Volume Ninety - Four

The Voice of Truth International

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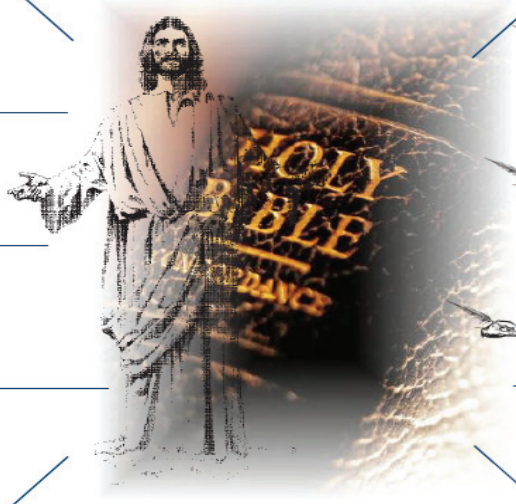

Chart Idea: Sermon Skeletons by J. C. Choate

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Why Did Paul Glory in the Cross?

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Paul Knew the POWER of the Cross

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Paul Knew the PURPOSE of the Cross

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- Galatians 6:16

Chart Idea: Handfuls on Purpose - Vol. 1 by James Smith

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

Soul Conscious

Louis Rushmore

"Male pattern blindness" is a phrase that I have heard on occasion being muttered by some woman, maybe even my wife, regarding men and perhaps me in particular. That expression is likely to occur, for instance, if I were unable to find something in the refrigerator, although whatever for which I was searching was plainly in view. (I tend to think, however, if there is such a thing as "male pattern blindness," there must also exist sometimes "female pattern blindness.") Someone else might utter another idiom when something obviously visible cannot be discovered, such as, "If it were a snake, it would've bitten you!" All of us, I suppose, on occasion are oblivious to what should be obvious to us. Most of the time, though, our "blindness" when trying to locate something is relatively unimportant and pertains to mundane matters associated with daily life.

Yet, it is a serious human failing when we appear to be blinded to spiritual matters, which pertain to one's eternal life. It is alarming when the children of God seem to have little concern for their own spiritual wellbeing and even less interest in the spiritual welfare of other people. The priority of seeking spiritual pursuits ahead of material needs was clearly stated by our Lord Jesus Christ. ***"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"*** (Matthew 6:31-33 NKJV). Nevertheless, the children of God have a long history of being blinded to spiritual things. ***"And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand,***

And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them'" (Matthew 13:14-15; Isaiah 6:9-10).

Is it any wonder that our Lord called upon His disciples to look beyond the material world in which they lived? Jesus Christ challenged His followers to be **soul conscious** when He said, ***"Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!"*** (John 4:35). Jesus was not talking about farming and harvesting a physical crop at the conclusion of a growing season. Rather, He used an example from agriculture to emphasize the requirement for His disciples to participate in His ministry ***"to seek and to save that which is lost"*** (Luke 19:10). This is consistent with our Lord's parting words to His apostles immediately preceding His Ascension. ***"…Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved…"*** (Mark 16:15).

What do you see when you view the persons with whom you interact?

Individual Christians need to be soul conscious. We must realize that our own bodies are merely vehicles that house our respective souls. The soul within an individual is comparable to a person riding inside of a vehicle such as an automobile. The car is not the person, but the person is in the car; the car and the rider inside it are separate. Eventually, the vehicle's passenger will leave it, and ultimately, one's soul will leave his body (James 2:26), unless the Second Coming occurs in one's lifetime (1 Thessalonians 4:15).

We must develop the disposition of identifying ourselves first and primarily as souls while secondarily identifying with the bodies that house our respective souls. Christians need to look at family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers, classmates and people in general differently from the way in which we typically view them. Purpose to look at them from the inside out—visualizing them as souls before we identify and classify them respecting their bodily characteristics (e.g., faces, stature, gender and race). Everyone is foremost a precious soul, each soul by itself more valuable than all of this world's wealth were it amassed together (Matthew 16:26). Christians must be soul conscious.

The churches of Christ need to be soul conscious. Individual congregations and collectively the congregations that comprise the brotherhood or universal church need to view humanity on the basis of their souls. The soul conscious church will view itself first as an assembly of souls and only secondarily think of itself along the lines of a collection of physical bodies. Instead of focusing primarily on gender, generations and race, think first and primarily of the souls within the children of God. Looking beyond the confines of congregational membership, see the world for what it is spiritually—billions of precious souls that happen to be housed presently in mortal bodies.

(Of course, faithful Christians must be aware of gender specific roles assigned by Scripture to men and to women. The emphasis herein is only to look to the spiritual nature of humankind to promote spiritually healthy behavior and improve evangelistic outreach to non-Christians and unfaithful Christians.)

Parents, your children are souls abiding in temporary dwellings—bodies. Brethren, your family members are souls wrapped in flesh. Souls are everywhere around us wherever we see anyone. Every person on planet earth is a soul in need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the salvation that it offers and the eternal life it promises. Truly, with souls around every one of us, the spiritual fields are white unto harvest.

Be soul conscious! See souls through spiritual glasses. Our own salvation and the redemption of the souls of others is dependent upon you as well as the Lord's church being soul conscious. What do you see when you view the persons with whom you interact?

What Happens in Baptism?

Jerry Bates

There are few religious acts about which there is more controversy than baptism. Most of the Christian world does not believe that it has anything to do with our salvation. Many say that it is only a symbolic ritual to show what has already taken place in our hearts and our lives, namely, the forgiveness of our sins. No passage speaks against this attitude more clearly than Romans 6:3-4. ***"Or do you know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."***

We need to understand that Romans 6 is not about baptism. It is about sin. The word "sin" appears 16 times in this chapter. Paul was encouraging Christians to remember what took place when they were baptized. I do not know of anyone who questions the fact that faith in the sacrifice of Christ is the basis for our forgiveness. Thus, the question is, **"When are our sins washed away?"**

Paul said that it occurs in baptism. Baptism is much more than a mere symbol or ritual. It is more than a physical act of obedience. In Romans 6:2, Paul taught that we died to sin when we were baptized. In 6:3, Paul declared that we are baptized into Jesus Christ as well as baptized into His death.

Most people would agree that it is the blood of Jesus that actually washes away our sins (Revelation 1:5), but how can we contact the blood of Jesus? The blood of Jesus was shed at the cross. When Jesus died, a soldier put a spear into the side of Jesus, and blood and water flowed out (John 19:34). When we

are baptized, we are baptized into the death of Jesus, which is where the blood was shed. Thus, we come in contact with the blood of Jesus, which washes away our sin. No one can be saved without dying to sin. No one can be saved without being united with Christ. No one can be saved without contacting the blood of Jesus. All of these occur in baptism, according to the apostle Paul.

Paul also said that after baptism, we are raised to walk in newness of life. In baptism, Paul wrote how our baptism is, in effect, a re-creation of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus ended His physical life, but only to begin a new resurrected life. In like manner, we die to sin; thus, we end our previous lives of sin and begin new lives of purity. **We do not just change a few things or erase a few mistakes. We start new lives.** This makes baptism the physical point at which our old lives end and our new lives begin. ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold, all things have become new"*** (2 Corinthians 5:17). Consequently, we begin a life of single-minded devotion to Jesus.

Considering what Paul penned that happens at baptism, how can anyone say that baptism is only a ritual or a symbol? While it is a symbol, what it symbolizes actually comes to pass, not by the power of any man or the water, but by the power of God.

1932—2008

You Can't Argue with God's Word

J.C. Choate

So many people want only the portion of God's Word that suits their belief, practice or situation. This leads them to accept part of it and to reject the rest. They try to explain, argue and reason it away. This is an abuse and a misuse of Holy Writ. We should want the truth and all the truth in a verse of Scripture. We should not stop there, however, but go on to accept the truth in every other verse. We should want to know all of the Lord's will for us. We should want to obey the whole truth and teach it to others. Willful ignorance or rejection of any part of God's Word will not help us or anyone else. **Partial truth is not enough.**

There are those who teach that all one must do to be saved is to **believe.** Verses like John 3:16; 3:36; 5:24 and Acts 16:31 are used to support this. In view of what other verses teach, there might be some argument as to whether this is all that God requires, but there can be no argument about the necessity of belief or faith itself. We know that these verses definitely teach that one must believe. Yet, these are not the only verses of Scripture to be considered when it comes to the salvation of the soul. Perhaps those who use these verses to teach "faith only" have isolated them. Maybe they have misunderstood and limited the meaning of faith.

Christ told us that one must **repent** or perish (Luke 13:3). Paul said that God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). There are other verses that teach and emphasize the need for repentance. One might conclude that the most important thing that one must do to be saved is to repent of his sins. At the same time, one might argue that there is more to salvation than this. Regardless, there is one point on which there can be

no argument and that is that God requires the sinner to repent of his sins.

There are several verses that stress the necessity of **baptism** (Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3). Does this mean that "baptism only" saves? Is not faith necessary? What about repentance? These questions may be brought up and discussed, but there can be no doubt about the necessity of baptism, if one is going to accept all of the truth of God's will.

Peter told the people on the day of Pentecost that they should **repent** and be **baptized** for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). Though nothing is said about **faith**, the question that was asked about salvation shows clearly that they believed already. However, regardless of which points are left out, the question is: What is stated? ***"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins…"*** There can be no discussion on this point. **All we can do is accept it.**

Whether we are dealing with the plan of salvation or some other subject, we ought to approach our study of the Bible with the attitude that we are going to accept all the truth in every verse and that we are going to accept every command in every statement.

Obviously, the Lord has not given all the truth in one verse, or even in a number of verses. Neither has He given all the commands of the Gospel in one verse. We cannot stop with one verse or two on any subject, but we must go on to read and study all of God's Word and harmonize it. We must accept all the truth in any given verse and then go on to the next verse. By so doing, we will be able to see all that the Lord requires of us. Only by believing and obeying the whole truth can we be saved. There can be no argument about this.

Certainly, we should never find ourselves in a situation where we are forced to argue with God's Word. Neither should we ever put ourselves in a position where we have to reject any truth in order to stay with some belief we have already accepted. If we do, we will lose every time—and, finally, **that decision to reject portions of God's Word will cause our souls to be lost eternally.** What a tragic price to pay for human pride or stubbornness, or whatever attitude might cause us to close our minds to truths that we don't want to accept!

It is vital that we remember the words of our Lord, ***"He that rejects me, and receives not my words, has one that judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak"*** (John 12:48-50).

Even our Lord did not have the temerity to change God's message. Surely, no human would dare to do such a thing.

J.C. Choate, now deceased, spent his life in mission work in Asia, through radio, TV and the printed page. *The Voice of Truth International* was his dream.

Are you lost? You need God's GPS: God's Plan of Salvation! Hear the Gospel, Believe the Gospel, Repent of your sins, Confess Christ as the Son of God, and be buried with Him in baptism. Salvation is the result!

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Paula Bates

Saints and Brethren

1. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; _____ always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all _____ and supplication for all the _____. Ephesians 6:17-18

2. …distributing to the needs of the _____ given to _____. Romans 12:13

3. Here is the _____ of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of _____ and the faith of _____. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' "Yes" says the _____, "that they may _____ from their labors, and their works follow them." Revelations 14:12-13

4. Greet the _____ who are in _____ and Nymphus and the _____ that is in his house. Colossians 4:15

5. For both he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not _____ to call them _____. Hebrews 2:11

6. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we _____ the _____. He who does not love his _____ abides in death. 1 John 3:14

Answers:

1. Praying, perseverance, saints
2. Saints, hospitality
3. Patience, God, Jesus,
4. Brethren, Laodicea, church
5. Ashamed, Brethren
6. Love, Brethren, brother

Blaise Pascal was a very famous mathematician and scientist of the early 1600's. It was he who developed the principles of hydraulics, and for whom its basic laws are named. Pascal was the first to formalize the theory of probability, and he even made one of the earliest calculating machines. He was considered a genius during his lifetime and even today.

Yet, spiritual faith was more important to Pascal, and he became a monk, whereupon he wrote many religious books, including "*An Apology for the Christian Religion*" ('Apology' is Latin for "Defense")—a thesis on Christian Evidences. He taught that all knowledge comes through God's revelations—His natural creation and His written Word. Pascal argued that spiritual faith must be based on God's Word, rather than upon human intellect, scientific reasoning or mathematical logic. He wrote that "there is a hole in each of us which is God-shaped, and we are troubled because we try to fill it with something/everything else but God." This is truly the most basic of human needs—to find God and make Him again a part of us (Psalm 16:9-11; Ephesians 2:12).

Men and women today are desperately searching for something with which to fill the massive void in their lives, and they are trying everything

that comes along, from drugs and sexual gratification to hard work and the pleasures money can buy. Some even try New Age mysticism or legalistic rites in religion. However, as Pascal reminds us, our emptiness is God-shaped because He Himself made us with the innate desire and even the need to seek Him (Acts 17:24-27). It is our God that we are missing—our Creator-God that we desire and our Sustainer-God that we need.

The Psalmist knew this concept long ago and pleaded for God to reveal and to teach to him His "ways," His "paths" and His "truth" (Psalm 25:4-5). God reveals Himself, His ways and His paths to man through His truth, and that truth is His revealed and written Word, the Scriptures or Bible (John 17:17; Luke 16:29-31; Hebrews 1:1-2). Only God's "truth" can fill the void of our God-shaped hole and set us free from sin, its guilt and depression (John 8:31-32; Galatians 5:1).

We find God and fulfill our basic human need only by hearing (Romans 10:13-14), believing (Acts 16:30-33) and obeying (1 Samuel 15:22-23; Romans 6:16-17) His written revelation. God works through His Word in those of us who believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13). As we fill ourselves with His Word, we fill ourselves with God Himself, His Holy Spirit and His Son Jesus Christ (John 16:12-13; Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16). It is our constant spiritual relationship with God that gives us true peace (John 14:27; Romans 5:1-5), rather than material things of this world. Both Pascal and the Psalmist (Psalm 23) recognized that we will never be satisfied with substitutes. **God and His Word alone fit the spiritual hole within us and make us truly whole.**

Claude Thompson lives in Dallas, Texas, USA.

Who Left the Lights On?

Passing the church building where they attended the morning services one Sunday evening the little girl exclaimed, "Look Daddy, somebody left the lights on. We should stop and turn them off." In silence the parents drove on. Later at home they decided that they had better start attending the evening worship, not only to satisfy the curiosity of their little daughter but their own consciences as well. If you passed the building on Sunday evenings, would your children wonder who left the lights on? ~ **Author Unknown**

When God Says "No"

Jim Poland

"No" is a word that seems abrupt and all too final. It's a word most of us do not like to hear when we ask for something we want. It's even worse when the answer "No" comes from God in response to our prayers.

Sometimes God says, "No." However, this does not mean that He is uncaring or unloving. He has demonstrated His great love for us in a most heartrending way! ***"For when we were still without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"*** (Roman 5:6-8).

God has said "No" to some of His greatest servants. God said "No" to the apostle Paul, a man who had left everything to preach the Gospel of God's saving love and grace to the world. When Paul asked the Lord to remove a physical problem of health, God said, ***"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness…"*** (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

God the Father, even said "No" to His Son, Jesus. When Jesus was facing death for our sins, He prayed three times, ***"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will but as You will"*** (Matthew 26:36-46). As we know, the answer was obviously, "No." Jesus did drink that cup of crucifixion for our sins.

When God says, "No," He has a reason, and His reasons are higher than man's. ***"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts"*** (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Jim Poland preaches for the church of Christ at Carthage, Missouri, USA.

The Risk, the Love and the Sacrifice

Charles R. Rose

It was in the earliest of times, in fact, it was before time as we know and measure it began. A Father and His Son were making plans to lay the foundation for the greatest event to take place in the history of the world before the birth of the Christ child. That event is shown in the first verse of the first book of the Holy Bible, ***"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"*** (Genesis 1:1).

Knowing that in Their plans was the creation of man in Their image (Genesis 1:26), with the ability to choose good or evil (Genesis 3:5, 22), the decision was made for the Son to become a fleshly man to bring lost humanity back to the Father should man choose the ways of evil. ***"He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you"*** (1 Peter 1:20).

The Risk

When He would come in the flesh, it would be necessary that Jesus experience every phase of human life, including: birth (Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 2:1-7); growing in all aspects of life (i.e., intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially) (Luke 2:52); and learning to be obedient (Hebrews 5:9). Notice that it was not a forgone fact that He would automatically obey everything the Father commanded. As with all human beings, this was learned.

As we contemplate the life and death of God's only begotten Son, we must realize the awesome risk taken when He ***"…being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men"*** (Philippians 2:6-7).

God

He knew the strength of Satan and his temptations when ***"before the foundation of the world"*** this decision was made. While in heaven, He was God the Son, with all the heavenly hosts to aid Him in His domain. On earth, He must ***"stand against all the wiles of the devil"*** (Ephesians 6:11) in the same way that all other "men" must stand.

What if He had, just one time, yielded to Satan's temptation? The consequences would have been devastating. Mankind, from Adam to the present generation and beyond, would be damned to a devil's hell for eternity because His was the only sacrifice which could offer any kind of hope. Had it been blemished by just one sin all humanity who has reached the age of knowing good and evil (see Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 7:16), including God's only begotten Son, Jesus of Nazareth, would have no hope. Thus we can see the magnitude of the risk to leave Heaven and come to earth.

The Love

Realizing the risk taken by God the Son causes me to appreciate the love shown to mankind even more. As a father of three I can tell you, without a shadow of doubt, that I could not bring myself to allow, much less be a party to, one of my children doing anything that might endanger their eternal souls. Yet, this is exactly what our Heavenly Father was willing to do because He loved us so much. His love for man, whom He had created in His own image and given to him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7), was so magnificently great that ***"He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"*** (John 3:16).

What heartache He felt for His lost creation! What pity He had for those who could do absolutely nothing to save themselves (Jeremiah 10:23)! What marvelous love—not only from the Father, but the Son as well! ***"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins"*** (1 John 4:9-10). ***"Love has***

been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment…" (1 John 4:17).

Yes, boldly—confidently—without fear or doubt, we may stand before Him in Judgment because we have kept His commandments (1 John 3:21-24).

The Sacrifice

We have this confidence, this boldness, because we know His love and understand the significance of His sacrifice. ***"When He came into the world, He said: Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. Then I said, Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God"*** (Hebrews 10:5, 7). ***"But this man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified"*** (Hebrews 10:12-14).

> ***Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the household of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.*** (Hebrews 10:19-25)

He took the risk, He manifested the love and He made the sacrifice. ***"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord"*** (1 Corinthians 15:58).

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The Bombardier Beetle

David P. Everson

When Christians look at the world around them, they see many marvelous works of God. Each one of these works is evidence of the great Designer. Yet, there are some works of God that go well beyond just the usual design evidence to the degree that explaining these organisms in any other way is impossible. Let's look at one of those examples, the bombardier beetle.

The Bombardier Beetle belongs to the genus Brachinus. They are small beetles about one half inch long. They live in most temperate climates, but this beetle is found mainly in Europe. Its most unique feature comes from the mechanism that God has provided for the beetle's defense. It is able to defend itself against animals many times its own size, including man. This beetle does this by shooting at the attacker up to 15 to 20 times every few minutes, and the story of this "beetle bomb" is nothing short of amazing.

The bombardier beetle has two glands in the abdomen that it uses to make and store two chemicals, hydroquinone and hydrogen peroxide. These chemicals when mixed together normally would produce an oxidation reaction that changes the nature of the chemicals. However, these beetles also have an inhibitor, that has not been identified, that somehow prevents this. When the beetle is about to be attacked by a frog, mouse or other insect, he quickly squirts some of the mixture into twin combustion tubes, which can be aimed in a 360-degree radius. These tubes secrete two special chemicals called enzymes that cause a change in the mixture. These enzymes are a mixture of 40% catalase and 60% peroxidase, but they are not used up in the reaction and can be used over and over billions of times.

The chemical reaction that occurs leads up to the explosive finale. The hydrogen peroxide is changed into water and oxygen, and the hydroquinone into quinone, a noxious chemical. As this reaction occurs, heat is given off which brings the liquid to boiling at 212 degrees Fahrenheit and builds up a great deal of pressure. The combustion tube has valves at the outside that

can be closed until the pressure rises sufficiently to expel the liquid a fair distance giving off an audible "pop" as it does so. It is this mixture that is expelled into the mouth and face of an attacker. It burns, it irritates, it startles and it confuses the attacker, who thinks twice about the bombardier beetle.

More interestingly, the male bombardier beetles and the female beetles each have a different type of chemical discharge. The males are unaffected by the discharge of another male beetle. The females are not affected by the discharge of either type. This would appear to help the females protect themselves against unwanted attentions of a male.

The question must now be asked, "How did this beetle get such an extravagant mechanism of self-defense?" The evolutionist must believe in millions of small accidents and changes to get this mechanism. Yet, why would a beetle evolve any of this mechanism if it did not produce a beneficial result the first time it was used? The mixture is of no use without the enzymes. The enzymes are of no use without the mixture. The mixture and enzymes are of no use without the combustion tube. The combustion tube is of no use without the valves to control direction and build up pressure. This could go on and on, but what it really means is that there is no way that this defensive mechanism could come about unless it all happened at once. Though it is an impossibility for evolution, it is a simple matter for the Great Designer! "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).

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Robison's Rubies

My parents taught me to be a good sport. When I lost, I wasn't to whine; when I won, I was not to brag. Boasting about accomplishments has no place in the life of a good sport. Going way beyond sports, the apostle Paul said, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). None of my talents, abilities or accomplishments will save my soul. Christ's cross is all that can do that, so I must obey Him. As the song says, I owe Him "my soul, my life, my all."

Were the Six Days of Creation Geologic Ages or Literal 24-Hour Days?

Kevin L. Moore

The day-age theory, espoused by progressive creationists and theistic evolutionists, alleges that each day of the creation account in Genesis 1 represents geologic ages (millions of years) instead of ordinary 24-hour days. Here are six simple reasons to reject this theory in favor of a more straightforward understanding of the text.

1. Whenever the Hebrew word *yom* ("day") is preceded by a numeral, it always refers to a solar (24-hour) day (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; cf., Numbers 13:25; 14:33-34; Exodus 20:9-11).
2. The phrase, "So the evening and the morning were the first day" (Genesis 1:5), is used over 100 times in the Old Testament and always refers to a 24-hour day.
3. If "day" in this context refers to geologic ages, then each "day" would be millions of years of continuous darkness followed by millions of years of continuous light.
4. Adam lived through the sixth and seventh days (Genesis 1:26-2:3), but he did not live for geologic ages (Genesis 5:5).
5. The Jews were commanded to work six days and rest one day each week because this was the pattern of creation recorded in the Genesis account (Exodus 20:8-11).
6. If God had wanted to describe creation in six literal 24-hour days, how could He have stated it any more clearly?

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Why I Believe in God

Michael Hooper

I believe in God because of the existence of cause and effect. An effect cannot exist unless there is a cause behind it. A world of living things exists. That is an effect. It is not philosophically reasonable for one to conclude that such an effect resulted from a non-living cause. A living effect always implies a living cause. Belief in a living God as the cause of the world of living things is, therefore, philosophically valid.

> "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they [we] are without excuse" (Romans 1:20 NKJV).

I believe in God because design exists. Nature has been intelligently designed. Fish are designed to swim in water. Birds are designed to fly in the air. A designer is **always** implied whenever there is design. Since this earth on which we dwell is designed, then there is a designer who designed it. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe in a living God as the Designer of this mammoth design called earth. It is also most unreasonable to conclude that such a Designer does not exist when the design is so evident.

I believe in God because real "right" and "wrong" exist. Let us for a moment assume that there is no God, but how, then, is real right and wrong decided? What is right or wrong would be merely the product of individual human thinking. Right or wrong would be subjective since humans do not always think the same. Various societies would have their

own subjective standards of right and wrong. The Nazis society headed by Adolph Hitler thought it was **right** to destroy millions of Jews.

Without an objective standard from a source higher than the human mind or society to determine right or wrong, the Nazis society would not be guilty of a real wrong. We would only **think** that they were **really** wrong, but we would not be able to prove it. It would be more like "their words against ours" type of situation without the objectivity of truth.

We are made as responsible beings by a source higher than subjective human societies. We, therefore, are answerable to that source. That whole scenario warrants the existence of a living God who made us, and we are accountable to Him for the choices we make. It also warrants the idea that God revealed to man's conscience [by His Word or Truth] what is right. On that basis, all wrongs can be known. Belief in God's existence is, therefore, reasonable.

I believe in God because intelligence exists. My intelligence could not have been a product of dead dirt, rock or gas, all of which are also void of any intelligence. My intelligence could not have appeared from nothing either. Nothing always produces nothing. It always takes something to produce something. If there were any point in time no intelligence existed, then there would have been no intelligence at all. That implies that the quality called intelligence is **eternal**. It, therefore, is reasonable to believe in an eternal and intelligent being called "God."

I believe in God because of Jesus. No objective historian will deny that Jesus did live. In non-biblical writings, he was mentioned when He crossed paths with the prominent figures about which those non-biblical writers wrote. The information concerning Jesus' life and ministry came to us through His witnesses who willingly laid down their lives for their testimony concerning Him. It is, therefore, hard to dismiss their credibility and the faithfulness of their message. According to their information, Jesus proved His claim to be God's Son by miracles that He performed. That without a doubt proves that God exists.

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The Door that Is Opened for Me

Cliff Holmes

When the going is tough,
And my pathway is rough,
There's a door that is opened for me.

When the mountains are steep,
And dark valleys so deep,
There's a door that is opened for me.

When souls have been lost,
For they count not the cost,
There's a door that is opened for me.

When I'm free from all sin,
And I am bid to come in,
There's a door that is opened for me.

When my journey shall end,
I'll see Jesus my friend,
By the door He has opened for me.

Book People

Dan R. Owen

Since the time of Moses, God has spoken to His people concretely in written revelation. Having given us His sacred Word, He expects us to follow it fully. Being God's people means being book people.

In 622 B.C., the people of Judah were anything but book people. They had adapted to the culture. They had been corrupted in their thinking and in their practices. They were just pagans who practiced a few vestiges of true religion. The Book of God was long forgotten.

One day, a priest in the Temple happened to find the Book of the Law. This discovery set in motion a series of events that reversed the catastrophic negative slide of the whole nation for a time. **Have you found the Book of God in your house?**

After the discovery, some people in Judah actually read the Book of the Law. They understood it, were deeply convicted by it and realized how important it was. It seems ridiculous and simple to suggest that we read the Book. Yet, only by reading it can we be aware of its vital contents and have the way of life made clear to us.

The King of Judah tore his clothes when he read the Book of

> ***Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word, saying, "Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of those who do the work, who oversee the house of the Lord." Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king. Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes.*** (2 Kings 22:8-11 NKJV)

the Law. He did not read it in a detached manner or think of it as strictly an academic pursuit. He heard God speaking to him and his people in the words of the Book. He realized that he and his people were in violation of the Book's precepts. He tore his clothes in remorse. Has reading the Book caused you to "tear your clothes"? Are you willing to face it personally and take it to heart?

Finally, King Josiah and all his fellow leaders obeyed the Book. They did something about what they read. They systematically destroyed paganism from their land, reinstituted biblical practices and generally sought to do what the Book of God directed them to do, because they knew it was the Word of God.

In this Old Testament account is the simple truth about what God wants us to do. Find the Book of God's Law. Read the Book. Tear your clothes (spiritually speaking). Do what the Book says to do. **Surely, God will bless us if we imitate Josiah's submission.** ✝

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Pulling on Both Oars

Brett Petrillo

An old Scotsman operated a small rowboat for transporting passengers. One day a passenger noticed that the old man had carved on one oar the word, "Faith," and on the other oar, "Works." Curious, the Scotsman asked the meaning. The old man replied, "I'll show you." He dropped the "Faith" oar and pulled the "Works" oar. The boat went around in circles. Then, he dropped that oar and pulled the "Faith" oar. The little boat went in circles the opposite direction. After the demonstration, the old man picked up "Faith" and "Works," and he began pulling both oars together. The boat sped swiftly over the water.

The old man explained, "You see, that is the way it is the Christian life. Dead works without faith are useless, and faith without works is dead also, getting you nowhere. However, faith and works pulling together make for safety, progress and blessing (James 2:14-26). ✝

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Meditation

Dwight Fuqua

Paul instructed Timothy, ***"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine"*** (1 Timothy 4:13). Two verses later Paul exhorted, ***"Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all"*** (verse 15). When we meditate on the will of God and commit ourselves completely to it, we progress spiritually and become greater servants of God.

Do you meditate? Because of mystic religions, meditation has fallen upon hard times. To meditate simply means "to ponder, to reflect upon, to meditate." The Greek word in this passage (*meletao*) means "to care for" or "to ponder." ***"Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still"*** (Psalm 4:4). This is a real challenge in our fast-paced world.

David was a man after God's own heart. **One:** He meditated continually upon the works of God. ***"I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands"*** (Psalm 143:5). **Two:** He was

committed to meditation. ***"I will remember the words of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds"*** (Psalm 77:11-12). **Three:** David found that meditation invoked positive feelings. ***"May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the Lord"*** (Psalm 104:34). **Four:** He meditated because he loved God's law. ***"Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day"*** (Psalm 119:97). **Five:** Thinking about God was precious to him. ***"How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them"*** (Psalm 139:17). No wonder David was a man after God's own heart!

We should meditate on God's Word! David wrote of the righteous man, ***"But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night"*** (Psalm 1:2). Those who would lead God's people especially need to meditate. God instructed Joshua, ***"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success"*** (Joshua 1:8).

We should meditate on the Word of God because it is a delight to us (Psalm 1:2), because we want to observe God's Word and be successful (Joshua 1:8), because it brings understanding (Psalm 49:3), because it makes us glad (Psalm 104:34), because it keeps us from sin (Psalm 119:11), because we love His Word (Psalm 119:97), because thinking about God is precious (Psalm 139:17) and because it brings spiritual progress (1 Timothy 4:15). ***"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer"*** (Psalm 19:14).

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Kenney's Pennies

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" **(Galatians 2:20 NKJV.) You may claim to be doing this, but if you are not following the commandments of Christ, then your claims fall short. Why not do something about that? One of His commands is found in Mark 16:16.**

The Church of Christ

Wes McAdams

Sometimes we talk about being the church of the New Testament or we talk about being like the first century church. We certainly don't mean we want to repeat the sins of the church in Corinth or accept a false Gospel like some of the churches in Galatia did. The churches of the first century were not perfect.

When we say we want to be like the church of the first century, we're saying that over the last 2,000 years, paganism, Catholicism, denominationalism and countless other influences have caused Christian theology and practice to evolve into something that is not the same as the Christianity practiced in the first century. When we say we want to be like the church of the first century, we're saying we want to go back to the New Testament to find out what Christians are supposed to do and to believe.

However, the church of the New Testament didn't actually have the New Testament, yet! The church in Corinth, for instance, had the letters Paul wrote to them, and they may have even had a couple of other letters that had been copied and shared with them, but they probably didn't have access to all 27 books of the New Testament during the first century.

So, if our authority comes from the New Testament, from where did their authority come? How did they determine what they were supposed to do?

Apostles and Prophets

From the very beginning of the church, Christians understood that if they wanted to know the will of Jesus, they must devote themselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42). The apostles were Jesus' official representatives. They were guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit brought to their remembrance all that Jesus had taught them (John 14:26). They had the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). When we say we want to be like the first century—New Testament—church, we're saying we want to devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching.

Paul said in Ephesians 4:11-12, **"[Jesus]** ***gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ."*** In addition

to the apostles, who were miraculously carried along by the Holy Spirit, there were also other prophets through whom the Lord spoke. Yet, the apostle Paul warned the Corinthian church that these miraculous gifts would soon pass away. He wrote, ***"As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away"*** (1 Corinthians 13:8). I believe these gifts passed away when God's entire will had been revealed through the apostles and they had written all 27 books of the New Testament. However, while these gifts lasted, the first century church was able to hear prophetic messages from the Lord.

Evangelists, Shepherds and Teachers

It wasn't just apostles and prophets who taught the first century church what to do and what to believe. The apostles trained evangelists, men like Timothy and Titus. They sent these evangelists to congregations to teach what had been taught to them by the apostles.

These men were to ***"reprove, rebuke, and exhort"*** the church (2 Timothy 4:2). They were to appoint elders in every congregation (Titus 1:5), and they were to take what they had heard from the apostles and ***"entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"*** (2 Timothy 2:2).

Today's evangelists who devote themselves to learning the apostles' doctrine and passing it on to others are following in the footsteps of these first century evangelists. We no longer have the apostles, but we have their teachings in the pages of the New Testament, and we still need evangelists who will share their message, the message of Christ.

So the first century church had evangelists who taught the apostles' doctrine as well as appointed mature Christian men to serve as shepherds and teachers over each congregation. These shepherds were given oversight of the congregation and were responsible for its spiritual well-being. Christians in first century church had to listen to their shepherds. The writer of Hebrews wrote, ***"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you"*** (Hebrews 13:17).

Evangelists and shepherds still play an important role in the church, but they especially played an important role in an age when the New

Testament was still in its formation. Just because we all have a copy of the New Testament does not give any of us the right to ignore the God-appointed authority for the structure of the church.

Old Testament Scripture

And we cannot forget that the first century church wasn't completely without Scripture. They still had the Old Testament Scripture. They would read the Old Testament publicly in their assemblies (1 Timothy 4:13). They would preach from it and teach from it. They would teach Christians how Jesus was their High Priest, how He was the atoning Sacrifice for their sins, how the church was the new Israel, and how they ought to imitate the faith of Noah, Abraham, Moses, Daniel and others (Hebrews 11).

It was concerning these Scriptures that the apostle Paul wrote, ***"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope"*** (Romans 15:4).

New Testament Scripture

Finally, the church also had New Testament Scripture. They may not have had the entire New Testament, but when you consider everything else they had at their disposal, one or two books would have been a great blessing. I imagine when a church—like the church in Ephesus—received Paul's letter, it not only copied it and sent it on to other churches, but church also read the letter over and over again, cherishing every word.

The apostle Peter wrote and encouraged Christians to listen to the apostle Paul's letters. He wrote,

> ***And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.*** (2 Peter 3:15-16)

We are so blessed to have the entire 27 books of the New Testament today. If we want to be the church that belongs to Jesus, we must do what they did after Pentecost, devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching. ✠

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1. Had Paul personally seen Jesus? When? (v. 1)
2. Who or what was the seal of Paul's apostleship? (v. 2)
3. According to Paul, who had the right to have a wife and take her with him as he traveled? (v. 5)
4. What examples did Paul use to prove that he and Barnabas had a right to be supported by the church? (v. 6)
5. What verse written by Moses does Paul quote to prove the same point as in question 4?
6. He who plows should plow in _____, and he who threshes in hope should be _____ of his hope. (v. 10)
7. If we have sown _____ things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your _____ things? (v. 11)
8. Why did Paul not take support from the church?
9. Of what did those who served at the altar partake?
10. According to Paul, how did God say those who preach the Gospel should live? (v. 14)
11. Why did Paul say he had nothing about which to boast even though he preached the Gospel? (v. 16)
12. Paul had been entrusted with a _____. (v. 17)

(See the back cover for answers.)

Verse Search

1 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? 2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we have no right to eat and drink? 5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? 7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?

8 Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? 10 Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. 11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? 12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more?

Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. 13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? 14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.

15 But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void. 16 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel? 17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship. 18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

NOTE: In this text Paul was defending his apostleship. We do not know who his enemies were, but the Corinthian church itself was proof of his apostleship. Apparently, his enemies criticized him for not receiving support for preaching the Gospel, as did other apostles and teachers. Paul argued that he had as much right to receive support as anyone else, even quoting Moses in support of his contention. However, Paul chose to forego his right to support in order to not hinder the gospel of Christ. Obviously, he felt that somehow he could reach more people for Christ if he supported himself, and that was his main concern. We need to be more concerned with that than our personal comfort.

If I Should Die Before I Wake...

Steve Higginbotham

When I was a child, my parents taught me to say this prayer. Did yours do the same? You know, the often memorized child's prayer that goes like this.

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

The possibility of dying before you wake is filled with implications? However, the main point is, "Have you made preparation for such an eventuality?" Are you prepared to die? Is your eternity secure? Good questions. Especially at a time of day when you slow down, have time to look back over your day and evaluate your standing before God. What if you died before you awakened? Would all be well? Probably, all of us would do well to ask ourselves that same question, but that question is not what I want you to focus upon at the moment.

I'd rather like to ask you if you've made preparation for the eventuality that you "wake up?" It's one thing to be ready to "die in Christ," it's another to be prepared to "live for Christ." What preparation have you made if you don't die be-

fore you wake? How have you planned and prepared to spend your time, talents and energy in service to God?

If you should awaken before you die, how will you use tomorrow? What plans have you made? Do your plans involve the kingdom of God? Would one be able to examine your plans and determine that you are a disciple of Jesus?

If you should awaken before you die, and you are greeted with another day, what will you do with your time? Do you have specific plans to share the Gospel? Do you have specific plans to render service in the name of Jesus to someone in need? Do you have a specific prospect for whom you are praying and trying to reach? Have you given thought to ways you can better serve and strengthen your local church?

Friends, I really don't think one can be fully prepared to "die in Christ" until one has prepared to "live in Christ." In fact, in order to be prepared to die in Christ, one must have lived in Christ.

So back to the question, "What would happen to you if you died before you awakened?" Beyond that question, though, is the equally important question, "What if you awaken before you die?"

If you should die before you wake,
I pray the Lord your soul to take.
But if you should wake before you die,
Then what?

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What More Could You Want?

J. Randal Matheny

- **Charismatic, heroic figure?** ☑
- **Powerful words and ancient wisdom?** ☑
- **Sense of identity?** ☑
- **Camaraderie and strong group loyalty?** ☑
- **Clearly defined mission?** ☑
- **Comprehensive explanation of existence?** ☑
- **A moving story?** ☑
- **Meaningful activity?** ☑
- **Consistent motivation?** ☑
- **Empowerment for success?** ☑

The Way of Christ has it all. ***"Christ is everything"*** (Colossians 3:11).

Baptism by Desire?

E. Claude Gardner

A popular television personality stated that a doctrine that would substitute for baptism is "baptism by desire." If a person failed to be baptized, then by reason of a good life and character, it would be equivalent to "baptism by desire." This was a novel and heretical theory, new to me. This farfetched plan joins numerous false ideas for rejecting a plain and simple command of God.

The venerable Marshall Keeble was wont to say, "The Bible is right," and this is true about baptism. Here are facts about baptism.

Clearly, baptism requires more than just a "desire."

It saves from sin. ***"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"*** (Mark 16:16 NKJV).

It is commanded. ***"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins: and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'"*** (Acts 2:38); ***"And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord"*** (Acts 10:48a).

It is for the remission of sins. ***"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord"*** (Acts 2:38).

It saves and gives a good conscience. ***"There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ"*** (1 Peter 3:21).

It then adds one to the church of Christ. ***"And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved"*** (Acts 2:47b).

It is a burial, not a sprinkling. ***"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His 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 live" (Romans 6:3-4).

It is essential in the new birth. ***"Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God"*** (John 3:5).

It enables one to "rejoice" after the baptism. ***"Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing"*** (Acts 8:39).

It places one into Christ, the Savior. ***"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"*** (Galatians 3:26-27).

Clearly, baptism requires more than just a "desire." Baptism cannot be rejected and substituted by the "Sinner's Prayer," faith only, good morality or fraternal orders. **Why do you wait?**

E. Claude Gardner is President-Emeritus of Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee, USA.

Heaven: The Rest Which Remains

Charles Box

Heaven is a place of love, joy and everlasting peace. ***"There the wicked cease from troubling, And there the weary are at rest"*** (Job 3:17). God is in Heaven (Matthew 5:16), and He provides Heaven as a place of rest for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9-11). Let us learn of Heaven.

Jesus Came from Heaven

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38). When God's time was just right, Jesus was born of a virgin named Mary (Galatians 4:4). Jesus bore our sins so Heaven can be our home (1 Peter 1:18-20). He came to Earth so we can go to Heaven.

Salvation

My Name Is Written in Heaven

"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:22-23). Your name is in many places, perhaps on a marriage license, property deeds, checks, diplomas, passports, bills and many other things. If you have put on Christ in baptism and are a faithful part of His church, your name is written in Heaven. Jesus will return from Heaven to gather His faithful ones to be with Him forever (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Heaven Is the Eternal Home for the Soul

"…In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). Our physical body will die, but there is an eternal house not made with hands waiting in Heaven (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8). There will be both a glorious body and a mansion in Heaven.

Heaven is Our Goal and Our Reward

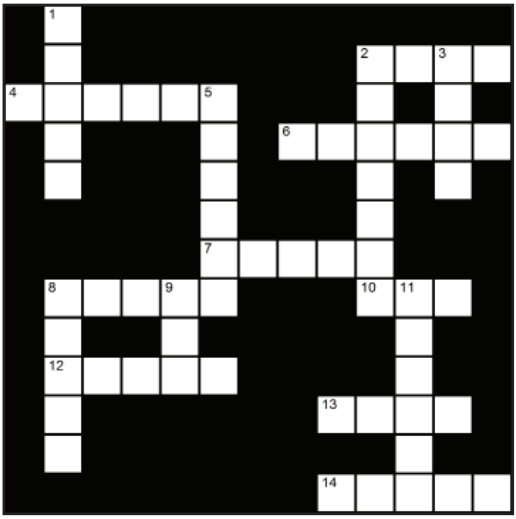
"Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven…" (Matthew 5:12). Heaven is man's greatest gain. To go to Heaven, hear (Romans 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent (Luke 13:3), confess Jesus as Lord and Christ (Romans 10:9-10), be baptized (Acts 22:16) and stay faithful (Revelations 2:10). Jesus wants all of His followers to be in Heaven. ***"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world"*** (John 17:24). Heaven is a place prepared for every true Christian. ✝

Charles Box preaches for the Walnut St. Church of Christ in Greenville, Alabama, USA.

Bible Find

Martha Rushmore

Noah & His Family



Across

2 "Noah was a _____ man." Genesis 6:9
4 The Ark had one what? Genesis 6:16
6 Noah built the Ark of what kind of wood? Genesis 6:14
7 How many went into the Ark? Genesis 7:1
8 What was result of the rain? Genesis 7:17
10 Second son of Noah. Genesis 6:10
12 First bird Noah sent out of the Ark. Genesis 8:7
13 Who shut the door of the Ark? Genesis 7:16
14 Noah covered the inside and outside of the Ark with what? Genesis 6:14

Down

1 What kind of leaf did the dove bring back? Genesis 8:11
2 Third son of Noah. Genesis 6:10
3 Son of Noah in lineage of Christ. Luke 3:36
5 "Noah ____with God." Genesis 6:9
8 It rained how many days and nights? Genesis 7:4, 12
9 Number of doors in the Ark. Genesis 6:16
11 The Ark landed on what Mount? Genesis 8:4

One Must Be in the Church to Be Saved and to Finally Enter Heaven

Sunny David

The Bible teaches that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). To be saved from sin, one must, be taught, believe in Him and be baptized (Mark 16:16). Those whom He saves, He adds to His church (Acts 2:47), which is His kingdom (Matthew 16:18-19). At His coming again on the last day, Jesus will receive His kingdom unto Himself, and He will deliver the kingdom, the church, to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24). ***"And thus we shall always be with the Lord"*** (1 Thessalonians 4:17). One must, therefore, be in the church to be saved and to finally enter heaven. However, as much as it is required to believe and to obey the Gospel to be saved and to become a member of the church of Christ, it is also equally important to remain saved in Him until the end. Christ taught, ***"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life"*** (Revelation 2:10).

People become followers of Jesus Christ after hearing His Gospel, believing in Him, repenting of their sins, confessing Him to be the Son of God and being baptized for the remission of their sins. Christ, according to His promise, adds them to the church, and they try to be faithful to Him by attending worship services of the church every Sunday as well as by staying away from all sinful things and bad habits in which they formerly engaged. However, due to the lure of sin and peer pressure, many again fall back into worldliness. The Bible describes such Christians.

> ***For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the latter end is worse for them then the beginning. For it would have been***

> ***better for them not to have known the Way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."*** *(2 Peter 2:20-22).*

Sin, if persisted in, is a process that progressively hardens souls. A Christian who goes back to his former life of sin becomes more and more insensitive to the voice of God and as well as to his own conscience. It becomes apparent that he finds himself in a state that is worse than the state in which he was prior to becoming a Christian. He or she had previously been in condition where one was more easily reached with the Gospel than after turning away from that which he or she had espoused. Also, the former state of such is better insofar as the reputation of the church is concerned, for those who have never known and obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ do not bring reproach upon His church as do those who fall away and go back into the world.

To remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, the followers of Christ are taught, ***"Do not love the world or the things of the world."*** Then, they are warned, ***"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever"*** (1 John 2:15-17).

What is the will of God the Father for His people? In his epistle to Christians, the apostle Peter wrote:

> ***As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the pollution that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue***

knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. *(2 Peter 1:3-11)*

Christians are citizens of the kingdom of Christ on earth; they enter Christ's kingdom at the same time when the Lord adds them to His church at their conversion (Colossians 1:13). Yet, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of Heaven into which they will enter at the time of the Second Coming of Christ will depend on if they have been faithful to the Lord until their death on earth [or if yet living, until the return of Jesus]. This is exactly what Christ had taught in His Parable of the Tares found in the thirteenth chapter of Mathews' account of the Gospel. He wrote:

Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear! *(Matthew 13: 40-43)*

Remember, Jesus said that on the Day of Judgment and reward, His angels will gather ***"out of His kingdom"*** all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness! What is the kingdom? It is the church. [It is the body of the saved, for which Jesus Christ will return and retrieve.]

Sunny David lives in New Delhi, India, and is a Hindi-speaking TV evangelist and an elder.

God's Church in a Decadent Culture

Greg Tidwell

The world around us attempts to destroy individuality and rob people of choices, presenting social trends as inevitable results from which no one can escape. When Christians buy into defeatist thinking, we become despondent and disheartened—too often surrendering to the trends of the day. Our Lord, however, has not called us to defeat but to victory. God has blessed us with free will, allowing us to use individual abilities and personalities in His service. When we adopt a herd mentality, following blindly the latest whim of modern culture, we compromise our God-given individuality.

Christians must hold the line in all of life, heeding the admonition of the apostle Paul: ***"do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."*** (Romans 12:2). **As our minds are refashioned through a daily effort to follow Christ, we will begin to transform those around us as well.** Within the church this produces true edification, a building up of the saints in holiness. Our influence, however, will extend far beyond the church. We have the opportunity to be both salt and light in a world of insipid darkness. **Rather than fading quietly into the backwaters of contemporary culture, our convictions should lead us to make a bold statement for Christian values.**

Central to our efforts is an obligation to discuss these matters within our families, setting Christian standards and resisting the influences of the world. Controlling outside influences is a vital first step. Even more to the point is the need for educating families to make Christian choices on their own initiative.

God's people should be confident about the rightness of biblical morality. Without being self-righteous or abrasive, we have an obligation to share these values with a world mired down in filth and despair. We must avoid a defeatist mentality when dealing with cultural issues. **The stakes are too high for us to be silent.**

Greg Tidwell is the preacher for the Fishinger and Kenny Church of Christ in Columbus, Ohio, USA as well as serves as the Editor of the Gospel Advocate.

Christianity—A Joyful Walk with God!

Thomas R. Dohling

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 100)

I am eager to discuss Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who loved us

and died for us so that we may be saved from sin (and self). God has made us to sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:6)!

There were many doubts in my mind because life has been harsh, hard and difficult. However, thanks be to God Who has been my Shepherd (my everything) and has brought me to a place where I am learning to trust Him. He is teaching me many things as I walk with Him, talk to Him and seek His will daily. The key is **trusting God**. Carefully consider the following from Jeremiah 17:5-8.

> ***Thus says the LORD: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."***

See the contrast! How cursed is the man who trusts in man (including in himself) and departs from God! How barren and empty his life is! How blessed is the man who trusts in God! How full to overflowing!

When we trust God, we tell Him **everything** (we even share our weaknesses with Him—the bad things about ourselves—bad thoughts, lusts, fears, desires, etc.) and look to Him to work things out in our lives. **He** is **eager** to do so, and He will because He is faithful and also because He is Love! Consider how He has loved us in that ***"He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"*** (John 3:16). He wants to save us so that we may have an abundant (spiritual) life that is of better quality than the life in the flesh.

I now understand that Christianity is ***"walking with God, in the Lord Jesus Christ."*** Thereby we know God from experience! This is much more exciting, thrilling and fulfilling than knowing about Him. As someone has said: "The Bible is evidence about God. We need to be rooted and grounded

in love and God **is** love" (1 John 4:8b). In order words, we need to have our foundation in Jesus, Who is God and the expression of His Love!

Consider Paul's prayer for the Christians in Ephesus (3:16-21).

> ***that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.***

He prayed that God may grant them (Christians at Ephesus) strength through His Spirit in the inward man that Christ may dwell in their hearts (the inward man) through faith so that they, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strengthened to comprehend (realize) the enormous dimensions of Christ's love for them that surpasses knowledge (can't be fully comprehended, just realized wordlessly, wondrously and humbly enjoyed) and thereby be filled with all the fullness of God Who is able to do **exceeding abundantly more** that we ask or think.

Each day that we consciously walk with God, allowing His will to be done in our lives, we know Him that much better.

Each day that we consciously walk with God, allowing His will to be done in our lives, we know Him that much better (from experience). Theology is theories and hypotheses about God. We don't dwell on theories and hypotheses, we **know** from experience **Who God is**, and just when we think we know Him, He does something unexpected, something startling and strikes us with awe and makes us realize that we don't really,

fully know Him. He shows us that He is **far above** human theories and hypotheses about Him! God Himself has said: ***"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts"*** (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Just walk with Him daily, (talk to) commune with Him with each breath that you take and trust Him to do the best for you and you will **know Who He is**—not everything, but what He chooses to disclose to you! Abide in His presence. There is more to life that the physical—God has made us in His image and given us the ability to **know Him** in a wordless way, in the inner man, deep within our souls. That is the individual's experience of God for himself. No one can explain it to you. It is between God and you. It will be a dynamic experience, an adventure! Remember to read and meditate on His Word (by reading the Bible, the evidence about God) and enjoy your wonderful walk with God on this earth until the time that He calls you all the way to His home to be with Him always! Yes, through thick and through thin, over the mountains (high points in life) and the valleys (low points in life), He will encompass you by His love and carry you in the paths of righteousness for the sake of His own name (because He wants to), if you will only allow Him! Enjoy life with God, Who desires to be your Father, and Jesus Christ, ***"the radiance of God's glory!"*** (Hebrews 1:3), Who leads (and helps you) by His Spirit through His Word.

As our Father, God loves to surprise us! Being Love, He seeks our good and loves to see us happy as we walk with Him, seeking His will. Oh, there are sad days, and there are dreary days, but we learn from walking with Him that these are to be expected on this earth. Through these difficult times and circumstances, we learn that **God** is our support, our comfort, our **Rock** and that He is faithful and that we need to trust Him. However, in our Father's house things are totally different! There's no sorrow there, no tears, no pain. There will only be worship, praise, joy and happiness as we behold Him in His glory, His goodness. What a Wonderful God we have! To **God** be the glory now and always, in Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen. ✝

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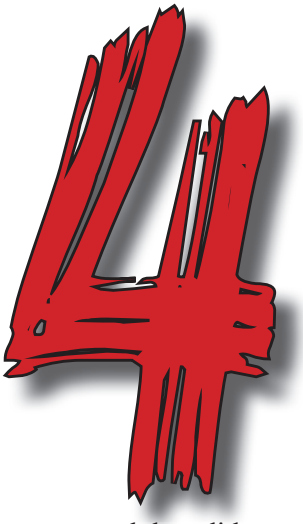

Questions

Doug Greenway and David A. Sargent

For several days Doug Greenway was repeatedly asked four questions to assess his condition. He writes:

"I had brain surgery on December 11 and spent four nights in the ICU. Every 30 minutes one of the nurses would come in and ask what I thought were dumb questions. They knew I was having blood pressure problems from the surgery and they did not want to miss it if I began to decline mentally."

The four questions were:
Can you tell me your name?
Do you know where you are?
Do you know why you are here?
Can you give me a "thumbs up"? *

Consider some spiritual applications of these basic questions:

Can you tell me your name? Who are you? Your ability to recall your name can be an indicator of your health, but it's your identity in relation to Christ that is most important. For ***"salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"*** (Acts 4:12). That name is **Jesus Christ**. Only through Jesus can we be saved (John 14:6).

Do you know where you are? Are you "in" or "outside" of Christ? In Christ is found every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). Outside of Christ there is no hope (Ephesians 2:12). Penitent believers are baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27). **Are you in Christ?** Are you following Him faithfully?

Do you know why you are here? People have sought to answer that question in a myriad of ways since the world began. The correct answer is: We are here to glorify the God who made us. ***"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"*** (1 Corinthians 10:31). **We glorify God by being Christians**, Christ-followers (1 Peter 4:16).

Can you give me a "thumbs up"? Are you doing well in living by God's priorities? The apostle Paul gave a "thumbs up" near the end of his life. ***"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing"*** (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

The key to answering these questions correctly is Christ, for God loves us so much that He gave His Son to die on the cross for our sins (John 3:16). It is through the gift of Jesus that we understand what life is all about and how to receive eternal life through Him.

God will save and give eternal life to **those who place their faith and trust in Jesus** (Acts 16:30-31), **turn from their sins in repentance** (Acts 17:30-31), **confess Jesus before men** (Romans 10:9-10) and **are baptized (immersed) into Christ for the forgiveness of their sins** (Acts 2:38). **He will continue to cleanse from sin those who continue to walk in the light of His word.** ***"…if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."*** (1 John 1:7).

So ask yourself these four questions, and answer them by saying "Yes" to Jesus through your trusting obedience.

Won't YOU answer these four vital questions?

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*** From "'What's Going On' In Your Life?" by Doug Greenway (minister of the West Main church of Christ in Tupelo, MS), a sermon shared by Dan Williams in PREACHER STUFF MINISTRY RESOURCE EXCHANGE (2/1/2016).**

Take Me to the Door, Lord

Patrick Morrison

Perhaps one of the strangest laws to be found within the pages of Holy Writ is recorded in Exodus 21:4-6. Under the Old Law, the Israelites were required to release Hebrew slaves after six years of servitude. Most Hebrews who were slaves became such out of necessity. More often than not, they enslaved themselves to pay off a great debt. After six years of servitude, they were free to go, whether or not the debt had been completely paid. However, the Hebrew slaves had the choice to begin their lives anew as free citizens, or they could remain with their masters for the rest of their lives.

You may ask yourself why a slave would choose to remain a slave rather than to go free. If the slave loved his master, he had the legal right to remain with his master for life. By making known his desire to remain with his master, the slave was then taken to the doorpost. The master then pierced the servant's ear with an awl, thereby allowing all who saw this servant to know the decision he had made to remain in service to his master.

It is the case today that slavery still exists all over the world. Whether or not everyone realizes it, all people in this world are slaves. Either man is in service to God, or he is in bondage to sin. There is no middle ground (Matthew 6:24). Slavery to sin does bring with it some freedoms—freedom from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), freedom from the blessings that can be found only in Christ (Ephesians 1:3) and freedom from salvation (Romans 6:23).

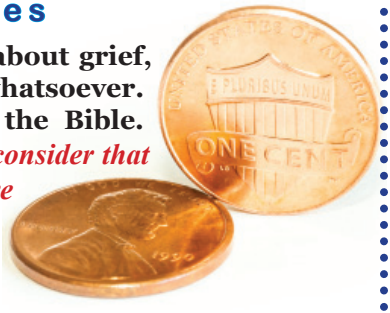
Servitude to Christ also has its freedoms—freedom from the guilt of sin (Acts 2:38) and freedom from the torment of a devil's hell (John 3:16).

We owe a debt to God that can never be repaid, not in 6 years, not in 6,000 years and not even in 6 million years. It is our choice to remain with God, to whom we are all indebted, or walk the pathway of sin, where we will find ourselves toiling under the burden of sin's dreadful consequences. God will not hold us against our wills, but Satan will attempt to keep us within his evil clutches. It is also the case that Satan cares not how his servants are treated, but God counts those who serve Him as sons rather than as slaves (Luke 5). Those who serve God can attest to the fact that God is indeed a merciful and loving Master.

Do you love the Lord? If we truly love Him, then we will do what He has asked us to do in His Word (John 14:15). Let us all make the decision to serve the Lord for as long as we live on this earth. May the entire world see that we have made the decision to remain with our Master forever. The world should see that we have had our ears pierced with the Lord's awl, spiritually speaking. May all who have chosen to remain with God never forget to whom they have given their allegiance. Will you choose to be a free citizen of God's kingdom by putting yourself into His service? The Lord stands at the door waiting. May our lives speak to the Lord, saying, "Lord, take me to the door this day."

Patrick Morrison preaches for the Sixth Avenue Church of Christ in Jasper, Alabama, USA.

Kenney's Pennies



Looking at some various quotes about grief, some really provide no help whatsoever. None compare to the words of the Bible. Proof? Try to top this one. ***"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"*** (Romans 8:18, NKJV.)

New Life When Baptized

Owen D. Olbricht

A person told me that baptism was not necessary in order to be saved because he knew people who were baptized who did not live the Christian life. His assessment did not prove his point that baptism is not necessary since people who do not live a new life after baptism may not understand Bible teaching concerning baptism.

Is being ***"buried…through baptism"*** (Romans 6:4) ***"…in which you were also raised"*** (Colossians 2:12) all that is required in baptism? In Romans 6, Paul addressed a possible misunderstanding of what he had written in chapters four and five. He stated that Jesus' righteousness ***"shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised for our justification"*** (Romans 4:24-25). Paul's thought does not end at the close of Chapter Four. He continued, ***"We have access by faith into this grace"*** (Romans 5:1). ***"But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more"*** (Romans 5:20). Paul's point was that by being buried and raised up, Jesus made possible grace that would cover all our sins.

Paul then addressed a possible wrong conclusion. If grace is sufficient to cover all our sins, we can sin all the more so that more grace

will be given. Paul rebutted this by stating that the purpose of grace is not to give us a license to sin, for we became dead to sin (Romans 6:1-2) when we were buried with Jesus by baptism into death to sin and raised with Him, ***"so we also should walk in newness of life"*** (Romans 6:3-4).

Properly understood, baptism is the turning point in our lives when we die to our past lives in order to live new lives for and with Jesus. Baptism is not just a ritual of being buried under water and being brought out of the water. That is not all which is involved in baptism. It includes not only the outward act but also an inward response, an obeying ***"from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered"*** (Romans 6:17-18). The result of our obedience from the heart in baptism should be freedom from a sinful life, after which we are to consider ourselves dead to sin (Romans 6:11).

If we understand our spiritual involvement in baptism, we will realize that it is a new birth (John 3:5), after which we are new persons, not the old persons we were. Before baptism we were dead in sin, but through faith in the working of God, when we are raised with Christ in baptism, we are made alive and all our transgressions are forgiven (Colossians 2:12-13).

In the next chapter, Paul returned to this thought, and wrote, ***"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above"*** (Colossians 3:1). ***"You have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man"*** (Colossians 3:9). Our old lives end when we are baptized and for each of us a new life begins. If we do not understand this, we miss the teaching that in baptism we share with Jesus His death and resurrection. We enter a new life even as He entered life anew when He was raised. So also we put off our sinful past and become new persons.

If the person being baptized does not realize he is dying to the person he has been and is becoming a new person, he is not becoming new, but only getting wet. Baptism is more than the physical act alone, for it must bring about the rebirth of the spirit of the one being baptized (John 3:6).

Owen D. Olbricht is a preacher and writer living in Sherwood, Arkansas, USA.

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses
(1 Peter 5:6-9)

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,

7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

This is a study in contrasts between God's involvement in our lives and the incessant attempts of Satan to deceive and destroy God's children. First, we are assured that *we live under the powerful hand of our Father.* If we surrender completely to Him, He will bring into our lives whatever is needed (joy, pain, trials, triumphs, countless tools) to shape us into the kind of children He can use in His kingdom, and the promise is there that, ultimately, we will overcome in exaltation!

What God requires of us, in the molding process, is that our faith and trust enable us to *cast every care on Him.* Why? Because our God LOVES us and wants for us only what is best!

But there is a stealthy enemy who is continually searching out the weak souls that he can lead astray through all the tools in his bag: temptation, lust, discouragement, failure, even success can result in turning out attention and commitment away from God.

What are we to do? First, we must *resist* everything the devil throws at us, with all our own strength combined with the strengthening of His Spirit within us. Then we must search our hearts to *know* that we are *surrendering* our everything to God, *trusting* in His care, *holding onto that strong faith* no matter what hardships and challenges come our way, because suffering *will* come, but *those challenges will only bring us closer to God.* **Romans 8 provides a beautiful commentary on these thoughts.**

Preaching to Today's Culture

Andy Robison

In many places, I've preached this point, and now it seems time to develop it into writing. Let me begin by stating the obvious: 2017 is not 1955. American culture in 1955 was vastly different from what it is today. At that time, most people were churchgoers, and most people claimed some kind of tie to Christ. The thrust of the Lord's church, therefore, was to convert people from the falsehoods of denominationalism. The aim was to unite believers in the truths of restored New Testament Christianity. That battle still needs to be fought today! It cannot be denied! However, current culture vastly differs.

In today's America, fewer people than ever go to any kind of church. More people claim atheism than ever before. Multiple generations of families have never set foot inside any place of worship. Some are pressing on to paganism;

1950's Malt Shop

Islam is making wide inroads. The march toward blatant immorality is sweeping the nation individually, legislatively and judicially. Church buildings of all of the denominations are slowly emptying.

What does this mean for evangelism? First, it does **not** mean changing the Gospel. Indeed, the Gospel's truth **cannot** be changed, but only perverted, and that with eternally sorrowful consequences (Galatians 1:6-9). God's teaching on morality, salvation, church autonomy, unity, love, marriage, life and all subjects remains the same (Matthew 28:20; Jude 3)! Yet, the change in culture does have implications for our approach to teaching.

That is as biblical as it can be. When Paul preached to a culture of Jews in Antioch in Pisidia, his starting point was, ***"Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers…"*** (Acts 13:16-17). He then preached a sermon on Israelite history and progressed toward the Christ. I have never started a sermon with similar words because I have never preached to a primarily Jewish culture. When Paul preached in Athens, Greece, there was apparently no Jewish population, but there were many idolaters. The city had idols set up all around, and philosophers debated every new thing. The apostle would have faced a bewildered and eventually uninterested audience had he started with ***"The God of Israel chose our fathers…"*** Instead, he started where they were, with an acknowledgement of their recognition of spiritual things and a discussion of their statue dedicated ***"to the Unknown God"*** (Acts 17:22-23). Thus, he achieved relevance.

He affirmed that it was that God who was the only real God, the Creator of all. He reasoned with them from their philosophers and from their common sense before he ever got to Bible subjects. However, he ended up preaching the same full Gospel to them, calling on them to repent and be prepared for the Judgment (Acts 17:30-31). Our current culture mirrors more an Athens, Greece than an Antioch in Pisidia. It does little good to ask someone for a Bible study when he (a) doesn't have a Bible (more and more don't) and (b) doesn't believe

in it in the first place. Why, he may not even believe in God.

Could it be that many young people over the last forty or fifty years, caught in the throes of the changing culture (they never knew the old, and were bombarded with the new) have been lost even after a good churchgoing rearing simply because we might have missed this point? Perhaps we did well in preaching the Gospel from the angle of how to answer denominational friends. Yet, maybe, in some cases (forgive the overgeneralizations necessary for making points), the battles young people were fighting were not with denominationalists, but with atheists, evolutionists, humanists, Deists or even pagans. This is **not** to accuse of sin or error. Adults and everyone still needed to be equipped for the battle in which they were raised (analogous to Antioch).

However, things were changing rapidly. I merely suggest that maybe the changes were so fast and furious (to an Athens culture) that we had trouble keeping up. Once, I had the painful experience of losing a new convert to the doctrine of evolution. Thus, determined to prepare a whole congregation against this delusion, I preached several sermons on Christian evidences. Why should we believe there is a God? When I got done, an elder commented, "We're glad you're done with that; we already believe that." Maybe it was my delivery; maybe it was somehow my fault. On the other hand, could it be that such a comment was (even innocently) bereft of vision in preparing a new generation for their challenges?

The fullness of the Gospel has answers for every challenge! In some corners of the world, preachers start off preaching against ancestor worship. I've never had to do that, but in those cultures, they do. The Gospel is always relevant! It is up us to study the Gospel, study the culture and flesh out the relevancy. The Gospel needs to be defended at every level, starting where each individual is. Can we work on making the Gospel relevant to our age, **without** changing its content? It is more than biblical to do so. It is imperative.

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Let Your Light Shine in the Community

Martha Lynn Rushmore

As Christians, how can we let our lights shine in our communities? Have we put Christ on as **the Light** of our lives? We cannot be the influence that we ought to be as long as we have not become Christians. Therefore, we must follow God's Word to become children of God. Let us find out how a person becomes a child of the King!

First, one must hear the Word of God as stated in Romans 10:17, ***"So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."*** **Secondly**, a person must believe God's Word as quoted in Mark 16:16,

"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. But he who does not believe shall be condemned." **Thirdly**, one is required to repent of his or her sins. There must be a change of heart (mind) and a change of actions. Luke 13:3, 5 say, ***"I tell you, no, except you repent you will perish."*** This must be essential as Christ spoke these words twice as emphasis that one—not should—**must** repent. **Fourthly**, it is necessary to confess that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. Romans 10:9-10 reads, ***"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."***

Lastly, a penitent believer must be baptized into Christ, and then, our Lord adds him to His church. In Acts 2:38 we find written, ***"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"*** After, we have done all that is required, only then does Christ add us to His church. Acts 2:47 records, ***"Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."***

How do we let our lights shine? We are to imitate Christ in the way we speak and act. We are watched by all around us. Our lives are like throwing a small pebble into a pool of water; ripples go on and on. We do not know who or how we are influencing those around us with our actions and speech. No one lives or dies to himself (Romans 14:7). So, let us all speak and act as Christ did when He was on the earth.

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How do we let our lights shine? We are to imitate Christ in the way we speak and act.

Hear and Obey the Lord Jesus

Tim Childs

Near the conclusion of Jesus' address to the multitudes in His Sermon on the Mount, He declared, ***"Not every one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of my Father who is in heaven"*** (Matthew 7:21). This is a passage that must be embedded in our minds. We should not live a day without pondering its meaning and significance to our lives and to others around us.

The term "Lord" is translated from a word in the Koine Greek, *kurios*, which, according to Strong, is the title of one who is "supreme in authority, that is controller." Thayer adds that the title is one "of honour expressive of respect and reverence, with which servants greet their master."

Jesus came to this earth, in part, to bring the message of God's will to all of humanity so we would not live and die in ignorance. In His prayer to the Father, Jesus said, ***"For I have given to them the words which thou gavest me…"*** (John 17:8). God no longer winks at ignorance, but He commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

Saul of Tarsus asked the right question when he made the query of Jesus, ***"Lord, what will You have me to do?"*** (Acts 9:6). A man demonstrating great wisdom, Saul, did as the Lord told him to do. He went into the city of Damascus and waited for Ananias. Saul was ultimately forgiven of his past sins when he was washed in the blood of Christ upon obeying the voice of God's messenger, Ananias (Acts 22:16).

Jesus does not want to hear an empty profession. Could Jesus ask you and me the same question He asked some of His day? ***"And why call you me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say"*** (Luke 6:46)?

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You Have Compassed This Mountain Long Enough

Jeff Archey

God declared divine instruction through Moses, ***"Ye have compassed this mountain long enough…"*** (Deuteronomy 2:3). In other words, Israel, you have gone around the base of this mountain for several days; it is time to move onward!

In another sense, there are "mountains" in life we compass or go around and around. We stay in the same old direction, but we need to listen to God and turn to a better direction, Friends! Why not resolve to do so? I challenge us to follow what God directs today. It is time that we cease compassing the mountains!

Wasting time is a mountain we compass. ***"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil"*** (Ephesians 5:16). As Robertson puts it, "We all have the same time. Paul goes into the open market and buys it up by using it rightly." There is the factor: It is imperative we use our time wisely and rightly. God forbid any of us were to be like Felix in Acts 24:24-25. He sent for Paul, but afterwards he trembled at what he heard. There is no example from the Scriptures where Felix came to Christ. We go around and around not using time wisely. Schedule carefully and prioritize with importance.

Apathy. Simply not caring. Can you imagine? No emotion, no compassion, no concern for anything or anyone. In Revelation 3:14-16, the church allowed the things of the world to dictate their comfort, and the Lord commanded them to repent! Indeed, a mountain that takes us around and around with no direction and no concern. Oh, ***"turn northward,"*** Friend!

Worry is a never-ending compass. Around and around with emotions all torn. ***"Be careful*** [or anxious] ***for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God"*** (Philippians 4:6). Turn it over to the Lord—the worry, the concern and the strife. Always remember a rule of thumb concerning worry: If you cannot do anything about it, worry will not change it, and if you can do something about it, then work and do not worry!

Ignorance is a mountain (Hosea 4:6). Ignorance is destructive. Those at Berea did not allow ignorance to permeate their lives (Acts 17:10-11). Ignorance and refusal to learn is as one that is ***"ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"*** (2 Timothy 3:7). Let us grow in our knowledge and put it to use (2 Peter 3:18).

Wasting precious time, apathy, worry and ignorance. Oh, there are so many throughout the world that compass these mountains and get nowhere. Praise to God that we have a direction to go! Dear Friend, do you have that right direction and plan?

Jeff Archey preaches for the East Side Church of Christ in Cleveland, Tennessee, USA.

Entertainment and True Worship

Basil Overton

There are good kinds and bad kinds of entertainment. Any amount of the bad kind is too much. Even good entertainment can be overdone. We live in an age that could well be called "the entertainment age."

A popular late-night American TV showman began working for another TV network. Media people said he got a pay raise from seven million dollars per year to 14 million dollars per year. The salary of the President of the United States is $200,000 of taxable income per year. With all the demands and pressures of his job, I am confident the President earns every penny of it.

Even though the President's salary is paid by taxpayers, compared to a 14 million dollar per year salary, his salary is a classic demonstration of how America's priorities are out of balance. It is likely the above mentioned TV showman will be paid more in two years than all presidents of the United States have been paid in the 200 years since George Washington was President. Likely, the income taxes that the TV showman will pay will be more than enough money to pay the President's salary.

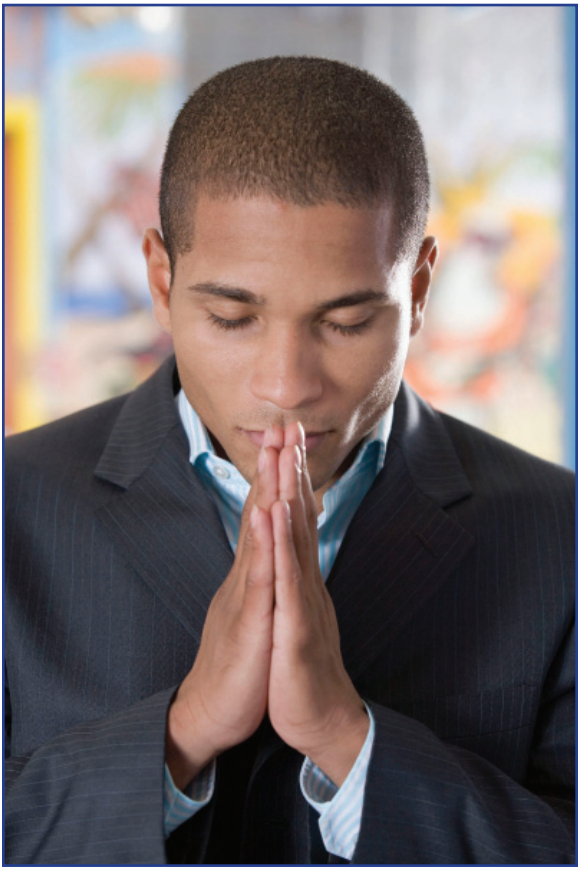
Ann Landers said in one of her columns that the prizefighter Evander Holyfield was paid 60 million dollars in 1990. She also said Joe Montana was paid three and a half million dollars in 1991 and missed several games because of an injured elbow. The list of such highly paid athletes would be much too long to publish here.

May Have Influenced the Church

The craze and craving for entertainment may have already adversely influenced the church. It may be that this age of entertainment has so surrounded, saturated and subdued so many people that some in the church expect to be entertained during the worship periods. It seems that even the short pause from entertainment involved by some who attend worship sessions seems to cause them to be bored because they are not entertained.

They may say, "I did not get anything out of it." **It may be that some do not get anything out of worship because they do not put anything in to it!** Furthermore, Christians should not attend worship sessions with the attitude that they are there to see what they can get out of it. Instead, **they should attend with the attitude that they are there to worship God and do their best to praise and please him!**

If the preacher is not "dynamic," some get bored. His preaching the Word of God and what people need to hear is not entertaining to some. If the preacher does not tell some intriguing, gripping, secular story every time he starts a sermon, and then tell several more such stories in his sermon, to some he is boring. If the preacher emphasizes what the Bible says, some may be bored.



I heard about a preacher who was doing his best to tell of the awful ordeal of the crucifixion of the Son of God, and he realized the people were not listening very well. Some were about to go to sleep. The preacher suddenly began telling a story he made up about a

dog getting killed, and the audience began to lean toward the preacher out of their seats! The preacher said, "I was telling you the story of our blessed Savior dying for our sins and you seemed very indifferent. I began to entertain you with an untrue story about a dying dog and I got your undivided attention!"

I heard an audio taped speech (I cannot call it a sermon) that was made by a popular preacher at a big religious gathering in Nashville, Tennessee. Along with other ridiculous things he said, he emphasized that worship should be "a party." He emphasized this in a context in which he made it clear that he thought worship services should be entertaining. He said people are not interested in doctrine, but he said nothing about any of the abundance of passages in the New Testament that emphasize the importance of right doctrine. **He was using wrong doctrine to emphasize that right doctrine was not important!** He made it clear that we need to have an atmosphere of entertainment in our worship services if we expect to attract people. Certainly, we should be friendly in worship services, but **being boisterous and acting "slap happy" or giddy are not proofs of true devotion and spirituality in worship!**

True Worship

Over the years, I have observed that many, including preachers, have emphasized what we can get out of worship. Of course, true worshippers can get much out of worship, but that should never be the primary concern. The primary concern should be what we put into worship as we turn our hearts to God our Father and Creator in solemn and devoted praise and adoration, and as we recognize our helplessness and emptiness without Him.

Jesus said we must worship God ***"in spirit and in truth"*** (John 4:24). In the context of New Testament teaching, we know this means we must worship God in the right attitude and in the way God said to worship Him! If one is bored when worshipping God as God says to worship Him, he is neither humble nor poor in spirit. ✝

Basil Overton (1925-2013) was the long-time Editor of *The World Evangelist* and lived in Florence, Alabama, USA.

How Far Are You Willing to Go to Worship?

Mark T. Tonkery

I knew of a couple once who traveled about two and half hours one way to go to worship services. They lived in the Northeast of the United States, and this was the closest congregation of the churches of Christ for them. This family was dedicated and determined to worship the Lord. How far would we be willing to go to worship?

In the Bible, we read of an individual who was dedicated to worshiping the Lord—the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40. The Scriptures tell us that the Ethiopian eunuch was traveling back home to Ethiopia after going to Jerusalem to worship. He would have traveled hundreds of miles by chariot just to go to the Temple of the Lord. While there, he would have only been able to go to the Court of the Gentiles because of his status as a eunuch. This would be kind of like someone today traveling hours away to go to a Gospel meeting only to get to the church building and being allowed to stand on the front porch. Yet, the Ethiopian eunuch was determined to go anyway to worship the Lord.

As the Ethiopian was returning home, he continued to nurture his faith by studying the Bible, reading from the prophet Isaiah. His personal

Bible study led him to the conversation with Philip in which the Ethiopian believed and was baptized (Acts 8:35-40).

Now just imagine if the Ethiopian eunuch had said any of the following. "It's too far to go to worship." "Why should I go to worship; I don't get anything out of it." "I'm spiritually strong enough that I don't need to go to worship." "I am too tired or too sleepy to go to worship." A hundred other excuses are so common today. Do you think we would be still talking about him if he made excuses like some do today? Do you think we would have his example of conversion if he was not willing to come to worship and study the Scriptures? Do you think he would have confessed his faith and would have been baptized if his heart was not open to the message of God?

Many times people make up all kinds of excuses for not coming to worship and Bible study. However, have you thought about what is missed when we skip worship? First, we miss an opportunity to worship the Lord. God wants us to worship Him (John 4:23). Second, we miss an opportunity to fellowship. Philip and the Ethiopian would have never been able to fellowship if he never went to Jerusalem. Third, we miss an opportunity to learn more about the Lord and the Scriptures. The Ethiopian was reading Scripture. Fourth, we miss an opportunity to be a positive example to others. The Ethiopian is a positive example because he was willing to worship the Lord, but what about us? What kind of example are we setting for our family and friends when we skip worship? Fifth, we miss an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord. If the Ethiopian would have not gone to worship the Lord, he would have not been taught what he needed to do to become a Christian.

How far is too far to go to worship when our souls are in question? What do we need to do to be in worship and Bible Study on Sundays and Wednesdays? If the Ethiopian eunuch would not allow hundreds of miles of hot and dusty desert roads, by the way of a chariot, to deter him, why would we allow anything to keep us from worshiping our Lord and Savior? Think about it!

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Is Clapping of Hands Appropriate in Worship?

T. Pierce Brown

The question was raised primarily in reference to applauding at a baptismal service. The one who asked it remarked that it seemed to him that it was equivalent to saying "Amen" at the end of someone's prayer, and it merely indicated approval of what was being done. If it were merely equivalent to taking his hand and saying, "I rejoice in your obedience," I would have no objection to it. However, it involves other significant principles.

Let us examine some and try to arrive at a scriptural answer to the question. When we say "scriptural answer," we do not claim that we know a Scripture that deals directly with the question, for if there was an approved example of early Christians doing it, or a command that indicated the propriety of it, we would not need to discuss the matter. If we could find a Scripture that said, "Do not clap hands," we would not need to discuss the matter. So, we must examine principles and Scriptures that deal with broader matters and strive to make a logical application of them.

First, let us look at the assumption that the clapping of hands is no more than simply expressing agreement with a statement or an action, as "Amen" might be. When an audience clapped and shouted approval of Michael Jackson's performance, did it evidence about the same thing as if the audience said, "Amen?" The basic meaning of "Amen" is, "May it be so." It has various nuances in other contexts, but the basic idea is approval of what another has said. The basic purpose of clapping of hands in our society is to show approval of a person's performance, involving his skill or ability.

When a person is baptized properly, it is approved of God and by all subjects of God. When a person prays appropriately, takes the Lord's Supper or sings properly, the same thing is true. Should we applaud at any or all of those times? If not, why?

Note two or three significant things. If a professional singer performs and the audience applauds, audience members are normally applauding the

performance of the musician. Is there anything in God's Word that leads one to assume that when a person leads a song, leads a prayer or preaches in worship, his performance is to be applauded? Is he or his performance the center of attention? Or, should our attention be on the message and the Christ whom the message should exalt?

In fact, if one applauded when a person got through leading a prayer at the Lord's Supper and removed the top of the containers of the fruit of the vine, would anyone know whether he was applauding the beautiful way he led the prayer, the superb flourish with which he removed the lid without banging it against the table or the fact that Jesus died for us? Is either of them the fit subject for applause? Just because you said, "Amen" when he offered the prayer, and approve of what went on, assuming that God also approved of it, would you advocate applause at that point? If the argument about clapping hands being equivalent to saying "amen" were valid, you would. If you had been standing at the foot of the cross when Jesus died, and knew the purpose for which he died, would you have approved of His loving sacrifice? If so, would it have been appropriate for you to applaud as the soldier thrust his spear into the side of our Lord? If you can see why not, it should not be too difficult for you to see why not in the other cases mentioned.

There are other principles involved. The performance of a singer or a pianist on the stage is supposed to be a performance that calls attention to the skill or to the ability of the artist who is performing. Thus, it is appropriate to applaud or to withhold applause in terms of how you valued the skill or the ability of the performer. That is not true with reference to the act of baptism, preaching, prayer, singing in worship or waiting on the Lord's Table. If one applauded at a baptism, he might be applauding the skill with which the baptizer put the person under the water without getting himself wet. I saw a person baptize another on one occasion by grabbing him around the throat with both hands and bending him backward with no other support. I might have applauded the fact that he came up alive without being strangled or choked to death. My point here is that applause always calls attention to the performers of the act, whatever the act may be. At a baptism, preaching, praying, etc., we should be calling attention to

the grace and the love of the Savior who authorized those acts.

When a preacher is preaching and I say, "Amen," I am not calling attention to the performance of the preacher, but to the message that exalts Christ. When a person is praying, and I say, "Amen," I am not calling attention to the beauty or to the eloquence of his phraseology, but to the validity and worth of his petition. If I applauded, I would be calling attention to his performance. This is inappropriate, and it has no place in an assembly for the worship of God. When a person is baptized, I approve of his action, if it is in obedience to the command of the Lord, who said, ***"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"*** (Mark 16:16). I also approve of the action of the person doing the baptizing, if he is doing it by the authority of Christ, in the way Christ commanded and for the purpose Christ ordained. If applauding by clapping of the hands were nothing more than a way of saying, "I'm glad he did that, for it glorifies God," I would have no objection to it. Yet, since God's Word gives no indication that He wants to be glorified in that way, and since that kind of applause is always used to call attention to the performers of the act rather than to God or the God ordained purpose of the act, I object to it.

If you have thought it appropriate to applaud at a baptism because you are merely showing gladness or approval of the act, and still think so, then try to give a sound and sensible answer to the question, "At what place in the worship or in the service of God would you not want to applaud by clapping the hands, since you should approve of every scriptural act?" Should it be done after the songs, after the reading or prayer, after the Lord's Supper, after the sermon or any time and every time you feel like rejoicing?

T. Pierce Brown (1923-2008) lived and preached in Cookeville, Tennessee, USA.

[**Editor's Note:** Furthermore, clapping in worship along with congregational singing amounts to the addition of a percussion element to the song service, which exceeds what is authorized (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Also, clapping in whatever venue it occurs is first an emotional outburst usually of a spontaneous nature that is out of harmony with the gravity and the reverence fitting for biblically prescribed Christian worship. Though our worship is to be "in spirit" (proper attitude, an emotional investment) "and in truth" (authorized), it certainly is not to unfold in a frivolous, party atmosphere.]

Some new definitions:

Arbitrator (ar'-bi-tray-ter): A cook that leaves Arby's to work at McDonald's.

Avoidable (uh-voy'-duh-buhl): What a bullfighter tries to do.

Counterfeiters (kown'-ter-fit'-ers): Workers who put together kitchen cabinets.

Heroes (hee-rhos): What a guy in a boat does.

Paradox (pare'-uh-doks): Two physicians.

I decided to stop calling the bathroom the "John" and renamed it the "Jim."

I feel so much better saying that I went to the Jim this morning

An ad for a hedge clipper that I had to read twice: "A built-in safety switch prevents accidental starting, and blades will stop when you take one hand off."

Wife: "Didn't I tell you to notice when the soup boiled over?"

Husband: "I did. It was 11:30.

Some people can ask questions that cause you to just shake your head in amazement.

For example, this fellow asked, "Can a kangaroo jump higher than a house?"

What a question! Of course a kangaroo can jump higher than a house! Have you ever seen a house that can jump?

A waiter brings the customer the steak he ordered, with his thumb squarely on top of the meat.

"Are you crazy?" yells the customer. "Don't bring my meal with your hand on my steak!"

The waiter responded, "Well, do you want it to fall on the floor again?"

Talk about having second thoughts upon choosing a place to eat. I went into this place in Abilene, Texas and said to the waitress, "I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse." She smiled, handed me a menu and replied, "Well… you've come to the right place."

An executive was interviewing a young woman for a position in his company. He wanted to find out something about her personality, so he asked, "If you could have a conversation with someone, living or dead, who would it be?"

The girl responded confidently, "The living one!"

I told my son, "You will marry the girl I choose."

He said, "No."

I told him, "She is Bill Gates' daughter."

He said, "Yes."

I called Bill Gates and said, "I want your daughter to marry my son."

Bill Gates said, "No."

I told Bill Gates, "My son is the CEO of World Bank."

Bill Gates said, "Okay."

I called the president of World Bank and asked him to make my son the CEO.

He said, "No."

I told him, "My son is Bill Gates' son-in-law." He said, "Okay."

And this is how politics works!

If God wanted me to touch my toes, He would've put them on my knees.

A Texan was taking a taxi tour of London and was in a hurry. As they went by the Tower of London the cab driver explained what it was and that construction of it started in 1346 and was completed in 1412. The Texan replied, "Ha! A little ol' tower like that? In Houston we'd have that thing up in two weeks!"

Next they passed the House of Parliament–started in 1544 and completed in 1618. The Texan said, "We put up a bigger one than that in Dallas and it only took a year!"

As they passed Westminster Abbey the cab driver was silent. "Whoa! What's that over there?" asked the Texan. The driver replied, "I don't know; it wasn't there yesterday."

Technology! The gas pumps of today can pump $50 worth of gas in the same amount of time it took just a few years ago to pump $15 worth. How's that for progress?

"My uncle in Detroit tried to make a new kind of car. He took the engine from a Ford, the transmission from a Cadillac, the tires from a Chevrolet, and the exhaust system from a Dodge."

"Really? What did he get?"

"Fifteen years."

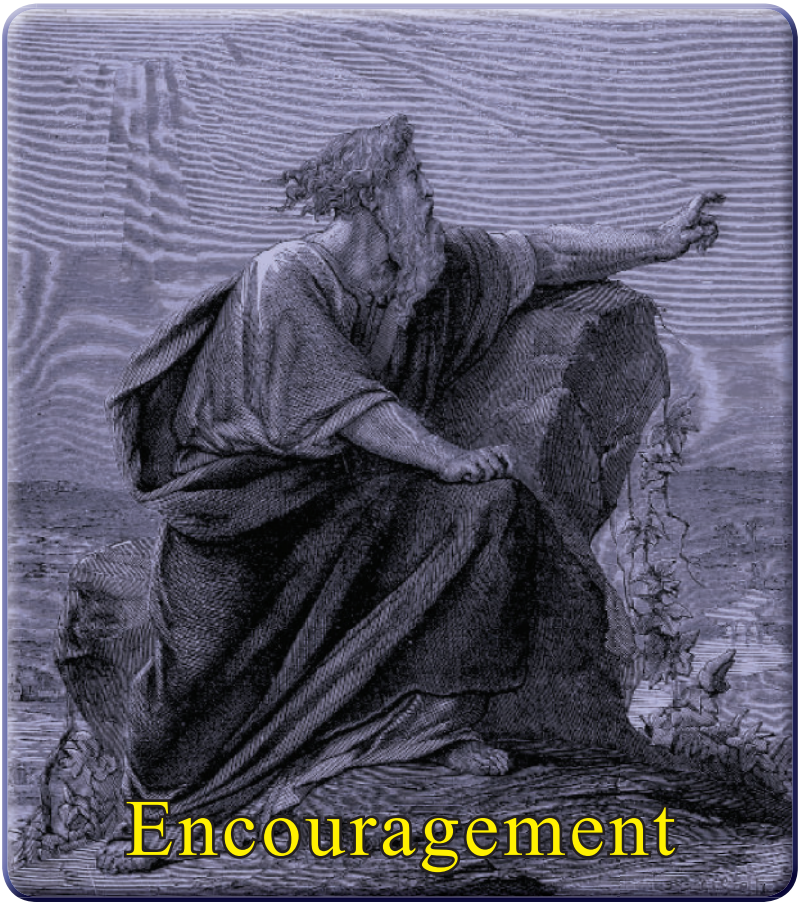
How Do You Measure Up?

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

1 Peter 4:12-17



Arlis Richardson

We all need encouragement in our daily walks in life. Many Bible characters faced the same disappointing problems that we face in modern times.

One had been selected by God to accomplish a task larger perhaps than any ever known to mankind. He was to lead people away from slavery, help to organize them into a nation and take them to a land flowing with

abundance. The task was awesome, but God was with him. Unfortunately, the pressures got to him, and we read of him failing to give proper credit to God. Subsequently, he was told that he would not be allowed to enter that Promised Land with those he was leading. How sad to spend all of one's life working toward something only to have it denied because of one failure. Yet, that was the verdict upon Moses!

Did Moses give up? No! He knew that there was something better after this life if he continued to carry out God's will. Therefore, he continued to lead Israel toward the Promised Land and to encourage a new generation. He was especially encouraging to his successor. Before Moses departed this life, he stood before this new generation of Israelites and stated, ***"But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither, encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it"*** (Deuteronomy 1:38). What a wonderful attitude! How encouraged Joshua must have been to have this great leader, in a moment of extreme personal sadness, asking the people he was leading to encourage him. Although Moses did not have a formal human-style funeral, he had the best funeral director ever known. ***"So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto to this day"*** (Deuteronomy 34:5-6).

What a great encouragement this should be to all of us. Even if we fail, there is hope if we determine that we are going to work for something beyond this life. We may lose many things in this life, but God's promises still abide. We are encouraged by the statement, ***"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable"*** (1 Corinthians 15:19). What better funeral arrangements could have been made for Moses? How wonderful to know that God will take care of things in due time.

Sometimes the burdens of frustration seem to overwhelm us. Yet, we also need not to be overly concerned about ourselves while trying to encourage others. How wonderful it is indeed to have encouragement come sometimes from unexpected sources.

Arlis Richardson has preached for decades for the churches of Christ in the USA, and now he is retired.

Routine

Derek Broome

When you wake up in the morning, what is the first thing you do? Shower? Eat breakfast? Brush your teeth? Most people have a routine that they follow each day, except for the occasional holiday and weekend. Now, for some people their routine is healthy and productive. They have found the best way to motivate themselves each day and use their routine to achieve maximum productivity. Yet, for others, their routine is harmful, lazy and produces only enough energy to barely get by. When we look at these two different approaches to life, we probably all recognize changes we need to make in our physical

lives. I know I do. Yet, do we recognize the changes we need to make in our spiritual lives?

In Matthew 23, the scribes and the Pharisees were living their lives just how they wanted. They were telling people to live one way while they were living another way. They were making themselves look good on the outside while on the inside they were full of corruption. They were upholding parts of the Law while they were forgetting other parts all together. In Matthew 23:27-28, Jesus continued His examination of their lives and said they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Obviously, their lives were not pleasing to the Lord.

Christ must be the focal point of our lives, and as His holy people, we should work each day to do His will.

What about our spiritual lives? Do we live like the scribes and Pharisees? Are we full of hypocrisy and lawlessness? Many Christians today are caught in the harmful trap of not really living for Jesus. To so many, a successful day as a Christian just means not knowingly doing anything wrong. We get in the routine of getting up each day, not committing any sins people will call us out on and going to bed feeling pretty satisfied each night. We go to Bible study and worship each week, sit on our normal pew, sing, pray and take of the Lord's Supper. We feel that in the end, we are doing all right. However, what about actually living for Jesus?

I believe we all can recognize the areas in our spiritual lives that need to change, but we have to want to change for our Lord. Christ must be the focal point of our lives, and as His holy people, we should work each day to do His will.

Derek Broome is the associate minister of the Siwell Road Church of Christ in Jackson, Mississippi, USA.

Alexander the Angry

Bill Dillon

Alexander the Great was one of the mightiest conquerors of history. He conquered not only Greece but Egypt and Persia as well. He even traveled as far as distant India. At 33 years of age, he was the undisputed ruler of the known world. Though Alexander mastered the world, he could not conquer himself.

Alexander's dearest friend was Cletus. From childhood they had played and grown together. More than that, they had fought side by side in numerous battles and campaigns. Even more, on one occasion Cletus had heroically saved Alexander's life.

In an unguarded moment during a drunken feast, Cletus offended Alexander by an untimely remark. Alexander was enraged and took a javelin and hurled it at Cletus, and in an instant Cletus was dead. Alexander wept bitter tears and was remorseful, but even the mighty Alexander could not bring back the dead. Alexander had conquered the world, but he could not control himself. He could command battalions, but he failed to restrain his own emotions. He could discipline legions, but he could not discipline his temper.

No bond of affection or friendship is powerful enough to hold friends together in the face of drunken outbursts and moods of rage.

It is a sadness that Alexander the Great did not learn in time the prevailing truth of Proverbs 16:32, which reads, ***"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city."***

Bill Dillon preaches for the Lord's church in Cotter, Arkansas, USA.

The Privilege of Prayer

Jack W. Carter

Prayer truly is a privilege. It is a promise to the faithful of God. It is the assurance that God not only watches His children but that He listens to them as well.

Prayer is not a pledge to just anyone. So many passages of Scripture speak of how the prayers of the sinful, rebellious and indolent are not heard. God says that they do not get past the clouds, that they are an abomination to Him and that even when calamities come He will not hear.

Many have a difficult time accepting this. God is a God of love, right? We are His children, even when we do not serve Him well, right? Surely He will not turn a deaf ear to even the worst of us when we cry out in distress, right?

Let's allow our God to answer these questions for us.

> ***"Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, and you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you, when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, would have none of my counsel, and despised all my reproof, therefore they shall eat of the fruit of their way and be sated with their own deices."*** (Proverbs 1:24-31)

If this is a warning to the unrighteous, it is also a vow to the faithful. When calamities come, **God will hear!** God will not only hear, but He will act.

Again and again this is proven. Again and again righteous people change the course of events through prayer.

Jack W. Carter (1930-2013) was a preacher for many years in the state of Colorado, USA

Qualities of a Great Home

Proverbs 31:10-31

Jimmy Clark

"An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels" (Proverbs 31:10). This passage, along with the verses that follow to the end of the chapter, describes a woman of virtue. However, there are more people mentioned than just the woman in this section. There is her husband (Proverbs 31:11, 23, 28). There are her children (Proverbs 31:28). There are servants in the household (Proverbs 31:15). Much of what is in this section gives insights to qualities of a great home. **Consider three.**

#1 Trust

"The heart of her husband safely trusts in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Proverbs 31:11-12). A foundational principle of successful marriages and homes is in the word "trust." Strong confidence in the credibility of the words of the vows that were made the day the two became one is without parallel in importance. Having a mutual confidence in the other when away from each other is a peace that all should know. However, it is tragic to see a husband who is controlling and suspicious of his wife's every word and step. Equally as damaging is the wife's probing into every action of her husband to see if he is really truthful and loyal to the marriage. Such activities on both sides are smothering and alienating. Trust allows each to be away from the other in different activities of the day and yet knowing that each is working for the common goal: a happy and productive life together.

#2 Toil

"She looks well to the ways of her household, and eats not the bread of idleness" (Proverbs 31:27). This section is filled with words of productive

labor. There are the words ***"seeks"*** and ***"works willingly"*** (Proverbs 31:13). There are the words ***"she plants a vineyard"*** (Proverbs 31:16). A casual look into the life of this woman would show that she had no time to be idle with all the production that she gave. She worked for the present needs and prepared for the future ones. The close of the section states of her, ***"Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates"*** (Proverbs 31:31). When all are working together for the good of the home, a great home is produced. Building a home involves much labor (Proverbs 14:1).

No home is great where compassion is absent. It is stated of this worthy woman, ***"She opens her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness"*** (Proverbs 31:26). She is compassionate to those unfortunate ones outside of her home (Proverbs 31:20). Showing mercy and kindness is to be close to the character of God Himself (Titus 3:4-5). Love and tenderness is to be sought more than all material riches. Solomon wrote in another place in Proverbs, ***"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith"*** (Proverbs 15:17). ***"Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than a house full of sacrifices with strife"*** (Proverbs 17:1). God joins a couple together in marriage (Matthew 19:6) and ***"has called us to peace"*** (1 Corinthians 7:15).

Since the Lord God made the home to be a blessing to humanity, it should follow that the Lord knows what is best for it. Would that each home were a taste of Heaven on Earth.

Jimmy Clark preaches for the Bethel Church of Christ in Athens, Alabama, USA.

How to Improve the Spirituality of Your Family

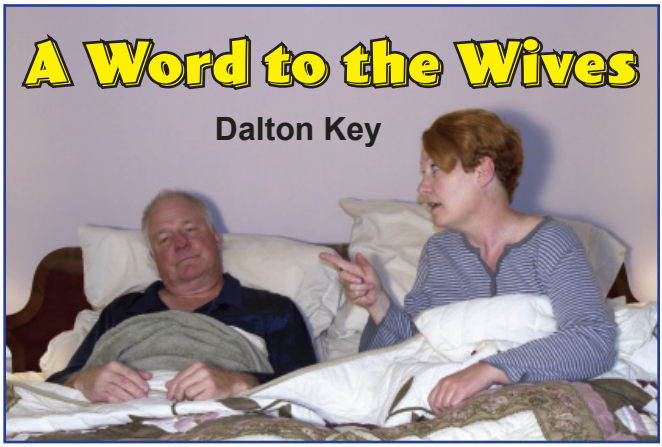
Ken Tyler

In a busy world, it is easy to lose our focus. For example, most parents are running their children to one sporting activity after another. There seems to be little time for anything else. It takes special effort to maintain and to improve our spirituality. I want to give some simple ways to help you improve the spirituality of your family.

1. **It begins with desire**. You must want to improve the spirituality of you family.
2. **Pray together at meals**. This acknowledges that you recognize that your blessings come from God and that you are thankful for them (James 1:17). With your meals mainly in the SUV and restaurant, don't forget to pray.
3. **Get your family together for Bible reading and prayer before you go to bed** (2 Timothy 3:15). This will keep you close to one another and to God. If the day has been difficult, it will give your family the peace it needs.
4. **As a family, go, visit and help someone with a special need** (Galatians 6:10). When you lift someone's burden, your family will recognize the blessedness of service. Our children are now grown, and I can see a real caring attitude toward others because we practiced this as they were growing up.

Improving the spirituality of your family must be the top priority. Our time is really limited when it comes to our children. I urge you to examine your focus and desire, and then to get busy.

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



Socrates was plagued with a nagging wife who would often give the little man a tongue-lashing and then dump a bucket of cold water over his head. The philosopher explained such bazaar behavior by saying, "After the storm, the rain."

When asked why he married Zantippe, Socrates answered, "Those who want to ride well choose restive horses because, if they can handle these, they can manage others. I want to learn to associate with all mankind, and I chose Zantippe, knowing that if I could handle her society, I should be able to get along with anyone." Socrates may well have taken on more than he was able to handle!

Abraham Lincoln is said to have died a slow, emotional death long before Booth pulled the trigger at Ford's Theater. His wife is said to have carped, criticized and complained to the point that Lincoln could do nothing right in her eyes. When he was nominated to run for the Presidency, he stood from where he was seated, took his hat in hand and said quietly, "I want to share this with the woman who loves me…my mother."

No, not all wives are nagging burdens. Most Christian wives are kind, sweet and gentle helpers to their husbands (Genesis 2:20). Solomon had such wonderful wives in mind when he wrote, ***"Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies"*** (Proverbs 31:10). What kind of wife are you?

Dalton Key is the Editor of *Old Paths* and preaches for the 10th and Rockford congregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA.

Six Qualities of Quality Leadership

Neal Pollard

In Deuteronomy, Moses began to review the events of the last forty or so years—what happened to cause the wilderness wandering and then what occurred while in it. In the middle of the first chapter, he talked about the time he implemented his father-in-law Jethro's plan to handle the numerous issues that were coming up between the Israelites. He called these men "judges" (as contrasted with the men and women who would wear that title and deliver the people beginning a few generations after Moses) who had certain divinely-given qualifications to meet. Deuteronomy 1:15-17 says,

> ***So I took the heads of your tribes, wise and experienced men, and appointed them heads over you, leaders of thousands and of hundreds, of fifties and of tens, and officers for your tribes. Then I charged your judges at that time, saying, "Hear the cases between your fellow countrymen, and judge righteously between a man and his fellow countryman, or the alien who is with him. You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not fear man, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it."***

They were to be wise. Verse thirteen adds "understanding" and "knowledgeable." Knowledge is the foundation beneath wisdom, and understanding is an outgrowth and application of wisdom. Problem-solving and issue-resolving require wisdom.

They were to be experienced—not novices. They were to have demonstrated the ability to judge and discern difficult situations.

They were to possess righteous judgment. In conflict, everybody feels he is right and the other party is wrong. How were these leaders to tell? A mind clear from improper motives and rash judgment would more clearly discern situations.

They were to be impartial. Favoritism was tantamount to corruption. Conflicts had to be resolved with utmost fairness.

They were not to ignore "big" or "little" problems. The "small" and the "great" fell to them to handle, if they could. If it was too big for them, Moses could be called upon to intervene. Yet, the design of this system was for these men to handle these matters. "Big" problems were not to be shied away from for their enormity, neither were "small" problems to be scoffed at in their seeming insignificance. Those enduring "big" problems needed intervention, and those who had "small" problems no doubt saw them as big in their own eyes.

They were not to fear any man. They could easily face intimidation, threats, bullying, bribery, ostracism or the like. However, God through Moses gave an unqualified and unequivocal command that they stand tall and fearlessly before each situation.

The system set up by God right outside of Egypt and before the wilderness journeys is not a direct parallel to God's pattern for leadership today. Yet, the text is dripping with principles and application. These same qualities will help God's leaders be quality leaders today!

Neal Pollard is the preacher for the Bear Valley church in Denver, Colorado, USA.

Did You Know?

"Ekklesia" is the Greek word translated "church" in the New Testament. It appears 115 times, mainly in Acts.

Scavenger Hunt

through Ephesians

Rebecca Rushmore

(Answers inside back cover)

1. **When will God "gather together in one all things in Christ"?**
2. **Who is the chief cornerstone?**
3. **Who are fellow heirs with the Jews?**
4. **How is Christ to dwell in our hearts?**
5. **Name the seven ones listed in Chapter 4.**
6. **Why are we to forgive others?**
7. **To whom is the church subject?**
8. **To what protective piece of armor is faith compared?**
9. **To what weapon is the word of God compared?**
10. **Who did Paul send to inform the Ephesians of how he was doing?**

Rebecca Rushmore is a Staff Writer for *The Voice of Truth International* and schoolteacher. She resides in Collierville, Tennessee, USA.

Forgotten Men of the Bible: Jethro

Rebecca Rushmore

We know much about many Bible characters. Such people are the subject of frequent studies and may even have whole books or chapters of books devoted to them and the lessons we can learn from them. There are other people mentioned in the Bible about whom we know very little. These people may only be mentioned in passing or are found in only one or two places in the Bible. Often these people are overlooked, yet they appear in our Bible for a reason.

John 20:30-31 tells us that Jesus did many things that were not recorded in the Bible. The things that were recorded are to strengthen our faith. Second Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that everything in the Bible is from God and is for our learning. With this in mind, there can be no doubt that these little known, **forgotten** men and women of the Bible can teach us valuable lessons today.

In the Old Testament, we read of many men who were considered by God to be men of great faith (Hebrews 11). One of these men, Moses, was given some advice by another who was not an Israelite. Who would consider giving instruction to a man called by God? The answer is Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. The first mention of this man is in Exodus 2:16-21. Here we find Moses had fled Egypt and the wrath of Pharaoh to the land of Midian. At a well, Moses assisted seven daughters of the priest of Midian. Their father, Reuel, invited Moses to be his guest and later gave one of his daughters to Moses for a wife. The next time we read of Moses' father-in-law is in Exodus 3:1 where he is called Jethro. The rest of the references to this man in the Book of Exodus also refer to him as Jethro.

What can we learn from this priest of a foreign nation that gave advice

to one called by God? First, Jethro was a man of hospitality. When Moses first assisted Jethro's daughters, they returned to their father without Moses. Jethro enquired about the man who helped them and sent his daughters back to get him so Moses could share a meal with them (Exodus 2:20). In Exodus 3:1, we find that Moses also worked for Jethro by keeping his sheep. Jethro was quick to offer food and shelter to a stranger. We, too, are to be quick to help others and show hospitality (1 Peter 4:9).

Jethro was a man who earned the respect of others. In Exodus 18:1-8, we read how Jethro brought Moses' wife and sons back to him after the Israelites left Egypt. Moses ***"went out to meet his father-in-law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent"*** (Exodus 18:7). Moses showed that Jethro had earned his respect. We as Christians are instructed to conduct ourselves in such a manner that others can respect us and glorify God. ***"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation"*** (1 Peter 2:12).

Jethro was also a man who rejoiced with God's people, offered a sacrifice to God for the wonderful things He had done and gave good advice to his son-in-law. After Moses and Jethro caught up on the events in each other's lives, Jethro rejoiced that God had done so many wonderful things to free His people from bondage. Exodus 18:9-11 reads:

> ***And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, Blessed be the LORD, who hath delivered***

you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of Pharaoh, who hath delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them.

At the end of Jethro's praising God, he offered a burnt offering to God. Aaron, Moses and the elders of Israel joined Jethro in a meal following the sacrifice, again demonstrating the respect they had for this foreign man (Exodus 18:12). We, too, must never forget all the wonderful things God has done for us. Our lives should be lived in thanksgiving to God (Colossians 2:7; 3:17) and a willingness to worship with God's people (Hebrews 10:25).

On his second day in the Israelite camp, Jethro watched Moses judge the people who came to him for help, then offered Moses some advice. Jethro observed that Moses was overwhelmed by the needs of the people. He feared that Moses and the people would be quickly frustrated by the process of having Moses judge all matters between individuals. With this in mind, Jethro offered Moses some advice. He suggested that Moses choose and train able men to judge in small matters so that Moses could concentrate on graver issues (Exodus 18:13-22). Not only did Jethro give this advice, he acknowledged that Moses should take the matter to God before choosing to implement the suggestions. ***"If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace"*** (Exodus 18:23). This man was able to see a potential problem and the solution for it while still recognizing that God is in control. We also need to seek God's counsel through prayer and Bible study when things in this life become burdensome (Matthew 11:29-30; Philippians 4:6).

Jethro was, indeed, a man to be admired. He was well respected by others and exhibited a reverent attitude toward God and His people. This **forgotten** man of the Bible had learned to rejoice with others in their happiness and to seek God's counsel in all matters of life. We would do well to imitate these fine qualities. ✠

Rebecca Rushmore is a Staff Writer for *The Voice of Truth International* and schoolteacher. She resides in Collierville, Tennessee, USA.

Reasons for Having Joy in Trials

Gary C. Hampton

Everyone goes through trials in life. From the human perspective, it is hard to think of them as anything but miserable. However, James opened his letter with a series of reasons to have joy in trial. Before we examine those reasons, it might be good to consider which James wrote to God's scattered people.

There are four men identified as James in the New Testament. It is unlikely the father of Judas was known so widely he could begin a letter with just his name and be recognized (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13). Other than some details about his family, we know little of James the son of Alphaeus (Acts 1:13; Luke 6:15; Mark 3:18; Matthew 10:32), so it is not likely that he wrote the letter of James either. James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John was well known but was killed by Herod in about A.D. 44. Thus, we conclude that James, the brother of our Lord is this book's author (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). Christ's brethren did not believe on Him during His early ministry (John 7:1-5; Mark 3:31-35). However, after the resurrection, Jesus' brethren were in the upper room praying with the disciples (Acts 1:12-14). The resurrection must have convinced them Jesus was God's Son (1 Corinthians 15:7).

For his salutation, James chose the word for "greetings" that means "joy to you." He went on to tell his readers that they ought to be happy even in the presence of many and various kinds of outward hardships and trials (James 1:2). This is not a faked happiness, but a sincere joy because the results of overcoming trials are known. Overcoming trials will result in receiving the promise (Hebrews 10:32-39). Jesus said, ***"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"*** (Matthew 5:11-12).

Robertson emphasizes the fact that one falls unwittingly into these trials. He is unexpectedly, and through no fault of his own, surrounded, much like the man who fell among thieves (Luke 10:30). Notice, James

assumed trials will come. **Becoming a Christian does not make one immune from life's troubles.** Jesus told His disciples, ***"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"*** (John 16:33). At the close of his first missionary journey, Paul went back to the churches and worked to strengthen the faith of the brethren. He said, ***"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God"*** (Acts 14:22). Peter also told the brethren not to be surprised when they experienced fiery trials. In fact, he urged them to rejoice because they had proven worthy to suffer for the Lord's sake (1 Peter 4:12-14).

The reason for joy in trials is that they produce patience (James 1:3). The word "testing" here suggests raw ore going through a furnace to remove the dross (1 Peter 1:6-7). So, this is like a trial to prove the purity of one's faith (cf., Genesis 22:1-14). Such trials produce a quality of lasting endurance, like a long distance runner must have. Furthermore, if patience is allowed to progress to its absolute end, the man of God will be full grown and whole or possess all his parts (James 1:4). Guy N. Woods said of the words "lacking nothing," "Basically, the word is a racing term, and points to the fact that **those who develop into mature Christians are not out-distanced by any**."

Gary C. Hampton preaches for the Siwell Road congregation in Jackson, Mississippi, USA.

Kenney's Pennies

"In God is my salvation and my glory; The rock of my strength, And my refuge, is in God" (Psalm 62:7 NKJV.)

How sad when people give up and walk away from the Lord or His church. Where do they think they are going? Who will be able to provide refuge from the grave? What happened to their pledges of commitment? Thankfully the Lord pledges never to forsake us!

Who Is A Christian?

Maxie B. Boren

There is considerable confusion in the minds of many as to what constitutes a Christian. Most people seem to think that anyone who professes any degree of belief in Christ, or who makes any claim of being so, is in fact a Christian. Yet, is that true? Is there not more involved than that?

The Bible teaches that the Gospel of Christ is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). In order for a person to become a Christian, he must not only hear and believe the Gospel, but he must obey it! Notice what Christ Himself said. ***"He that believes*** [the gospel] ***and is baptized shall be saved…"*** (Mark 16:16). Notice that in the 6th chapter of the Book of Romans believers were freed from sin **when** they obeyed from the heart the teaching they had received (verses 16-18). That teaching was the Gospel, and they obeyed it by being baptized into the death of Christ and by being raised from the watery grave even as Jesus was raised by God's power (vss. 6-11).

While a lot of people go to Romans 5:1 to prove that salvation is by faith only, they ignore Chapter 1, Verse 5 and Chapter 16, Verse 26, both of which speak of ***"obedience of faith."*** When one's personal faith leads him to obey the commands of Christ (i.e., the commands inherent in ***"the faith once for all delivered to the saints,"*** Jude 3), he **then** becomes a Christian. Thus, baptism of a sincere believer is ***"into Christ"*** (Galatians 3:26-27).

The **pattern** is clearly revealed in Acts 2. Please note the Gospel was preached (verses 22-36), and those who believed it asked what they should do (verse 37). They were told to ***"repent and be baptized"*** by the authority of Christ, in order to receive the remission of their sins (verse 38). Those that did so (verse 41) were added to the Lord's church (verse 47), which is the body of the saved (Ephesians 5:23) and the reconciled (Ephesians 2:16).

Some object to the concept of obedience by focusing all of their attention on the grace of God. Certainly a great deal of attention needs to be focused on His grace because the Bible teaches that it is ***"by His grace"***

that salvation is made possible (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:7). We would **not** minimize that for a moment, and indeed we rejoice in God's grace! However, it is fallacious to make the *umbrella* of God's grace so inclusive as **not** to exclude anyone! The Bible excludes those who refuse to hear and see the truth (Matthew 13:15), who refuse to believe the truth (see John 3:18, 36; Mark 16:16) and who do **not** obey the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Further, Jesus Himself taught that those who worship according to the doctrines of men do so in vain (Matthew 15:7-9).

One of the biggest problems I have with some of our brethren who have been embracing a liberal posture in recent years is their tendency to ignore such plain Bible teaching as given above in fraternizing with denominational error. These have emphasized God's grace so much that they seem to have convinced themselves that God accepts everyone, regardless of false teaching. It would be best for them to reread such passages as Romans 2:5-11; 16:17; Galatians 1:8-9; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:3-4; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 9-11; Revelations 2:2; 14-16; 20-25.

Brethren, this truly is of paramount importance! Through careful study, we can know the truth (2 Timothy 2:15; John 8:32). Let us believe the truth with all of our hearts, live it daily in our lives and preach it in love (Ephesians 4:15), working while it is day (John 9:4) in reaching out to the lost with it.

Maxie B. Boren (1932–2016) was a Gospel preacher and an elder in the Brown Trail congregation in Bedford, Texas, USA.

Did You Know?

Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, fell to the Assyrian ruler Sargon II in 722 B.C. When the Assyrians conquered a nation, they moved some of the native people out and moved in people from other conquered lands. The Samaritans described in the New Testament were descendants of Israelites who intermarried with foreigners brought to the area by the Assyrians. This mixed-race heritage was despised by the Jews of Jesus' day.

Will a Faithful Christian Barely Be Saved?

Dennis Gulledge

Peter wrote, ***"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"*** (1 Peter 4:17-18). These verses often come to mind when brethren have doubts relative to their ultimate salvation. The idea with some is that if anyone is saved it will barely be so. There is such is a total misunderstanding.

"Judgment" is used here of an approaching "fiery" trial that Christians would experience (vs. 12). "House of God" is a designation for the church (1 Timothy 3:15), which would be affected in this trial. "Scarcely" denotes that which happens only with great difficulty. The context does not speak of the final Day of Judgment, but an approaching period of trouble that would affect the brethren at a time not far distant. Therefore, the apostle was not saying that a faithful Christian, if saved at all, would be saved by the narrowest of margins! Let us put that doubt out of our minds!

Peter had earlier said, ***"For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"*** (2 Peter 1:11). These words were written shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The effects would be felt far and wide (Matthew 24:21-22). Acting upon Jesus' instructions to leave the city, Christians would be spared death, but it would be a period of extreme trouble for the churches at that time.

Dennis Gulledge preaches for the church of Christ in Mabelvale, Arkansas, USA.

Why Do So Many Study Without Arriving at the Truth?

Ardron Hinton

The fact that many people make some use of the Bible frequently does not prove that they are learning what they need to know. Some Bible truth is not studied properly. For example, the Athenians were considered to be the scholars of their day, but most of their religion was pagan. ***"For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing"*** (Acts 17:21). They wanted their religion to entertain them. As such, they were ***"… always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"*** (2 Timothy 3:7). This describes some of Paul's hearers. They had a taste for ungodly living. They did not seek the truth of God where it actually is. This truth is located in the **Bible**, the Word of God, but they chose to believe only what pleased them. In Hosea 4:6, we learn the result of not knowing the difference between truth and error. ***"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."***

Contrariwise, ***"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled"*** (Matthew 5:6). ***"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened"*** (Matthew 7:7-8).

"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 7:11). ***"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you"*** (1 Peter 5:6-7). We see in these two verses that it is necessary to be open-minded and willing to accept the truth when we find it.

Ardron Hinton (1929-2015) was a longtime preacher of the Gospel in Oklahoma, USA.

Faithful Attendance!

Mark N. Posey

Hebrews 10:25

Introduction

Faithful attendance to all worship assemblies provides spiritual growth that is inexpressibly valuable. Notice the following benefits of faithfulness.

Body

I. **God's Worship Is Transforming.** The Christian has been transformed into a ***"new creature"*** (Romans 12:1-2). Ongoing sanctification is necessary for spiritual growth (2 Peter 3:18).

II. **God's Love Is Compelling.** It is the ***"love of Christ"*** that compels us to strive for ***"goodness and mercy"*** here and a dwelling in the ***"house of the Lord forever"*** (Psalm 23:6).

III. **God's Family Is Encouraging.** We ***"admonish one another"*** in singing, ***"provoking one another to love and good works,"*** and ***"build up"*** with God's Word. Thank God for our church family.

IV. **God's Children Are Hungering.** Kingdom citizens ***"hunger & thirst for righteousness"*** (Matthew 5:6). Since the Gospel reveals the ***"righteousness of God"*** (Romans 1:17), we know that it is God for Whom we hunger and thirst.

V. **God's Enemy Is Prowling.** Like a roaring lion the Devil seeks his prey (1 Peter 5:8). Thus, our sobriety and diligence is imperative in the wonderful arena of faithful living for the Lord.

Conclusion

Our desire to be with God and His people must be strong, faithful and secure!

Mark N. Posey is the preacher for the Austinville church of Christ in Decatur, Alabama, USA.

What Is the Restoration Movement?

Jimmy R. Canup

Some in our world have never heard of the Restoration Movement. Others have heard of it, but they do not understand the meaning and purpose behind it. Still others have heard, but they have misinterpreted it. It is our aim to set forth what the Restoration Movement is and to explain the meaning behind it. The churches of Christ today have a relationship to the Restoration Movement.

In approximately 33 A.D., in the city of Jerusalem and on the day of Pentecost, the church of our Lord had its beginning. This took place following the preaching of the apostles as they presented the Gospel for the first time. All of this is recorded in Acts 2. From this point of establishment, the pattern for the Lord's church is revealed in the New Testament. Every facet of the church is set forth. The time, place and occasion are revealed. The work of the church is very plainly set forth. How God intends for us to worship is also revealed. God has given the organizational plan for the church. In Hebrews 8:5, Moses was instructed to make the tabernacle according to the pattern shown to him on Mt. Sinai. The same principle of following a divine pattern holds true for the church of the Bible.

Jesus and the apostles warned of a future departure from the Truth. This departure began in the days of the apostles. By the second century, a number of departures had taken place to the extent there was little resemblance left to the original church. From this condition evolved Roman Catholicism. In 606 A.D., Boniface III was given the title of universal Pope. This led to a period known as the Dark Ages. During this time, Roman Catholicism controlled the minds of the people and Bibles were chained to the pulpits.

In the 1500's, such men as Martin Luther, John Huss and others began a movement in an attempt to reform the then existing religious condition. This was known as the Reformation Movement. Out of this movement

evolved a large number of manmade organizations known as Protestant denominations. They were "Protestant" because they were a "protest" against Roman Catholicism. They were "denominations" because they were divided by teachings and practices from each other.

In the 1800's, another movement had its beginning. It was known as the Restoration Movement. Such men as Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton W. Stone, John Smith, as well as many others, set forth a plea in the religious world for men to go back beyond all manmade doctrines, creeds and organizations and to restore the pattern of the church found in the New Testament. Out of this movement came a biblical slogan stated by Alexander Campbell. The slogan was, "To speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent." The basis for this is found in 1 Peter 4:11, ***"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."*** Another plea or slogan set forth was, "To call Bible things by Bible names and to do Bible things in Bible ways."

This plea and movement is just as valid today as it was when first spoken. This plea is still being made today by churches of Christ. **Alexander Campbell and other of his contemporaries did not found a new church. They did not found the church of Christ.** They called upon men to return to the New Testament for all matters pertaining to our eternal wellbeing. They were not infallible men, and they made mistakes, but no man makes a mistake when he follows the New Testament and that alone!

Just suppose that the game of baseball should cease to be played on earth for one thousand years. A millennium later someone found a baseball rule book, laid out a diamond and again according to the same rule book began to play the game of baseball. All sensible people would have to agree that he did not begin to play a *new game*, but rather that person simply began to *restore* the game of baseball.

This is the same principle today among the churches of Christ. We are not attempting to be a new church. We claim no denominational affiliations. We are simply and humbly asking men and women to join hearts and hands with us and to go back to the New Testament to follow that as our lone and sufficient guide to reach Heaven after life here is over.

Will you accept our plea and our challenge?

In Romans 16:16, Paul said, ***"…the churches of Christ salute you."*** Please, today, investigate what the church of Christ teaches and practices. In the long ago, the prophet Jeremiah called upon the nation of Israel to restoration by saying, ***"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, we will not walk therein."*** Do not let that rejection of God's ways be your attitude, too! Your eternal destiny is involved. Do not take any chance on loosing your soul.

Jimmy R. Canup is a Gospel preacher who has preached the Gospel of Christ for decades for the churches of Christ, especially in Virginia, USA.

Kenny's Pennies

"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: 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, 3-4 NKJV)

The life, sacrifice, burial and resurrection were not only recorded in the Gospels but were prophesied in the Old Testament. Those who teach that the Jews' rejection of the Messiah was unplanned in the mind of God are totally incorrect. The same Scriptures that prophesy of the coming Messiah, His Kingdom and eternal reign also speak of the Messiah's rejection, too. This plan was before the foundation of the world!

Examine Yourselves as to Whether You Are in the Faith—in the Church

Ernest S. Underwood

That the Holy Scriptures plainly teach that there is one, and only one church, cannot be successfully denied. Paul, in Ephesians 4:4 wrote: ***"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling."*** In this same epistle, he wrote, ***"And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all"*** (Ephesians 1:22-23). By reading the writings of any standard church historian, one can follow the fortunes of this one church. Soon after the close of the first century, the apostasy began, culminating some five hundred years later in an organization with one man claiming to be the head of the church. Many centuries later, men arose with the idea of reforming that apostate organization. These actions resulted in the Reformation Movement. Conceived and born in this movement was the concept of denominationalism.

In our nation today, there are more than four hundred denominational organizations or churches. Since the admonition of the inspired apostle is to ***"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith,"*** it seems reasonable that each one should, yea must, question himself about the church of which he is a member. In other words, can I prove by the Scriptures that the church of which I am a member is that **one** body spoken of by Paul? Is the church of which I am a member the one that Jesus said he would build and the one He purchased with his blood (Acts 20:28)? Would your preacher be willing to make the statement, "The church of which I am a member is the **one** church of the New Testament, and I can prove it by the Scriptures?" Do you as a member of that church have a right to ask him

that question? If not, why not? The New Testament describes the church in such a fashion that one can certainly take that body of Scriptures and identify that one body.

Let's look at the church of the New Testament. In the New Testament, the word ***"church"*** never refers to any kind of physical building, but it identifies those who have been called out of sin by their obedience to the Gospel. Thus, the church consists of the saved (Acts 2:47; Colossians 1:13-14).

Jesus said, ***"Upon this rock I will build my church"*** (Matthew 16:18). Any student of the language recognizes that the ***"will build"*** of that statement is future tense. In Acts 2:47 (KJV), we find the saved being added to the church. Some time between Jesus' statement and the events of Acts 2, the church had its beginning. In Mark 9:1, Jesus told His disciples that the kingdom would come with power in their lifetime. In Acts 1, Jesus identified that power as the Holy Spirit coming upon the apostles. This event occurred on the Day of Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ, as recorded in Acts 2. On that day, those who obeyed the commands of the Holy Spirit, as spoken by Peter, were added to the church.

Is this the church of which you are a member? Can you take the Scriptures and prove it? Does God approve of the way that you use his Word to prove it? In other words, one needs to ask, "Am I wresting the Scriptures, or am I taking them in their context to prove by them that the church of which I am a member is that one church?"

Ernest S. Underwood is a preacher as well as a missionary to India. He resides in Doraville, Georgia, USA.

Did You Know?

During Old Testament times, caves were used as a burial place (Genesis 23:9), as sometimes as homes (Genesis 19:30; 1 Kings 19:9) and as hiding places (Joshua 10:16).

On the Road to Derbe

God's Providential Work through the Ages

Betty Burton Choate

Editors' Note: The following is *historical fiction*, a departure from our usual format, for the purpose of making a point respecting the providence of God relative to the preservation of God's Word—the Bible.

"Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Then he came to Derbe and Lystra, and behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy…" (Acts 15:40-41; 16:1).

Paul and Silas were walking along the Roman road between Lystra and Derbe. The day was hot and the road seemed to be growing longer. Paul looked thoughtful. "As hard as travel is in this heat, it would be so much more difficult if the Romans hadn't built these roads, tying the empire together."

"And what a blessing it is that the Greeks spread their language everywhere, so that now most people have Greek as one of their languages. That is a great tool in our work!" Silas remarked.

"Just think of how many centuries ago God, even in His providence, was preparing the way for us to do the work Jesus commanded, to ***'Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature!'"*** Paul exclaimed.

"The good roads and the common language also make it easier to circulate copies of your letters to the churches scattered everywhere, and of the accounts some of the apostles and brother Luke wrote about the life of Jesus," Silas added.

"But still, it's a big challenge to reach every person. That's why this work is not just for us and the apostles, **it's for every Christian to tell the good news to the people they know.** What a wonderful thing it is that Jesus died for us and that all of us can have forgiveness if we will believe in Him and obey Him!"

Now, imagine for a moment that Paul and Silas were somehow transferred to our present time. "Oh, the traffic is picking up!" laughed Silas, as he jumped out of the way of a strange vehicle overtaking them. "What was THAT?"

"I don't know!" Paul muttered, looking around in shock. "Everything's changed! Look at the huge city in front of us! And what's that moving around in the sky?"

"Let's run into Derbe and find out what's going on!" Silas called as he began to run. Being careful to stay on the grassy bank beside the heavily traveled road, they soon reached the first shops on the outskirts of the city.

"Look! This says some kind of 'bookstore'" Paul shouted. "Let's go in and find out what's happened!" The shopkeeper met them at the door."What can I do for you?" he asked.

As Paul was about to answer, Silas, who had walked ahead, exclaimed,

"What is ***this***? It says, **'Holy Bible'**!"

"Oh, that's a Bible," the shopkeeper answered.

"A Bible?" questioned Silas, picking up one of the books. "Paul! Paul!" he almost shouted, holding out the book to Paul. "Look! Here's your letter to the church in Ephesus! And Colossae! Oh, Paul, here under the name 'Acts of the Apostles' is the story of your conversion on the road to Damascus!"

Paul grabbed the book, reverently, opening it to the first pages. "Genesis! ***'In the beginning God created…'*** and, Silas! Silas! Look: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John! Their accounts of our Lord's birth and His teachings, His death and His resurrection! Silas! **It's all HERE in one book!"**

The shopkeeper looked on with puzzlement. "Yes," he agreed, "that's the whole Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. I also have it available in other languages, if you are not comfortable with Greek. It has been translated and printed in most of the languages of the world."

Suddenly, a voice could be heard in the background. "What's that?" asked Silas.

"Oh, it's just a TV program I watch every day," answered the shopkeeper. "A man whose name is actually Paul, like yours, preaches from the Bible. He's very careful to teach the truth, exactly as it's written in the Bible. He is the preacher in the church here in Derbe."

"Is he in that little box?" Paul asked?

"Oh no!" laughed the shopkeeper. "Don't you know about television? His lessons are recorded, and then over the TV people throughout the country can see them. There are even programs that can be seen in other countries."

"Ooh," Paul uttered in stunned amazement.

"We have so many ways of teaching people now," the shopkeeper explained. "Come here and I'll show you." He pointed to a small box. "In case you don't know, that's a radio." He turned it on, and a voice began to speak. **"I am a part of the church of Christ,"** the shopkeeper explained. "We have radio programs that can be heard all over the world."

"But how do people hear and see these things?" Paul asked.

"Oh, most people have radios, and even televisions. You know how it is;

when some new thing comes out, even poor people will struggle to get it!"

The shopkeeper looked thoughtful. "You must be really behind the times!" he laughed. "Do you know about computers and the Internet?"

"No," Paul answered with a question in his voice. "What are they?"

"Well, **this is the age of worldwide communication!"** the shopkeeper began to explain. "The church here records our congregational worship on a computer, and then it is put on the Internet, and anyone who goes to that site can see and hear the whole worship! We also put lots of writings on the site and Bible studies. If someone wants to study the Bible, he can sign up, and then brothers or sisters in the congregation here will help him with the lessons. That way, people, even in countries where Christianity is not allowed, can become Christians! It's a wonderful way to ***'go into all the world'*** like Jesus told us to do."

"And you are a Christian?" Silas asked.

"Yes," the shopkeeper answered. "There are churches in many cities and in most countries. It's a sad thing, though, that many who believe in Christ have taught different doctrines and made their own churches, so there's lots of division among people who claim to be Christians."

"The Holy Spirit warned even in the first few years after the church was started that some would do that," Silas said. "It's sad, because people will be confused, and that is Satan's way of blinding them to the truth for which Jesus died."

"But, Silas, just look at what God has done so that everybody can know the Gospel! Nobody has to walk from city to city now, or ride a donkey! Look how fast they can travel! And with God's whole book THERE in peoples' hands so they can study it any time—and all these ways of preaching and teaching everywhere in the world—Silas! God has provided the tools so that everybody can know that they can be saved through Jesus! Do you know what this means? ***Do you know what this means?***"

"That Jesus' promise to be with us always is still true," Silas answered with a triumphant smile. **"He has never left His people alone."**✠

Betty Burton Choate is the widow of J.C. Choate, founding Editor of *The Voice of Truth International*, living in Winona, Mississippi, USA.

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* 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".

So you are born into an unbelieving home, you live according to the religion of your parents, you grow old, and you die, thrust into eternity to meet the God you never knew. What unspeakable tragedy! The scenario is LIFE for the majority of the people of the world.

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I AM DEATH

I am Death.....
I prey on all mankind;
I come at the darkest hour
When they know not;
I still the heart beat
And the life blood stops its flow;
I rob men of their future
And turn fair beauty into dust;
I take man from the living
And place him in the grave;
I send him forth to face
Eternity in another world;
You can't avoid my stealthy call
For I will come;
Yea, be prepared to meet me:
I am Death.

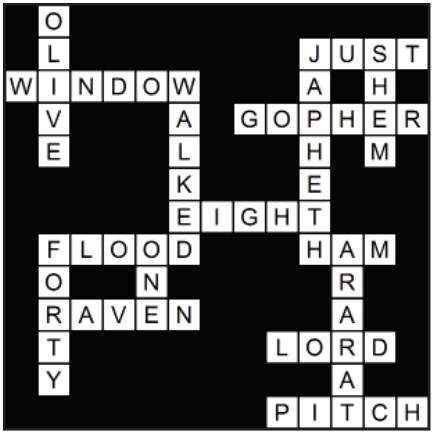
J.C. Choate early 60's

Answers to Puzzles

Verse Search (Page 34)

1. Yes, on the road to Damascus
2. The Corinthian church
3. The other apostles, brothers of Jesus, and Cephas
4. Soldiers, vineyard keepers, and shepherds
5. Deuteronomy 25:4
6. Hope, partakers
7. Spiritual, material
8. Lest the cause of Christ be hindered
9. The things of the altar
10. From the Gospel
11. Necessity was laid upon him to preach
12. Stewardship

Bible Find (page 42)



Scavenger Hunt (page 89)

Answers:

1. "in the dispensation of the fullness of times" (1:10)
2. Jesus Christ (2:20)
3. Gentiles (3:6; 2:11-13)
4. by faith (3:17)
5. body, Spirit, hope of your calling, Lord, faith, baptism, God (4:4-6)
6. God has forgiven us (4:32)
7. Christ (5:24)
8. shield (6:16)
9. sword of the Spirit (6:17)
10. Tychicus (6:21-22)

For Further Information, Please Contact:

God has entrusted to Christians His work of the ages.

Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). God's work through the Patriarchs and the nation of Israel was done to bring Christ into the world and to accomplish the shedding of His blood for the forgiveness of the sins of all who obey Him. The work of the ages was completed with the resurrection of our Lord. On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the treasure of salvation was placed in the hands of humans, to take the message to the world. We, living in this world today, hold that treasure in our hands.

- The souls of our children are in our hands. With the increased corruption and godlessness in the world, we must be vigilant in teaching our children so strongly that they will have a firm commitment to God, no matter what comes.

- The souls of the people living around us, the souls of the people with whom we work and the souls of family members have been entrusted to us; there may be no one else who can be God's voice to them. If we are silent, we are closing God's mouth, and we are their hope whether they know it or not—and even if they don't want to hear.

Not everything will be easy—we are in a war with satan—and there will be opposition. Look at the history of God's people: filled with hatred and persecution — but there will be love and gratitude, too, from those who are saved because we shared. We must teach with love but with urgency because time is short.

Christ entrusted God's work of the ages to us. Angels would not have failed Him, but this work is ours alone. By doing it, not only is eternity changed for other souls, but we grow personally spiritually through reaching out. Let us live every day with that consciousness.