Volume Seventy-Three

The Voice of Truth International

Mission Learning Center in Action

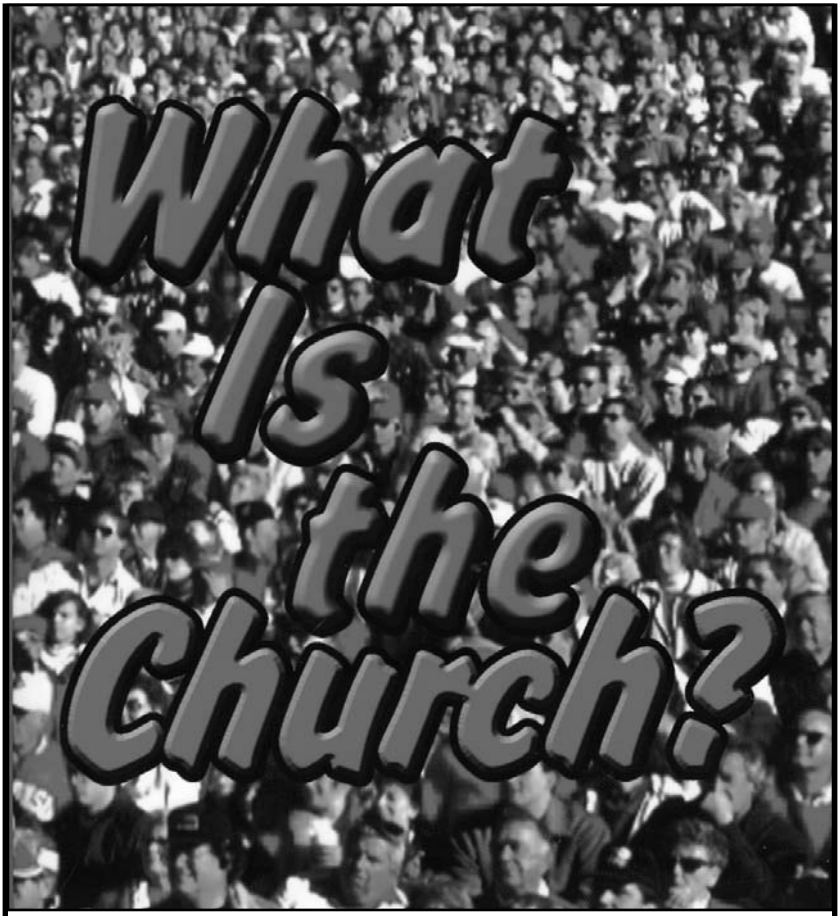
Indifference

G.A. Studdert-Kennedy

When Jesus came long years ago
They hanged Him on a tree.
They drove great nails through hands and feet
And made a Calvary;
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns,
Red were the wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days
And human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came
to our town
They simply passed
Him by;
They never hurt
a hair of Him,
They only let Him die;
For men had grown
more tender,
And they would not
give Him pain,
They simply passed
on down the street
And left Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, “Forgive them,
They know not what they do.”
And still it rained the winter rain
That drenched Him through and through.
Many walked the street that day,
But blind with apathy,
While Jesus crouched against a wall
And cried for Calvary.



The Church of Christ (Romans 16:16) is not a building, and it is not a denomination; it is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27) made up of baptized believers (Acts 2:38,47) who wear the name of Christ (Acts 4:12). Its plea is, "Let's just be the church for which Jesus died (Acts 20:28), the church that was established on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41,42), the church that is organized with elders and deacons as in the first century (1 Timothy 3), the church that worships according to the New Testament pattern (Acts 2:42,46; 1 Corinthians 11:22-26; 16:2; Acts 20:7; 2 Corinthians 8,9), the family of God (Galatians 4:4-7), and the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:23-33) for which He will one day return (Revelation 22:12)".

Have you been born into that Family?

A Sinner: Lost for Eternity

HEAR THE GOSPEL... ***"... how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?"*** (Romans 10:14).

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL... ***"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day ..."*** (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

REPENT OF PAST SINS... ***"... unless you repent you will all likewise perish"*** (Luke 13:3).

CONFESS CHRIST AS SAVIOR... ***"... whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven"*** (Matthew 10:32).

BE BURIED WITH CHRIST IN BAPTISM... ***"... 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).

"... 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).

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

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The churches of Christ salute you
(Romans 16:16).

An Old, Old Story Remains Relevant Today (Unfortunately)

Byron Nichols

In spite of the powerful influence of Satan, who would ever have anticipated the extent of homosexuality that exists in our world today? Perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of it all is the amount of acceptance and favorable publicity that this behavior is now enjoying, in spite of the history of degradation and shame associated with this practice that God dealt with in such a dramatic and forceful manner many centuries ago.

Please understand that this is not an effort to "bash" homosexuals, but is a call to vigilance and righteousness, courage and conviction in our families, our communities, and throughout society as a whole. As both Christians and citizens, we dare not be unconcerned or adopt a "hands-off" attitude toward a behavior that is destroying the lives of thousands upon thousands, including a growing number of innocent victims.

The Term "Gay"

It is not uncommon at all for words to undergo a change in meaning over time. However, to alter the meaning of biblical terms can be a very dangerous action resulting in a conflict with, or deterioration of, God's meaning which He conveyed in the Scriptures.

Those who engage in homosexuality, as well as society in general, have chosen to avoid using terms related to this practice that are employed in God's Word, and they have adopted the widespread use of the softer terms of "gay" and "lesbian". To take a word that has historically denoted being lighthearted, merry, lively, or bright and showy in color, and to shamefully pervert it into referring to one of the most repulsive and detestable sins described in all the Bible is most assuredly an act of utter defiance toward God.

With no intent whatsoever to try to legislate for anyone else, I try diligently to refrain from referring to homosexuals as "gays" or "lesbians". God's Word uses only forms of the word "homosexual" to refer to those involved in such behavior. I feel compelled to use God's choice of terminology rather than that of people who have chosen to flagrantly live in, and parade their violation of, His law for mankind.

The Spread of the Homosexual Agenda

Instead of being embarrassed or feeling shame, homosexuals have become much more open regarding their illicit practices, advertising their behavior and promoting their lifestyle as if it were something to be proud of and commended for.

There is an ever-growing group of high profile people who have emerged from their homosexual "closets", now flaunting and proudly proclaiming their behavior that is unacceptable to God. Their numbers include many prominent entertainers, world renowned athletes, highly influential people in big business and government, etc.

An especially saddening reality in all of this is the fact that countless people who are not homosexuals themselves strongly endorse and defend the idea that this lifestyle is just as acceptable as any other, and that no one should stand in opposition to this behavior.

This is true even among a growing number of church groups, resulting in some very serious conflicts within their ranks. Not only are there congregations of various churches now accepting practicing homosexuals into their membership, some are now allowing men and women who are acknowledged homosexuals to serve in preaching and other leadership roles. Numerous churches are actively trying to attract homosexuals, without any effort at all to encourage them to give up that behavior. In addition, there are some very large congregations that are specifically homosexual churches.

This Is Not a Political Presentation, But...

For any Christians here in America who may not already be aware of this,

we all need to realize the existence of several powerful politicians in Washington who are readily identifying themselves now as homosexuals. Not only that, some states have already made it legal for same sex couples to marry or to at least receive government benefits that up to now have been restricted to heterosexual, legally married couples.

An increasing number of politicians are openly seeking the support of homosexuals by using their influence to help bring about changes that favor these people, at the expense of all taxpayers.

Did you know that three of the last six U.S. Presidents have openly sought and supported legislation in favor of homosexuals?

Does it gravely concern us as Christians in America that this moral problem is getting worse and worse, and that it is happening with the blessing of people of much power and prominence?

Enlightenment From the Word of God

It's only fair and proper that God be given an opportunity to express Himself in this discussion, so let's hear from the Lord and His inspired spokesmen on the subject of homosexuality.

Genesis 2:22-24: *"Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."*

Genesis 19:3-13: (Rather than take the space for these verses, the reader is encouraged to read directly from his own Bible the account regarding the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.)

Leviticus 18:22: *"You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination."*

Leviticus 20:13: *"If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them."*

Romans 1:26,27,32: *"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due…who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."*

1 Corinthians 6:9-11: *"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."*

Hebrews 13:4: *"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."*

1 Timothy 1:9,10: *"Knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine."*

Romans 12:9: *"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good."*

Proverbs 14:34: *"Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."*

God Is a Forgiving God

Homosexuality is a sin, but it is essential that we also understand that **it can be forgiven.**

Remember that 1 Corinthians 6:11 says, ***"And such were some of you."*** Paul had just named quite a list of sins, including homosexuality, and he reminded some of those Christians in Corinth what they had been in the past, and what they had become, and this was possible only because of the love and forgiveness of God. **Any penitent and obedient sinner that God is willing to forgive must also be forgiven by those who are already His faithful children.**

(Note: I highly recommend F. LaGard Smith's book on this subject, *Sodom's Second Coming*.) ✞

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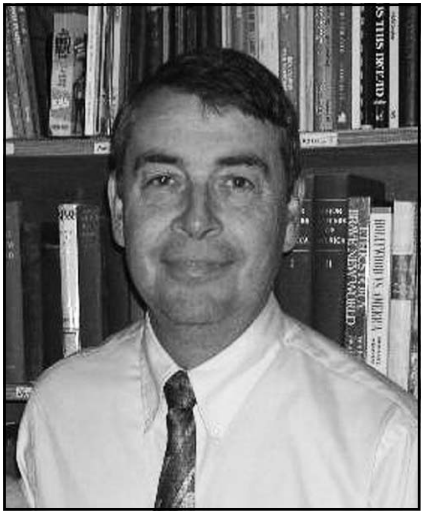

The Awareness of Sin

Jerry Bates

Christian preachers and writers often moan and complain about sin in the church. We rightly think that Christians should have no part in the sin that is found on every hand in the world. We sometimes wonder how or why Christians would live the way they do, all the while claiming to be true, faithful servants of God. We wonder how we can motivate Christians to be more committed to Christ.

I do not claim to have all the answers, but one possible solution is for ALL Christians to realize their own sinfulness. At first, this may sound foolish and incorrect. How would a consciousness of our own sinfulness lead to more commitment? Surely, the reverse would be true. However, I think that one of the primary problems in the church in a lack of consciousness of sin. As a result of this, too many Christians are lackadaisical in their service to God.

Christ taught about this very thing in Luke 7:36-50. Jesus was eating in the home of Simon the Pharisee. While eating, a sinful woman came into the house and washed Jesus' feet with her tears, kissed them, dried them with her hair, and anointed them with a fragrant perfume or oil. Simon was horrified that Jesus allowed her to do this. In his mind, Jesus' action (or lack of action) only proved He was not a prophet. If Jesus did not know she was a sinner, He lacked the knowledge necessary to be a prophet. If Jesus knew she was a sinner and did not care, then He lacked the holiness necessary to be a prophet. Either way, the result was the same. Jesus was not a prophet; He was merely a man, so Simon thought.

Jesus knew what Simon was thinking, so He uttered a short parable of two debtors. One owed 500 denarii, and the other owed 50 denarii. In the first century, a denarii was the wage for a day's labor. Thus, one man owed about 500 days of labor while the other owed only 50 days of labor. Nevertheless, neither could pay, and when they approached the creditor, he promptly forgave them both. Jesus then asked Simon a question, "Which of them will love him more?" (Luke 7:42). Simon's correct answer was the one to whom more was forgiven.

The application is clear. If we are aware of our sin and our need for forgiveness, then love for God and Christ will naturally follow. I wonder if many times we as Christians have not forgotten our need for forgiveness. Oh, we realize we are not perfect; however, our sin is not nearly as great as everyone else's sin. After all, we have always lived good, moral lives and have not committed many serious sins. We have become like Simon the Pharisee, who in his self-righteousness did not think he needed forgiveness. The result was that he loved God little, whereas the sinful woman, whose sins were many (Luke 7:47), loved much. Jesus stated the principle, "*To whom little is forgiven, the same loves little*." The point is not whether we have many sins or very few, but rather our consciousness of sin.

It really doesn't matter whether we have few sins or many. We cannot atone for any sins, and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We all must be forgiven, or we are doomed to eternal condemnation. Thus, we all need a real consciousness of the great debt of sin we owe to God and the great gift of forgiveness and salvation that Christians have received through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Several things naturally follow from a lack of consciousness of sin, according to Christ. "*He to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little*." As a result, one has little love and appreciation for God. As a consequence of that, one feels little need for obedience, because love and obedience go together. Jesus said, "*He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me*" (John 14:21). According to Jesus, if we do not obey, then we do not love either. Accordingly, if our love increases, our desire to obey will also increase.

Furthermore, one has little motivation for full commitment to God. After all, if our sins are relatively few and nothing major, then we have not received an exceedingly generous gift. If God has not been generous with me, why should I be generous with Him? Thus, one constantly wants more and more from God. If He ceases to bless us as we think He should, then our service likewise ceases.

It should be apparent that many things naturally result from a lack of realization of our sins. We all have a debt of sin that we cannot pay. Through Christ we have the gift of salvation, something that we can never earn or deserve, and certainly a gift that God was not forced to offer us. Once we fully realize the magnitude of God's gift, then our love, appreciation, and commitment will increase. Remember the words of this song by Ellis Crum:

He paid a debt he did not owe;
I owed a debt I could not pay;
I needed someone to wash my sins away.
And now, I sing a brand new song,
"Amazing Grace."
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.✞

Male Leadership in the Church

Louis Rushmore

It is important to emphasize biblical fundamentals, especially when they differ from contemporary religion. Since, the churches of Christ belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 16:16), they are obligated to conduct themselves according to what He **authorizes** (Colossians 3:17). Really, all people living in the Gospel Age should heed the words of Jesus Christ rather than Moses or the Old Testament prophets (Matthew 17:1-5; John 12:48). Further, Jesus Christ is the Lawgiver (James 4:12) and Mediator (Hebrews 9:15) of the New Testament, to which people living today must turn for religious instruction. In addition, Jesus Christ condemned alteration of divine instruction with "the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). The inspired apostle Paul likewise condemned false Gospels (Galatians 1:6-9) and the human will when substituted for the divine will (Colossians 2:23). Hence, one must turn **exclusively** to the New Testament to learn what God has authorized respecting Christianity.

This is true regarding all subjects addressed in the Bible, including the roles of men and of women. The respective roles for men and women in the church and in the home are not culturally based, but they go back to near creation. They were implemented by God before there was any culture (1 Timothy 2:13-14; 1 Corinthians 11:8-9).

The churches of Christ are obligated to implement in congregations the type of church leadership that the New Testament ***authorizes***. **Therefore, the churches of Christ do not have female leadership in the church because it is not authorized by God.** Since God has restricted women from leadership roles in the church, this places a serious responsibility upon male members of the church to assume their God-given role (1 Timothy 2:8).

Everyone who respects biblical authority and wants to please God will concern himself with **what Almighty God has authorized**. In the case of church leadership,

that means that the local church will be led by godly men, and that the church will not have female leaders. We can no more change the respective roles that God has assigned to men and to women than we can alter God's plan of salvation. Both corruptions of scriptural instruction would be eternally and spiritually disastrous!

Attitudes in contemporary society around the world already have infringed on the God-given roles of men and of women. Women are not the least inferior to men intellectually and certainly not spiritually. Furthermore, equality between men and women spiritually is a biblical doctrine (Galatians 3:27-28). In addition, equality between men and women in the workplace may prevail, and perhaps that is all right. However, in the home and in the church, God Himself has specified the respective roles of men and of women, and faithful Christians must not deviate from divine instruction. The reason that for over 6,000 years women have been submissive to men in the home and in religion is because God legislated that doctrine in Scripture. For nearly the past 2,000 years, God has included in the New Testament the submission of women to men in the home and in the church. Despite ***political correctness*** in modern society, perhaps nothing better illustrates the unchanging roles for men and women as God designed them than the immutable fact that the female of our species still must give birth to our offspring. The apostle Paul alluded to this role in 1 Timothy 2:15. The ***role of women in the church*** or ***in the home*** is only controversial to those who do not properly respect the authority of God and His Word.

The inspired Word of God gives several reasons for the subordination of women: (1) "For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13); (2) woman, not man, was deceived by Satan (1 Timothy 2:14); (3) woman was created **from** man (1 Corinthians 11:8) and (4) woman was created **for** man (1 Corinthians 11:9). Yet, a woman's salvation and worth are not tied to a man (Galatians 3:28). However, the Gospel does not dissolve physical distinctions between races, political or economic status, or the sexes. The standard for Christians, including women, is not the practices of society around them (Romans 12:2). Final authority for the conduct of Christian men and Christian women in the home or in the church rests with God. Our Heavenly Father has the **absolute right** to distinguish between roles for women and for men.

Male leadership in the church that Jesus built had its beginning in the Garden of Eden. Yes, 4,000 years before the institution of the New Testament church, Almighty God established male leadership in religion and in the home. This principle of male leadership continued throughout Patriarchy and Judaism, and male leadership persists under Christianity. What we are discussing herein is essentially, "The Role of Men."

By divine inspiration, Moses wrote regarding the aftermath of sin in the Garden of Eden, *"To the woman He said: 'I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children; Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you'"* (Genesis 3:16 NKJV). Therefore,

the subordinate role of women to men does not pertain to custom or culture, but predates both. Also, the Gospel has not altered or removed the subordinate role of women any more than it has affected (1) painful childbirth, (2) sweat and labor, and (3) physical death (Genesis 3:16-19), all of which will remain until the end of time.

By divine inspiration, the apostle Paul connected male leadership in the church to male leadership in the Garden of Eden. *"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression"* (1 Timothy 2:11-14). Likewise, when writing to the Corinthian church, the apostle expressed the same doctrine. *"But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God… Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man"* (1 Corinthians 11:3, 9). It is no more appropriate for a woman to take for herself a role that God designated for men than it would be appropriate for a man to take for himself the role of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christian sisters must not presume to teach men publicly, and Christian men do not have God's permission to allow women to teach men publicly about religion. As far as God and the children of God are concerned, the respective but distinctive God-given roles for men and for women are unaffected by contemporary culture and society.

The inspired Word of God gives several reasons for the subordination of women: (1) "For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13); (2) woman, not man, was deceived by Satan (1 Timothy 2:14); (3) woman was created from man (1 Corinthians 11:8) and (4) woman was created for man (1 Corinthians 11:9).

"The Role of Women" helps define "The Role of Men." Specifically, whatever is not ***the role of women*** in the church must be ***the role of men***. For instance, women are forbidden in the New Testament to teach men publicly about religion. *"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence"* (1 Timothy 2:11-12). *"Let your women keep silent in the churches [assemblies], for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church* [assembly]*"* (1 Corinthians 14:34-35). Therefore, men have the responsibility for ***publicly*** teaching God's Word to other men. However, Aquila and Priscilla, Christian husband and Christian wife, show that a woman may teach a

man ***privately*** (Acts 18:24-26), as long as she does not attempt to take charge over him or to teach in an authoritarian way (1 Timothy 2:12). Christian women can and must teach their non-Christian husbands, too (1 Peter 3:1), but by example if he will not consider their words. In addition, women also speak and teach when they participate in singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Otherwise, women are forbidden by inspired Scripture to preach or to teach men publicly.

"The Role of Men" in the Lord's church has been predetermined by God, and it is not subject either to alteration or neglect by Christian men. Before one even entertains discussion of church leaders (e.g. elders, deacons, preachers, and teachers), Christian men (and women) must realize that God has chosen men over women to lead in the church.

In the church, leadership roles are assigned to men and supportive roles are delegated to women. Yet, not even every man can be an elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7), deacon (1 Timothy 3:8-13), preacher or teacher (1 Corinthians 12:18). However, men as a group are charged by God with the responsibility to guide and publicly teach the church. God has forbidden women these same duties.

That men rather than women are to lead in the church is evident from the New Testament teaching that men are to lead the public prayers. *"I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting"* (1 Timothy 2:8). The word "men" here means "male." In addition, "men" in verse 8 are contrasted with "women" in verse 9.

No one dare change any doctrine of the New Testament at all (Galatians 1:6-9; Revelation 22:18-19). Of course, then, especially Christians must be careful to observe the God-given roles of men and of women in the church (and in the home). The fact that many males may not rise to the occasion to be teachers and preachers is a sad commentary on men, but that human failure does not negate God's law respecting the roles of men and of women in the church. The fact that many males may not rise to the occasion to be the husbands and the fathers in the home that they should be is a sad commentary on men, but that human failure does not, for instance, make a wife into a husband or make a mother into a father. The home needs both male and female roles to be the coordinated home that God designed it to be. Likewise, the church needs both male and female roles to be the coordinated church that God designed it to be.

When Christian women take for themselves the role of men either in the home or in the church, it is the fault of Christian men. Women, though, are not blameless. **First**, men ought to take for themselves the roles in the home and in the church that God assigned to them. **Secondly**, Christian men ought to forbid Christian women from assuming for themselves roles that God has not given to them. The respective roles in religion and in the home that God established from the dawn of man's earthly pilgrimage are still in force. By divine design, the role for public activity in the assembly of the church belongs exclusively to designated males. ✞

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The Difference Christ Made

Bobby Dockery

Bret Hart is the author of a delightful short story, "The Luck of Roaring Camp", which tells of the birth of a baby boy in a rough frontier mining town of the 1880's. The mother died in childbirth, and as there were no other women in the camp, the care of the child fell to the rough miners. A startling change came over the once dissipated town: drinking, gambling, and swearing were curtailed as the hardened miners grew tender in their concern for the child's welfare. What had once been a den of vice and violence became a model community. The arrival of the child made a dramatic difference on the life of the little town.

About two thousand years ago, another baby boy was born — in a small Judean village — and the world has never been the same since! Think of the impact the birth of Christ has had! What a difference His coming has made! The pivotal point of history is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Let us consider some of the differences that His coming has made:

He raised the status of women. Before Christ, the exploitation and abuse of women was the rule. Women were often subordinated to a state of drudgery hardly better than slavery. They were regarded as chattels to be bought and sold like cattle. The condition of women before Christ can be gauged by looking at their treatment in parts of the world where the teachings of Christianity are not generally accepted. Christ revolutionized the status of women. No movement in history has done as much for women as Christianity! The modern Feminist Movement is in reality a return to exploitation because it repudiates the Christian principles that have been the very basis for the gains women have made!

He raised the level of morality and decency. Christ came into a world which had been brutalized by sin. The apostle Paul paints an alarming picture of the depravity of the first century world in Romans 1:24-31. To a world steeped in murder, sensuality, immorality, and perversion, Jesus brought a better way. He did what the moralists and philosophers could not do — He died for sin so men and women might be cleansed of it (2 Corinthians 5:21). Tragically, it seems that the modern world is determined to turn from Christ to embrace the same pagan vices that spelt ruin for ancient society! As Batsell Barrett Baxter has commented: "Christ is the best hope for mankind… Without Christ our homes go to pieces and our personal lives become confused, empty, and despairing. Without Christ society is doomed."

He raised the hopes and aspirations of mankind. Jesus came because men were hopeless and helpless (Ephesians 2:12; Romans 5:6). Men knew they were sinners and yet were helpless to do anything about it. So God did something about it! He sent His only begotten Son to ransom men from sin (John 3:16). The hope of the world lies in the fact that Jesus tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). He brings hope to those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:8,9). He changed the world by bringing people something to live for — something to die for — something to hope for!

Jesus made a difference! He is still making a difference today! He came to a world seething with hate, depravity, lust, fear, and despair, and He brought love, forgiveness, self-control, faith, and hope. He turned the world upside down. He can make a real difference in your life if you are willing to let Him! ✝

Bobby Dockery is a writer and preacher in Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA.

Fearing God

Ernest S. Underwood

Generally, when we talk about fear, we have in mind the act of being afraid of something. I am afraid of spiders. I loathe them, killing every one that comes close. If you have one for a pet, well, I have doubts about your sensibilities. Just to think of such gives me goose bumps.

However, there is a fear that has a different meaning, and, it is commanded by God. In Psalm 128:1 we read: *"Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways."* Notice that this fear, rather than being panic of any sort, is simply having respect for, and awe of, God. Those who have such fear will always be found walking in the way of the Lord. One cannot have such respect for God and fail to walk in His ways. This is one of the major problems of denominationalism. Those trapped therein have not been taught to have a proper fear (respect) for God. Did not the wise man Solomon say, *"Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all"* (Ecclesiastes 12:13)? **Question:** Is one showing proper honor and respect for God and walking in His way when he calls himself after some man or some system? Is one walking in the ways of God when he deliberately rejects anything that God has commanded as it relates to one receiving salvation from past sins? Are you walking in the fear of the Lord?

God's Desire to Bless All Men

Wayne Barrier

Psalm 67 is a beautiful passage that summarizes several powerful promises concerning God's relationship with man. The chapter reads as follows:

> *God be merciful to us and bless us, And cause His face to shine upon us, That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations.*
>
> *Let the peoples praise you, O God; Let all the peoples praise you. Oh, let the nations be glad and sing, be glad and sing for joy! For You shall judge that people righteously, And govern the nations on earth.*
>
> *Let the people praise You, O God; Let all the people praise you. Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us. And all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.*

God loves us and desires to bless us with joy, peace, mercy, salvation, daily care, and an eternal home with Him in heaven. He asks us to allow Him to govern us, through obedience to His Word. He asks that His way and His will be the basis of our walk in life and He will bless us. He will righteously judge us.

God promises that the earth will yield the things we need to sustain our life. He asks that we honor, praise, worship, fear, and respect Him.

As we study God's inspired Word, we can learn how to address every question in life. Why are we here? What is our purpose? Where are we going? God has a plan for every person in every nation. He wants us to submit to Him. He then will bless us.

Man needs God's blessings today. God's way will eliminate many of the massive problems that plague the world today. We can let God govern and bless us. He allows us to make the choice to believe and obey Him or to reject Him. We reap the consequences of our decision. ✞

Wayne Barrier lives in Florence, Alabama, USA, and does mission work in several countries.

What Is God Like?

Samuel A. Matthews

God is eternal! God has always lived. He will always live. The Bible says of God: "*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God*" (Psalm 90:2). All people who live on the earth will grow old. All will die. But God can never grow old or die. Let us hear the Bible again: "*You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak you will fold them up, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will not fail*" (Hebrews 1:10-12).

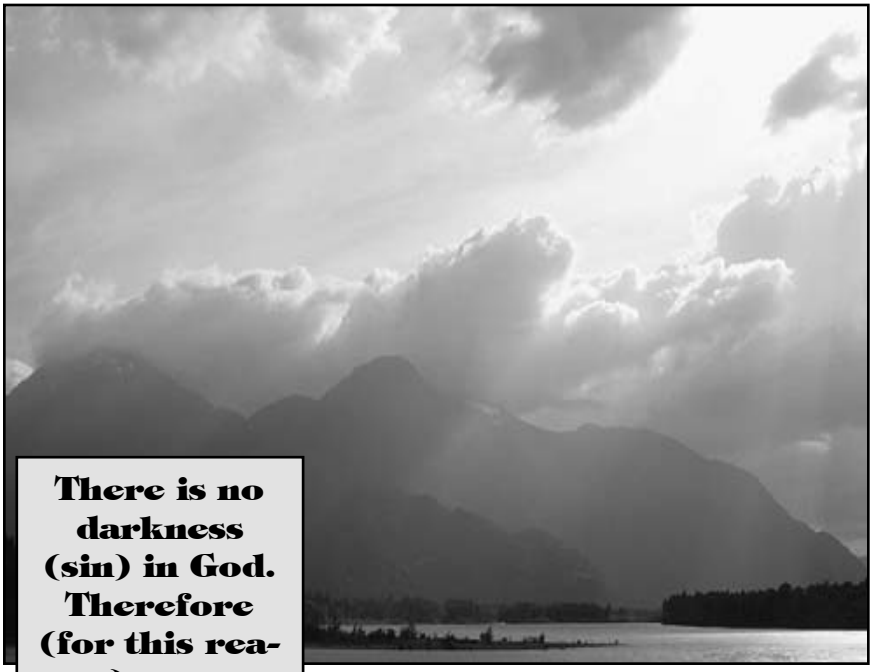
God is all powerful! "*Is anything too hard for the Lord?*" (Genesis 18:14). We human beings are weak. There are many things we do not have the strength to do. But God has all power. He can do anything. By His great power, God created the heavens and the earth (Jeremiah 10:12). By His great power, God created man. We can trust the promises of God, for He has the power to fulfill them.

God is all-knowing! God knows everything, for God sees everything. It is possible to hide things from the eyes of men, but nothing can be hidden from God. The Bible says, "*For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He ponders all his paths*" (Proverbs 5:21). And again, "…*God is greater than our heart, and knows all things*" (1 John 3:20).

God is unchanging! Everything in this world changes. Governments change when nations become independent and new leaders replace old leaders. Ways of living change. Habits and customs of people change. The weather changes. Styles of clothing change. Even our bodies change as we grow older. But God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (cf. Hebrews 13:8). "*For I am the Lord, I do not change…*" (Malachi 3:6).

God is spirit! God is not a human being as you and I are. Our Mormon (LDS) friends are being taught and deceived into believing that "God the Father is a glorified and perfected man, a per-

sonage of flesh and bones — see D &C 130:22 — in which tangible body an eternal spirit is housed" (*Mormon Doctrine* by Bruce McConkie, 319). However, no matter what the Mormons falsely teach, God is not a man, nor has He ever been a man. (Read Numbers 23:19; Job 9:32; 33:12; Hosea 11:9.) "*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*" (John 4:24). God does not have weaknesses and sicknesses of the flesh as you and I do, "*…for a spirit does not have flesh and bones…*" (Luke 24:39).



There is no darkness (sin) in God. Therefore (for this reason), we can trust Him, for He will not deceive us (lie to or mislead).

God is light! "*This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*" (1 John 1:5). There is no darkness (sin) in God. Therefore (for this reason), we can trust Him, for He will not deceive us (lie to or mislead).

God is love! "*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love*" (1 John 4:8). God loves us. He has proven His great love for us by giving His Son to die for our sins. "*In this*

love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [to pay the price — His death on the cross] *for our sins*" (1 John 4:10).

God is holy! "*You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy*" (Leviticus 19:2; cf. Psalm 111:9). God is designated as the "Holy One." Peter told the Jews: "*But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you*" (Acts 3:14; cf. Mark 1:23,24; 1 John 2:20). Job said: "*I have not concealed the words of the Holy One*" (Job 6:10). "*The Holy One of Israel*" is common in the Old Testament (Psalm 89:18; Isaiah 1:4; Jeremiah 50:29).

God loves us. He has proven His great love for us by giving His Son to die for our sins.

God is true! He is the True One. "*But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting King*" (Jeremiah 10:10). The Word of God is called "*Faithful and True*" (Revelation 19:11). The souls under the altar refer to the Lord as the "*holy and true*" one (Revelations 6:10). Being in the True One is being in Christ and in God: "*And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life*" (1 John 5:20).

God is faithful! "*God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son*" (1 Corinthians 1:9). "*He is faithful that promised*" (Hebrews 10:23). If God is to protect His people from the devil and his temptations, He must be faithful (2 Thessalonians 3:3; 1 Corinthians 10:13). "*Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it*" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Although He hates sin, He loves us; therefore, He is merciful.

God is righteous! "*For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright*" (Psalm 11:7). All His "*commandments are righteousness*" (Psalm 119:172). God cannot do any wrong; therefore, He hates all sin (cf. Proverbs 6:16-19).

God is merciful! Although He hates sin, He loves us; therefore, He is merciful. "*The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy*" (Psalm 103:8). He will forgive the sins of all alien sinners when their faith in God causes them to truly repent (make up their minds to turn away from practicing sin and turn back to God), and be baptized (immersed in water) for the remission (forgiveness) of sins by the blood of Jesus (Acts 2:38; Matthew 26:28). ✞

Samuel A. Matthews works with the church of Christ in Groton, Connecticut, USA.

Beast to Beauty

David P. Everson

In the animal kingdom, the ability to change from an immature form to an adult is called metamorphosis. We all know of the caterpillar changing into a beautiful butterfly or a maggot becoming a common housefly, but there is one insect that indeed makes a "Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde" transformation. It is the common ant-lion.

It gets its name from the larva stage when it is most fierce looking and acting predator of ants and other small insects. At this state, it has a short fleshy body with six legs and disproportionately large caliper-like jaws armed with strong spikes and bristles to help grasp its prey. It builds a very spectacular and complex trap in the loose soil. This "pit-trap", constructed by an elaborate series of backward circular motions, ends up becoming cone shaped and about 1/2 inch deep. The ant-lion sits at the bottom of the pit with its jaws exposed waiting for a luckless ant or other insect to slide down the side into its waiting jaws. If an insect tries to climb out before reaching the bottom the larva flips sand and dirt up to knock the victim to the bottom. It is truly a beast when it comes to catching its prey, but that is only half of its life for yet to come is the beauty.

A truly remarkable change occurs with this insect as it changes from the larva to an adult. When the larva has eaten enough food to grow sufficiently, it begins its change into a thing of beauty. By undergoing a complete breakdown of its internal organs, it emerges from the pupa as one of the most graceful of God's creations. The large lace wings of the adult allow it to fly with a most fluid of motions. The arrangement of colors gives this insect a striking beauty that rivals that of any insect in the world. And so, this lowly creature has made the transformation from beast to beauty.

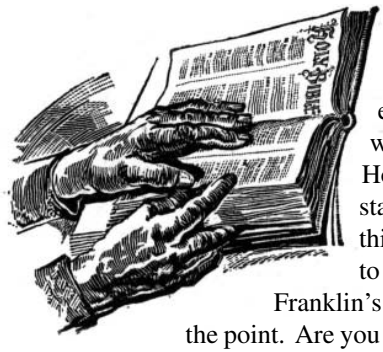
The ability to go through these remarkable changes is one of the gems of God's creation, and plagues evolutionary scientists because they are unexplainable in terms of natural selection. If we exclude the intelligence of a Grand Designer, it is impossible to explain how the ant-lion or any other insect knows how to undergo metamorphosis. ✞

Dave P. Everson is an elder in the church of Christ in Belington, West Virginia, USA. He taught high school biology for many years, and he conducts evidences workshops.

Are You Sure That Is What the Bible Actually States?

David R. Kenney

When teaching an adult Bible class, I asked, "Where in the Bible will you find 'Consistency, thou art a jewel'?" Some began to search while others had looks of contemplation. As some time passed, one cautiously responded — "It sounds like something out of Proverbs, but I do not think it is in the Bible." He was correct — the statement is not in the Bible. In fact, the origin of this statement is debated, but the principle is accepted so readily that some think it belongs with the Bible. More recently, the White House erroneously attributed "The Lord helps those who help themselves" to the Bible. The White House issued a correction acknowledging the statement was not from the Bible. Likewise, this phrase's origin is uncertain but believed to have been made popular by Benjamin Franklin's *Almanac*. These two examples bring me to the point. Are you really sure you know what the Bible actually states? Not "we" or "they" but do you know what the Bible actually states?



We live in a nation that has had a healthy respect for the Bible and its principles. The teachings of the Bible were incorporated into our textbooks to instruct our youth. But today it seems biblical instruction is being forced further and further out of the mainstream to where we have reached the point that many fail to recognize the source of our nation's morals and ethics. We often hear that we are a "Christian nation", that we derive our values and ethics from the "good book" or the Bible. Some may state we have "Judeo-Christian values", which is another way of stating this same historical truth. Our nation has a critical knowledge and understanding gap in two fundamental areas — the founding principles and documents of our Republic, and values and ethics of the Bible. We can cite examples of misapplications in both areas. What George Washington

stated is still true: "It is impossible to rightly govern a nation without God and the Bible." Perhaps Washington had these words in mind from the prophet Hosea: "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children*" (Hosea 4:6 NKJV).

We live in a nation that has had a healthy respect for the Bible and its principles. The teachings of the Bible were incorporated into our textbooks to instruct our youth. But today it seems biblical instruction is being forced further and further out of the mainstream to where we have reached the point that many fail to recognize the source of our nation's morals and ethics.

Some resist the principle that our nation's morality is tied to the Bible, advocating that morals and ethics are autonomous, or free floating, similar to the fluctuations of the U.S. dollar on the currency market. The removal of the Bible as the foundation for our nation's values and ethics, and making these arbitrary, is not only a haphazard course but a dangerous one. Consider all the factors that can impact the stability of the dollar. As the dollar goes up and down in value, the varying factors also impact our nation's economy.

Likewise, if we allow our values and ethics to change with varying factors, we are in essence turning ourselves over to the whims of those in power at the time. While our ethics may seem comfortable to us now, what will we do when the environment changes? What will be the basis for argument for stronger morality or against wrong when we have surrendered the very foundation on which our standards have rested? Before our nation is given over to a sea of uncertainty and confusion at the hands of multiculturalism, political correctness, and ecumenicalism, we should examine afresh what the Bible actually teaches. ✝

David R. Kenney preaches for the church of Christ in Wadsworth, Ohio, USA

The Inspiration of MARK, LUKE, JAMES, AND JUDE

Hugo McCord

A question has come about the inspiration of five New Testament books, Mark, Luke, Acts, James, and Jude since they were not written by apostles.

The apostles of Christ, being baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5; 2:1-4), with complete ("whatever") binding and loosing authority (Matthew 18:18), had miraculous "power" (Acts 1:8) to lay hands on Stephen (Acts 6:5,6) to empower him to preach in Jerusalem without an error: his opponents *"could not stand against the wisdom and Spirit by whom he was speaking"* (Acts 6:10; 7:1-53).

Before Stephen spoke by the "Spirit", miraculously, he had already been *"full of the Spirit"* (Acts 6:3), non-miraculously, as are all sinners from the day of their baptism (Acts 2:38; 5:32).

At the same time the apostles laid hands on Stephen, they also laid hands on another disciple *"full of the Spirit",* non-miraculously (Acts 6:3), named Philip (Acts 6:5,6), afterward called *"Philip, the evangelist"* (Acts 21:8). The apostolic hand-laying empowered him to preach in Samaria without an error, and to perform miracles (Acts 8:6,12,13).

Philip's "new converts" (Acts 8:15), on the day of their baptism had received the Spirit, non-miraculously (the promise being *"to you and to your children, and to all who are far away,"* Acts 2:39), but apparently Philip (a non-apostle) was unable to lay his hands on his *"new converts that they might receive the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 8:15), miraculously, for the apostles back in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria to lay hands on Philip's "new converts". Consequently, after "*Peter and John placed hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 8:17), miraculously.

When a Samaritan magician named Simon *"saw that the Spirit was given by the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money"* (Acts 8:18), trying to buy the power to lay his own hands on people to cause them to *"receive the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 8:18-19), miraculously. We rejoice that Peter's words of rebuke brought sincere repentance to the magician (Acts 8:20-24).

I learn from the preceding paragraphs that there was no way for Mark, Luke, James, and Jude to write five New Testament books without the laying on of the apostles' hands, and the imparting of the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit. ✞

Hugo McCord (1911-2004) had been a long-time professor of Bible at Oklahoma Christian University in Edmond, Oklahoma, USA.

The Bible

Tommy Hagewood

The following are four important facts about the Bible that we should all know.

The Bible is the ONLY book that came to us from the mind of God. All other books were produced merely by human beings. The Bible, on the other hand, comes from God's mind and was revealed through human agents (apostles and prophets) by the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-13; Galatians 1:11,12; Ephesians 3:1-5).

The Bible is the ONLY Book that comes to us from the heart of God. In speaking of God's people in Romans 9:23-26, Paul notes that God has called out His people to make known *"the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had prepared beforehand for glory."* This fact is not only revealed to us in this passage, but according to Paul, was also prophesied in Hosea 1:10. This great love is encapsulated in John 3:16.

The Bible is the ONLY Book that tells us ALL things we must know, believe, and do to get to heaven (2 Peter 1:3). It will make one a child of God and will make that child complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Nothing else is needed; nothing else is acceptable for our spiritual needs.

The Bible is the ONLY Book by which humans will be judged. The part of the Bible by which you and I shall be judged is the New Testament (John 12:48; Romans 2:16). The basis of that judgment will be the deeds we do in the body while living on earth (2 Corinthians 5:10). **No other book should command our interest like the Bible!** ✞

> "***…no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, 21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit***"
>
> (2 Peter 1:20-21 NKJV)

Obligations to Truth

Vance Hutton

What is truth?

This question was asked by Pilate in John 18:38. The Lord tells us in John 17:17 that the Father's Word is truth. Paul would write of the Word of the truth of the Gospel (Colossians 1:5). Paul connected the Word and truth in 1 Thessalonians 2:13 and told Festus that he spoke forth words of truth (Acts 26:25). Paul again spoke of the Word of truth being heard by the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:13). Authority rests with truth in any area, and especially the truth of God. It is the standard: the standard of judgment (John 12:48); the standard of worship (John 4:24); and the standard for living (Colossians 1:27). It will never be destroyed (Matthew 24:35). Please notice some obligations to truth.

Listen to Truth

Listen to the truth or be destroyed (John 14:6; Acts 3:23). The wise man listens to the sayings of the Lord (Matthew 7:24-27). The Ephesians had listened to the word of truth (Ephesians 1:13).

Know the Truth

Over and over the Bible commands coming to a knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4). We can know truth (John 8:32), coming to understand it (Ephesians 3:3,4; 5:17). Paul wrote of them that know truth (1 Timothy 4:3). We must know truth to the point of being able to rightly divide it (2 Timothy 2:15). John wrote of folks knowing truth (2 John 1).

Believe Truth

People will be condemned who do not believe the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:12). Failure to believe the Lord and His Word leads to one dying in sin and being unable to be with the Lord in the next world (John 8:21-24). Sanctification by the truth is connected to belief of the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

Love Truth

Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 wrote of some who would perish because they received not the love of the truth in order to be saved. No wonder the

psalmist in Psalm 119:97 spoke of loving the law of God. We meditate on the things we love. Do you think about it daily?

Obey Truth

Peter wrote of purifying the soul by obedience to the truth. Obedience implies commands. Truth certainly has commands, and these must be obeyed. Christ is the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him (Hebrews 5:8,9). A sad picture is presented in Romans 2:8 of those who failed to obey truth. The Galatians had been deceived and hindered into not obeying truth (Galatians 3:1; 5:7).

Walk in Truth

John wrote about walking in truth. He told the elect lady that he rejoiced greatly to find her children walking in truth (2 John 4). He rejoiced again to hear of Gaius walking in truth (3 John 3). John said he had no greater joy than to hear of his children walking in truth (3 John 4). This is the idea of 1 John 1:7 as we walk in the light.

Defend Truth

The church is to be the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). Paul had kept or guarded the faith (2 Timothy 4:6-8). He was set for a defense of the Gospel (Philippians 1:17). Speak forth the truth in love (James 5:19). Some will seek to change truth (2 Timothy 4:4). Let us all be friends of truth and defend it.

Truth makes one free (John 8:32). We are begotten by truth (James 1:18) or born again by truth (1 Peter 1:23). Our souls are purified when we obey truth (1 Peter 1:22). No wonder at this point the Bible refers to being made free from sin (Romans 6:17,18). The truth brings salvation (Ephesians 1:13) because it brings us to the blood of Him who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Are you keeping your obligations to truth? ✞

Vance Hutton is the preacher for the church of Christ in Double Springs, Alabama, USA.

Only Truth is Truth!

Nothing More Is Truth.

Nothing Less Is Truth.

Truth Either Is or It Isn't.

Truth May Be Inconvenient, But It Is Still Truth.

Truth Is Present or Absent – Period!

Only Truth Is Truth!

How to Study the Bible

Clarence DeLoach, Jr.

There are sound, practical, and sensible procedures involved if one is to get the most out of Bible study. It begins with your attitude! If you feel, as many do, that the Bible is antiquated, obsolete, and no longer relevant to the lives of modern man — that it does not relate to the problems and issues we face — then you obviously could not care less about knowing and understanding what it says. If you think, as some do, that it is a human production reflecting the folklore, religious, and cultural thinking of its time, then there would be no more reason to painstakingly peruse its content than any other historical relic. If you believe, as the liberal theologians, that it is filled with historical, geographical, and scientific errors, then there would be no reason to study it, because you couldn't trust it on any matter.

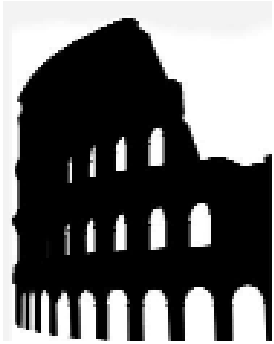
However, if you believe as the Psalmist in Psalm 119 that it cleanses (verse 9), that it is wealth and riches (verse 14), that it is honey to the taste (verse 103), that it is a lamp to our feet (verse 105), that it blesses, quickens, imparts wisdom, comforts, and directs our steps (verses 66, 92, 97, 133), and if you believe, as I believe, that it is the infallible, verbally inspired Word of the living God; that it is the complete, all-sufficient communication of God's eternal purpose, will, and grace to mankind; that it is the final court of appeal in all matters pertaining to our relationship with God, and that it will be opened to judge us at the Judgment — then it becomes absolutely imperative that "*we study to show ourselves approved of God*" (2 Timothy 2:15).

When our attitude is right toward the Bible, we will:

- Love it. "*O, how I love thy precepts*" (Psalm 119:97).
- Prize it. "*I consider your precepts to be right concerning all things*" (Psalm 119:128).
- Study it. "*Open my eyes that I may see the wondrous things out of your law*" (Psalm 119:18).
- Memorize it. "*Your word I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against you*" (Psalm 119:11).
- Trust it. "*So shall I have an answer for him who reproaches me for I trust in your word*" (Psalm 119:42).
- Obey it. "*I have said that I would keep your words*" (Psalm 119:57).
- Declare it. "*With my lips I have declared your judgments*" (Psalm 119:13).

The quality of your study begins with your attitude toward God and His Word. ✝

Clarence DeLoach, Jr. has preached for many years in the state of Tennessee, USA.



Romans 11:11-36

Jerry Bates

1. What had come to the Gentiles as a result of the Jews' disobedience? (v. 11)
2. What did Paul hope would happen to the Jews as a result of the salvation of the Gentiles? (v. 14)
3. To whom was Paul referring when he talked about the branches being grafted into the olive tree? (v. 17)
4. Why did the Gentiles have no reason to boast about their salvation? (v. 18)
5. How did the Gentiles become part of the tree? (v. 20)
6. What would happen to the Gentiles if they did not fear? (v. 21)
7. There are two sides of God's nature. To whom does He show severity? To whom does He show goodness? (v. 22)
8. What would happen to the Gentiles if they did not continue in the goodness of God? (v. 22)
9. What would happen to the Jews if they did not continue in unbelief? (v. 23)
10. What Old Testament verses are quoted in Romans 11:26,27?
11. What was Paul hoping would be the result of the mercy shown to the Gentiles? (v. 31)
12. How great are the wisdom, knowledge, and judgments of God? (v. 33)
13. What Old Testament verses are quoted in Romans 11:34,35? (v. 7)
14. Can man truly understand the ways of God? (v. 34,35)

(see the inside back cover for answers)

11 I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. 12 Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

13 For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. 15 For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

16 For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. 17 And if some of the branches were broken off, and you being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, 18 do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you.

19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. 23 And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

25 For I do not desire, brethren that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in our own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; 27 For this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

28 Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, 31 even so these also have not been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they

also may obtain mercy. 32 For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.

33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor? 35 Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?"

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

NOTES: Some commentators see in these verses details of a complicated end-time scenario of a large-scale future conversion of the Jews. However, Paul is not talking about some long future conversion of the Jews during a millennial kingdom. This can be seen by Paul's use of the word "now" in verse 31. Paul was talking about the Jews living during his day, not thousands of years into the future. The Jews had fallen through their rejection of Christ, but there was still hope. If they turned to God in faith, they could still be saved. God no longer has a special purpose for Israel as a nation, nevertheless, every individual Jew is just as precious to Him as the nation of old. God still loves the Jews, and He wants all of them to be saved.

Paul is writing this section primarily to warn the Gentiles against being boastful of their salvation. The Gentiles were grafted into this tree because of their faith, not due to their goodness. The Jews were not broken off just to make room for the Gentiles. Thus, there is no reason for them to boast. Furthermore, just as the Jews were broken off due to their unbelief, the Gentiles would likewise be broken off if they did not continue in their belief. Everyone, Jew or Gentile, is saved only by faith in Christ, and then only if he/she continues in that faith.

This section closes with a heartfelt expression of praise to God. Salvation is fully a gift to us by God and not in any way a repayment of something He owes us. God is free from any obligations that one may try to place on Him. God's ways are beyond our understanding. We will never be able to fully figure out God's thinking or His deeds, even after they are explained to us. God is an infinite resource of riches, wisdom and knowledge. Through faith in Christ, each of us can enjoy access to this storehouse of treasures, which God is eager to bestow upon His people.

Have You Thought Enough about Sinning?

Mike Benson

I listened to her sob over the phone, "This isn't supposed to be happening to me — I'm a Christian wife and mother!" The very sound of her voice made my heart feel like lead. For months she had been involved in an affair with a man she had met at work. A friendly chat had evolved into dinner, then intimacy. Now her adultery had been exposed. She was pregnant with her lover's baby and could no longer hide her burgeoning figure. Everybody knew — her non-Christian friends at work, her family, her church family, her husband, and her God.

She lamented her behavior and wanted ever-so-desperately to turn back the clock — to undo her illicit deeds. Then too, she worried about what her future would unveil. "Where will I live?" she asked. "Who will take care of me and the baby?" "What about my other children?"

I wanted to say some "magic words". I wanted to alleviate her grief and mend her broken heart. Most of all, I wanted to see her restored to the Lord and her marriage repaired. My last wish wasn't possible. Having severed her sacred trust with her husband, he had filed for divorce. In a few days the legal work would be completed and their eleven year bond would be dissolved in a court of law.

I didn't say it to her on the phone, but I couldn't help ponder later, "She should have thought more about sin." That's right! She should have thought MORE, not less, about sin. Often times, we get ourselves into trouble because we don't think enough about sin and its consequences. Jesus said, "…*It is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell*" (Matthew 5:29b). Hell. Wages (cf. Romans 6:23; Numbers 32:23; Galatians 6:7-8). Consequences. Satan doesn't want us to think about consequences — only the momentary gratification and pleasure. If he can divert our attention away from the results, we will falter and sell our souls for a "mess of pottage" (cf. Genesis 27).

I have a new-found appreciation for the words of the Hebrews writer: "*By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin*" (11:24,25).

Salvation

Moses thought about sin. He considered the eternal dimensions of staying in Egypt and sharing in the sensual pursuits of his peers.

> What faced (Moses) was a crisis decision: whether to remain in the eyes of men 'the son of Pharaoh's daughter', or to throw in his lot with the despised people of God. He could not be both an Egyptian and an Israelite. On one hand was all the splendor of Egypt, with its rare treasures and its magnificent heritage; to be in Pharaoh's palaces and to possess perhaps even the throne, to be in a position of power and in a place of privilege and refinement – all the things (the author describes them as the fleeting pleasures of sin) an ancient empire could offer. On the other hand were poverty, contempt, and affliction, for Israel at this time was a nation of slaves, groaning under its heavy load, with broken spirits and vanished hopes, hemmed in inexorably to daily abuse. Yet Moses, by faith, recognized these to be the people of God. He deliberately chose to travel with them the dangerous way rather than to continue in ease. He saw, by faith, that to continue in ease would be sin and further, that pleasures of sin give no lasting satisfaction… (Neil Lightfoot, "The Faith of Moses," *Jesus Christ Today*, 215-216).

Like Moses, we need to think more about sin and what happens if or when we yield to our desires:

- 🕮 **A brief, lustful look could lead to an affair.**
- 🕮 **A simple wink could wreck my marriage.**
- 🕮 **Moral compromise would invalidate my example.**
- 🕮 **A single click of the mouse could lead to a wrong relationship.**
- 🕮 **A short-term thrill would devastate my family.**
- 🕮 **An affair will jeopardize my salvation.**
- 🕮 **The fleeting excitement of passion will rob me of inner peace.**

Dear Christian, have you thought enough about sinning? "…*But fornicators and adulterers God will judge*" (Hebrews 13:4b; cf. Revelation 21:8). ✞

Mike Benson is a Gospel preacher living in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, USA.

Thoughts About Evangelism

Charles Box

God loves the lost and has made plans to save them through the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Let us never think we can be free from the blood of others if we fail in evangelism. "*When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul*" (Ezekiel 3:18-21).

1. The love of Christ constrains us to be evangelistic. "*For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died*" (2 Corinthians 5:14).

2. The work of the church is to seek and save the lost. "*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Luke 19:10).

3. Every Christian must bear fruit. "*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit*" (John 15:2).

4. One soul is worth more than the whole world. "*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*" (Matthew 16:26).

5. Christianity is a taught religion. "*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets. 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me*" (John 6:44,45).

6. We must evangelize because sinners will not come to us. "*Go into all the*

world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15,16).

Nothing builds the church but face to face, heart to heart evangelism. Let us arise and reach the lost for Jesus. ✞

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Man's Part of God's Scheme for Human Redemption

Louis Rushmore

- 🕮 **Hear God's Word exclusively (Romans 10:17) rather than turn to human creeds (Matthew 15:9).**
- 🕮 **Believe that Jesus is the Son of God (John 8:24).**
- 🕮 **Repent of past sins (Luke 13:3; Romans 3:25).**
- 🕮 **Be willing to acknowledge publicly one's confidence that Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 10:9-10).**
- 🕮 **Obediently submit to be immersed in water (Colossians 2:12) for the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16) by the blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5; Romans 6:3-5).**
- 🕮 **Remain faithful to Jesus Christ, even if one's faithfulness results in the loss of his life (Revelation 2:10).**
- 🕮 **When sin creeps into the Christian's life, he must repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).**

The Valley of Decision

David Deffenbaugh

Choice. That single word does as much to describe modern America as any other. While it most certainly describes America from an economic standpoint as consumers demand choice and the market place scrambles to accommodate, the description, by no means, ends there. The word also has come to describe our morality as well. The murderous act of abortion is classified as choice. Honesty has been unceremoniously removed from its lofty place as an absolute and dumped onto the heap of personal choice, to be exercised at one's discretion for the purpose of personal advantage. Choice is also aptly descriptive of America's spiritual pursuits. From the tried but far from true are the adages "Attend the church of your choice" to the modern "market-driven" church that establishes its doctrines and practices on the whims and desires of the masses. One can not only find any sort of religion he might desire, but also any combination of beliefs and ideals he might wish to concoct.

Choice, itself, is not bad. It is one among many of the characteristics of freedom. But in our culture's uninhibited and furious exercise of choice, one significant detail has been overlooked; the important part of choice are the consequences of the decisions made. It's not the right or ability to choose that is supreme, but choosing what results in what is good and right.

The Old Testament prophets graphically described this principle of choice. For instance, Joel wrote, "*Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision*" (Joel 3:14). "The day of the Lord" in Joel's message meant the day of God's judgment. What happened on that day, whether for good or evil, depended on the people's choice whether to follow God. The reason Joel was on the scene was to warn them that their previous decisions carried with them the consequence of God's wrath.

Another prophet, Isaiah, said it like this, "*As they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so I will choose their punishments and will bring on them what they dread. Because I called, but no one answered; I spoke, but they did not listen. And they did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight*" (Isaiah 66:3,4).

Choice is indeed a marvelous thing, but more marvelous still is choosing good and truth and right. **Every person stands in the valley of decision, and what happens to each will depend fully on the choices that are made.** ✞

David Deffenbaugh preaches in Paragould, Arkansas, USA.

Paul's Need to Preach the Gospel

Gary C. Hampton

Paul viewed himself as a man forever in debt. He had been entrusted, like a steward, with the Gospel and felt compelled to preach to all who would listen. Among those he mentioned were the barbarians, or those who did not speak Greek. Oddly enough, he saw his *freedom* in Christ as *binding him* in the preaching of the Gospel to others (1 Corinthians 4:1; 9:16,17). The *American Standard Version* says, *"stewardship entrusted to me"* at the close of verse 17.) Paul did not plan to avoid paying his debt to those at Rome, but stood ready to preach the saving message to them, too (Romans 1:14,15).

Some may have said Paul was ashamed to preach in the great city of Rome. He was not, because the Gospel is God's powerful means of taking a man dead in sin and making him alive in service (Ephesians 2:1-6). It is the seed that produces Christians. Paul was not ashamed, because the Gospel is of Christ, or the message of God's own Son come down to earth (John 1:1-18). Further, it is a message for all (Acts 1:8). The Gospel reveals both the rightness of God and the way for man to become right in God's eyes. Those who would be saved accept the righteousness of God by faith and continue in it by faith, which is a quote from Habakkuk 2:4 (Romans 1:16,17).

Our prayer should be that we all take the attitude of Paul. None of us could be saved without the blood of Christ. We, too, are debtors to the lost and should serve as ambassadors for God, to plead with them to accept the amnesty from sin offered in the great sacrifice on Calvary. Let us constantly seek opportunities to teach the Gospel and pray that God will open hearts to receive the truth! ✞

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"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Romans 1:16 NKJV).

Hungering for 'Old Time' Bible Preaching

Maxie B. Boren

Fun, games, and gimmicks can last but for a brief while, until people grow weary of them. Then they start longing for "more substance". And well they should! The brotherhood of Christ has "had enough" of the liberal movement that has wrought such havoc among us, and the majority are yearning for a return to "sound doctrine". Jesus taught, *"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled"* (Matthew 5:7). And the apostle Paul declared to the Ephesian elders, *"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 20:32). Many brethren are indeed hungering for "old time" Bible preaching and they are finding it in conservative congregations of the Lord's church that have never stopped preaching it.

As I have often observed, there is a very strong parallel in what has been going on in our nation and what has transpired in churches of Christ. Over the last thirty to forty years, many in our nation abandoned biblical standards and moral sensibilities in favor of "anything goes" and more irresponsibility. In like manner, during the same time-frame, many in the church abandoned definitive biblical preaching and "sound doctrine" for the agenda of self-appointed and self-designated "change agents". The result has been catastrophic for both the nation and the church.

Thankfully, however, I believe there is growing evidence that the majority of Americans are beginning to wake up and see that the "socially liberal" ideas have been so very wrong for our country and that we as a nation had better turn back to God and the standard of conduct found in the Bible, or else this society is going to "go down the tubes". Similarly, there are encouraging signs that the majority of people in the church are beginning to wake up and see the radical ideas of the "change agents" are so very wrong for the church, and that we must return to God's way of "sound doctrine" and "the old paths" (Jeremiah 6:16). ✞

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Strange, and Stranger Still

Dalton Key

Strange:

The case of the man in Salina, Kansas, who, in 1977, called the police with a missing persons report on his wife. When asked how long she had been missing, the man answered, "since 1968." When questioned further as to why he had waited so long to file the report, he said he was "just starting to get impatient."

A recent AP report from Potsdam, Germany, concerning the mummified body of a man found sitting in a chair in front of his television set. According to authorities investigating the matter, he died a full four years ago. But though his electricity was cut off because of non-payment, no one ever reported the 51-year-old man missing, or even bothered to check his apartment.

Stranger still:

Church members who fall away from the Lord and His church, with little notice or concern from faithful brethren. Lost sheep are searched for until found and lost money is cause for immediate attention, but lost souls just seem to fall through ever-widening congregational cracks. ✞

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"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

Hell's Foundations Quiver at the Shout of Unity!

Paul Holland

There once were two cats of Killkenny,
Each thought there was one cat too many.
They fought and they spit,
They clawed and they bit,
Till instead of two cats there weren't any!

GOD WANTS US UNITED

In Numbers 32, two tribes of Israel wanted to settle in Gilead, on the east side of the Jordan River. Moses' response was, *"Shall your brothers go to war while you yourselves sit here?"* (6) Division is discouraging (7-15).

In the New Testament, there is also a strong emphasis on unity. Early in Jesus' ministry, He pictured the kingdom as being composed of those from the north, south, east, and west (Matthew 8:11). In the middle of the Book of John, Jesus says, *"I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd"* (10:16).

There is strength in numbers. There is power in unity. Like a lot of little links in the mail that forms a bullet proof vest, unity makes us stronger, it makes us more powerful, and it makes us more effective.

And because hell's foundations quiver at the shout of unity…

SATAN'S METHOD OF OPERATION IS DIVISION

All division stems from division away from God first. That's what happened at the Tower of Babel. The Babylonians in Genesis 11 were united. But they were divided from God. They were not pursuing God's purposes. They were not pursuing God's plans. He commanded man to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28). But the Babylonians were not doing that.

The theme of Genesis 11 is unity. But it was the wrong kind of unity. It was unity among men at the expense of unity with God (11:1). They worked together to build a city and a tower to reach heaven (11:4). They wanted to make a name. When God confused their languages, He did so to get them to scatter throughout the whole world (8).

So if we want to have unity, it has to be unity on God's terms — not unity

for the sake of unity. Again, in the New Testament, Satan operates largely by causing division. The church of Christ in Corinth was divided. Some were saying, *"I am of Paul." "I of Apollos." "I of Cephas."* And *"I of Christ."* They were divided over doctrine; they were divided over socioeconomic lines; they were divided between the haves and the have nots. Paul warned them that the heart of their problem was their worldly attitude toward the Gospel (1 Corinthians 3:3).

There is weakness in division. There is confusion in division. There is irresoluteness in division. There is defeat in division. If — based on Jesus' prayer for unity in John 17:20-21 — the world will believe in Jesus because of unity, then the reason there are unbelievers in the world is partly due to the division among those who call themselves believers in Christ!

And because hell's foundations quiver at the shout of unity…

HOW CAN WE BE UNITED?

These points will work for all our relationships:

Be united with God, at our work, within our own families, in your congregation, and in Christianity at large. Unity brings strength! ✞

Paul Holland works with the church of Christ in Paris, Kentucky, USA.

The Church Is One!

The synonyms in the New Testament for the church confirm that there is only **one** church.

- Jesus only promised to build **one church** — His church (Matthew 16:18).
- Jesus is the Head of **one body**, which is the church (Colossians 1:18).
- Jesus is King of **one kingdom** — His kingdom (Colossians 1:13).
- Jesus is the Master of **one house**, which is the church (1 Timothy 3:15).
- Jesus is High Priest over **one priesthood** (1 Peter 2:5).

What Is Your Estimate of the Church?

John R. Vaughan

What is your estimate of the church? The apostle Paul reveals his estimate of the church when he speaks of it as a "*glorious church*" (Ephesians 5:22-27). To say the church is glorious means it deserves praise and honor. Why is it a glorious church? There are several reasons.

THE CHURCH HAS A GLORIOUS FOUNDER Jesus said, "*Upon this rock I will build my church*." Jesus is the Founder of the church.

THE CHURCH HAS A GLORIOUS HEAD "*And He (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church*" (Colossians 1:16). "*For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church…*" (Ephesians 5:23). This means we must look to Christ for all authority in the church (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 3:17; 2 John 9).

THE CHURCH WAS PURCHASED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST The church is the only thing Jesus saved by His blood. We value an article by the price we must pay to acquire it. Heaven valued the church so much it paid the blood of Jesus.

THE CHURCH HAS A GLORIOUS NAME The church wears the name of Christ. Earthly institutions wear the names of men, but the church wears the name of Jesus (Romans 16:16).

THE CHURCH HAS A GLORIOUS MISSION The mission of the church is to glorify God. "*Unto him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations.*" The mission of the church is to preach the Gospel of Christ (Mark 16:15,16; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 1 Timothy 3:14). The mission of the church is to save souls (Mark 16:15,16). The saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47).

THE CHURCH HAS A GLORIOUS DESTINY The church will pass on into eternity in heaven. "*That he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but it should be holy and without blemish*" (Ephesians 5:27).

Earthly kingdoms flourish and die. Human organizations perish after a while. However, the church of our Lord will continue through eternity. It is indeed glorious! ✞

John R. Vaughan has preached for the Lord's church for many years, particularly for the Graymere congregation in Columbia, Tennessee, USA.

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

2 Peter 3:10-13

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

The ultimate end of the physical creation was described in 2 Peter 3. But, for the obedient who are faithful until death, *"... in Christ all shall be made alive"* (1 Corinthians 15:22). Our promise is that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, where only righteousness dwells!

We realize that God's creation, in the beginning, was perfect, designed to function without death.

What brought about the change? Disobedience to God: sin.

Scientifically, the result of sin is called the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Why is every physical thing in a spiraling state of deterioration? Because the ultimate result of sin is death: *"For as in Adam all die…"* (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Historically, God has not destroyed unless sin was so rampant that there was no longer the desire in hearts to repent. In the days of Noah, though he preached for more than 100 years, no one repented and turned to God. The result was the worldwide flood (Genesis 6-8).

In the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, the evil of sexual immorality was so rampant that God rained fire and brimstone on the cities (Genesis 19).

Ninevah, however, repented, and was spared (Jonah).

Jesus said (Matthew 24:37-44) that the final destruction will come when the world will be as it was in the days of Noah — when (according to the pattern of past destructions) evil reigns in so many hearts that there is no longer any balance between good and evil.

A Balanced Diet

J.C. Choate

Man must have bread and water, physically and spiritually, to survive. Spiritually, of course, this nourishment is not earthly or carnal. Jesus is identified as the bread of life and the water of life (John 6:35; 4:14). The sustenance we have through Him saves us and nourishes us, giving us hope in this life and the promise of a home in heaven in the world to come.

It is spiritually expedient that we feed upon the Word of God. Christ said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). In the Sermon on the Mount, He said, *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled"* (Matthew 5:6).

In our study of God's Word, and even in the sermons we hear, we need a balanced diet. To dwell upon any one part of the truth over a period of time, to the exclusion of other truths during that time, will warp our thinking, will stunt us and dwarf us, causing us to be one-sided in our view of God's will. Imbalance in our diet will result in fanaticism, error, apathy, and many other spiritual ills.

We know that in our daily lives, physically, we need a well-balanced diet to be strong and healthy. It is not good to eat only those foods that may be our favorites. Milk products are a must for infants and the young, and to a certain extent throughout life; yet, there comes a time when, for proper physical growth, a person must move on to stronger foods and even to meat itself. The same principle is true spiritually. Peter said, *"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby"* (1 Peter 2:2). The Hebrews writer tells us that to be strong we must go on to partake of the meat of the Word. He speaks of some

who had not continued in their growth process and had consequently died. He explains, *"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 strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil"* (5:12-14).

We are living in a time that is generally called "the junk food age". Junk food is sweeping the world. Even such countries as Russia and India have been invaded by it. This food is synonymous with high-fat content, low food-value, and fast service.

There is a lot of spiritual junk food being offered today with fast service too. You are told you can "be saved" on the spot, any time, wherever you are, by faith alone or just a prayer. Most people are enthused by a good show and thrills and excitement, so there are multitudes of religious leaders and preachers out there who offer people what they want — for a price, of course.

When we eat only light foods, along with a lot of sweets, we are heading for health problems. But what we all need most of the time is some properly home-cooked food which includes an assortment of vegetables along with a reasonable amount of good meats to provide our regular allotment of daily nourishment.

Spiritually, we may hear the Gospel enough to understand it, believe it, and obey it to be saved, but if we never mature beyond that point we are in trouble. What we need is a good strong base on which to build a solid Christian life. This involves not only a knowledge of the Gospel, the church, and worship, but also the understanding of Christian evidences, what faith is all about, how prayer works, and the application of all of the other aspects of the Christian life.

On the other hand, it is just as easy for us to think we have arrived, that we know it all, and to assume that since we understand the basic teachings of God's Word, everyone else knows them, too; therefore, there would be no need ever to bring up such basic subjects again in lessons for the church in general.

Peter said, *"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"* (2 Peter 1:12). He went on to say, *"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance"* (2 Peter 3:1).

How many times in the Scriptures do you read references to Noah and the flood, the deliverance of the children of Israel out of the land of bondage, the

destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and other Old Testament stories? The Lord chose to have four writers tell of His life and of His death, burial, and resurrection. Paul, Peter, and John, in particular, wrote and emphasized many great lessons again and again. These retellings serve as our reminders and reinforcements of God's truths.

In our personal studies and in our pulpits, we need to have studies on the sovereignty of God, on the beauties of heaven, the torments of hell, and numerous other themes which will encourage us to obey God and to go on to attain greater heights in our Christian lives. But we also need to study and hear lessons from time to time on the Gospel, scriptural baptism, the oneness of the church, the kind of music God wants in worship, and other basic principles.

We must never forget that we are not the only ones who are to be taught God's Word, and that others may be at different spiritual levels with a variety of spiritual needs. In our meetings, there are children, young people, and hopefully some new converts, visitors, and even older members who need to hear a wide range of subjects taught from God's Word. These teachings must be given again and again over a period of time because it is so easy for man to forget what God wants him to do or not to do. If the proper job is done, then those who attend corporate services will be taught the truth, growth will follow, members will be prepared to teach God's Word to others, and the church will be strong.

If this is not done, the non-members who attend will leave untaught, the children will grow up ignorant of God's Word, and the new members will forget the truths they once knew. By pretty words and fair speeches they will become weak and indifferent, and the church itself will not be strong.

But the damage is even greater: the younger members will grow up not knowing the basic truths that save us and sustain us, and they will turn more and more to the religious world around them. This has already happened too many times in formerly strong congregations.

My brethren, we must return to the kind of biblical study and Gospel preaching that will restore us — and the church universal — to a knowledge of God's Word. That knowledge will nourish our souls and will enable us to do the work God has given us to do. Only a balanced diet of God's Word will do this. As Paul exhorted, *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might"* (Ephesians 6:10). ✞

J.C. Choate was a long-time missionary to India before his death in 2008.

The Wrong of Gambling

Hershel Dyer

There are sincere followers of Christ who sometimes ask, "What is wrong with gambling?" Perhaps it does little good now to say that this is a question that would hardly have been raised among Christians in earlier days. Hence, if gambling was so generally considered to be wrong by our predecessors, what was the reasoning behind this?

To begin with, gambling is destructive to the principle of "*love your neighbor as yourself*" (Matthew 22:39). Every participant in a game or sport of chance desires to win. To this end every gambler puts down his or her money. Nobody wants to lose what he or she has bet. Whoever the winners are — in a lottery, at a horse race, from a poker table, etc., are taking home money that those providing it did not want to give to them. The winners then have in their possession money, which by their gambling, they have taken against the desire of their neighbors.

How different this is from neighborly business dealing. A seller has a product that he offers to the public for a price. A buyer, desiring or needing the product, arrives to make his purchase. The seller is happy because he has made a good deal for himself, and the buyer is happy for being able to exchange his money for the product he wanted. Hence, both seller and buyer are pleased with the transaction.

The casinos, the race tracks, the smoke-filled poker rooms, and every gambling resort have their many stories of disappointed and desperate persons who have lost. The bread and rent money that was put down with the hopes of some jackpot or bonanza is an all too common occurrence. The psychological effect that follows so often, calling for a "Gambler's Anonymous" recovery organization, shows the mind-addicting nature of it.

Finally, the thought of the State sponsoring such morally deteriorating enterprises should be repugnant to all citizens. ✞

Hershel Dyer is a long-time Gospel preacher living in Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA.

"Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need"

(Ephesians 4:28-29 NKJV).

Doctrine To Live By

"The Whole Counsel of God"

Steve Vice

In Acts 20:27 Paul said, "*For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*" Paul wanted people to have a complete and thorough understanding of the will of God. Two reasons that Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the apostles were: 1) to bring to their remembrance all things that He had said to them (John 14:26); and, 2) to guide them into all truth (John 16:13).

In the courts of our land, the oath is often repeated, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" It is also recognized by honorable people that a half truth is the same as a lie. Therefore, it is evident that in order for justice to be fulfilled, the whole truth must be told.

It is common today for religious people to say, "All you need to do is to receive Jesus into your heart and you will be saved." This sounds good, but the Bible does not teach it. John 1:12 does speak about receiving Jesus. But it does not say that the person who receives Jesus will be saved. It says that the person who receives Jesus has "*the right to become children of God…*" (future tense).

It has been said that all a person needs to know about salvation is found in Romans 10:9,10. Is Romans 10:9,10 the whole counsel of God concerning salvation? No. In Romans 2:4 the inspired writer speaks of repentance. We know that without repentance there is no salvation (Luke 13:3). But Romans 10 says nothing about repentance. Therefore, Romans 10:9,10 is not the whole counsel of God on the subject of salvation.

Others look to Ephesians 2:8,9 as the final and only authority concerning salvation. But this leaves out the fact that the Christians at Ephesus confessed their faith in Christ (Acts 19:19). Also, we must not overlook the fact that the Christians at Ephesus were also baptized (Acts 19:5; Ephesians 4:5). If a person wants to learn the whole counsel of God on these matters, he or she ought to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11).

Most of us can quote the golden text of the Bible — John 3:16. But when you quote it, do you insert the word "shall" instead of "should" in this verse? If

a person inserts the word "shall", then it makes Jesus a liar, because in this same book in 8:31-52 and 12:42 there were people who believed in Jesus, but they were not saved. The verse truly says, *"… should not perish."* In other words, the possibility of perishing still remains. It *should* not happen, but it *could.* Does John 3:16 tell all that a person needs to know about salvation? Anyone who teaches so has surely failed to teach the whole counsel of God on this subject.

Jesus Himself said that a person must believe in Him (John 8:24). Confession is also necessary for salvation (Matthew 10:32,33). Jesus plainly said that unless you repent you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:3). It was also Jesus who said, "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*" (Mark 16:16). Shall we neglect the counsel of Jesus Christ the Savior in this matter? "*But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him*" (Luke 7:30). It is a serious matter to reject or neglect the whole counsel of God on any subject, and salvation is the most important subject of all. ✞

Steve Vice is an elder in the church of Christ in Forest Park, Georgia, USA.

"I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God"

(Acts 20:26-27 NKJV).

The venerable apostle Paul affirmed that he neither held back nor cowered respecting the announcement of all the purpose of God for humanity to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17,20,27). He solemnly called the elders forth as witnesses, whereby because of his preaching and teaching he was guiltless, irrespective of whether anyone were saved or lost (Acts 20:26; cf. Ezekiel 3:17-21). Paul did not neglect to present unpopular divine truths. He did not minimize inconvenient Bible doctrine. Paul did not disguise God's truth to make it more palatable. There were no omissions and no partial presentations of the Gospel of Christ by him. The apostle preached God's Word without reluctance, despite risking disfavor with its hearers (Galatians 4:16). The apostle Paul was a mailman from God, delivering a message that was not his own (Galatians 1:10-12).

Is It a Miracle?

Betty Burton Choate

The time frame is the first century A.D., and the place is Pamphylia where Paul, Silas, and Timothy are traveling overland from Lystra to Derbe and on to other cities of the area, en route to Troas, a thriving western seaport.

On an earlier, very difficult and danger-filled journey, Paul had first preached the Gospel to these people, establishing churches all along the way. Now he is delivering to them *"…the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily"* Acts 16:4).

We can easily imagine Paul and his dusty, travel-weary companions as they walk those ancient roads in the summer's heat. They rejoice over the growth of Christianity, but at the same time, they long for the rapid spread of God's written message among the infant churches. Communication is so slow — handwritten, painstakingly hand-copied letters, carried also by hand from sender to receiver.

Superimpose the twentieth-first century over that scene. Paul jumps out of the way as a car whizzes by; he hears the roar of a jet leaving the nearby Derbe airport; down the street he sees a loaded book stall, offering all kinds of reading material in his own language — including a book bearing the name, The Holy Bible.

"I can't believe my eyes," Paul exclaims, reverently taking the book in his hands and turning the pages with awe and wonder. "Here are all the words we've written to the churches, in this one book — and there's a stack of them! Do you realize what this means? Everyone who wants a

copy of God's Word can have one for his own studies at home and with other people!"

As Paul is exulting in the new-found treasure, Timothy turns the knob on the strange little box he finds in his hands and suddenly the air is filled with music and voices from seemingly nowhere! How astounded Paul is when he hears the mention of Jesus' name!

"Stop!" he cries, almost beside himself with excitement! "What is that man saying?"

"…I declare to you the Gospel … that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures…" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

"Paul!" Timothy almost shouts, "Don't you recognize that voice? That's *your* voice coming out of this box! *How can such a thing be?"*

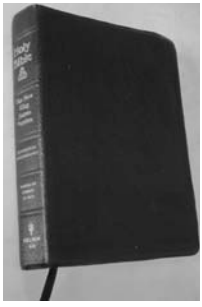
The shopkeeper explains, "That's a radio. The voice was recorded on a CD, and now it's being played on a radio station fifteen hundred miles to the south of here. Actually, it's a very common thing in these times."

"Do many people have these radios?" Paul asks.

"Practically everybody," comes the reply.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy look at each other in amazement, hardly able to contain their excitement. "Do you realize what this means?" Paul asks, his voice breaking with emotion. *"Do you realize what this means?"*

No, this printed page, radio, TV, and the Internet are not miracles; they are God's providential provisions for the mass teaching of His Word during this age of seven billion souls. But if we could see them through Paul's eyes, we would glory in the opportunity that is ours as the Lord's people, and we would work together as one body to ensure that the voice now being heard throughout the world remains the voice of His Truth. ✞



Betty Burton Choate is the widow of J.C. Choate, longtime missionary to India.

Ambassadors

Richard L. Jones

"*Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God*" (2 Corinthians 5:20).

The ministry of reconciliation was not given just to the apostles. Every Christian gets to share in this glorious work. As Christ's ambassadors, we have a work to do and a word to share.

The work of an ambassador is honorable. One who represents Christ has an honored position, and yet it is called a ministry. So, we are Christ's servants in having a great responsibility.

This is a representative work in that we represent Christ to men and women. God has a scheme or plan of redemption so that we will no longer be alienated from Him because of our sins. Our job as ambassadors is to present His plan to all people everywhere. There is no other plan by which man can be saved.

Our work is urgent because of the danger to those who are outside of Christ. They are outside the ark of safety. They have not come into the "city of refuge" where safety exists from the avenger.

Ambassadors are not allowed to present any terms except those of the one whom they represent. We are allowed to promise salvation, forgiveness, and reconciliation to those who accept the Word of His authority. Our opinions don't count. In this day, when almost "anything goes" when dressed in religious language, let us remember that God is the only authority, and we may share only the Word He has given.

Our message is urgent. The apostle Paul said, "*We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God*". He implored, begged, and pleaded with people to be saved. Do we take our assignment seriously? ✞

Richard L. Jones preached for many years for the Lord's church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA.

Yesterday is Gone!
Tomorrow is out of reach, today!
Now is all we have at hand!

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going"
(Ecclesiastes 9:10 NKJV).

"By Your Fruit..."

Rodney Nulph

At the close of His masterful Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, speaking in the immediate context of false teachers, affirmed, *"Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.* ***Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them"*** (Matthew 7:17-20 emphasis added).

Not only are false teachers known by their fruits, but so also are "false Christians." Although the term "false Christian" is a contradictory term, sadly it is often a reality in the church for which Jesus died. How can we be sure that **we** are not the corrupt trees of which Jesus spoke?

First, we must ask, what fruit should I bring forth? Every accountable person has at some time brought forth bad fruit (Romans 3:10, 23). However, penitent believers change their fruit (Luke 3:8) and begin to bear fruit pleasing to the Lord (John 15:8). This one no longer walks after the flesh, but now after the Spirit (Romans 8:1ff). As a Christian grows and walks a more mature walk following the Word of God, he or she mortifies or puts to death the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 8:13) and begins to bear spiritual fruit. *"…the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law"* (Galatians 5:22-23). By your fruits you shall be known; what fruit do you bring forth?

Secondly, we must ask, how do I bring forth this fruit? Being able to identify a specific type of fruit and understanding how to cultivate or grow that fruit are two different things. For example, in the physical realm, I can easily identify bananas, but I have no idea how they are to be grown. If we, as God's children, are to ever bear the spiritual fruit He requires, then we must understand what the "grow-

er's handbook" (i.e., the Bible) has to say regarding growing our fruit. In the section of the grower's handbook titled John 15:5, the Master Grower said, *"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."* Being attached closely to the Lord means that we do **all** the things He commands (Luke 6:46; John 14:15; 15:14). Surely, the one who attaches himself to the Master Vine will certainly begin to bear the fruit of that Vine. One cannot be attached properly to the Lord and bear the fruit of the devil (Matthew 7:16)! By your fruits you shall be known!

Fruit bearing is serious business! In order to make certain that we are not a corrupt tree, we must bring forth spiritual fruit, and spiritual fruit is a result of a healthy attachment to the Vine.

What type of fruit are you bearing? Are you a good tree or a corrupt tree? ***"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them"*** (Matthew 7:20 emphasis added)! When the Lord of harvest (Luke 10:2) comes, what type of fruit will He harvest in you? ✞

Rodney Nulph is a Gospel preacher and Associate Editor of *Gospel Gazette Online*. He lives with his family in Medina, Ohio, USA.

Where is Your Place at the Wall?

Chad Ezelle

In the opening chapters of Nehemiah, we see a man who was consumed with God's plan for his life. His zeal for God's work was evident in the way he handled himself before the king, the way he responded when told about the state of Jerusalem and the planning he did while waiting for the right opportunity. Further, it was because of that zeal that Nehemiah accomplished such great things in God's kingdom.

His zeal led him to the walls and gates of a tattered city. When Nehemiah reached his beloved town, he found a place in ruins and people who did not care one way or another. Their city — God's city — was in terrible shape, and no one was doing anything about it. Nehemiah inspected, was honest in his assessment of the city, and got to work on organizing the necessary rebuilding of the wall.

If we are honest with ourselves about God's kingdom today, it's not in much better shape than Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day. The walls of the church (not the buildings) are broken and the gates are burned — and maybe that is the big reason that we do not see many people these days entering the gates of the kingdom.

It is about time we fixed the city — the church. It is time that we inspect the walls and figured out where we can do some renovation and rebuilding on God's city, the church, Jesus' body. The walls are broken and the gates are burning — have you found your place to renovate and rebuild yet? ✞

Leading Others to the Savior

Jim Howard

The most significant service in the whole world, and yet one of the most under-utilized, is that of leading others to the Savior. Salvation is of eternal significance. A precious soul is worth more than the whole world. **You would think that the first priority of every individual and every institution in the world would be the salvation of every person in the world.** Yet sadly, evangelism appears to be way down the list of priorities of most people, as well as most institutions.

Why do we fail so miserably in the most important work in the universe?

(1) Because Satan is alive and well and has as his most important work keeping people far away from the Savior. A real war is in progress between the purposes of God and the designs of the Evil One.

(2) Because many of us do not really believe that people are lost without Jesus. We certainly would not admit this truth, but our actions speak louder than our words. The apostle Paul had no doubt that the world is lost without the Savior. As he put it, "*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

(3) Because we have forgotten that it is the power of God's Word of the cross that prepares the hearts of men and women for salvation, not human ingenuity or evangelistic technique. Our job is to bring individuals into contact with the cross. God will do the rest.

(4) Because we fail to start at home. How many of us who wear glasses have had the embarrassing experience of misplacing our glasses, only to find them sitting right on our nose? The best evangelism opportunities are also close to home — among those whom we love and who love us — husbands, wives, sons, daughters, longtime friends, and relatives. It is far easier to go a thousand miles away on a campaign and knock on doors and talk to people we will never see again. It involves more emotional risk to talk about ultimate realities with those who are closest to us. Yet, all studies indicate these are the ones who will be the most receptive to the good news.

Let us love God's merciful purposes enough, and let us love those who are lost enough, to get involved in their lives for their eternal benefit and to the glory of a sovereign God. ✞

Jim Howard preaches the Gospel in Madison, Mississippi, USA.

Importance of Public Worship

John Gipson

Years ago one heard many sermons on the importance of public worship. Perhaps many of us felt that it was becoming redundant and we longed to hear something else. Redundant or not, public worship is important. The Hebrews writer urges, *"... not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near"* (10:25).

It seems clear to me that to *assemble together* is a Christian duty. One can hardly forget that Christ frequented the synagogues and the Temple, that Christ's disciples were *assembled* when Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection, that they were *assembled* at the day of Pentecost, that Paul waited at Troas until the brethren *came together,* etc. The same pattern of *"not neglecting to meet together"* should prevail today.

Some who profess attachment to Christ's cause neglect more assemblies than they attend. We do not wonder that unbelievers stay away, or that those who have fallen in love with the world do not have any interest in such gatherings, but many who are Christians by profession are also guilty of this. Some have become once-a-week worshippers. Others come out when the weather is good. Some attend when they take a notion. It is obvious that there is little spiritual relish. Their religion degenerates into a "form of godliness" with a noticeable lack of joy, desire, or "want to".

God deserves our service. We meet together to honor His name, to read His Word, to declare His praise, to remember His Son. But to fail to meet *"as is the habit of some"* is to pour contempt on all these things.

A failure to attend the assembly weakens the church. By being together we form a visible building, all the stones united together. To neglect this is to weaken the energies of the church and to discourage the godly.

We ought to meet together for our own benefit. Our holiness, comfort, and usefulness in great measure depend upon such services. Our knowledge is yet imperfect, our faith feeble, our hope clouded, and our love languid. In short, we need the assembly.

One has suggested we might forsake the assembling of ourselves together if we had "no mercies to acknowledge, no sins to confess, no blessings to crave, no enemies to overcome, no soul to sanctify, no hell to escape, and no heaven to gain." ✞

John Gipson works with the Windsong Church of Christ in Little Rock, Arkansas, USA.

Taking Care of the Lord's Money

Royce Frederick

Paul was an apostle of Christ. If anyone could be trusted, surely Paul would be at the top of the list.

But Paul knew that even an apostle could be tempted to sin. After all, Judas had already fallen into the sin of greed; "…*he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it*" (John 12:4-6; see Matthew 26:14-16).

Paul took great care to guard against all kinds of sin, including greed: "*But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified*" (1 Corinthians 9:27). Paul was especially careful about how he handled the Lord's money. On two occasions, he participated in the delivery of large amounts of money for the Lord's work, and on both occasions, other people worked with him.

The first of these occurred in Acts 11. "*And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem (in Judea) to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul* [Paul]" (Acts 11:27-30). So, two men delivered the gift to a group of men, "the elders". These were apparently the elders of the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 15:2; 21:17,18).

Later, when Paul was collecting money for poor Christians in Jerusalem, he informed the givers that other people would be helping him handle the money: "A*nd* (to you at Corinth) *we have sent with him* (with Titus) *the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches, and not only that, but who was also chosen by the churches to travel with us with this gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and to show your ready mind, avoiding this: that anyone should blame us in this lavish gift which is administered by us; providing honorable things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men*" (2 Corinthians 8:18-21).

The contributions of the church belong *to the Lord,* not to a preacher or the leaders of the church. The Lord's money should be cared for in a way that is "*honorable…not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men*" (8:21). If we handle the money honestly, the Lord will see it, because He sees everything. But we need to make an extra effort to be sure that our honest handling of the money is also visible to men, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here are some suggestions regarding how to properly care for the contribution of the local church:

1. Select several trustworthy Christians, who will then work together counting the money immediately after each Sunday assembly. Various persons could serve in this work on a rotating basis.
2. Keep careful records of how much is given.
3. Deposit the money in a bank account, with the names of two or more men on the account.
4. Carefully consider suggestions from all of the members regarding how the contributions should be used. This helps the members give freely from their hearts.
5. Keep careful records of how the funds have been used.
6. Inform the members about how the funds have been used, and freely permit any of the members to examine financial records at any time.

We need to take great care about how we handle the Lord's money. If we misuse funds entrusted to us, we bring shame and harm on ourselves, our family, and the Lord's church.

Paul warned the young preacher, Timothy — and us, "*But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness*" (1 Timothy 6:9-11).

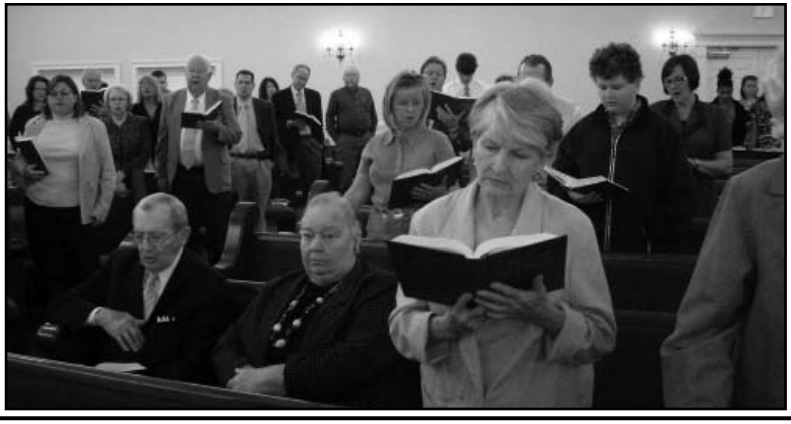
"*A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold*" (Proverbs 22:1). ✞

Royce Frederick is the Editor of *International Gospel Teacher* and lives in Fort Worth, Texas, USA.

A SONG LEADER'S THOUGHTS

Tommy Durden

On a bright Sunday morning I glanced through the crowd,
which had gathered together to worship God aloud.
I was the song leader, and we'd already begun:
Two songs, a prayer, and another we'd sung,
Then we were seated, and the preacher began
but my mind wasn't on his message just then,
For I knew our singing had been very weak —
The preacher most likely was in no mood to speak.
"Why was it that way? Did *I* do my best?"
Well, I could hear *myself* over the rest;
There must be a reason for the lack of concern
for this part of our worship, and *that* I must learn.
I wonder: could it be we don't realize
that singing is *worship,* so we just *minimize?*
We pray with the spirit and the understanding too,



but the same Scripture speaks of the singing we do.
We must realize this as our voices we raise,
It takes our best efforts; there‘s just no two ways;
Then it could be because we’re failing to see,
the real joy that singing should give you and me.
We exhort one another as we sing a song,
It should give us a feeling we truly belong.
Yes, we belong to the King who reigns up above,
We should sing with joy of His wonderful love.
I did notice, too, many failed to obey,
the signs and directions my hands would display.
Some were slumped over, their head in their book,
others raised high through the window to look.
I just know we can sing more sweetly together,
If they’ll all watch my hands instead of the weather.
I’m really concerned as I sit here and ponder,
what does God say of our singing up yonder?
Does He smile as we sing, or … does He say,
“Can they really love Me while they’re singing that way?”

Reverence in Worship

Joel Stephen Williams

The term "worship" in English comes from the Anglo-Saxon "weorthscipe", later "worthship", which means, "to ascribe worth to someone or something". Worship means "reverence or veneration paid to a being or power regarded as supernatural or divine; the action or practice of displaying this by appropriate acts, rites, or ceremonies" (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1933, 12/319-21). Not everything we do in the "worship service" is worship, and in order for it truly to be worship, it must be done in spirit and in truth and in reverence towards God. What can we do in order to be more reverent in Worship?

1. **Preparation.** If we rush to the church building and talk to one another only about secular matters, we will not be able to suddenly turn on a worshipful frame of mind in an instant.

2. **Avoid frivolity.** In order for worship to be authentic, it must be done in a language and in forms that make sense to people. It does not have to be boring, dreary or carried out in a language and methodology of an age already past. However, an attitude of frivolity is not the way to be contemporary. It is not the way to speak in the language and forms of this generation, while being reverent at the same time. One brother recently reported attending two services, both of which were very contemporary in form with lots of new songs. In his opinion, one of the services was very reverent and inspirational while the other was not. The problem, in his opinion, was an attitude of frivolity on the part of the worship leaders, which rubbed off on the congregation as a whole. For example, one song leader said, "Spit out your chewing gum for this next song because it is a fast song".

3. **Focus your thoughts on God.** Worship is praising God and ascribing worth to Him. We cannot do this unless we focus our thoughts on God. Some of the songs we sing must be hymns (which are addressed to God) rather than all of them being Gospel songs (which are addressed to one another). Our prayers must be addressed to God. Avoid allowing public prayer to be used simply for crowd control (to get people quiet) or as an opportunity to preach another sermon.

Worship is a matter of the attitude of our hearts. If we put forth a conscious effort, through the above means and many others, we can make an improvement in the reverence of our worship services. ✝

The Road Less Traveled

David Haddock

The Bible speaks of two paths in life.
One is broad and filled with wickedness and strife,
It's a road often traveled by the majority of men,
It seems filled with enjoyment, but it's also filled with sin.

The broad path seems so fun, but it leads to doom.
This road never gets filled up, for more sinners there's always room.
The world sees this road as the smart way to travel,
But many on this path see their life begin to unravel.

Even though sin may be fun for a season,
The sinner finds his life empty with no rhyme or reason.
But there's a narrower path with a smaller gate;
It leads to life of peace and a better fate.

This narrow path is found by few;
It requires obedience to God and a life that is new.
It's a different way to travel, and to the world it's not sensible;
It requires faith, unselfishness, forgiveness —— things the world finds reprehensible.

This narrower path is filled with goodness and light;
In a world of evil and darkness, it offers an answer to man's plight.
Man's soul is eternal, no matter what some might say;
It's Heaven or Hell on the judgment day.

So make your mind up, and enter in the narrow gate;
No matter what you've done, you can change your fate.
God loves you so much, He wants none to fall,
And that's why He made available the Gospel for all.

David Haddock lives in Clinton, Mississippi, USA

Don't Lie About Your Faith

Jimmy Jividen

Perhaps the strongest condemnation Jesus gave during His personal ministry was to the scribes and Pharisees. The surprising thing about this was that they were religious leaders. The scribes were the literary scholars who studied and wrote the law. The Pharisees were the "pious ones" who sought to keep every jot and tittle of the law. Their sin was hypocrisy. They pretended to be something they were not. Jesus said, "*All that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds, for they say things and do not do them*" (Matthew 23:3).

If a person does not practice what he preaches, he is a hypocrite. He claims to believe something with his words, but contradicts them with his life.

If a person does not practice what he preaches, he is a hypocrite. He claims to believe something with his words, but contradicts them with his life.

John tells of another group of people far different from the Pharisees, but who also were dishonest about their faith. They claimed to know Jesus, but refused to obey His commandments. It is not clear from the text how they claimed to know Him. Perhaps it was through an "emotional experience". Perhaps it was through some secret "mysterious knowledge". Perhaps it was their own wistful thinking. Whatever their claim, it was not valid. John writes, "*The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him*" (1 John 2:4).

To claim to believe in Jesus and not obey His teachings is hypocrisy. To claim to know Jesus and not obey His teachings makes one a liar.

Don't lie about your faith. ✞

Jimmy Jividen is an author and a preacher living in Abilene, Texas, USA.

(Editor's note: Please be praying earnestly for this stalwart of the faith, as well as for his family. He continues to suffer greatly from a very serious disease.)

Growing Toward the Light

Bonnie Rushmore

As one goes out the back door onto the patio along the side of our house, there is a flower bed where three or four small trees/bushes grew. Louis and I decided to move those bushes to the corner of fence that we installed last year. I had planted a rosebush in that location only to discover that it did not get enough light because of the overshadowing trees. So, with some difficulty, we moved the bushes to the fence and the rosebush to the flower bed where it would get more light. This left several feet of bare ground along the house between roses and the cement pad of the patio. So, the natural thing to do was to plant more flowers.

I purchased some lily bulbs and planted them between the rosebush and the steps into the house, stopping about three feet from the steps as that area is overshadowed by the roof. A couple weeks later, the plants started to emerge from the ground. As the plants became taller, they all leaned toward the rosebush. I soon discovered buds and then open blooms on the lilies. However, they are still growing toward the rosebush. I underestimated the amount of light that part of the flower bed is receiving. The lilies are growing toward the rosebush because that

is where the sunlight is most prominent.

This brought a thought to my mind. Are we growing toward the Sonlight of Christ? 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 NKJV). If we are growing toward Jesus, we are walking in the light of righteousness and not in the darkness of evil (1 John 1:6,7).

Remove the shadow of the world from our lives and grow directly toward the Sonlight of Christ, growing and flourishing in His kingdom while on this earth.

Just as the lilies I planted were overshadowed by the roof, blocking the direct sunlight, sometimes we allow the cares of this world to overshadow the direct Sonlight of Christ toward us. Matthew 6:33 states, "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*" The full context (6:25-30) is a lesson on worry. Jesus shows how God cares for the flowers and the birds, and He certainly will provide for our needs as well. We will have the necessities of life — food, shelter, and clothing — if we put God first in our lives and strive to daily walk in the Sonlight of Christ.

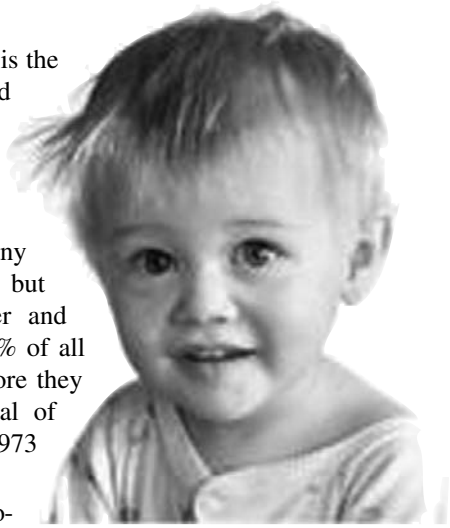
I also realized that even though the lilies did not have direct sunlight, they grew and bloomed because they guided themselves toward the light. They are bent, but they are blooming! As Christians, we may be living our lives with the darkness of the world overshadowing us. We may be doing some good works; however, we are not as effective as we should be since we are *bent toward* the Sonlight not *growing directly toward* Christ. Our Spiritual path has highs, lows, twists, and turns instead of a direct, upward road toward our Heavenly Father.

I may need to move the lilies to another part of the yard where they can receive direct sunlight to flourish and grow. Let us learn from the lilies. Remove the shadow of the world from our lives and grow directly toward the Sonlight of Christ, growing and flourishing in His kingdom while on this earth. ✞

Bonnie Rushmore is a staff writer for the T*he Voice of Truth International* as well as the layout person. She and her husband live in Winona, MS, USA where they and others cooperate to help perpetuate the long-standing missionary work of the late J.C. Choate.

AMERICA'S CONTINUING HOLOCAUST

Ron Boatwright



January 22, 1973 (Roe v. Wade) is the darkest day in the history of the United States. On this day the U.S. Supreme Court made the unconstitutional ruling that killing an unborn baby is an act protected by the Constitution of the United States. It ruled that any woman who wants to kill her alive but unborn baby may do so whenever and however she decides. Since then 23% of all babies in this country are killed before they ever see the light of day. The total of murdered babies in the USA since 1973 is 46 million and climbing.

This legalized murder is called "Pro-Choice", but the baby has no choice. Any unborn child can be doomed to death if his mother deems him an inconvenience or burden to her life. It is argued that any woman has the right to do with her body as she chooses. But the baby she carries is *not* her body. Its life belongs to the body of another human being. An awful inconsistency exists in this country. One can be put into Federal prison for taking and destroying an unhatched American bald eagle egg. Yet one can kill a human child before it is born and receive our government's blessing. *This is insane!* Life is a gift from God. Acts 17:25 says God *"gives to all life, breath, and all things"*.

Proverbs 6:17 says God hates *"hands that shed innocent blood."* What can be more innocent and defenseless than an unborn child? Revelation 21:8 says those who are guilty of murder *"shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone."*

A few of the many ways of killing little innocent babies by abortion include:

1) Suction Aspiration (in the first trimester) uses a sharp instrument to cut up the baby and a powerful suction tube sucks up the baby's body parts and blood. **2) RU 486** (at 5 to 9 weeks) is a drug taken by the mother for the purpose of starving the child and inducing its death. **3) Saline Amniocentesis** (used after the 16th week) a needle injects a concentrated salt solution into the womb. The baby breathes in and swallows the salt and is poisoned to death within an hour. **4) With Partial Birth Abortion** (performed at 6 to 9 months) the baby is pulled out feet first while still alive and kicking, exposing the entire body outside the womb except the head which is purposefully kept inside the womb. A sharp instrument is shoved into the back of the baby's skull which kills it as it kicks and squirms, and then its brains are sucked out with a vacuum tube to finish the killing process. The child's head is then pulled out of the womb and its body is thrown into the trash. This is the reality of murder by abortion, which occurs on the average of every 24 seconds in the United States. During the 1-minute that you took to read this, 2.5 babies were murdered in the abortion mills in the USA in the name of "Pro-Choice". ✞

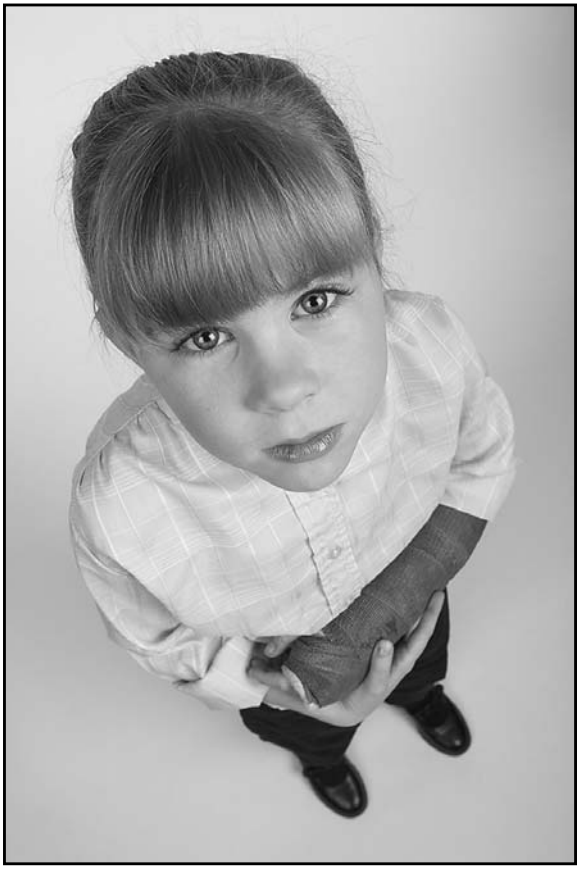
Ron Boatwright is a preacher of the Gospel in Bragg, Oklahoma, USA.

"Before I formed you in the womb
I knew you;
Before you were born
I sanctified you…" (Jeremiah 1:5)

"For You formed my inward parts;
You covered me in my mother's womb.
I will praise You,
for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Marvelous are Your works,
And that my soul knows very well."
(Psalms 139:13,14)

After-birth Atrocities

Brad Harrub



There are certain things that you never expect to see during your own lifetime. These are things either so technologically advanced or maybe so insanely godless that you assume they will not be a reality while you still walk this earth.

Well, one of those has happened. On February 23, 2012 the *Journal of Medical Ethics* published an article titled "After-Birth Abortion: Why Should the Baby Live?" In this article, the authors want to get rid of the term infanticide and begin using the term afterbirth abortion. In the introduction of this article, the authors state: "The authors argue that what we call after-birth abortion (killing a newborn) should be permissible in all cases abortion is, including cases where the newborn is not disabled [parenthesis in orig.]."

While the idea of killing newborns may be something you never thought would happen during your lifetime, consider how desensitized Americans have

become to abortion. Will our children and grandchildren become desensitized to the killing of newborn babies? The authors state: "This means that many non-human animals and mentally retarded human individuals are persons, but that all the individuals who are not in the condition of attributing any value to their own existence are not persons. Merely being a human is not in itself a reason for ascribing someone a right to life". Being human is special! Man was created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26), and we possess souls that will go on into eternity.

Why would men suggest we kill innocent babies? The authors declare: "The alleged right of individuals (such as fetuses and newborns) to develop their potentiality, which someone defends, is over-ridden by the interests of actual people (parents, family, society) to pursue their own well-being because, as we have just argued, merely potential people cannot be harmed by not being brought into existence. Actual people's well-being could be threatened by the new (even if healthy) child requiring energy, money, and care which the family might be in short supply of". In other words, if the baby is an inconvenience in any way, you should be able to kill it. Consider the words found in Proverbs 6:16, *"These six things the Lord hates. Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood."*

Currently our children are sitting at the feet of instructors who are teaching that man evolved from ape-like creatures. Textbooks have replaced God with naturalism and humanism. Our nation and courts have tried their best to outlaw and silence Jehovah God.

Killing children is just the next logical step for a nation that has no absolute standard for right and wrong. While Christians must stand up and fight the atrocity of killing newborns, we must also rise up and address the root of the problem — the reality that God exists and our nation will not stand without Him. The inspired psalmist stated, *"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God"* (Psalm 9:17). We need to remind our communities, coworkers, friends, and family, *"Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people"* (Proverbs 14:34). It is time we teach our children they were created by God. We need to humble ourselves, and seek Him. *"If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land"* (2 Chronicles 7:14). ✞

Brad Harrub works in the field of apologetics, in Brentwood, Tennessee, USA.

We Are a Breath!

Marilyn LaStrape

Job pleads and cries for justice and mercy during his intense suffering. In Job 7:1-7 he says, "*Is there not a time of hard service for man on earth? Are not his days also like the days of a hired man? Like a servant who earnestly desires the shade…So I have been allotted months of futility, and wearisome nights have been appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, 'When shall I arise, and the night be ended? For I have had my fill of tossing till dawn.' My flesh is caked with*

worms and dust, my skin is cracked and breaks out afresh. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. Oh, remember that my life is a breath!" Job says this again in verse 16. "*I loathe my life; I would not live forever, let me alone, for my days are but a breath.*" How long does it take to draw

a breath? In comparison to eternity, that smallest bit of time could be an accurate representation of just how short our lives are!

Job fully acknowledges God's control and life-giving spirit over every living creature. Then he asked this thought-provoking question in Job 12:9-10: "*Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this, in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?*" Elihu, one who reproved Job and his friends, said in Job 34:14-15, "*If He should set His heart on it, if He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish and man would return to the dust.*" A truer statement was never made!

Psalm 78 comprises a survey of the history of the children of Israel. It tells of the marvelous grace of God and is also the sad, sad commentary of Israel's rebellion after He delivered them from Egyptian bondage. It recounts again and again God allowing them to continue to live despite their repeated acts of disobedience. It also reminds us repeatedly that God truly is gracious, longsuffering, and patient. God loves us and wants us in heaven with Him!

Psalm 78:17,18 says, "*But they sinned even more against Him by rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness. And they tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy.*" Verses 21 and 22 say God heard this and was furious because they did not believe Him and did not trust in His salvation. However, God's compassion is displayed once again in verse 38. "*But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath.*"

God's grace and forgiveness that are available to us are far beyond the comprehension of the sharpest and keenest human mind! Psalm 78:39 reveals this: "*For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again*." Psalm 89:47,48 reads, "*Remember how short my time is; for what futility have You created all the children of men? What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the grave?*"

So, what helps us to keep perspective and make an adventure out of living? Our confidence must be in God as we allow Him to lead us through the **land mines** of this sin-cursed fallen world! Solomon says it superbly in Ecclesiastes 5:19,20, "*As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor — this is the gift of God. For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart*." ✞

Marilyn LaStrape and her husband Joseph are members of the church of Christ in Hewitt. Texas, USA.

Satan Hindered Us

Loy Mitchell

"*Brothers, though we have been separated from you for a time (in face, not in heart), we have striven more diligently with intense desire to see your face: we wanted to come to you (I, Paul, indeed more than once), and Satan hindered us*" (1 Thessalonians 2:17,18).

Paul had a great desire to visit the Thessalonians. However, there was a hinderer — Satan! The word "hinder" means to impede or interrupt. We do not know the exact nature of this hindrance. However, Paul recognized it as the work of Satan.

"Anything which hinders God's messengers from doing the work of the kingdom may rightly be viewed as the work of Satan" (Raymond Kelcy).

LOVE FOR THE THINGS OF THE WORLD CAN HINDER US.

"That which was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the message, but the worry of the times and the deceitfulness of riches choke the message, and he bears no fruit" (Matthew 13:22).

"But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world and can take nothing out; and since we have food and clothes, let us be content with these" (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

LOVE FOR THE PLEASURES OF THE FLESH CAN HINDER US.

"Do not love the world, neither the things in the world. If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him; because all that is in the world, the desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eyes, and the pride in one's possessions, is not of the Father, but is of the world. The world is passing away, and its desire, but he who does God's will abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

LOVE OF SELF CAN HINDER US.

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross, and let him follow me. Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24,25).

Friends, Satan is active. He wants us to be interrupted or stopped from doing God's work.

Let us make sure that our love for pleasures, possessions, and self will not be used by Satan to hinder the work of God. ✞

Loy Mitchell, former missionary to Zimbabwe, now lives in Dyersburg, Tennessee, USA, as he continues to be involved in the work in Zimbabwe.

Cents or Sense?

Paul Clements

Did you know you can hold a coin so close to your eye that you can't see anything but the coin? However, if you move the coin away from your eye, it becomes much "smaller" and the world around it becomes "larger". It is all a matter of perspective, and *you* determine that perspective.

It is also noteworthy that sometimes things become much too important to us, and we pass on that perspective to those around us (e.g., our children). We even let things come between God and us. Not good! In regard to proper perspective, money and possessions do not need to have first place in our lives. One writer said, "Getting all we can and canning all we get," can become an obsession. Nobody should be rebuked for being industrious and hardworking, but when the making and collecting of money and possessions becomes an end in itself, rather than a means to serve God and provide for our family, then we are holding the coin too close to our eye. It restricts our vision, our perspective.

The Bible says, "*The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith…*" (1 Timothy 6:10). Notice the passage does not say "Money is the root of all kinds of evil," but rather *the love of money* is the problem. One does not have to have a lot of money to love it. Could this qualify as covetousness? Covetousness is the inordinate desire to have something. So yes, the love of money could fall into the category of covetousness. To covet is a sin (Colossians 3:5). Have you ever heard of anyone confessing to be guilty of the sin of covetousness? Rarely, if ever have I heard such. I guess none of us have a problem with this sin.

Yet, we hear children of God who think money, talk money, and live money. We see members of the church who forsake their spiritual responsibilities, forsake the assembly, neglect their families, or destroy their health for money. Yet, nobody has a problem with covetousness, right?

This ought to make us think, huh? Remember, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*" (Matthew 6:21). Take care to beware. ✞

5-Minute Bible Study

Idol Worship

Paula Bates

1. Do NOT become _____ as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and _____, and rose up to _____." 1 Corinthians 10:7
2. _____ said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign ____ that are among you, _____ yourselves, and change your garments. Genesis 35:2
3. You shall have NO other _____ before me. Exodus 20:3 (First of 10 Commandments)
4. There shall be NO _____ god among you: Nor shall you _____ any foreign god. Psalms 81:9
5. Now while _____ waited for them at _____, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to _____. Acts 17:16
6. He who _____ shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be MY _____. But the cowardly, _____, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, _____, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the _____ _____. Revelations 21:7, 8

Answers:

1. Idolaters, drink, play
2. Jacob, gods, purify
3. gods
4. Foreign, worship
5. Paul, Athens, idols
6. Overcomes, son, unbelieving, idolaters, second death

The State of the Children

Rebecca Rushmore

The conversation in my classroom one day went something like this.

Teacher: "This is the chess set my dad used to teach me how to play chess. That is a chess set like you buy today."

Student 1: "Is that the same dad that is with your mom overseas right now? Your real mom and dad?"

Teacher: "Yes, my parents. They have been married for 38 years."

Student 1: (Facial expression shows amazement/disbelief.)

Student 2: "They didn't get a divorce? I thought you were supposed to get divorced after a couple of years."

Yes, both of these students were completely serious. None of the other students indicated they disagreed with the statements made by the first two. Do you understand what happened? Six students, ages 12-13, find it uncommon for a couple to be married 38 years and believe marriages are supposed to end in divorce on a regular basis!

Why is this such a big deal? Consider the following ideas.

First, divorce and remarriage are so common in the United States that many do not realize God's plan. In Genesis 2:24, God instituted marriage with these words, "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*" When Jesus taught during His earthly ministry, He repeated this statement to the Pharisees when they questioned Him about divorce. Matthew 19:1-9 records this encounter and includes further information on God's plan. Verse 9 states, "*And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.*" God stipulates sexual immorality as the only reason for divorce and remarriage. The one who divorces and remarries for any reason other than sexual immorality, the one who committed the sexual immorality, and the one who may marry the one guilty of sexual immorality are all guilty of adultery. In Matthew 19, the example is given of a man divorcing his wife; however, Mark 10:1-12 shows that divorce is not God's plan, no matter who

begins the process. As the children in the local congregation can tell you, "God's plan for marriage is one man, for one woman, for life!"

Second, **if Christian parents do not instill in their children God's view on marriage and other moral issues, the world will instill other values in them.** Gone are the days when television shows like *Little House on the Prairie*, *The Waltons* and *Leave It to Beaver* flowed over the airwaves. These shows displayed families who worked together, worked through problems, and generally worked at becoming good, moral people. Many of the shows on today's television stations depict single parent homes, children and adults who manipulate to get what they want, and a general lack of moral behavior. Hollywood stars and sports heroes often make headlines with multiple marriages or live-in relationships, immoral, and illegal behavior. In Deuteronomy 6:6-9, the Israelites received instruction to teach their children about God at every opportunity. Luke 2:52 shows that the boy Jesus "*increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men*." Mary and Joseph carried out the commands of Deuteronomy 6. The mother and grandmother of Timothy practiced this as well (2 Timothy 1:5). Today's Christian parents must follow the examples of Mary, Joseph, and Timothy's mother and grandmother.

Parents cannot rely on weekly attendance at Bible class and worship to fill a child's mind with biblical teachings; that is only about four hours each week at best. If the average child sleeps about eight hours each night, in the course of a week, the media and school have the opportunity to claim their minds the remaining 108 hours. Which do you think will make the biggest impact, 4 hours or 108 hours? Redeem as many of those 108 hours as you can for the Lord (Ephesians 5:16).

The state of the children in my class shows some pretty distorted views on marriage (and other topics), probably based on personal experience. Not all children that age have the same distorted views. However, if even one of a child's friends has similar views, that child is at risk to accept those views if someone else does not lay a solid foundation of God's truth (Matthew 7:24-28; Luke 6:48,49).

The children of today will be the leaders of the church tomorrow. Like Paul instructed Timothy, faithful Christian parents need to teach children now so they can lead the church tomorrow and teach the generation to follow (2 Timothy 2:2). What is the state of your children? Do they have a solid foundation in God's Word, know, love and obey God? If not, what are you going to do about it? ✝

Rebecca Rushmore worships with the Collierville Church of Christ in Collierville, TN, USA, and she participates in stateside and overseas mission trips.

Parents Are the Key

Ferman Carpenter

There are three God-ordained institutions in the world. These are the home, the church, and the government. The home is the oldest of these institutions, and is second in importance only to the church. If the Lord's church and the civil government are going to be as God would have them, the home must be as God would have it, and **parents are the key**.

In the home a child receives the foundation training for life in this world and for eternity. Parents need to realize that their children did not ask to be here, and as the parents, they are responsible for their children's presence in this world. The influence a child receives in the home will determine where he will spend eternity. This is a sobering thought and an awesome responsibility, and **parents are the key.**

If parents are to do the job that God wants done, then they must begin at the very start of life. Far too often, they wait until their children get older to begin training, only to find them already set in their ways. A great lesson is taught by Manoah, the father of Samson. When Manoah learned that he and his wife were going to be blessed with a son, he asked, "*How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?*" (Judges 13:12). He was concerned, even before the child was conceived. Many parents become involved in developing their children in the physical realm, but have little or no concern when it comes to their development in the spiritual realm. The results being, when their children grow up, they are more concerned about the physical than the spiritual.

The Bible gives parents clear instructions on training their children. Solomon wrote, "*Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it*" (Proverbs 22:6). Paul wrote, "*Provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4). It is significant that both Solomon and Paul stressed the fact that parents are to "train up" and "bring up". That means parents are ultimately responsible for training their children, and not society, not the church, not schools, and not childcare centers. Moreover, the time to start training children is not when parents are more "financially secure", but from the time they are babies, and for as long as they are in our care and under our supervision.

Much of society today is immoral. The public schools, government, entertainment, and advertisers seem intent on pulling mankind away from God. We cannot *isolate* our children from sin, but we can *insulate* them against it. We

have accepted the challenge by becoming parents, and now we must accept the responsibility of being Godly parents. Christ said in John 15:19, "*Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.*" But if parents don't teach that to their children, then who will? **PARENTS ARE THE KEY!** ✞

Ferman Carpenter preaches for the Westhill congregation in Corsicana, Texas, USA.

Mother and Father Forsake

Mark McWhorter

The love of a mother and father is one of the greatest and most forceful things in the world. In most instances, mothers and fathers will do almost anything for their children. Parents also believe that they are parents as long as they live and as long as their children live.

However, sometimes parents will forsake a child. It may be because they do not have proper love. It may be because their child has done something that they cannot accept. The child may have done some terrible thing.

Yet, sometimes it may not be because the child has done something terrible. There are times that a parent may forsake a child for the wrong reason. A parent may not properly understand something the child has done or believes. In biblical times, many people did not believe in the One True God. They did not believe in Jesus. When a child decided to follow God, the parents may have forsaken the child.

"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up" (Psalm 27:10). David stated that, even if his parents forsook him, God would not. God is our Heavenly Father. He will never forsake us if we are true to Him.

In Mark 10:29-30, we read, *"And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions: and in the world to come eternal life."*

While parents may forsake a child for believing in Christ, that child will have many older Christians who will treat him as if he were their child. Other Christians his age will treat him as if he were a brother or sister, and younger Christians will look up to him as if he were their father. Best of all, the Heavenly Father will give that person eternal life in heaven. ✞

Fathers That Stay

Jack W. Carter

I remember when my father worked all day for one dollar. He also walked several miles to and from work to save the three-cent streetcar fare. When he was injured and had to spend some time in the hospital, he always saved the fruit they gave him so that he could give it to his children. He had very little to offer as far as material things were concerned, but he did something that many fathers did not do during the terrible depression — he stayed!

He stayed to lead the prayer at supper time, to play sandlot softball, kick-the-can, run-sheep-run, and other games with us. He stayed to help us fix our toys and create new ones from scraps of wood, metal, and string. He stayed to put cardboard in our shoes when the soles wore through. He stayed to trim our hair and to discipline us when needed. He was there to help us develop a proper work ethic, to know the meaning of responsibility, trustworthiness, and dependability. He was not a perfect father by any means, but he was there in such a way that even his imperfections taught valuable lessons.

Sadly, even fewer fathers are staying now than the number who stayed during the Great Depression. The reason is largely different. Today it is mostly because families simply get in the way of the craving for self-indulgence. The National Organization of Women hasn't helped, with their constant husband and father degrading tactics. A spokeswoman for this organization admitted that this had contributed to the deterioration of the home. Then, with amazing brazenness, she said, "We made a mistake with our tactics, but we will take steps to correct the situation," as though the rise or fall of the male role depends upon the fundamental principles of this feminist movement. Also, if a mistake was made initially, how can we be confident that the proposed cure will fare better? ✝

Jack W. Carter is a preacher of the Gospel and lives in McAlester, Oklahoma, USA.

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Heirs Together of the Grace of Life

Dwight Fuqua

Our marriages are under fire. The pressures of modern society are bombarding our homes. Established moral landmarks are being moved.

The national divorce rate has reached epidemic proportions. Even Christian homes are feeling the strain and some are breaking up. It has touched all of our lives.

Christian couples should have everything going for them. Bible study, prayer, and religious discussions in our homes should be a daily boost to our spirituality. Involvement in the work of the church should give us mutual purpose. Public worship should instruct in and strengthen our commitment to Divine values. Our relationship with God should solidify our relationship with each other.

Our homes should not only be a haven from the storm, but a spiritual launching pad. In their most intimate of relationships, husband and wife can help each other serve the Lord. Adam needed a "*helper comparable to him*" (Genesis 2:18). When God created Eve, He did so with the intent that they help each other in every area of life — especially the spiritual.

The same is true in your marriage. Christian couples should be "*heirs together of the grace of life*" (1 Peter 3:7). This objective requires more than just living together. It requires love, honor, submission, understanding, forgiveness, and hard work. Your marriage is a covenant between the two of you, and the very foundation of your relationship is commitment — your commitment to God and to each other.

Your love for each other is to be like Christ's love for the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). It is to be sacrificial and enduring. Keep your love flowing. Look for (make) opportunities to show your love. Do not allow daily distractions to keep you from expressing your love. Never stop loving and growing and serving together. After all, you are *"Heirs together of the grace of life."* ✞

Dwight Fuqua preaches for the Findlay congregation in Sparta, Tennessee, USA.

Home As God Would Have It

Randall Caselman

"Home" is God's word for heaven on earth. When things are right in the home, there is no place we would rather be. When things are right at home, the whole world is a better place. Thoughts of home stir the heart, tug at the soul; visions of a fireplace, the warmth of parents, love, safety, security, peace. Home is suppertime and the smell of homemade bread, popcorn, peanut butter cookies. Home is a place of sharing, loving, caring, knowing that all is right, no matter how bad the day has been.

We must understand that healthy, happy, functional Christian homes do not happen by accident. They are a result of work and discipline. Home is where Christian principles are not only taught, they are modeled. I remember praying with Mother before I went to school and seeing Daddy with a Bible in his lap each evening. Yes, we had more Bible than television. I can remember my parents talking about what was right and wrong and how to apply the Word to life. I never remember a conversation about how to make more money, how to further their careers, how to keep up with the neighbors. **Family, as God would have it, is no accident; it is a result of God-centered living.**

Abraham was chosen by God because, in His foreknowledge, God knew that he and Sarah would make good parents. And they did. Paul tells us that Abraham was such a father that he became known as the Father of the Faithful. What a tribute to Abraham and Sarah! What a challenge to us to be better parents. We can do it! God will equip us. He will bless us, assist us, guide us if we want Him to, allow Him to, ask Him to.

We hear a lot of talk today about family values. "Family values" has become a nebulous phrase, twisted to mean a host of different things, depending upon the individual using it. I am not interested in promoting our politicians' ideas, but Abrahamic family values, biblical values for the home. We must return to an interest

in how to get our children out of the womb, into the home, into the church, and on their way to heaven; become parents of the faithful or we become family failures. How do we do it?

Place God first. At Sinai it was "*no other gods before Me*." Jesus said, "*Love God with all your heart, body, mind, and soul*." In the Sermon on the Mount, He said, "*Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven.*"

Love your spouse. Love the wife as Christ loved the church. No relationship on earth is as important as husband and wife; not job, not education, not investments, not children, not friends — nothing! We will not be great parents until we become great lovers. Dysfunctional children come from dysfunctional parents, most often a result of a lack of love for one another. The greatest gift we can give our children is to love our spouse with an unrivaled love.

Genuinely love our children. God never gave the responsibility of raising our children to the government, to the local school board, to the day-care center, or to the church. Our children's spiritual, cultural, social, educational, financial, and physical welfare is biblically placed upon our shoulders as parents, and any attempt to remove that responsibility and place it elsewhere is against God's will.

If we allow today's public educational system to take over our responsibility for raising our children, they very well may become atheists, because the schools can't talk about God. It's against the law. We must work to restore Abrahamic family values, to become fathers of the faithful.

Prioritize Vocation. Scripture teaches that a man who will not provide for his family is worse than an infidel. Most of us are not guilty here. What we are guilty of is placing career before God and family. We have allowed the world to squeeze us into its mold. We fathers have been guilty of this for a long time, and now mothers are falling for the same devilish scheme. If I had my life to live over, I would change very little. However, I must apologize to my wife and children for placing career over them too many times. That's sad, sinful, and wrong. Don't make this mistake.

Family values, Abrahamic, biblical values, becoming parents of the faithful — that's a home as God would have it. ✞

Randall Caselman preaches for the Bella Vista Church of Christ in Bentonville, Arkansas, USA.

Is Your Home As God Would Have It?

Why Marriages Fail

Bill Dillon

A little girl of eight years looked up from a book of fairy tales and asked her father, "Does m-i-r-a-g-e spell marriage?" The wise father reflected upon numerous unhappy marriages he was aware of and replied, "Yes, dear, that's one way of spelling it — the way used by many, I fear."

Unfortunately for millions of homes, marriage is all too often a mirage. The beautiful vows so full of tender meanings spoken on the wedding day sadly change to echoes of a hollow mockery. Why? Why do hopes of marital bliss so often dissolve into strife and discord? Why do marriages become mirages? Divorce records reveal some striking similarities in marriage failures. Marriages fail because of:

1. A lack of appreciation — Terms of endearment will insure that even the least favor will never be taken for granted. The toils and burdens of making a living, raising a family and carrying out the daily grind of responsibilities frequently seal the lips to words of gratitude and praise. One said, "A compliment a day will keep divorce away." It is disillusioning to any hard-working wife or problem-burdened husband to be taken for granted. Like a tender plant, a marriage must be nurtured in the sunlight of approval and refreshed by the moisture of praise. A word of appreciation costs so little; it means so much.

2. A lack of loyalty — A husband and wife must maintain feelings of loyalty to each other. A wife must feel that her husband is on her side reconfirming her decisions, taking up for her and supporting her all the way.

It is never a laughing matter when a wife criticizes or ridicules her husband before others. Neither husbands nor wives should ever discuss a spouse's limitations in public. None of us are perfect. To tell the truth, we are so terribly imperfect that we would be miserable if we had to live with a perfect person.

There must also be a loyalty to the Lord, above all else. God is the "super-glue" that can hold a marriage together.

3. Lack of love — Love is not to be equated with lust. The divorce courts are littered with the wreckage of homes that were built on physical attraction alone. Marriage is not a kiddy game; it is for those who are courageous enough to live life the way it was meant to be lived. Marriage is not for petty personalities, or for puny peeves and poutings. It is for mature men and women of vision, faith, and mental toughness.

No marriage can endure without patience to perform the routine tasks of family life over and over again; and kindness to oil the machinery of daily relationships; and humility to apologize when appropriate.

In the building of a good marriage the road winds uphill much of the way, but the view from the top makes all the effort worthwhile.

Don't let your marriage fail! ✞

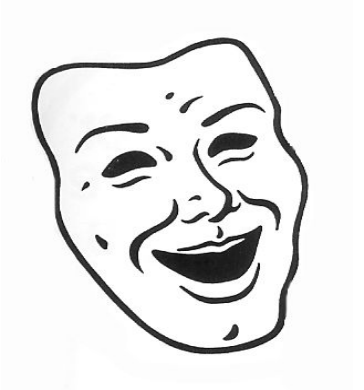
Bill Dillon is the Editor of *Gospel Gleaner* and preaches for the Lord's church in Hickory Ridge, Arkansas, USA.

What Have They Seen in Your House?

Ernest S. Underwood

King Hezekiah had been sick, and an envoy from Babylon came under the pretense of checking on his health. In a moment of false pride, the king showed him all of his riches and treasures. Later, God's prophet Isaiah came to him and asked this stirring question: *"What have they seen in your house?"* What a question, one that can aptly be applied today in a different sense. What can be found in our houses? Can those things, whether objects or attitudes that God calls an abomination, be found there? Can beer, whisky, illegal drugs be found there? What about pornographic material? Are there things there that will harm the children's minds and warp their attitudes towards things holy?

On the other side of the coin, do you and your family have an abundance of reading and study material to help you learn more about proper moral and ethical living? If there is a Bible in your house, is it well-worn by constant use, or is it just a place to store baby pictures and mementos? One last question: If Jesus were coming in Person to your house today, are there some things that you would be ashamed for Him to see? ✞



"How did the wedding go?" asked the preacher's wife.

"Just fine until I asked the bride if she would obey, and she said, 'Do you think I'm nuts?' and the groom said, 'I do,' and then things really began to happen fast."

A firefighter was working on the engine outside the station when he noticed a little girl next door in a little red wagon with little ladders hung off the side and a garden hose tightly coiled in the middle. The girl was wearing a firefighter's helmet and had the wagon tied to a dog and a cat. The firefighter walked over to take a closer look.

"That sure is a nice fire truck," the firefighter said with admiration.

"Thanks," the little girl said.

The firefighter looked a little closer and noticed the girl had tied the wagon to the dog's collar and to the cat's tail.

"Little partner," the firefighter said, "I don't want to tell you how to run your fire truck, but if you were to tie that around the cat's collar, I think you could go faster."

The little girl calmly replied, "You're probably right, but then I wouldn't have a siren."

Three older gals were at the doctor for a cognitive reasoning test. The doctor says to the first woman, "What is three times three?"

"297," was her prompt reply.

"Ummm hum," says the doctor.

He then says to the second lady, "It's your turn now. What is three times three?"

She answers, "Friday."

"Ummm humm…" The doc then says to the third gal, "Okay, ma'am, your turn. What's three times three?"

"Nine," she says.

"That's wonderful!" says the doc. "Tell me, how did you get that?"

She says, "It's simple. I just subtracted 297 from Friday!"

One day a father was reading his paper. His young son came in and asked, "Dad, will you take me to the zoo tomorrow?"

"No," said the father. "If they want you, they can come and get you."

The village blacksmith finally found an apprentice willing to work hard at low pay for long hours.

The smithy immediately began his instructions to the lad. "When I take the shoe out of the fire, I'll lay it on the anvil, and when I nod my head, you hit it with this hammer."

The apprentice did just as he was told. Now he's the village blacksmith.

A woman decided to have her portrait painted. She told the artist, "Paint me with diamond rings, a diamond necklace, emerald bracelets, a ruby broach, and a gold Rolex."

"But you aren't wearing any of those things," he replied.

"I know," she answered. "It's in case I should die before my husband. You see, I'm sure he will remarry right away, and I want his new wife to go crazy looking for the jewelry!"

A grandfather bought a hobby horse by mail order as a birthday present for his granddaughter. The toy arrived in 189 pieces. The instructions said that it could be put together in an hour. However, it took the old man two days to assemble the toy.

Finally, when it was all put together, he wrote a check, cut it into 189 pieces, and mailed it off to the company.

Time

Alex Gibson

Do any of you know how poison works? It seldom happens like in the movies where someone just falls over dead. Often a person who has been poisoned may look like he is sick, and he may look that way for a long time before he dies.

"Why is that important?" you may ask. It's easy. Think back on your history lessons to the earliest civilizations. Often there are two features that we see of their remains: their tombs and their temples. In Egypt the pyramids and obelisks; in Greece, there are tombs and temples, as well as numerous statues of gods and goddesses. In Europe you have churches and cathedrals and catacombs. But what do we have in America today? No, we don't build the huge temples of the past, and sometimes our church buildings can hardly be distinguished from other public meeting places. I've seen some that stand out, but having been from the Atlantic to the Pacific, there's been a number of times where, without a sign, I wouldn't have known if I was looking at a church building or a hair salon.

So am I saying we need to pour our money into huge church buildings that stand out and are impressive? Not a chance. But you can see that, in the ancient world, their gods were important to them. My question becomes, "How important is our God to us? Is He worth dying for? Is He worth fighting for?" I should hope so. Sadly, though, in today's world, people are being more and more lured away from meaningful things to entertainment, even in religion.

Now I'm not one to bash a good time. I spend a lot of time with my wife. And I enjoy riding my motorcycle — truly a good time. But what if that was all

I did, just relaxed all day every day and never worked? It wouldn't be too long before I'd be fat and lazy, up to my eyeballs in bills, and having my freedoms taken away.

Yeah, well what if I kept a healthy balance between work and play but never gave time to God? That kind of imbalance is spiritual poison and results eventually in spiritual death. You become more drawn into your own world and all the things in it, while the time spent with God becomes less and less. You slowly lose control over yourself, and you may become more angry or maybe let some language slip, or give in to temptation. You are slowly drifting and becoming spiritually sick.

And that is what is happening today in the world. Need proof? The new "Call of Duty" game came out some time ago, and I know over a dozen who were at the store at midnight to buy it. The Twilight or Harry Potter books and movies have a similar effect. I can find videos on YouTube that have over 9 million hits. Then there are TV shows to consider.

So let me ask you, how much time did you spend today with God versus your entertainment? I'm guilty of letting the entertainment win by a huge margin. I spend time during the day listening to music, surfing the internet, and riding the bike, but less time studying about God and praying. So you see the problem in the life of the typical Christian. What does that do? It is a kind of poison to the soul. It creates distance, so that God's voice through His Word and in our consciences is too quiet to hear over an Ipod.

The thrust here is that people are killing their spiritual walks by poisoning themselves with entertainment. They become consumed by the "here and now" of things and don't stop to give back to God. Often times, that phrase is taken in reference to *money* but here I mean it with *time*. Pure and undefiled religion is helping the orphans, widows, and needy of this world (James 1:27). It's showing love to others, and that often has a price tag of *time*. Simply throwing money at people will not help them much, nor will it bring you closer to the antidote to distraction. That comes from sitting down and spending time with God and then going out and doing something about it with those around you. I promise you live near someone, and that if you take the time to get to know him you'll find some way to show him God's love and so get to know Him better in the process. Try it and don't be shy. *"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind"* (2 Timothy 1:7). Please feel free to share any feed back or ideas. God bless. ✞

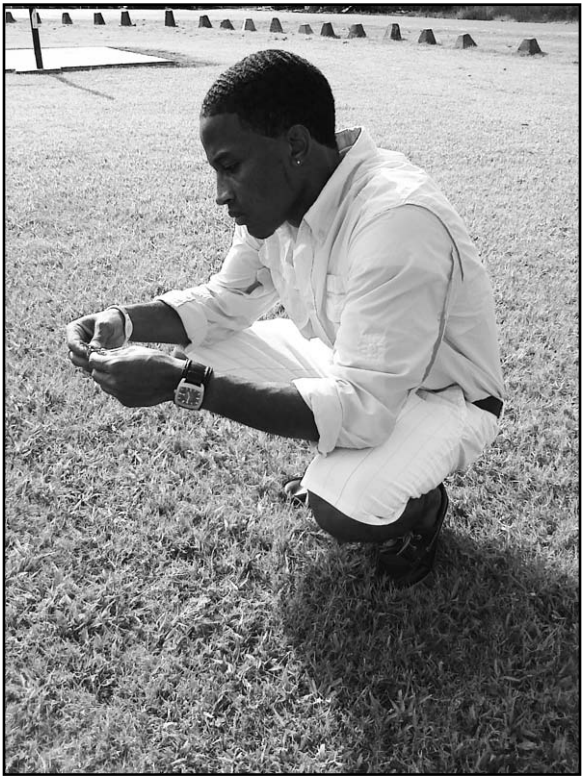
Alex Gibson: zex1@hotmail.com

The Church of Christ Is Right!

Stephen Gill

Like others, I read many Scriptures from Psalms and Proverbs, believing that in reading and applying such, that heaven would be awaiting my arrival when this life was over. I also preached the Gospel for two years from a non-denominational/ Baptist standpoint, in which I came up with lessons based on what I had heard from other non-denominational preachers and the few passages I read. Yes, you heard it, "Read", but never ***studied*** to show myself approved.

In the spring of 2011, I enrolled in Mississippi Delta Community College, where many doors of opportunity began to open for me. My best friend, Jeremy Harris, knew my zeal for God's Word and encouraged me to visit the Christian Student Center on campus, where an elderly white couple would give their last dime in order to get a student to sit down and study God's Word with them. Although in the past, I had persecuted the church of Christ like the apostle Paul, I managed to reach within the depth of my spirit for strength to learn what the church believes and teaches.



The first time I met Gene and Madolyn Gibson, Madolyn asked,

"Stephen, what brought you back to Mississippi?"

My reply was, "God spoke to me and told me to come back."

Her eyes watered as she looked at me and said, "We would really like to study with you."

Like many so-called Christians, I perceived that she did not believe that I was a true prophet and that God spoke to me. To this very day I sit back and laugh because I now know that God speaks only through His written Word. After months of prayer, I decided that if anyone would stay up to midnight, studying the Word with students, it was worth giving them a chance to study with me.

"My opinion and yours don't have any foundation, so let's allow God's Word to speak up for itself," Gene explained. As we studied the book of Acts, the second chapter, I began to see God's plan for salvation for that certain generation and for all the generations to come. The apostles received the gift of the Holy Ghost to perform miracles, and to speak in other tongues (languages) in order to confirm the Gospel and salvation through Jesus Christ only.

All of this was all done so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled. First Corinthians 13:10 speaks about the time period in which prophecies and other tongues (languages) would cease. Now that we have received the perfect, complete, and holy Word of God, there is no longer a need for prophets and tongues confirming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We hold it already within our hands in the form of God's Book — the Bible.

There is also no longer a need for a man standing in a pulpit saying that he would heal an individual, only if they support his ministry with x-amount of dollars, because only those first century apostles, and those to whom God allowed them to give spiritual gifts, had the power to miraculously heal the sick and raise the dead. John 14 speaks about Jesus informing His apostles concerning the time when they would receive those gifts.

Further, neither Jesus, Paul, nor Peter ever took payments for healing. The only thing they asked was faith in the Son of Man and faithful living after the people were healed. So if there's anyone today who claims to possess these gifts spoken about in the New Testament, please have him stop by your local hospital and heal those with cancer and diabetes, instead of charging people for entertainment.

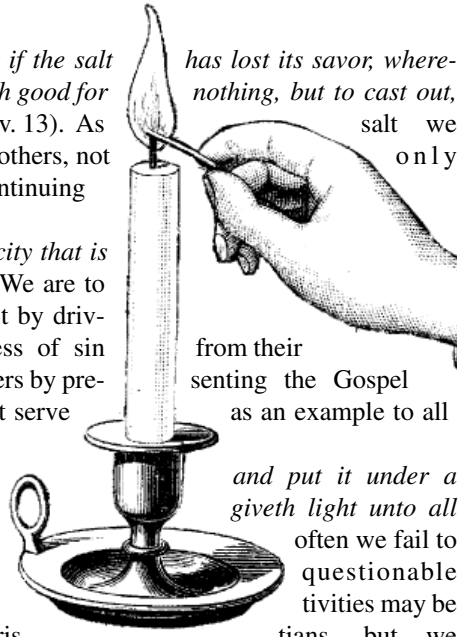
On September 7, 2011, I was baptized into Christ and was added to the church. I thank God through Jesus concerning that elderly couple that directed me to the narrow way by the guidance of God's Word. ✞

Stephen Gill is a student at Mississippi Delta College in Morehead, Mississippi, USA.

Let Your Light Shine

A Commentary on Matthew 5:13-16

Dale Grissom



"*Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men*" (v. 13). As salt we are to have a preserving influence on others, not only in bringing them to Christ, but as a continuing influence in their lives.

"*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid*" (v. 14). We are to be the light that leads others to Christ by driving away ignorance and the darkness of sin from their lives. Not only must we enlighten others by presenting the Gospel of Christ, but our Christian lives must serve as an example to all with whom we come in contact.

"*Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house*" (v. 15). Far too often we fail to let our lights shine. Those who go to questionable places or engage in questionable activities may be trying to hide the fact that they are Christians, but we must constantly be aware that the lives we live are to be a reflection of Christ. It is important that, in every aspect of our lives, others see Him living in us.

"*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*" (v. 16). Good works must be apparent daily in our lives. Our love for Christ is shown in the keeping of His commandments; our love for the souls of others is evident when we teach them what they must do to be saved.

May the joy of being a Christian always be evident in our lives. ✞

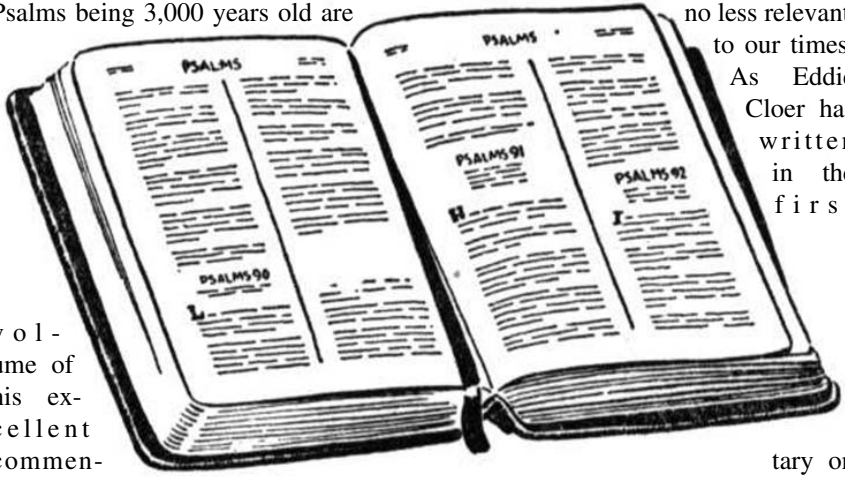
Dale Grissom works with the church of Christ in Dexter, Missouri, USA.

The Book of Psalms

Dennis Gulledge

Perhaps no Old Testament book has served so well in our private devotions as the Book of Psalms. How often have we turned to it for comfort and instruction over the years? There are those times in our lives when a close reading of Psalm 23 is purely therapeutic. Certain chapters may receive more attention than do others for various reasons, but the entire book is inspired of God and profitable for our instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

When I was a graduate student in the late 1970s, I well remember a course in the Psalms taught by the late brother Hugo McCord. He pointed out that the Psalms being 3,000 years old are no less relevant to our times. As Eddie Cloer has written in the first volume of his excellent commentary on the Book of Psalms, "While circumstances have changed and people have changed, amazingly the psalms have remained relevant. People in all ages have found their own emotions, struggles, and prayers voiced in them. Is this fact not proof of the divine inspiration of the Book of Psalms?" (*Truth For Today Commentary*, Psalms 1-50, p. 6).



In the King James Version of the Bible, the title is simply given as, "The Book of Psalms". The Hebrew title is Tehillim, meaning, "praises, hymns or songs". The Greek title is Psalmoi, from which we get the English word Psalms. Putting these two sentiments together, we have "Psalms of Praise". By way of

earned tribute, the book is called, "The Songbook of the Bible".

It is from the Book of Psalms that some seek authority for instrumental music in the worship. It is, however, an exercise in futility. The noun form of Psalmoi (above) is the Greek word psallo. From this the famous "psallo argument" is constructed. The basic meaning of psallo is "to touch". In the Old Testament, it referred to touching the strings of a harp (Psalms 33:2; 71:22). The New Testament writers, however, never employ the Greek word psallo in the sense of playing stringed instruments (especially in worship). In the Koine Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written, psallo refers only to singing. In Ephesians 5:19, it is used figuratively of touching the heart-strings, "*making melody in the heart unto the Lord*".

Of particular interest to some are the subtitles (superscriptions) that appear at the heads of 116 chapters in the Book of Psalms. For example, the subtitle at the beginning of Chapter 3 says, "*A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son*". The subtitles appear as headings between the title and the text in our English Bible. In the Hebrew Bible, however, the subtitle comprises the first verse of the chapter. The subtitles will typically tell the author of the psalm [David, Aseph, etc.], something about the historical setting behind the psalm (Psalm 34), what are believed to be ancient musical notations [i.e. "Aijeleth," "Gittith," "Muthlabben," "Nehiloth," or "Sheminith" or the particular use of the Psalm] (Psalm 30). Whereas the subtitles are informative, they are not considered to be a part of the inspired text of the book of Psalms. ✝

Perhaps no Old Testament book has served so well in our private devotions as the Book of Psalms. How often have we turned to it for comfort and instruction over the years? There are those times in our lives when a close reading of Psalm 23 is purely therapeutic. Certain chapters may receive more attention than do others for various reasons, but the entire book is inspired of God and profitable for our instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Dennis Gulledge is the preacher for the Mabelvale Church of Christ in Mabelvale, Arkansas, USA.

What is a "Renewed" Mind?

Ardron Hinton

The challenge of Romans 12:2 is to avoid being shaped by the world around you by being shaped instead through the renewing of your mind. To do this, we would need to know what a "renewed" mind is. Looking around us, it should be obvious that allowing current human notions to shape our thinking is dangerous. The only really likely alternative is to be reshaped in our thinking by something better than popular, human nonsense. Notice the context of our verse to get an idea of what a "renewed" mind is like. We really need to know.

According to 12:1, this renewed mind obviously has self-discipline, because it has the body under enough control to make all of life a "living sacrifice" that is "*holy, acceptable to God*". Verse 2 adds the thought that this renewed mind is well-informed, since we are told that it is committed to proving "*what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*". Verse 3 gives humility as another characteristic by calling on the disciple of Christ "*not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think*". Coupled with this is the command to use our faith to do some serious and reasonable thinking. Verses 4 through 8 suggest that this renewed mind will be reasonable and cooperative, making the person truly helpful as a coworker and one willing to bear responsibility.

Beginning in verse 9 is a call to love others sincerely and actually to put this love into practical application daily. A number of these applications are mentioned, including being affectionate and caring, being willing to share others' feelings, to avoid high-mindedness, and overcoming evil with good rather than being vengeful.

A "renewed" mind is one that has been shaped by God's ways rather than by the popular but foolish thinking of the moment offered by human society. It is a mind committed to spiritual improvement and growth. If we are not actually working at having a "renewed" mind, then by default we'll have a mind that simply fits the mold of the world around it. Romans 12 is a challenge to give your mind a good check-up. ✞

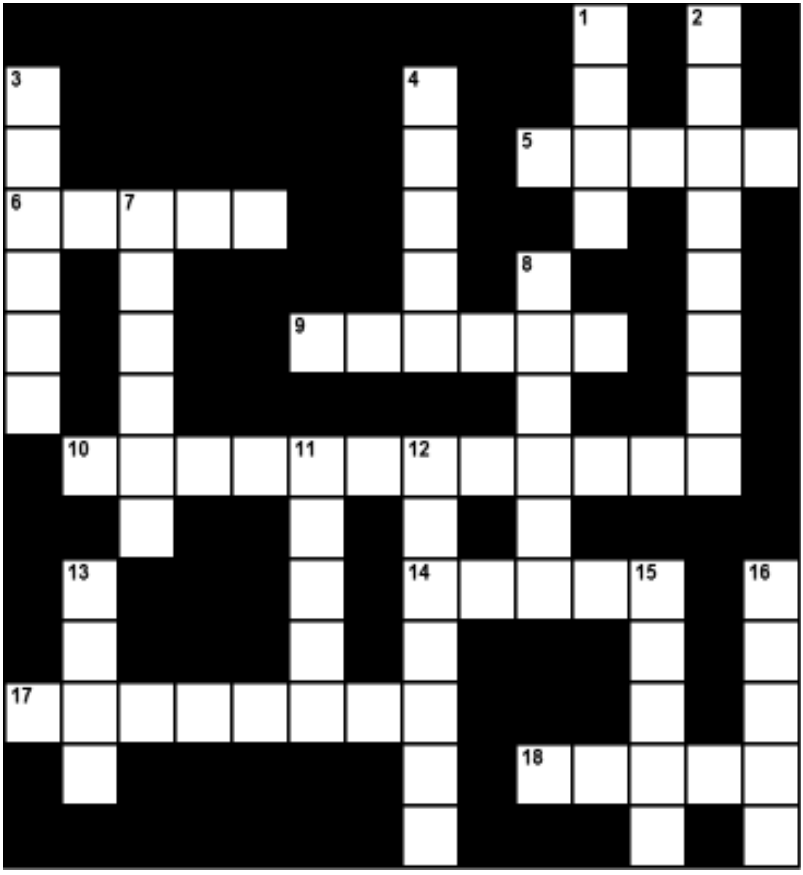
Ardron Hinton is a preacher of the Gospel living in Blair, Oklahoma, USA.

Bible Find

Hebrews 11

Bonnie Rushmore

Hebrews Chapter 11 is often called the "Bible Hall of Fame". The Hebrews writer states that each individual listed in this puzzle accomplished great deeds by his faith. Use the *New King James Version* for clues.

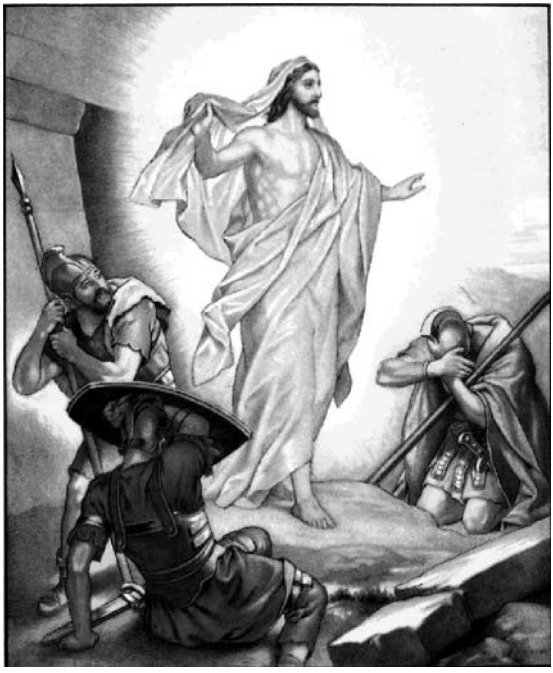


What About Miracles?

Ken Tyler

Question: "The Bible tells of many miracles that happened. Do we have miracles today? Why or why not?"

Answer: The Bible teaches that we do not have miracles today. A miracle was a supernatural act of God, an act above and beyond the laws of nature. For example, God took one of the ribs of Adam and made Eve (Genesis 2:22). That was a miracle.



Today many people refer to events as miracles when they are simply God's amazing but natural law. A child is born and someone says that it is a miracle! No, that is only God's natural law, which says that every seed reproduces after its own kind (Genesis 1:11,12,21, 25). To simply snap a human into existence would be a miracle.

The purpose of Bible miracles was to confirm the messenger, that is,

to prove that he was from God and that the message he was speaking was God's Word. It is very important for us to realize that during Bible times the people did not have the complete, written revelation of God as we have today. We must remember that the Bible was only then being given. So how were the people to know who God's messengers were? They knew because God empowered His messengers to perform miracles to prove that they had been sent by Him and that the message they were speaking was from Him. We are told in Mark 16:20, "*And they* [apostles] *went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following*."

So when the complete message of God had been given in written form — in the New Testament — there was no longer a need for any man to perform miracles to prove that what he was saying was from God. All people have to do today is study the Bible and see if what is being preached is the truth. Therefore, miracles ceased when the completed revelation was given (1 Corinthians 13:9-12). I challenge anyone today to raise the dead, take up serpents, and drink deadly poison as was done in the first century (Matthew 10:8; Mark 16:18). It can't be done!

Even the miracles Jesus performed were for the purpose of proving to people that He was the divine Son of God. He went forth and preached that He was the Son of God, the Savior of the world. How did people know He was the Savior? Simply by the fact that God empowered Him to perform miracles. Listen carefully to John 20:30,31, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name*." We plainly see from this passage that Jesus performed miracles to cause people to believe that He was the Son of God, and, as a result, to be saved. Acts 2:22 tells us that Jesus was "*approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs*."

No, we do not have miracles today, for there is no biblical need. ✞

Ken Tyler preaches for the Arab Church of Christ in Arab, Alabama, USA.

The same power of Omnipotent God lies behind *miracles, providence* and *natural law*. However, miracles were discernible suspensions of natural law for the purpose of validating a messenger or a message. Providence is not discernible and provides for something in keeping with the will of God. Natural law, what we discern today, was produced by and is maintained by God.

Responsibilities of Church Membership

G.L. Mann

Introduction:

A. Every worthwhile relationship of life involves responsibility.
B. Membership in the church of Christ bestows the highest and holiest privileges and blessings; therefore, it involves greatest responsibilities and most serious obligations.
C. Some of these obligations are:

I. Local Church Membership

A. The congregation is the only unit of organization revealed in New Testament for doing work of Lord.
B. For a Christian to be in full fellowship with the church, he must be associated with, be a part of, and amenable to a local congregation.
C. There is no such thing in New Testament as MEMBERSHIP AT LARGE.
D. Paul always associated with a local congregation, Acts 9:26-30; 13:1-3; 14:25-28.
E. He recommended Phoebe to the church at Rome, Romans 16:1,2.

II. Subjection to Elders

A. Elders are to exercise oversight, 1 Peter 5:1-3.
B. "*Obey them that have the rule over you*", Hebrews 13:17.
C. "*Let the elders that rule well…*"1 Timothy 5:17

III. Cooperation in Work of the Church

A. "*Be ready unto every good work*", Titus 3:1
B. "*Every joint supplieth*", Ephesians 4:16.
C. "*Every tree is known by its own fruit*", Luke 6:44.
D. "*Prove your own work*", Galatians 6:4,5.

IV. Preserve Unity, Peace, and Harmony

A. "*No divisions among you*", 1 Corinthians 1:10.
B. "*No schism…same care for another*", 1 Corinthians 12:25.

C. *Avoid them that cause divisions among you,* Romans 16:16,17.
D. "*Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace",* Ephesians 4:1-3.

V. Preserve and Maintain the Purity of the Church

A. Christ gave His life for the church, Ephesians 5:25-27.
B. We must maintain spiritual, moral, and doctrinal purity, Ephesians 5:27.

VI. Help Fulfill the Mission of the Church

A. We have been united with Christ that we might bring forth fruit unto God, Romans 7:4.
B. Fruitless branches will be cut off. "*Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away*", John 15:2.
C. "*Herein is my father glorified that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples*", John 15:8. ✞

*For as **the body is one** and has **many members**, but all the **members** of that **one body**, being many, are **one body**, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into **one body** — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact **the body is not one member but many**. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the **members**, each one of them, in **the body** just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are **many members**, yet **one body**. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those **members of the body** which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those **members of the body** which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed **the body**, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in **the body**, but that the **members** should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the **members** suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the **members** rejoice with it. Now **you are the body of Christ, and members individually**.* (1 Corinthians 12:12-27 NKJV)

When members fail to assume their congregational responsibilities, spiritually speaking, the local body of Christ resembles a stroke victim or a body that has experienced a tragic accident or some other medical emergency — loss of functionality! Is your church healthy and coordinated because of you?

Balaam

Rex Banks

Under Moses' leadership, the children of Israel make their way from Goshen to Mt. Sinai, arriving in the mountain district in the third month after the Exodus. There they encamped for a whole year, and the last twenty-two chapters of Exodus, along with the books of Leviticus and Numbers 1-11 contain a record of all the transactions that occurred while they were in the area.

Although it is a journey of only about two weeks from Sinai to the southern boundary of Canaan, because of disobedience it was another 38 years before the nation was permitted to enter the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, Moses' successor.

During this period of time, Israel encountered and interacted with various individuals and nations. Recent archaeological discovery provides extra-biblical information about one such individual named Balaam, the son of Beor.

The Israelites encountered Balaam, a pagan prophet, during their wilderness wanderings when Balak the Moabite king, fearing an invasion of his land, called upon Balaam to curse the Israelites (Numbers 22:5). In Numbers, chapters 22-36, we have the account of these events in the plains of Moab.

In 1967, excavations at a site of an ancient Ammorite city known as Deir Alla uncovered an incomplete inscription that is of great interest to students of Scripture. According to archaeologist Andre Lemaire, "The principal personage in the Deir Alla text is the seer Balaam, son of Beor, well known to us from the stories in Numbers" (*Biblical Archaeology Review* Sept-Oct 1985).

The text contains the following: "Inscription of Balaam, son of Beor, the man who was a seer of the gods. Lo, the gods came to him at night and spoke to him according to these words, and they said to Balaam, son of Beor, thus: 'There has appeared

The science of archaeology consistently provides independent confirmation of the Bible.

the last flame, a fire of chastisement has appeared!' And Balaam arose the next day and he could not eat and he wept intensely. And his people came to him and said to Balaam, son of Beor: 'Why do you fast and why do you weep?' And he said to them: 'Sit down! I shall show you how great is the calamity! And come, see the deeds of the gods!"

An online publication, *Jerusalem Archaeological Review* volume 10, Internet Edition (http://www.kccs. pe.kr/arch047.htm) discusses the significance of this discovery in an article entitled "Words of Biblical Prophet Found on Stone Tablets!" We read that these tablets "reveal a completely independent account of the story of the Prophet Balaam. The perspective is not from the Israelites, but from those they conquered during their conquest of Canaan."

We read: "The area in which the ancient fragments were found is known in the Bible as the Valley of Succoth (Psalms 60:8; 108:89). **It is not far from the Plains of Moab,** the site of Balaam's encounter with the Israelites…

"'This momentous discovery,' says the biblical historian, Prof. Ory Mazar, 'seems to confirm the existence of the prophet Balaam, an epic figure of the Bible and a contemporary of Moses.'"

So the Deir Alla inscription takes its place alongside many other archaeological finds that provide independent confirmation of the biblical text. ✝

Rex Banks is a preacher of the Gospel in New Zealand. His email address is rex.banks@xtra.co.nz

Who Am I ?

Rebecca Rushmore

Can you identify me? Read each clue and think carefully. If you guess my name after the first clue, give yourself a score of 100 points. If you know who I am only after the fifth clue, your score is 60, etc. When you are sure of my identity, look up the passages of Scripture following each clue to verify the facts from God's Word.

1. My name means laughter.
2. I had an older brother who despised me.
3. In fear, I lied and claimed my wife was my sister.
4. I was the father and great grandfather of twins, the only two sets mentioned in the Bible.
5. My descendants became a great nation, and so did my brother's descendants.
6. I was born to my parents when they were old.
7. I was a child of promise.
8. My father was willing to offer me as a sacrifice.
9. Sarah was my mother.
10. I married a woman named Rebekah.

See answer on inside back cover

My Score:_____

Beginning in 1974, several congregations began simulating within their classrooms various foreign lands for the purpose of acquainting students from 3-years-old and up with nations and people especially that the Lord's church needs to evangelize. These rooms were called **Mission Learning Centers.** Children become aware of different living conditions, foreign languages, different cultures, foods strange to them and precious souls who desperately need to hear the Gospel of Christ.

To create the proper atmosphere, a classroom is transformed into a mini extract from a particular country being emphasized. This may require construction of a set comparable to preparation for a play. Two-by-fours, plywood sheets, paint and trimmings to depict a foreign culture may need to be fashioned to transport students from their familiar and comfortable homeland to a land far away. Children will sample foods eaten by the citizens of the country being studied, see persons attired in the costumes of that nation and learn some phrases in a foreign language. They will be apprised of differences in culture between what they know and people living in the other country. They will learn of the special challenges that the foreign nationals face, with an emphasis on the fact that they need to hear the Gospel of Christ.

A passport resembling the official USA passport, but tailored to identify the local congregation, is provided for each child. Every little boy or girl is given a visa to the country about which they are studying. Bible lessons are taught to the students in the backdrop of the setting, and an emphasis on the Great Commission or telling others about the Gospel is stressed in each session. Over the course of a year, perhaps, various classes take their turn, rotating into the special room.

Walking Along the Jungle Path

Every year, another country is chosen and the procedure repeats itself. Over the years, the children will acquire numerous visas in their passports and have an increasing awareness of the world beyond our borders. More importantly, from a very young age, children will become aware of the need to evangelize the world with the Gospel of Christ. Future church leaders, including our missionaries, will come from these classes. Without purposeful preparation of our children, we will have fewer effective leaders in the future, and we will have few missionaries to carry the Word of God abroad.

A Bible Lesson in the Clearing in a Foreign Land

The **objective** of the **Mission Learning Center** is to train children to grow up being mission-positive in Bible classrooms designed as another culture, simulated to appear as nearly like that culture as possible. The **purpose** of this teaching is to impress students with three things: (1) a ***Christ-***

centered Bible lesson, (2) the ***culture*** of another country, tribe, region or land, and (3) the Great ***Commission***, connecting all three things in a Sunday morning Bible class.

The first Sunday, bring in the 3-year-olds from their regular class to the **Mission Learning Center** room. Next Sunday, bring the 4-year-olds. Each week, bring in an older class through the 8th grade. The balance of the older students can be taught together with a greater emphasis on how they might prepare themselves to participate someday in an actual mission trip.

The entire room of the **Mission Learning Center** should be authentically and genuinely decorated and furnished to be as much like a culture as possible, using artificial trees, flowers, etc. and putting up lifelike "walls," rooms and structures to resemble the foreign land as much as possible. Souvenirs, perhaps refrigerator magnets, will be given to each child as a reminder of his or her simulated mission trip.

Enhancing teaching with props, such as cultural music, foreign flags, foods, pictures, money and information about foreign money exchange, maps, a globe, school systems, and occupations. Each student passport will appear real – dark blue – howbeit with the name of the congregation appearing on the "issued by" page. Add a visa each time the child visits *another country* in the **Mission Learning Center.** Use a rubber stamp to validate and process the passports and visas upon entry.

When students arrive in the **Mission Learning Center,** greet them with a hello in the language of the people depicted in this session. Later, as the students are about to depart from the **Center,** read from an open Bible the Great Commission from Matthew 28:19,20. Firmly emphasize the words, **"Go Teach All Nations."** Explain what Jesus wants us to teach to people of other nations and cultures. Close with a prayer. Say goodbye in the language of the people being highlighted in the **Mission Learning Center.**

From The Heart OF...

Following is one possible scenario to create a foreign experience and foundation for introducing children to missions abroad.

> Disaster has struck the country of Haiti. Buildings and homes have collapsed from the earthquake, trapping people, polluting the water, and disrupting transportation. Tremors are continuing to disrupt aide efforts. The local residents are incapable of responding to the enormous needs. Two days have passed since the first tremor, and the cry for assistance has been broadcast. Will you help them?
>
> This is the introduction and question posed to children during a recent visit to the **Mission Learning Center.** Why bring up such scenes and overwhelming situations to children? The short answer is because we serve a God who is in control and who responds to those who call for help. Jesus commissions us to see, care, and help. Can children help in these circumstances? What can they do? How does the story of the Good Samaritan fit in this situation? Training young missionaries to face these challenges and respond for Jesus is the focus of the **Mission Learning Center.** In the recent Haiti disaster session, a young child calls out "ed se isit la" (help is here) in Haitian Creole after discovering a trapped victim. The opportunity to experience and learn from a wide range of foreign mission fields allows students to apply Christian teaching and to learn their roles in God's expanding kingdom. (Lisa White)

The late Don Petty and his surviving wife and lifelong companion, Sylvia, were instrumental in developing and implementing the **Mission Learning Center** in more than one congregation over the years. Don and Sylvia did mission work in Pakistan and Iran but treated everywhere on earth as a destination for proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. Their labors for the Lord continue to live through **Mission Learning Centers** that populate several congregations in the United States. One such congregation from which additional information can be gleaned so that you, too, can begin a Center in your congregation is the Webb Chapel Church of Christ, 13425 Webb Chapel Rd., Farmers Branch, TX 75234. Contact Lisa White at 972.261.7210 or lwhite@hsgd.org.

Without purposeful preparation of our children, we will have fewer effective leaders in the future, and we will have few missionaries to carry the Word of God abroad.

How Do You Measure Up?

"…Be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;

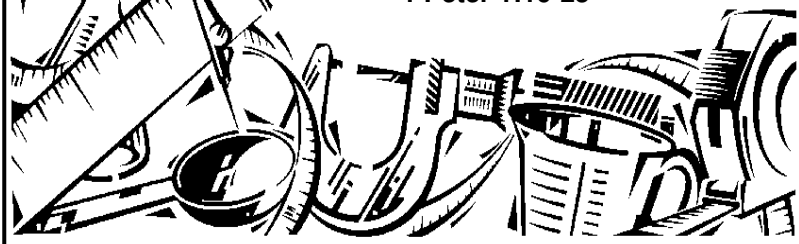
18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

22 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

24 because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

1 Peter 1:16-25



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What Can You Do to Help Spread the Word?

* For just a moment, put yourself in a village in Africa, or even in a large city in India, or in the jungles of South America. You are an immortal soul, living in a perishing body. How will you knowledgeably prepare for the judgment and eternity that awaits us all?

* Does the church of Christ exist in your community, so that you can hear the Gospel preached? For most people in the world, the answer is "No".

* Is there a source for buying Bibles in your community? Though the Bible has been translated into most languages, villages seldom have bookstores. For most people in the world, the answer is "No".

* If you have found the Truth and are a Christian, is there a bookstore from which you can order additional study materials? For most people in the world, the answer is "No".

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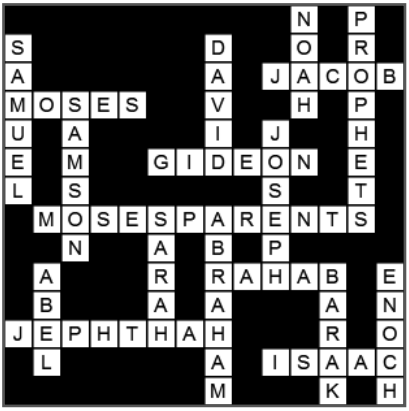
Verse Search (page 30)

1. Salvation.
2. They would become jealous and turn to God.
3. Gentiles.
4. The root supports the branches.
5. They were grafted in.
6. They would be broken off.
7. Severity toward those who fail; Goodness towards those who continue in His goodness.
8. They would be broken off.
9. They would be saved.
10. Isaiah 59:20-21 and Isaiah 27:9.
11. The Jews might obtain mercy.
12. They are unsearchable or beyond our understanding.
13. Isaiah 40:13 and Job 41:11.
14. No.

Who Am I? (page 103)
Answer: Isaac (Genesis 17-35; 38:27-30)

Bible Find (page 96)



For Further Information, Please Contact:

Scenes from a Mission Learning Center

A Coastal Scene

Teaching in the Jungle

Maps help students the locations of Mission Fields.

[Front cover: Sylvia Petty as Missions Teacher]