until we forgive them. That is absolutely not true. God will forgive them when they meet His conditions – including repentance and asking the offended one to forgive as well as asking Him to

forgive. But are we aware that even when He is willing to forgive others who sin against us, He will not forgive *us* unless we forgive them too?

(4) **Forgetting the things that have been forgiven.** Forgetting requires not bringing up past offenses or in other ways holding them against the forgiven person.

The common, though perhaps unconscious, response is to keep things in memory but "on the back burner," just in case of a repeat performance or some other indiscretion.

Many who are sinned against get historical. Not hysterical but *historical*, calling up every mistake of the past and putting it on the table with the present mistake.

The matter of memory plays a part in accepting forgiveness, also in forgiving ourselves. One may have some neurotic or pathological guilt, not believing that anybody else – not even the Lord himself – can forgive sins such as he has committed.

Like Isaiah, we get a glimpse of the Holy God and we feel undone, unclean, not worthy to be allowed to exist, expecting the Holy God to destroy us (Isaiah 6:1-5). But the lesson to learn from Isaiah is that God can cleanse, forgive, save and use as His ministering servants those who submit themselves to Him.

TWO GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SALVATION

By way of clarification, we are not talking about God's plan of salvation or implementation of God's plan in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are concerned here with our own personal part, doing our part so that God can do His part for our salvation.

(1) **The first basic requirement for salvation is being forgiven of personal sin.** The unforgiven are not saved and cannot be. Do not say that our sin is God's fault. God has no need to be forgiven for anything. He has never done anything wrong. Nor can anybody convict Jesus Christ of any sin (John 8:46).

There is not one human other than Jesus who ever lived that did not and does not sin (Romans 3:10, 23). Even Christians sin (1 John 1:1-4, 7-9). I reiterate the point: the unforgiven are not saved and cannot be.

(2) **The second basic requirement is obeying the gospel, which is required from every person who wants to be forgiven.** Faith in God, His Christ, His Spirit, His words and His works is essential (Hebrews 11:6).

Repentance is essential too, not only sorrow and regret or remorse for one's sins, but also ceasing from the sin and correcting the damage done when possible. Repentance is a death

to the prior sin one has committed (Romans 6:1-2).

One has not really obeyed the gospel until he allows himself to be baptized into Christ, immersed in water in the likeness of the burial and rising to life of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 3:26-27). God will add to the church, the spiritual body of Christ, all those and saved by obeying from the heart His doctrine and gospel (1 Corinthians 12:13, Romans 6:17, Acts 2:41 and 47).

SCRIPTURES TO CONSIDER

Matthew 6:12-15: From the model for praying, Jesus taught the disciples that in the prayer we are to recognize God as Father and ourselves as His people.

Notice also that receiving what we ask may require giving the same to others who ask. The evil one, Satan, is the enemy of our souls. We should not be enemies of God or enemies of the souls of others.

Luke 17:1-5 and Matthew 18:15-17: An important addition and explanation is provided about the need and frequency of forgiveness for those who sin against us. We are allowed to accuse and rebuke those who sin against us. If the sinner repents, forgive him. *If* may also be understood as *when*. *If* implies that the condition must be met – only *if* he repents can he be forgiven.

If he does not repent but is forgiven anyway it makes repentance irrelevant. *When* concerns the timing of your response to the repentance – *when* he repents, forgive him. At the time of his repentance he should be forgiven.

Even when you cannot know if his repentance is genuine, his word will eventually be supported or disproved by his actions. If he is a repeat offender rebuke him again and forgive him again if and when he repents again.

There is no end to forgiveness when it is based upon repentance. You can be willing to forgive and perhaps forgive those who sin against you, but it does not change their status with God. Encourage them to repent so that God can forgive them.

Ephesians 4:31-5:2a: The motivation for forgiving others is specified. It is *if* and *because* we have been forgiven by God in Christ that we are willing and know how to forgive others. It is because we love as the Lord loves. It is also because we want to be identified as true children of God, true disciples of Christ.

THREE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

(1) God will not forgive those who refuse to obey the gospel (Hebrews 5:9; 1 Peter 4:17-19).

(2) God will not forgive Christians who will not repent and live faithfully according to the commands of Christ, which includes their treatment of others (James 2:13; Matthew 6:15).

(3) Lastly, those who know what they should do but refuse to do it can-

not be forgiven or saved. They have no hope of being saved until they do what God requires (Ephesians 2:8-14, 22).



Neo-Sectarian Words

John T. Polk, II

"Sound, Sounder, Soundest"

The only preaching endorsed by the Holy Spirit in the churches of Christ was of "sound doctrine." All sin is condemned for being "contrary to **sound doctrine**" (1 Timothy 1:10). Christians are in apostasy when "they will not endure **sound doctrine**" (2 Timothy 4:3).

An elder should be "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by **sound doctrine**, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9), and face corrupt false teachers to "rebuke them sharply, that they may be **sound in the faith**" (Titus 1:13). The obligation for a Gospel Preacher to set churches in order with Elders is to "speak the things which are proper for **sound doctrine**" (Titus 2:1). Heeding sound doctrine should cause "older men" to be "**sound in faith**, in love,

in patience" (Titus 2:2), and "young men" to have "**sound speech** that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you" (Titus 2:8).

"Doctrine" is either "sound" or "unsound," and there are no degrees in between. There is no such thing as "sound, sounder, soundest," as these invoke comparison that God doesn't make. Since "sectarianism" is making divisions and separations which God hasn't given, then degrees of doctrine would be "sectarian" in its very nature.

"Balanced"

What is "**balanced preaching**?" "Balance" is a word never used of "doctrine" or "preachers" in the New Testament. To "balance" something means to "compare it with something else," or to "equalize it with another thing." With what is "doctrine" or are "preachers" to be "equalized?"

Paul appealed to Timothy not to be “balanced” with false knowledge: “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane *and* idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge-- by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace *be* with you. Amen” (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

Jesus said there is a difference between ignorant worship and true worshipers: “You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:22-24).

What “balance” can there be between these two kinds of worshipers? Peter appeals to Christians to not “balance” our “good works” with worldly works:

“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:11-12).

If the doctrine we should preach is “sound,” with what should it be “balanced?” If preaching “sound doctrine” produces “true worshipers,” with what does our worship need to be “balanced?” If we heed “sound doctrine,” with what should our Christian living be “balanced?”

Unfortunately, those in the church of Christ who demand “balanced” preachers and doctrine, “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” (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

So-called “balanced preaching” tilts the scale toward false doctrine, and is “sectarian!” Gospel preaching is not a “balancing act,” but learning to “Take firm hold of instruction, do not let go; Keep her, for she is your life” (Proverbs 4:13).

“Mainstream”

The churches of Christ should be committed to “Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end” (Hebrews 3:6). This does not make us a **“mainstream church of Christ,”** for that would mean there are tributaries or lesser streams connected that

would be acceptable. There is no other stream!

When Paul wrote, "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse" (Colossians 1:2), what other "brethren in Christ" were there in Colosse?

When Paul wrote "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called *to be* saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours" (1 Corinthians 1:2), what person "sanctified in Christ Jesus" was not in their assembly when they came "together in one place" (1 Corinthians 11:20)?

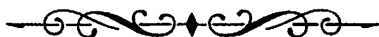
Jesus built "His" church (Matthew 16:18), and Paul pleaded "with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

Since Jesus built His church, and Christians should have "no divisions among" them, there is only the church of Christ or it is not! There are no partial churches of Christ in Scripture, and it is "sectarian" to try to make it so.

In Conclusion

"Sound doctrine" should not be "balanced" in order to support a "mainstream church of Christ!" We should "no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15).

"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love" (1 Corinthians 16:13-14).



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The One Who Said "I Thirst" Created the Seas

Raymond Elliott

There He was, God the Son, incarnate in human flesh, nailed to Calvary's cross. Jesus Christ was dying for all of mankind "by the grace of God" (Hebrews 2:9).

He had been hanging on that rugged cross almost six hours. While He was on the cross, He spoke seven times. Of the seven sayings of Jesus Christ, the shortest was: "I thirst" (John 19:28). Surely His words indicated the intense suffering He was enduring on that "tree" (Acts 10:39; Galatians 3:13). A Roman soldier gave Him a mixture of sour wine (wine that had passed its time and had turned into vinegar) and water.

Genesis Creation Account

Our Lord Jesus Christ created the "waters" in the beginning (Genesis, chapter one), and yet there he was saying, "I thirst."

He also created the trees, from which wood was used to make the cross on which He hung, as He was suspended between heaven and earth.

Also, He had created the material for the hammer or mallet being used by the Roman soldier to drive the nails into His hands and feet and the spear used by the Roman soldier that pierced His side.

Even the soldier was a descendant of the man and woman who God formed/made in the Garden of Eden (Genesis, chapter two).

Jesus Christ could have called down "more than twelve legions of angels" (Matthew 26:53) to rescue Him from that cross "but He died alone for you and me."

You may ask: how was Jesus involved in the creation of the heavens and the earth? In Genesis 1:1 we read, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." In the Hebrew language, "God" is from 'Elohim' which is a noun that is masculine and plural.

Now observe what is written in Genesis 1:26, 27: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in **Our** image according to **Our** likeness...'"

"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

New Testament Creation Accounts

In the New Testament we learn that God the Son was truly involved in the creation of the heavens and the earth and all things therein. The apostle John declared this truth in chapter 1:1-3 of his gospel:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."

In verse 14 we read, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

The apostle John bore witness of this great truth. The eternal Word (Logos) was incarnate in human flesh and His name was called "Jesus" (Matthew 1:21).

The apostle Paul plainly taught that God the Son (Jesus) was involved in the creation. "He (Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (Colossians 1:15-17).

The writer of the book of Hebrews in chapter 1, verses 1-4, speaks of God the Father's evaluation of His Son: "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His

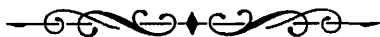
Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, **through whom also He made the worlds**; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

We can truly say that God the Father was the architect/designer of the heavens and the earth; God the Son (Jesus Christ) executed His plan and God the Holy Spirit was the finisher.

*"He is the Alpha and Omega,
the Beginning and the End.
The Son of God, King of Kings,*

*Messiah, Jehovah, The Prince of
Peace, is He.
Son of Man, Seed of Abraham,
Second Person in the Trinity"*

- From the song, *Alpha and Omega*,
Lyrics by Robbie Trice



Jack Wilhelm Remembered

Florence, AL: Jack Wilhelm died after a fatal fall on Sunday morning, February 7, while he was preparing for morning worship. He was 85.

Brother Wilhelm spent 22 years as president at Mars Hill Bible School in Florence (1962-83, 2000). During these years the school earned a reputation for sound doctrine and practice.

In addition to his work as an educator, he was a gospel preacher. Brother Wilhelm preached for many churches in the area and conducted more than 200 gospel meetings. He also spoke at various events for more than 230 churches in Alabama.

Wilhelm also did a daily radio program from 1950-95, and began a daily television program, "Televisit with the Bible," in 1957 that aired for 50 years.

From 1980-1992 he published the RSVP Newsletter for ministers in all 50 states. It has been estimated that as many as 1000 congregations might have heard sermons that ministers adapted from his published materials. Since 1987, he taught classes each spring and fall for ministers at Athens and Winfield. He wrote the Gospel Advocate's Companion yearbook for 2003-2004 and 13 Foundation Quarterlies for adults from 2004-2007. He wrote additional study books for Lambert Publishing.

Gospel Meeting Announcement

Marion, IL: The Lord's church in Marion, Illinois is having a gospel meeting with Mike McDaniel from April 10-12. Mike preaches for the Central church of Christ in Caruthersville, Missouri. He is also the moderator for the television program *A Bible Answer*.

Preachers Workshop

Walnut Ridge, AR: The Main Street church of Christ will be conducting a preachers' workshop on April 16.

A morning session will be conducted by Kenneth Gossett and will last from 9am-12pm. An afternoon session will be conducted by Dean Fugett and will last from 1-3pm.

For more information contact Joshua Dement (870) 378-5551.

News from the Southwest School of Bible Studies

Austin, TX: The Southwest church of Christ and School of Bible Studies will be conducting an evangelistic campaign this year in conjunction with a gospel meeting, rather than hosting its annual lectureship. The date for the campaign is April 9-13.

The school has also recently hired Clay Bond as a new instructor. Clay is an alumnus of the school and has been preaching in Texas.

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Lonnie Jones Fund

Blue Ridge, GA: Lonnie Jones passed away February 17. He was the gospel preacher for the Blue Ridge congregation in Georgia. Lonnie was 44 and leaves behind a wife and three children. Individuals wishing to extend financial support of the Jones family may do so through the Blue Ridge church of Christ. Please make you financial support payable to Blue Ridge church of Christ at the following address:

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42nd Annual Lectureship

Knoxville, TN: The Southeast Institute of Biblical Studies will host their annual lectureship April 24-27. The theme for this year is "Grow: Becoming Like Jesus." For more information call (865) 691-7444.

Gospel Gleaner staff writer and director of the West Virginia School of Preaching, **Andy Robison**, will be speaking on the program. He will be speaking Monday, April 25, at 2:30.

New Study from WVBS

World Video Bible School is producing a new series of studies titled *Bible Land Passages*. Filmed on location, the study profiles key sites in the Bible lands and explains events from the

Studies from the Old Testament and the life of Jesus are based upon bringing the viewer to understand and appreciate the way the accounts unfold in the context of history, geography and archaeology.

Several of these video lessons/documentaries are completed and available for free viewing at:

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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

The

GOSPEL



GLENER

Volume 28 / Number Four
April, 2016

For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

Staff Writers

Stephen R. Bradd	Bill Brandstatter
Ronald D. Bryant	Gerald Cowan
Raymond Elliott	Mel Futrell
Ferrell Hester	Mike Kiser
Grady Miller	Owen D. Olbricht
David R. Pharr	John T. Polk II
Ivie Powell	Travis Quertermous
Andy Robison	Ron Thomas
Ernest Underwood	Mike Underwood
Robert L. Waggoner	Sam Willcut

Associate Editors

James R. McGill ♦ Bill Dillon

Editor

Andy Erwin

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www.gospelgleaner.com

(256) 627-3215

Direct Operation of the Holy Spirit

Andy Erwin

The doctrine of total hereditary depravity states that the guilt and the consequences of Adam's sin have been passed down to every one of his descendants – i.e., the whole of the human race, thus corrupting the entire world.

The doctrine may be defined as “total” meaning complete; ‘hereditary’ meaning inherited from Adam; “depravity” meaning depraved from the ability of will to do any good accompanying salvation, and **unable by his own strength to save himself or to assist in anyway thereunto.**

Stemming from the doctrine of total hereditary depravity is the doctrine of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

In the Westminster Confession of Faith we find the theory expressed thusly:

“Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without **the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit**, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, nor to dispose themselves to reformation.”

Regenerating Grace

The “regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit” is what we shall deem a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine follows accordingly:

- (1) Man is unable to do anything to save himself due to his defiled nature.
- (2) Therefore, God must send the Holy Spirit upon him (whether man wants to receive Him or not) to change his corrupt nature. This is what the Calvinists call “irresistible grace.”

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- (3) Thus, "all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; **without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God**, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform."¹
- (4) Moreover, "when God carries out this good pleasure in his chosen ones, **or works true conversion in them**, he not only sees to it **that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit** so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, **he also penetrates into the inmost being of man**, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised."²
- (5) "**He infuses new qualities into the will**, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, **the unwilling one willing**, and the stubborn one compliant; he activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds."³

What Does the Bible Teach?

Now that we have read what the denominational creeds teach, let us take a few of these statements and address them accordingly by comparing them with what the Bible teaches.

- (1) "Without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they (the lost, AE) are neither willing nor able to return to God."

Here we have the doctrine of inability coupled with the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. According to this statement, the purpose of giving the Holy Spirit is so that man might be willing and able to obey God.

However, the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit indwells the person after he has become a child of God. Peter testified of the Holy Spirit "whom God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

Paul taught the Ephesians that they were sealed with the Holy Spirit, but not so that they might hear and believe, but "after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in who also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13).

Thus, we find that Calvinism is teaching us that we must receive the Holy Spirit in order to receive the word of God and believe. Yet, the Bible teaches us that we receive the

Holy Spirit *after* we have heard the word of God and believed.

Once again, Paul taught the Galatians that “*because* you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Galatians 4:6). And, we become children of God “by faith in Christ Jesus,” and obedience to the gospel, not by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:26-27).

We might also look to the day of Pentecost and ask when those souls received the gift of the Holy Spirit. It was not before baptism, but after (Acts 2:28). We are born of the Spirit when we are born of water, and baptized into Christ (John 3:3-5). Such “refreshing” comes after conversion, not before (Acts 3:19).

(2) A second assertion we reject is as follows: God “works true conversion in them” (i.e., His chosen ones).

According to Calvinism, God sends His Spirit on some (i.e. His chosen), but not on others. Such a statement turns God into a respecter of persons, which the Bible says clearly He is not.

Here we are exposed to the deeper problem of Calvinism – their concept of God. The Bible teaches that God does not respect persons (Colossians 3:24-25), and everyone will be judged by the same standard (John 12:48).

The Bible teaches that Christ died for every man (Hebrews 2:9), and that every man is entitled to hear the gospel (Mark 16:15). God wants every person to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1Timothy 2:4).

How could the Bible be true if God chooses to help some souls obey the truth and not others? How could God be seen as fair and just in the eyes of those He did not help? How could He be seen as loving and merciful for refusing to help these souls? According to Calvinism, not only did God not help these others, He created them for the sole purpose of being lost.

Along this same line of reasoning, we take issue with a third statement:

(3) God “sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed” to the elect.³

Here we have a case where their creed expresses one doctrine here and another doctrine on the point of unconditional election. According to their doctrine of unconditional election, one does not even have to hear the gospel to be saved. Hearing would be a condition, and man is saved by God’s election rather than obeying conditions, according to Calvinism.

False doctrine will always be inconsistent. It will always catch itself coming and going with contradictions. This is an acid test for truth and error.

The Bible teaches us that faith comes by hearing the gospel preached (Romans 10:14-17), and that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6) and be saved (John 8:24).

God has seen to it that the gospel is to be preached to all nations and every creature (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).

We shall also take issue with a fourth statement:

(4) God “enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit.”

We believe this to be true, but not according to the process in which Calvinists believe. We believe that God enlightens the mind of “whosoever will” (Revelation 22:17).

He enlightens the mind by the preaching of the gospel. Souls have their heart opened by the preaching of the truth (Acts 2:37; Acts 28:23-29). Our souls are purified by obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22-25).

We must receive with meekness the word that can save our souls (James 1:21).

Truly, “the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11-12).

The grace of God has appeared in the gospel as it is preached to the lost, not by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

H. Leo Boles carefully expressed a truthful statement worthy of our consideration when he said, “Let it be understood now that since the church was established there has never been a genuine case of conversion that was not begun, carried on, and consummated by the Holy Spirit.”⁴

It is not our intent to leave the Holy Spirit out of conversion; but it is our express intent to state carefully that He operates on the heart of the lost *only* through the written and revealed word of God.

Foy E. Wallace, Jr., among others, was careful to explain how the sinner is begotten through the word.⁵ Wallace noted and commented upon James 1:18 and 1 Corinthians 4:15, saying:

“All life is generated through *seed*. When the Word – the spiritual seed – is planted in the heart, it germinates on the same principle as the corn that is deposited in the earth. The Word has in it the embryo of spiritual life. This was according to God’s will, the apostle James said, and having thus willed it, God accomplished it with *the word of truth* – and the apostle Paul put it: *through the gospel*.”⁵

Never a Fool

The doctrine of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit has led to many unscriptural practices. Extreme claims and foolish experiences have been stated as a proof of conversion. Yet, we know for certain that the Holy Spirit has never caused anyone to act like a fool.

The “mourner’s bench” is the result of this doctrine. On this bench lost souls have to prove they are being led by the Holy Spirit by relating or manifesting an experience.

The agitations of the modern Pentecostal and Holiness movements are the result of this doctrine as well. Let it also be noted that the lack of such “experiences” has caused many souls

to search deeper into God’s word, find the truth, and obey it.

In answering this doctrine, one needs only to show the evident disagreement, false doctrines, and confusion among all the groups which claim to be led directly by the Holy Spirit. God certainly is not the author of such works. If God was directing them, certainly they would all speak the same thing, and their words would be truth.

¹ Canons of Dort, III, IV; Article 3

² Ibid., Article 11

³ Ibid.

⁴ H. Leo Boles, *The Holy Spirit*, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1983), 195.

⁵ Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *The Mission and Medium of the Holy Spirit*, (Nashville, TN: Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Publications, 1967), 18.

⁶ Ibid.



Gifts of the Holy Spirit – Then and Now (*An Answer*)

Owen D. Olbricht

The leaders of the Restoration Movement never arrived at a unanimous conclusion in their effort to understand the work of the Holy Spirit. The conclusion that arose among the majority of them was that the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit ended when complete revelation was given,

after which special revelation and direct guidance by the Holy Spirit no longer continued.

Very few followers of Jesus, if any, deny that John had a heaven-given ministry of preaching to prepare others for the coming of Jesus (Acts 19:4), but no special signs of the Ho-

ly Spirit were granted to him to confirm that his message was from God (John 10:41). His credentials were based on the prophecies of the Old Testament (Matthew 3:1-4; Luke 1:17; John 1:23).

A False Hope

A false hope arises if the church of today expects the same leading and empowerment enjoyed in the early church, as expressed in the article, "Power of the Spirit," in *The Bridge*, (Vol. 56, No. 2, Fall 2015, pg. 1). Observe:

"The Holy Spirit is essential for the church's mission. Just as the Holy Spirit led Jesus (Mark 1:12) and the early church (Acts 11:15-17; 16:7-10), so also the Spirit leads the church today. Just as the Holy Spirit empowered the church and Christian preaching (Acts 4:29-31; 1 Corinthians 2:4-5), the Spirit gives gifts so that the church can be edified and can participate in the ongoing work of the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 12:4-7)."

Are we to expect the Holy Spirit to lead us as He led Jesus to be tempted in the wilderness and to work through us as He worked through Him to perform miracles (Acts 10:38)? Are we to receive the great power that shook a house and gave the apostles ability to witness for Jesus (Acts 4:31, 33), and empowered them to perform signs and

wonders (Acts 5:12)? Can we have the nine spiritual gifts that were in the early church (1 Corinthians 12:7-10)?

The answer is that no one today is able to exercise these gifts through the power of the Holy Spirit, which must be evidence that these special gifts of the Spirit have ceased.

Empowerment by the Spirit

The article progresses to affirm that a transformation into the image of Jesus comes by an empowering act of the Spirit. Such a conclusion does not take into account that the transformation comes by, "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Also, the article says that the fruit of the Spirit takes place as "...the result of the Spirit's sanctifying work in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23; see also 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1 Peter 1:2),"

This conclusion overlooks the fact that Christians have the responsibility to add these virtues to their lives (2 Peter 1:5-7). The sanctifying power of God comes by the Spirit and by faith in the truth, which has been revealed by the Spirit (John 16:13; 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

An Invitation

At the end of the article is an invitation: "More importantly, we invite you to join us as we seek the Spirit's

presence and empowerment and as we participate in God's mission to redeem all things."

The Spirit is always present (Psalm 139:7-12). We neither need to attend in order to have the presence of the Spirit (Psalm 139:7-11), nor do we need to seek for Him to give us special empowerment.

As members of God's family, He continues to give us common strength in the inner person (Ephesians 3:16). Special empowerment, and signs, and wonders were given to confirm the word (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:3-4), and Jesus' signs were written so that we might believe He is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:30, 31).

If we expect these endowments, we are expecting spiritual gifts that were given to the apostles for proof that they were true apostles (2 Corinthians 12:12), which included the ability to give gifts to others though the laying on of their hands (Acts 8:18; Rom. 1:11).

Jesus, who was endowed with all power, and the apostles to whom He gave power in a secondary sense (Acts 1:8) are in a class all their own. No one after them has been in their class and no one today should expect the same empowerment with which they were endowed or which they were able to confer to others.

The Worth of Worship

Bill Dillon

Worship is the Christian's spiritual vitality. Worship is to the soul what bread is to the body. In periods of praise to God we are renewed and re-dedicated to high alms and holy purposes. Worship tempers us against the evils in the days yet to be.

One of the finest statements ever made on the value of attending worship services came from the grief-stricken father whose oldest son had been killed in a traffic mishap. Funeral services were conducted and the two little remaining brothers with their heart-broken parents proved themselves equal to the exacting task of sudden tragedy. The following Sunday, the family was the first to arrive at the church building. Their faces bore the shadows and strains of the deep grief through which they were passing. The father explained, "We're here today because we couldn't think of a better place to be!"

The father was right. Worship gives comfort as we place the weight of sorrow and of every problem on the knees of God!

The very fact of the first day of the week is a shining memorial of the Lord's resurrection and His triumph over death. Guilt, grief, and the grave are vanquished in the brightness and glory of the Lord's victory. This fact alone is enough to dry every tear on the earth!

HOW TO MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN

Robert L. Waggoner

Some presidential candidates are recognizing that our nation is in decline and are pledging to make America great again. Many Americans agree that our nation is in decline, although perhaps most have no idea why. People see economic hard times and a lack of leadership in the world. We face international terrorists and fear potential loss of personal liberties.

Greatness in a Person's Character

Amidst this angst, people want leaders who assure them that things will get better. Along comes a presidential candidate who appears to many to be the epitome of success because of his personal wealth. Many voters think that we need a national leader who knows how to produce personal wealth to our citizens. But his language is excessively foul, even in public and on national television. Many of our great-grandmothers, who lived during what some have called the greatest generation, would have insisted on washing his mouth with soap!

A person's character is indicated by his speech. "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34; see also Luke 6:45). Such a person does not have character

qualities to lead a nation to greatness because a nation is exalted whenever it is righteous.

Greatness in a Nation's Character

One Bible version translates Proverbs 14:34 thusly: "Righteousness makes a nation great, but sin diminishes any people."

Our nation has lost its greatness because it has turned away from God. God told the Israelites that they would be blessed if they kept his commandments, but cursed if they departed from him. (Deuteronomy 28). Israel diminished its greatness when it turned away from God.

Moses charged the Israelites "You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

David praised God, saying, "Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all" (1 Chronicles 29:12).

No power on earth is greater than God. Whenever a nation follows the ordinances of God, that nation is prosperous and protected by God, not

only from international threats, but also from dangers in local neighborhoods.

Whenever a nation departs from living by divine ordinances, that nation loses its prosperity and its divine protection. Moreover, its people are no longer safe within their own neighborhoods. Our nation will become great, prosperous, and safe again whenever its leaders and its people turn back to God.

Now is the time for righteous people to seek leaders who fear God. However, we must not depend upon people for guidance, strength, and safety but upon God.

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD, and depart from evil" (Proverbs 3:5-6).



SLANDERING YOUR BROTHER

Ronald D. Bryant

"Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it."

To slander is to speak prejudicially of another, whether it is true or false. In Christ, our words are to be ruled by love and truth; by that which is good and right. A godly person "has no slander on his tongue, does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellow man" (Psalm 15:3). Moses warned the Jews, "Do not go about spreading slander among your people" (Leviticus 19:16).

Evil-Speaking

Evil-speaking comes in many forms; yet, can be set under two

heads: (1) "Whispering" and (2) "Backbiting." Whispering is the secretive or covert, defamation. Backbiting is public defamation.

Each can be done in a variety of ways; by false accusations, by divulging private matters, by insinuation of wrong, by exaggeration, by deliberate misrepresentation, and by assigning sinister motives to one's actions. Such actions are inappropriate, should not be engaged, and should not be given an audience.

Many, by bent of personality, tend to offend in this way. Others do so for they are not careful in thought or conduct. It seems imperative that each of us ought to exercise great, even constant care, to possess the

right attitude and have honorable conversations about others.

Some literally cultivate the habit of speaking ill of others, and think nothing of so doing. Some are “rumor-mongers,” and they delight in gossiping about others!

Christians stand under the obligation to relate toward all in a respectful and Christ-like way. We must endeavor to avoid being a critic or an accuser, realizing that such causes great harm to the cause of Christ.

Against those in Leadership

We are to have no desire to speak against another. Furthermore, we are charged not to speak evil of one who is in leadership.

Paul gave this charge, “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses” (1 Timothy 5:19). Obviously, because they are in office, servant-leaders are watched closely, yet this prohibition stands to guard not the elders, but the office in which they serve. Their reputation concerns the honor of Christ, the head of the church.

Evil Listening

One's ears may be as guilty as his tongue. It is not right, nor wise to listen to the whisperer. Never give attention to one who slanders. It is right to respond to such with rebuke and pleading for what is good and

right. It is right to express disapproval of such.

Solomon spoke of such: “As a north wind brings rain, so a sly tongue brings angry looks” (Proverbs 25:23).

Slanders can sometimes be discouraged when they are not accepted. David said, “Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy; the one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure” (Psalm 101:5).

Conclusion

Finally, it is the Lord God who tests His servants. Paul posed this powerful question to the followers of Christ, “Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand” (Romans 14:4).

Anyone who speaks against or judges his brother is acting as critic and accuser. He lays claim to authority that does not belong to him. God alone has the right to judge and to pass sentence upon man.



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Have You Considered...

John T. Polk, II

Self-Esteem

A Christian is not "to think of *himself* more highly than he ought to think but to think soberly" (Romans 12:3). It is a completely worldly characteristic to seek self-elevation, that is, to stroke one's own ego.

Following Christ changes this outlook entirely. "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion" (Romans 12:16). This last forbidden expression, "wise in your own opinion," is aimed at the worldly, false sense of "self-esteem" so eagerly taught to children.

The desire to be known as the first, best, smartest, and most popular has caused ruin within and without. This grasping for self-importance is a most destructive attitude.

The Corinthians' obedience to the Apostle Paul's preaching in Corinth (Acts 18:1-18) seemed to begin the church of Christ there, but he didn't feel the need to remind them, years later, that he was their *first located preacher*:

"We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us--a sphere which especially in-

cludes you. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment. But 'he who glories, let him glory in the LORD.' For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends" (2 Corinthians 10:13-18).

God is not impressed when we commend our own achievements, but only when we accept His judgment as our standard of acceptance. Any Christian, gospel preacher, eldership or local church that must constantly list their achievements to impress others must repent and get back to the mind of Christ, for "he who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

Saint or Sinner?

The line between saint and sinner has been blurred in many people's minds so they think they are followers of Christ without repenting of their sins! "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6).

God's line has not changed, though: "For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them" (Ephesians 5:5-7).

Jesus said: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

No one who remains in their sins is in "fellowship" with, nor "has any inheritance" from, God.

Live Good Enough Without Christ?

Many seem to think that if they live by Christian principles, they do not need to repent of sin. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

It's true that ungodly people may do good, but it is not true that ungodly people who do good do not need to be converted to Jesus Christ. God's "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17), but He taught that all must "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Jesus said: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16), which allows God to work "in

you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ" (Hebrews 13:21). Jesus also said, "without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Once Saved, Not Always Saved

There are many who think they have been saved and sealed so that they cannot sin and be lost. "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:10).

"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1).

If God's written Word is obeyed, people would not willingly choose to remain in sin, for it is inconsistent with a Christian life. But even Christians will sin. Paul wrote "the church of God in Corinth" to "let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 1:2; 10:12). "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall" (Hebrews 4:11).

Those who can enter "that rest" can "fall," hence the warning. It is impossible for a Christian to also choose to "continue in sin" (Romans 6:1-2), a completely contradictory life-style!

Look Closely

"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he

who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also" (1 John 4:20-21).

In Christ, who is our "brother?" All those who were "baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

Since "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47), no one, in or out of the church of Christ, can hate Christians and claim to "love God."

Say and Do Not

"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4).

Saying but not obeying only deceives one's self. Commands "in Jesus' name" are "His commandments."

Jesus' Apostle Peter commanded, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you

shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

To claim "remission of sins" before repenting and being baptized, means a person has not kept "His commandments." Jesus said of Pharisees, "they say, and do not do" (Matthew 23:3). Jesus also said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me" (John 14:21). Do you love Jesus Christ? Do you, truly, "know him?"

What we "say" about our spiritual condition may not be accurate according to God's written Word. Therefore religious "claims" must constantly be tempered and checked by the Scriptures, not personal witnessing.

Our stroked egos will not determine our eternity, for Jesus well said: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

We are only fooling ourselves to "claim," but not practice, what God's Word says!

Begging to Give

Frank Chesser

Paul's heart beat incessantly for the plight of the oppressed. He needed no prompting to "remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10), for he had never forgotten them.

He labored to ease the burdens of the needy saints in Jerusalem. Spiritually indebted to Jewish Christians, Paul pleaded with the Gentile churches to express their gratitude in monetary contributions to aid their Judean brethren (cf. Romans 15:27).

An Enduring Example

The churches in Macedonia were in "great affliction" and "deep poverty" (2 Corinthians 8:2). They were in need themselves. A collection to assist them would have been befitting.

However, in spite of their dire circumstances, they were begging to give, "praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift" (2 Corinthians 8:4). Evidently, in view of their distressed state, Paul had discouraged them from giving. Thus, they were literally pleading with him to accept their gift.

A Standing Rebuke

This example of almost unparalleled benevolence is a standing rebuke to the covetous, self-serving, materialistic attitude characteristic of so many in the church today. While surround-

ed by every conceivable device to promote satisfaction, fun, and ease, the weekly contribution is a perpetual witness to our spiritual complacency, selfishness, and ingratitude.

Some congregations are clothed in purple and fare sumptuously every day. They recline in plush buildings with elegant furnishings touched off with centers for fun and frolic to appease the flesh. Pleas for money for physical gratification will fill the baskets while impassioned petitions for support to evangelize the world fall on deaf ears.

Begging missionaries are a brotherhood disgrace. Missionary families are special. Precious few are willing to walk in their shoes. It is a tragedy when such families are forced to canvass the brotherhood, begging for a few financial crumbs to carry the gospel to some foreign field. Churches should be begging to give in order that they might go!

The Key to Giving

The secret to liberal giving is the gift of "self." Those Macedonians "first gave of their own selves to the Lord" (2 Corinthians 8:5). Denying self is the most difficult demand of the gospel (Luke 9:23). However, once done, material giving becomes as natural as breathing.

Imperatives from Christ

Luke 2:29

1. This is the first recorded utterance of our Lord, spoken during his childhood days. They set forth an imperative that governed His whole life.
2. To say something is an “imperative statement” is to put it in the category of a command. To say that something is an imperative is to say it is something NOT to be avoided or evaded.
3. We learn from Jesus there are some things we “MUST” do.

I. The Imperative of Love

- A. No one can please God in anything they do unless they are motivated by love. It is two dimensional—for God and man. Matthew 22:35-40.
- B. Jesus is our pattern for this kind of love. His love desires that no one should perish. John 3:3-5; 2 Peter 3:8; 1 Timothy 2:3, 4
- C. Love calls for full obedience. 1 John 4:20, 21; 5:2, 3.

II. The Imperative of Duty

- A. Love and obedience cannot be separated. John 14:15; Galatians 5:6.
- B. Christ expressed his duty as an imperative. John 4:4, 34; 9:4. (He did not go through Samaria to save time!)
- C. Our duty requires us to do the best we can. Luke 17:10; James 4:17; Jeremiah 20:9; Amos 3:8; 2 Peter 1:13; Ephesians 5:14-16.

III. The Imperative of Sacrifice

- A. The innocent for the guilty was the necessary price. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:4-6.
- B. Christ expressed this need as an imperative. John 3:14-16; and constantly stated it. Matthew 16:21; Luke 22:37; 24:44
- C. Acceptable service means sacrifice and cross-bearing on our part. Matthew 10: 34-39; 16:24-26.

IV. The Imperative of Salvation

- A. His sacrificial death was not all. Acts 2:23, 24; John 20:9.
 - B. His resurrection proves His death was not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:20, 21; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18.
 - C. It is our duty to proclaim the “Resurrection Gospel.” Mark 16:15; Colossians 1:23; Acts 4:20; 1 Corinthians 9:16.
1. Let a ship on the sea sink and there is no limit to the efforts men will put forth to salvage the hidden treasures it has in store.
 2. We ought to be just as persistent to save the treasure hidden under the rough exterior of sinful men—their soul. Acts 4:12
 3. May these imperatives from Christ move us to be about the Father’s business as well.

- Mike Kiser

Philip S. Fall and the Beginning of the Church of Christ in Nashville

James R. McGill

The church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee, had a remarkable beginning. A small church had been meeting since 1820 in a building they erected on Church Street (then called Spring Street) in the heart of downtown Nashville. The church had maintained an informal on-and-off connection with the Concord Baptist Association, but they made it clear that they would be governed by the Scriptures only, not by any human creed.

Their sincere desire to be a true church of Christ intensified as they continued to search the Scriptures. In May, 1826, Philip S. Fall of Frankfort, Kentucky, accepted their invitation to come to Nashville to help them in their quest. They had learned that Fall was fully committed to the restoration of the New Testament church and that he was fervently preaching those great principles.

The Falls had immigrated to America from Brighton, England. Very soon after arriving in the United States, the parents of Philip and his much younger sister Charlotte died, leaving Philip to care for Charlotte in the role of parent. Charlotte eventual-

ly became the wife of noted educator and evangelist Tolbert Fanning.

Fall Arrives in Nashville

The Nashville church was already well on its way to becoming in every sense the church of the New Testament. The arrival of Philip S. Fall accelerated their progress. They quickly put into practice every new truth they learned regarding the organization, worship, and doctrine of the church of Christ, including the preaching and practice of the simple, pure gospel plan of salvation.

A few months later, in 1827, they were able to say that they, as the church of Christ in Nashville, had:

“resolved to reject all human creeds...and to adopt the Bible as the only infallible rule of faith and practice....That they will...in imitation of the Apostolic churches, meet for worship every Lord’s day to break the loaf, unite in reading the scriptures, prayers, praise and contributing for the support of the poor saints, and that all persons making truly the confession required...be received by immersion for the remission of sins into the church.”

The Church of Christ Restored

One historian said mistakenly, "Alexander Campbell capsize the First Baptist Church of Nashville." Campbell did come to Nashville in 1827, but the congregation itself, with great encouragement from Philip S. Fall, and with the Lord's blessing, had already restored the New Testament church in Nashville.

Only four or five out of the 155 wanted to be Baptists. They left and began meeting in the Masonic Hall. They became the nucleus of the First Baptist Church of Nashville.

The downtown church of Christ grew to an attendance of more than 800. About a third of the members were black.

Surviving Through Problems

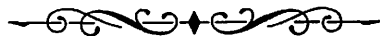
After Philip S. Fall returned to Kentucky for a time, and as the years passed, problems arose in the Nashville church. With numerical growth and financial prosperity, the church built a large and luxurious building on 4th Avenue (Cherry Street). There was a division in the church, followed by a lawsuit.

A year later, in 1857, their lavish building burned. The church then bought back the original modest building on Church Street. They continued to meet there until they moved

to their new building on 7th Avenue (Vine Street) in 1887.

Philip S. Fall had come at their request in 1826 to help the group as they moved toward restoring the true church of Christ in Nashville. Through all the years, he was respected in the community. This respect included the highest governing authorities--even Military Governor (and later President) Andrew Johnson--during the dark days of the 1862-1865 Federal occupation.

Sixty-one years after arriving in Nashville to preach his first sermon in the Church Street building, Philip Fall preached for the last service in that building, at the age of 89, on March 27, 1887.



Gospel Gleaner Returns to 20 Page Format

In order for the *Gospel Gleaner* to continue mailing at the "machine rate" the USPS has required that we decrease the size and weight of the paper to 20 pages. We regret that we are no longer going to provide 28 pages each month, but such is essential in order to continue the subscription rate of \$1 per issue. Thank you for your understanding and most of all, your prayers.

Andy Erwin

India Missions

Report from Dan Curry, Arnold, MO: In the 1960s India missions began with a Canadian minister, Brother J.C. Bailey. He helped establish congregations in that country. Many brethren have travelled there since and the work continues to this day.

My name is Dan Curry, I work for and with the congregation that meets in Arnold, MO. My efforts for the Lord are mainly in prison evangelism. But each January I make a trip to India with a group of Christians from the Poplar Bluff area and other places.

We travel to Kakinada, India in the state of Andra Pradesh. January 2016 was my seventh time going, but many of the group has been making the same trip since 2002. The work has grown and now there is a monthly amount of money sent to the brethren there to help with the work of the Lord.

The daily work there consists of spreading the gospel, a preacher's school, and an orphan home.

When the group goes, we travel to many places and preach the gospel. Since I have been going over 1000 souls have been added to the kingdom. God's word is so powerful and the Indian people so receptive.

The resident preacher that we work with is B. Vijay Kumar and his brother B. Karin Kumar. There are many more brethren, but they are the main ones and they are our translators as well.

There is much more to tell but the space is limited. If you would like more information or to support the work, please write or call Vernon Curry at the Highland Drive church of Christ 1601 Highland Drive Poplar Bluff, MO 63901 email vernoncurry2003@yahoo.com

Please pray that the efforts can continue.

Gospel Advocate Has New Owner

Nashville, TN: Neil Anderson has sold the Gospel Advocate Company to an area business man, Randy Duke.

Duke is an elder for the Mt. Juliet congregation in Mt. Juliet, TN. Duke has also been working with Bear Valley Bible Institute in Denver, CO, as Director of Development.

The *Gospel Advocate* is the fifth-oldest magazine in the United States.

Truth in Love Lectures

Pulaski, TN: The East Hill congregation will be hosting their 26th Annual Truth in Love Lectureship from May 11-15. For more information call (931) 363-2777.

Middle Tennessee School of Preaching and Biblical Studies Enjoys Graduation

College Grove, TN: The annual graduation of the Middle Tennessee School of Preaching and Biblical Studies was conducted on April, 1 at the College Grove church building. A fine meal was provided following the ceremony and wonderful fellowship was enjoyed by all.

Five students graduated this year. The school's enrollment is nearing 200 at nine locations.

Mike Stewart was the first director of the school, serving from 2002-2015. He was the graduation speaker. Milton Stephens, minister of the Lynnville congregation in Lynnville, TN, is now the school's director.

Summer classes are scheduled to begin the first Monday of June. Classes are offered in the evenings, open to everyone, and free of charge. The summer term will begin the school's fifteenth year of operation. Past and present instructors include Jim Boyd, Gary Colley, Jim Lewis, Jim McGill, A.T. Pate and many other faithful gospel preachers.

Graduates of the school are now teaching and preaching in churches of Christ in Oklahoma, Kentucky, Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee.

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Christiana Church of Christ Looking to Hire a Gospel Preacher

Christiana, TN: The church is looking for someone who is sound in faith to take on this part-time work. The congregation consists mostly of senior members at this point. The attendance is in the 40's on Sunday mornings with about half that number on Sunday evenings. The contribution averages approximately \$1,000/weekly.

Contact Ron Lokey 102 Webb RD
Bell Buckle, TN 37020; (931) 389-
6456.

Hackleburg Seeks Gospel Preacher

Hackleburg, AL: This church is looking for a fulltime minister to live and work in their community. The preacher's house is new and so is the church building. Contact C.D. McDuffa for more details (205) 494-9101.



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GOSPEL



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May, 2016

For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

Staff Writers

Stephen R. Bradd	Bill Brandstatter
Ronald D. Bryant	Gerald Cowan
Raymond Elliott	Mel Futrell
Ferrell Hester	Mike Kiser
Grady Miller	Owen D. Olbricht
David R. Pharr	John T. Polk II
Ivie Powell	Travis Quertermous
Andy Robison	Ron Thomas
Ernest Underwood	Mike Underwood
Robert L. Waggoner	Sam Willcut

Associate Editors

James R. McGill ♦ Bill Dillon

Editor

Andy Erwin

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Compromising God's Word

Andy Erwin

Each congregation of God's people has a decision to make – shall we progress or digress? To *progress* is to move forward or onward. Progressing is synonymous with going forward and becoming better.

To *digress* is to turn aside from the main subject or goal. Digressing is synonymous with straying, wandering, and backing up. Honestly, does anyone want to belong to a congregation that is straying, wandering, or backing up from New Testament Christianity?

Yet, many will remain silent while the leadership of their congregation is digressing. Silence is the voice of compromise. Many do not want to hurt another's feelings; or, they may believe it is impolite to protest. Perhaps they do not wish to appear dogmatic or judgmental.

How Does Digression Occur?

Judah fell into wayward digression when they ceased loving the truth. Digression occurred for Judah when they yielded to one compromise at a time. It started by compromising God's law of marriage for Israel. It ended with a complete apostasy.

God implored: "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall

be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward" (Jeremiah 7:23-24).

A Deadly Result

The beloved apostle John expressed the danger of compromise in this way:

"Whosoever transgresses, and abides not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abides in the doctrine of

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Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 9-11).

A person who compromises and chooses not to abide in the doctrine of Christ has not God. If someone tries to convince you not to abide in the doctrine of Christ, "...receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that bids him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." That is clear enough, isn't it?

Compromise Then & Now

Beginning in the second century, the notion of a presiding bishop among the churches began to gain traction. Had brethren in the second century remained steadfast, stood their ground, and stayed with the Bible in opposing digression when the idea of a presiding bishop was first introduced, there may never have been a pope in Rome.

The office of the pope is the ultimate result of their religious compromise. Imagine if you can all of the blood that has been shed and all of the atrocities committed by the men who have been given this title through the centuries – all of which could have been avoided had Christians only held fast to the word of God.

It is also true that many congregations of the Lord's church today have digressed from what they were just a generation ago. Sadly, it has become commonplace to see once faithful congregations becoming more and more denominational in their practices.

How does this happen? If you give the devil an inch, he will take a mile. If brethren will only make a hard stand the first time doctrinal error and compromise is introduced, they can remain faithful to God. We need to be asking ourselves what kind of church we wish to be, and what kind of church do we wish to leave our children. Apostasy is only a generation away (Judges 2:10).

Moving Forward

While we must reject compromising, our mission statement cannot be only to oppose error. We must also make every effort to proclaim saving truth to the lost. If a congregation's teaching efforts consist mainly in opposing error, and very little is done to teach and convert lost souls in the community, that congregation will dwindle and eventually die.

The best way to avoid compromise in the Lord's church is to be so completely enthralled with God's saving truth and its power that you would never dare to compromise it. "Buy the truth and sell it not" (Prov. 23:23).

The Content of Preaching

Robert L. Waggoner

People sometimes say that preaching should be less about the church, and more about Jesus. Sometimes they say that preaching should be more practical and less doctrinal. Such comments prompt the question, what does the Bible say about the content of preaching?

When every New Testament passage that uses “preach,” “preached,” or “preaching” is examined, five major topics are discovered which describe the content of biblical preaching. New Testament preachers preached *Jesus*. They preached *Christ*. They preached the *gospel*. They preached the *word*. And they preached the *kingdom*.

Preaching Jesus

More specifically, they preached *Jesus* (Acts 8:35) “as the Christ” (Acts 5:42; Romans 16:25). They preached “the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). They preached “Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18). They preached “the Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20).

Preaching Christ

Second, they preached *Christ* (Acts 8:5; Phil 1:15, 16, 18), “that he is the son of God” (Acts 9:20). They preached “the unsearchable riches of

Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). They preached “Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Corinthians 4:5). They preached “Christ’s gospel” (2 Corinthians 2:12). They preached “Him” (Galatians 1:16; Colossians 1:28) as “Christ crucified” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Preaching the Gospel

Third, they preached the *gospel* (Matthew 11:5; 26:13; Mark 14:9; 16:15; Luke 7:22; 9:6; 20:1; Acts 8:25; 14:7, 21; 16:10; Romans 1:15; 15:20; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 9:14, 16, 18; 15:1; 2 Corinthians 10:16; Galatians 3:8; 4:13; Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 4:2; 1 Peter 1:12; 4:6).

The gospel they preached is described as “the gospel of Christ” (Romans 15:19), “the gospel of God” (2 Corinthians 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:9), “the gospel of peace” (Romans 10:15) “the everlasting gospel” (Revelation 14:6), “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matthew 24:14) and “the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14).

Preaching the Word

Fourth, they preached the *word* (Mark 2:2; Acts 8:4; 11:19; 16:16; 14:25; 1 Corinthians 15: 2; 2 Tim. 4:2). The word they preached is described as the “word of faith” (Ro-

mans 10:8), the "word of the Lord" (Acts 8:25; 15:35, 36), and the "word of God" (Acts 13:5; 17:13).

That the preaching of the word is the same as the preaching of the gospel is indicated by the fact that the words "gospel" and "word" are used interchangeably (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2).

Preaching the Kingdom

Fifth, Jesus and his disciples preached the *kingdom*, and "the things concerning the kingdom" (Acts 8:12). The kingdom is described as "the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 4:17; 10:7) and "the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2, 60; 16:16; Acts 8:12, 20:25; 28:31). Since "kingdom" and "church" seem to be used interchangeably in Matthew 16:18-19, then we may conclude that they preached about the church.

A Final Point

In preaching these things, New Testament preachers emphasized certain specifics. They preached "in Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2; 17:3; 1 Corinthians 15:12).

Peter said that they were commanded to "preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). Paul preached the same (Acts 17:31).

Jesus declared that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached" (Luke 24:47; see also Mark 6:12). Luke wrote that "through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 13:38). That preaching about Jesus also includes preaching about baptism is indicated by the fact that when Jesus was preached by Philip, the Ethiopian wanted to be baptized (Acts 8:35, 36). Whenever the content of our preaching today is like that of Jesus and his apostles, then it may be characterized as biblical.

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JUDGING THE LAW

Ronald D. Bryant

Judging a Brother

It is necessary, even vital, to study the context of Romans 14. Therein, Paul dealt with matters of indifference; the observing of feasts, the eating of certain foods, etc. He dealt with the fact that some were sitting in judgment of and were speaking evil of one another in matters of indifference. In such matters, he asked, "Who are you to judge another man's servant?"

Criticizing and censuring is judging; and to engage in such is to arrogate to oneself a right and a power to which he is not entitled. One who would promote himself to the chair of critic and censure, should ask himself: "Who gave me this position?" Paul's question: "*Who are you to judge someone else's servant?*" (Romans 14:4), demands a response ruled by honesty and humility before God.

Judging the Law as Unfair

Paul elaborated, saying that one who speaks against his brother speaks against the law and judges it. How can this be? There are several things to consider.

First, every sin is an affront to the law that forbids it. By doing contrary to the law, one judges the law to be

unfit or unworthy of being obeyed. The law forbids rash judgment and speaking evil of one another; therefore the person who does this, approves what the law condemns, and in effect judges that specific law.

Nathan asked David, "*Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?*" (2 Samuel 12:9). In the heat of his desire, David looked on the law as insignificant.

In sinning one judges the law prohibiting that sin as being irrelevant. When sin is seen for what it is, it is clear that evil thoughts prevailed and the law of God was devalued and set aside. It may have even been thought of as unworthy, hard, or unfair.

Satan's has always represented God's law as oppressive. He has ever worked to make man think evil of the law. Paul sought to prevent such thinking, saying, "*The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good*" (Romans 7:12). In that context Paul insisted that the law was good even when it caused death to him!

To love God is to hate evil. His law drives each of us away from sin and draws us to life. God's purpose in His revealed will is to save us from

sin and from death. So God makes sin odious, identifying it with death. To love sin is to despise God and His will for our lives, and to follow a course of speaking evil of the law; of devaluing and despising it.

Judging the Law as Insufficient

Second, at that time there were those that condemned one another regarding things that did not matter – matters of indifference. Some were ruled by self-will and personal opinion, without any warrant from the Word. In their actions they condemned the law, acting as though it was not exact enough, but stood in need of support with human rules.

To make laws where God has not is to imply that His revealed will is imperfect, and is to judge God's law. Some, desiring to be wiser than God, become law-makers. They do so because they want to rule. They want to bind others in the chains which they have made.

True, there is an *"obedience of faith"* (Romans 1:5; 16:26), by which the heart and mind are to be taken captive by God. But, such obedience is not ruled by men or by human opinion.

Two errors can be identified: (1) When people count or uphold something as holy which God has not made holy; (2) When some condemn that which God never condemned. Man is

never in the place of God. We are not in the place of God. It is not in our power to define sins or duties.

Paul addressed the attitude we are to have toward the doctrines of men, decreeing: "Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations – Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men?" (Colossians 2:20-22)

Exemptions from Human Judgment

Three things are exempted from human jurisdiction: God's counsels, the Holy Scripture, and the human heart. We should not dogmatize personal opinions, nor subject people to ordinances of our own making. We have no right to press our own personal requirements or observances as duties.

Personal pride can become inordinate. Some would like to bind their views on others, and they often put forward their private opinions as doctrine.

Some tend to condemn that which does not personally please them, and they act as though their views are articles of faith. Yet, no man, nor group of men, is the judge of the world.

They make themselves authorities but not servants.

Some will censure others for things God's Word allows and approves. In so doing they condemn not just individuals, but the law itself.

They set the power of corrupted wit against the revealed wisdom of God. They follow a dangerous course, relabeling and redefining everything.

The prophet of God warned, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20).

In Conclusion

In this present world, it is common that God is insulted and sin is praised. Open and gross sins are gently rebuked and given more acceptable names. Right thinking and right living are defamed. In the name of progress, rebellion is called freedom, and religion is defined as oppressive. The will of God is looked upon as a barrier to joy, and as oppressive, and sins that are literally shaming and enslaving are championed. Life is devalued, morality is opposed, and the way to life, to healthy families, and real hope for the future is ignored and opposed.

"When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment of it." Those who are given over to

disobedience, oppose the word of God. They come to judge it, and refuse to be judged by it. To cultivate contempt for God and for His word is to embrace a way of rebellion and irreverence. It is to live without meaning or hope.

When people lose respect and reverence for God and the things of God, their restraint is gone, they become loose in their conduct and become slaves of sin. Humility enthrones God. Pride ruins life, as it enthrones willful and destructive sin. Our only hope is Christ!

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Seven Deadly Mistakes

2 Timothy 3:16-17

1. Define: Misunderstand, misapprehend, misconceive.
2. While some mistakes are trivial, the mistakes we shall study are deadly.
3. These examples come from the Bible. All of them are common today.

I. Disobeying God.

- A. Adam. Genesis 3:6; Romans 15:9. Did God mean what He said?
- B. We can do the same today. Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 6:46
- C. The consequence. Ephesians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

II. Substituting For What God Wants.

- A. Nadab and Abihu. Leviticus 10:1, 2. Did God mean what He said?
- B. Denominationalism is full of it. From sprinkling to instruments.
- C. Wages are the same as sin. Romans 6:23; 2John 9.

III. Living an Ungodly Life.

- A. Cain. Genesis 4: 6-8; I John 3:12. Did God mean what He said?
- B. Not after the grace of God. Romans 6:1, 2; Titus 2:11, 12
- C. Results in destruction. Galatians 5:21; Revelation 21:8

IV. Putting the World before the Lord.

- A. The rich young ruler. Matthew 19:16-22. Did Jesus tell him the truth?
- B. Priority problem. Matthew 6:33. (Do what we want to.)
- C. Means hell in place of heaven. Luke 12:20

V. Denying Jesus

- A. The pitfall of Simon Peter. Matthew 26:57-75. Did he believe Jesus?
- B. Best to confess now. Romans 10:9, 10; Philippians 2:9, 10.
- C. Will result in being denied by Him. Matthew 10:32, 33

VI. Failing to Make Full Preparation.

- A. The five foolish virgins. Matthew 25:1-13. Did they know the rules?
- B. Some partially obey the gospel. "Faith Only" they call it.
- C. These were excluded from the feast. Revelation 22:14

VII. Postponing Salvation.

- A. Felix. Acts 24:24-27. His reaction says his was no mistake!
- B. Consider the excuses that are given. Possessions, jobs, family!
- C. It could cost you your soul. James 4:14; Hebrews 9:27

1. Are you making any of these mistakes?
2. Don't make the greatest mistake, rejecting Him. John 3:18
3. While the Titanic was cruising, there was music and dancing. But, when the disaster struck, the tune changed to "Nearer My God to Thee."

- Mike Kiser

Hope

Bill Dillon

"I am dead. There is no hope for me."

Charles Manson
December 26, 1969

Manson spoke these words as he stood before Judge William Keene in Los Angeles, California. He was answering questions about the senseless slayings of seven persons, including the famous movies tar, Sharon Tate.

Regrettably, the pitiful cry of Manson is the lamentation of multiplied millions all over this sin-blasted planet called earth. Men and women live all around us without love, faith, or optimism. Their lives are a mixture of broken hearts, crushed spirits and worst of all empty souls.

Dr. R. McNair Wilson said, "Hope is the medicine I use more than any other. Hope can cure nearly everything." Another physician pointed out, "If you lead a person to believe there's no hope, you drive another nail in his coffin."

The message of the gospel of Christ is hope for a despairing world. The Bible message is:

- "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

- "Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1).
- "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

If you are going through an emotional earthquake, with much of your joy and stability threatened; if all around you is grief and loss; if you are in the dark valley of disappointment – then God's word to you is a word of hope!

Remember, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). Remember, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)

When we are right with God, wondrous things become realities. With Christ, we have the right to be hopeful about our lives.

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STUDIES IN PRAYER (1)

Gerald Cowan

It would be wonderful if the Lord had set forth in one part of scripture a complete explanation of prayer: how to do it; why and when to do it; what to expect in the way of an answer; who the righteous man is whose prayer is effective (James 5:16); how to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and more. Personally, I would like to know about ritualized prayer or form prayers (such as repeating the model prayer from Matthew 6:9-13 or Luke 11:2-4). I would also like to know why certain fervent prayers get a NO answer, even when many people join in the prayer and express it as a genuine desire of their hearts.

No single passage of scripture tells us all we need to know about prayer; just as no single passage answers all the questions we have about our faith and practice, plan of salvation, proper worship, etc. Of course that is not to say that these questions have no answers. The answers are in the scripture, and are plain enough for all to understand, but it takes effort on our part to search for the information and put it all together.

The present essay will attempt to answer some common questions about prayer and encourage us to pray more

often and more effectively.

What Is Prayer? Who Can Do It?

Prayer is an effort to express oneself effectively, appropriately, and acceptably to God. It is a privilege. God welcomes the prayers of those who are trying to find Him, know Him, or relate to Him as His people. The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers (1 Peter 3:12a). But there are some prayers that God will not hear – better to say there are some persons whose prayers God will not hear. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Even their prayer is an abomination to Him (1 Peter 3:12, Proverbs 28:9).

There are two ways to classify prayer that, while not helpful in understanding what prayer is, can help us understand the importance of it.

- Prayers can be **effective**. James 5:16 *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man...* can accomplish desired purposes, is acceptable to God and effective for the person.
- Some prayers are **vain** (James 1:7 and 4:3). They are not acceptable

to God and do not accomplish anything good for the person.

There are at least **five types of effective prayer**.

- 1.) **A Request.** This is the basic meaning of "to pray" – to plead, beg, beseech, or make request for oneself or in one's own behalf (Philippians 4:6, 2 Corinthians 5:20).
- 2.) **Intercession** is a request made in behalf of someone else (1 Timothy 2:1).
- 3.) In **thanksgiving** one can express his own thanks, but cannot offer up the thanks of others (Philippians 4:6, Colossians 3:17).
- 4.) In prayers of **praise** one may join others in praising God, but he can only express his own personal praise, not another's (Hebrews 13:15, Acts 2:47).
- 5.) A **confession** is usually thought of as acknowledgment of sin (1 John 1:9, Acts 8:22). It is seldom appropriate to confess the sins of others, though we can offer our complaints about such things while seeking God's help in responding properly to them.

The Mechanics of Prayer – How to Do It?

Physical posture is irrelevant unless it indicates attitude. But,

posture does not necessarily indicate attitude. The fact is: One may pray with his head bowed (Genesis 24:48), standing up (2 Chronicles 20:9, Luke 18:11 and 13), with uplifted hands (1 Timothy 2:8), kneeling (Acts 9:40), prostrate on the ground or floor (Numbers 16:22), with eyes open or closed (John 11:41 and 17:1, compare Luke 18:13).

Prayer may be spoken aloud, but God also hears silent prayers offered up in one's thoughts (1 Samuel 1:10-13). God sees and reads the heart and the mind (Jeremiah 17:10, Revelation 2:23). He says He will look to one who has a broken heart and contrite spirit (Isaiah 66:2, Psalm 34:18) – but not necessarily to those who kneel, bow their heads and close their eyes or thump themselves on the chest or make certain signs with their hands. Attitude counts; posture may be irrelevant if the heart is right.

In all prayers public and private, one should try to express himself in meaningful thoughts, words, etc. **Eloquent words and flowery phrases** do not necessarily impress God. God knows and understands us (John 2:25, Acts 1:24, Hebrews 4:12-13), so we can pray naturally, in the dignified and proper words of our own language. **Memorized or read, or ritualized prayers repeated verbatim**, may not be acceptable to God, or effective for the person who

“prays” them. They may be completely irrelevant to the situation in which they are prayed (Matthew 6:7).

Scripture does not impose a certain kind of “**prayer language**.” In particular, there is no biblical requirement that one use “thee and thou” when addressing God. These forms are certainly not prohibited, but they reflect 17th century English forms – God understands 21st English as well as all other languages. Pray in the language you and those who have any share in the prayer are sure to understand. It is never appropriate to use crude or vulgar language. Slang, flippant, nonchalant or irreverent language has no place in prayers to God.

Prayer ought to be **offered to God, in the name of Jesus Christ** (Colossians 3:17, John 15:16 and 16:23-24). “In the name of Christ” means by his authority (Matthew. 28:18, Ephesians 1:21-23). It means recognizing him as our only Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5, 1 John 2:1, Hebrews 4:14-16). It indicates we are in fellowship with God through him (1 John 1:3).

Agree with God, not just with each other. Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.”

“If two of you shall agree on earth

about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 21:22 and 18:19).

However, the will of God must be considered in everything (1 John 5:14, James 4:15). The important thing is what God wills, not what we ask. Any disregard for the will of God makes prayer vain, empty, ineffective, and unacceptable.

Initiative

Mark Dillon

Winston Churchill once said that we make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. Helping others is something you can start doing at any time. Find what you can do and do it! All too often, we focus on what we can't do and never get around to doing what we can do.

When David went to face Goliath, nobody told him to. In fact, he was openly discouraged from it. David had initiative and he used it.

Philip took the gospel to Samaria. We do not find that someone told him to go there. He just went.

Initiative is the ability to initiate things, a first step, being able to begin something. We would do well to have the initiative of David and Philip in our daily lives.

Lessons Learned from the Rich Young Ruler

Ernest Underwood

The subject of salvation, one's personal salvation from sin, is the most important subject with which anyone will ever have to deal. Its proper study, and the obedient and application of it, involves one's eternal destiny.

The New Testament teaches that the purpose of Jesus' leaving heaven and coming to earth as Man was to make the way for man to be saved from his sins and ultimately live eternally in heaven with Him. What must man do to accomplish this? Let us notice a few lessons to be learned from the "Rich Young Ruler" (Mark 10:17 ff.).

A Biblical Question & Answer

The young man came to Jesus with this question: "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17) As we listen to the answer that Jesus gave this young man we must remember that He had not yet died on the cross. Jesus lived and died while the Law of Moses was still in effect. Thus, He told the young man to keep the law under which he was living. Jesus even enumerated some of those Ten Commandments given to Moses by God.

In answer to Jesus' statement the young man stated that he had kept

these things from his youth. O' that all young men and women could truthfully make this statement today! Jesus did not dispute the answer given Him. Rather, He said to him, "One thing you lack" (Mark 10:21). What was that one thing?

Is Obedience Necessary?

Another question: Would it be absolutely necessary for this young man to do what Jesus told him to do? If we answer this question correctly, that is, according to the Scriptures, it will remove some obstacles in answering the question about salvation, and how it is obtained.

What did Jesus tell him, and what was his response? The scripture records, "Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me. But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:21-22).

Notice must be taken that this good man, this young man, this rich man, this man with some authority, walked away from the One to whom he had run earlier. What lessons are there to be learned from this section of Holy Scripture?

Lessons Learned

It is possible and acceptable for one to want to be saved and to inherit eternal life. It is not selfish for one to so desire. To have the desire for salvation one must realize that he or she must come to the Author of it (Hebrews 5:8-9). Even though one may be a good moral person, and has obeyed some laws of God, this one is not yet saved.

Lacking one thing in obedience to the Lord can keep one from having

the salvation he or she desires and seeks.

Jesus loves those who are sinners. He came to "take away the sin of the world" by giving His life on the cross. Those that refuse to obey, actually or symbolically, turn their backs to the Lord. The last picture the Scriptures give us of this young man was of his sorrowfully walking away with his back to the One who loved him.



Remembering Jessie P. Sewell

James R. McGill

Jesse P. Sewell (1876-1969) was reared in the Viola community of Warren County, Tennessee, near McMinnville. He was baptized into Christ at the Old Philadelphia church of Christ. This congregation started in the 1830's. His grandfather Sewell did some of the early preaching there, and his parents were faithful members. At age 15 he entered Viola Normal College near his home.

When Jesse was 17, he developed a severe eye infection, requiring him to go to Nashville for treatment. While in Nashville he began attending the Forster Street church, where he was given the opportunity to take an active part in the midweek meetings.

Along with the other young men in the congregation, Jesse was called on to read the Scripture, word prayers, and make talks. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Corsicana, Texas, where he was invited to preach for the small church of Christ there.

Nashville Bible School

The next year, in 1894, at age 18, he moved back to Nashville and entered the Nashville Bible School. The school had begun just three years earlier. He was blessed with having great teachers, including James A. Harding and David Lipscomb.

It was there that Jesse met Daisy McQuigg. She was one of three sis-

ters from Bonham, Texas, who were enrolled in the Bible school. Jesse and Daisy were married in 1899. Jesse graduated from the Nashville Bible School the same year.

Interest in Christian Education

From the good impressions the school made on him, Jesse said, "I was interested in building a Christian college from the day I left Nashville."

In 1904, while Jesse was preaching for the Pearl and Bryan church of Christ in Dallas, he became the secretary-treasurer of Southwestern Christian College at Denton, near Dallas.

Among Jesse's achievements in Dallas, he encouraged the church to support foreign evangelism. They began assisting in the support of William Bishop's preaching in Japan. Bishop had been Sewell's roommate at the Nashville Bible School. The church next took on partial support of John Sheriff (an evangelist from New Zealand) in his preaching in south Africa.

College President

At age 36, in 1912, Sewell became president of Abilene Christian College, when the school was just six years old. Jesse served effectively for twelve years, but he had to resign for health reasons. He left the presidency in good hands as Batsell Baxter succeeded him in 1924.

During Sewell's years as president, the school became a 4-year college, grew in student enrollment, and increased in faculty. Before coming to Abilene, the Sewells had been successful in oil leases and insurance interests, and they personally gave their money to help meet the school's acute needs.

Jesse and Daisy were married for 45 years until her death in 1944. The couple had one son, Jesse McQuigg Sewell. Four years after Daisy's death, Jesse, at age 72, married Maxie Runnels. She was the widow of a deacon in a congregation where Jesse had preached.

Preaching and Teaching

Jesse P. Sewell was a successful preacher of the gospel of Christ. He also maintained his lifelong interest in advancing Christian education in schools. He even held the view that in every community there should be a school where children of the church of Christ could study the Bible and the other subjects under Christian teachers in a Christian environment.

His last work in Christian education was at Harding College in Searcy, Arkansas, where he taught Bible for seven years, from 1950 until he suffered two heart attacks in 1957, when he was 81, and was no longer able to teach. He returned to Abilene, where he died in 1969. He was 93.

Salvation Is For "Each One"

John T. Polk, II

The first time the Gospel of Christ was preached in its fullness, the apostles commanded the audience: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38 NKJV).

The plural, second person pronoun ("you") repent" changes into the singular, third person "every one," because of a specific Greek word that is used, *hekastos*.

The Baptist Argument

Because of this change in "person," Baptists have argued that the command to "repent" is for the sinner, but "be baptized" is for the saved Christian, thus denying that baptism has anything whatever to do with effecting the salvation of a soul. They have overlooked, however, that this Greek word distributes any general command given to a group ("be baptized") to each one in that group. Therefore, "the remission of sins" is given only to the individual who observes both commands: "repent and be baptized."

The change in pronoun number emphasizes that both verbs must be obeyed in the stated order and for the stated purpose ("for the remission of sins") by each one in the audience.

"For" defines the purpose for both commands, "in order to obtain" that "remission." No one has ever been saved only by "repentance" because it is co-joined by "and" to "be baptized," making both verbs equally necessary before "the remission of sins" is applied.

This faulty Baptist argument has left many who strongly believe in Jesus Christ, and devotedly repent, to claim salvation for themselves before being baptized into Christ.

The Bible Answer

However, Paul later reminded Christians: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

How can anyone be saved without the benefit of Jesus death? Since baptism is "into His death," no one has ever, or can ever, be saved by His death before entering that death by baptism. Millions of people simply need to complete their faithful devotion to Jesus Christ by being "baptized into His death."

Salvation is purely an individual matter, requiring each life to be committed to the change from being a sinner to being saved. None can be saved because of their godly parents, spiritual spouse, Christian children, or their own goodness without submitting to Jesus.

Faithfulness: An Individual Matter

When the church of Christ gathers in worship to God with a **weekly contribution**, it is for each individual to give, because of this Greek word. Observe: "On the first day of the week let each one [*hekastos*] of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come" (1 Corinthians 16:2). And again: "So let each one [*hekastos*] give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The contribution each first of the week is a collection from individual Christians. Some Christians may feel their contribution is not needed because there are "good givers" already in the church; but *each* Christian must give from his own "prosperity!"

Everything done "in the name of Jesus Christ" is an individual's duty. Note: "But let each one [*hekastos*] examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one

[*hekastos*] shall bear his own load" (Galatians 6:4-5).

This applies to a Christian's **daily speech**. Notice: "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one [*hekastos*] of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25);

The rule also applies to **marriage**: "Nevertheless let each one [*hekastos*] of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Ephesians 5:33);

It also applies to **faithfulness**: "And we desire that each one [*hekastos*] of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end" (Hebrews 6:11).

Living the Christian life acceptably before God is entirely in the hands of each Christian. Weak brethren are those who expect others to stay on their case and get them to obey as they should. Instead of being an encouragement to others, they are a drain on the spiritual lives of other brethren by not being self-motivated to serve the Lord Christ. These brethren seem to believe it is up to someone else to make sure they attend worship services, stay devoted to their marriage vows, and participate in various good works.

Much local, congregational work consists in propping up brethren who will not obey Christ for themselves.

Hear the apostle Paul: "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's [*hekastos*] work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's [*hekastos*] work, of what sort it is" (1 Corinthians 3:11-13).

If they will be corrected, they must be. "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 also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). And, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

There are plenty of brethren who have legitimate spiritual needs, to which we must respond. However, some brethren are content to remain an encumbrance to the church. Such brethren must not be allowed to be a discouragement to the others. "For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you,

brethren, do not grow weary in doing good" (2 Thessalonians 3:11-13).

Judgment: An Individual Matter

On the final Day of Judgment, God "will render to each one [*hekastos*] according to his deeds" (Romans 2:6). Again, "each one" means there will not be "groups" held accountable for their sins, but every individual within each group.

Jesus wants the gospel to be preached "to every creature" (Mark 16:15). Sin is an individual matter: "But each one [*hekastos*] is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:14). No one's judgment will be according to their congregation, elders, ministers, friends, relatives, or fellow workers. Paul wrote: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one [*hekastos*] may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

John, also, wrote: "The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one [*hekastos*] according to his works" (Revelation 20:13).

Since God "is not far from each one [*hekastos*] of us" (Acts 17:27), let us each accept our individual response to Jesus Christ before we face God in the Judgment.

Report from Owen Olbricht

Mission Trip from March 22 – April 9:

Sopot, Poland: March 23-30: The work was slower than expected for it was hoped that the Easter holiday would bring more people for the good resurrection lectures of Edward Whar-ton. An opportunity was opened for me to discuss twice with the very good translator, a Pentecostal preacher, who was open to discuss freely spiritual gifts and salvation.

Miass, Russia: March 31-April 3: After a cancelled flight and a day of flights and airports (I was taken at 9:00 AM by taxi to Gdansk, Poland on Wednesday to catch my flight), I arrived the next day in Chelyabinsk, Russia around 5:00 AM.

After a few hours of sleep, we took a two hour bus ride to Miass, Russia where I spoke eight times, twice a day Thursday through Saturday (6:30 - 8 PM) and twice on Sunday (April 3, 10:30 AM to 12:30 PM). Thursday evening a TV reporter came to the first lecture and interviewed me afterward. The church in Miass would like a full time preacher. Andrei Greshnikova preaches there now and works for TV transmission at the tower. He has a wife and baby girl. He was baptized through our work in Chelyabinsk in 1996, I think, when he was a boy.

Chelyabinsk, Russia: April 3-8: We returned by bus on Sunday (April 3) to Chelyabinsk where I spoke (6:30 PM) then spoke until I left twice a day 12:00 PM and 6:30 PM, eleven times in all. The church has gone through a number of trying times. The members in the congregation are dedicated and desirous of reaching people in this 1,400,000 population city. Most of the members were faithful in attendance to the lessons, which were usually forty minutes, about twenty minutes plus twenty for the translator, then followed by questions, which added about an hour more. The question period was beneficial for it gave members a chance to find answers to some things that were troubling the congregation as well as to other things of interest. The members instead of visitors received the greater benefit of the teaching. Discussion of a large outreach effort in the fall, late September or early October, was one of the important aspects of my being with the Chelyabinsk congregation.

Finally, the trip was beneficial and helpful for the congregations, but was somewhat disappointing because of the lack of visitors. This seems to reflect the present of mood in Russia, which is reflected in other reports of workers in Russia. Poland may be different, but I am not sure. Keep praying for the work.

Future Preachers' Training Camp

Moundsville, WV: The West Virginia School of Preaching will be conducting a "Future Preachers Training Camp" June 24-26, 2016. More information is available online at wvsop.com under the "Reference" tab.

Upcoming Gospel Meetings

Gospel Gleaner editor, Andy Erwin will be in a gospel meeting with the Oliver church of Christ in Rogersville, AL, June 5-9.

Andy will also be with the Springer congregation in Hohenwald, TN, June 26-29.



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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

The

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Associate Editors

James R. McGill ♦ Bill Dillon

Editor

Andy Erwin

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(256) 627-3215

Make a Good One

Andy Erwin

Many of us remember, or know by reputation, the great gospel preacher Gus Nichols. For many years he preached in Jasper, Alabama. He died on November 16, 1975.

Upon deciding to dedicate his life to preaching the gospel, his dear wife Matilda said to him, "If you are going to make a preacher, make a good one." She also gave this advice to her sons who dedicated their lives to preaching the gospel.

Sister Nichols' words serve as great advice for us today. Whatever we determine to do in life, let us determine to "make a good one." Or, as wise Solomon said, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" (cf. Ecclesiastes 9:10).

In school, make a good student. At work, make a good employee. In life, make a good neighbor. But, most importantly: if you are going to make a Christian, **make a good one.**

Characteristics of a Faithful Christian

The New Testament provides us with the characteristics of a good and faithful Christian. If we are going to make a good Christian we must look to the Bible for the definition of goodness. The goodness that we have

in mind is not determined by man, but by God. Being found "good" in the eyes of men, and being found good in the eyes of God are not always the same thing. "His ways are not our ways."

If we are to make a good Christian, we must possess **pure religion**. Pure religion is the product of a pure heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." It is not enough to be clean on the outside. Those things do not defile a man. We must be clean on the inside.

The heart is where our Savior dwells, and so let us keep our hearts

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andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com

undefiled by the world. "Pure and undefiled religion" – this must be our aim if we are to make a good Christian.

Moreover, if we are to make a good Christian, we must have a **maturing religion**. We must ever be found adding to our faith (2 Peter 1:5 ff.) and "growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord" (2 Peter 3:18). If we would make a good Christian we must be ever learning and always growing in Christ.

If we are to make a good Christian we must possess an **exemplary religion**. We should hope to be able to say as Paul said, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:9). Through our teaching and our lives we "hold forth the word of life and shine as lights in the midst of a crooked generation."

The Pharisees were well-schooled in rituals and traditions, but fell far short in true religious practice. Therefore, Jesus said of them "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do" (Matthew 23:2-3). Such must not be the case for us. If we are to make good Christians, we must be "doers of the word and not hearers only."

Lastly, if we are to make a good Christian we should have a **teaching religion**. Let's go back now and observe the progress we have made in answering the question of who is a good Christian. We have gone from a pure heart, to a maturing faith, to becoming an example of Christianity to others, and now to teaching and preaching what we practice. We must practice what we preach; but we must also *preach what we practice*. If we will keep learning and continue growing, we will reach a point where we will become very capable teachers of the gospel.

Developing these Characteristics

In order to develop these characteristics, let us begin at the cross. Every aspect of the Christian religion must begin at the cross. Every decision we make must be made with a view to honoring the Christ who died for us. Everything we do for God, and in the name of Christ, must be done because of the cross. Fix the cross firmly in your hearts, and have no doubt that you will "make a good one."

Secondly, have in mind an accurate ideal of what you hope to be. Jesus must be the ideal.

Know what a faithful Christian looks like, and strive to be that person. Do so knowing that you are more than a conqueror through Him who loves you.

And finally, don't allow failure to discourage you and cause you to quit trying. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world; don't lose it.

Sadly, many of us have seen brethren who have quit trying. Some of these even matured to the point of being very capable teachers of the word; but something happened in life to cause them to take their eyes off the

prize. We simply cannot do that. No matter how deep the valley may seem, God is there too. He is with us and He will help us.

Every time you get knocked down, look for the outstretched hand of God to lift you again. You may very well find that His hand has been there the whole time.

Remembering G. K. Wallace

James R. McGill

G. K. Wallace (1903-1988) was born into a large farm family in McKinney, Texas, where his father was a sharecropper. He was baptized into Christ when he was twelve years old by his cousin Foy E. Wallace, Jr., who was just twenty. Just after baptizing G. K., his cousin told him he hoped to hear G. K. preach.

Wallace preached his first sermon when he was twenty-one, at Moro, Texas. He was an honor graduate of Abilene Christian in the 1920's when Batsell Baxter was the college president.

In 1928 G. K. Wallace engaged in his first religious debate. Over his lifetime, he participated in 50 debates against those advocating a very wide range of religious errors. A number of his debates were published. At least one of his books, *Denomination-*

al Dogmas, has been used as a textbook in Christian colleges.

Marriage to Lillian

Wallace married Lillian Smith of Woodbury, Tennessee, in 1954. It was a second marriage for both. G. K. had a son and a daughter, and Lillian had two daughters. Following the death of her husband, Lillian had accepted an invitation from Florida Christian College president James R. Cope to come to the college in Tampa in the role of house mother (or women's dormitory supervisor). Lillian and G. K. met when he also came to the college, to teach Bible.

Two years later, at the invitation of Freed-Hardeman president H. A. Dixon, G. K. Wallace began a long association as an administrator in various roles at Freed-Hardeman University,

including that of vice president. He was a successful fund raiser. Among his ideas was that of having an annual \$100 per person (or per couple) dinner in December. From that beginning many years ago, each December dinner now raises more than a million dollars.

Excellent Teacher

Wallace retired from the college in 1968, at age 65, but he continued to come to the university to speak during the annual lectureship week each February for a total of 39 years during his lifetime.. He taught a large class of several hundred students in the Bader gymnasium each morning of the week.

He also spoke on lectureships at other Christian universities, schools of preaching, and churches, but none as regularly or as many times as at Freed-Hardeman. He was an interesting speaker. There was something about his manner of presentation that made listeners wish he would keep on talking.

Successful Preacher

G. K. Wallace could count twenty or more Wallaces within his family, including cousins and uncles, who were preachers of the gospel. They did an outstanding work for the Lord.

When one thinks of the success of G. K. Wallace as a debater, lecture-

ship speaker, college teacher, and writer, one should not overlook what surely must be among his greatest successes: He preached in many gospel meetings, in which he would be invited by a church of Christ to come and preach each evening (and often mornings, too), over a period of two weeks or so.

Wallace had much success in this work. There were many responses to his appeal for people to obey the gospel.

My late wife Nedra Olbricht recalled one such meeting she attended in Mammoth Spring, Arkansas, with G. K. Wallace preaching. One hundred people responded during that series of gospel meetings, as penitent believers, to make the confession of their faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and to be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

When one considers the many gospel meetings each year, for many years, in which Wallace preached, possibly no other aspect of his work did more eternal good.

G. K. Wallace had the distinction of being the first guest preacher invited speak on the nationally broadcast *Herald of Truth* program. That program began in 1952, featuring James W. Nichols and James D. Willeford as the two regular speakers.

The Last Years

After Wallace developed a heart condition and had major surgery, he reduced his activities. G. K. and Lillian were again living in Florida. One night in 1980, when he was 77, he listened as usual to the eleven o'clock news. The next morning he awakened to realize he had become

totally deaf! He enrolled in a lip-reading course, and the following year he took a sign language course.

Like other preachers of the Wallace family, G. K. Wallace was a remarkable man who used his ability in the Lord's service to save souls. He died in 1988. He was 85.

"SIMPLICITY OF HEART"

(An Example of a Word Study)

Grady Miller

"So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47).

Luke closes his inspired history of Pentecost with a beautiful summary of the sweet fellowship, heartfelt joy, and the rousing success of the first disciples in Jerusalem. The story of those early years, when God's people enjoyed spectacular growth in the face of deepening opposition and bitter persecution, continues to instruct and edify the child of God today.

A Meaningful Phrase

Focus your attention on that phrase "simplicity of heart." Even a begin-

ning student, someone reading this passage for the very first time, knows that "eating with gladness" and having "simple hearts," in this context, is a good thing. But he might wonder, "What, exactly, does it mean to have *simplicity of heart*?"

After all, being "simple of heart" isn't always a good thing. Students reading from the King James and New King James translations know that Paul warned the saints in Rome of false teachers who, by smooth words and flattering speech, would "deceive the hearts of the simple [*akakōn*]" (Romans 16:18). Being "simple hearted" in this way is dangerous!

However, the same word is found in Hebrews 7:26 and describes Jesus as "harmless." And in that context, *akakos* is a good thing!

Consulting Translations

One of the first things you and I do when we study a Bible verse is compare it with other translations. For example, “simple of heart” in Romans 16:8 is rendered “naïve” in the ESV and NIV, and “unsuspecting” in the NASB. That helps, doesn’t it?

Just so, when we look at Acts 2:46 in other English versions we find not “simplicity of heart” but “singleness of heart” (KJV), “generous hearts” (ESV), “sincerity of hearts” (NASB; “sincere,” NIV), “humble hearts” (NET Bible), and “joyful hearts” (NCV).

These differing translation choices of the word are not wrong. The disciples in Jerusalem were indeed joyful, humble, generous and sincere. But, still, “joyful hearts,” “humble hearts” and “singleness of heart” do not mean the same, exact thing. In this instance, a comparative reading of English translations just doesn’t help a great deal.

Consulting Concordances

It’s time to break out the concordance! Whether we favor *Young’s*, *Strong’s*, *Crudens* or another standard reference, we can look up a puzzling word, or words, or phrase and see how the term is used in other Bible verses. If the author uses a word *here*, and he or another writer uses the same word

there, one reference usually sheds light on the other.

If, for example, we wonder about the expression “with one accord” in verse 46, we can compare it with the *ten other occurrences* in the Acts, plus one more in the book of Luke. By comparing and contrasting one verse with another, we can easily determine what it means when people come together “with one accord.”

But when we look at “simplicity of heart” we must be careful. Remember, our English Bibles are only translations. A word found in one verse may be the same, precise word used in another verse — but it may not.

The best known example is our English word “love.” Good Bible students understand the need to do more than look up “love” in our English references. We need to take an extra step and determine whether “love” is translated from *agape* or *phileo*.

“Simplicity” is found three times in the New Testament in the New King James (Acts 2:46; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 11:3), three times in the King James Version (Romans 12:8; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 11:3), and once in the English Standard (2 Corinthians 1:12) and New American Standard translations (2 Corinthians 11:3). But the careful student will note that the “simplicity” in Acts 2:46 is different. It is translated from a Greek word that

is found only once in the New Testament — *aphelotēs*. That means we cannot turn to another verse to see how the word is used and do a direct comparison.

Consulting the Commentaries

What now? Comparing “simplicity of heart” in the standard English translations hasn’t helped us. And a quick check in our concordance shows we cannot do an “apples to apples” comparison, since *aphelotēs* is found in just one New Testament verse, Acts 2:46.

Well, we could take a grand tour of the commentaries. That is sometimes helpful. F. F. Bruce says the word “probably” means generous hearts.

J.W. McGarvey says in his *Original Commentary on Acts*, “By the expression ‘singleness of heart’ is meant the concentration of their affections and desires upon a single subject.” But in his second, new commentary he doesn’t offer any explanation or comment, and many other commentaries give no particular notice to *aphelotēs*.

Consulting the Lexicons

There is yet another set of resources available and accessible to even the beginning student. A modest investment in Bible study tools, especially word studies, is a wonderful

help. A standard Greek lexicon is the obvious starting point.

You might even consider studies written for the English student who may not have (or want) a scholarly proficiency in Koine Greek — Marvin Vincent’s *Word Studies of the New Testament*, Kenneth Wuest’s *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* and A.T. Robertson’s *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Many are familiar with *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*.

The Results of Our Study

With just a little extra digging and a closer look at *aphelotēs*, we learn that the word is constructed from *phelleus*, “stony or rocky ground” and the negative prefix “a” is attached.

Think about the difference in *political* and someone who is *apolitical*. In other words, Luke’s portrait of the early Jerusalem disciples is “NOT a stone-filled and rocky field” — but *aphelotēs*. That’s the idea behind our English translations of “pure, smooth, sincere, single-hearted, generous, joyful, humble.”

The word study makes Luke’s grand summary at the close of the Day of Pentecost even sweeter and more meaningful. The thousands who gladly received the word and were baptized were added to the family of believers (verse 41).

They put off the old man and put on the new man. Their new birth led to a new life, a new identification and a new walk. Their continuing fellowship with the apostles and with one another brought joy, peace and pur-

pose. That excitement and commitment was seen every day in the temple and from house to house. Gladness and joy, praise and worship became an everyday calling.

The Danger of Conformity

Ivie Powell

The Bible plainly declares that children of God are not to be "conformed (or 'fashioned' ASV) to this world" (Romans 12:2). A Child of God is instructed "to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

When a child of God becomes a friend of the world he has aligned himself against God. "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

This being true of the individual, would it not also be true regarding the church? In other words, if a congregation becomes worldly in its philosophy and practice, it has become an enemy of God.

An example of this is the church at Laodicia (Revelation 3:14-22). Take careful note that they were called upon to repent, "As many as I love, I

rebuke and chasten; be zealous therefore, and repent" (v. 22).

When a congregation of the Lord's people becomes worldly in their practices they will eventually lose their distinctiveness as the Lord's church. Not only will they lose their distinctiveness, they will also lose their influence. There is never an exception to this rule!

"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, to be trodden under foot of men" (Matthew 5:13). Not only does this apply to individuals but to congregations of the Lord's church as well!

Warnings from the Past

Several years ago at the Fort Worth Christian College Lectures the late Rex A. Turner, Sr. addressed the subject: "A Time for Non-conformity in a Day of Worldliness." Due to the length of the material, I have lifted

some excerpts from this outstanding lesson for our careful and prayerful attention.

“The doctrine of nonconformity applies in matters that involve righteous character, good morality, and godly consecration. The doctrine differentiates between loyalty and disloyalty, between actual commitment and pretended commitment, and between inward righteousness and outward righteousness...”

“The world is strongly influencing the church downward, but the church has little strength to influence the world upward....

“Conformity will destroy the power of any church. It will destroy the power of any individual Christian. It will cause men to be lost in hell. How important then is a consideration of those things that will develop the spirit of nonconformity within the hearts of the saints? Teach nonconformity....

“Study the lives of the world’s great nonconformists.... Noah, Daniel, Paul.... Practice nonconformity.... Have faith in the Bible.... Desire to serve God.”

Franklin Camp was another great servant of the Lord. He once wrote:

“The appeal of the world has become so strong for so many in the church that we no longer want to

be different. The church has lost its distinctiveness....

“The church has changed. She has trimmed her ways to try to please the world. We have learned how to preach and not upset the sinner nor offend the world. We have our budgets and buildings and we cannot afford to lose worldly ungodly members....” (“Love Not the World” *Christian Life*: September, 1979).

A Recent Example

A prime example of how strong worldliness is in the hearts of brethren is the moving of services to a different time or shortened length for the Super Bowl. If this is not conforming to the world, what would it take to conform to the world? Brethren need to be reminded frequently that recreation and entertainment are not the work of the church, but the work of the home!

A Plea to Brethren

Far too many brethren are copying the denominational world in an effort to attract and keep numbers. Always remember, what draws people keeps people! Why not be satisfied with God’s drawing power – the gospel (Romans 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:14).

Let us take heed brethren lest we become “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:4-5).

How to Save Your Children

Stephen R. Bradd

If you are a parent, this article is especially for you. However, if you're not a parent, there will still be worthwhile principles for you to consider.

Solomon's Address to the Young

Let's begin by allowing Solomon to address our young people. He wrote:

“Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” (Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:1).

Youth is undeniably a special time of joy & delight. Solomon advises young people to follow their hearts, but also urges them not to forget that God will judge them. In other words, pursue happiness and pleasure, but do not do so in an unrestrained manner.

Young people who are filled with wisdom will rejoice in the strength

and vitality of their age. They will remove sorrow and evil from their lives, and they will do well to remember and serve God faithfully all their days.

Reasons to Remember God in Youth

There are several excellent reasons for remembering God in our youth. First, there is no promise of tomorrow. Such is the case even for those who are strong and healthy. Death is no respecter of persons.

Second, one is more likely to obey God when young and before becoming deeply entrenched in one's ways (i.e., habits, vices, and worldview).

Third, it is a great blessing to have one's entire life to devote to serving God instead of merely one's last days.

Growing Up to be Lost

Unfortunately, most youth are going to grow up and be lost. We know this to be the case because of what Jesus revealed:

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

Few find the way to eternal life. Statistics vary on this subject, but some have estimated that 75% (or more) of American young people leave their religious upbringing as adults. This number may be slightly lower in the churches of Christ, but it is still a very high number.

Although we rightly assume that parents who don't serve God will generally raise children who, as adults, don't serve God; it is sadly the case that parents who self-identify as "Christians" often also raise children who, as adults, don't serve God. But what is the cause of this disturbing truth?

Many reasons could be cited, but fundamentally I believe much of the cause can be pinned to cultural influences combined with a lack of proper teaching. With the rise of media and the use of technological devices in the lives of our youth, the power of cultural influences is stronger than ever. TV, movies, video games, music, social media, internet, texting, etc., all influence our youth to think and behave in certain ways, and often these ways are ungodly.

Even children brought up in religious homes often spend dozens of hours weekly with other children who aren't being raised to love God or His word. Their attitudes and actions can have a strong leavening influence.

I believe that cultural influences can be minimized with proper teaching. I'm not talking about having good teachers at school or in Bible class; those are beneficial, but cannot possibly overcome cultural influences alone. By "proper teaching" I am referring to the foundational role Christian parents must play in teaching their children daily.

Daily Bible Teaching

Every day parents must combat negative cultural influences and instill positive values from God's word. It is not enough to keep your children well fed and clothed and take them to church weekly. That is a naive recipe that will typically lead to failure! You must invest rigorously of your time, your energy, and your passion into your child's life so you can be positioned to teach them what is really important and show them how to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. You must stay well-connected to them daily so they trust you and look to you for guidance. Such is not easy but it is not impossible, either.

If parents are to overcome the constant bombardment of ungodly cultural influences in the lives of their children, they must do it with proper teaching. Proper teaching is required daily to continue nurturing a wholesome, Christian worldview while plucking out the seeds of doubt and wickedness as they are sown into the

minds of our children and before they have time to take root.

Is Christ in Your Life?
Or, Is Christ Your Life?

Spend a moment to pause and truly contemplate this question: Is Christianity important to you OR is it your identity? When Christians gather together to worship God, then I know that their Christian walk is important to them. However, their attendance alone at an assembly won't necessarily tell me if Christianity is their identity.

In my estimation, there is a huge difference between claiming Christianity is important in my life and affirming it as my identity. For something to define me (as an identity), it must be the central pillar of my life. It must affect every aspect of my being; it must drive the decisions I make (the big ones, of course, but even the seemingly small ones). There is a difference between supporting something casually and being totally committed to it with every fiber of one's being.

I read an article recently about an NFL quarterback who is in great shape even in his late 30s and hopes to play many more years. If he succeeds in this goal, it won't be an accident but due to his total commitment to football. His love of the game determines what he eats (mostly vegetables), when he goes to bed (about 8

PM so he can get plenty of rest), how much exercise he gets, how vigorously he studies film, etc. His entire life every day (in season or out) is about being the best QB he can be; it is his identity. It is a primary reason for his success & longevity in the game. Football is his life.

What about Christians? Is Christ really our life? Or, is He just an important component of our lives (like family, our job, our hobbies, etc.)?

Failure to Prioritize & Failure to Teach

If our priorities are not proper, then our ability to properly teach our children may be fatally undermined. Our children certainly hear our words of instruction, but our actions--how we actually live our lives--either expose our hypocrisy or confirm our verbal messages. I challenge you to be brave and ask your children what they perceive your priorities to be. How might they respond? Money? Pleasure? Socializing? Recreation? Entertainment? Food? Work? God? Doing what is right? Prayer? Bible study? The church? Etc. If our priorities aren't necessarily what we claim they are, our children will see this.

Parents, God put you in charge; you must lead! "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). To seek first God's kingdom & God's right-

eousness is to make Christianity your identity. If everything in your life is ordered and determined around the fact that you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then you are properly equipped to teach your children and overcome the negative cultural influences that abound. If parents aren't seeking the Lord's way first, what hope is there that they will lead their children where they themselves are unwilling to go?

In Conclusion

Friends, are you serious about the souls of your children? If you're only partially committed to Christ, your children will see it, even if you successfully hide it from the church. But, what happens when both parents are faithful and active Christians? Some have claimed that over 90% of children will follow their parents' lead when both father and mother are zealous and dedicated to the Lord and His work. That's 90%! There is simply no substitute for having two parents that are faithful & active disciples of Jesus!

Let us all learn from this wisdom written long ago:

"And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all

your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13).

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Studies in Prayer (2)

Gerald Cowan

QUESTION: Who is “the sinner” that God will not hear, and who is “the righteous man” whose prayer God hears and acts upon (see John 9:31, James 5:16, 1 Peter 3:12)?

If taken literally, John 9:31 would mean God does not hear any prayers at all, because *all have sinned* and there is not a righteous man anywhere who never sins – even Christians can and do sin (Romans 3:10 and 23, 1 John 1:8-10). The *sinner* in John 9:31 is one who does not fear God or worship Him, does not do the will of God, even when he knows what it is. He is not doing and not seeking to do what will make him right with God.

The *righteous man* of James 5:16 is simply one who wants to do and is trying to do— actually doing what he knows to do – what makes him right with God. To put it in terms of John 9:31, he is a *worshipper of God who does His will*.

QUESTION: Does prayer “change the mind of God?”

No, but it affects His response to the person. Much of God’s relationship to man is described as “if...then.” “If you do certain things, then I will do certain things.” When we pray, God will do something He might not

have done otherwise. “Ask and it shall be given, knock and it shall be opened, seek and you shall find” (Matthew 7:7). “But you do not receive because you do not ask” (James 4:3). You must *ask in faith, without doubting* (James 1:5-6).

QUESTION: How can one *pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17)?

Prayer does not have to be verbal. It can be simply an attitude of openness to the presence of God, recognition of fellowship with God by His Spirit. One can be ready to pray at all times – i.e. in a prayerful attitude at all times. Prayer can be an ongoing interactive conversation with God. It can be interrupted by periods of silence, work, play, or worship – even sleep. But, it can be returned to and continued at any time, and can be augmented by expressions of need, intercessions, thanksgiving, and praise as the occasion warrants.

A prayer does not necessarily have to end with, “*In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.*” Remember what we have already said about prayer “in the name of Christ.” One must be aware that he is approaching God directly, that he has the right to do so because of Christ – he is authorized by Christ to pray to God. Pray-

ing “in the name of Jesus” can also mean “as taught by Jesus, in harmony with the teaching and the expressed will of Jesus.”

For the benefit of others who may be listening to the prayer (in public prayers, for example), saying “in the name of Jesus” at the end or at some point in the prayer is a reminder and an admonition about the relationship to God in Christ of the one offering the prayer and of those who listen and try to make it their prayer as well.

QUESTION: Can One “Pray the Lord’s Prayer” by repeating the model prayer Jesus taught in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4?

Yes, with some reservations. But not as a recitation of the Lord’s words. Merely repeating a prayer someone else has composed or stated does not make it somehow one’s personal prayer. But if one understands the words and repeats them with their intended meaning and application as one’s own statement, request, etc., then it is acceptable. Just reading some portion of scripture to God – reading God’s words back to God – is not prayer.

These words of Jesus are a model or pattern, an example of what to pray and how to pray to God. The admonition about attitudes that could invalidate one’s prayer (for example, unwillingness to forgive others makes

God unwilling to forgive you (Matthew 5:14-16) are just as much a part of the Lord’s instruction as the words commonly quoted, from “*Our Father in heaven*” to “*Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*”

The supposed *prayer* is quoted but the explanation and contextual instructions are generally ignored. The Lord’s words here are not to be taken as a formula, nor as a holy incantation with divine power in the words themselves. Unless one prays from his own heart what these words mean and imply, repeating them is an exercise in futility.

Some suggest, wrongly, that we should not say, and cannot pray, “*Your kingdom come.*” In Matthew 6:10 and Luke 11:2b “*Your kingdom come*” and “*Your will be done on earth as in heaven*” are placed in apposition to each other – both mean the same thing. With that in mind, since it is perfectly proper to pray that God’s will in everything should be heard, accepted, and obeyed, it is perfectly proper to pray that His kingdom continue to come, grow, and increase on earth – to mirror the attitude of beings in His heaven.

If one is going to “pray the Lord’s prayer” (the prayer or kind of prayer the Lord taught us to pray) here are some necessary implications.

- **Faith.** *"Our Father..."* It is not reasonable to offer praise to or ask a favor from someone you do not believe in (Hebrews 11:6, James 1:6).
- **Recognition of His authority.** *"Father"* is an authority figure. Either submit to Him or stop praying to Him (Galatians 3:26, Hebrews 12:6-7).
- **Brotherhood.** *"Our Father."* We cannot acknowledge the fatherhood of God without accepting the brotherhood of mankind – all humans are in the image of God, and have a place in the human family (Genesis 1:27, Acts 17:26-27). More to the point, for prayer, there is also a brotherhood of believers, in the church family of God (1 Timothy 3:15, 1 Peter 2:17). *Love the brotherhood.*
- **Reverence.** *"Hallowed or revered be your name."* Compare Psalm 111:9.
- **Loyalty and humility.** *"Let your kingdom come"* (understand this as Let Your kingship, Your sovereignty be acknowledged), *and let your will be done.* It is a pledge of obedience and commitment to the Lord.
- **Confidence and trust in God's providence.** *"Give us our daily bread."* Leave tomorrow in the hand of God. Compare Matthew 6:33-34.
- **Repentance.** *"Forgive us."* This requires recognition and confession of sin.
- **Forbearance – forgiveness of others.** *"Forgive us as – to the extent that or in the same way that – we forgive others who have sinned against us."* Compare Ephesians 4:32.
- **Purity, desire for deliverance from evil.** *"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (from the evil one)."*
- **Submission.** *"For the kingdom, power and glory are Yours."* We do not try to change the divine decrees. We do not fashion a church or a covenant to suit ourselves but instead yield ourselves to what the Lord has done, has given, and now requires in His kingdom and His church.

IN CONCLUSION

The first factor in effective praying is to remember to whom you are speaking: God. If prayer is reverent, honest, and thoughtful as the natural outpouring of the heart to God, it will be effective. It will be accepted and honored by God. It will not be in vain.

One last note: it does not mean or guarantee that His answer will always be "yes," or that He will invariably give us the desires of our hearts and the requests we make of Him. Sometimes God answers an acceptable prayer by saying, *"My grace is sufficient for thee"* (2 Corinthians 12:9).

CAN WE CATCH A FALLING STARR?

John T. Polk, II

When Ken Starr's investigation led to the impeachment proceedings against President Bill Clinton, he must have been the purest moral person in Washington, D. C., because the Propaganda Press found no scandal in him to publicize! But, according to subsequent events, brother Starr may not have been the fixed "north star" we thought.

According to an article in *Christian Chronicle*, May, 2010, written by Bobby Ross, Jr., though Starr's father was a gospel preacher, while studying at George Washington University in Washington, D. C., Starr said he "moved into evangelical Christianity." Starr told the *Chronicle*. "I worshiped for many years at the McLean, Va., Bible church."

After the Impeachment, later in 2004, Starr became Dean of Pepperdine University's Law School in Malibu, California, saying, "I am thankful to be worshiping again in the Churches of Christ." However, in 2010, Starr was appointed President of Baylor University in Waco, Texas, the largest Baptist University. In his interview in *The Baptist Standard*, Starr said, "I'm comfortable with the articulation of Baptist distinctives — including the role of baptism...I feel a great sense of kinship and fellowship with the Baptist community."

According to the *Baptist Press*, February 16, 2010, "'Ken Starr's home church McLean Bible is Baptist as you will find, it just does not have

Baptist in its name,' Stone, the regent chairman, said. 'The pastors on our board are familiar with this church and had a great, terrific conversation with [Starr] about his doctrinal beliefs.'" Starr may have had "a great sense of kinship and fellowship with the Baptist community," but when a public problem arose on Baylor's Campus in 2016, he was ousted as Baylor's President, and a week later, resigned as its Chancellor.

Catch a Fallen Starr's Lessons

1) Preaching what the Bible says demands a change in life and worship, and worldly people will condemn us for it. In Athens, Paul "preached to them Jesus and the resurrection" but added "the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:18, 23). In Corinth, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). The Jews, however, said, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13). Ken Starr should have listened to "Peter and the other apostles [who] answered and said: 'We ought to obey God rather than men'" (Acts 5:29).

2) As Starr's "star" rose, the world's credentials became important to him. Paul had those credentials, but said, "what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suf-

ferred the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:7-8).

Jesus, our Lord, had said, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets" (Luke 6:26). When "all men speak well," it may mean, instead of our "light" shining to the world, the world has enveloped us to the point that we are no longer showing them the way.

Jesus said, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19-21). Worldly people try to put out the light that exposes and condemns what they are doing.

3) The track record of those who once knew the truth, but compromised and abandoned it is not good at all. Judas Iscariot confessed his error but hanged himself without reform (Matthew 27:3-5). Demas forsook Paul (and his doctrinal stance!) "having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:10).

Peter's warning is for Christians "who have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," but follow those "who live in error" while promising "liberty" (2 Peter 2:18-22). There is no record in the Bible of these ever repenting or coming back to Christ!

4) Paul did not "feel a great sense of kinship and fellowship" with: the Ephesians, though they had been bap-

tized, until "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:1-7); the Corinthians, until "by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13); the Colossians, unless they were circumcised "by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Colossians 2:11-12). This spiritual bond was only among "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse" (Colossians 1:2), not with every citizen living there regardless of how or whom they worshipped and served!

We must heed Paul's warning: "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted--you may well put up with it!" (2 Corinthians 11:4). Without due diligence, we "may well put up with" perversions of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and lose our own soul!

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Ron Thomas to Leave Highway Congregation

Sullivan, IL: After 18 years with the Highway church of Christ, as their preacher and later as one of their elders, Ron Thomas is moving to Chillicothe, Ohio to preach for the Sunrush congregation.

Ron will be missed in the Central Illinois area as he has been a staple among the churches and fellow gospel preachers.

Ronald Gilbert Returns from Trip to Malaysia

Cookeville, TN: Ron Gilbert reports: "During our stay in Malaysia and Singapore I had the privilege of preaching 22 times and conducting personal Bible studies for about 16 hours with several different people. Our brethren in Malaysia are working under somewhat difficult conditions but they are doing a good work for the Lord. They need our prayers and our encouragement. I know it is always an encouragement to me to be with them and see their great love for the Lord and the good that they are doing. Please

Recent Debate on Baptism and Faith Only

Lafayette, TN: From May 27-28 a debate on the subjects of water baptism and faith only was conducted at the Macon County Junior High School.

Jack Honeycutt, preacher for the Willette church of Christ, affirmed the essentiality of baptism for the remission of sins. Michael Brawner, a Missionary Baptist preacher, affirmed the proposition, "The Scriptures teach a person's last requirement for soul salvation is faith only in Jesus Christ, coming from the heart."

The Gospel Broadcasting Network carried the event live. The debate is also archived on youtube.com.

keep these good brethren in your prayers."

Ron is currently making plans for his annual trip to Zambia. If you can help in this work, make your check to Ronald D. Gilbert- Mission Fund. Send it to Rock Valley church of Christ, PO Box 49494, Cookeville, TN. 38506 and mark for "Africa Trip 2016."

Brother Gilbert will be taking suits, bikes, and books for the native preachers.

Andy Erwin to Preach for West Fayetteville

Fayetteville, TN: *Gospel Gleaner* editor Andy Erwin and his family will be moving to Fayetteville, Tennessee to work with the West Fayetteville church of Christ. David Sain has been the preacher for the West Fayetteville congregation for the past 11 years.

West Fayetteville has a good reputation for soundness of faith throughout the brotherhood. For the past twenty years the congregation has overseen the work of the International Gospel Hour radio broadcasts.

The late Winford Claiborne was the voice of this program for many years, as well as the evangelist for the congregation at West Fayetteville. Jody Apple is now the speaker for the broadcasts.

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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

The

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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

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David R. Pharr	John T. Polk II
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Andy Robison	Ron Thomas
Ernest Underwood	Mike Underwood
Robert L. Waggoner	Sam Willcut

Associate Editors

James R. McGill ♦ Bill Dillon

Editor

Andy Erwin

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www.gospelgleaner.com

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Daniel and the Lions' Den

Andy Erwin

Daniel's Biography

Daniel came to Babylon when he was quite young. By the time of his trial in the lions' den, he could have been as old as 85 or 90. Step by step he rose to successive positions of honor and responsibility in Babylon and also with the Medes and Persians (Daniel 6:1-3).

Daniel is said to have distinguished himself because of an excellent spirit (6:3). We see in him the virtues of self-control, genuine piety, unshaken faith in God, and faithfulness in the discharge of his duty to his king.

Daniel's Environment

He was surrounded by all the excesses of sin one might expect in an ancient near-eastern king's court – immorality of every kind, ruthlessness, and idolatry; yet, in the midst of this environment, a fair flower of character, pure and stainless, grew to the glory of God. This type of development comes, not from our exterior surroundings, but from interior motives. Let no one say, "If conditions were more favorable, what a Christian I could be!" It depends on us and the inmost will of our soul.

Daniel also had a weak-minded, irreligious king, who loved the idea of

his subjects praying to him as a god for an entire month (6:6-9). Darius, like Pilate, was made the instrument of evil men in their plot against Daniel. Let it be known: men are responsible for the evil they can prevent, as well as the good they can accomplish.

Daniel's Enemies

You can tell a lot about a person by his friends and his enemies. Daniel's enemies were wicked politicians who were filled with envy (6:4-5). They hated a good man simply because he was good (cf. Titus 3:3; Romans 1:29). Truly, "Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous; but who can

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stand before envy?" (Proverbs 27:4) Being righteous does not guarantee us that we will be free from enemies. In fact, the Bible says just the opposite: "He that departs from evil makes himself a prey" (Isaiah 59:15). The world hates those who are not of the world (cf. John 15:18-19). To possess Daniel's character, we must be prepared to share this experience.

Daniel's enemies could calculate his actions by his faith (6:5, 11). Could our enemies accurately determine our actions before we make them? Would our enemies know that we would rather go into a lions' den than to compromise our convictions?

Daniel's Options

Daniel could have compromised. It has been said that "Silence is the voice of compromise." Bear in mind that he was not commanded to worship the king. Neither did he have to drop one petition from his daily prayers. The only compromise he was being forced to make is that he would have to pray privately or silently. That's not so bad is it? Just a little compromise – that's all. Such a little compromise would have been so easy. One might call Daniel stubborn. Some might accuse him of being a rabble-rouser. Such was the opinion of his enemies. Yet, for Daniel, such a compromise would have meant sinning against God. Why should the righteous be forced to change, simply

because the wicked do not like their righteous activities, morals, and teachings?

Instead of compromising and taking the easy way out, Daniel chose to do as he always did (6:10). Calmly and deliberately, he went into the same room he always went; he opened the same window he always opened; he prayed with the same voice he always prayed (with supplication, i.e. an intensified prayer), and he prayed in the same direction toward Jerusalem he always prayed (1 Kings 8:46 ff.).

Daniel's fear of God rose above his fear of man; and thus, a hero was made. Daniel chose to live in God's strength, rather than his own weakness.

Daniel would not begin to compromise his convictions. He knew that once one conviction was compromised, it would become easier to compromise another. The great prophet decided not to begin a series of compromises, even if it meant his life. He knew that regardless of what happened, it would not be the end of his relationship with God – there would be a reckoning for the decisions he made.

Martin Luther once stood before the Diet of Worms and said: "I dare not retract anything. Here stand I. I cannot do otherwise. God help me." Many faithful gospel preachers have

been forced to make the same stand as well – sometimes before ungodly elders and members in the Lord's church. It is not easy to stand against the wicked protests of hypocrites in the church and enemies in the world; yet, the truth is worth standing for – God is worth standing for – even if it means standing alone.

The King's Dilemma

The king – believed to be deity and infallible – could not go on record as changing his mind (6:8, 12-17). Thus, a great dilemma took over his mind. Would he save his friend, or be exposed as a fraud? While Daniel rested peacefully in the lions' den, the king was tormented all night (6:18-19). The crown of an earthly empire could provide no peace to the man who wore it. His only hope was that Daniel's God would save his friend (6:20).

The Enemies' Fate

Of course, God did deliver Daniel. God shut the mouths of the lions and the mouths of Daniel's enemies in the process (6:24). When God delivers, He delivers completely.

Let us learn that while it may appear that the wicked are prospering in their wickedness, God is still in control. The prosperity of the wicked will not last forever. Sooner or later, judgment takes hold of the wicked. The wicked will reap what they have sown. "Be not deceived, God is not

mocked. For whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

In Conclusion

Let us now conclude by asking: how did Daniel overcome?

- First of all, he had an unwavering trust in God. He believed that God would deliver him from his enemies and his people from captivity.
- Second, he had a vision in his soul. Looking toward Jerusalem, he could envision his people going home. This was the purpose for his prayers. His vision was too important to compromise. His prayers must continue.
- Third, Daniel's fear of God was greater than his fear of men. Daniel was determined to fear God and keep His commandments. He simply was not deterred by what man could do unto him.

It seems that the time is fast approaching when Christians in this country will be forced to choose between their faith and their civic freedom. We too must have an unwavering trust in God, and a vision in our soul. Trust and live in God's strength rather than our weaknesses. Remember that when the fear of God rises above the fear of man, heroes of faith are made.

Forgetting History and Fellowshiping Error

Mel Futrell

As human beings we are prone to forget on occasion. While forgetting a few day-to-day things is probably rather harmless, some forgetting can be harmful and quite costly. Perhaps you are familiar with the famous statement of the Irish philosopher, statesman and author Edmund Burke that says: "Those who ignore history are destined to repeat it." If not, maybe you know George Santayana's restatement of it: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." These corollary principles of forgetting the past and ignoring history sadly are found even among God's people in Bible times.

Old Testament Examples

Repeatedly in the Old Testament (especially in the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah) God warned Israel and Judah about what awaited them because they had forgotten Him (Isaiah 17:10), even "days without number" (Jeremiah 2:32).

Israel forgot God, and trusted in falsehood (Jeremiah 13:25). His children had even forgotten His name for the name of Baal (Jeremiah 23:27). Later, God, through Jeremiah, questions them about whether they had

"forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, and the wickedness of the kings of Judah" (Jeremiah 44:9).

Consider the following from the book of Jeremiah that vividly illustrates the point:

"Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up. To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity" (Jeremiah 18:15-17).

A Recent Example

My friends, forgetting the past or ignoring history – especially the inspired history found in God's word – can be costly. God expects us to remember Him, His word, what He has done for us in sending His Son, and what He has and has not authorized for His church (Colossians 3:17).

Such leads me to set before you a truly wonderful brotherhood anecdote

that really brings home the issue of forgetting history and fellowshipping religious error.

At the 1950 Harding College Lectures conducted in Searcy, Arkansas, Jesse P. Sewell (1876-1969) presented several excellent lectures on Bible and Restoration themes. However, his lecture titled "Biographical Sketches of Restoration Preachers" is probably the best known and most often repeated.

At the end of that lecture he recalled an "incident" from the life of the late J.W. McGarvey (1829-1911) that touches on the theme of this article. As you will see "this great old man" in the twilight of his life had deep concerns. Brother Sewell said:

"Now I will tell this incident in the life of Brother J. W. McGarvey. In January, 1902 or 1903, I was preaching for the Pearl and Bryan Streets Church in Dallas. Brother McGarvey, an old man at the time, was invited to speak at the Central Christian Church in Dallas.

"We had three men in the Pearl and Bryan Streets Church who had graduated from the College of the Bible in Lexington, under Brother McGarvey, and they were great admirers of him. They suggested that we invite Brother McGarvey to preach at Pearl and Bryan that night. We did so. I was just a boy of 24 or

25 then. I was sitting by the side of this great old man on the front seat, waiting for the service to begin.

"As we sat there talking, Brother McGarvey said to me: 'Brother Sewell, I want to say something to you, if you'll accept it in the spirit in which I mean it.' I told him I'd appreciate anything he had to say to me. He said about these words, 'You are on the right road, and whatever you do, don't ever let anybody persuade you that you can successfully combat error by fellowshipping it and going along with it. I have tried. I believed at the start that was the only way to do it. I've never held membership in a congregation that uses instrumental music. I have, however, accepted invitations to preach without distinction between churches that used it and churches that didn't. I've gone along with their papers and magazines and things of that sort. During all these years I have taught the truth as the New Testament teaches it to every young preacher who has passed through the College of the Bible. Yet, I do not know of more than six of those men who are preaching the truth today.' He said, 'It won't work.'

"That experience has been an inspiration to me all the days of my life since. It has helped me, when I was ever tempted to turn aside and go

along with error, to remember the warning of this great old man."

Brother McGarvey was correct in his assessment that fellowshiping error just "won't work" (Ephesians 5:11). Yet, the folly of fellowshiping religious error sometimes escapes our brethren. Thus, the need for a timely warning is seen; and this warning from a "great old man" should aid us all in remembering the past as we live in the present and prepare ourselves for the future.

PREACH THE WORD

Ivie Powell

When a man enters the pulpit it must be to hide behind the cross, and to proclaim Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1Corinthians 2:2). The seriousness of preaching can quickly be seen by reading what Paul wrote to Timothy:

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

Every preacher must frequently read and continually commit himself to discharge the soul-saving message of Christ faithfully and fully. Absolutely nothing takes the place of preaching the glorious gospel of Christ.

Concerning the importance of preaching, Paul said, "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe" (1 Corinthians 1:21). To the Ephesians Paul wrote, "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27).

The Kind of Preaching Needed Today

When men refuse to preach needed truth, they are not pure from the blood of all men. While lessons are certainly needed on such subjects as God's love, grace, mercy, and the home; we must never overlook or refuse to preach on such subjects as:

- The New Testament Church
- Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage
- The Works of the Flesh
- Church Discipline
- The Sin of Instrumental Music in Worship
- Falling from Grace
- Hell

It has been years since many congregations have heard sermons on the aforementioned subjects as well as lessons on immodest apparel, drinking, dancing, and the sinfulness of denominationalism. Why? Because such preaching is considered "too hard," and "drives people away." Such an attitude is not new. In Isaiah 30:10, the scripture says: "prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits."

The Kind of Preachers Needed Today

As faithful proclaimers of God's word, preachers must not be men pleasers. Concerning this matter Paul said, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet please men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

Those who adjust their lessons to placate ungodly men and are apologetic about any firm preaching are not faithful to the charge as set forth by Paul in 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

The textbook on the "Who, What, How, and Why" of preaching is the Bible. An excellent example of this is found in 1 Thessalonians 1 and 2. Observe that the preaching of the gospel resulted in people turning "to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:6-9).

Paul said he was: "bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor uncleanness, nor in guile; But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness. Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others" (1 Thessalonians 2:2-6).

Preaching that would leave non-Christians and members of the church comfortable in their sins is not gospel preaching. For one to avoid exposing sin of any kind is to abandon the role of preaching the word. Furthermore, such preaching gives false hope to those out of Christ.

What the church and the world needs today is a revival of bold and loving proclamation of the gospel of Christ – God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Preaching that deals in generalities and abstractions will not save anyone.

As one writer so well stated, "gospel preaching should enlighten the mind, disturb the conscience, energize the will, and stir the heart." Such preaching glorifies God and will save all who will obey it. My brethren, "Preach the word!"

VISUALIZING SOUL-WINNING IN THE FUTURE

Robert L. Waggoner

Because we're not inspired prophets, we can only visualize future possibilities by discerning current trends. Even so, we cannot know which future events may be significant. How then do we visualize soul-winning in the future?

Learning from the Past

In order to visualize the future, let's look at the past. Imagine that you had lived in Europe 500 years ago and that you were going to assess the future of soul-winning for the 16th century. That was when Roman Catholicism dominated, not only the *nations* of Europe, but also, through their sacramental system, everyone's daily lives. Had we lived in Europe in 1499, and had we tried to visualize the future of evangelism in the 16th century, could we have guessed that the next century would produce the greatest advance in Christianity since apostolic times?

The 16th century was a revolutionary century for religion. This was the time of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and a host of other reformers who, like those in apostolic times, turned their world upside down.

Because we live more than 500 years later, we can look back on the intervening history, evaluate changing situations, and see how they affected the future of soul winning thereafter. As events and ideas then shaped the future, so also they do now. The new invention of moveable type (c. 1450) enabled Erasmus to print his Greek New Testament (1516), which then assisted scholars in translating the Bible into the languages of the people.

However, the particular event which sparked the Reformation Movement was the sale of indulgences. Luther protested that practice on biblical grounds, and thereby set in motion a chain of events which caused religious teachings to dominate the lives of European nations for the next century and a half.

We can only guess what new inventions or situations might possibly spark greater intensity in evangelism during the 21st century. Surely the communications industry, especially the computer and the internet, will influence soul-winning in the future. But, ideas put forth by the Reformers were at least equal to events and inventions in changing their world.

The Reformers set forth the biblical idea that people are justified by faith. This conflicted with the Roman Catholic concept of justification through self-help, the sacraments, and mysticism.

A second idea was that the Bible is the only valid authority in Christianity. This conflicted with the Roman Catholic teaching that the papacy, church councils and Canon Law were proper religious authorities.

A third idea was that all believers are priests in Christ Jesus. This conflicted with the Roman Catholic teaching that specially ordained priests were essential to administer sacraments of the church.

There were also other ideas, but all ideas were valid only if they were true. Their truthfulness, however, had to be proven. The Reformers had to resist entrenched ungodly religious powers who felt threatened by these truths. The Reformers often sacrificed, and some of them gave their very lives, to present these truths.

From that time until now, many other biblical truths have been presented which have enriched our lives and benefited societies. All these have contributed to greater effectiveness in soul-winning. On the other hand, whenever biblical truths have been suppressed, as in communist

countries, human life is deprived and societies decay.

Looking to the Future

Assuming that the past is a key to the future, we therefore ask what factors or events will dominate the world of the 21st century, and what ideas must be presented to produce a bountiful harvest of souls in the 21st century?

Surely the communications industry, especially the computer and the internet, as well as other technological developments in an industrial and information age, will have an impact upon future evangelism.

The facts that the world's population is getting older and that the world's population will probably double (to 10.2 billion) within the next one hundred years are also factors which will influence soul-winning.

The fact that the world, as a whole, is becoming less rural, and much more cosmopolitan, means that local congregations will need, of necessity, to become more cross-cultural, even in small towns and rural areas. Many other factors, too wide in scope, too numerous to mention, and too unknown to imagine, will surely affect soul-winning in the 21st century.

Just as we may ascertain present factors to contemplate future trends and possibilities for soul-winning, so

also we can look at false concepts which now dominate the world's thinking, and suggest ideas which need to be incorporated into the world's thinking if we are to have a bountiful soul-winning harvest in the 21st century.

Falsehoods to Overcome

A major false concept is that civil governments are omnipotent and have the right to regulate all aspects of life. This needs to be countered with the biblical truth that the biblical authority of civil governments is limited to the administration of justice – which includes the maintaining of order and peace within society.

The false notion that civil governments are unlimited in their biblical authority needs to be countered also with the biblical truth that there are three divinely sanctioned institutions – the family, the church, and the civil government – that they are equally subject to God's ordinances, that each has different assigned roles and responsibilities by God, and that none of these institutions has biblical authority to preempt responsibilities given by God to any of the other institutions.

More specifically, the false concept that public education must be secular must be countered with the biblical truth that all education should be "Christian." The biblical teaching that parents, not civil governments,

have authority and responsibility for their children's education must come to permeate society's thinking.

Another specific implication derived from the biblical limitation of civil governments is that families, not societies acting through taxation, are responsible for their individual members' economic welfare.

Another false concept – that some things are sacred and some things are secular – needs to be countered with the truth that the Bible knows of no category of the secular wherein some aspect of life may be separated from religion. In Scripture, the sacred must permeate all aspects of life.

Christian Character a Key

Soul-winning in the 21st century depends not only on existing factors, changing events, and presenting truths that counter false ideas; it also depends upon whether our character qualities are the same as were those of Christ and His apostles.

Jesus declared that He "did not come to be served, but to serve" (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). So must we. Ours must be lives of self-sacrifice. "Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me'" (Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

Evangelism was important enough to Christ, "that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). The apostle Paul counted all things "loss for Christ." He said he "suffered the loss of all things, and count

them as rubbish," in order to gain Christ (Philippians 3:7-8).

The personal question confronting each of us relates to just how much we are willing to get involved in soul-winning. The answer to that question lies in our willingness, as servants, to deny ourselves.

THE CONVERSION AND LIFE OF AN INDIAN MAIDEN

Raymond Elliott

Birdie Miller Sixkiller

Her name was Birdie Miller Sixkiller. She was born on November 26, 1903, and died on October 16, 1988, at the age of 85. She lived on the Cherokee Indian Reservation in North Carolina. She became an educator and taught Primary grades on the Qualla Boundary in Cherokee for 30 years.

During her later years she also taught in the Cherokee Indian School in the state of Oklahoma. She was politically active for the progress of the Native Americans. Because of her contribution made for the betterment of her people, an artist painted a portrait of her which can be seen with other Native Americans on the artist's website.¹

Brother Bob Rigdon, now of Fort Walton Beach, Florida, and an associ-

ate minister with the church there, related to me some important information regarding this gracious lady. Bob was a well-known gospel preacher and educator in Western North Carolina for nearly a half-century. While he preached for the church and taught at Western Carolina University in Sylva, North Carolina, he taught and preached often for the congregation in Cherokee.

Her Story

John Harlan was baptized during a gospel meeting when Chester Hunicutt and Bob were working together at that time. John told Bob about his mother, Birdie Miller Sixkiller. She was then teaching in Oklahoma and would often visit with her son. It was during those visits that Bob became acquainted with sister Sixkiller and became a great admirer of this Chris-

tian lady. This is what Bob has written concerning our sister in the Lord:

“She gave me a New Testament written in the Cherokee language. She informed me that it was the only Bible they had when she was growing up on the Reservation (Note: This New Testament was published in 1820 and again in 1827). The Old Testament was not translated into their language at that time.

“She had obeyed Jesus at a very young age. She mentioned to me that all the churches on the Reservation when she was a teenager baptized for remission of sins and partook of the Lord’s Supper every Sunday. Also, they did not use instruments of music in worship. Then the denominations began to move in and all that changed.

“After she retired from teaching she moved back to Cherokee, North Carolina. She taught children’s classes at the church. She visited numerous people inviting them to church and set up home Bible studies until her death in the 1980s.

“She was in her late 80s when she passed away. Birdie was severely crippled and had to wear a special shoe with a six inch sole and later needed a cane to walk.”

This story of a Native American lady who became a believer in our Lord Jesus Christ and served Him

faithfully for so many years, thrilled my soul when I first learned of it. Perhaps it was for a personal reason. My maternal grandmother, whose maiden name was Sizemore, was a quarter-blood Cherokee. My mother related how a Native American woman once asked my grandmother to live with her.

I am happy to say that my grandmother also became a Christian, having been influenced by a godly lady friend. I have always had a tender and compassionate feeling in my heart for the Native Americans who have suffered much over the years. But, there more are important reasons as to why I am writing about the conversion and life of sister Sixkiller.

Her Example

She learned of Jesus through a study of the New Testament in her own language. Her faith in her Lord was not founded on the teachings propagated in the creeds of men; rather, her faith came through the Word of God (John 20; 30, 31; Romans 10:17).

She understood at a young age that in order to be saved by the grace of God she had to believe in Jesus Christ, repent of her sins, and be immersed into Christ for the remission of her sins (Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 2:36-38). She did not have the professional guidance of someone to help

her misunderstand the simplicity of the way of salvation as taught in the New Testament.

Please observe that the congregation where she worshiped partook of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Now how did they know to do that unless it is to be understood these Christians studied such passages as Matthew 26:26-29; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 and Acts 20:7 and came to the conclusion that the church in the first century met on the first day of the week to break bread. There is no biblical record to indicate that our brethren in the infant church ever partook of the Lord's Supper on Saturday and/or infrequently like once a month or just on special occasions.

It is important to observe that the congregation on the Cherokee Indian Reservation sang during their worship assemblies without the addition of instruments. In their study of the New Testament which was written in their language, these Native Americans understood singing was the only kind of music authorized in the Holy Scriptures (1 Corinthians 14:15, 23; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). This was true also of the first century Christians as well as Christendom for hundreds of years.

It was only when denominational doctrines and practices invaded their religious community that innovations

were introduced into the worship of the church. It is not the word of God that divides Christians; rather, it is the dogmas, creeds and traditions of men that separate believers (Matthew 15:7-9).

In Conclusion

How wonderful it would be if our liberal-minded brethren would consider the significance of this story of a young Indian girl who obeyed the commands of the gospel of Jesus Christ and worshiped faithfully with the local congregation in her community.

How sad that many of our leading brethren and congregations are being greatly influenced by the doctrines of men as they come to the conclusion that baptism is not necessary for salvation; that the Lord's Supper can be taken on any day of the week and/or on such occasions as weddings, etc; and that the use of instruments in the worship can be justified by the silence of the Holy Scriptures.

Moses E. Lard, a pioneer preacher and author wrote these words concerning the doctrines and practices of men:

"To warrant the holding of a doctrine or practice it must be shown that it has the affirmative or positive sanction of this standard, (The New Testament, RE) and not merely that it is not condemned by it. Either it

must be actually asserted or necessarily implied, or it must be positively backed by some divinely approved precedent, otherwise it is not even an item in Christianity, and is therefore, when it is attempted to be made part of it, criminal and wrong.”²

WORKS CITED

- 1.) Type the name of Birdie Miller Sixkiller into Google (or your search machine). Click on the link of *Gallery and Museum Shows* and you will see a portrait of sister Sixkiller.
- 2.) *Lard's Quarterly*, 1864, Volume 1, page 330.

How Do You Picture God?

Douglas Hoff

Just as a faulty self-image can negatively affect one's entire life, a faulty picture of God will negatively affect the way he relates to the Lord – if he even chooses to think about God at all.

Concepts about God are often learned early and can set the stage for the rest of a person's life. Wrong concepts about God are based on a lack of information or faulty information.

Attitudes may be learned from family members such as parents or grandparents. Even if the family does not speak much about God, children will often pick up ideas at school, either from teachers or friends. The world is generally eager to portray God in a negative light. If such negative images about God become a person's spiritual reality, it will greatly hinder or prevent his relationship with his Creator. The only way to correct

this problem is by learning the truth about God from consulting the inspired Scriptures which reveal His character traits.

Do You Believe He Exists?

Some think God doesn't exist. This is a big problem for many people today. Obviously, if a person is convinced there is no God, he certainly won't be concerned about wanting to learn about what he considers to be a figment of man's imagination.

However, the Scriptures show that such a person is without excuse (Romans 1:20). By considering the created material universe, man should correctly reason that there is a Creator. Also, the Bible teaches that God put within each of us the desire to search after and find Him (Acts 17:27). Recall that Jesus promised that if we seek, we shall find (Matthew 7:7-8)!

Do You Accept His Providence?

Others picture God as not being terribly concerned about humanity's problems. They think He created the universe, but then just stepped back and let things transpire naturally without any intervention – miraculous or providential. Such people are quick to speak about “unanswered prayers.” They think this proves their case about God's lack of concern.

However, a study of the Scriptures will prove just the opposite. God is very desirous of hearing the prayers of His people. He hears and answers prayers that are in harmony with His will (1 Peter 3:12; 1 John 5:14).

Do You Believe He Is Loving and Just?

Some conceive that God is cruel and even unjust. They look to point instances in the Old Testament when God commanded the extermination of certain wicked people. The slaughter of innocent children convinces them God is not worthy of devotion, service, and worship.

However, it takes the omniscience of God to make perfectly just judgments and we humans just aren't qualified to make those judgments. One thing to keep in mind is that the innocent children who perished were spared the eternal damnation of their sinful parents.

Do You Believe He Is Reasonable?

Still others have a picture of God as a hard taskmaster. The one-talent man made such an accusation against the master: ““Lord, I knew you to be a hard man” (Matthew 25:24). However, keep in mind the master called the servant wicked and lazy (Matthew 25:26).

Such people often make biased judgments about their employers and so we should not put too much weight on that evaluation of the master. The two other servants had no complaint about him! The commandments of the Lord are not grievous (1 John 5:3).

In Conclusion

In actuality, the true picture of God is that of a loving heavenly Father who cares about mankind. He loved us enough to give His only begotten Son so we could be saved from a justly deserved hell (John 3:16).

Unless we have the right picture of God, we will fail to appreciate God for who He truly is. Praise God for He is worthy (Revelation 4:11; 5:12).



Have It Your Way Religion

Jonah 1:1-3

1. I like being able to order my hamburger, and have it my way.
2. There are some that feel that this is the way it ought to be in religion!
3. Jonah was the most unhappy man in the Bible. Things did not go to suit his mind about matters. He did not like his mission and he did not like the outcome of what his mission accomplished (Jonah 3:10- 4:1).
4. Some may not be as obvious as Jonah, but the attitude prevails.

I. Bible Examples of Some Who Wanted It Their Way.

- A. The case of Naaman. 2 Kings 5:1-14
- B. The Rich Young Ruler. Matthew 19:16-22
- C. The crowd about the cross. Matthew 27:40, 41; Luke 23:39

II. Special Groups Who Feel The Same Way Today.

- A. Atheists deny the existence of God, and have no explanation for the origin of life. Genesis 1:1
- B. Modernists deny the inspiration of the Scriptures and the possibility of the miraculous. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; John 3: 2.
- C. Cults want a latter day revelation or to say that their tradition tops God's revelation. Jude 3; Revelation 22:18, 19.

III. Denominationalism Is Full of This Way of Thinking.

- A. The "church of your choice" idea. Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:3-6.
- B. Men voting on whether others can be a member. Acts 2:47
- C. Gender and the ministry is one's choice. 1 Timothy 2:11-15
- D. The mode and subject of baptism is a matter of personal and church choice. Matthew 28:19; Colossians 2:12.
- E. Martin Luther was displeased with Romans 3:28! James 2:24.
- F. Some act as if church government is a choice. Acts 20:17, 28.
- G. And what of the idea, "You can do whatever the Bible does not tell you 'not' to do in worship." John 4:24.

IV. Some Church Members Want It Their Way.

- A. They don't care for the regular assembly. Hebrews 10:25.
 - B. Some don't care for sanctification. Titus 2:11, 12 or James 1:27.
 - C. Some don't care for church discipline. 1 Corinthians 5:1-6; 6:9, 10.
1. Now, I think we all can see that religion is not a fast food restaurant.
 2. Instead of your way, are you letting HIM have His way with you?
 3. Now consider these passages: Proverbs 16:25; Jeremiah 10:23

- Mike Kiser

You Stood Against Me

Ron Thomas

The story of Balaam and his donkey is well known to Bible readers, and somewhat known to those who don't read the Bible, but might attend a church somewhere. In the actual historical story, however, there is a metaphor or spiritual teaching that represents the actual case of a great many people today.

It is my intent to give some thought to this unfortunate scenario. I encourage all to read Numbers 22 through 24 for the purpose of "hearing" God in His word.

Who Was Balaam?

Balaam was a man of this world, but a man who had enough sense to realize there is a God in heaven to whom people will ultimately give an account. He was also a soothsayer, one who used pagan religious magical incantation (rituals) to lead the people astray. Yet, Balaam was also one who knew the Lord to some degree, as is evident in the reading of the three chapters.

Whatever knowledge Balaam had of the Lord, his knowledge was enough to understand that he could only do what he was allowed or authorized to do. He could do no more. When he was called upon by Balak, and his representatives who came to

seek his counsel and blessing, Balaam said to the king's representatives, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, as the LORD speaks to me" (Numbers 22:8).

Balaam let Balak, king of Moab, and his representatives know that it would only be the Lord's will and word that would be implemented.

Request and Denial

The permission sought by Balaam to work on behalf of the king of Moab was refused by the Lord (22:13). The king, not easily dissuaded from his desire, sent back to Balaam men of more distinguished standing and with a larger "diviner's fee" to entice the soothsayer (22:7; cf. 22:15-18).

Balaam responded to the emissaries accordingly: "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more" (22:18). Thus, not only would Balaam speak the Lord's word, but he conveys the limitations placed on him by the Lord.

However, on the occasion of the second visit, the Lord allowed Balaam to go for purposes greater than Balaam realized. Balaam with this

knowledge of God did not allow the Lord to shape his life; he went for purposes that were selfish, directly connected to greed (22:32). Because he went with such a motive, the Lord stood in Balaam's way, with Balaam being entirely unaware.

On three separate occasions the animal Balaam was riding protected its master. So enraged by the cumulative effects of the episodes, the Lord allowed the "dumb" animal to speak some sense into an enraged man.

So angered was Balaam that when the donkey did talk Balaam did not miss a beat and spoke to the animal as if another man was speaking to him (22:28-30). One might say that Balaam had "road-rage" and lost sight of a proper response to a speaking animal. When he should have been "dumb-founded" by the experience, he was not.

Opened Eyes

Finally, what the donkey saw, Balaam was finally to see. The Angel of the Lord stood in Balaam's way and when Balaam saw it, he came to realize how close he came to the Lord's punishment.

He dropped to his knees before the Angel of the Lord. "And Balaam said to the Angel of the LORD, 'I have sinned, for *I did not know You stood in the way against me.* Now there-

fore, if it displeases You, I will turn back'" (22:34).

There is no reason to minimize the confessional penitence expressed by Balaam, as if he confessed his sin because it was merely a "procedural mistake" (as put forth by one source). Would the Lord allow such a sentiment to go unchecked? Hardly!

Balaam confessed his sin because he knew he missed the mark of righteousness as set forth by the Lord. Balaam knew what was right, and he failed to do it! He was distracted from honorable intentions and allowed himself to be motivated by dishonorable greed. However, it is clearly evident that whatever penitent attitude he had, it did not last for long. What this ultimately means is, though he thought he knew the Lord, in fact, "he knew not the Lord."

Traveling on Balaam's Road

People who call themselves Christians (and certainly those who do not) will often "confess" their sin, but continue on the same "road" because it is a road that is desired. There are many travelers, and they believe that surely so many travelers cannot all be mistaken or wrong. They are weak spiritually and vulnerable to Satan's ploys (2 Corinthians 2:11), never realizing the Lord is against them (cf. Amos 9:4). They want the Lord to judge them like they judge themselves, but

as Balaam prophesied to Balak, "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19)

Balaam is a lot like many people today who identify themselves as Christians. They have more than a mere knowledge of God, but a strong belief that He exists and that man will stand before Him in some way or another for judgment. Balaam knew this also, but like many Christians and people in general, this knowledge was not allowed to shape life to live in accordance with this information.

Balaam's response to the Lord illustrates exactly how it is with a large majority of people today, especially with those who have identified themselves as Christians. Balaam was unaware that the Lord stood in his way. It is also true today that people do not know the Lord is standing in their way. Ultimately, such souls do not know the Lord is standing against them because they do not know the Lord. The words they speak in protest do not change the fact. Their lives speak louder than their words.

Know the Lord

To know the Lord is to understand His will (Ephesians 5:17) and to obey Him (1 John 5:3). To know the Lord is also to understand that Satan's devices are easily seen (2 Corinthians

2:11). If there is a desire to hear the Lord and live by the limitations He has set forth (cf. Luke 6:46), then the trappings of Balaam will not be our own. Consequently, the path we travel will be the same path Jesus traveled, and can you think of a better path to travel upon?

In the days of Hosea, the Lord lamented that His people were destroyed (already) because there existed a "lack of knowledge" regarding His way of righteousness. The Lord expected those who expressed love toward Him to show it in their lives. Yet, they did not know the Lord, and thus did not manifest His will in their lives. For many Christians the same will apply.



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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

The

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James R. McGill ♦ Bill Dillon

Editor

Andy Erwin

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Gospel Gleaner Publications

PO Box 456

Fayetteville, TN 37334

www.gospelgleaner.com

(256) 627-3215

Church Discipline

Andy Erwin

The reader will observe this to be an unusually long article for the *Gospel Gleaner*. However, we are not without reasons for publishing such a lengthy treatise for our relatively small paper. The subject of church discipline is as biblical as the subject of baptism, the Lord's Supper, elders, deacons, and ministers. Yet for many congregations of the Lord's church, this subject goes without teaching, without understanding, and therefore, without practicing. To be sure, there are many misgivings about the subject and practice of church discipline. It is not uncommon to hear someone speak of it as "cruel" or "un-Christian." However, this is not at all the way the Bible describes the process. In fact, Jesus said that it ought to be done with the intention of gaining your brother.

Another person may question the church's right to discipline a brother for his sins when, in truth, "We all sin." Such statements truly serve to illustrate our need as ministers to teach our congregations the difference between a brother who sins and repents; and an erring brother who continues to live in willful, rebellious sin and is a constant source of complaint and reproach upon the church. Still, such a candid expression possibly

reveals an even greater concern, which is that of rampant worldliness in the church. For many congregations it would be hard to discipline one guilty party without also having to discipline many others who are committing similar or worse sins. Of course this is the consequence of failing to teach and practice discipline according to the New Testament for a prolonged period of time. Sin does not seek to co-exist in congregations; it seeks to take over.

Others are hesitant to practice church discipline believing, "We will do more harm than good." While such a sentiment could be expressed

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about anything that is deemed controversial, in most cases, the persons who are upset by church discipline are upset because they are in greater sympathy with the guilty party than with the teachings of Scripture. Do we value the soul of the erring brother if we allow him to continue in his sin without attempting to save him? Is his soul worth the risk of offending others? What greater harm can occur than losing the soul of our erring brother?

It is commonly charged that church discipline is contrary to brotherly love. This allegation is also the consequence of our failing to teach and to understand the Scriptures on this matter. When Paul called for the discipline of the erring brother in Corinth, it was not because he lacked love for this brother, but so "that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:5). Which is the truer manifestation of brotherly love: to turn a blind eye to a brother's sin and do nothing to save him from eternal destruction; or to teach, admonish, and discipline (if necessary) in order that he might repent of his sins and be saved ultimately in heaven?

Discipline is also often avoided because it is a most unpleasant experience for everyone involved. It is embarrassing to the guilty person(s) for certain; but it can also be extremely difficult for any family members

involved. The faithfulness of the church's leadership is tested in such cases possibly more than at any other time. Moreover, the sympathy and devotion of the congregation is tested. Will they show greater devotion to Christ through their devotion to their elders and the biblical decision they are being forced to make, or will their devotion be given to the erring one?

While church discipline is a most unpleasant and trying experience, we must again ask ourselves if this one soul is worth the effort. How much does this one soul mean to Jesus? Did He not die for this soul as well? The only way to settle such anxiety and answer our questions and fears is to look to the Bible, study what God has revealed pertaining to the matter, and yield to His will with a faithful determination to do what is commanded.

THE LORD'S TEACHING

The subject of church discipline did not originate with man, but was introduced by the Savior Himself. Jesus knew that Christians would sin and that they would sin against each other from time to time. Knowing our nature better than we know ourselves, Jesus gave provisions to the church so that such matters could be settled. He did not then, nor does He now, intend for a congregation of His people to be stifled by internal conflict. Thus, we read:

"Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15-17).

The process is clear: (1) go to the brother in error; (2) in the case that he did not repent when admonished, take witnesses the second time; (3) if the erring brother is still unwilling to repent, and after every word can be established by witnesses, take it before the church; (4) if he is still unwilling to repent before the church, withdraw fellowship from him.

Everything is to be done in the light and above board. We should also note that while the Lord is dealing with a personal matter between two brethren, these rules apply in public matters as well. You will remember that Aquila and Priscilla approached Apollos personally over a public matter. Paul also did the same with Peter.

A point must be made, however practical it may seem, that the matter must be a matter of such severity as to warrant these extreme actions. Only if the sin is of such a nature that it

requires admonishing at the risk of the person's losing his soul, should we begin the process towards discipline. If we *must* go, hopefully, the erring brother will see his error with a spirit of Christ-like humility, and he will repent of his sin and ask for forgiveness. But, such is not the obstinate nature of sin, and a person's heart can be "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Knowing this to be true, as the Master knows the hearts of men, our Lord offers further provisions for such cases.

To prevent false witnessing in Israel, the Law stated, "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15).

By charging that two or three witnesses should be called into such cases as this, our Lord is helping to prevent false witnessing from occurring, while also allowing unbiased persons to judge the dispute between their brethren. The apostle Paul also had this principle in mind in the matter of lawsuits (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). It would seem most reasonable to believe that the most qualified witnesses to call in such disputes would be the elders of the congregation involved.

If the erring brother remains unwilling to repent, and his sin and impenitence can be established by two or

three witnesses, then the matter is to be taken before the church. The church is not to be kept in the dark when such things escalate and can affect the whole of the congregation. And to be perfectly honest, many of the church's members are probably already aware by this point in the controversy. Here is an opportunity to clear the air, and for everyone to be informed as to the reality of the events, rather than to gossip as is usually the case in such matters.

The matter is to be taken before the church with a view to the erring brother repenting of his sins. Unfortunately, once a heart has become so hardened, it is entirely possible that even the pleadings of people whom this person has known for a lifetime will not penetrate his conscience. What other alternative does the church have but to "let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector" – the two classes of people the Jews strictly avoided?

It would be disobedient to Christ's word and superfluous to carry out such a public ordeal to end only with the church choosing to look the other way. If this was not to be the course of action from the beginning, why even go through the process? Nothing has changed. The brother is still in error. His sins remain. His heart is still hardened. What good has been done? As we can see, the Savior's

teaching is leading to this point of church discipline. It is the only eventual course of action the church can take when a brother or sister chooses to live in willful, rebellious sin.

The passage we have been studying is not the only time Jesus addressed the need for church discipline. In His letter to the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7), Jesus commended the church for not bearing with those who were evil, saying, "You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars."

However, with the church at Pergamos, Jesus found them to be guilty, and told them to repent, and to do so quickly. Observe:

"...because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate" (Revelation 2:14-15).

Thyatira also allowed "that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" (Revelation 2:20). Those holding to this doctrine were told to repent or face the Lord's punishment. Thus, we see that Jesus

was pleased when a congregation put away wicked and false teachers; and conversely, He was sorely displeased and threatened punishment when congregations allowed the false doctrines and teachers to continue.

THE APOSTLES' TEACHING

The apostle Paul had more to say on this subject than did the rest of the apostles; and since he wrote more of the New Testament than the others, this should not seem strange to us. Paul is very clear when he writes:

"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" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

The withdrawal included keeping no company with him, so that he might be ashamed (v.14). But, such a withdrawal did not come without a warning (1 Thessalonians 5:14), and it was to be done while admonishing the erring "as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:15).

Paul expressed this teaching in other passages as well. He urged his brethren at Rome, by writing:

"...note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flat-

tering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17-18).

To Titus, the great apostle wrote: "Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned" (Titus 3:10-11).

To his beloved son in the faith, Timothy, the same instruction concerning false teachers was given:

"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself" (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

Concerning the one who would preach "another gospel," Paul taught the churches of Christ in Galatia, "let him be accursed." Paul warned about false teachers and teaching, and his instruction was to withdraw from them. Clearly the doctrinal purity of the church was more important to Paul than the ego of the preacher! The beloved apostle also practiced what he preached, delivering "Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan that

they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20).

Another instance of church discipline within the writings of Paul needs to be studied. This is the matter which occurred in Corinth between a son and his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5). In this passage, Paul teaches the church to withdraw fellowship from a brother because of immorality. In this case it is sexual immorality; but Paul also notes other sins such as covetousness, idolatry, a reviler (someone who uses abusive language), drunkenness, and extortion. It is a significant passage of scripture because it clearly states for us the reasons why an erring brother should be disciplined. You will observe that the reasons are purely spiritual.

It is a case of a brother who valued a carnal relationship above all of his spiritual relationships. Here was a church that was not saddened by this egregious relationship, but was "puffed up" and arrogant about it. Perhaps they did not believe they would be held accountable for allowing this sin to continue in their fellowship. Paul told them "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"

Such souls who are rebellious toward the will of God will inevitably influence others to be rebellious. Peter speaks of this type of person when he writes about:

"...false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Jude recognized such an element among the churches he worked to establish.

"For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

"These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves" (Jude 12).

"These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit" (Jude 19).

The time had long since passed in Corinth "that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:2). And yet, nothing had been done. Therefore, Paul instructed them:

"...when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such

a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:4-5).

The motivation was purely spiritual and in the best interest of the sinning brother and the congregation as a whole. As long as this brother persisted in this sin, he would not be pleasing to God. As long as the church was being influenced by his wickedness, they would not be pleasing to God. The brother had to repent of his sin, and the church had to repent of their idleness in this matter. Paul concludes by saying "Therefore put away from yourselves the evil person" (v.12).

The church did withdraw from this man, and we read about the results of their faithful action in 2 Corinthians. Paul makes it clear that his instruction pertaining to this man was given "out of much affliction and anguish of heart" and "with many tears" (2 Corinthians 2:4).

Secondly, Paul says he did so "that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you." Certainly this helps to dispel the notion that brotherly love is absent in such cases.

The church did as Paul commanded and the erring brother repented. Upon his repentance, it was time "to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too

much sorrow." The church should do this immediately, "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (v.11).

Paul also urged the Galatians, writing, "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 also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1-2). When an erring brother seeks forgiveness, it is time to recognize his godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10) and restore him with a spirit of meekness.

While James does not deal with the specific issue of church discipline, he does address most clearly the subject of sin in the church. James does not tell us to ignore our sins or the sins of a brother, but to repent of the sin (James 4:4-10), confess the sin and pray for the sinner (James 5:16).

James thus gives us God's law of pardon for erring Christians. The result is that a sinner has been turned from the error of his way, and a soul has been saved from death (James 5:19-20).

Moreover, friendship with the world will make one an enemy of God (James 4:4). **One can choose to stand with God and be judged by the world, or he can stand with the world and be judged by God.** But know this: God will not fellowship such ones who choose the world over

Him; and the church cannot extend fellowship to anyone who is not in fellowship with God. Our role is to teach, urge, and attempt to convert the wayward brother. In so doing, we will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

The beloved apostle John also dealt with the issue of discipline and withdrawing from false teachers. Note:

“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” (2 John 9-11).

The issue again is that of false teachers, their false doctrines, and how the church should respond to them. The church is as guilty as is the false teacher for teaching error, if they choose to support him in his error. We are as guilty as the sins and sinners we condone and support. John did not want to “lose those things we worked for” (2 John 8) and he understood that doctrines contrary to the gospel could destroy everything which had been done up to that time. The message is clear: do not bid God-speed to anyone attempting to destroy God’s church.

The apostle John also addressed another matter of discipline, this time with the brother named Diotrophes (3 John 9-11). Here is an example of church discipline which needed to be practiced on someone who was divisive in the church because of his sinful personality. With Diotrophes we find a man who loved “to have the preeminence” and would not receive any brother who might be considered his equal. Moreover, he would put them out of the church (v.11).

John responds to his maliciousness by writing, “Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words” (v.10). He further warns, “Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God” (v.11).

Diotrophes serves as an example of what not to do in church discipline. He was putting brethren out of the church without scriptural cause, and solely because of his sinful attitude. While Diotrophes may not have been teaching another gospel, or living an immoral life, his personality was divisive; and for that reason, his deeds would be brought to light. He was a divisive man, and undoubtedly would have been rejected had he not repented after being admonished by John (cf. Titus 3:10).

CONCLUSION

We hope that this study has helped us to see that the Lord and His apostles were in unanimous agreement as to the subject of church discipline. We began with a study of Jesus' words on what could be matters of personal conflict between brethren. We have observed three reasons for the local church to withdraw fellowship from an erring brother; namely: (1) refusing to repent of teaching false doctrine which would divide the church; (2) refusing to repent of immorality which would corrupt the purity of the church; (3) and in the case of Diotrophes, divisive egotism which would destroy fellowship and unity among brethren.

Perhaps we should also conclude by asking this question: how can we enjoy fellowship in eternity if we cannot enjoy fellowship *now*? As a congregation, we do no service to our brethren living in error if we choose to ignore their error and refuse to honor God's word in this matter. Neither do we serve the reputation of the church in the community. Neither do we serve the forthcoming generations who must be taught right from wrong clearly and earnestly. We must decide for their sakes as well as our own if we are to set an example of faithfulness or an example of compromise.

Knowing the nature of sin and worldliness, and the way it overcomes

a person and a congregation, let us choose to respond to our sins biblically – with repentance, confession, and prayer. If we are called upon to exercise church discipline, may we be found faithful in this charge also!

Let us learn to obey all the teachings of our Lord, not merely those with which we might agree. If we are only obeying when we agree with Jesus, or when His teachings seem acceptable to us, we truly are not obeying Him at all. We must observe all things He has commanded (Matthew 28:20). And, we have no right to claim Him as our Lord if we fail to do what He has said (Luke 6:46). We are servants of whom we obey (Romans 6:16).

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God's Commands and Promises

Robert L. Waggoner

For human benefit God created heaven and earth and "made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food," including "the tree of life" (Genesis 2:9). Then God said to Adam, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17).

The command that Adam must not eat of the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil was accompanied with the promise that disobedience would bring death. But Adam and Eve disobeyed (Genesis 3:6) and thereby doomed themselves and their posterity to death and separation from God (Genesis 3:24).

Had Adam and Eve obeyed God's commandment they could have lived forever in close association with God. Now that they had been separated from God, one might wonder how humanity could ever be reconciled to God. Separated from God, humanity became excessively wicked (Genesis 6:5). God therefore decided to destroy mankind with a universal flood, except for Noah and his family (Genesis 6:8-9; 7:7, 13, 23; Hebrews 11:7).

Ten generations after Noah's flood (Genesis 6-9) human population had expanded into nations (Genesis 10) and were separated into different language groups (Genesis 11:1-9). Because of the consequences of sin, people continued to be separated from God. If humanity and God were to be reconciled to enable individuals to live forever, then some procedure had to be initiated to accomplish that purpose. Only God could do that. And that process would take considerable time.

People became idolatrous. In the Chaldean city of Ur, Terah, the father of Abram was idolatrous (Joshua 24:2). Archaeological findings indicate that people in the city of Ur worshipped the moon as a god. However, Abram went against the religious ideals of his culture.

He listened to God Almighty. "Now the LORD had said to Abram: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all

the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:1-3; see also Genesis 11:31; Acts 7:2-5; Hebrews 11:8).

Because God did not disclose to Abram (whose name was later changed to Abraham, Genesis 17:5) how he would fulfill his promises, Abraham would not realize that obedience to God’s command would eventually lead to revelation about God’s reconciliation of all humanity to himself. The promises that Abraham would have a great name, that from him would come a great nation, and that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:2, 7; 13:14-17; 15:7, 18; 17:8) would be disclosed in the history of Abraham’s immediate descendants.

The land portion of the covenant was renewed with Abraham’s son, Isaac (Genesis 17:19, 21), and his grandson Jacob (Genesis 35:9-12; see also Deuteronomy 1:8; 6:10; 29:13; 30:20; 2 Kings 13:23; Psalm 105:8-11).

However, the portion of the promise that through Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3) would not be fully realized as the basis for God’s reconciling all humanity to himself until the coming of Christ many centuries later (Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39; Galatians 3:14, 16, 22, 28-29; 4:28).

Abraham believed God, obeyed his commands (Genesis 12:4-6), left his home town culture, and went where God directed him (Genesis 12:4-6). Because Abraham was faithful (Genesis 22:15-18; Hebrews 11:17-19) and obeyed God’s commandments (Romans 4:20; Hebrews 6:15; 11:9), God established with Abraham an everlasting covenant (Genesis 15:18; 17:2-14) and fulfilled his promises to him (Genesis 18:18-20). God’s promises to Abraham were numerous (Genesis 12:7; 15:1, 4, 13-16).

God’s Promises are Conditional

God’s promises to people are conditional upon their obedience to his commandments. Throughout the Old Testament God consistently fulfilled his promises to those who obeyed his commandments and withheld his blessings from those who did not obey. Some examples illustrate this fact:

- **Noah** was commanded to build an ark for the saving of his household (Genesis 6:20). He did (Genesis 7:5) and was thereby saved from a worldwide flood (Genesis 8:15-16; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5).
- **King Jehoshaphat** “sought the God of his father and walked in His commandments.” Therefore, “the LORD established the kingdom in his hand and . . . he had

riches and honor in abundance” (2 Chronicles 17:3-5).

- **King Uzziah** “did *what was* right in the sight of the LORD . . . and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper” (2 Chronicles 26:3-5).
- **King Hezekiah** “did what was right in the sight of the Lord.” Therefore “the LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went” (2 Kings 18:3, 7; see also 2 Chronicles 29:1-2; 31:20-21).
- On the other hand, because **King Saul** “did not keep the word of the LORD,” God “turned the kingdom over to David, the son of Jesse” (1 Chronicles 10:13-14).
- Moreover, when **King Solomon** “did not keep the word of the Lord,” the kingdom was taken away from him (1 Kings 11:10-11).

God's Blessings are Conditional

Whenever community leaders direct people to obey God's commandments, then the community as a whole prospers. And conversely, whenever community leaders direct their people away from obedience to God's commandments, then the community as a whole has many difficulties. Whenever communities turn away from God, then individuals who obey God's

commandments may find themselves unable to be prosperous in their lifetimes. In fact, they may be persecuted by ungodly citizens whenever they obey God.

This is consistent with promises that God had made through Moses. He declared to the nation of Israel:

“You shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them. Then it shall come to pass, because you listen to these judgments, and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you the covenant and the mercy which He swore to your fathers. And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your land, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flock, in the land of which He swore to your fathers to give you” (Deuteronomy 7:11-13).

On the other hand, God said:

“If you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, then all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the fruit of your body

and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The LORD will send on you cursing, confusion, and rebuke in all that you set your hand to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, because of the wickedness of your doings in which you have forsaken Me" (Deuteronomy 28:16-20).

The commands and promises of God relate not only to life on earth, but also to the prospects of eternal life. Many of the prophets realized this and obeyed God even though they did not fully understand the nature of the promise that God had made to Abraham (Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 1:10-12). Moreover, inasmuch as most of the prophets lived when their communities were departing from God, they were themselves persecuted by their fellow citizens (Matthew 20:29-35; Luke 11:47-48; Hebrews 11:32-40).

In Conclusion

How you respond to God's commandments and promises indicates your understanding of, and attitude toward, God. If you obey God's commandments, you indicate your belief (i.e., trust) that God will keep his promises. When you keep God's commandments you also indicate love toward God. "For this is the love

of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3).

Jesus said, "He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me" (John 14:21). On the commandments of loving God and neighbor hangs all the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 22:40).

All the commandments are summarized in the saying "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Romans 13:9). On the other hand, if you know God's commandments but do not obey them, you indicate that you do not trust God to keep his promises.

Since God loves us and wants to bless us, both in this life and in the life to come, should we not be careful to learn and obey his commandments? Obedience is the only way we will be privileged to receive the blessings that come from God's promises.

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Remembering Joe S. Warlick

James R. McGill

Joe Warlick (1866-1942) was born near St. Louis. The family later moved to Texas. In 1885, at age nineteen, Joe preached his first sermon in a small west Texas town. For the next fifty-four years, until he suffered a heart attack in 1939, Warlick continued preaching, debating, and writing without interruption.

His preaching was mostly in evangelistic meetings in which Joe would preach daily and nightly before moving on to preach at another location. He presented the gospel plan of salvation so plainly that thousands were led to faith in Jesus, repentance, and baptism for the forgiveness of their sins.

Preaching and Debating

Joe alternated between debating and preaching. A significant number of conversions resulted from the debates. Warlick presented the truth so that it stood out clearly in sharp contrast to the error presented by his opponent.

Warlick participated in 399 debates!

Outstanding Education

Joe had a fine education and made the very best use of it. Both in his

writing and in his speaking, his training enabled him to express himself in the most understandable way.

Joe had an older brother, Jim, and some younger sisters. Their father had decided that since he could afford to send only one child to school, it would be Jim, since he was older. But Jim said, "I don't care for an education and Joe does....Let Joe go to school." Joe said that this was the turning point in his life. Jim died in 1937 in Oklahoma City. At Jim's funeral, Joe said, "Whatever success I have attained in life I owe to Jim."

Joe and his first wife, Florence, had four children. In 1901, five years after Florence died, Joe married Lucie. Joe enjoyed the great blessing that both Florence and Lucie were fully supportive of his life's work.

Warlick's Writing

It would be natural to think first of the amazing number of Warlick's debates, and of the wonderful way in which the Lord blessed his preaching. He preached in many states and in Canada.

But Joe Warlick was also an outstanding writer. He made his points

as simple and clear to the reader as he did to the listener.

The Stark-Warlick Debate

One very historic example of Joe Warlick's use of both his speaking and writing skills was in the Stark-Warlick debate on the use of instrumental music in the worship.

This was a public, spoken debate, but the two disputants agreed that they would afterward write out their speeches for publication in a book to be published by the Gospel Advocate Company.

The debate was held at Henderson, Tennessee, in 1903. Henderson was significant because it was the home of West Tennessee Christian College.

At that time it appeared that any hope of stopping the tide of digression was dim. The church throughout that area was going into apostasy with such innovations as the introduction of instrumental music into the worship and the missionary society. The debate was a great success—a victory for truth.

Here is a typical sentence of Warlick's debate. It illustrates his clarity and forcefulness. He challenged his opponent: *"If there be in all the Bible one...verse authorizing instrumental music to be used in the worship of the church of Jesus Christ, bring it forward."* His opponent could not.

Far-Reaching Effect

More than a century has gone by since that debate. And for more than a century, at that very location, Freed-Hardeman University has been training great numbers of faithful gospel preachers and has helped toward building thousands of Christian homes. How different it might have been, were it not for the way the Lord used Joe S. Warlick!

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Heaven and How to Get There

Matthew 6:19-20

1. The thought of the after-life stirs our emotion.
2. Not everybody is going to heaven who thinks they are. Matthew 7:21-23.
3. It is possible that our refusal to think about the after-life is due the fact that we have invested everything in this life.
4. Life and immortality have been brought to light. 2 Timothy 1:10.

I. Is Heaven A Real Place?

- A. It is God's dwelling place. Matthew 5:16, 34; 6:1; 23:22.
- B. It is the place from which Christ came. John 6:38.
- C. It is the place that Christ went to. Mark 16:19; 1 Peter 3:22.
- D. It is the place the Holy Spirit came from. 1 Peter 1:12; John 16:7.
- E. It is the abode of angels. Matthew 22:30; 24:36; Luke 22:43
- F. It is the place from which Christ will come. 1 Thessalonians 4:16
- G. It is the final abode of the righteous. 2 Corinthians 5:1; 1 Peter 1:4

II. What Kind of Place Is Heaven?

- A. A prepared place. John 14:3.
- B. A permanent place. 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Peter 1:4.
- C. A perfect place. Revelation 21:8, 27; 1 John 3:2.
- D. A peaceful place. Revelation 21:4, 25.

III. How Can People Get There?

- A. Jesus is the only way. John 14:6.
- B. One must die in Jesus. Revelation 14:13
- C. How does one get "in" Christ. Galatians 3:26, 27; Romans 6:3-5.
- D. Those who do not die "in" Christ, die "in" sin. John 8:21, 24.
- E. The crown only awaits the faithful. Revelation 2:10; 2 Timothy 4:6-8.

IV. Why Should You Want To Go To Heaven?

- A. The only alternative is hell! Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:43-48.
- B. The contrast between them is awful. Revelation 20:10; 21:8.
- C. But know this, you will go somewhere!

1. What are your plans for eternity?
2. Do you have any hope for a home beyond this life?
3. Let Christ become the Lord of your life, and lead you to heaven.
4. Let Christ have your heart now. Colossians 3:4

- Mike Kiser

WHO WILL GET YOUR VOTE?

Raymond Elliott

Recently, the main discussion in most conversations has centered on the theme of politics. It seems that everyone is talking about his or her favorite candidates for the various local, state and national offices. One cannot help wondering how much good could be achieved in the cause of the Lord if the same amount of time, money, and influence were exerted in spreading the gospel.

Nevertheless, the freedom to vote as one pleases is certainly a great privilege offered by this nation of ours. The Lord God made man to be a creature of choice. From Adam down, man has had to make choices morally and otherwise. But, the greatest decisions are to be made in the spiritual realm and not in the political circle. Let us mention now some of the momentous occasions wherein decisions had to be made, either for the Savior or Satan.

God or Baal

First of all, we read in 1 Kings 18 where Elijah the prophet met the prophets of Baal in a direct confrontation on Mount Carmel. Elijah was set to prove that Jehovah God was the One all nations should worship and serve. The party of indecision was Israel.

The great prophet inquired of the double-minded congregation, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him. But the people answered him not a word" (1 Kings 18:21).

Israel as a whole had held Baal to be Lord and God, prince of nature, source of life, not to the exclusion of God, but along with Him. But man cannot serve two masters.

It is better to be cold than lukewarm (Revelation 3:16). If there is a God, serve Him. If there is a judgment, prepare for it. Decision of character is necessary for a great change. Faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26). A heavy condemnation rests on those who "profess that they know God, but in works they deny Him..." (Titus 1:16).

It is a fatal inconsistency to believe in God and yet not follow him. The majority of the Athenians was indecisive and told Paul that "We will hear you again on this matter" (Acts 17:32). Israel was moved by transient feelings like Felix and Agrippa (Acts 24:25; 26:28). Indecision on the part of Israel was characterized by the words, "But the people answered him not a word."

God or Idols

Second, a choice had to be made regarding The Lord or idols as found in Joshua 24:14, 15. Here speaks the sturdy old warrior who had led Israel to victory in many a battle.

Joshua invited Israel, as did Elijah, to make their choice between the false worship and the true, between the present and the future, between the indulgence of their lusts and the approval of their conscience. But, as for himself, his choice was already made. It is wonderful to see that in the day of the lack of faith among the children of Israel, a leader as Joshua making his decision known to the people.

Presently, there is an urgent need for Christians to dedicate themselves to the service of God. Enthusiasm cools. Men sleep and tares are sown among the wheat. The Christian athlete rests content with the laurels already gained. The warrior, having defeated the enemy, allows him time to gather his forces for another battle. The temple that was beautifully cleansed is left unattended and is allowed to grow filthy, requiring thorough renovation. The question needs to be raised, "Who then is willing to consecrate himself this day to the Lord" (1 Chronicles 29:5)?

Neutrality and compromise are not acceptable. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me..." (Matthew

12:30). God will not accept a divided allegiance. Joshua had already made up his mind. He did not wait to see what the majority of the people would approve before he committed himself to his course of action. Boldly, he stated his intentions to cleave with full purpose of heart unto the Lord.

The Ephraimites, slow to come to the rescue in the hour of danger, but swift to claim a place of honor when a victory had been won, have found many imitators in every age (Judges 12: 1, 2). There are always men who wait to see the direction of the current popular feeling lest they risk their reputation or their safety by taking a decisive step.

God or Mammon

Third, a choice has to be made between God and mammon. Our Lord declared that "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).

The Aramaic word "mammon" denotes riches or wealth. In this text, mammon is personified as a kind of "god of this world." Mammon, which should be an instrument for stewardship, is apt to become our master.

Mammon-rule, mammon-worship, is one of the most distinct features of the day, and few of us know how deep is its mark in our souls. God will command a scattering when mammon will urge to a further keeping and gathering; God will require spending

on others when mammon or the world will urge a spending on one's own lusts. Therefore, the two lords having characters so different, it will be impossible to reconcile their services.

Christ and Barabbas

Fourth, men had to choose between Christ and Barabbas (Matthew 27:17). Perhaps Pilate hoped that the people would favor releasing Jesus. It would have seemed that when it came to choosing between a vile robber and murderer and a benevolent moral teacher, common sense would have guided the choice favorable to the Lord. But their decision was to release Barabbas.

Such a decision was indicative of the people's hatred for Christ and a sign of the people's blindness to the merits of Christ. This choice still has to be made today by each of us. "Not this man, but Barabbas" is still the cry of everyone who hates good and loves evil.

What will you do with Jesus? It is you that is standing there with your sins. It is you that has been released. It is Christ who has died for our sins. Each of us must cast his influence either for the Lord or Satan.

Two Leaders, Two Gates, Two Ways

Last of all, everyone must decide between two leaders, two gates and two ways (Matthew 7:13, 14). Our decision will determine the direction

we will travel in this life and also our eternal destiny.

The term "strait" demands the best in life. This narrow way is the way of the cross, the church, the blood of Christ, the truth and the life (John 14:6). It is broad enough for all the redeemed, yet, it is too narrow for the way of the world. Few people choose this way to travel. The "broad" way is the choice of the majority. This is the way of sin, sorrow, death and eternal destruction.

The most important election in life is choosing between light and darkness, good and evil, righteousness and sin, the Savior and Satan. Each person must decide for himself. The question remains: "Who will get your vote?"

New Podcast Begins!

The Milestone church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida, has launched a new evangelistic effort with a weekly program called, GOD'S EVER-LASTING WORD. The program is in the form of a podcast, currently available on iTunes, Stitcher, and the web site:

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An announcement to your congregation regarding this effort will be greatly appreciated.

A Glorious Thought!

"I love to think that my life should spring from His death; my healing, from His wounds; my glory, from His shame. If God forsake Him not, I cannot be accepted. If thorns press not His temples, I can never wear a crown of glory. Now, in the grave He lies; He must conquer death, or I must sleep forever. If there ever was a time when all the harps of heaven were still, and not one note of angelic music sounded through the skies, 'twas when that lifeless, mangled form was lying in the rich man's tomb! But the

voice of God pierces the gloom and silence of the grave; angels attend upon His second birth; with a glorious escort, He passes upward in His chariot of clouds, and enters in through the everlasting gates. Those doors were closed when Adam fell; they now receive the conqueror of sin and death. And, glorious thought! They are still unbarred; and I and you, and all that follow Him in life, shall one day enter through the gates into the everlasting city of our God."

"Raccoon" John Smith (1784-1868)

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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

The

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Staff Writers

Stephen R. Bradd	Bill Brandstatter
Ronald D. Bryant	Gerald Cowan
Raymond Elliott	Mel Futrell
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Grady Miller	Owen D. Olbricht
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Ivie Powell	Travis Quertermous
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Ernest Underwood	Mike Underwood
Robert L. Waggoner	Sam Willcut

Associate Editors

James R. McGill ♦ Bill Dillon

Editor

Andy Erwin

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Gospel Gleaner Publications

PO Box 456
Fayetteville, TN 37334
www.gospelgleaner.com
(256) 627-3215

Marriage, Divorce, and Re-Marriage

Andy Erwin

For our present study, I wish to call your attention to the matter of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Our study is not a pleasant one, but an essential one none the less. It is one of great controversy, but this has not always been the case. Once, a time existed in our nation when divorce was seldom known and hardly a preacher anywhere dared to question the word of God on the subject. Times have changed. People today have a propensity for divorce. And, with the rising number of divorces occurring in our families, among our loved ones, and in our churches, some of our preachers, elders, and churches have changed their feelings on this matter.

Times may have changed, but the Bible has not. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). God has said, "I am the Lord, I do not change..." (Malachi 3:6). The same can be said for His word which "lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:23). The same can be said for those who faithfully keep His word as "he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17). The word of God will read exactly the same on the day of final judgment as it does right now. Jesus teaches us, "He who rejects Me, and does not

receive My words, has that which judges him, the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

It is not for us to change the word of God, but for the word of God to change us. Regardless of how many preachers or elders may argue with or question the word of God on this matter, we are not going to be judged by them or their words. We are going to be judged by the Lord and His word. His say on the matter should be our greatest concern. His word on the matter is *the* final authority whether we agree with it or not.

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andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com

Marriage

In the very beginning of time, the sacredness and blessedness of marriage was understood. God viewed His wonderful creation and was pleased with everything He made, with one exception. He said, "It is not good that man should be alone." God desired then, as He desires today, for man to marry and have companionship with woman. Adam, the first husband, understood that the woman created from his rib was "flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones." He said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

From the very beginning, we find stated that marriage is between a man and a woman. It's sad that we have to pause for a moment in our lesson and point out something as clear as that, but these are the times in which we live.

A biblical marriage is a natural union between a man and a woman. Anything otherwise is unnatural (Romans 1:26-27). Marriage is a union of man and woman, husband and wife, which involves both parties leaving father and mother and becoming one flesh, a new family. Jesus adds, "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6).

Marriage is a covenant made between the husband and the wife and is to be honored for life. "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband" (Romans 7:2).

"A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39).

Marriage is a union that should be "until death do us part." The Scriptures establish the fact that marriage is between a man and woman, who become one flesh, and are not to be separated by any man. The Scriptures teach us that death is the only possible means of a separation between a husband and wife which would not involve sin being committed by someone involved.

The Bible teaches us that wives are to submit themselves to their own husbands, as unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:21). Likewise, husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the church and gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25).

How many more marriages do you think we would see honored "till death do us part" if both parties involved would simply honor the Golden Rule and treat each other as they

would like to be treated? If we would just do that, and live that way, we could end this lesson right now and go no further. We would have no need to talk about divorce or remarriage. But, it is because we do not treat one another the way we should that we must proceed to our second point, the subject of divorce.

Divorce

It has been said that murder destroys lives, while divorce destroys families. I believe this is true. God hates divorce. Read with me from Malachi 2:15-16: "...Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," says the Lord of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."

Sometimes I meet people who believe they can divorce, so long as they do not remarry. But, God *hates* divorce. A marriage must not be torn asunder. We should work to save our marriages at all costs. As spouses, we should be more forgiving. We should be more encouraging. We should be more giving and more understanding. We should be more patient and long-suffering. We should seek to live in such a way that it is a great joy and pleasure for our spouse to be "one flesh" with us. We should establish

our homes on the principle of the Golden Rule.

However, sometimes a spouse can be downright sinful and violate the marriage bed through their fornication and promiscuity. For this cause, the Lord granted one exception for divorce. "Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality ("fornication," KJV), and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). Christ gives us one exception that would cause God to accept and grant a divorce, which is "porneia" or "illicit sexual intercourse."

The Pharisees came asking Christ, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" (Matthew 19:3). They did so "tempting Him." Upon His answer, they continued, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" Jesus answered, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication ("Sexual immorality" is not a good translation. "Porneia" literally means "illicit sexual intercourse."), and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 19:8-9).

The Law of Moses permitted divorce, but this was not God's plan from the beginning. The Law of Christ takes us back to the original purpose of the union and states only one reason for divorce – fornication. Also note that fornication is the sexual act. Adultery is the unscriptural union that takes place after an unscriptural divorce. And from Solomon we read, "Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; he who does so destroys his own soul" (Proverbs 6:32).

The disciples responded to Christ's teaching by stating, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry." Now, consider the Lord's reply. He did not back down from what He said. Rather, He put things in the proper perspective. He said:

"All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb [*someone incapable of sexual activity from birth*], and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men [*castration was a practice among some*], and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it."

A eunuch for the "kingdom of heaven's sake" would be one who has

abstained from a marriage relationship in order to please God. You find an example of this when the children of Israel returned from Babylonian captivity, only to begin intermarrying (*again*) with the various heathen people of the area (Ezra 9:1-2). You would think that they would have learned that lesson by now! But here again, they entered into God-forbidden marriages, mingling Israel's seed with others, while taking up the abominable practices as before.

Ezra described this act as a "transgression" (Ezra 9:4). A transgression is a sin against God's law (1 John 3:4). Their marriages caused them to sin against God's law. In this case, it was the Law of Moses. Ezra commanded them to put away these wives according to the law. Read their response with me:

"Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large congregation of men, women, and children assembled to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly. And Shechaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, spoke up and said to Ezra, 'We have trespassed against our God, and have taken pagan wives from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope in Israel in spite of this. Now therefore, let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and

those who have been born to them, according to the counsel of my master and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law. Arise, for this matter is your responsibility. We also will be with you. Be of good courage, and do it" (Ezra 10:1-4).

Let us continue reading from Ezra 10:10-13:

"Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, 'You have transgressed and have taken pagan wives, adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do His will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the pagan wives.' Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, 'Yes! As you have said, so we must do. But there are many people; it is the season for heavy rain, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter.'"

They said, "...there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter." Some use this as an argument to turn a blind eye today. They say, "But there are so many people who are in an unscriptural marriage, that we cannot ask them to change." This was not the attitude of Ezra or of the guilty people. You either want to serve the Lord

or you don't. They decided to obey God, "And they gave their promise that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they presented a ram of the flock as their trespass offering" (Ezra 10:19).

Read also Ezra 10:44: "All these had taken pagan wives, and some of them had wives by whom they had children." The fact that children were involved did not negate the sin. How sad it is when we drag our children into our sinful decisions and victimize them. They are the real victims here! But, when a sin is committed, that child needs to learn from their parents how to address that sin. They need to learn repentance firsthand.

Some decide to live their lives as they please. They have the same attitude that Jeremiah faced in the long ago: "As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you! But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth..." (Jeremiah 44:16-17).

Paul dealt with the issue of divorce as well (1 Corinthians 7:10-16). Paul begins by essentially restating the Lord's words, saying, "A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife" (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

Why should they remain unmarried? Jesus has said, "Whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery..." Paul was counseling them to refrain from a divorce that would lead to adultery. The guilty, departing party had no Scriptural right to remarry.

Paul adds, "If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him" (1 Corinthians 7:12-13). Christians are not required to marry *only* because of faith. Hence, the marriage bond is not to be broken *only* because of faith.

He continues, "But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15). The case at hand is one in which a brother or sister is forsaken by a disbelieving spouse. The implication from verses twelve, thirteen, and sixteen is that they are departing because they are not pleased to dwell with a Christian spouse. This passage does not suggest a departure for any reason. It does not suggest a divorce between Christians. And, it does not suggest a marriage to a third party.

Two other possibilities remain – reconciliation and remaining unmarried (see v.11). "Bondage" herein appears to refer to a greater subjection to the disbelieving spouse than to Christ. Christians are not bound to keep the marriage covenant above the covenant they have with Christ.

Re-Marriage

Let us now focus on the possibility of remarriage. A marriage to another by the innocent party is permitted in the case of fornication or in the case of death. Jesus has said, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). Paul has said, "A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39).

A marriage to another by the guilty party or without fornication being involved is adultery; for "...whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9).

Adultery is a sin in which people live. "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the

husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man" (Romans 7:2-3). How long was this woman living in adultery? The Bible says, "As long as her husband lived."

In Galatians, Paul wrote concerning the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). The very first "work of the flesh" Paul mentions is adultery. What is adultery? "Whoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." What is the consequence for this sin? "Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21).

Adultery is a serious matter. Adultery makes the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage so serious. Men and women should marry knowing God's will on the matter, knowing their soon-to-be spouse's marital history, and that the marriage covenant is to be kept for life.

We cannot continue divorcing like we're doing. Families are being wrecked, children are victimized, and churches are devastated. We cannot

continue allowing false doctrine to be taught on this subject. And we cannot continue to bury our heads in the sand, remain silent, and make this the "don't ask – don't tell" policy of the church.

In Conclusion

God's word can be easily understood by a willing and honest heart. Marriage is between a man and a woman (preferably faithful Christians) for life. God hates divorce. Fornication is the exception granted by Christ for a divorce. Unless a divorce occurs for the cause of fornication, any remarriage will result in adultery.

Adultery will cost you your soul – forbidding you entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Adultery is a sin. As with every sin, man must repent. Man cannot repent of this sin and continue living therein. To repent of the sin of adultery, a person must come out of that union which is causing the adultery.

It could be that someone giving attention to this lesson is currently living in adultery through an unscriptural divorce and remarriage. Let us repeat the words of Christ, "and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it" (Matthew 19:12).

The Kingdom of God

Hugh Fulford

God rules over the entire universe. In his benediction, Jude wrote: "To God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 25).

On the other hand, nothing is more obvious than the fact that since the fall of mankind in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), the majority of God's creation has been in rebellion to Him. The apostle John, writing to Christians near the end of the first century A.D., said, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

The apostle Paul showed that there are two spiritual realms when he affirmed that Christians have been delivered "from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13). Everybody is in one or the other of these domains — the power of darkness (the kingdom of Satan) or the realm of spiritual light (the kingdom of God's dear Son) (Ephesians 5:8).

In the Old Testament, God had a theocratic earthly kingdom composed of fleshly Israelites, the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. However, this was not the ultimate

kingdom that God had in mind for His people. The prophet Daniel spoke of a kingdom that the God of heaven would set up during the fourth empire of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar's vision (the days of the Roman emperors)—a spiritual kingdom "which shall never be destroyed . . . and it shall stand forever" (Daniel 2:44).

In keeping with this prophecy, both Christ and His forerunner, John the Baptist, were born and carried out their earthly ministries during the world-wide rule of Rome (Luke 2:1-7; Luke 3:1-6). John's message was: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Shortly thereafter, Christ appeared on the scene and proclaimed the same message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

Mark tells us, "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15). To say that the kingdom of God was "at hand" was to say that it was near to being established. Just as Paul spoke of his departure (death) being "at hand" (not

meaning that he had already died, but was approaching death (2 Timothy 4:6), so both John and Jesus proclaimed that the long awaited kingdom of God was "at hand" (not meaning that it had already been set up, but that the time for its establishment was quickly approaching).

Throughout His ministry, Jesus spoke many parables that emphasized various features of His soon-to-be-established kingdom (see Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8; et al). He instructed His disciples to pray for the kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10). And while the disciples persistently misunderstood the nature of the kingdom (Matthew 18:1; Acts 1:6), Jesus emphatically stated: "My kingdom is not of this world . . . My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:36). Rather than earthly in nature, Christ's kingdom is heavenly in nature.

Christ said that the kingdom would come "with power" during the lifetime of some of His contemporaries (Mark 9:1). Just before His ascension back to heaven, He told the apostles that they would receive power "when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). Thus, when the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles the power came, and when the power came the kingdom came!

The second chapter of Acts tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost

(verses 1-4). On that occasion they preached the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and coronation of Christ (Acts 2:22-36).

Daniel had prophesied: "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven (the ascension of Christ, Acts 1:9-11)! He came TO (not FROM) the Ancient of Days (a description of the eternal God), and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall never pass away. And, His kingdom is one which shall not be destroyed (previously spoken of in 2:44) (Daniel 7:13-14).

Simply defined, the kingdom of God is "the rule of God." God's kingdom is composed of innocent children who have not reached the age of accountability for "of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Luke 18:16).

As ministering spirits, obedient angels are part of God's kingdom (Hebrews 1:7, 14). (It is worthy of note that some angels sinned, did not keep their proper domain, were cast down to hell [tartarus], and delivered into chains of darkness for the judgment of the great day [2 Peter 2:4;

Jude 6]. Clearly, they are *not* a part of God's spiritual kingdom)!

It is sometimes alleged that the kingdom of God is composed of all who believe in Christ. This view is advanced to downplay the necessity of actually obeying the gospel of Christ in order to be a citizen of the kingdom. It is an effort to enlarge the umbrella and to include under the rule of God more than His word would allow.

The demons believe and also tremble (James 2:19), but it would be ludicrous to say that they are citizens of God's spiritual kingdom.

Some believed in Christ during His personal ministry, but they would not confess Him (John 12:42-43). Jesus said if we will not confess Him before men, He will not confess us before the Father (Matthew 10:32-33). A believer who will not confess Christ surely is not a part of God's kingdom. Therefore, merely to believe in Christ is not sufficient for making one a citizen of God's kingdom.

With reference to accountable humans, only those who have been "born again . . . of water and the Spirit" are citizens of the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5). In so doing, they have been saved from their sins and added to the church (Acts 2:47), which is the same as being delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13).

From the standpoint of accountable humanity, the kingdom of God and the church are co-extensive in that only those persons who have obeyed the gospel and been added to the church are citizens of the kingdom. If any accountable person since Acts 2 is in the kingdom of God but not a member of the body of Christ, the church, who is that person?!

At the end of time, Christ will deliver the kingdom to God the Father "that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). In the meantime, faithful preachers are to preach "the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12), including how one enters the kingdom (John 3:3-5). They are to be busy "preaching the kingdom of God" (Acts 20:25), and diligent in "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence" (Acts 26:31).

As citizens of the kingdom, we are to make it our priority in life (Matthew 6:33). We are to live in such a way that we might be preserved for the heavenly kingdom (2 Timothy 4:18), and experience an abundant entrance "into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:10-11)—heaven itself!

The Preacher and Politics

Raymond Elliott

In 1971 my family and I moved to a city in south Alabama that had a population of about 8,000 people. One of the first things that one of the elders told me was “don’t get involved in the local politics.” I followed his advice. In the congregation where I preached, I knew that many of the members had different ideas about who should be elected to the various local political offices. Some were very outspoken as to their favorite candidates. I have never made it a ‘test of fellowship’ with those brethren with whom I might disagree politically.

My responsibility as a gospel preacher was and is to “preach the word”, the “gospel of Christ” (2 Timothy 4:2, Romans 1:16) and not politics; so, I never addressed the subject from the pulpit, knowing that it would have had an adverse effect on my influence with my brethren and my efforts to lead others to Jesus Christ. That is not to say I have never preached on ethical and moral issues that some candidates were advocating, locally and nationally.

Over the years I have preached on what the Bible teaches regarding the respect for human life in the womb of the prospective mother; that marriage is to be between a man and woman;

the sins of fornication and adultery; the sins of drunkenness, homosexuality, gambling and a host of additional subjects that may be condoned by our government and advocated by various candidates.

I do pray for our nation. I pray for political leaders to be elected who would have respect for the principles of morality found in the Word of God; to be men and women of integrity and have in their hearts the well-being of the citizens of our nation.

Please consider what the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (ESV, 1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Christians are to be in subjection to those in authority as we are taught in Romans 13:1-7. That is not to say there may be times when we ought “to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Civil governments are ordained of God for the good and protection of

its citizens (1 Peter 2:13-15); however, that does not mean God is pleased with every government any more than He would be pleased with individuals who disobey Him.

In reality, God's wrath will be poured out on nations that forget Him (Psalm 9:17). I do believe that God works in the affairs of nations as you can read in Daniel 4:32: "...until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses" (See also 5:21).

I would encourage young preachers to adhere to the directive Paul gave to the evangelist Timothy that is found in 2 Timothy 2:4: "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier." Christians are in subjection first of all to our King, Jesus Christ who reigns over His kingdom of which we are a part (Matthew 5:5; Colossians 1:13, 14).

Now having written the above, I will state that as a citizen of this great nation and as a Christian, I am conservative, politically and religiously speaking. I am greatly concerned that our nation has become so secular and that sins of every kind that are committed by our citizens are often encouraged and condoned by our elected officials and the Supreme Court. The sin of 'unbelief' is rampant in our

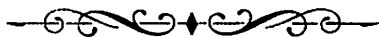
society that once believed in the Supreme Being and Creator of the universe.

I do not know what God has in store for our nation. Will He punish us for our transgressions or will He bless us? My prayer for our country is found in the lyrics of this song: "*God Bless America, Land that I love. Stand beside her, and guide her Thru the night with a light from above. From the mountains, to the prairies, To the oceans, white with foam God bless America, My home sweet home.*"

While I do not know what the future holds for our nation, I do place my complete trust in Him who has infinite wisdom and Almighty power.

"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You; And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge, Until these calamities have passed by."

- Psalm 57:1



THE SONG THE ANGELS WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO SING

Ronald D. Bryant

God's plan of redemption is a work which seems to concern men only; yet, it is far more. In terms that can be easily expressed, but are difficult to fully comprehend, redemption is a vindication of the justice and the mercy of God.

It is also a work that is exposed to the consideration of every intelligent being in heaven and on earth. While some may not be disposed to inquire into God's dealing with mankind, most readily make inquiry. The apostle Peter asserts that the salvation of mankind is a subject of interest to the angels (1 Peter 1:12b).

Most of us know very little concerning angels, and next to nothing of the fall of angels. Curiosity about that event has ebbed and flowed down through the years. Of greater moment is the fact that most people have an interest in the justice of the Lord God Almighty, and more, they long to be recipients of His mercy.

Living under God's authority and being subject to His judgment, it is right that we be concerned with these two realities. In reality the method of

God's dealings with any being should be of interest to us. This being true, it follows, that the redemption provided by the Lord God, in and by Jesus Christ, because it relates to eternity, should be of vital concern to every rational being, even as it is to the angels of God.

The apostle Peter wrote of the inquiry made by the prophets, and then of the longing of the angels. The prophets wrote of the salvation of man, and did not understand what they wrote. In an exacting fashion, this implies that the words written by the prophets did not originate with them, and that the subject matter was not given to benefit them. Peter declared that the prophets spoke of, *"the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, are things which the angels desire to look into"* (1 Peter 1:12).

While the angels, being higher than the prophets, had greater knowledge, even they did not have a full understanding of the plan of redemption. No man or angel possesses an intuitive knowledge of God's plan of redemption!

The angels longed *"to look into;"* they intently gazed upon, yet could not fathom the depths of *"the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels"* (1 Timothy 3:16). Because they engaged in *"ministry to the heirs of salvation"* they were disposed to desire to penetrate this mystery that reflected such wonders of His love, justice, wisdom, and power.

It was *"in the fullness of time"* revealed to all heaven and in earth, in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. Now they are able to know about it, but only through its revelation in the work and word of Christ, and in His Church. Additionally, it is to be considered that the angels do not share in redemption. They cannot come to God in and through obedience to Christ. They do observe the conversion of eternal souls to Christ, yet cannot fully comprehend that process. While they possess knowledge of the distinction between good and evil, it remains that they do not know the power of conversion.

Is it possible that as they witness the conversion of sinners, and observe their life as the redeemed, that they continue to long to possess knowledge of the means whereby it is accomplished? *"Redeemed,"* is a song the angels cannot sing!

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The Tribe of Judas

John T. Polk, II

"Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, 'Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.'" (John 12:1-8)

This is the only gospel account of the character of Judas Iscariot so clearly identified by his long-standing practice of thievery. His sin was hidden to "the twelve," but not to Jesus Christ. John later explained what Jesus had predicted: "'Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of

you is a devil?' He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him, being one of the twelve" (John 6:70-71).

Jesus knew the heart of Judas, before Judas made it obvious by his course of action. But, even by the time of the Lord's Supper, "Jesus said to him, 'What you do, do quickly.' But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, 'Buy those things we need for the feast,' or that he should give something to the poor'" (John 13:27-29).

The facts about Judas Iscariot are established by plain Scriptures: 1) he was the son of Simon; 2) he was "one of the twelve" (John 6:71); 3) he was not a "traitor" when selected, but became one (Luke 6:16); 4) "he was a thief" who continually stole from the disciples' "money box" (John 12:6); 5) he "betrayed" Jesus for "thirty pieces of silver" (Matthew 26:14-15); 6) "Satan entered Judas" when he struck the bargain with the chief priests (Luke 22:1-6); 7) by the time of the Passover supper, after which, Jesus established His Supper, "the devil" had put into Judas' heart (John 13:2), or Judas chose to follow the Devil's

way; 8) after the Lord's Supper, "Satan entered him" (John 13:18-30, v. 26), or Judas completely gave himself over to his evil way.

According to John's account, Judas betrayed Jesus Christ because his covetous practice of thievery grew. Did Jesus let Judas have "the money box" in order for Judas to repent? We know when God allows us to be tempted, He wants us to exercise our faithful convictions and become stronger (1 Corinthians 10:13). We may choose, however, like Judas, to exercise our choice toward evil (James 1:13-16). Even Jezebel in Thyatira, was given "time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent" (Revelation 2:20-21).

To protect their false doctrine of "once-saved, always-saved," people have denied that Judas was really a disciple, or an apostle. This is a complete denial of Scripture. Note:

"And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the

Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him. These twelve Jesus sent out" (Matthew 10:1-5).

This passage alone establishes: 1) three times, that Judas was one of "the twelve;" 2) they all were endowed with spiritual "power over unclean spirits" and "all kinds of disease;" 3) they were all "sent out" to preach "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5); 4) and after the events in Matthew's gospel account had occurred, Judas clearly was identified as the one who "betrayed Him." Why not give up the false doctrine, rather than deny the Word of God?

Common treasuries ("the money box") are the simplest temptation for thieves, those driven by covetousness. Jesus also said: "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15).

Like Judas, those whose plans to help the needy always involve giving monies through their hands, are more often than not, covetous, not generous! Donations to governments, investments, retirement funds, foundations, charities, relief funds, colleges or universities, and world-wide or global organizations must be judged by: 1) who, and how many, will handle this donation before it reaches those for whom it was intended; 2) what percentage of this donation will be used for "overhead charges, or

handling fees;" and 3) how far from the recipient the donor remains.

When Jesus described the Samaritan who responded to an individual's needs, He said, "a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him" (Luke 10:33-34).

The closer we are to the person(s) to be helped, the surer we may be that we have helped! If we are trying to send aid to distant situations, it is best to personally know the "missionary" to whom we are entrusting our donation.

Each "first day of the week," Christians must "lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), as "the collection for the saints." That contribution should be overseen by spiritually-minded men, and the church is responsible for seeing that they are! Our aim should always be to "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:20).

Because there are many in "the tribe of Judas," we must constantly be aware of their motives, rather than their messages of "help the poor,"

"evangelize the world," and "save the planet." May their tribe die out!

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Pepperdine University Vacates Title IX Exemption

Andy Erwin

From a recent *Christian Post* article, we learned that Pepperdine University (Malibu, California) has decided to waive its right for the federal Title IX religious exemption that allowed the school to maintain its biblical convictions on marriage and gender identity.

Samuel Smith reported, "Over the last few years, many Christian schools have requested and been granted religious exemptions to the Obama administration's interpretation that the Title IX law of 1972 prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Those exemptions allow colleges to enforce campus policies that prohibit their students from engaging in things like homosexual relationships and sexual relations outside the context of marriage."

In a statement published by *Inside Higher Ed*, Pepperdine officials said: "Early this year, the university withdrew from the previously granted exemption because it does not fully reflect Pepperdine's values today. We believe that Pepperdine's mission and the goals of Title IX are aligned, and we are committed to complying with Title IX in its entirety."

Smith also cited how Pepperdine originally sought Title IX exemption because of its belief that "God ap-

proves sexual relationships only between male and female in holy wedlock" and for its belief that "women should not serve in positions of authority or leadership over men in public worship, religious instruction, or in the home." Pepperdine officials did not respond to an inquiry for additional comment.

While this news may have been shocking to the *Christian Post*, it is in no way shocking to members of the church who have been following the digression of Pepperdine for several years. It has been a long time since the administration of that school stood for *anything*. Therefore, why should we be surprised to see them fall for *everything*?

Pepperdine serves as a case study for other Christian universities of what not to do/be. They began compromising their convictions in the 1960s (at least) and today they apparently have no convictions. It remains true: if you give the devil an inch, he will take a mile.

In my opinion, the honorable thing for the administration to do is to turn over the keys to its buildings and bank accounts to people who are sympathetic with the school's founding purpose. Either do that, or remove any and all association with the churches of Christ.

Why the Bible Was Written

Douglas Hoff

The phrase "it is written" is found eighty times in the Bible. Twenty six occurrences are in the gospel accounts. Most of these are in connection with something Jesus said.

Why did inspired men like Joshua, Matthew, Paul, and Peter remind their readers so often that God had previously written something on the matter under consideration?

In each case it was to make or prove a point! It was an appeal to the highest authority man could find. God's word settles the matter because His word will stand for all time. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

To Remember God's Will

In His infinite wisdom, God knew that man would need the His will preserved in written form. Man tends to forget. Man also tends to doubt even those things that are well known.

Peter wrote: "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remem-

brance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance" (2 Peter 1:12-15).

The writer of Hebrews showed that God wants His children to believe and have hope through the written word: "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show 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" (Hebrews 6:13-18).

Notice that not only did God make a promise to Abraham (and his spiritual descendants), but He confirmed

it with an oath. Both the promise and oath were initially spoken, but then committed to writing.

To Verify God's Will

Since God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), He has nothing to hide. With His word committed to writing, humans can always check and see what He has promised.

In today's society people often consider written documents more authoritative and binding than a verbal agreement. (Of course, Jesus wants the word of His followers to be equally binding whether spoken or written; see James 5:12; cf. Matthew 5:33-37). Between men, written contracts serve to remind the parties of their obligations and rewards or privileges.

To Obey God's Will

God's word has been preserved for all mankind, not just those who lived when it was revealed. It had to be in writing so that everyone could have a chance to learn God's will and obey it.

How could people living in the twenty first century in the United States of America know how to be saved, if they had to rely on a verbal record of God's revealed will?

Many have played the children's game where a message is passed around the room by being whispered from one ear to another. The message

delivered by the last player usually has been seriously corrupted from the original.

The Bible preserves the very word of God. Though modern man does not have the original document written by inspired men, we can be sure we have the correct message. Multiplied copies and translations were made shortly after the originals were penned. Peter spoke of Paul's letters (2 Peter 3:15, 16).

Copies were made and circulated of Paul's letters. As a matter of fact, there are more than five thousand manuscript copies and fragments of New Testament letters still existing today! Some of the more famous ones are on display in museums.

The salvation of each person depends on his obedience to the gospel of Christ. God has told mankind that He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

People can only repent and be saved when they come to an understanding of their sin against God's law. God's word reveals how to obtain His forgiveness. This is why the Bible was written!



God's Word to a Politician

Bill Brandstatter

We are in another political season. The words are hot and heavy. The ads and signs are again a part of our daily experience. Has anyone knocked on your door?

We often are concerned about how to vote. If God could speak to the voter what would He say? Of course, God does speak to the voter. He speaks to all men through His Son (Hebrews 1:1).

If God could speak to a politician what would he say? We have a record of God speaking to a politician in the book of Acts (Acts 24:25ff.). Not only is He speaking to a politician in the first century, God is also speaking to us via the word (Ephesians 3:3, 4). What God has to say to a politician in that day, still applies to politicians today.

Paul first introduced us to Governor Felix in the form of a letter from Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26-30). The buck was being passed from one politician to another. The Sanhedrin had released him and sent him to Felix. Felix was a "governor;" a better term is "procurator."

We read of some political games played by Felix. He wanted bribe money from Paul (Acts 24:26). He

also left Paul bound to please the Jews (Acts 24:27).

PAUL REASONED with FELIX

One of the hardest things to do with a politician or anyone is to reason with them. Some can make facts look like lies, and lies look like facts. Some will believe anything that looks real. Many believe because of certain circumstances.

Reasoning doesn't equal arguing or debating. Paul reasoned with Felix. He used some information Felix already knew (Acts 24:21-22).

Notice also that Paul did not remain silent. He spoke up. Some might believe it was the wrong time. Felix held Paul's destiny in his hands. Felix could have sentenced Paul and let it go at that. Paul took the opportunity to tell him about Christ when Felix asked him. When politicians or anyone desire to know our beliefs, we should let them know the reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15).

PAUL PREACHED the RIGHTEOUSNESS of GOD

One person has stated that righteousness is "right living." That may be as good and as close a definition as we might get to the original Greek.

Solomon wrote: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

We cannot by our own wisdom chart our own path in life. The great men of the Bible were men of faith, who worked God's righteousness: Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses and others.

However, righteousness is more than right living; it is *doing as God directs according to the way in which God directs*.

According to Jesus, our righteousness is not to be ordinary, but extraordinary (Matthew 5:20). Man has a righteousness problem. "There is none righteous, no not one" (Romans 3:10).

Notice also Romans 1:32. Not only is it wrong to do that which is evil; it is also wrong to approve of that which is evil.

PAUL PREACHED SELF-CONTROL

In the Bible the word "temperance" and "sobriety" are often used to mean self-control. The lack of self-control has gotten a lot of people in trouble. David should have practiced self-control when he saw Bathsheba. Judas should have practiced self-control in regards to the thirty pieces of silver. Felix also had a problem with self-control.

Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that Drusilla was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Felix sent a man named Simon who was a magician to go get her as his wife. Felix had seduced her from her rightful husband and secured her for himself. She had a reputation as a ravishing, youthful beauty.

The lax morals for Felix and Drusilla help us to understand why Paul picked these topics. Are the morals of America loose today? Don't we need the same topics and the same information?

Self-control is one of the Christian graces enumerated by Peter (2 Peter 1:6). Self-control means we need to learn how to curb certain attitudes and appetites. Unlike Felix, Paul was one who knew and practiced self-control (1 Corinthians 9:27).

PAUL PREACHED about the JUDGMENT to COME

We certainly don't know what aspect of the judgment he spoke about. Everyone will stand before God in the judgment (Hebrews 9:27; Romans 14:12). Whatever Paul said specifically to Felix caused a reaction. Every action has a reaction. He adjourned the proceedings and procrastinated (Acts 24: 22).

After preaching to Felix, he became "terrified" (Acts 24: 25). He became convicted of his sins, but did

nothing. His conscience was bothering him. He handled the situation by dismissing the messenger. Often, if a man doesn't like the message, he attacks the messenger. Isn't that the case with Christ? Paul recognized this too. That is why he wrote, "Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16)

CONCLUSION

God's message today for the politician would no doubt include the same three points: righteousness, self-control and judgment to come. God wants all of us to be aware of righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. We need to make sure those we vote for believe in, practice and promote Christian principles.

What Will Be Remembered?

Gerald Cowan

If the New Testament churches can be used as a pattern, we may need to control more carefully what people will remember about us as congregations of the Lord's people. Too many are concerned about relatively unimportant things and seem not to be concerned enough about truly important things.

Let us take the church at Thessalonica as an example. And let us notice not only what the preacher (the apostle Paul in this case) remembered about it but what others remembered when the church at Thessalonica was mentioned.

LOCATION

No street address and no indication of whether their meeting place was in the inner city, the slums, the heart of

the business district, or the fashionable suburbs. No indication of it being a resort area popular with tourists or those trying to escape weather conditions back home. No hint that it was home to business or other enterprises that would draw people to it.

There may be great churches in miserable locations and there may be miserable churches in great locations. For most practical purposes location is irrelevant to the work of the church and its members.

BUILDING AND FACILITIES

No mention of such things. No indication of the seating capacity of the auditorium (and whether or not the seats or pews were cushioned), the number of classrooms, whether or not there were facilities for entertainment, how

many vehicles were available for transportation. and how efficient the heating and cooling systems were.

There are countless cathedrals and showplaces of religion scattered around the world – scores of them in religiously dormant Europe and not a few here in our own country. But those historically notable buildings are often notably devoid of members and meaningful religious activities, depending often upon contributions from tourists in order to keep their doors open. Grand temples do not make a great church. The church is always people, not a building.

PREACHER

No mention is made. Churches which depend upon a famous preacher to draw attention and attract attenders will often find that they cannot keep him – others may offer him more in the way of compensation and he will probably accept the best offer for his services. Preachers also are subject to illness and death – they cannot endure forever. Preachers also wear out, burn out, and become a handicap rather than an asset.

Have you ever visited the place where some famous name was preaching, only to go away disappointed by having received a warmed over rendition of a sermon used too many times and delivered in a frayed, listless, voice by a man bored by his own rep-

utation but duty bound to defend it (and actually ends up damaging it by a sub-par performance)?

A church that is built around its preacher is in danger of imminent demise when he departs or dies, or decides to relocate. The preacher for some time at Thessalonica was the apostle Paul. But the church did not advertise itself by saying “the apostle Paul once preached here.”

It is not what was once preached here but what is now being preached that is of continuing relevance and importance. It is not a great evangelist who makes a great church. Quite often it is the church which enables one to become a better preacher. And too, when the preacher is remembered, very few of those who heard him can tell you much of what he preached, or when, and how it was authenticated as “gospel of Jesus Christ.”

A church whose reputation rests upon its preacher is certainly vulnerable, and likely to be forgotten when its preacher is gone. A church that is famous for its past may be irrelevant to its contemporaries.

ELDERS

No mention. Paul sometimes mentioned elders of the churches he wrote to and preached for (see Philippians 1:1 for example).

He did emphasize the qualifications and the works of elders (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1), and he made a special effort to both admonish and encourage elders (as for example in his address to the elders from the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17-28). He never minimized the importance of elders to a local congregation, but he never referred to any church as being significant because of its elders.

DEACONS

No mention. It is common practice to overlook the works and contributions of properly functioning deacons – even more than the contributions of properly functioning elders.

The qualifications of deacons are set forth in 1 Timothy 3, but there is no comprehensive definition or description of their appropriate works (some churches now seem to have no realistic understanding of the work of deacons).

But it is not the work of a few special servants (the word DIAKONOS or deacon actually means servant or minister, one who does special service or ministry) that make a church memorable. Neither deacons, elders, nor preachers can do all a congregation should do. Like all other members of the congregation they simply do their part and the congregation is credited with the collective total of works and services of all.

NUMBER PROGRAMS & WORKERS ON THE “STAFF”

None of these are mentioned. No indication of associate ministers, program directors, administrators, secretaries, bookkeepers, teachers, janitors and grounds-keepers, etc.

Paul did mention the impact of the evangelistic efforts of the Thessalonian church (1 Thessalonians 1:5-10). But all programs and ministries must be maintained and be currently functioning if they are to be relevant in evaluating the church.

ATTENDANCE FIGURES

Not mentioned (not even the average Sunday morning attendance for worship). No indication of how many meetings were conducted each week – or even how many on Sunday. No mention of the percentage of members who returned at other assembly times such as Bible study meetings, prayer meetings, or such special occasions as “gospel meetings” which are sometimes called “revival meetings” by those who recognize their need for revival and renewal. No mention of the percentage of “registered members” who show up for any assembly of the church. (You might wonder about the percentage of our own Sunday morning worshipers who are present for any other assembly or activity of the church – it can sometimes be embarrassing to view the numbers).

We might think these numbers are indicative of the spiritual health of the church – they are – but Paul made no mention of such things in his remembrance of the church at Thessalonica.

NUMBER OF BAPTISMS

Not mentioned. Perhaps the efforts of the church to reach others for Christ are not reflected accurately in the numbers of people who respond obediently to the gospel. This is not to say that appropriate and accurate records of baptisms are not important.

The fact of such events, though not the number of persons, is mentioned (as for example in Acts 18:8 and in all the accounts of conversion and church growth in the New Testament writings). But it is significant that the number of baptisms was not mentioned in Paul's remembrance of the church. Other related numbers are also ignored.

NUMBER OF "SPECIAL PRAYER REQUESTS"

Not mentioned. Apparently the spirituality of the church was not measured by the number of persons who made public confessions of error or the number of times various ones asked for prayers in their behalf.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE "PLACING MEMBERSHIP"

Not mentioned. It is often the case today that people want to become

members of churches that seem large, active, and attractive – they pass by lesser congregations in order to be identified with a fashionable or currently notable church. Nothing like that was apparent in Thessalonica.

BUDGET

Not mentioned, and no indication of whether or not (if they had an established budget) it was being met. Perhaps a budget and contribution statistics do not reflect the giving power of the church or the wise stewardship of those who prepare and administer the budget.

Perhaps "meeting the budget" does not reflect the spirituality (or lack of it) of the givers.

WHAT WAS REMEMBERED?

Even though all the things we have just mentioned, which are so important to so many in the church today, were not remembered or mentioned, the church itself was well remembered by Paul and others. When Paul wrote to them, here is what he remembered:

- Their works proceeding from their faith, their labor was prompted by love, and their patient endurance in hope (1 Thessalonians 1:3).
- They were followers of the Lord and therefore followers of the servants of the Lord who in-

structed them (1 Thessalonians 1:6).

- They were examples to all who believed (1 Thessalonians 1:7), examples of what believers in Christ ought to be (compare 1 Timothy 4:12).
- They were evangelistic, sounding forth the word of the Lord's gospel message to others, both locally and abroad (1 Thessalonians 1:8).
- They received the word of the Lord in much affliction and had turned from idols in order to serve the true and living God (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 9).
- They were brothers in Christ, beloved of God (1 Thessalonians 1:4).

CONCLUSION

If the apostle Paul were to visit us and then write a letter to us about his impressions of us, what would he remember? What do other preachers and visitors who have been here remember about us? What do members who move away to other places in the world remember about the church they have left behind at this place?

When you leave and move on to other places – you may well do so at some time. What will you remember about the church here?

Is it fair to wonder and ask what the church remembered about Paul?

He mentions a few matters about how he and his fellow workers for Christ conducted themselves while in Thessalonica.

It would be worthwhile to consider the question about yourself. If or when you leave – including if you die – what will the church remember about you? Would it be a good memory including appreciation for your example and your works? Would it be a less favorable memory?

You are now determining how you will be remembered.

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WHY DOESN'T THE CHURCH GROW MORE?

Robert L. Waggoner

I sometimes read articles in brotherhood papers saying that the church is not growing today as it was in the 1950s because Christians now lack the dedication that Christians then had. While there is truth in that idea, it seems too simplistic! Such declarations generally fail to note that society is different now than then. Why is that? How does that difference affect Christians' lack of dedication today?

The answer is that humanism and its allied philosophies have changed our world. They have displaced the Christian precepts that our Constitutional forefathers structured into our society, and replaced them with the principles of humanism. These philosophies have destroyed absolutes in law and morality. They have given us situational ethics and relativity. They have removed Christianity from the school classroom and the market place and they have secularized all of our culture. They have overturned many of the checks and balances of our republican form of government and they have produced judicial supremacy over the legislative branches of government. They have promoted extensive governmental agencies and built vast governmental bureaucracies. They have threatened our culture by minimizing gender roles in society.

They have sought acceptance of homosexuality and same sex marriage unions. They have overturned anti-abortion laws and now produce over a million abortions every year. They are leading toward legalized infanticide and will ultimately promote obligatory euthanasia on everyone who is considered a burden to society.

Humanistic ideologies have made America the most violent, crime ridden nation on earth. They have produced massive marriage failures and contributed immensely to the breakdown of the home and family. They have cursed our country with extensive pornography and vile profanity. They have not yet destroyed Christianity in America, but they have already won over to themselves almost all agencies of government, schools, and other institutions of society.

Mainline denominational churches have, for the most part, already capitulated to these anti-Christian philosophies. Many Christians have had their faith weakened, and many Christian families have lost one or more of their members to these erroneous philosophies. Christian families are hurting.

I'm fully persuaded that converting people to Christ is not as easy today

as it was in the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. I'm convinced that the rise of humanism is a primary cause. And I've said so on several occasions while conducting church workshops about humanism.

One day, in response to such comments, a Christian brother called my attention to Robert Hooper's book about brother Willard Collins. Brother Collins noticed in 1973 that the secularization of our society was having an impact upon the church. This was obvious to him because of the annual decline in the number of baptisms and restorations resulting from his gospel meetings. (Robert Hooper and Jim Turner. *Willard Collins: The People Person*. Nashville: 20th Century Christian. 1986, 66-68).

Scholars from both conservative and liberal perspectives are also agreed about the significance of humanism in the western world. R. J. Rushdoony, a Calvinist scholar, writes:

"in most countries today, and no less in the United States, humanism is the established religion of the state and is progressively the source of legal revisionism. Humanism is also the established religion of schools and most churches, and most of society. Christianity is quite logically progressively excluded from state, school and church and has a weak and scarce-

ly tenable position in modern life. It probably lacks extensive and organized persecution in most countries because orthodox Christianity has become progressively weaker and less and less relevant." (Rousas John Rushdoony. *Christianity and the State*. Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1986, 8).

Moreover, James Reichley, of the Brookings Institute, has written:

"Despite many ups and downs, the influence of secular civil humanism in the West since the Enlightenment has generally followed an ascending course. Even in the United States, where religion remains a powerful social force, civil humanism is now probably the dominant value system within the intellectual community. It thereby exerts strong influence over the entertainment and news industries and over the higher levels of the educational system and the government bureaucracy. Leo Pfeffer, a distinguished authority on church-state relations, has written, 'Secular humanism [is] a cultural force which in many respects is stronger in the United States than any of the major religious groups or any alliance among them.'" (A. James Reichley, *Religion in American Public Life*. Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 1985, 47, with quotation from Leo

Pfeffer, "The Triumph of Secular Humanism", *Journal of Church and State*, Spring, 1977, 211.)

Since our culture generally no longer looks to God, the Bible, and Christianity, and since the faith of many Christians has also been weakened by humanistic influences, it is no great marvel that the church is not growing very rapidly in these times. What really concerns me, however, is that many Christians seem to be totally unaware of secular humanism and

how it has already changed our society. I'm fully convinced that before we Christians see much church growth we will first have to do battle against humanism. And if Christians are to effectively fight against humanism, then we must know what humanism is, how and where it operates, and what we can do to overcome its devastating influence in our world.

Several decades ago, I decided to conduct church seminars about humanism and its anti-Christian influences. I've conducted more than seventy-five. I've been studying this subject for more than thirty years. Brethren need to know how humanism is threatening, and sometimes destroying, Christian families and churches. If the church of our Lord is to grow, if Christian families stay close together and grow strong together in the Christian faith, then Christians must have knowledge to disarm this growing menace of humanism that is now attacking us in so many different ways.

Why not learn more about this subject? I've written a book about it. It is entitled, *Christianity or Humanism: Which Will You Choose?* (\$12.95)

I also have a free CD which contains ten power point lessons, used in church seminars, and additional information. Contact me at drbob1110@gmail.com.

Humble Servants of God

Humble servants of God are the light of the world. Taking God at His word and toiling with all their strength, the ripples of their lives go out into ever widening circles of godliness. Humble servants of God don't keep score of offenses, don't care who gets credit, and don't get their feelings hurt due to oversights. They only say, "*We have done that which was our duty to do*" (Luke 17:10).

Are you and humble servant of God?

-Bill Dillon

News and Notes from A.T. Pate

First, my commendations to Andy Erwin, friend and former student, for his splendid work as Editor of "The Gospel Gleaner". His thoughts on "Daniel" in the July issue are appreciated.

It was at Gray's Point near Jackson, TN, on October 25, 1948, that I preached my first sermon. Brother W.C. Hembree, an elder in my home church, made the appointment. As the new work was just getting started, we met under a tent. My sermon: "The Power of God's Word".

That beginning of proclaiming the "Unsearchable Riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8) has taken me to ten states and the Grand Bahamas in some 250 Gospel Meetings. With a grateful heart, I say, "The Lord has been mindful of me".

Fast forward to 2016: In April I was with the Rolling Hills Church in Mt. Sterling, KY. (Raccoon John Smith country) My first meeting in that area was in 1954. Many have followed.

On June 1, I was opening speaker in the summer series of the North View Church in Columbia, TN.

On July 31 it was my privilege to be guest preacher for the big day of the New Hope Church near Ashland

City, TN where Jim McGill serves as minister.

On August 31 I was the concluding speaker in the summer series of the Green Hill Church in Mt. Juliet, TN.

On Tuesday night, September 13, I was with the LaGuardo church near Gallatin, TN during their gospel meeting.

In London, KY, I will be with the Mt. Zion Church, September 25-28, for their Fall Gospel Meeting. It has been my privilege to conduct about 12 meetings with this church since 1964.

October 16-18 I am to be with the church in Greenville, TN in a Gospel Meeting.

My last meeting for the year 2016 is scheduled Nov. 6-9 in Clay City, KY. I say again, "The Lord has been mindful of me."

Recently here at Central in Nashville, one was baptized as a result of our daily radio program. The Central church began broadcasting the Gospel by radio in 1925. (worldwide internet wnah.com)

Editor's Note: It is wonderful to get this report from brother A.T. Pate. Let me encourage all faithful brethren to send us news of your work and upcoming efforts. May God bless you!

Ongoing Mission Work

Ronald Gilbert has returned from a mission trip to Zambia and Malawi. Four gospel meetings were conducted with a combined audience of over 6,000. 88 souls baptized into Christ and 189 restored.

Nashville School of Preaching Has New Director

Mike Greene has been named the new director of the Nashville School

of Preaching & Biblical Studies. He recently left the pulpit of the Leeham Ave church in Bowling Green, KY.

Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies Seeks New Director

The Milestone congregation in Pensacola is seeking a preacher and new director for the school of preaching they operate.

Visit their website for more information: www.nwfsbs.org



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For the Lord, His Word, and His Church

The

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Staff Writers

Stephen R. Bradd	Bill Brandstatter
Ronald D. Bryant	Gerald Cowan
Raymond Elliott	Mel Futrell
Ferrell Hester	Mike Kiser
Grady Miller	Owen D. Olbricht
David R. Pharr	John T. Polk II
Ivie Powell	Travis Quertermous
Andy Robison	Ron Thomas
Ernest Underwood	Mike Underwood
Robert L. Waggoner	Sam Willcut

Associate Editors

James R. McGill ♦ Bill Dillon

Editor

Andy Erwin

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Gospel Gleaner Publications

PO Box 456

Fayetteville, TN 37334

www.gospelgleaner.com

(256) 627-3215

Alcohol Poisoning

Andy Erwin

Truth is never used to promote alcohol – politicians will lie to bring it into a community; commercials will lie in their advertising; users will lie to hide it from others. The truth is that alcohol is a poison which will kill a person, family, and community slowly – drink by drink. It will poison the body, the soul, the family, and the community in which it enters.

A Poison to the Body

Use of alcohol may cause the body to be poisoned to death. It poisons the brain, bones, heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, pancreas, reproductive organs, and immune system.

“Alcohol remains the number-one drug problem in the United States. Nearly 17 million adults in the U.S. are dependent on alcohol or have other alcohol-related problems, and about 88,000 people die from preventable alcohol-related causes. In teenagers, alcohol is the most commonly abused drug. Thirty-five percent of teens have had at least one drink by age 15. Even though it is illegal, about 8.7 million people 12 to 20 years of age have had a drink in the past month, and this age group accounted for 11% of all alcohol consumed in the U.S. Among under-aged youth, alcohol is responsible for about 189,000 emer-

gency-room visits and 4,300 deaths annually. Withdrawal, for those physically dependent on alcohol, is much more dangerous than withdrawal from heroin or other narcotic drugs.” (emedicinehealth.com)

Truly, the sting of alcohol brings “woes” to the user. Solomon teaches, “Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaints? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? Those who linger long at the wine, Those who go in search of mixed wine. Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it swirls around smoothly; At

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(256) 627-3215
andyerwin@gospelgleaner.com

the last it bites like a serpent, And stings like a viper" (Proverbs 23:29-32).

A Poison to the Soul

Alcohol will inflame a person. Observe, "Woe to those who rise early in the morning, That they may follow intoxicating drink; Who continue until night, till wine inflames them! (Isaiah 5:11) Anyone who has ever seen a person raging after prolonged use of alcohol will accept the truth of this passage.

"Wine is a mocker, Strong drink is a brawler, And whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Proverbs 20:1).

"Alcohol, more than any illegal drug, was found to be closely associated with violent crimes, including murder, rape, assault, child and spousal abuse. About 3 million violent crimes occur each year in which victims perceive the offender to have been drinking and statistics related to alcohol use by violent offenders generally show that about half of all homicides and assaults are committed when the offender, victim, or both have been drinking. Among violent crimes, with the exception of robberies, the offender is far more likely to have been drinking than under the influence of other drugs." (National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence)

Alcohol will overcome a person (Isaiah 28:1). It will cause one to err

in vision and stumble in judgment (Isaiah 28:7). Wine will take away the heart of a man (Hosea 4:11), and cause one to grow indifferent toward his fellow man (Amos 6:6).

Worst of all, a soul deceived and deluded by alcohol will cease looking for the Lord's return, because they are only looking for their next drink.

Our Lord warns us accordingly, "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly" (Luke 21:34).

A Poison to the Family

Alcohol will bring poverty to a family.

- "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not be rich" (Proverbs 21:17).
- "Do not mix with winebibbers, Or with gluttonous eaters of meat; For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, And drowsiness will clothe a man with rags" (Proverbs 23:20-21).

Tragically, parents who are addicted to alcohol will trade the well-being and security of their children for a drink. Israel did this as "They have cast lots for My people, Have given a boy as payment for a harlot, And sold a girl for wine, that they may drink" (Joel 3:3).

Addiction to alcohol will prevent a man from being the caretaker of his home. "Indeed, because he transgresses by wine, He is a proud man, And he does not stay at home" (Habakkuk 2:5).

Alcohol addiction leads to many divorces and further alcohol addiction among the children. According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, 26.8 million children in the United States are exposed to alcoholism by their family, resulting in a higher risk of the child becoming an alcoholic.

A Poison to the Community

The Bible teaches us how alcohol, sexual perversions, shame, and violence travel hand-in-hand, with alcohol being at the root of such societal woes.

"Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbor, Pressing him to your bottle, Even to make him drunk, That you may look on his nakedness! You are filled with shame instead of glory. You also—drink! And be exposed as uncircumcised! The cup of the Lord's right hand will be turned against you, And utter shame will be on your glory. For the violence done to Lebanon will cover you. And the plunder of beasts which made them afraid, Because of men's blood And the violence of the land and the city, And of

all who dwell in it" (Habakkuk 2:15-17).

From the Department of Justice we find that alcohol is a factor in 40% of all violent crimes today. And, 37% of almost 2 million convicted offenders currently in jail, report that they were drinking at the time of their arrest.

Name one community that has ever been made better because it allowed more alcohol in its stores, because it open a single bar, or because it sold liquor by the drink.

Alcohol Poisoning: A Warning

Alcohol pushers will lie to you. Alcohol itself will lie to you. Alcohol will make a liar out of you. The devil is the father of lies and all liars will be condemned in hell (John 8:44; Revelation 21:8, 27). For your soul's salvation, don't let alcohol lie to you and make a liar out of you! Drunkenness and drinking parties are sinful and will cost you your soul (1 Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:21; 1 Peter 4:3).

Alcohol Poisoning: A Solution

Alcohol poisoning is a sin problem. In order to overcome any sin problem we must look to God's word for the solution.

In Psalm 51, David teaches all of us how to solve a sin problem. His sin problem involved the episode with Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite.

David approached the Lord with a broken spirit and a broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17). He was not attempting to hide the severity of his sin, but acknowledged it and said his sin was “always before him” (Psalm 51:3). He sought the Lord’s forgiveness (Psalm 51:1-2, 7-12, 14).

And, he approached life with a new mission in mind – to live for God and bring others to Him (Psalm 51:13-15).

May each of us overcome our sins through this biblical solution!



The Restoration Plea

Ronald Bryant

First and foremost, it is a “plea” not a claim. Second, we believe that this plea is a basis and a means to unity before God. It is expressed in the following fashion: Let it be our aim to do what God commands and be that which He intends, holding fast to the will of God revealed in and through Christ.

The Restoration Plea Is About Honoring God

Central in Scripture is God’s purpose to save us from sin and bring each of us into a right relationship with Him. This demands that we recognize and honor Him as the Lord; acknowledging that He is infinite in all of His attributes.

We believe and confess that His will does not change: “Forever O Lord, your word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89), that He reigns over all things: “Alleluia! For the Lord

God Omnipotent reigns!” (Revelation 19:6).

We believe that His purpose is secure and cannot be defeated: “I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him” (Ecclesiastes 3:14). “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13).

We do not presume to restore the Lord God of heaven to His rightful place! He has not stepped down or aside! We seek to know and honor Him, and give Him glory, and believe that all should do so.

It is our plea that all come to Him, and worship and serve Him acceptably in reverence and godly fear (Hebrews 12:28).

We do not labor to restore Jesus Christ to His place as Savior and Lord! We do not believe that Jesus has ever resigned or stepped down from His place as Lord and Savior. It is our plea that all believe in Him, obey Him, and live for Him; acknowledging Him as the Son of God (Matthew 17:3), as the only Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), and as the author of eternal salvation (Hebrews 5:8-9).

We believe that He has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). We believe that He is the head (the only head) of the body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18, 24). We believe that He is the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15). We believe it is right to seek to be one with Him and to turn men to be in allegiance to Him.

The Restoration Plea Is About Respecting God's Word

We do not presume to restore the word of God to its rightful place! We believe that the Scriptures inspired of God are the rule and guide for mankind. We believe that the Scriptures are infallible and authoritative (Matthew 24:35); the message of salvation (Romans 1:16-17); that it is eternal (1 Peter 1:22-25). We believe that it is wrong to add to it, or take from it (Revelation 22:18-19). We believe that to pervert it is to bring condemnation upon oneself (Galatians 1:6-9).

Therefore, we reject human doctrines and human creeds, and urge all to believe and obey the word that is able to save their souls (1 Peter 4:11-17). It is our plea that all come to love, respect, obey, and abide in the revealed will of God.

The Restoration Plea Is About Understanding the Church

We do not presume to bring back the "true church!" We believe that the church revealed in the New Testament is the one purposed by God (Ephesians 3:10-11), that it was purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28).

- ◆ We believe that the "true church" existed in its ideal form in the mind of God, was purchased by the blood of Christ, and was established upon a day in history (Acts 2:36-47).
- ◆ We believe that the realization of the ideal church as one body of redeemed souls fulfilling was and is God's eternal purpose (Ephesians 3:10-11).
- ◆ We believe that the church belongs to Christ, has ever been made up of the saved, and exists to give glory to God (Ephesians 3:20-21).
- ◆ We believe that the saved are become the church - "the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10-11). We believe that the church is the product of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6ff; 9:15-26), and

that it has ever been one body (Ephesians 4:4-7).

- ◆ Furthermore, we believe God has decreed its organization (Philippians 1:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:1-15; Titus 1:3-11), its actual identity (Romans 12:4ff); and its worship and its service (Hebrews 12:28; John 4:23-24).

Compelled by love for God and Christ, by reverence for the inspired word, and desiring to be one with God, we seek to yield to God, live for

Him in Christ, under the authority of the gospel and in the body of Christ. This is not a program, nor merely a profession of faith. It is a passion that rules our hearts and lives.

We know that we are not perfect, but believe that the way of Christ is. We long to be one with Christ – in the church revealed in the New Testament. This is a plea not a boast!



Acceptable Worship

Robert Waggoner

Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:21-24).

Worship is communion with God. While we sometimes say we worship by singing, praying, giving, teaching God’s word, and partaking of the Lord’s supper, this is not precisely

correct. These activities are not worship in themselves but rather the means by which we worship. Just as one is not born again simply because he has been immersed in water – because he must also be born of the spirit (John 3:3, 5) – so also genuine worship happens not simply by doing certain activities in the correct manner, but by doing them with our spirits in communion with God. Jesus taught that “God is a spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24).

Worship “in Spirit”

That worshipful spirit which all should have is aptly described by John’s vision of heavenly worshippers

around the throne of God. In this vision worshippers are described as prostrated before God as they give him glory, honor and thanks (Revelation 4:8-11).

As in the fourth chapter of Revelation, God the Father is worshipped for his eternity and his creation, so in the fifth chapter, God the Son is worshipped for his having redeemed us by his blood (Revelation 5:8-14). This description of heavenly worship serves as a model of the spirit each worshipper should have in his own heart as he humbly prostrates himself before the Lord.

A person's spirit is indicated by that person's attitude and behavior. Many different spiritual qualities may be involved in acceptable worship to God. The spirit of faith was apparently why Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God (Genesis 4:1-7; Hebrews 11:4). By implication, Cain did not sacrifice by faith and therefore he and his sacrifice were rejected.

Likewise, the spirit of reconciliation with brethren, if need be, is essential before one's worship is acceptable to God. Jesus said, "if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

Moreover, Jesus declared that the spirit of obedience is required for one's worship to be acceptable. Jesus condemned those persons who taught the doctrine of Corban (i.e., that the financial benefits they should give to support their aged parents could be given to the rebuilding of the temple). He said, "In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:1-9; see also Mark 7:1-13).

God has always required that those who worship him be spiritually right with him. Even in the Old Testament, God required that those who worshipped him live with a spirit of righteousness. Unless they lived righteous lives, God was displeased with their sacrifices (Isaiah 1:11-17; Micah 6:6-8).

From these passages, we may conclude in general terms that Jesus taught that acceptable worship requires that worshippers be in a right relationship with both God and fellow human beings, and that worshippers must come to God in the spirit of faith.

Other specific spiritual qualities involved in acceptable worship to God may be observed regarding specific New Testament mediums of worship. For example, regarding **financial giving**, "let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of a

necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). He who gives should do so with the spirit of liberality (Romans 12:8).

Regarding the **Lord's Supper**, scripture teaches that it must not be in an unworthy manner (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29). The worshipper must partake in a spirit of self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28), and in remembrance of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

Regarding **singing**, worship in spirit involves "making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19), "teaching and admonishing one another" and "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

Regarding **prayers**, worship in spirit is demonstrated by continually offering "the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Hebrews 13:5), "giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20).

Regarding **preaching and teaching**, worship is spiritual in that it consists of "edification and exhortation and comfort" (1 Corinthians 14:3). Preaching requires convincing, rebuking, and exhorting, with all longsuffering (2 Timothy 4:1-2) and "a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1).

Worship "in Truth"

We commonly answer by saying that true worship means conforming to the truth of God's word. Correctness of ritual in worship was certainly required in the Old Testament.

God specified precisely what sacrifices he wanted and how he wanted them made (see the Book of Leviticus). To worship improperly was to displease God. Because Nadab and Abihu used sacrificial fire that God had not ordained, they were stricken dead (Leviticus 10:1-2).

We who live under the New Testament may also worship improperly, i.e., not according to the truth of God's word. For example, worshipping in truth requires that we sing because that's what the New Testament teaches (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) – rather than by singing with accompaniment of a mechanical instrument.

Or, we say that worshipping in truth requires eating the Lord's Supper every Lord's day when the church comes together because that's what the New Testament teaches (Matthew 26:26-29; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Acts 20:7) – rather than once a month, or once per quarter.

However, while these applications of the meaning of true worship are not incorrect, this type application is surely not what Jesus meant when talking

to the Samaritan woman in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of John. What Jesus meant by true worship comes out of the historical context of the passage.

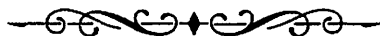
Jesus' comment was in response to the Samaritan woman's thinking about the Jews conviction that, under the law of Moses, worship should be in Jerusalem, whereas the Samaritans thought that worship should be in Mt. Gerizim. In saying "neither" (John 4:21), was not Jesus talking about something other than correctness of rituals in worship? In this context, was not Jesus saying that those things which were under the law – such as worshipping at Jerusalem – were but a shadow of the true things to come thereafter (see Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1)?

Is not Jesus saying that true worship will not be according to the law of Moses but will be according to Christian teaching? In this sense, worship under the law of Moses was but the shadow, whereas worship in the Christian age is that which is "true" (i.e., in the sense of real or genuine). Worship under the law, based upon animal sacrifices and an inferior covenant, was imperfect, but worship under Christ is perfect, being based upon Christ's blood of the new covenant (See Hebrews 7:11 – 9:14; 12:22-29).

God Seeks True Worshipers

After Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden of Eden, God sought the worship of their children, Cain and Abel. He has always sought worship from humanity. Worship toward God relates specifically to recognition of what God has done. Prior to Christ's redeeming activity, worship toward God related specifically to God's creation and to God's deliverance of his people from perils in this life. In saying that the Father is seeking worshippers, Jesus may have had reference to the fact that worshippers were being sought by what was soon to be achieved through Christ's death and resurrection.

Remember that John's vision in heaven portrayed worship by the heavenly host because of God's creation and Christ's redeeming work. We who live after Christ's redeeming activity have greater cause to worship God than those who lived before Christ's redeeming activity. Our hearts should therefore be filled with awe and gratitude not only for God's creation, but also for his redemption. Let us therefore worship fervently in spirit and in truth.



Gossip in the Lord's Church

Robert Clarke

It is 5:45 on a Sunday afternoon and Mike and his family are walking into the church building where he and his family have worshiped ever since they moved into town a number of years ago. As soon as Mike gets inside the building, one of the elders comes over to him and says, "Hey Mike, would you have time to meet with the elders for a few minutes after the close of services this evening"?

After the close of services that evening, the elders all sit down with Mike and explain to him that another member of the congregation has come to them and made them aware of the fact the Mike had recently participated in something that a Christian shouldn't have been involved in. The first thing Mike wants to know is, who said this about him. The elders' response to this question is, "We're not at liberty to say."

How many times has this event played out in the Lord's church? How many people are aware of the fact that whether or not Mike was actually guilty of any sin in this case, the elders and Mike's anonymous accuser are all guilty of the sin of gossip? How many people are aware of the fact that gossip is a sin equivalent to some of the worst sins known to man?

Gossip is mentioned in Romans 1:29. Although some Bible translations use the more antiquated term, "whisperers," today we would say gossipers. Read Romans 1:29-31 and see the other sins that are listed right along with being a gossip. Read Romans 1:32 and see that a person who practices such things (including being a gossip) is worthy of death.

Elders should try their best to be a good example to the rest of the flock (1Peter 5:3). Allowing and participating in gossip does not provide a good example. Elders are to oversee their own local congregation. This overseeing of the congregation is not overseeing as in the sense of being the "boss" of the congregation but rather overseeing as in standing guard over the congregation as a shepherd would stand guard over a flock of sheep in order to protect the sheep from straying and to protect them from predators, just as Christ would have them do on His behalf (1Peter 2:25, 1Peter 5:2).

If elders are going to stand guard over the flock, they must know and be very familiar with the New Testament and use the New Testament as their guide in all things and teach the rest of the congregation to do the same.

For instance, in this case when Mike's accuser came to the elders with the accusation, the elders should have immediately said, "What did Mike say when you mentioned this to him?" If the elders had asked Mike's accuser this question, they would have most likely found out that Mike's accuser hadn't said anything to Mike and had no intention of doing so.

The elders' responsibility at that point would have been to politely direct the accuser to Matthew 18:15-17 and instruct the accuser to go to Mike and see if he can get it worked out between the two of them alone and then come back to the eldership with this issue only if he can't get it worked out with Mike alone.

Sometimes, when an accuser prefers to accuse his brother or sister behind his back, he will reference 1 Corinthians 5:1, saying that "Paul didn't specify who reported their sexual immorality" – thinking that this is justification for accusing a fellow Christian behind his back. Actually, Paul did specify back in 1 Corinthians 1:11 where he was getting his information.

When Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 5:1 that he had been made aware of sexual immorality in the church at Corinth, you can be sure that the Corinthians were fully aware that this report came from those of Chloe's family.

Other times someone will say, "This is different because it's a public sin" – thinking that this is justification to accuse a fellow Christian behind his back. Most of the time, when a sin is a public sin, it is only public because the whole congregation has been gossiping about it!

Just because the whole congregation is guilty of gossip doesn't mean the one being accused should be treated differently. If the whole congregation is gossiping, the eldership has a bigger problem to address. But then, how can the eldership deal with gossip if they themselves are participating in the gossip?

Remember the Holy Spirit inspired words of the apostle Paul in Galatians 6:1, "Brothers, if a person is caught up in a transgression, you who are spiritual are to restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, watching out for yourself, so that you will not also be tempted." Notice that the apostle Paul didn't say, "If you see a brother in sin, go and tell other people about it." If we see a brother in sin and we go to anyone but that brother about it, we're gossiping, even if we go to the preacher or the elders.

In Matthew 7:24-27 Jesus gives us a parable about the one who hears His words and "does them" versus the ones who do not. Surely we all want to stand on Judgment Day having put His word into practice.

The Book of the Lord

Isaiah 34:16

1. This chapter contains a message of prophecy regarding the Edomites.
2. While descendants of Esau, their history was an insult to Israel.
3. Their fate is spelled out. (vs. 6, 7, 11, and 12).
4. In days to come when anyone questioned what happened to them, and why, they would be referred back to this prophecy. Edom testifies to the truthfulness of the claim the Bible came from God.
5. We want to study the advice of this text.

I. Why Is It Called "The Book of The Lord?"

- A. Because it is inspired by the Lord. 2 Timothy 3:16, 17
- B. Because it describes the Lord. Genesis 1:1
- C. Because it is sanctioned by the Lord. Isaiah 55:10, 11
- D. Because it leads to the Lord. Acts 8:35, 36
- E. Because it will be used by the Lord. John 12:48

II. Why Should We Read The Bible?

- A. To gain enlightenment. Psalms 109:105 (A book of knowledge by which we can know of the past, present, and future.)
- B. To gain example. 1 Peter 2:21 (Of what we ought, and ought not to be like. Many characters and situations in the Bible.)
- C. To gain excitement 2 Corinthians 5:11; Romans 2:5 (Knowledge and practice do not always harmonize!)
- D. To gain edification. Acts 20:32 (It speaks of itself as milk for the immature, and meat for the mature.)
- E. To gain encouragement. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (Nothing else speaks such promises and words of consolation.)

III. How Should We Read The Bible?

- A. Reverently. 2 Timothy 3:15. "Holy Scriptures".
- B. Fervently. John 5:39 "Search"- like a miner after ore.
- C. Frequently. Acts 17:11 - "daily".
- D. Prayerfully. Psalms 119:18- "open my eyes that..."
- E. Practically. James 1:21-25 - "doers of the word".

1. Are you heeding the advice of this verse? A chapter a day will help keep the Devil away! The Devil does not fear a Bible with dust on it.
2. The Bible finds us where we are, and if we will permit it, it will take us where we need to go.
3. What evidence do you have that the Bible is NOT true?

- Mike Kiser

WAS PETER EVER A POPE?

John T. Polk, II

"Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 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. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'" (Matthew 16:16-19, NKJV)

A Word Study: Rock and Peeble

The Roman Catholic Church has argued that, "Peter" and the "rock" upon which the church is built are one and the same. Nothing in Scripture justifies this conclusion! The name "Peter" is the translation of the Greek word, "*petros*," which means "a pebble, stone," whereas, the word "rock" is from the Greek word, "*petra*," which means "a ledge, or bedrock." Whatever the church of Christ is to be built upon is "*petra*," not "*petros*."

This clear distinction was drawn by Jesus Christ, Himself. "One of the two who heard John *speak*, and fol-

lowed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, 'You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas' (which is translated, A Stone)" (John 1:40-42). The word translated, "a stone" is the Greek word, "*petros*." If later Jesus intended to build the church upon "*petra*," why didn't Jesus give Peter that name and avoid any confusion?

The word "*petra*," is used of Jesus Christ when Old Testament prophecies are quoted in the New Testament:

- **Matthew 16:18:** "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."
- **Romans 9:33:** "As it is written: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.'" (quoting from **Isaiah 28:16; 8:14**)
- **1 Corinthians 10:4:** "For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock

was Christ.” (reference to **Exodus 17:5-7; Numbers 20:10-13**)

- **1 Peter 2:8:** “A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense. They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.” (Peter was quoting from **Isaiah 8:14-15.**)

Since Jesus, and not Peter, is referred to as “*petra*,” then the “rock (*petra*)” in Matthew 16:18 upon which the church of Christ is built is Jesus Christ, not Peter! If not, why not?

Catholic Claims Refuted

IF this clearly taught Peter’s superiority over all the other apostles, then:

- Why were they still disputing the issue later? **Matthew 20:20-28**
- How were James, Cephas and John *all* “pillars?” **Galatians 2:9**
- Was Paul the Gentile “Pope?” **Galatians 2:7-10**
- How was the church of Christ “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone?” (**Ephesians 2:20**)

Peter’s teaching is a part of the foundation of the church, but not distinct from the rest of “the apostles and prophets.” In Matthew 16:16, Peter had confessed inspired truth, established by the prophets, and that truth about Jesus Christ is the “bedrock”

upon which the churches of Christ are built, not Peter, himself.

The Roman Catholic Church willfully ignores these passages of Scripture that shed light on their dark doctrine of apostasy from the will of God! At no time in the rest of the New Testament did God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the apostles, or the churches of Christ ever teach or act in such a way as to indicate the superiority of Peter over the church of the Lord:

- Paul did not consider Peter above other apostles: **2 Corinthians 11:5:** “For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles;” **1 Corinthians 9:5:** “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?”
- Peter was never acknowledged as being in Rome, or their “Bishop!” Paul was prisoner in Rome and wrote **Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, Philemon**, but NEVER MENTIONED PETER AS BEING IN ROME! Paul wrote the **Book of Romans** and saluted 27 Christians, but NOT Peter! Peter wrote 2 letters, but never mentioned being in Rome!

Doesn’t it seem strange, per the claim of the Roman Catholic Church, that Peter was in Rome as the Head of

the Churches of Christ but neither he, nor the rest of the New Testament, once mentioned this most important fact or person?

When Jesus said to Peter "Follow Me" **John 21:19**, the Roman Catholic Church says it is teaching Peter's Primacy. But when Jesus tells Philip "Follow Me" **John 1:43** NO ONE suggests the Roman Church is built upon Philip! How inconsistent is this?

Paul later condemned anyone who would claim to be a member of "Cephas," rather than Christ: "For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, 'I am of Paul,' or 'I am of Apollos,' or 'I am of Cephas,' or 'I am of Christ.'" (**1 Corinthians 1:11-12 NKJV**)

The Obvious Conclusion

The obvious conclusion must be that the Roman Catholic Church has perverted Scripture to establish their claim that "Peter was the first Pope." In so doing they have ignored Jesus Christ's own distinction of terms that destroys their claim; spoken in the silence of the entire New Testament about their claim; and seized authority for themselves that the Godhead never gave them.

Jesus claimed, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on

earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen." (**Matthew 28:18-20**)

No "authority" is left for Peter or successive "Popes." Disciples are baptized with the authority of the Godhead, not the Roman Catholic Church. Disciples are to be taught what Jesus commanded, not uninspired traditions added by the Roman Catholic Church!

The "keys of the kingdom of heaven" were given to, and used by, "Peter, standing up with the eleven" on the day of Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection from the dead. When they preached the completed gospel of Jesus, they opened the door of "the kingdom of heaven" and ended with: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (**Acts 2:38**).

This, and not Roman Catholic Doctrine, is what is authorized to be done today. One day, this door will be shut.



Who Is Jesus?

Owen Olbricht

Who is Jesus? The answer we receive will depend upon whom we ask. Jesus asked His apostles this question by saying, "But who do you say that I am?" to which Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Matthew 16:15, 16; see also John 6:69).

Contrariwise, *The Watchtower* magazine published by the "Jehovah's Witnesses" (No. 4 2016, p.14) answers the question, "Jesus is the firstborn Son of God. Jesus was created, and thus had a beginning."

Jesus Had No Beginning

The Bible teaches us that Jesus had no beginning, but is eternal. He existed at the time of the beginning and is the origin of the beginning.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

In the Greek language "was" is indicative, imperfect, active, meaning He *already was existing* in the beginning, thus He caused the beginning by creating everything that has been created.

Prophesied

Micah prophesied about Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and also taught His eternal existence, by writing "Yet out of you shall come forth to Me, The One to be ruler in Israel. Whose goings forth are from of old, *From eternity*" (Micah 5:2).

Instead of writing His "going," Micah wrote His "goings," meaning His goings were more than from "ancient times" (as is wrongly expressed in the NIV), but rather His goings have continued *from eternity*. Jesus is as eternal as is the Father.

God's Nature

As the only begotten, divinely unique Son of God (John 3:16), He has the God-nature of the Father. If He does not have the God-nature, He is not the Son of God. Even a human son must be human, if his father is a human.

In John 1:18, Jesus may have been called "the only begotten God" (John 1:18; NASB, because of manuscript variants, instead of the "only begotten Son of God;" NKJV). As the Father is God so also is Jesus, for He is referred to as the Son of God, not that He became a Son by a birth, but is

described as the Son to express that He is of the very same nature as the Father.

This is brought out by the statements that before He became a human "*He existed in the form of God*" (Philippians 2:6). Even now He has the same nature in His relationship with the Father, "And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature" (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus is identical in form, glory, and nature to the Father.

If Not God

If Jesus is not God and does not have the God-nature, then who is He? Is He an angel, as affirmed by the "Jehovah's Witnesses"? Or, is Jesus a being of some kind that looks like God, possesses His attributes, and acts like God, but is not God?

If Jesus is not God, then He is a being like God who:

- Created the heavens and earth (Genesis 1:1)
- Will come with His angels and sit on His throne to judge all nations (Matthew 25:31, 32)
- Is ruling over all heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18)
- Does all the Father does (John 5:19)
- Will be the only judge of all who are judged (John 5:22)
- Has the same honor as the Father (John 5:23)

- Will raise all the dead (John 5:28)
- Is one with the Father (John 10:30)
- Looks like the Father (John 14:9; 12:45)
- Is in the Father and the Father is in Him (John 14:10, 11; 17:23)
- Possesses all things the Father possesses (John 16:15; 17:10)
- Had glory with the Father before the world existed (John 17:5)
- Had God's form and took on the nature of man (Philippians 2:5-7)
- Is the image of God (Colossians 1:15)
- Has the brightness of God's glory and exact nature of God (Hebrews 1:3)
- Upholds up all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3)
- Is better than the angels (Hebrews 1:4).

Conclusion

If Jesus is not God, then He is a being like God, and does all God can do, while possessing the God-nature. No being can make this claim. The only conclusion which can be made is the one spoken by the angel; Jesus could only have been "God with us" (Matthew 1:23).

Perhaps a little boy's conclusion can apply to Jesus. The boy told a friend who denied a bird was a bird, "It flies like a bird, looks like a bird, and chirps like a bird. So, it must be a bird."

The Election Is Now Over

(Political Maneuvering)

Ron Thomas

What kind of idol do you serve in life? Oh, you say you are not serving any kind of idol? That's great, but are you sure you are not guilty of being blinded by your own loyalties (or politics)? In this article I want to address two kinds of idols with which people of today struggle, even as they did in the days of Jeremiah.

Idols in Jeremiah's Day

It seems there are two kinds of idols in life. There is the obvious kind of idol one reads about in Scripture, the one that can neither see nor hear. This was an inanimate object, the creation of man. With man being a worshipping creature, it was his desire to make something tangible, material wherein he could have a visual object before him to represent something greater than the non-visual.

In Jeremiah 10, the Lord (through Jeremiah His prophet) spoke to the people encouraging words, words that were a reminder of what is actually powerful and living. That which threatened Jerusalem with violence was guided by idolatry, a lifeless object, but was given "life" by the creation of man. The idols leading the invading army were of man's making,

thus, incapable of doing anything at all! Israel (Judah), however, did not pay necessary attention to the Lord's word, so the Lord expressed His incredulity thusly:

"For the customs of the peoples are futile; For one cuts a tree from the forest, The work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; They fasten it with nails and hammers So that it will not topple. They are upright, like a palm tree, And they cannot speak; They must be carried, Because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, For they cannot do evil, Nor can they do any good" (Jeremiah 10:3-5, NKJV).

If we might be able to use a human sentiment and attribute it to the Lord, perhaps one could say the Lord was dumbstruck by the actions and thinking of man when He looked upon those who took a tree and bowed before it. What made it even more aggravating, to the Lord, was that these people understood exactly who the Creator was (and is), but in their determination, they wanted something other than Him, perhaps to show themselves wise in the midst of the geographical neighbors.

Jeremiah laments: "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (10:23, NKJV). This well-known passage in Jeremiah clearly teaches that in the way of righteousness and spiritual correction people have no clue how to get to God. Consider what Jeremiah is saying: it is not possible for man, on his own, to know the way of righteousness. A great many people think they know, but it is obvious to one who reads the Bible that a person cannot find the Lord's "destination" without a God-ordained righteous path to walk.

What path will one walk if not the Lord's path? Inevitably, it becomes a path of one's own making. The blind, who lead the blind, walk in this path.

On the other hand, if a person chooses to walk the Lord's path, he must walk as a follower – not of the blind – but of the Lord. Jesus said, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46)

The people of Jeremiah's day are really not much different from the people of our own day. We have exchanged their particular kind of idols for our own idols of today.

Idols in Our Day

A person can read Facebook and be overwhelmed with the political

satire, humor, and support during an election year. As I looked at the social media page, I wondered if there was another idol in the making. Of course, to support a way of thinking in the political arena gives no warrant for another to conclude idolatry is occurring. Though there may be no necessary warrant, some of the posts I have seen at least provoked me to wonder about it.

During the days of Jeremiah, the people were in a political, economic, and spiritual struggle. We experience the same today. As God's "weeping prophet," Jeremiah looked at the landscape and had much to lament, for people looked to other men (or people in general) for solutions. If these "other men" were God's prophets, like Jeremiah, the Lord would have done much to help. As it was, they desired to hear nothing from the Lord.

Jeremiah preached to people who refused to hear and obey the Lord. He preached to people who were on the cusp of experiencing the Lord's wrath in a way none really expected. He preached to people who thought of themselves in a way that no spiritually inclined person was to think. He preached to people who thought of themselves as wise to this world.

One's stand before the Lord is crucial to being received by the Lord. The standard of measurement is not the individual's own thinking, but the

Lord's way of righteousness (cf. Isaiah 55:8-9).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about how they were called upon by the Lord to be imitators of Him (1 Corinthians 11:1), and then he wrote to the church at Ephesus the same admonition (Ephesians 5:1).

His disappointment was very plain for the brethren in Corinth to read when, in fact, they confused the Lord's standard for another. "For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12).

The nation of Israel was split into two nations, and two political entities. Of the two, the northern tribes (Israel) were so corrupt the Lord sent them into Assyrian captivity, and it all started with a king (politics) who changed the Lord's standard of worship (1 Kings 12:25-33). After his own heart he devised a new "way" of worship (12:33), but all it did was begin the long trek toward destruction. Because they refused the Lord's counsel, they experienced violence when their nation was brought to its end (2 Kings 17).

During the time in which Jeremiah preached and wrote, the Lord brought Babylon to Judah's doorstep; the other

political entity, but one who had some degree of loyalty to the Lord. Ultimately, however, Judah faced the same end as Israel.

Application

Many of the people living during the time of Jeremiah (and before) considered themselves loyal to the Lord, adept at political maneuvering and wise to the ways of the world. No matter the problem in which they engaged, they believed in their capability to pull themselves out. If they failed, the Lord would do it (they believed)!

As it was then, it is similar today. People believe they have answers to whatever problems experienced, and those answers are in political and secular solutions. If that fails, they believe the Lord will pull them out. This spiritual delusion brought Israel/Judah disaster, and it will bring us the same.

Perhaps our major political parties can be properly understood as one looks at Israel and Judah. One party has long-since abandoned God, the other feigns loyalty.

Solutions:

Have you considered the Lord?

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in

this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Now that the general election has come and gone, a pertinent question to ask is: Who did (and do) you rely on?

Brighteners on the Pathway of Life

James W. Boyd

There may be times when we are inclined to think of the whole world much like Nathanael considered Nazareth; nothing good could come out of it. Much of the world does cause us to feel the bad is getting the best of the good with all the wars, disease, riots, blasphemies, and moral erosion. We may be tempted to be like Peter after he requested to walk on the water, but began to look at the turbulent seas about him and began to sink. If we center our thoughts only on what is deplorable we may well fail to see many things that actually brighten life's path even in the midst of so much that is regrettable.

After Israel requested and was allowed to have a king, Samuel came before the nation to remind them of all that God had done for them in the past with provisions, protection, and abundant blessings – both physical and spiritual. There was good reason for that reminder, lest they forget their blessings and the source of them. For

a few moments, think with me of some very real and significant things that ought to cause us to lift our heads and raise our voices in praise and thanksgiving that they exist.

Saving Souls Brightens Life

Luke 15:7,10, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance ... Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

If this can cause joy in heaven, should it not cause joy here on earth among those whose goal is heaven? Is it not wonderful to see people with conviction, knowledge, understanding, and courage make a commitment for matters that are right and eternal? This restores our faith in the power of righteousness even in a wicked world. It restores our confidence that there remain many people of honest and

sincere hearts who, when taught, will put the Lord first in their lives. Such occasions will brighten the path of the Christian.

Christian Lives Brighten Life

Life is brightened when you have occasion to see people truly living daily lives in fulfilling their Christian duties. Many people are doing many good things for the cause of Christ without fanfare, notoriety and attracting attention. There are those who have a genuine concern for the lost and they are busy demonstrating that concern by trying to win souls to salvation. They perform acts of kindness and benevolence. They express sympathy, give assistance, and actually look for opportunities to do good.

It bothers me to have some school, paper, or even a church have a big day of honoring and celebrating what they call "The Christian of the Year." How do they know who is the Christian of the year?

They have the right to recognize brethren for their works' sake, but such a distinction smacks of egotism and haughtiness. As far as we or they know, the one God considers the Christian of the year may not even be noticed by brethren. It may be some humble, hard-working, sacrificial servant of God that goes about living godly without all the "hip-hip-hoorah" that many stir around them. To know

and see such people as these humble servants is refreshing, especially in the midst of evil, and in the midst of "honors" bestowed on those with "big-names" and big purses.

Godly Parents Brighten Life

Life is brightened when we are privileged to learn of some parent being attentive to the physical and spiritual welfare of their children. They bring them to worship, study the Bible with them, make sure the children know how to choose their companions, concerned about the development of their mind and talents, giving them the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" by word and example.

So many fathers and mothers have abandoned their children and some do not even recognize they have done it. They turned their upbringing over to the child-care center, to grandparents, baby-sitters, while they pursue their careers of money and glamour. They naively think all is well simply because they supply adequate funds for the fashions, fads, and material things.

Parents often sacrifice considerably for the welfare of their children, but it is a real blessing to the child and a real "lift" to observe parents making that special effort to provide for their spiritual guidance and instruction. It is not too hard to detect that child whose parents are on the job from those children too often left to themselves, or

turned over to somebody else. When you see Ephesians 6:4 being obeyed, it does make life a little brighter.

Help in Hardship Brightens Life

It is strengthening and encouraging when observing how many react in time of crisis, hardship, and disruption that comes in life. Sickness, death, financial stress, and various burdens often break upon families and individuals as they sail the stormy seas of life. But there be those who seem to continue their course.

They are like a mighty vessel that encounters rough seas but persist on the way, possibly rocking and tossing somewhat on the stormy waves, but not being knocked from the goal. They refuse to allow themselves to be submerged beneath the slashing upheavals that can characterize periods of life.

Knowing how we ought to react to problems, and reacting that way are sometimes very different. It is easier to say what we should do than it is to do it. Sometimes when beset with adversities we do not always do our best thinking anyway.

We are subject to weakness and have our frailties. But our own problems are made lighter and seem to be less, and our courage is raised when we are privileged to see others taking their "lumps" and handling them successfully. We see how valuable a

strong faith is. We are better equipped to bear up and press on.

Many never take their eye off of the Lord even in the blinding events of difficulties. These things brighten our own path of life.

Good Examples Brighten Life

While many are indifferent, rebellious, and seem to go out of their way to do what they ought not, it is most refreshing to know that there are many who go out of their way to do as they ought according to God's Word.

Many young people have brought disgrace upon themselves, their families, the church and shamed their generation. But how fine it is to see some clean-cut, ambitious boy or girl who believes in respecting their parents, respecting things holy and sacred, have high moral standards, and who take seriously the admonition of Paul to Timothy to "Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4: 12).

We do not doubt that the tragedy of many youths is that they have "gone to the dogs." While we bemoan this and make efforts to prevent it, and recover those who have fallen, we are made to realize that there are many Christian young people who are not going into such ways of life. They rely on God because they have had good teaching and had the wisdom to

apply that teaching. Many young people have been called upon to sacrifice school honors, position, acceptance, and other things that they deserve because they would not compromise righteousness and His kingdom before all else. They care for the aged, neglected, anxious, less fortunate and bereaved. They stand for the truth even when the odds are stacked against them. Even when some other brethren will take the position of the wrong, they will stand, and they are not ashamed for the world to know that they serve the Lord and follow His will. Is not this something for which every child of God can give thanks?

Gratitude Brightens Life

Our nation has a day that is called Thanksgiving Day. It is a good celebration because it calls to mind how God has blessed this land in ages past. We do ourselves and our nation a favor to consider the good things that happen and exist in this world so often dimmed with gloom and doom. What is good deserves commendation.

We know it is necessary to condemn evil and we do not hesitate to do it. But we also believe it is necessary to commend the right and speak words of appreciation for those who will do the right. This is giving honor to whom honor is due. There is still much good in our sin-sick world. We stand in awe at the wonders and beau-

ty of nature. We are amazed at the providence of God, the sweetness of fellowship of faithful brethren. We enjoy the spiritual blessings in Christ, such as the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with Deity, the assurance of heaven to the faithful. We ought to be ready to strew flowers along life's path and give thanks for all others who do the same.

The "Seven Thousand"

Once Elijah was so discouraged that he thought he was the only one in Israel wanting to do God's will. He had some reason to think that way because of the behavior of his people. But God told him that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed their knee to Baal.

Surely, there are "seven thousand" yet who want to follow God. We must put forth effort to locate one another, be helpful to one another, strengthen each other, and brighten the path of each other. We are constantly reminded that the conflict between good and evil rages.

One can be motivated and be a more effective servant of God by looking at the good that remains as well as attacking the evil. We make a mistake to do one without the other. God's power is His Word and we must learn it, follow it, teach it, and uphold it, giving others an example of what it is to believe it.

That which brightens the path of life more than anything else is the spiritual salvation God offers through Christ. It can belong to all who hear the Word, believe it, repent of sins,

confess faith in Christ, and are baptized into Christ, living faithfully as a child of God who has the justified hope of eternal glory with God.

Gathered Unto Their People

Andy Erwin

Since our last printing, we have lost some great gospel preachers and laborers in the kingdom.

Garland Elkins died in Memphis on October 28, 2016. He was 90. Brother Jim McGill wrote a fitting tribute to brother Elkins which can be found on our website: www.gospelgleaner.com.

John Shelton of Anna, Illinois, died on November 8. He will be remembered by all who knew him as a kind and meek man. He loved the Lord and His church. He was faithful to God as a gospel preacher, and as an elder at Anna. He was a friend, a brother, and a father figure to his brethren.

Glann Lee of Wayne County, Tennessee, was a talented writer and preacher. He too has recently passed away.

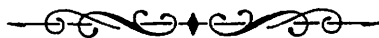
Maxie Boren of Bedford, Texas, held over 700 gospel meetings and preached for over 62 years! Brother Byron Nichols wrote a beautiful

summation of brother Maxie's ministry in the most recent *Voice of Truth International*.

A.T. Pate of Nashville, Tennessee also died on January 31. He was hoping to complete 70 years of ministry this year. Brother Pate was one of kind! He was a dear friend, encourager, and a prince of man. He always referred to the *Gospel Gleaner* as "our paper." We shall miss him dearly.

Virgil Hale died on Friday, October 7 at his home. Virgil preached for many years at the Green Plain church of Christ in Hazel, Kentucky, and was the host of the popular Bible program: *Searching the Scriptures*.

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them" (Revelation 14:13).



MY HEART ACHES - *AGAIN*

Raymond Elliott

The following article appeared on the Facebook timeline of a dear friend of mine in the month of November, 2016. John Mark Hicks worked with me as an associate preacher at the Prattville, Alabama church of Christ for five years while he taught for us at Southern Christian University (Now Amridge University) in Montgomery.

We became very close in our relationship and worked together in a harmonious manner. I grew to love John Mark and his family very much. I write this to inform you of my love for him and to let you know that what I write, I do in brotherly love.

Since the following announcement was made public on Facebook and is here quoted verbatim, you should accept it to be accurate.

"The All Saints Church of Christ is a new group of Christians meeting in Nashville on Sunday afternoon from 4-5 pm who celebrate the risen Christ through a service that integrates a historically traditional structure including both acapella and instrumental music and prayers as well as reading of the Word from the New and Old Testament, Psalms and the Gospel. Men, women and children are welcome in leading and participation of the service.

"The emphasis is not on the short sermon, but instead it is on the communion around the table. A love offering is accepted weekly with ALL money collected going directly into a non-profit work selected for the week such as AGAPE or Room in the Inn or other missions.

"It is scheduled Sunday afternoon at an alternative time from typical church gatherings to enable participants continued worship and fellowship in established faith families while offering an alternative addition to those who are curious or interested in a service with a slightly different emphasis.

"All are welcome regardless of spiritual background or religious affiliation. Personally, I have found it to be a refreshing and spiritually sound worship with the focus totally on God, His Holy Word and His Love for each of us.

"Typically we meet at The Vine Street Christian Church on West End, however meeting location may shift depending on availability. This month we will meet at Vine Street. Please feel free to message me if you would like to visit and/or need more information."

In years past, when many congregations did not have a 'full-time'

preacher or even a 'regular' preacher, brethren would assemble on the Lord's Day to partake of the Lord's Supper. Usually these were small congregations as far as the number of the members was concerned. When I was a youth, my home congregation met in a rented building to sing, pray, read the Scriptures, and partake of the Lord's Supper. The emphasis in our assembly was indeed, "communion around the table."

I have written the previous paragraph to say that the type of gathering as mentioned in the announcement is nothing new. But, what is new is found in these statements: "a service that integrates a historically traditional structure including both acapella and **instrumental music**", and, "**Men, women and children** are welcome in leading and participation of the service."

I contacted John Mark about this announcement and asked him his convictions concerning the use of the instrument in worship and allowing women in leading the congregation during the worship assembly. He assured me that he did agree that both were scriptural and acceptable and that he had held such convictions for a number of years. John Mark is a professor in the Bible department at David Lipscomb University in Nashville.

I am reminded of the passage of scripture found in Ecclesiastes 1:9:

"That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun."

Please allow me to apply this passage to the division that is presently occurring in the church of Jesus Christ. Over a hundred years ago, a digressive movement occurred in the body of Christ when the Missionary Society was begun; and, especially when the use of the instrument was introduced into the worship of the church.

Of course, there were other contributing factors involved in the great division of the body of Christ. Generally speaking, the same issues that faced the brethren then are the same ones we are dealing with today. The seeds of error were planted in the minds of brethren years ago by those men who taught false doctrines. We are now reaping what has been sown over the years regarding error and unscriptural innovations into the worship of the church.

Yes, my heart aches because family members, friends, relatives and brothers and sisters in Christ are being separated because of the division now taking place in the body of Jesus Christ. How sad, indeed!



Important News Regarding the *Gospel Gleaner*

Brethren, we thank you for your patience in our delaying to print this most recent issue. Lack of finances necessitated the delay.

The *Gospel Gleaner* has never been a for-profit business venture. During the first 24 years of the *Gospel Gleaner*, the paper was overseen by various congregations, published quarterly, and freely given to all. Over these past four years, we have not had a congregation willing to oversee the work and subsidize it financially. For this reason, we have been charging a subscription on \$1 per issue and considerably less than that for bundles.

It is our desire once again to give the paper freely to all who desire it as long as supply is available. We hope to get this paper into as many hands as possible. In order to do so, we will need your help. If you desire to keep the *Gleaner* in print and to reach as many people as we can, please help us. If you no longer wish to receive the paper, please let us know.

Let us know what you, *our readers and supporters*, wish to do with this paper. Do you believe it serves a purpose as an independent voice in Christian journalism? Do you believe it is a good work which needs to continue?

If any faithful congregation of the Lord's church wishes to help with some of the expenses, we will gladly accept it. But, I do not intend to become a circuit-riding fundraiser for the paper. I have too much work to do as a gospel preacher in my local work. Let this suffice, my brethren, as my only request for your help to return the paper to its original intent and offer it freely.

If we are to discontinue the paper, allow me time and opportunity to reimburse anyone who has already paid for a subscription in advance. We certainly do not want any hard feelings to exist. We love you and thank you for your kind support and brotherly love.

Andy Erwin

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