Volume Ninety-Five

The Voice of Truth International

The Predawn

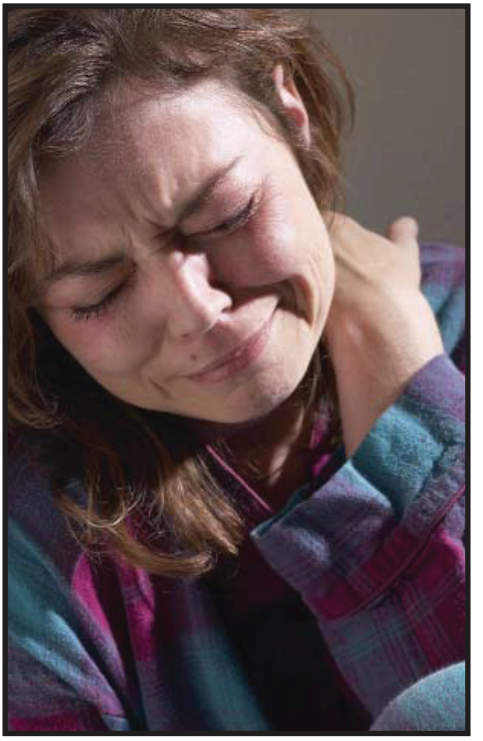
Betty Burton Choate

Like a tolling bell inside my head
Tragedy wakes me
To the predawn,
to the hour of tortures,
to awareness
= returned =
of anguish;
to the creeping chill
of horror and of fear,
to the gray dawn of crushing hurt.

I die in this stillness!

Let me move!
Let the day come!
Let me see
the one step
I must take
toward healing,
the one step
I must take
toward strength.

Let me walk!
Let me move!
Let me work!
Let me cry out
all the pain at last
And, tonight,
let me rest, let me sleep,
In the peace
of God's enfolding heart.



God's Redemptive Plan

God's Part

- *Love (John 3:16)*
- *Grace (Ephesians 2:8)*
- *Mercy (Titus 3:5)*
- *Gospel (Romans 1:16)*

Christ's Part

- *The Blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5)*
- *Our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5)*

Holy Spirit's Part

- *Revelation (2 Peter 1:20-21)*

Man's Part

- *Bible Faith (John 8:24)*
- *Repentance (Acts 17:30)*
- *Baptism (1 Peter 3:21)*
- *Obedience (Hebrews 5:8, 9)*
- *Purity (Revelation 22:14)*
- *Faithfulness (Revelation 2:10)*
- *Love (1 John 2:10)*
- *Hope (Romans 8:24)*
- *Works (James 2:24)*
- *Endurance (Matthew 10:22)*
- *Confessing Christ (Romans 10:9-10)*
- *Being Born Again (John 3:3-5)*
- *Laying Aside Evil (James 1:21)*
- *Preaching (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21)*
- *Calling on the Name of the Lord (Romans 10:14)*
- *Knowledge of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15)*

SAME BUILDING BLOCKS: THEREFORE CHURCH & KINGDOM THE SAME

Now!
King of kingdom, 1 Cor. 15:24-28
& Head of church, Col. 1:18

A.D. 65
church/kingdom exists,
1 Tim. 3:15; Col. 1:13

A.D. 96
John in kingdom, Rev. 1:9

A.D. 45
Gentiles in kingdom,
Isa. 62:2; Acts 10-11

A.D. 40
church spreads, Isa.
2:3; Acts 1:8; 8:1

A.D. 33
church came with
power, Acts 1:8; 2:1-4

A.D. 33
church begins,
Acts 2:41, 47

A.D. 33
fourth kingdom
Dan. 2:31-45

A.D. 33
Christ exalted
Acts 2:33

A.D. 33
at Jerusalem, Isa.
2:2-3; Luke 24:47

A.D. 33
last days,
Acts 2:16-17

A.D. 33
waited for it,
Mark 15:43

A.D. 33
shall come,
Luke 22:18

760 B.C.
last days, Isa.
2:2-3; Joel 2:28

600 B.C.
those kings,
Dan. 2:44

555 B.C.
Ancient of days,
Dan. 7:13-14

A.D. 30
at hand, Matt.
3:2; 4:17

A.D. 31
prayed for it,
Matt. 6:9-10

A.D. 32
to come with
power, Mark 9:1

A.D. 32
will build,
Matt. 16:18

Christ's cross of the kingdom is also Christ's cross of the church

The church in God's eternal purpose, Eph. 3:10-11
Therefore, the church
= the kingdom

Same Keys!
Kingdom keys opened the church door, Matt. 16:18-19; Acts 2
Therefore, kingdom keys = church keys & kingdom = church

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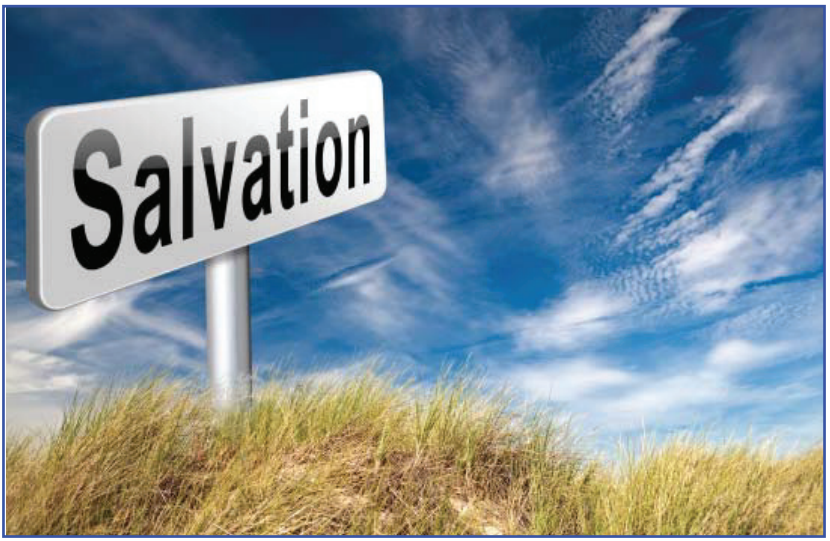
The churches of Christ salute you
(Romans 16:16).

Church Membership

Louis Rushmore

The late brother T. Pierce Brown once wrote the following profound and biblically accurate statement: "Church membership is the byproduct of salvation." Some folks in their minds divorce church membership from salvation, but in reality, there is an inseparable, biblical link between them. One cannot enjoy salvation without church membership, and one cannot have actual church membership without first having been saved from his or her past sins. Despite what individuals might imagine, church membership and salvation are permanently tied together.



The very process by which one enters into salvation is the identical process by which one enters into church membership. The New King James Version reads, "…the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Other translations, referring to church membership, read, "…the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47 English Standard Version).

That process leading to salvation and church membership culminates at immersion (Romans 6:3-5) or baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38, 41). Contrary to what general denominational dogma stipulates, water baptism does save from sin (1 Peter 3:20-21). Jesus summarized the divine plan for human redemption in Mark 16:16 as faith plus baptism equals salvation.

Corresponding to the physical act of baptism, at baptism, the Holy Spirit places the saved into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), which is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18) of Christ (Romans 16:16). Hence, salvation and church membership are the same activity. Therefore, to decry church membership is to denounce one's own salvation. Furthermore, to falter in the obligations of one's church membership (Hebrews 10:25) jeopardizes one's salvation, too (Hebrews 10:26-31).

A Christian's salvation is only as healthy as his or her church membership. The degree of activity with which one engages his or her church membership is an indicator of one's spiritual health or salvation. Nevertheless, numerous New Testament passages encourage Christians to act like Christians! "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8 NKJV). The Lord's church needs to act like the body of the saved—as individual Christians and collectively as congregations.

False Peace

Jerry Bates

"Peace" is a beautiful word that sends waves of contentment through the hearts of most people. Peace is the one thing that nearly everyone of any culture wants more than anything else. We love peace with our fellow man, but even more valuable than that is peace with our Creator, God. Unfortunately, according to Scripture, most people do not have that peace (Matthew 7:13-14). What is even sadder, many think they have that peace, and yet they are deceived. Christ uttered some heartbreaking words in Matthew 7:21-23. ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"***

These words are found at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and often these words are used to combat the error that man is saved by faith alone. Certainly, this text shows that it takes more than mere faith to be pleasing to God. However, in the context, that was not the primary purpose of those words. The purpose was to open our eyes to the dangers of self-deception—to a false peace or a false sense of security. Therein is a dire warning: One who seems the most religious and closest to God, in reality, may be a stranger to Him!

Notice how Jesus described these very religious people. Firstly, they thought they had a correct belief. They boldly proclaimed Jesus as Lord. There is nothing wrong with that confession. Indeed, we must all confess our faith in the Lord Jesus (Romans 10:9); however, mere words are worth

nothing. Even the demons freely confess Jesus as the Son of God (Luke 4:41). Paul spoke of some who ***"profess to know God, but in works they deny him…"*** (Titus 1:16). Many trust in their faith or trust in the faith of their families, yet they never serve God from the heart. Furthermore, these people apparently show great religious zeal. The repetition of the words, "Lord, Lord," indicates zeal and enthusiasm, but religious zeal apart from a heartfelt devotion and commitment is likewise worth nothing.

Secondly, these people had prophesied in the name of Christ. To prophesy means to deliver a spiritual message. At first, we might think this is impossible. Surely a person who teaches truth would be pleasing to God. However, it is possible for one to teach and to preach a correct message while not being in the kingdom himself. For example, Balaam in Numbers 22 spoke all the right words, but Peter said that he loved the wages of unrighteousness (2 Peter 2:15). Paul spoke of some preachers of his day who preached the truth, but they preached it out of envy, strife and selfish ambition (Philippians 1:15-16). This is the danger that even preachers face. After preaching the truth and baptizing many souls, we may still be lost because we are not doing it sincerely from the heart.

Thirdly, these people claimed to cast out demons and to do many other wonderful works. Judas Iscariot is a good example of this. When Jesus sent

out the 70 disciples, which included Judas, they were truly able to cast out demons (Luke 10:17). However, we all remember the last state of Judas. He betrayed Christ for 30 pieces of silver. Rather than truly repenting, he went and hanged himself. We also read of some Jewish exorcists, such as the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-16, who made false claims. Jesus warned of false christs and false prophets who would arise and perform great wonders that would deceive many (Matthew 24:24). It has been debated whether those signs were real or not, but for our purpose here, that question is not important. Some impressive things are done by numerous religious people, and claims of miracles are made even today. Many of these people will point to those achievements as proof that God is pleased with and has blessed them, but those "great" things do not equate to faithfulness when their teachings conflict with Scriptures.

On the Day of Judgment, there will be many surprises. Jesus said that **many** will say these things on that day. These are not just some isolated exceptions to the rule, so to speak. The language in Matthew 7:21-25 shows the conceit and self-deception of these people. One can imagine the arrogance exhibited as they **insist** and **demand** that the Lord accept them. Yet, Jesus will say, ***"Depart from Me, I never knew you."*** These are not evil people. They are religious people who did many good things in the name of God. What was the problem? They had not obeyed God's commandments from the heart.

It is the heart and the truth that matters. So many seem to be concentrating only on what they do. While it is good to be busy working for God, we also need to be intent on doing those things from the heart. Without the heart being involved, all our activities are worthless. However, we must be warned that doing the wrong things for the right reason is also worthless. We may have a zeal for God, but if we do not follow or teach the truth, then zeal and enthusiasm is of no value. In Romans 10:1-3, Paul warned that the Jews had a zeal for God, but it was not according to knowledge. Therefore, their zeal alone could not save them. All the way through the Sermon on the Mount, we find that Jesus emphasized the heart, and now at the end, He emphasized that even in our godly service we must do it for the right reason, that is from the heart. It is not altogether **what** we do but also **why** we do it that matters. It is easy to fool others, and we sometimes fool ourselves. Nevertheless, God is the Judge, not anyone else, and we can never fool Him, because God knows the hearts (Luke 16:15).

1932—2008

The Love that We Need Today

J.C. Choate

We hear a lot about love today. We are told that we should love our brother. It is said that we should love one another instead of opposing our fellowman. This is true. Yet, those who preach love often end up in rioting and fights with those who do not agree with them. In spite of all that is said about love, there seems to be less of it demonstrated than ever before.

So many of those who constantly preach love think only in terms of physical or carnal love. Their minds are preoccupied with fleshly pleasures, and they have concluded that this kind of emphasis is the solution to the problems of the world today. However, this is not true. Free love or fleshly love adds to the problem instead of solving it. We are reminded of the apostle John's statement when he said, ***"Do not love the world or the things in the world. 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).

God's Definition of Love in Contrast to the Definition of the World

What is love? It is affection, attraction, friendship and a concern for another person. It may be physical under the proper circumstances, but we are thinking more in terms of ***brotherly love*** at this time. This is the love that we should have for one another, as Christians and as fellow human

beings. Love should be the basis for all of our actions and relationships. For a better definition, read 1 Corinthians 13 where Paul told what love is, what it will do and what it will not do.

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails…" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

The world does need love in ever-increasing quantities. This love needs to be pure, genuine and sincere. It should not stop with the man and woman relationship or with one's own immediate family. Rather, it should include our friends, neighbors, country and the world. Jesus even said that we should love our enemies. Listen to Him. ***"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you"*** (Matthew 5:44).

What Love Does Not Do

We should understand, though, that love should not lead us to compromise the truth or to cover our eyes to the sins that are around us. It will strengthen us to help those we love to overcome their sins and weaknesses by lovingly confronting them with the problems, rather than politely ignoring sins that will take them to hell unless there is repentance. It will encourage us to go to him or her instead of waiting for them to come to us for help. Love will, however, cause us to be more patient, understanding and forgiving in dealing with the erring and with those who need our support. This is the kind of love the world needs—not just the kind that is talked about, but the kind that is practiced. This is what will change the world for the better and will do more ultimate good than all the laws and armies in existence.

Love is not a sign of weakness but of strength. The love that is under consideration here is founded in God and in Jesus Christ, His Son. As a result, we are brought to the point of obeying Divine teaching and practicing Divine will in our lives. The love that we have for God leads us to love our neighbor and all others in this world (Matthew 22:36-39). Because we love Him, we love one another also.

5-Minute Bible Study

Paula Bates

Repentance

1. John came baptizing in the wilderness and _____ a baptism of _____ for the remission of sins. Mark 1:4

2. When Jesus heard it, He said to them, Those who are _____ have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the _____, but _____, to repentance. Mark 2:17

3. From that time Jesus began to _____ and to say, Repent for the _____ of heaven is at hand. Matthew 4:17

4. I say to you that likewise there will be more _____ in heaven over one sinner who _____ than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. Luke 15:7

5. And that repentance and _____ of sins should be preached in His _____ to all _____ beginning at Jerusalem. Luke 24:47

6. Then Peter said to them, _____ and let every one of you be _____ in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are _____ _____, as many as the Lord our God will call. Acts 2:38-39

Answers:

1. Preaching, repentance
2. Well, righteous, sinners
3. Reach, kingdom
4. Joy, repents
5. Remission, name, nations
6. Repent, baptized, afar off

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Enjoyment without God?

Denny Petrillo

"For who can eat and can have enjoyment without Him?" (Ecclesiastes 2:25). Certainly men do eat, enjoying food in abundance. Men today are pleasure men, enjoying the fruits of unparalleled wealth. So what was Solomon's point?

First, true enjoyment of the blessings of life is not possible, in the ultimate sense, without God. While some may feel that alcohol with a meal is "the good life," such is, in reality, shallow and empty. Why? Because one sadly believes that his enjoyment comes purely because of his own efforts and his own abilities. Thus, there is no gratitude. It is a failure to recognize that if God didn't send blessings to the righteous and unrighteous they wouldn't have anything at all (Matthew 5:44).

Second, recognizing the hand of God in one's blessings heightens enjoyment, even in the simplest of blessings. We don't need to live in mansions, to drive a nice car or to have fancy clothes to be happy. Paul said that ***"if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content"*** (1 Timothy 6:8). He also penned, ***"I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."*** How can one successfully do this? The key is, ***"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"*** (Philippians 4:12-13). Solomon, who was blessed with considerable wealth, recognized that having all that one could ever want (see his list in Ecclesiastes 2:1-11) was ***"vanity and striving after wind."*** Why? Because true, lasting enjoyment is not found in things or worldly pleasures.

Having God in one's life provides a ***"peace that surpasses understanding"*** (Philippians 4:6), and allows one to rejoice and appreciate all of God's wonderful blessings. So, what is the answer to our question? Can one have enjoyment without God? No, not true enjoyment. Only when we have God in our lives can we fully enjoy all that this life has to offer.

Denny Petrillo is the President of Bear Valley Bible Institute in Denver, Colorado, USA.

Peace

Andy Robison

When Jesus was born, there was angelic praise: ***"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men"*** (Luke 2:14)!

Seven-hundred years before Christ was born, it was prophesied that He would be called ***"Prince of Peace"*** (Isaiah 9:6). Paul said that Christ ***"Himself is our peace…"*** (Ephesians 2:14). Even a superficial glance at Scripture associates the name of Jesus with peace. Yet, Christ Himself said, ***"Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division"*** (Luke 12:51). Even more striking is Matthew's record of Jesus' similar statement, ***"Do you think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword"*** (Matthew 10:34).

How can He be the author of peace and a source of division at the same time? There are those people who oppose all religions, including Christianity, as ideological causes of violence. Could it be true? Please consider these thoughts.

Christ Brings Peace with God

Those who follow Christ faithfully can have the peace that they have overcome their sins. Nothing pounds a man's soul more than the knowledge of doing wrong. Though many do not admit this even for years, the guilt creates problems. Societies from the beginning of time have sought some kind of God for some kind of redemption. Moral systems have been turned upside down and evil called good, and good evil, but men have still sought some kind of forgiveness. Micah pictured guilty men wondering how many animals they should offer for their sins, and even asking if they should give their firstborn children—a thought heinous to God (Micah 6:6-8).

Christ, though, brought freedom from every ungodly, pagan system. He brought freedom from even the tutorial (Galatians 3:24-25) Mosaic Law's sacrifices. He offered Himself ***"once for all, having obtained eternal redemption"*** (Hebrews 9:12). Those obedient to Him experience salvation

(Hebrews 5:9). Understanding that faith is inclusive of obedience, Paul's statement in Romans 5:1 is most consoling. ***"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ…"*** Those Christians who give their anxieties to God, then, experience the ***"peace of God, which surpasses all understanding"*** (Philippians 4:7).

Christ Brings Peace between Groups of Men

Jew and Gentile (and by extension—all races and classes of people) are brought together in the church of Christ (Ephesians 2:14-17). They are all ***"one in Christ Jesus"*** (Galatians 3:28). Indeed, the Gospel was designed so that men from every national, racial, and socioeconomic background could come together to be united in the kingdom of God. Americans, Russians, Iraqis and Chinese are brethren in God's family (Mark 3:31-35; Hebrews 2:11-12). Where the church is functioning as it should, such barriers as race, wealth and nationality are overcome by the precious blood of Christ.

The Disobedience of Men Spurs Division

Indeed, Christ brings division in families when some obey and others do not obey the Gospel. Five in one house would be divided, He taught (Luke 12:52-53). Christians bring persecution upon themselves simply by living righteously (1 Peter 3:13-17; 4:12-16). What is persecution except a sharp division between people of the human race? Early Christians were falsely labeled as haters of mankind because they would not approve of the immorality of a corrupt, idolatrous society. That charge seems to be making a comeback.

Rest assured, Christ **never, ever** authorized attacks or any use of violence by Christians individually or by the church collectively. He

desperately wants peace, and He commanded His people to submissively pursue it, as much as depends on them (Romans 12:18; Hebrews 12:14).

Christ's Principles Bring More Peace

Even among those who might not be New Testament Christians, inasmuch as Christ's principles are practiced, there is more peace. He taught a selfless, giving, sacrificial love, even towards one's enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). He taught men to treat others as they want to be treated (Matthew 7:12). Those two principles alone bring peace—peace that oppressed, humble people so desperately crave.

Andy Robison is the minister for the Hillview Terrace Church of Christ and the Director of the West Virginia School of Preaching in Moundsville, West Virginia, USA.

A Time When God Will Not Hear

Ernest S. Underwood

In Proverbs 28:9 there is an interesting statement about God and man's prayer: ***"One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, Even his prayer is an abomination."*** Does this mean there actually can come a time when God refuses to hear the prayer of man? He, himself, tells us that this is true. When, though, will He refuse to hear a prayer? When one turns away from hearing God's law? ***"Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded… Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me"*** (Proverbs 1:24-28).

Today, we hear men urge others to "call upon the name of the Lord" by saying something they call "the sinners prayer." Those who make those exhortations, and those who follow such pleas, have turned away from hearing God's Word. Such a prayer will not be answered; it is an abomination to God. Listen to God through His Word; obey it from the heart. Then, He will hear your prayer.

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

Jesus Brings Hope Out of Tragedy

Charles Box

Our world is filled with tragedy. People are injured and killed by floods, fires, tornadoes and accidents. Earthquakes and hurricanes come with their destructive power. Disease works with deadly force. Yet, out of tragedy Jesus can bring hope.

A Child Was Ill

There is always something sad about the sickness or the death of a child. A 12-year-old girl was gravely sick. Mark 5:22-23 reveals how the father of the child approached Jesus. ***"And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet and begged Him earnestly, saying, My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live."*** The tragedy of a sick child brought this ruler of the synagogue to his knees. Many people in Jairus' position were opposed to Jesus. It may be that he had been opposed to our Lord as well, but all of that was forgotten as he came to Jesus for help and hope. Jairus emptied himself of all pride as he fell at the feet of Jesus and begged for help. Most of us would like to run our own lives, but let us be humble enough to realize that our only help

and hope is in Christ. Jairus learned this, and through learning this gained the health of his daughter.

A Woman's Last Hope

As Jesus went with Jairus, a woman from the crowd came and touched His garment.

> ***So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him. Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well. Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction.*** *(Mark 5:24-29)*

The poor woman had suffered twelve years, spent all her money on doctors and only grew worse. Doctors have their place, but they had not been successful in helping this woman. She came to Jesus as a last resort. Isn't it strange how so many do exactly the same thing? They try everything else, and then finally, they decide to try Jesus. Let us learn that our Lord Jesus Christ is an ever-present help in time of trouble.

A Woman Is Healed

When healing took place, it took something out of Jesus.

> ***When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well." Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched my clothes?"*** *(Mark 5:27-30)*

Great things are accomplished only when someone is willing to put his

or her very life into it. This was true of Jesus, and it is also true for us and our work today. Jesus was great because He was willing to give Himself in service to others. The disciples could not imagine how Jesus knew someone from the crowd had touched Him. Often, we, like the disciples, have no understanding of the sacrifices made by others to serve people. This section of Scripture lets us also learn a great lesson from the woman. ***"But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth"*** (Mark 5:33). She simply told Jesus the ***"whole truth,"*** and the result was beautiful. ***"And He said to her, Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction"*** (Mark 5:34).

Despair Turns to Hope

Word comes which causes great despair. ***"…Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"*** (Mark 5:35). Jesus, however, was not in despair. ***"…Do not be afraid; only believe"*** (Mark 5:36). There is a powerful contrast of the hopelessness of the mourners and the hopefulness of Jesus. The voice of hope spoke to say, ***"…Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping"*** (Mark 5:39). The ungodly often ***"laugh to scorn"*** those who would take Jesus at His word. With gentle and powerful words Jesus silenced their laughter. ***"…Talitha, cumi, which is translated, little girl, I say to you, arise. Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement"*** (Mark 5:41-42). At Judgment Day, many, who have mocked those of us who desire to be simple, New Testament Christians, will stand in silent, stunned amazement.

From Mark 5:21-43 let us learn: (1) People face many tragedies in this life. (2) Sickness and disease come to young and old. (3) Jesus really does care when people are hurting. (4) Jesus is able to turn despair into hope. (5) Those who scorn Christianity will be put to silence. (6) Jesus is our only hope. (7) If we allow Christ to rule our lives, then, life now **and hereafter** will be ours (Romans 6:1-6; Acts 3:36-41; John 10:10).

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Parents, Protect Your Children!

Carl Mitchell

In a beautiful, poetic statement in the Psalms, we read, ***"Righteousness and peace have kissed each other"*** (85:10). The thought conveyed is that these wonderful qualities go together. I believe that is the nature of God's Word—such an affinity exists among its great virtues that one seems to lead naturally to others on a continuously ascending scale.

This is also true of evil. We could very well apply this principle to today—"New Ageism and postmodernism have kissed each other."

These Satan-inspired philosophies are everywhere around us. They travel well in the same company, not that they are the same in all their contents, but they are very much alike in their basic attitudes toward the absence of absolute truth, their centering upon the individual rather than God as the seat of authority and in their scorn of a final judgment according to Holy Scripture.

Parents should be alert to the powerful thrusts that various forms of media offer these "kissing companions." **The film industry, television, popular magazines and a plethora of books feature these unholy companions.**

If you think those pushing the "New Age" philosophy are silent, go to a bookstore to see the abundant choices featuring channeling, messages from angels, guided imagery, meditation, the benefits of hallucinogenic drugs, psychic powers, works regarding "Mother Earth" (Gaia), reincarnation

and much more. Better yet, consult a good source of information about the negative impact this movement is having, such as Douglas Groothuis' *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* (Harvest House, 1996).

New Age and postmodern philosophies are being propagated through entertainment. Their "buzz words" have infiltrated our education system. At a time when frightened screams accompany any reference to God, the Bible or Christian faith in the public schools, these religions and philosophies appear welcome.

What can parents do to protect their children from such a culture that promotes such worldly views? **First**, we must realize that we can count on God blessing our efforts for good. **Second**, we must be aware that the picture I have just painted is not imaginary—our culture is rapidly changing as a result of these influences. In fact, George Barna's **I***ndex of Leading Spiritual Indicators* (Word Publishing, 1996) shows that:

- Almost 25% of adults surveyed believe in a New Age-type god who will reveal himself through culturally developed religions;
- 11% see God as a "state of higher consciousness";
- 3% believe every person constitutes god;
- 8% see god as the final consummation of human development;
- 8% believe that the future can be seen through astrology.

Parents must educate their children in the great truths of the Bible—God's plan to send Jesus, His incarnation, life, teaching, redemptive sacrifice for sin and His resurrection. They must teach them about Christian living, divine help, the Second Coming, Judgment, Heaven and Hell.

They should share their conversion stories. They must understand that **we are in a life-and-death struggle with Satan for the destiny of our children**, and that there is too much at stake to depend on Sunday school, Christian schools, VBS or summer camp to equip them for the battle. Parents must give the best they have to direct the souls of their children to the God who created them and who desires to live with them eternally.

Carl Mitchell served as a Professor of Bible at the Harding University in Searcy, Arkansas, USA.

Get Off the Fence: Evolution

Jack Wilkie

Far too many Christians try to "ride the fence" in today's world. They get caught between clear biblical teaching and what culture pressures them to believe, and so they attempt to strike some sort of compromise. The same happened often in the Bible, and one such example came on the day of Elijah's challenge against the prophets of Baal. In 1 Kings 18:21, as the people gathered near to see who would prevail between God and Baal, Elijah challenged each of them: ***"How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him."***

It's time for true Christians to challenge those who are riding on the fence and ask them, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions?"

"Yeah, I'm a Christian, but I also believe in science, so I don't deny evolution." The commonly proposed idea that a person can't hold to the Genesis account of creation and still believe in science has led many Christians to utter that statement, but should they? Do we have to ride the fence between believing in the Bible and holding on to Darwinian macroevolution? Absolutely not.

Get Off the Fence because the Evidence Is on God's Side

The message always seems to be something along the lines of, "We have to get on the side that scientists are telling us to get on or the world will think we're not cool." Well, guess what; the Bible has never been socially acceptable. Jesus told us to expect that (John 15:18-25). Further, it's intellectually dishonest for people to continue to propagate the "Bible vs. science" narrative: "Science doesn't have biases, and therefore it doesn't take sides." Yet, scientists ***do*** have biases, and that's what is often forgotten. Creationists and evolutionists are provided the exact same evidence by science. They only differ in their interpretations, and people are going to see what they want to see. The ***evidence,*** though, remains neutral, and there's plenty of reason to believe that it sides with the biblical account.

One example would be polystrate fossils, fossils that pass through multiple layers of sediment, completely destroying the evolutionary time frame established by their belief in the geologic column. Another would be how evolution necessitates creatures literally living without working lungs or a working heart as they wait for those organs to transition from one type to the next. Or, consider the utter lack of evidence of creatures in between stages of evolution in the fossil record. The list could go on, but the point remains that true science casts serious doubt on evolution.

Besides, why should we be worried about the opinions of those who don't have any explanation for from where the universe came? Why should we be worried about the opinions of those who refuse to budge on the date of dinosaur extinction when evidence continues to mount that they were alive much more recently than previously thought? Why should we be worried about the opinions of those whose explanation for everything is that "nothing" exploded and created an impossibly intricate universe? These people can't even figure out how long humans have existed. I really don't care if people who cling to such laughably stupid claims think I'm unintelligent for disagreeing with them.

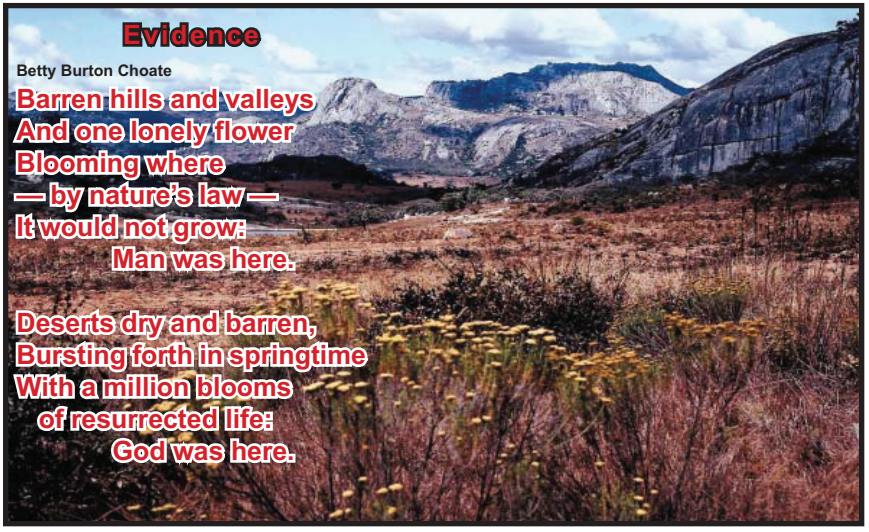
Get Off the Fence because the Bible Doesn't Offer both Options

If you deny the creation record of Adam as the first man, you're making some bold claims. You're saying that Jesus and the Bible's inspired writers were all mistaken when they referred to Adam and the creation account. If you believe in Jesus as God incarnate and that the Scriptures were inspired by God, and at the same time that creation was a myth, you're claiming that God Himself was unaware that Genesis 1-3 was just a myth. In addition, you're saying that Adam and Eve did not introduce sin and death to the world, and that death was a natural occurrence long before mankind ever existed. That means that God, not man, would be responsible for death and suffering, which completely destroys the Gospel. Do you see now why these compromises hurt our foundation of faith and damage the church's influence? One side of the fence or the other has to be chosen.

I'm not saying that a Christian can't go to Heaven if he believes in evolution, but those who would trade the account given by Genesis and held by Jesus to line up with the ever-changing standard the world tells us we have to believe are walking a dangerous path. We can't let those who deny God's very existence interpret the Bible for us, particularly when scientific evidence isn't even on their side. The church is not helped by those who compromise the Bible.

Don't believe the idea that the Bible and science are incompatible. "Getting off the fence" on theistic evolution doesn't mean choosing between the Bible and science; it means choosing between **the Bible's scientific evidence** and **evolution's embarrassing lack of scientific evidence.** Do the research with an open heart and an open mind, and you'll find that the inspired Genesis account is reflected and confirmed by science in countless ways, with more evidence emerging all the time. Don't be caught sitting on the fence between God and evolution. It's already collapsing under you.

Jack Wilkie serves as one of the editors of *Think Magazine*, published by Focus Press in Franklin, Tennessee, USA. This article was first published in that magazine.



Give Attention to Reading

Jimmy Clark

"Till I come, give attention to reading…" (1 Timothy 4:13). This short exhortation is interesting to ponder. Paul did not specify what to read, though such would be governed by divine principles of righteousness and morality. The reading mentioned is conjoined to the words ***"exhortation"*** and ***"doctrine"*** (1 Timothy 4:13). Consider some thoughts about reading, especially as it relates to the Bible.

Written Communication is Profitable

The fact that the will of God is in written form is of great importance in the exhortation to give attention to reading. Paul wrote to Timothy in another epistle, ***"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete thoroughly equipped for every good work"*** (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul wrote to the Ephesian brethren ***"how that by revelation he made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already) which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ"*** (Ephesians 3:3-4).

It is certainly the case that written records are profitable when looking at the life of Mordecai. ***"That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus"*** (Esther 6:1-2).

Written Communication is Provable

Once words are put down on paper or suchlike materials, there is a way to refer to the actual communication if challenged. The peopole of Samaria were opposed severely in the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem in the days of Zerubbabel. After the work was stopped at the order of King Artaxerxes' letter (Ezra 4:23) and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah prophesied to the Jews to proceed with the work (Ezra 5:1), there arose opposition to the progress of the work (Ezra 5:3-5). When a search was required to look into the claim

that Cyrus had ordered the work of rebuilding, a written record was found of the decree made by Cyrus (Ezra 6:2). The directive became, ***"Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God on its site"*** (Ezra 6:7). A written communication provided proof for truth to be seen. Such should be searched in the reading of the Word of God of all claims made by men (Acts 17:11). God desires men to prove all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Written Communication is Powerful

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joint and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Peter wrote, ***"Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease"*** (2 Peter 1:15). Written words live on after men are dead. Jesus used the written word to stand against the temptation of the devil (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Satan knew the power of the Word of the Lord which ***"lives and abides forever"*** (1 Peter 1:23). It will comfort sorrowing hearts (1 Thessalonians 4:18). It will do what God desires of it (Isaiah 55:11). ✝

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Russel G. Bell

I believe that more people would study the Bible if they knew more about it and where to begin. The Bible is a big book, and according to some people, it is a book on which no one can agree. However, I suggest to you that the Bible is the Word of God, revealing God's will for man.

Instead of being one book, the Bible is a library of 66 books, written by about 40 different authors over a period of 1,600 years. The miraculous thing about the Bible is it all fits together to tell a single story of God providing a way of salvation for man. There are no contradictions in the Bible, for it is a perfect book. The problem of disagreement on Scripture is man. The Lord said through the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:15, ***"Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling a right the word of truth."*** This demands that we open our Bibles and investigate for ourselves God's will for man. ✝

THE WORD OF GOD

Does the Bible Really Teach That?

Neal Pollard

Perhaps you have had a chuckle over ***chimney corner Scriptures***—those things that sound like or we think that are in the Bible but are not there (e.g., "Let your conscience be your guide," "confession is good for the soul" or "God works in mysterious ways"). It is not as funny when our hearts and our minds are not adequately protected from a teacher or preacher who promotes something as biblical that is not. It may be someone who touts a thing as acceptable to God that the Bible teaches is not acceptable to God. It may be someone who asserts that something must be believed or done, though the Bible does not bind it.

Either way, God holds each of us accountable for knowing His will. We are cheating ourselves and our souls when we allow a teacher or a preacher to dictate to us how we should feel or think about a given matter. I am not saying we should be suspicious or distrusting. Instead, I am saying we should be like the Bereans. One of the most powerful, positive statements made about any group of people is said of them in Acts 17:11. ***"Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."*** You have likely read that passage before, but what was the Holy Spirit saying about them?

They Were Characterized by Excellence

They were noble-minded. Notice that it began here. All else positive that was said about them began with their mindset. Jesus praised people who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6). These people were predisposed to accept God's Word. What higher praise can be lavished on anyone?

They Were Characterized by Eagerness

The antithesis of this is apathy and indifference. The Bereans were ***word-receivers***. They were sponges, anxious to know God's Word. The Bible, from cover to cover, touts itself as the message of salvation. Doesn't it deserve our greatest enthusiasm?

They Were Characterized by Examining

The Bereans were not uncritical, undiscerning students. They were listening to one of history's greatest Christians, borne along by the Holy Spirit, but they still checked what he had to say with Scripture. Every man who purports to be God's proclaimer deserves that same level of scrutiny.

They Were Characterized by Everydayness

The Bereans were not content to wait for the next Bible class or sermon. They were daily devourers of these Divine dictates! Aren't there things you feel compelled to do daily (eat, sleep, brush your teeth, check your Facebook)? We prove to God we are serious about the blessing of having a relationship with Him by constant, consistent consultation of His revealed mind and desires, which we find only in His Word!

How can we tell whether something is just a man's conviction or is God's command? How do we know that some strange, new doctrine is true or false? Do not be content to let somebody be your sole source of gauging that! Be a Berean! ***"That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting"*** (Ephesians 4:14 NKJV).

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Kenney's Pennies

"'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?' The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55-57 NKJV). All other victories pale in comparison to the victory over death. If you are following a philosophy or a religion that is unable to provide this victory, then you should follow the best religion and the philosophies of the New Testament. Only Christianity is the religion of the Empty Tomb with the promise of tombs being emptied some Day!

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What the Bible Teaches about Itself—Its Finality

Paul Holland

As Paul and Silas traveled in Paul's second missionary journey, they passed from Thessalonica (Acts 17) to the city of Berea. While in Thessalonica, Paul taught the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah, reasoning with them ***"from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead"*** (17:2-3). Paul knew that as the Jews were heavily invested in their Bibles (our Old Testament), he needed to show clearly that Jesus was that Savior.

Paul had some degree of success in Thessalonica among Jews and Gentiles, but the Jews, as a bloc, were jealous (notice their reaction was neither grounded in Scripture nor reasoning) and wound up driving Paul and Silas out of town. At that point, they came to Berea.

Luke wrote that the Jews in Berea were more ***"noble-minded"*** than the Jews in Thessalonica. The verb translated "noble-minded" means a "willingness to learn and evaluate something fairly" (Louw-Nida). I presume that Paul did in Berea the same thing he did in Thessalonica (verses 2-3), but in Berea the Jews were willing to open their Bibles ***"with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so"*** (vs 11).

Incidentally, if we, as preachers, want our congregations to be as noble-minded, then we need to encourage, allow, train and insist that they search the Scriptures to see if what we are saying is true. In other words, don't speak so fast that the audience cannot take down appropriate notes from our lessons. Don't quote Scripture to such a degree that our audience cannot follow that we are appropriately interpreting the text within its context. Have them open the Scriptures in your sermons and allow them to see and read the text for themselves.

Why? Because the Bible teaches, as the Jews and Paul illustrate, that

it has the final word on any given religious or spiritual subject. Kevin DeYoung, in his book *Taking God at His Word*, writes that the Bereans were more noble because "they were utterly submissive to the Scriptures. They would accept something new—if it could be supported in the Scriptures. They would believe something controversial—if it were based in Scripture. They were willing to follow Christ for the rest of their lives, provided they were, in the process, following the Scriptures" (pg. 75). What a remarkable point to make and so relevant for us today!

There is a considerable degree of disunity and disharmony among professing Christians today. You have Catholics and Orthodox, liberal Protestants and so-called evangelical (conservative) Protestants. Then you have Christians who just follow the New Testament. The fundamental difference among them is their belief in, and approach to, the finality of Scripture. Where is your authority? Is it the Pope? The Patriarch? Modern culture? Respective creeds? Or, is it only the New Testament of Jesus Christ?

The Word of God is just that, the ***Word of God***. How can we ignore it? Add to it? Alter it? Diminish it? It is by the word of Christ that we will be judged (John 12:48), and that is final!

Paul Holland is a preacher of the Gospel, working with the Swartz Creek CHURCH OF CHRIST in Swartz Creek, Michigan, USA.

Kenney's Pennies

"Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it'" (Luke 9:23-24 NKJV).

Clearly Jesus has not promised us a life of comfort and ease as Christians here, but crosses to bear until we get there. Reminds me of these words: "But God hath promised strength for the day, Rest for the labor, light for the way, Grace for the trials, help from above, Unfailing sympathy, undying love." I hope that when we face our adversities, we look up.

Unique Eternal Salvation

Owen D. Olbricht

"I am saved; I am sanctified, and cannot be lost. I do not go to church!" This was the response a young man gave me when I invited him to hear me speak at the church of Christ during a campaign in Finger, Tennessee. He strongly thought that he was saved and that he could not be lost.

Why He Believed

He may have believed the teaching "once saved, always saved" because he heard this preached many times. Preachers of this persuasion base their doctrine on various Bible passages, like John 10:28. Jesus said that no one could snatch His sheep from His hand or the ***"Father's hand."*** This is true, but Jesus did not say that ***we cannot depart from their hands***, only that no one can snatch us from their hands.

Paul taught that many harmful things are not ***"able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus"*** (Romans 8:35-39). This also is true, but Paul did not write that ***we cannot separate ourselves*** from the love of God.

Jude wrote to Christians, ***"keep yourselves in the love of God"*** (Jude 21), which means we must do something to remain in God's love. Jesus said, ***"abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love"*** (John 15:9-10). Jesus taught that God's love is conditional. We will remain in His love if we keep His commandments.

Those who are wicked and do not respect God are hated by God (Psalm 5:5; 11:5), and He ***"will love them no more"*** (Hosea 9:15). In like manner as we love banana but not rotten ones, God loves all people, except the rotten ones who will not do His will (Matthew 7:21).

A Branch in Jesus

Jesus taught that He is the vine and His followers are the branches (John 15:5). In order for us to have spiritual life and produce, we must remain in the vine, which represents Christ. ***"Every branch in Me that does not bear***

fruit He [the Father] takes away" (John 15:2). ***"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned"*** (John 15:6).

Jesus is the vine in whom is eternal life (1 John 5:11). In order to have the eternal life in Christ (1 John 5:11), a person must be baptized into Him (Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:26-27) and remain in Him and bear fruit. A person in Jesus who does not bear fruit is taken away by the Father, meaning he will wither and die without the life of the vine (John 15:2). If anyone who is in Jesus does not remain in Him, he is cast aside, withers and is thrown into fire and burned (John 5:6). A branch (a person) in the vine (Jesus) can be severed from the eternal life in Jesus and as a result will wither and be cast into the fire and burned.

Eternal Life in Jesus

We have the eternal life in Jesus (1 John 5:11), if we enter into Him, continue to believe in Him and remain in Him. If we do not remain in Him and bear fruit, we will be cast into the fire and be burned. "Once saved, always saved" is true ***only*** if we remain in Christ and continue to obey Him (John 15:9-10).

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Robison's Rubies

The apostle Paul said in 1 Timothy 2:1-2, ***"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."*** Christians ought to show respect for public offices by praying for the leaders. Even if those leaders show no sign of Christian principles, Christians ought to pray for them. Why? Good leaders led by the Providence of God are the key to having some kind of "quiet and peaceable life" on this earth. To live lives of godliness and reverence in freedom—without interference—is a unique thing in the history of the world. Christians ought to pray for leaders that such blessings might spread and not shrink.

Impenitence

Dwight Fuqua

In addressing the Gentiles' need for the Gospel, Paul spoke of their unbelieving heart (Romans 1:21, 28). In addressing the Jews' need for the Gospel, he spoke of the ***"impenitent heart."*** He wrote, ***"But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"*** (Romans 2:5).

What does "impenitent" mean? According to Vine, the word Paul used *(amenanoetos)* means "without change of mind." It means to feel no regret about one's sins. It has a terrible consequence because "repentance" *(metanoeo)* involves a change of mind. A hard heart results in an impenitent mind! An impenitent mind results in an unrepentant life! An unrepentant life results in condemnation! Paul told the impenitent, ***"you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath…"***

Job addressed the impenitence of man. He said, ***"There are those who rebel against the light; they do not know its ways nor abide in its paths"*** (24:13). A valid observation! He asked, ***"Who has hardened himself against Him and prospered?"*** (Job 9:4). A valid question!

David addressed the impenitence of man. He said, ***"God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready"*** (Psalm 7:11). He asked the impenitent, ***"Why do you boast in evil, 0 mighty man?"*** (Psalm 52:1).

Solomon addressed the impenitence of man. He presented a frightening reality.

> ***Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, because you distained all my counsel, and would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, when***

> ***your terror comes like a storm, and your destruction come like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish comes upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me. Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies.*** (Proverbs 1:24-31)

Solomon was demonstrating that ***"the perversity of the unfaithful will destroy them"*** (Proverbs 11:3).

Isaiah addressed the impenitence of man. He spoke of how the Lord called the weary to rest, yet they would not hear (28:12). He called them ***"stubborn-hearted"*** (46:12) and ***"obstinate"*** (48:4). When He called, they did not answer, and when He spoke, they did not hear; they persisted in doing evil (65:12).

Regrettably, many today have no regrets! Like Esau, they have ***"found no place for repentance"*** (Hebrews 12:17). Like those of Isaiah's day (Isaiah 6:9-10) and Jesus' day (Matthew 13:14-15), they do not understand with their hearts, see with their eyes and hear with their ears. The Master said, ***"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent"*** (Revelation 2:5).

God cries out to the impenitent! ***"Hear this now, 0 foolish people, without understanding, who have eyes and see not, and who have ears and hear not: 'Do you not fear Me?' says the Lord"*** (Jeremiah 5:22-25). ***"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up wrath for the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"*** (Romans 2:4-5).

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The Invitation of All Invitations

Patrick Morrison

A good friend and fellow preacher, brother Glenn Hitchcock, posted an interesting tidbit on his Facebook page the other day that I thought was worth sharing. On one occasion, someone wrote to Emily Post, perhaps one of the world's most well-known and renowned experts on the subject of etiquette. The inquirer posed this question: "If one were to receive an invitation to the White House, but had a previous engagement, what would be the procedure for handling such?" Mrs. Post replied, "An invitation to the White House automatically cancels all other engagements." Can you imagine receiving an invitation to attend some function at the White House? I think most of us, political affiliation notwithstanding, would consider it one of the highest honors of our lives to receive such an invitation! I would suspect that we would do everything we could to clear our calendars and readjust our schedules in order to accept this invitation. Mrs. Post was probably taken aback that anyone would consider a prior engagement to be more important than an invitation from the White House!

An invitation to the White House pales in comparison to the invitation we have received from the Lord Jesus Christ. The Creator of all that we see and all that we are, the Giver of our souls, the Sustainer of our lives, the Sacrifice for our sins, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Hope of life beyond this life and the Judge of all the earth has invited us to His banqueting table! Who could ever envision a prior engagement to be more pressing than this invitation? Yet, there are those who will make all sorts of excuses as to why they cannot come.

> ***A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready." But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, "I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have***

me excused." And another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused." And another said, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, "Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame." And the servant said, "Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room." And the master said to the servant, "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet." (Luke 14:16-24)

The invitation of Jesus demands immediate attention. It demands that we make time for the great banquet that He has prepared for all who will come. There is nothing in this world that is more important or more urgent than answering the invitation from Heaven! Yet, countless souls consider this invitation to be insignificant. The pursuit of money and other material things has so enamored the souls of many that they are willing to turn down an invitation to sit at the table of Jesus! Others may consider the invitation important, but not important enough to act on it immediately. Some seem to look upon the invitation of Jesus as though waiting on something better to come along. Some seem to think that this invitation can be answered at any time, that the banquet will always be prepared and that they can go at any time.

There will come a time when the window of opportunity for this great feast prepared by the Lord will close. This does not simply mean missing out on the opportunity to sit at the table of Jesus; it means spending all eternity separated from the one who has bidden us to come feast with Him eternally! Your invitation has been sent. No one can accept or reject it for you. I plead with you to answer this invitation immediately, for you may not have another opportunity!

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1. Paul said that he had become a _____ to all. (v. 19)
2. Why did he do what he did in the above question? (v. 19)
3. To the Jews, Paul became a _____. To those under the law, he became as under the _____. To those without the law, he became as those without the _____. (v. 20-21)
4. Did Paul become totally without any law? (v. 21)
5. What law did Paul say he was under? (v. 21)
6. Paul said that he became all things to all men. Why? (v. 22)
7. He did this for the sake of the _____. (v. 23)
8. How many people receive a prize in a race? (v. 24)
9. Anyone who competes in a race is _____ in all things. Why? (v. 25)
10. What is the difference between the crown we are seeking and the crown athletes are seeking? (v. 25)
11. How did Paul say we need to run? (v. 26)
12. What did Paul do to his body? (v. 27)
13. Paul said that even though he had preached to others, it was still possible for him to be lost. (v. 27) True False

(See the back cover for answers.)

Verse Search

19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; **20** and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; **21** to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; **22** to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. **23** Now this I do for the gospel's sake; that I may be partaker of it with you. **24** Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. **25** And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. **26** Therefore I run thus; not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. **27** But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

NOTES: In these verses, we might say Paul set forth his guidelines for his ministry. His philosophy was to put the preaching of the Gospel above his personal desires. He was willing to conform his personal desires and comforts to the customs of other people in order to bring them to Christ. However, that does not mean that he did anything in order to be like the ones he was teaching. Just as we are, he was always under law to Christ. Sometimes, people misuse these verses to justify their actions by simply claiming they are trying to relate to the ones they are trying to teach. While the sentiment might be good, we must always remember that we are under the law of Christ and never compromise that for any reason. Our lives must always conform to the law of Christ, not the other way around.

Verse 27 is an important verse. Many people believe that once a person is saved, he is always saved, regardless of what he may do. Paul clearly indicated that such a belief is not true. Paul made sure that he disciplined his body and brought it into subjection to Christ, because if he did not, he could lose his reward. All his good works that he did could not make up for an evil lifestyle. Apparently, some today think the opposite. Their lives obviously do not conform to the commands of Christ, yet they continue to preach or do other good Christian works that they think proves their salvation. In order to obtain our crown, we must follow the rules; that is, obey the commands of Christ. By walking in the light, the blood of Christ washes away our sins (1 John 1:7).

A Unique Mission

Bob Plunket

Someone has said that Alexander went forth to conquer the world. Caesar went forth to subdue his enemies. Plato and Socrates went forth in search of knowledge. Columbus went forth to discover the new world. Stanley went forth to explore Africa. Warriors have gone forth to rout armies, and their march has been tracked with blood, misery and death. Expeditions have gone forth to explore distant regions to see the wonders of nature and view the monuments of arts. Philanthropists have gone forth on errands of mercy.

Men of our day have gone forth to explore the moon and the far reaches of outer space. Men have found oil on the floor of the sea, and now they have gone into the microscopic world of genes and DNA.

However, the most unique quest is stated in one short line: ***"Christ came to seek and to save the lost"*** (Luke 19:10). He did not come to conquer the world, but to save it. He did not come in search of knowledge, but to impart it. He did not come in search for a new world, but to impart a new life. He did not come to rout armies, but to disband them. He did not come in search of treasure, but rather to tell us where to invest ours. He did not come to the world to condemn it, but to save it. He did not come to this earth to destroy it, but to build upon it His church.

What should be the mission of the church of Christ today? Should it not be to seek and to save the lost? Our mission is not to reconcile Christ to our world, but to reconcile our world to Christ. Neither is our mission the mission of merely accumulating religious knowledge, but rather the proclaiming of the Gospel of Christ. The church, like Jesus, should feed the hungry, heal the sick and care for the widows and orphans, but we must never forget that this was to Jesus, and should be to us, a means to an end—saving the lost. **Too often, the church has been bogged down with a social agenda and people died full, clothed and well, but lost.** If the church does not concern itself with the spiritual needs of the world, then who will? His mission is our mission—***"to seek and save the lost."***

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One Flock and One Shepherd

Cliff Holmes

"I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock and one Shepherd" (John 10:16). There are four outstanding points in this Scripture.

Other Sheep, Not of this Fold

Who were the sheep in the fold of Jesus Christ, the good shepherd? His disciples, the apostles and all who came to Him seeking salvation from sin, sorrow, trial and tribulation. There were many others who needed to be drawn to that sheepfold. Twelve or more were listed as listening to Peter's sermon on that day of Pentecost, to say nothing of Jews, Greeks, Gentiles, Romans, as well as totally heathen pagan nations. Today there 34,000 sects and denominations who claim some sort of connection with The Christ. They have created 3.5 million congregations, and claim a membership of 1.9 billion souls. There are sects which practice vile teachings of which Jesus would never approve. Millions still worship false gods, or even Satan himself. Would Jesus say, ***"I must bring them also"***?

I Must Bring Them Also

Would Jesus say ***"I must bring them also"*** to just anyone? Yes, it is His will that all men come to repentance and be saved from their sins. The only way this can happen is if they ***"listen to my voice,"*** Jesus said. How can they believe in Him whom they have not heard, how shall they hear without a teacher, and what if no teacher comes to teach? How will they listen to his voice (Romans 10:13-15)?

They Will Listen to My Voice

Someone must come to be that voice. In the Limited Commission, Jesus sent men to the lost of the house of Israel. They went, taught and did many mighty works as the spokesmen (the voice of the Shepherd), and many believed and came to repentance. Later, Jesus gave the Great

Commission to His disciples—and by extension to us also. "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). We, too, have been called to 'listen to His voice.' This was not just a request from Jesus; it was a command that applies to Christians today as well.

There Will Be One Flock and One Shepherd

When we have accepted the call, it is incumbent upon us all to **do the job and do the job well.** Not **if** but **when** we have done this job well, we shall all be one flock and Jesus shall be the One Shepherd. ✝

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Agnostics in the Church

Mark McWhorter

"Awake to righteousness, and sin not: for some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame" (1 Corinthians 15:34). An agnostic is someone who says he does not know. He says something could be possible but he cannot know for sure. What most people consider a religious agnostic is someone who says he does not know if there is a God—and he really does not care.

Yet, in our verse above, we find other agnostics. In the context of 1 Corinthians 15, Paul gave the assurance that Jesus was raised from the dead. There were Christians in Corinth teaching that Jesus had not risen from the dead. He gave several arguments against such false teaching. Paul said that they need to avoid believing such doctrine. He warned that those who already believed such needed to awake to righteousness. They needed to come to the truth. The Greek word that is translated ***"have not the knowledge"*** is the word from which we get "agnostic."

There were Christians in the church at Corinth who were against proper knowledge. They evidently were saying they could not know if Christ had been raised, and possibly they did not care. Yet, Paul pointed out that such belief undermines all New Testament teaching. Paul wrote that a person cannot be such an agnostic and be saved.

Study your Bible. Be assured that Christ died and was raised from the dead. ✝

The Exciting Thing

John Gipson

As a youngster, I listened to Winston Churchill's speeches over the radio during World War II, and I was greatly moved by them. Later, I acquired some tapes of his more famous speeches, and again I was captivated. That man knew how to hold an audience without a rope. He used words as a general would use his troops marching into battle. It was powerful stuff.

It was not until I read William Manchester's biography of Winston Spencer Churchill that I learned of the Irish-American lawyer and congressman Bourke Cockran, and the impact his oratory made on Churchill. Cochran advised Churchill that he should avoid scurrility, and affectations. He said, "What people really want to hear is the truth—it is the exciting thing—speak the simple truth." Plato, centuries before Cockran, stated, "There is nothing so delightful as the hearing or the speaking of truth."

Jesus came into the world speaking the truth, and the people heard Him gladly. Even those officers sent to arrest Him returned without fulfilling their mission. Their explanation? ***"No man ever spoke like this man!"***

Later, the apostles of Jesus would be accused of turning the world upside down. How was it accomplished? Not through military might, intellectual brilliance or political maneuvering, but through truth—the simple truth. In our world, so beguiled by lights, glamour, noise and motion, nothing could be more exciting than the speaking of truth. ***"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"*** (John 8:32 NKJV).

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Bible Find

Martha Rushmore

Across

3. Lot's wife turned into a pillar of what for looking back? Gen. 19:26
4. What were Abraham and Sarah to name their son? Gen. 17:19
6. How many people left the two cities? Gen. 19:15
8. What was Abraham's first son's name? Gen. 16:11
10. Lot's family was told to not look where? Gen. 19:17
11. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for what sin? Gen. 19:5
13. Where was Sarah when the three men were telling Abraham that Sarah would have a son? Gen. 18:9

Down

1. Sarah would be the mother of what? Gen. 17:16
2. Abram was given what new name by God? Gen. 17:5
3. Sarai was given what new name by God? Genesis 17:15
5. What did God establish between Abraham and Himself? Gen. 17:7
7. What did Abraham do when God told him he would be a father? Gen. 17:17
9. How many men visited Abraham? Gen. 18:2
12. What was the name of Abraham's nephew? Gen. 12:5

New Testament Model of Giving

Lance Mosher

I have come across many people lately who are frustrated with their religious leaders and the constant focus on "tithing" in their churches. I suppose I would get frustrated, too, if I were serving under religious leaders stressing the tithing pattern, since tithing under Christ is not biblical!

When the nation of Israel was brought out of Egyptian slavery by the power of God, after some time in the wilderness, they were gifted with the Promised Land. Once possessed, each tribe of the Israelites was given a land inheritance, except for the Levites. With land inheritance comes the work of harvest and tending to livestock. Instead of an inheritance, God gave the Levites the most important job of the nation—to minister to the Israelites through the priesthood. With such an important job, they didn't have time to take care of land. Therefore, they had to depend on the rest of the nation for their livelihood, which was provided through God's tithing system (Numbers 18:21-24).

Many religious groups teach "tithing" today. However, we need to recognise two fundamental things about tithing in the Bible. (1) Israelite tithing was never about money; it was about food products. (2) The commandments for tithing were given to and only relevant to the nation of Israel under the Law of Moses. Leviticus 27:30-34 reads:

> ***"Thus all the tithe of the land, of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's; it is holy to the Lord. If, therefore, a man wishes to redeem part of his tithe, he shall add to it one-fifth of it. For every tenth part of herd or flock, whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord. He is not to be concerned whether it is good or bad, nor***

shall he exchange it; or if he does exchange it, then both it and its substitute shall become holy. It shall not be redeemed."

These are the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses for the sons of Israel at Mount Sinai.

As long as the Levitical priesthood was in effect, the rule of tithing was in effect. However, Christ came with a New Covenant, which made the first covenant obsolete (Hebrews 8:6-13). Christ now serves as the High Priest, not according to the order of Aaron and the Levites, but according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5-7). Hebrews 7:12 says, ***"For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also."***

Since Christians do not serve under Levitical priests, there is no reason for the tithing system to still exist. Instead, the law on giving has changed with the change of the priesthood. Christ serves as High Priest, and every single Christian serves as a priest in the spiritual nation of God (1 Peter 2:4-10).

Christ came to earth to give everything (Mark 10:41-45). We who want to be like Christ should have the same attitude, since we understand that it is from God that we receive any blessing (James 1:16-18). The reason why God abundantly blesses us is so that we ***"may have an abundance for every good deed"*** (2 Corinthians 9:8). What does that have to do with giving? A friend recently asked it this way. "Why does God need money?" The truth is, He doesn't! However, He has commissioned His people to ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation"*** (Mark 16:15). God does not need money, but His people need money in order to spread the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:9-14). First Corinthians 9:14 records, ***"So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel."***

In addition to providing funds to spread the gospel, Christians also are to provide funds for those in need. Acts 11:27-30 notes:

"Now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up and began

> ***to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders."***

For those in the New Testament, following in the Spirit of Christ, giving was a blessing. So it should be with Christians today. Notice what 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 says, ***"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come."*** Add to that 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, which reads:

> ***"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed."***

With Old Testament tithing, ten percent of food was specified. In New Testament giving, tithing is irrelevant. Instead, putting all of this together, Christians are to give according to their income, as they have purposed in their hearts, every first day of the week, bountifully, cheerfully, not grudgingly and not under compulsion. **It's a blessing to give when we realize that all we have belongs to the Lord, anyway, and the more we give, the more the Gospel spreads.** We can learn from the poor Christians in Macedonia, who were able to give abundantly, because ***"they first gave themselves to the Lord"*** (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). Take encouragement from Luke 6:38, which notes, ***"Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over."***

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Faith and Sight

Joseph Ezenweze

Paul wrote, ***"Therefore we are always confident, knowing that whilst we are at home in body, we are absent from the Lord: For we walk by faith, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord"*** (2 Corinthians 5:6-8 KJV). Paul said that Christians living on earth are absent from the Lord. They have not in their human state gone to the place prepared for the saints (Matthew 25:46, Revelation 14:13).

As absent from the Lord, we in the human body walk by faith, not by sight. That means that we are to trust in the Lord's words even though we are not in direct personal contact with Him. This does not mean that we can doubt God's Word.

Paul knew that Jesus is the Saviour even though he did not know Christ ***"after the flesh"*** (2 Corinthians 5:16; 2 Timothy 1:12). Jesus, being in Heaven, did not mean that men on earth could not know Him to be the Christ.

There was a time when faith and sight went together. Men walked by faith because of sight. In John 20:29 we find, ***"Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."*** Thomas believed the Lord's resurrection only after personally seeing the Him (John 4:39-42). He believed because of sight.

Many during the Lord's ministry came to believe on Him because of the things they saw and heard. Others saw the dead raised. Some were amazed at our Lord's teaching and preaching. Others were impressed by the miracles performed during the days of the early church, and some of these obeyed the Gospel.

Today, God performs no miracles as He did in the days of Christ's ministry and in the time of the early church (Ephesians 4:8-16; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Romans 8:24). Today, we cannot personally witness the miraculous. We can come to faith by the Word of God that recorded the

miraculous (John 20:30-31; Romans 10:17). So, while Thomas had faith because of sight, we now have faith in the absence of sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Yet, a day is coming when faith and sight will be together again. We read in 1 John 3:2, ***"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."***

We will not quit believing the words of Christ when we ***"see him as he is."*** Faith will not vanish in heavenly sight. We will have faith and sight in Heaven. Thomas had faith after sight. We now have faith without sight. In Heaven, we will have sight after our faith on earth and continuing with faith. God help us.

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Robison's Rubies

Proverbs 16:3 states, ***"The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the Lord tests the hearts."*** Sometimes, when wondering why things don't go a way that I might see as better, I need to remember a few things. Even if something seems bad to me, the Lord is able to use it for good. He could use a test to make me stronger. He could teach me something through it so that I might be able to help somebody else down the road. James said, ***"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience"*** (James 1:2-3). Paul said, ***"tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance character; and character, hope"*** (Romans 5:3-4). Though they're hard, maybe tough times can help make me a better person.

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses (Isaiah 63:7-10)

7 "I will mention the loving-kindnesses of **the Lord** and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord has bestowed on us...

8 For He said, "Surely they are My people, children who will not lie." So He became their Savior.

9 In all their affliction He was afflicted, and **the Angel of His Presence** saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old.

10 But they rebelled and grieved **His Holy Spirit**...

In Isaiah 48:16, the Word, "the First and the Last," "the Redeemer," says prophetically of His coming into the world, "And now the Lord God and His Spirit have sent Me." This passage shows the Word, laying aside His authority to be made in the likeness of men (Philippians 2:5-7), under submission to "the Lord God" and "His Holy Spirit."

In John 14:16 and 16:7 we see the Holy Spirit under the 'sending' authority of God and Christ, as He would assume His role as Helper to those who would be born as children of God.

In considering the Old Testament Scriptures, we need to take note of the three of the Godhead who are portrayed there as working together with humanity. In this passage in Isaiah, we read of "the Lord," "the Angel of His Presence," and of "the Holy Spirit."

In Exodus 33:1-2 we read of "the Lord" speaking to Moses concerning the journey the Israelites were about to begin, and He said, "I will send 'My Angel' before you."

In Joshua 5:13-15 the account is given of "the Commander of the Lord's army" appearing to Joshua. The conversation ends with Joshua falling on his face to worship "the Commander" who declared that His presence caused the very ground on which He was standing to be holy.

Throughout the Old Testament we see "the Angel of the Lord" leading the Israelites (Exodus 13:21; 14:19) in the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. First Corinthians 10:4 identifies the Personage as the one Who was born as Jesus Christ.

John 1:1 identifies "the Word" as being with God in the beginning, and He was God. Throughout the Old Testament we read, "the Word of the Lord" came to so-and-so, saying, "Thus says the Lord..." He was spokesman for the Godhead, Mediator even then.

Wise Men Came Seeking Jesus

Sunny David

Almost two thousand years ago when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, the Bible says, ***"Behold wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him"*** (Matthew 2: 1-2). The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was in fulfillment of many prophecies that were recorded hundreds of years before in the Old Testament of the Bible. Prophet Micah almost seven centuries before the birth of Christ had foretold, ***"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be ruler of Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting"*** (Micah 5:2). Isaiah, another prophet of God, had declared, ***"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel"*** (Isaiah 7:14). The word **Immanuel means God with us**. When Jesus was born, God entered the ranks of humanity, became a man in the person of His Son Jesus Christ, and paid the penalty of human sins—laying upon Himself, in the person of His Son, the iniquity of us all (John 1:1, 14; 3:16). Isaiah had also predicted that the child Who would be born as God's Son will be a King Who would rule in His everlasting kingdom forever (Isaiah 9:6-7). Isaiah had foretold Jesus' virgin birth, and Micah had predicted the village of His birth, Bethlehem.

The Old Testament Scriptures, which were originally written in the Hebrew language, were translated later into the Greek language in about 250 B.C. The wise men who came from the East, perhaps Arabia (Genesis 25:6), to worship Jesus, were scholars, philosophers or astrologers. The Greek Bible describes them as Magi, which was a priestly caste during the Persian rule many centuries before the birth of Christ. The presents they brought (i.e., gold, frankincense and myrrh) were the product of Persia. They, the wise men, while in their country, had seen an extraordinary star

such as they had never seen before, which they took to be an indication of an extraordinary person born in the land of Judea, over which land this special star was seen to hover in the nature of a comet or a meteor rather in the lower region of the air. This differed so much from anything that was common that they concluded it to signify something uncommon and of a great significance. Based on their study of the Old Testament Scriptures, which also predicted, ***"A Star shall come out of Jacob; A scepter shall rise out of Israel…"*** (Numbers 24:17), they concluded that the King of the Jews, the Immanuel, about Whom they had been reading in the Scriptures, had been born. Therefore, they set out to meet Him. We do not know their number. The conjecture that there were "three" rose from the fact that three kinds of gifts are mentioned, which they offered after they found Jesus.

Those men were surely wise, because as soon as they had seen the extraordinary Star, they lost no time but set out to look for the new King, following the Star. It must have taken a long time for them to journey sitting on animals and going through the jungles and rough, mountainous terrain. Yet, nothing discouraged them. They were wise, because in seeking Jesus they were following the Star, the Guide, that God had provided them. It was a light set up by God to lead them to Christ. The Bible says, ***"… the Star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the Star they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy"*** (Matthew 2:9-10).

Even today the wisest way of finding Christ and what He requires of men to learn from Him, and what He teaches them to do, is to go directly to His New Testament in the Bible and read or hear from it. There are many false things being taught in the name of Christ today, which are not found in the Bible and which have nothing to do with Christ and His teaching. For example, what must one do to be saved (Mark 16:16), of what church must one be a member (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; 2:47) and how should one worship Him acceptably (John 4:24; Matthew 15:8-9) are corrupted in the teachings of men. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught:

> ***Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and***

the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded of the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell, and great was its fall. *(Matthew 7:24-27)*

To be wise, one should not only hear or know about Christ, but one must do what He teaches. The rain, the floods and the winds represent a figure of speech to describe the coming Judgment Day (John 12:48). Often people want to go to men and to books written by men to learn about Christ and His teachings. However, those who go to the real source, the Bible, God has given us the guide for all spiritual matters. Those who learn about Christ and His teachings thereby are certainly wise.

Another notable thing that we learn from those wise men is that when they observed that the Star they were following had stopped going any further, and had come to stand where the young child was, they went inside the house where ***"they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him"*** (Matthew 2:11). Notice, they didn't worship Mary. The wise men knew that Mary was just another human being who was used by God to bring His Only Begotten Son into the world (Matthew 1:18-25). No doubt, Mary was a God-fearing and a God-loving person, and that is why God used her for such a great and wonderful task. Yet, certainly she was neither ***"the mother of God"*** nor an individual as holy and as sinless as Christ was. The wise men, therefore, worshiped Jesus, the Son of God, and offered their gifts to Him. The apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:15-17 said, ***"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."*** Wise men and women today seek Jesus as did the wise men nearly two thousand years ago.

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His Commission Is Our Mission

Darrell Surrette

I have spent over 22 years of my still young life in the military. Of those 22 years, several have been preparing for deployments, being deployed or recovering from them. Each of those days brought about a mission that was the "top priority." Those missions changed, based on the situation. Likewise, within the church, we have a great mission. One great contrast between worldly missions and the mission given to the church is that it hasn't changed from year to year, or even from century to century. This should make fulfilling it easier, right?

Within the New Testament, Matthew, Mark and Luke each give an account of this great task (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-20; Luke 24: 46-47)! Look particularly, though, at Matthew's account, which reads, ***"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age'"*** (Matthew 28:18-20 ESV).

Our mission has been so recognized around the world and in the church that it has earned the title of "The Great Commission." If it is so great to us, it begs the question, why isn't there more noticeable evidence of this mission within most of the meeting places where we gather to worship? We could spend a great deal of time (time worthy to be spent, no doubt) discussing the reactions to the Commission itself, and we are good at expressing verse 19 behind the pulpit. However, I would say the world seems to need a whole lot of verse 20 also, with the emphasis being built from verse 18!

Specifically, notice the first point Jesus made. ***"All authority is given to me."*** What is so profound within that simple statement is that Jesus essentially said, **"listen to what I am about to say, because that is**

what counts." We would dare not take the directions of our employer, commander or boss lightly for otherwise we may not have employment much longer. Why, then, is acting out the **Great Commission** not getting more emphasis than it is? You see, the message today is heard from the pulpit, but it was never meant to be confined to the pulpit! The word ***"go"*** means exactly what it says.

One thing I have learned with every mission I have ever had is that **you either complete it or fail to do so.** When you fail, the results are typically severe, and the guilt is difficult to bear. We must ask ourselves, "Which position are we in on obeying this command of our Commander?" This is no judgment on any individual, but simply a wake-up call, I pray, to our idleness. We tend to gravitate towards leaders that aren't afraid to do themselves what they ask their subordinates to do. We tend to have a lot of respect for those who have been where we are, and who aren't afraid to get their hands dirty (so to speak). We tend to want to follow them. Where are the leaders in the church regarding obeying the command to ***"go"***?

We have a Savior and a Leader Who showed us the way by leaving Heaven and coming to this world in order to bring the Gospel. His command should then become our mission! He is already victorious, so let us take up His cause, the same one that saved even you! Go to your family members, to neighbors, to friends, to coworkers, to a city where the Lord's church doesn't exist or to a country where little Gospel has been taught and spread the Word to any who will listen ***that Jesus is Lord!*** Then speak to them what we have become proficient at teaching behind the pulpit to everyone around us, ***"Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*** ✝

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Did You Know?

Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, and the Temple were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of the Babylonians in 587 B.C. Most of Judah's people were taken as captives back to Babylon; only the poorest people were left behind in Judah.

Government & The Christian: A Perspective of Church & Culture

Steve Higginbotham

Imagine a homeless man living on the streets. He's able to get by, never having more than he needs, but always having enough to survive. Then one day a man showed compassion on him by giving him a house in which to live with all the amenities, free of charge. Consequently, this formerly homeless man was able to live in great comfort.

However, as time passed, this benefactor underwent a change of heart regarding his generosity. Circumstances caused him to rethink all the acts of kindness he had shown the former homeless man. The first indication of his changed mind-set was that he removed the air conditioning from the house. Several months later, he turned off the running water. Finally, he cut off the electricity. Although this former homeless man no longer had some of the conveniences he once had, he was allowed to continue living in the house.

Now then, here's my question: "What should the attitude of the former homeless man be?" Should he be "up in arms" about the conveniences that had been taken from him? Or, should he be thankful for the period of time he had to enjoy them.

I believe that while he has every right to be *saddened* by the withdrawal of some of the conveniences to which he had become accustomed, he mustn't lose sight of the blessings he had, while he had them. None of these things were his "right." They were "gifts," and he should give thanks for the time he had to enjoy them.

That said, throughout history, Christianity has seldom found the favor of government. Christianity existed through hardship, persecution and sacrifice, but it existed. We just so happened to be born in a time and a place when our government has been kind to Christianity, even bestowing upon Christianity a "favored status." Yet, times are changing. Many of our blessings are being taken from us. Privileges we once enjoyed are now

being removed. What should our attitude be? I believe the answer to this question is the same answer given to the first question.

Friends, Christianity doesn't need governmental favor to survive and thrive. The blessings we have enjoyed and that our parents have enjoyed may be taken from us tomorrow. If so, that gives us cause for sadness, but not for despair! In fact, maybe a dose of "persecution" is just what the "Great Physician" ordered to awaken us from our spiritual lethargy and to renew our zeal and commitment to God and His agenda. Such "medicine" isn't pleasant, but it just may be good for us. Give it some thought.

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What Are the Marks of a Disciple?

Therman Hodge

A Disciple is a student, learner and follower. Furthermore, a disciple conforms all of his mind, words and actions to that of his Teacher – Jesus (Luke 6:40). Jesus lives in His disciples who conform to Him (Galatians 2:20). It is the responsibility and privilege of the disciple to be like Jesus. So we ask, "What are the marks of a disciple?"

First, a disciple of Christ must abide in the Word (John 8:31; 14:14, 23). There are three things involved in abiding in the Word: (1) One must receive it (Psalm 1:2). (2) One must meditate on it (Galatians 2:20). (3) One must apply it (James 1:22).

Secondly, disciples of Christ must love one another (John 13:34-35). Why is it a new commandment? (1) It is new in object (John 4:20). (2) It is new in measure (Matthew 5:43-45). (3) It is new in purpose (John 13:35). It is this love one for another that attracts others to become disciples of Jesus also.

Thirdly, disciples of Christ must bear fruit (John 15:5-10; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9). There are three things taught in John 15: (1) One must abide in the Father's love (John 15:10). (2) One must keep the Father's commandments (John 15:16). (3) A disciple must bear fruit (John 15:16). These three are like a three legged stool. They all help support each other!

In conclusion, we ask, "Do you bear the marks of a disciple?" "Is Jesus living in you so that you will make other disciples for Him?" "Are you truly a disciple of Jesus?"

A Memorial to the Lord

Gary C. Hampton

Memorials, like statues, tombstones and plaques are used all over the world in honor of men, especially the dead. The Lord's Supper is a memorial service. ***"And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of Me.' Likewise, also the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you'"*** (Luke 22:19-20). Christ also said, ***"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come"*** (1 Corinthians 11:23-34, especially 26). So, every time a Christian partakes of the Lord's Supper, he is partaking of a memorial feast.

The Passover was a shadow of the Lord's Supper. The Passover feast was eaten by the Israelites once a year to remind them of their release from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 11:1-8; 12:25-27, 46). Paul described the Lord by saying, ***"For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us"*** (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus' sacrifice is the Christian's means of release from

the bondage of sin (Ephesians 1:7). Because He is our Passover, not one of His bones was broken (John 19:31-36).

The memorial feast has two elements, the bread and the fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:23-25). The bread would have been unleavened since Jesus and the disciples had just finished the Passover meal (Exodus 12:15). In fact, we might notice that Matthew calls it ***"the first day of the feast of unleavened bread"*** (26:17). Jesus said, ***"This is my body."*** This has led some to teach the doctrine of transubstantiation, which says the bread and fruit of the vine become the literal body and blood of Jesus. Since Jesus was present in His physical body when this feast was instituted, it seems obvious that He was using a metaphor. Some of us say, "I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse." We do not mean we could literally eat a horse, but we are saying we have a large appetite. Similarly, Jesus was not saying we eat and drink His literal body and blood, but that the bread and fruit of the vine represent such to the Christian.

The Lord's Supper should be taken upon the first day of **every** week. Luke wrote, ***"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight"*** (Acts 20:7). Paul was in Troas seven days (vs. 6), yet the disciples came together for the Lord's Day since Jesus was raised on that day (Mark 16:9; Acts 2: Leviticus 23:15-16). Now, when God said, ***"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"*** (Exodus 20:8), the Jews understood that He meant every sabbath. When Paul said, ***"Upon the first day of the week let everyone of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come"*** (1 Corinthians 16:2), we have understood that to be **every** first day. If the boss said payday is on the first day of the week, we would understand every first day as his meaning. Why can we not understand that the church assembled upon every first day of the week to break bread? We should all partake of it as a weekly memorial of our Lord's great sacrifice for sins.

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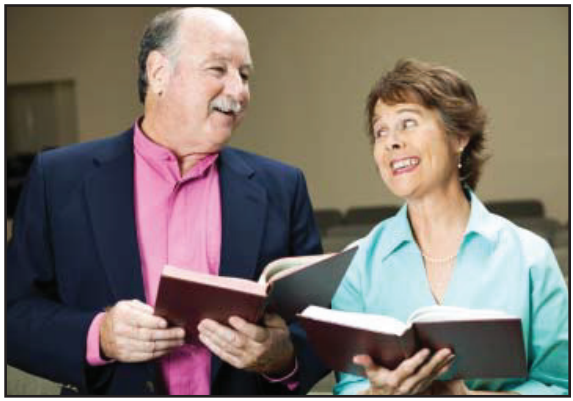
Worshiping God in Song!

Mark N. Posey



The authorization for singing in the New Testament is contained in the following Scriptures: Matthew 26:30; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; 13:15; James 5:13; Revelation 5:8-9; 14:1-3; 15:2-3. Every one of these passages constitutes singing—vocal music—as part of worship of the New Testament Church.

The aforementioned passages are the strongest authority for using vocal music in worship of the church of Christ. Notice the categorization of these passages.

- **Direct command:** Hebrews 13:15; James 5:13; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.
- **Apostolic example:** Matthew 26:30; Acts 16:25; 1 Corinthians 14:15.

God told us clearly and plainly how He wants to be praised. With the fruit of our lips we sing praises to Him and lift up His High and Holy Name. God is worthy of our best. Note that God was specific regarding how to worship Him in song. He authorized vocal singing for those living under the Law of Christ. May we never stray from His desire—our obligation! ✝

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Revive Us Again: There Is Need for Revival in Today's Church

Claude Thompson

William P. Mackay's mother tried to instill biblical values in her son, and when he left home, she gave him a small Bible. However, he rebelled against her teachings, and he even sold the Bible. By his own account, he became "more wicked" as he grew older. Mackay became a medical doctor in Scotland, and he was treating a terminally injured laborer whose only request was that his landlady bring him "The Book." Once he had it, he read or held that little book constantly during his last days. After the man's death, Mackay was responsible for disposing of his belongings. To his surprise, he learned that the man's book was his own Bible, with his name still inscribed inside in his mother's handwriting. The same message that Mackay had earlier rejected as worthless now brought him guilt and conversion.

As he became spiritually revived, Mackay wrote the words of a poem, which were set to music by John Husband as the great hymn, "Revive Us Again." The year 2013 was the 150th anniversary of its publication, and this milestone invites a closer look at the spiritual messages of this masterpiece.

"Revive us again… may each soul be rekindled." Both the Hebrew word *khaw-yaw* and Greek *anazao*, translated "revive" or "revival," mean to "live again." Although it is used to indicate a literal resurrection of the dead to physical life (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 13:21; Romans 14:9), it is more often used metaphorically as "to flourish or become active again" (Judges 15:19; Nehemiah 4:2). Sin can be revived in man (Romans 7:9), and faith also must be revived (Romans 12:2; Galatians 6:1).

Man's faith must be continually **"revived"** and **"rekindled"**—**"again,"** again and again! In fact, revival is possibly more important than initial obedience. Of those who sin knowingly, Peter warns that ***"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" (2 Peter 2:20-21). Spiritual revival is man's freewill choice, but it is also the work of God. It requires **"fire from above."**

"We Praise Thee, O God." This song is actually a prayer of praise to God for His work in spiritual revival. The opening line of four of its five verses starts with this declaration of praise, and some hymnals use it as the title. All three persons of the Godhead are mentioned as worthy of praise for their part in spiritual conversion and revival.

- **"God"** the Father is the source of all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). Man, too often, prays only for his physical needs, but Mackay's prayer asks only that God bring us closer to Him.
- **"the Son…Jesus, who died."** Jesus was active in man's creation (John 1:1-3), and He is also the **"Lamb that was slain,"** redeeming man back from sin with His own blood (Titus 2:14). He is **"now gone above,"** awaiting for His faithful followers to join Him (Revelation 5:5-6).
- **"the Spirit of light…has shown us our Savior,"** who leads us to initial faith and otherwise instructs us through the Scripture (2 Peter 1:20-21).

"Fill each heart with Thy love." Love is God's motive for all of His works of grace. Jesus, **"the Son of Thy love,"** is the ultimate display of that love (John 3:16). Love toward God and our fellowman also must be the only motive for our response to His love and commands (Matthew 22:37-40). Love is the greatest of the abiding graces (1 Corinthians 13:13).

"Revival" is not a word we hear much today. Perhaps that is because we have forgotten our first love and now practice our religion more by habit or by tradition. There is great need for a true revival of faith and spiritual activity in the lives of Christians today. May our prayer be like that of William Mackay and the Psalmist, **"revive us again"** (85:6). **"Hallelujah! Amen!"**

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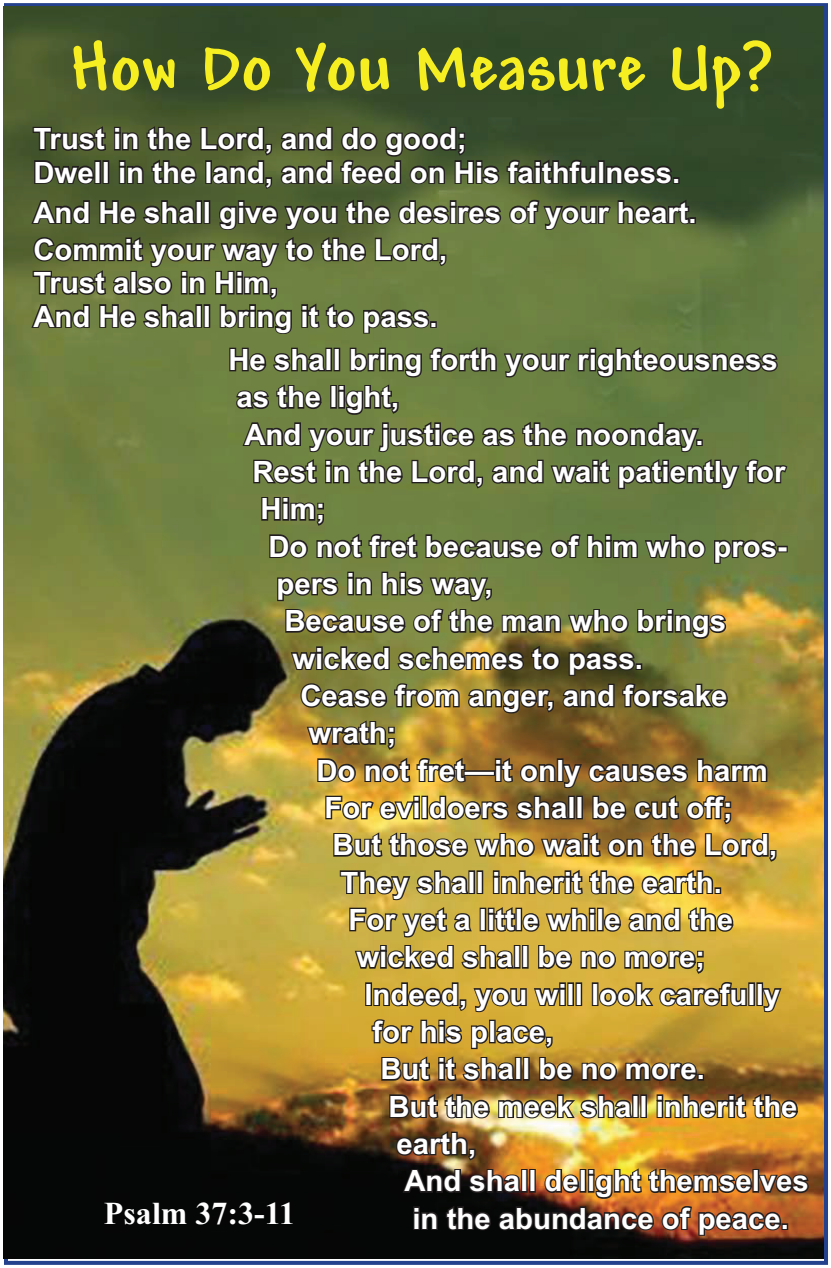
How Do You Measure Up?



Trust in the Lord, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the Lord,
Trust also in Him,
And He shall bring it to pass.
He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,
And your justice as the noonday.
Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him;
Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret—it only causes harm
For evildoers shall be cut off;
But those who wait on the Lord,
They shall inherit the earth.
For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more;
Indeed, you will look carefully for his place,
But it shall be no more.
But the meek shall inherit the earth,
And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

Psalm 37:3-11

A little boy was waiting on his mother to come out of a store. As he waited, he was approached by a man who asked, "Son, can you tell me where the post office is?"

The little boy replied, "Sure, just go straight down the street a couple of blocks and turn to your right."

The man thanked the boy kindly and said, "I'm the new preacher in town, and I'd like for you to come to church on Sunday. I'll show you how to get to Heaven."

The little boy replied with a chuckle, "Awww, come on; you don't even know the way to the post office."

Two political candidates were having a hot debate. Finally, one of them jumped up and yelled at the other, "What about the powerful interest that controls you?"

And the other guy screamed back, "You leave my wife out of this!"

One day several years ago I was reading the newspaper when my son came in and said, "Dad, will you take me to the zoo tomorrow."

I told him, "Nah. If they want you, they can come and get you."

Mike's wife bought a new line of expensive cosmetics guaranteed to make her look years younger. After a lengthy sitting before the mirror applying the "miracle" products, she asked, "Darling, honestly, what age would you say I am?"

Looking her over carefully, Mike replied, "Judging from your skin, 20; your hair, 18; and your figure, 25."

"Oh, you sweetheart, you!" she gushed.

Mike interrupted, "Hey, wait a minute! I haven't added them up yet."

A young Bible class student was asked to list the Ten Commandments in any order.

He answered: 3, 6,1 8, 4, 5, 9, 2, 10, 7.

At the airport check-in counter I overheard a woman ask for window seats for both her husband and herself.

The clerk pointed out that this would prevent them from sitting together.

"Listen, Sweetie," the woman replied, "I've just spent 10 days of quality time in a compact rental car with this man. I know what I am requesting!"

Just Like Mom

He didn't like the casserole,
And he didn't like my cake.
My biscuits were too hard…
Not like his mother used to make.

I didn't perk the coffee right,
He didn't like the stew.
I didn't mend his socks
The way his mother used to do.

I pondered for an answer;
I was looking for a clue.
Then I turned and smacked him,
Just like his mother used to do.

Little Johnny opened his birthday gift from Gramma. It was a water pistol! He squealed with delight and headed for the nearest sink.

His mother was not so pleased. She turned to Gramma and said, "I'm surprised at you, getting him a water pistol! Don't you remember how we used to drive you crazy with those?"

Gramma just smiled, "Yes, I remember."

At Sunday school they were learning how God created everything, including human beings. Johnny was especially intent when the teacher told him how Eve was created out of one of Adam's ribs. Later in the week his mother noticed him lying down as though he were ill, and said, "Johnny, what is the matter? Johnny responded, "I have pain in my side. I think I'm going to have a wife."

The big red "F" stared back at him on his exam paper.

Freddy looked at his glum friend and asked, "Why did you get such a low grade on that test?"

"Because of an absence," Johnny answered.

"You mean you were absent on the day of the test?" he questioned.

Little Johnny replied, "No, but the kid who sits next to me was."

Earthly Wealth and Fame May Never Come to Me

Don Myers

In Matthew's recording of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had a considerable amount to say regarding earthly concerns and possessions. One of the greatest dangers in our spiritual journey is the way we deal with money and possessions. Included in those directions and cautions were (1) not giving to others for the praise of men (6:3), praying for our daily bread (6:11), practicing fasting (6:18), not storing up treasures on earth (6:19), serving God—not wealth (6:24), cease worrying about the necessities of life (6:25), caution about being surrounded by people of the world who are absorbed with making and having wealth (6:32) and to live one day at a time—tomorrow will take care of itself (6:34).

Just a Few Thoughts on Jesus' Words

First, just like the indicators in our automobiles (gas gauge, temperature gauge, seat belt warning, etc.), there are some things (if we will keep an eye on the dashboard of our hearts) that give us a quick check on where we are spiritually. Have we ever caught ourselves making sure someone else knew we did something good for someone else with materials and goods that really belong to God—possessions given to us by God? Oh, we can have some very sneaky (yet, unwitting) ways of parading those before the eyes of others. Jesus said that we are to never give in order to get praise of men because that will be our only reward. We should never give to others to get the notice of others. Why do we do that? When we give to get praise of others, we do not really give, but we make a purchase of the praise of men.

Second, can I become so absorbed about what I will eat, drink or wear tomorrow that I forget to pray and truly be thankful for my **daily** bread today? When my wife, grandson and I sit down to eat, I often comment to them with my full plate, "This is our living." I can only eat so much in a day—and no more. Have you ever bought a car (new or used) and found yourself soon

looking for or talking about the next car you wanted to buy? Daily bread? Daily necessities? Eat what is in front of you without thinking about what you will eat tomorrow. Do you remember the Israelites gathering more manna than they needed in a day? What was left over bred worms! Wear what you have on without thinking about the next garment you will put in your full closet.

Third, Jesus did not say, "***if*** you fast," but "***when*** you fast." Jesus assumed His disciples would fast. Of course, we cannot check on each others' fasting or report to others, "I am fasting," because we would come under Jesus' caution not to fast in order to be seen of men. During times of fasting, we temporarily break from earthly necessities to devote ourselves to prayer and possibly to be reminded how dependent we are on God's provision. Someone said, "God stays in touch with every man through his belly." God causes His rain to come on the just and the unjust. The just need to raise their eyes to Heaven and from the heart say, "Thank you, Lord God."

Fourth, have you ever been perfectly content, only the next moment to see a TV commercial asking if you are ready for retirement and then become instantly discontented? Billions of dollars are spent on advertisements crafted by college educated professionals who are skilled in creating discontent. They are great at it! Carl Wade said something like, "I was perfectly content with my little motor boat until a $32,000 Ranger bass boat with a 225 HP Honda engine zipped by me!" **Can we become possessed by our possessions? Is it possible that we are buying things we cannot afford to keep up with people we don't even like?**

Fifth, are you concerned about running out of food or clothing? Jesus said for us to stop worrying about the necessities of life. Have you ever been hungry? Have we missed many meals? Our God who provided for us yesterday is the same God who gives us our daily bread. Our concern as Christians is to be surrendered to the reign of Jesus the Lord, and all these other things will be provided as God sees our need. Do our worries over such things shout, "God, I really don't trust You!"

Sixth, it is hard to keep earthly and material things in perspective when we are immersed in a sea of national and international greed. Yet, those

people who are seeking to have and to have more are miserable! Yes, they are! **Things cannot satisfy.** We've got the wrong heroes. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be free of the earthly chains that bind us? What if we could simply be satisfied with the simple—today's food, clothing and drink? We are not going to carry it with us. There are no pockets in a shroud.

Finally, are we trying to live in tomorrow to the extent that we are failing to attend to the challenges of today? Aren't today's challenges enough without stacking tomorrow on our shoulders? Have you heard of the man walking down the road on a 100 degree afternoon, sweating, while carrying a one-hundred-pound sack on his back? A man came alongside of him in a horse-pulled wagon and asked, "May I give you a ride?" To this offer, the grateful man replied, "Yes, oh thank you!" The burdened man climbed in the back of the wagon, and the benevolent man urged his horse forward only to hear the man in the back of the wagon grunt. Turning around, the driver of the wagon saw the man whom he had picked up standing in the back of the wagon with the one hundred pound sack still on his back! The man asked, "Why don't you put down that sack?" To this the man replied, "I did not know when you offered me a ride that that applied to my sack." Are we still straining under loads Jesus has long before offered to carry for us? Peter said, ***"Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."***

What would Jesus know about life? Why, God made the world, hence He knows how it works! God, in the body of Jesus, became one of us! The God-man never traveled a hundred miles from where He was born. He had only one earthly possession—His clothes. After He embarked on His earthly ministry, do you ever remember reading of Him having a house on which He paid a monthly payment? What was His concern, and with what was He absorbed? Herein, is the secret of living on earth—peace and contentment! Where else did we ever think we would find it except in and through Him?

These words of Jesus are not just for memorizing, but for living. Pray God we learn to really live.

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What Does the Bible Teach about Fasting? Is It for Christians Today?

Eric Obeng Asante

Fasting, in the biblical sense, is the abstaining from food and drink for a spiritual reason. In the Old Testament era, the Jews fasted frequently, though there was only one fast prescribed by the Law. Once each year on the Day of Atonement, the Hebrews were to "afflict" their souls (Leviticus 16:31), which meant fasting (cf., Isaiah 58:3).

Though there are no compulsory fasts required of Christians today, the New Testament seems to take for granted that children of God would see the need to fast occasionally. When the Lord's disciples were criticized for not fasting, Jesus responded by suggesting that it was hardly appropriate for them to fast while He was yet with them. The time would come, however, when He would be taken away from them; then they would fast (Luke 5:35).

Too, in cautioning against improper motivation in worship, Christ warned: ***"Moreover when you fast, be not, as hypocrites"*** (Matthew 6:16). It is significant that He did not say, *"if,"* but, *"when"* ye fast—reflecting the *expectation* that they would.

Fasting, for the Christian, is strictly a voluntary matter. It should arise out of a feeling of intense need, not as a result of mere formality.

What Is the Value of Fasting?

When, then, might fasting be of value? Fasting may be spiritually beneficial in times of **personal sorrow.** David and his men mourned and fasted upon hearing of the death of Saul (2 Samuel 1:12), and Nehemiah did similarly when he was informed of Jerusalem's decimated condition (Nehemiah 1:4).

Fasting and prayer would certainly seem to be fitting when **a loved one is critically ill** (2 Samuel 12:16). Fasting frequently accompanied **repentance** as an outward and genuine indication of contrition for spiritual

rebellion (1 Samuel 7:6). The people of Nineveh proclaimed a fast when brought to a recognition of their sins (Jonah 3:5).

Fasting was practiced in connection with **great and important religious events.** Moses fasted during that period when he was receiving the Law (Exodus 34:28). Christ fasted prior to His encounter with Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2).

The church fasted before sending Barnabas and Saul on that perilous first missionary campaign (Acts 13:2-3). Fasting was certainly a component in the dynamic ministry of Paul (2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27).

Warnings for Those Who Fast

Admittedly, however, fasting can be abused. The practice must never be employed as a substitute for personal godly living.

Isaiah delivered a blistering rebuke to those who fasted, and then pursued their own worldly pleasures (Isaiah 58).

Moreover, fasting must not be an occasion for the flaunting of one's religion. The Pharisees were guilty of this very thing (Matthew 6:16-18).

Finally, the rigors of fasting must not be allowed to ignite a spirit of religious smugness and self-righteousness. This certainly could be a temptation (cf., Luke 18:9-14).

Benefits of Fasting

In the final analysis, there does seem to be some benefit in voluntary fasting at certain times. Reflect upon the following:

- The Scriptures seem to suggest that God honors fasting when performed as a token of deep and sincere dedication.
- Physicians indicate that moderate fasting can be a benefit to health, having the effect of allowing our systems to occasionally cleanse themselves.
- The mind appears to be able to plumb greater depths of contemplation during periods of fasting.
- Fasting can help one hone a keener edge on self-discipline.
- Fasting can also have the added affect of reinforcing our appreciation for those things of which we're deprived during the periods of abstention.

Scripture References

Leviticus 16:31; Isaiah 58:3; Luke 5:35; Matthew 6:16; 2 Samuel 1:12; Nehemiah 1:4; 2 Samuel 12:16; 1 Samuel 7:6; Jonah 3:5; Exodus 34:28; Matthew 4:2; Acts 13:2-3; 2 Corinthians 6:5; 11:27; Isaiah 58; Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 18:9-14.

Self-Control

Ed Benesh

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11).

In 1920, the 18th amendment to our constitution was adopted to ban the consumption of alcohol. Most simply refer to this as "Prohibition." However, thirteen years later the 21st amendment repealed the eighteenth, revealing to us the validity of the phrase "you can't legislate morality." While only partially true, it is true nonetheless. Why? Well, prohibition proved that alcohol was not the problem, just like guns, sex and gambling are not problems. As the old saying goes, "Guns don't kill people. People kill people."

The problem is our lack of self-control, which would also be difficult to legislate. We do not need gun control or stricter laws about the availability of sex or gambling. We need more self-control. We need less of the flesh and more of the Spirit. Fortunately, our loving Heavenly Father has made us an offer that is just too good to refuse. You see, if you will allow it, God can come into your life, bringing control and godliness so you may be more like Christ. By His spirit we can be empowered to live above the evil influences of the world, and thus the problems that stem from them. In this day, let the Spirit of God live within you and have control.

THE LORD IS CALLING OUT ALL WARRIORS TO DO BATTLE WITH THE DEVIL!

LET US ALL PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR AND GO TO WAR!

(Ephesians 5:25)

The Devil's Master Plan

Dave Hart

Scary!!!!! Think about it.

Satan called a worldwide convention. In his opening address to his evil angels he said, "We can't keep the Christians from going to church. We can't keep them from reading their Bibles and from knowing the truth. We can't even keep them from forming an intimate, abiding relationship experience in Christ. Once they gain that connection with Jesus, our power over them is broken. So let them go to their churches; let them have their conservative lifestyles, but *steal their time,* so they can't gain that relationship with Jesus Christ. This is what I want you to do, angels: **Distract them from gaining hold of their Savior and maintaining that vital connection throughout their day!"**

"How shall we do this?" shouted his angels.

"Keep them busy in the nonessentials of life and invent innumerable schemes to occupy their minds," he answered. "Tempt them to spend, spend, spend, and borrow, borrow, borrow.

"Persuade the wives to go to work for long hours and the husbands to work 6-7 days each week, 10-12 hours a day, so they can afford their empty lifestyles. Keep them from spending time with their children. As their family fragments, soon, their homes will offer no escape from the

pressures of work! Overstimulate their minds so that they cannot hear that still, small voice. Entice them to play the radio or cassette player whenever they drive, to keep the TV, VCR, CDs and their PCs going constantly in their homes and see to it that every store and restaurant in the world plays non-biblical music constantly. This will jam their minds and break that union with Christ. Fill the coffee tables with magazines and newspapers. Pound their minds with the news 24 hours a day. Invade their driving moments with billboards. Flood their mailboxes with junk mail, mailorder catalogs, sweepstakes, and every kind of newsletter and promotional offering free products, services and false hopes.

Keep skinny, beautiful models on the magazines so their husbands will believe that external beauty is what's important, and they'll become dissatisfied with their wives. That will fragment those families quickly! Even in their recreation, let them be excessive. Have them return from their recreation exhausted, disquieted and unprepared for the coming week.

Don't let them go out in nature to reflect on God's wonders. Send them to amusement parks, sporting events, concerts and movies instead.

Keep them busy, busy, busy! Then when they meet for spiritual fellowship, involve them in gossip and small talk so that they leave with troubled consciences and unsettled emotions. Go ahead, let them be involved in soul winning, but crowd their lives with so many good causes that they have no time to seek power from Jesus. Soon they will be working in their own strength, sacrificing their health and family for the good of the cause. It will work! It will work!"

It was quite a convention. The evil angels went eagerly to their assignments, causing Christians everywhere to get more busy and more rushed, going here and there. I guess the question is: Has the devil been successful at his scheme? You be the judge! Does "busy" mean:

B-eing U-nder S-atan's Y-oke? ✝

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HUSBANDS, PLEASE READ!

Samuel Matthews

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25 KJV). Loved ones, for men who are married, there is no greater challenge than the one posed by the inspired apostle in this text. Loving our wives is easy, but loving them ***"even as Christ also loved the church"*** sets a very high standard. Our marriages will not be as they ought to be if we haven't followed the pattern of Jesus' love for His church. Therefore, in this article, we will see just how Christ loved the church. Then, with the Lord's help, we husbands might act accordingly toward our wives.

Christ loved the church sacrificially. Our text says He, ***"gave himself for it."*** He loved the church, **not** for what the church could do for Him, but for what He could do for the church. Jesus said, ***"I am among you as he that serveth"*** (Luke 22:27). He said that He ***"came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"*** (Matthew 20:28). To succeed at loving one's wife as Christ loves the church requires an attitude of sacrifice toward her. We are not likely to have to die for our wives, but we must be willing to serve their needs. Indeed, true love ***"seeketh not her own"*** (1 Corinthians 13:5).

As husbands, we need to understand that our wives have needs that differ from our own, and it's our job to meet those needs. While not all wives have identical needs, a survey among participants in a ladies' Bible study in which they were asked what they needed most from their husbands showed the following results:

1. The number one need expressed was for their husbands to exercise spiritual leadership. In fact, 91% of the women surveyed listed this as their most pressing need. Husbands, your wife needs you to take the lead in preparing your family for eternity, including your authority to enforce righteous behavior, modesty and involvement in worship and Bible study.

2. The next most pressing need among the respondents was family commitment. She needs you to be as committed and involved as she is to making the home a fortress against all that might threaten the family.

3. Also high on wives' list of needs are conversation and communication. It is hurtful to the wife when her husband does not talk to her as a friend. Though the husband may not intend to be treating his wife as unimportant, this is often how it is viewed by her. She is your partner and deserves to share your thoughts and plans.

4. Another expressed need was for affection and love. Though this is also high on the needs lists of husbands, how wives anticipate affection to be shown is usually different. As husbands, we need to use our imaginations to invent new ways of showing true affection for our wives.

5. Also on the list was financial security. This should not be interpreted as the need for riches but rather the need for the husband to be responsible for supporting the family. There are two extremes to be avoided. The husband who abdicates his responsibility to support his family has failed to meet a real need. On the other hand, some use the obligation to support the family as an excuse for practicing materialism.

Christ loved the church exclusively. Although Jesus loves the whole world just as His Father does (John 3:16), He sanctified the church as His bride (Ephesians 5:26-27). This means He ***set apart*** His church from the rest of the world. Likewise, the marriage relationship demands sanctification. The husband is ***set apart*** to belong to the wife, and the wife is ***set apart*** to belong to her husband—he for her, she for him. Any interference with this God-given arrangement is sinful.

Wisdom demands that, as much as possible, the husband avoid situations where he is expected to work closely with a woman other than his wife. If one's occupation requires him to work with women, then he must make sure there are others present so that no false accusation can be made and no doubt can be planted in the mind of his wife.

The sexual needs of both marriage partners are to be satisfied by each

other exclusively (1 Corinthians 7:2-5), as together they ***"flee fornication"*** (1 Corinthians 6:18) ***"and such like"*** (Galatians 5:19-21). This exclusivity forbids any viewing of pornography.

Christ loved the church caringly. Our text says, ***"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself"*** (Ephesians 5:28). **When one does what is best for his wife, he does what is best for himself.** The apostle declared, ***"For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church"*** (v. 29). To nourish is to feed. Christ feeds His bride with ***"the living bread" of life*** (John 6:48-51).

We protect and care lovingly for something or for someone we cherish. A loving husband will nourish his wife with his care for her. The wise husband will nourish his wife by making it clear to her and others that he cherishes her.

Christ loved the church enduringly. Jesus has made His church ***"members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones"*** (Ephesians 5:30). In like manner, ***"shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh"*** (v. 31). Jesus used this same quote from Genesis 2:24 to teach the inseparability of marriage (Matthew 19:5-6). God joins male and female (in the marriage arrangement) into ***"one flesh,"*** one body. Man is not to separate what God joins (Matthew 19:6). **For the New Testament Christian, the thought of divorce should be as remote as thinking of dismembering one's own body.**

The way Christ loves the church should cause a man to have a greater appreciation for his wife. He should view her as a highly prized, valuable (and nicely packaged) gift from his Creator who knew just what he needed. The wise man wrote, ***"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord"*** (Proverbs 18:22).

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[Edited version of an article by brother Al Diestelkamp]

Wives!

Betty Burton Choate

What a mess Satan has made of our culture! We have allowed him to warp the thinking on men (I've even read that they are virtually obsolete now; we don't need them in our modern world, because their first tendency is to fight—the source of all the wars), on women, on the home, on divorce, on homosexuality, on suicide, on abortion, on marriage, on infidelity—on the creation and God and religion. The thinking of much of our population concerning all of these subjects is exactly the opposite of what it used to be—and the opposite of what the Scriptures teach.

Is the world a better place because of our experiment in ungodliness? Obviously not. Crime, suicide, divorce, mental illness and every other type of atrocity has mushroomed in the past fifty years. A survey, taken back then, concerning the greatest fears in a child's heart listed fear of the dark, of storms and of doing poorly in school. What are the fears today's children face? Abuse, divorce and terrorism. What a different world!

"Humanism" is the primary root cause of this crisis, as the world is on the slippery slope of self-destruction. One of the most effective tools humanism has used to bring us to this point has been to assault the modern Eve. Yes, she has been listening again to that old serpent, and she has believed his lies. Yes, again, Adam has been with her, but he has not fulfilled his responsibility of protecting his wife and his home from the death that will surely come from eating the forbidden fruit.

Name the Lies!

Being a career woman is good.

Sixty years ago, Satan began to convince husbands and wives that the wife could, should and sometimes must work outside the home. Granted,

there are situations in which there is literally no choice: she must earn the living or help to do so, or the family will go hungry. More often, though, the wife works because there is the desire for more of the extras of this world's goods, and at least part of the payment for those extras is made at the expense of the husband/wife relationship, of the mother/child relationship, of the home and of the spiritual life of the family.

It takes time to nurture any relationship, and that is what is consumed when there is a full-time job outside the home. Sadly, the workplace also becomes the scene of "friendly" relationships that may cause two divorces and endless heartaches.

Women's "liberation" is good.

Absolutely the most effective degradation of women has come through the lie of "equality." No, women are not second-rate humans by creation, but many have made themselves low-grade by following this part of humanism's culture. Women are now "equal"—they can even be hired to do the hard, heavy work that used to be reserved for men. In their "equality" and willingness to accept immorality as a way of life, they have often been left with the lifetime consequences of abortions or with the financial, emotional and spiritual responsibilities of raising children alone.

Dressing stylishly—lewdly—is good.

In their stupidity, many women ***make merchandise of themselves*** by showing off their bodies in sickening ads. Many, in their daily lives, parade through the world in semi-nakedness, and then they cry "foul" when men respond to their message of ***I'm here for the taking***.

Having one's children in daycare is good.

Mothers relinquish the rearing of their children—their most precious possessions—to strangers. Yes, when there is no choice, this necessity is a tearing of the heart—but there are mothers who can't wait for Monday to get back to the office and to get those noisy kids out of their hair.

"Living in" with a boyfriend is good.

And when the lazy man, who was not expected to make any commitment, is ready to leave, what price has the modern Eve paid?

"Divorce is better than living with a man I just don't love any more."

It is common today for men and women to enter marriage with the attitude that "if this doesn't work out, we'll just get a divorce." With that basis on which to build, how many marriages will weather the challenges and the storms? Who usually has the more difficult life after the divorce? God forbids divorce (Mark 10:4-9).

What Is the Cure?

Actually, it is simple. First of all, there must be a reevaluation of all of these factors that have become so distorted in our culture of humanism. The way for a woman to make that reevaluation is to immerse herself in God's Word, looking for all the keys given there. God made women; He made marriage; He made the home. It is only logical to conclude that the directions in His book will mold us so that we can live safely and happily in this world.

The critical "first thing" is a total commitment to God.

God is **for** godly women, for stable marriages and for happy homes. A commitment to God will ensure that the wife cannot violate these principles or relinquish these goals.

The second requirement is her commitment to her husband.

God's plan, according to Genesis 2:23-24 and Ephesians 5:22-31, is for the wife to be voluntarily in subjection to her godly husband, who is to cherish and protect her.

She must be ready to sacrifice for the good of her family.

The godly wife will put the needs and happiness of her husband and family before her own, and the result will be the happiest of lives in return for herself.

She must let God's Word govern her behavior, her attitude and her dress.

A wife who is observant, thoughtful, compassionate, and loving toward the husband for whom she continually prays will be rich.

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Are We Raising Athletes or Christians?

Wes McAdams

If you know my family and me personally, you probably know my 9-year-old son loves baseball. He watches nearly every Texas Rangers' game on television (or lies in bed listening on the radio), he pitches for his Little League team, he could sit and talk about baseball for hours on end, and it's a rare occasion that he does not have some sort of ball in his hand (even in the house). Yet, I strongly believe Christian families need to exercise caution when their children have athletic talent and passion.

The Idolatry of Sports

I believe anything can become an idol, and I think a good definition of idolatry is, "Feeling about something the way one should only feel about God." Idolatry is believing deep down in one's heart that a person cannot be whole without this thing in his or her life. In other words, this thing makes life worth living. So, it's not hard to see how Americans idolize sports.

- Are the gigantic stadiums we construct really very different from ancient temples?
- Aren't professional athletes sort of like priests who intercede with the sport on our behalf?
- Don't Americans watch, listen to and read about sports religiously?
- Doesn't our favorite team playing seem to trump everything else in our lives?
- Isn't our emotional state dependent on the performance of our team?
- Don't many Americans believe sports make life worth living?

I don't want my son to idolize baseball. I don't want him to think baseball makes life worth living. I don't want him to believe he can't be whole without baseball. I want him to know that baseball could disappear overnight and everything would be just fine.

Don't get me wrong. I want him to play baseball and to enjoy it as long

as he wants to, but at the end of the day, I want him to remember that it is a game—**not a god**.

The Priority of Jesus

When I was a kid, my mother used to tell me, "You can only have one priority." There can only be one thing that's most important in one's life. There can only be one thing that takes precedence over everything else. As a father, I am determined that baseball will **not** be our family's priority.

In Matthew 10:37-39, Jesus said this about being His follower. ***"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."***

If Jesus was talking to us today, wouldn't He say, "Whoever loves baseball or soccer more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves football or basketball more than me is not worthy of me"? Jesus and His kingdom must be our priority. Everything else must be considered "rubbish" in comparison (Philippians 3:8).

Bottom Line

Every Christian family must decide how it will go about making sure sports never become idols in their homes. We all must make sure that in our own hearts, and in the hearts of our children, some mascot does not sit on the throne where Christ should be seated. We must not allow sports to

rule over our lives, dictating our schedules and determining our emotional state. We are going to have to turn off some games and verbally declare, "Sports are not an ultimate thing in our home."

We are going to have to be incredibly intentional to spend far more time, money and energy on the things of Jesus Christ than we do on sports. Children intuitively understand what is most important in their homes. They pick up on the verbal and non-verbal cues about what takes precedence. They can tell if games and practices are more important to us than worship, Bible study, evangelism and service to others. It isn't just the sermons we preach with our mouths, but the sermons we preach with our wallets and our calendars that influence our children.

As my boys grow, I have to constantly ask myself the rhetorical question, "Am I raising athletes or Christians?"

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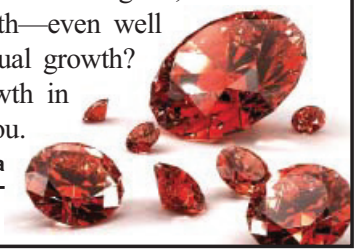
Robison's Rubies

Isn't it exciting to watch young people grow? As their physical stature increases, they learn more and more about the world around them and their interaction with it. The growth process fascinates parents, teachers and many others who care about the children. It is significant that Luke 2:52 records that ***"Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."*** Coming into the world as a baby, He had to grow up. As He did, he grew in all four areas of life: physically, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Those are the ways all need to grow, but sometimes people neglect spiritual growth—even well into adulthood. Are you neglecting spiritual growth? You can learn more about spiritual growth in God's Word. Visit a church of Christ near you.



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Repent or Perish

Dennis Gulledge

Preachers of the Gospel have used these words countless times in sermons as authority for urging the necessity of repentance. There is no question that turning from sin (repentance) is absolutely indispensable in conversion (Acts 17:30-31). Further, there is no doubt that we need to urge the authority of God's Word for all that we believe and practice (1 Thessalonians 5:21). In this day when "proof text" preaching is highly criticized, we need to always place God's New Covenant authority behind all that we do and teach (2 Timothy 4:2).

Note Luke 13:1-5 in view of its setting and circumstances.

> ***There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish"*** *(Luke 13:1-5).*

This, and all passages, should be quoted, cited or used in respect to their context. Was Jesus giving us a point to be inserted into the Gospel plan of salvation? If so, then that is the way I need to utilize this passage. If not, and I use it in such a sense, am I not guilty of taking the passage out of its context, even if the point to be made is a good one.

The context of this passage involves Jesus teaching a multitude (Luke 12:1-13:9). We have included in this section of Scripture His teaching

on hypocrisy (Luke 12:1-12), materialism or covetousness (vss. 13-34), watchfulness (vss. 35-48), impending tragedy (vss. 49-59) and repentance (Luke 13:1-9). In verse 1, Luke cited an incident not recorded in Scripture. Uprisings and rebellions were common among the Jews. Pilate's cruelty is in evidence here. The interesting thing to those who reported this incident was that it was believed to be an act of divine punishment of those who were worse sinners than themselves.

The Book of Job should have laid that notion to rest in their minds. Jesus earlier taught His disciples against this false idea (John 9:3). The Lord added to it another disaster—eighteen deaths in the fall of the tower of Siloam (vs. 4). Jesus used these incidents to teach the lesson of repentance to the people of Israel (vss. 3, 5). These events added force to Jesus' call for repentance in Israel (Matthew 4:17). Israel was the intended focus of God's punishment in the destruction of Jerusalem forty years yet removed. Why would it be strange to think that Jesus implored His people at that time to repent or "likewise" perish in the force that would be God's judgment against Jerusalem? That historical fact takes nothing away from the basic need of people to repent of their sins or "likewise" perish in hell forever. ✝

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Kenney's Pennies

"I love the Lord, because He has heard My voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live" (Psalm 116:1-2 NKJV). God does not always grant our petitions, but He always hears His children's cry. Sometimes we just want to be heard by another party, whether or not he or she agrees with us. Christians never have to wonder about being heard by the Lord. No matter what the outcome, we will have been heard.

Christ Coming with All His Saints

Kevin L. Moore

We read in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, ***"so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints"*** (NKJV). Then Jude 14 states, ***"Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints.'"***

Since the Lord is to come **for** his saints, not **with** his saints (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18), this apparent discrepancy needs further clarification. The Greek word *hagioi*, rendered "saints" in some translations, actually means "holy ones." Who are the "holy ones" who will accompany the Lord at His second coming? The Bible gives a clear answer: ***"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy*** [*hagioi*] ***angels with Him…"*** (Matthew 25:31). The ***"holy ones"*** who will accompany Jesus at His return are holy angels (Matthew 13:39; 2 Thessalonians 1:7), not the living and resurrected faithful who will meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).✝

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Scavenger Hunt

through Luke

Rebecca Rushmore

(Answers inside back cover)

1. To whom did Luke address his book?
2. Name the two men mentioned as high priest when John began preaching.
3. In which region did Jesus begin His public ministry?
4. Name the three fishermen partners who left their nets to fish for men.
5. What did Jesus do the night before He chose the twelve apostles?
6. Who did Jesus say had greater faith than anyone He had seen in Israel?
7. Name the two men who appeared with Jesus at His transfiguration.
8. From which region was the leper who returned to thank Jesus?
9. Where was Jesus praying before His arrest?
10. From where did Jesus ascend into Heaven?

David's Charge to Solomon

Therman Hodge

"As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it" (1 Chronicles 28:9-10 NKJV). David exhorted the people to fear God. Another record of the charge appears in 1 Kings 2:1-4, which reads:

> ***Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: "I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; that the Lord may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,' He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'"***

The servant of God must "know God." Solomon was charged to ***"know the God of thy father"*** (2 Chronicles 8:9). The apostle John wrote by inspiration how one can demonstrate that he knows God—by keeping His commandments (1 John 2:4-5). Keeping the commands of God is evidence of knowing God.

Solomon was also to "serve Him." He was to serve with a ***"perfect heart"*** (v. 9-10 KJV) and so ought all Christians to serve God (Acts 11:23). Further, Solomon was to serve with ***"a willing mind."*** No other kind of service is acceptable to God. One's service needs to be rendered with reverence—***"godly fear"*** (Psalm 2:11; Hebrews 12:28). After all, whose

servants are we (Romans 6:16-18)? Since Christians are servants of God, how should they serve—***"heartily"*** (Colossians 3:23-24).

Solomon was to "take heed." David's exhortation to his son was, "Don't delay." We also ought to seek the Lord early and continually. ***"…The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you"*** (2 Chronicles 15:2). Likewise, we need to "take heed" and "continue" with God. ***"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you"*** (1 Timothy 4:16). Especially, even Christians need to take heed lest we fall (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).

David told Solomon to "be strong and do it." Strength is essential—morally and spiritually. The children of God are to ***"be strong in the Lord"*** (Ephesians 6:10). The **doing** part of God-given religion must not be overlooked. Doing is vital (James 1:27)! Christians need to be busy for our Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58); God calls busy people. For instance, Moses was with Jethro's flocks, Gideon was threshing wheat, David was with his father's sheep, Nehemiah was bearing the king's cup, Peter and Andrew were casting their nets, James and John were mending their nets, and Paul was busy persecuting Christians. There is no room for the lazy or the idle in the Lord's service.

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Robison's Rubies

Philippians 4:13 is a great verse of Scripture bringing encouragement to many hearts. ***"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me."*** Taken out of context, this verse could be made to mean things never intended. I never expect, for example, to ever be able to literally walk on water or to raise the dead. In context, it is beautiful. Paul, from prison, wrote about how he had learned to be content in all situations. No matter what life threw at him, he was able handle it. He knew how to be abased and he knew how to abound because Christ strengthened him. Now, there is a lesson I can and should learn: **whatever trials may come my way, I can endure them all through Christ**.

Stephen: A Faithful Witness to the End

Brian R. Kenyon

Memorial Day is about remembering those Americans who lost their lives in war. Those of us on this side of life can only say "Thank You" to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice to secure and maintain the freedoms we enjoy. It took faithfulness to the cause of freedom for them to have given their lives. However, there is an even greater cause than that of political freedom—**the cause of Christ!** We can all be encouraged by those we find in Scripture who paid the ultimate price for that cause. Stephen is one such example. The characteristics he displayed will also enable us to live for the Lord, even if that means paying the ultimate price in this life for our faithfulness. Like Stephen, we must be:

Willing to Serve Tables

Stephen first appears in Acts 6. The Jerusalem church was concerned about helping people in need, as should all Christians (James 1:27; Galatians 6:10). As their present situation stood, this church could not see to the needs of the Grecian widows (Acts 6:1). The apostles could not leave their work in ***"the word of God"*** to ***"serve tables"*** (Acts 6:2). Thus, they told the congregation, ***"Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word"*** (Acts 6:3-4).

Stephen was among the seven men that the congregation chose (Acts 6:5). He met the qualifications. First, he was of ***"good reputation*** [honest report, KJV]," which meant that his peers thought well of his integrity. Second, he was ***"full of the Holy Spirit."*** We know that for Stephen this involved miraculous powers (Acts 6:8). Third, he was ***"full…of wisdom"*** (Acts 6:3). Stephen was willing to do what many in our day would think

is too menial—serve tables! Would we be willing to do this for the cause of Christ? We would if we possessed those same qualifications. We must be of ***"good reputation"*** (3 John 12). Although Christians today are not miraculously ***"filled with the Holy Spirit,"*** we are still commanded to be ***"filled with the Spirit,"*** non-miraculously (Ephesians 5:18). Stephen may have had a miraculous type of wisdom (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:8), but we receive our wisdom from asking God (James 1:5). Would our character allow us to ***"serve tables"*** if that is what the Lord needed?

A Fearless Teacher of God's Word

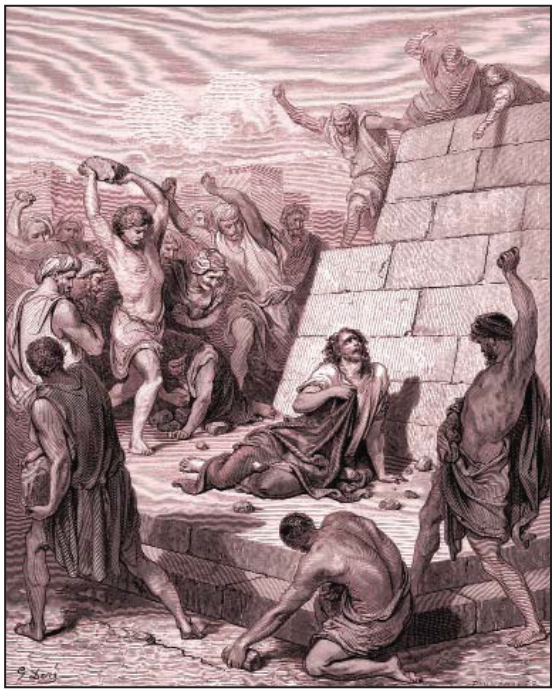
Though he was selected to serve tables, Stephen did not hesitate to take advantage of the opportunities he had to teach others the Word of God. It may have been that his work of serving tables took him among people and that providential opportunities arose for him to teach. His teaching was plain, clear and irrefutable. Even the most learned men of the synagogue ***"were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke"*** (Acts 6:10). As a result of his uncompromising teaching, he met opposition from those who did not like the truth. He was falsely accused and framed.

> ***Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us"*** (Acts 6:11-14).

Stephen, however, was ready to answer (Acts 6:15), and answer he did! He gave a brief history of God's people (Acts 6:2-36); he showed that Christ was that Prophet whom Moses said would come (Acts 6:37-38). Further, he showed how the Jews of his day, like their ancestors, had not kept the law (Acts 6:39-53). Christians today must also be fearless teachers of God's Word. We may not preach publicly, and we may not be

"scholars," but all of us must take advantage of the opportunities we have to teach God's Word. As parents, we must teach our children His Word (Ephesians 6:4). This means, of course, that we must know the Scriptures (2 Timothy 2:15). No matter what our position in life, it takes courage to teach and live God's Word. Do we have that courage?

Faithful unto Death



Stephen had spoken the truth, but instead of his hearers being ***"cut*** [pricked, KJV] ***to the heart"*** and seeking forgiveness as those on Pentecost did (Acts 2:37), ***"they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth"*** (Acts 7:54). Stephen's death was a direct result of his preaching. Some preaching puts the listeners to sleep, but with Stephen's preaching, the listeners put him to sleep—permanently (until Jesus comes again, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). Stephen's preaching affected him personally. He was slandered by false witnesses (Acts 6:13), brought before the High Priest (Acts 7:1), and died a cruel and heartless death (Acts 7:54-60). Stephen's death affected the church. It brought great sorrow (Acts 8:2), and it caused the church to be ***"scattered abroad"*** (Acts 8:3-4; cf., 11:19).

Stephen's death affected the cause of Christ. All except the apostles left Jerusalem, and what might have seemed like the end of the church resulted in

its expansion; Christians went everywhere, preaching, teaching and planting the church (Acts 8:4)! At his death, there was significance in what Stephen saw and in what he said. He saw ***"the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God"*** (Acts 7:56), which showed the concern and involvement of Jesus when His disciples suffer death. Stephen said, ***"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"*** (Acts 7:59), which showed his complete confidence in Christ, and ***"Lord, do not charge them with this sin"*** (Acts 7:60), which showed his Christ-like attitude (cf., Luke 23:34).

Stephen's death sheds light on Jesus' statement, ***"be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"*** (Revelation 2:10). This does not simply mean to be faithful until the day we die, but it means be faithful, even if our faithfulness costs us our life! Jesus said, ***"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him*** [God] ***who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell"*** (Matthew 10:28).

Conclusion

Stephen gave his life for the cause of Christ. He stands as an example to us. Do we have the disposition that we would even serve tables if that is what the Lord asked of us? Are we fearless in teaching the Word of God? Are we faithful unto death? May the Lord give us strength to give our lives to Him, to always be willing to do what He says and to ***"not grow weary in well doing"*** (Galatians 6:9).

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Did You Know?

- The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1948, proved the manuscripts used to translate the English Bible were accurately copied from the original texts.
- The first book ever printed on a press was the Gutenberg Bible in 1455. The first complete Bible printed in English was Coverdale's Bible in 1535.

Are We Apologists?

Mike Riley

Merriam-Webster Online defines the word "apology" as being derived from the Greek word "apologia" which means, "a speaking in defense." This Greek word does not imply admission of guilt or regret, but a desire to make clear the grounds for some course, belief or position (i.e., "his speech was an apologia for his foreign policy"). The apostle Paul used the above Greek word in Philippians 1:7, 17 (as well as in 1 Corinthians 9:3; 2 Corinthians 7:11; 2 Timothy 4:16) when he made clear his "defense" of the Gospel.

Thus, the inspired apostle Paul was indeed an "apologist" in "defense" of the Gospel of Christ. Therefore, apologists are necessary and the study of "apologetics" (a branch of theology devoted to the defense of the divine origin and authority of Christianity) is necessary as well. Using Paul as our example (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17), we as Christians, should always be prepared to make a "defense" ("answer" KJV) or "apologia" to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15).

Why Was Jesus Baptized?

Jerry A. Jenkins

There are numerous reasons why people are baptized, such as (1) Their parents have them baptized when they are infants, (2) Those around them are being baptized, and one joins in to be a part of the group, (3) They believe it will help them in their business endeavors to have endorsements from those who believe that baptism is important, (4) They believe it is a public affirmation that by God's grace they have been saved already, (5) They believe it is a condition of salvation. Perhaps there are many other reasons for which people are baptized.

Why was Jesus baptized? He must have considered it important for He traveled 70 or 80 miles to the place on the Jordan River where John was baptizing. Jesus was not baptized for the reason John was baptizing. By this is meant, John was baptizing in order that one's sins might be forgiven. The inspired New Testament writer states, ***"John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins"*** (Mark 1:4).

John understood that Jesus did not need to be baptized for the remission of His sins. He stated, ***"I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?"*** (Matthew 3:13-14). John understood that he was a sinner, and he understood that Jesus was not a sinner.

Why then was Jesus baptized, if not for the reason John baptized those from Jerusalem, all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan, as they came confessing their sins? The Lord gave the reason saying, ***"Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness"*** (Matthew 3:15). The great Methodist scholar commenting on the phrase, ***"to fulfill all righteousness,"*** stated, "That is, every righteous ordinance…"

Had Jesus refused to obey the command of baptism, He would have been in the same camp as the Pharisees and experts in the Law, as Luke stated that by their refusal they ***"rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John"*** (Luke 7:30). Baptism was not demanded

by the Law of Moses, but God sent John the Baptist to preach the nearness of the coming kingdom and to baptize all for the remission of their sins.

Why should people in the 21st century be baptized? Here are a few reasons: (1) Because Jesus commanded it (Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:18-20), (2) Because baptism is coupled with faith and linked to salvation in the teaching of Jesus (Mark 16:16), (3) Because baptism is linked with repentance and the forgiveness of sins in the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:38), (4) Because in baptism one calls on the name of the Lord. ***"Arise and be baptized, calling on the name of the Lord"*** (Acts 22:16). (5) Because in baptism one is brought into spiritual contact with the blood of Jesus (Romans 6:3) and (6) Because in baptism we act out the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:3-4).

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[**Editor's Note:** Though Jesus and people today are baptized for different reasons, nevertheless, baptism is no less necessary for persons now than it was for Jesus Christ. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

Fundamental Facts about New Testament Baptism

Ronald D. Reeves

I. Baptism is supported by divine authority.
- A. The name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19)
- B. The name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38; 8:12)
- C. The name of the Lord (Acts 10:48)
- D. The name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16; 19:5)

II. Baptism is a command of God to be obeyed.
- A. Commanded by Jesus to the apostles (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15-16)
- B. Commanded by the apostles to the Jews (Acts 2:38)
- C. Commanded by Peter to Gentiles (Acts 10:48)
- D. Commanded by Philip, the evangelist, to Samaritans (Acts 8:12)
- E. Commanded by Ananias to Saul of Tarsus, a Jew (Acts 22:16)

III. Baptism is a command of God applied to all accountable people.
- A. General application
  1. To all the world (Mark 16:15-16)
  2. To all nations (Matthew 28:19)
- B. Specific application
  1. To every creature (Mark 16:15-16)
  2. To every one of you (Acts 2:38)

IV. Baptism is preceded by other divine requirements.
- A. Personal faith in Jesus as the Son of God (Mark 16:16; John 8:24; 3:16)
- B. Repentance of past, personal sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30-31)
- C. Confession of the person of Jesus (Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

V. Baptism is accomplished in water.

A. Baptized in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:6, 13; Mark 1:5, 9; John 1:28)
B. Baptized after going into the water (Acts 8:38)
C. Baptized with water (Matthew 3:11, 16; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:26, 31, 33; Acts 1:5; 8:36, 38; 10:47; 11:16)
D. Baptized with much water (John 3:23)
E. Baptized in a burial (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12)

VI. Baptism ushers in divine blessings.

A. In connection with sin
   1. One will be saved (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
   2. One will receive remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
   3. One will have his sins washed away (Acts 22:16).
B. In connection with Jesus Christ
   1. One is baptized into Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27).
   2. One is baptized into the death of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-4)
   3. One is with Him in baptism (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12).
   4. One puts on Christ (Galatians 3:27).
C. In connection with the New Testament church
   1. Into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13)
   2. Added unto the church (Acts 2:41, 47)

VII. Baptism is followed by a changed life (Romans 6:3-4).

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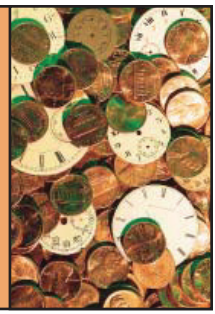
Kenney's Pennies

"As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:13 NKJV). It is by design that God reveals Himself to us as "Father" because fathers are so important to our families, to our communities and to our nation. Even a father who did not have a father in his life can know what he needs to do for his children based on how the Father deals with His children.



What Challenges Did the First Century Church Face in Becoming a Potent Force?

Struggling with Local and Religious Customs

Jeremy W. Barrier

From a study of the Book of Acts and the letters to the churches, we can see that the early church struggled with local and religious customs, and this perhaps hampered its growth during the early years.

They Struggled with Local Religious Customs

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. (Acts 15:1–2)

In Acts 15, we read about a "disagreement" that arose between some of the Christians from Judea, called "brothers" in this passage, and those who were from Antioch, a city on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. In essence, this would have been a disagreement that emerged between people living in very different cultural worlds. In particular, while they were both 'Christian' groups, they had very different religious customs. In

this case, the specific custom that was under dispute had to do with whether Christians must fulfill the Jewish custom of circumcision. Circumcision means to "cut around" and referred to the Jewish ritual of cutting off the foreskin from the male's penis to demonstrate a visual boundary marker that suggested that one was living within a covenant agreement with God.

During the first century, Palestinian Jews customarily circumcised their newborn children and even circumcised adult converts to Judaism. However, Jews living outside of Palestine, often called *diaspora* Jews often did not require converts to their faith to be circumcised, thus causing tension amongst their religious and social ranks. Interestingly enough, as many people, especially Jews, began to convert to Christianity, they carried over their religious Jewish customs into their new 'Jewish' sect (the faith that eventually was known as Christianity). Thus, those who were part of the 'Jewish sect of the Nazarenes,' that is, "Christians," were also struggling with whether people who were in covenant with God through Jesus should also circumcise their males to provide a boundary marker. As we see in Acts 15, upon reading the rest of the chapter, those early Christians continued to discuss this issue in Antioch, and then even back in Jerusalem—Jerusalem being a center for both Judaism and the emerging group of Gentile Christians. When the men in the Jerusalem meeting left the "negotiations," they were agreeing through the guidance of inspired leadership to maintain the truths that the worship of idols was forbidden to Christians, that there should be no eating of blood and that sexual immorality was forbidden. The pronouncement was also made that non-Jews were freed from the Jewish law of circumcision. Thus, an agreement was struck.

However, this agreement only lasted so long, and as soon as Christianity began to arise in other places with new and different local customs, circumcision continued to show up as a dividing issue. Such was the case in Galatia, where we find out from Paul's *Letter to the Galatians* that a group of infiltrators were pressuring the Galatians to circumcise their new converts to Christ. Paul adamantly resisted such a decision—encouraging the Galatians to maintain their liberty from such ritual actions, and thus

resist those overtures. To quote Paul, he stated in Galatians 5:1-2, ***"For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you."***

What is interesting about this decision is that Paul, for various reasons, felt that he must resist circumcision because it was infringing upon the integrity of the Gospel. In the first chapter of his letter to the Galatians, he warned the Galatians to reject any Gospel that is not true to the Gospel that was first preached to them. The important detail to remember here is that Paul **was not opposed to the ritual practice of circumcision in and of itself**. He was opposed to circumcision **if it was intended to somehow foreshadow the Gospel**. In Acts 16:1–4, we read about Paul asking a young traveling companion named Timothy to be circumcised. What is interesting about this situation is that Timothy was the son of a Greek father with a Jewish mother. Due to his Greek father, he was never circumcised. However, Paul, upon asking Timothy to travel with him, had him circumcised ***"because of the Jews who were in those places"*** where Paul and Timothy were about to travel. What this proves for us is that Paul was willing to circumcise or have others circumcised, in order to not offend people for cultural reasons, but only if he felt that it would not compromise the truth of the Gospel.

Time-Keeping Schemes

Another issue that we see emerging as a difficult issue for the early Christians was deciding which calendar to use. This is something that most of us spend little time thinking about today, especially since so many countries and people have adopted the same calendar. However, this issue was very difficult to navigate for early Christians. For the first Christians living in the Mediterranean region of the world, there were essentially two main calendars with which they were familiar. First, there was the Roman calendar based on the movements of the Sun with most days of the week being named in honor of Greek and Roman gods, and the four seasons of the year being based on Greek mythology. The year was filled with

numerous religious festivals and was filled in every way possible with Pagan religious beliefs.

The other important calendar was the Jewish calendar, based on the movements of the Moon and completely based on the Jewish worldview with only one day of the week, *Sabbath*. Every day of the week was not necessarily named but called one day from Sabbath, 2 days from Sabbath, etc. This is exactly what we even see the apostle Paul doing in 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 or Luke when he wrote in Acts 20:7, ***"On the first day from Sabbath, when we met to break bread…"*** This calendar was also filled with events, new moon festivals and other time-keeping seasonal elements, but it was all based around the Jewish lunar calendar. We see these calendars discussed in at least two places within the New Testament (Galatians 4:10; Colossians 2:16). Colossians 2:16 states, ***"Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths."*** Galatians 4:10 reads, ***"You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years."***

What is interesting about both passages is that they mention ideas related to the Christian faith and time-keeping schemes. First, in Colossae, Paul encouraged the believers to not allow others to condemn them because they were using time-keeping schemes that were based in Jewish or Pagan backgrounds. In essence, while Paul was not recommending that the Colossians acknowledge or honor a Pagan faith, he was at the same time saying that Christianity is much bigger than this, and suggesting that it is not necessary for Christians to create a calendar all to their own. After all, Paul was aware that these Pagan calendars were based on a faith that is not real, but merely idols (see 1 Corinthians 8:4, where Paul stated, ***"we know that 'no idol in the world really exists,' and that 'there is no God but one.'"***).

In the case of the Galatians, quite the opposite was the case. The Galatians had apparently adopted a religious (in particular, Pagan) calendar, and it had come between them and their God! In this latter case, we see the other extreme, where it is possible for a local custom, in this case a time-keeping scheme or even circumcision, to separate one from God. What one must be careful not to do is to confuse the two and make judgments too quickly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what I am trying to say is several things at once. First, the Gospel of Christ is unchanging, and the truth of the Gospel is to be maintained in whatever we do. Second, the early Church sometimes had trouble distinguishing between the Gospel and local religious customs. The particular custom at which we looked here was circumcision, and very briefly, we considered the Greco-Roman calendar versus the Jewish calendar, too. In each case, what we saw was Christians working diligently to determine when and where local customs might be maintained, and when those customs must give way for the Gospel.

Nonetheless, what we need to notice is that the early Christians were in danger of not being able to continue as a new faith group because at times they were not able to tell the difference between religious customs and the Gospel, which led them to sometimes impose their local customs on others. Last, but not least, we see that Paul did not have a problem with local customs, even Pagan local customs such as certain foods eaten in the name of Gods, or even time-keeping schemes, like calendars. He did not have a problem with them, unless they were compromising the Gospel.

It takes a lot of patience and wisdom to tell the difference, and one must be careful when making these distinctions within one's own country. Ultimately, what we find out is that Paul, who often chose to allow for Christian "freedom" was the representative of the Gospel that we see today. He was not imposing overbearing and numerous rituals upon those around him, and at times this made it very difficult for him. Yet, when his life came to an end, it was the Gospel that he bore which won the world. If we want the Gospel to be a potent force, we need to keep it free from the entanglement of local and religious customs.

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They All Agree

Guy Caskey

Men who started religious movements, such as the Reformation Movement, agreed with each other and with the Bible on first principle teaching that has to do with our becoming Christians and worshipping God. These men in the Reformation Movement doubtless knew that:

1. **He wants us to be united:** ***"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that You sent Me"*** (John 17:20-21).

2. **He wants us to walk by the same rule:** ***"Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind"*** (Philippians 3:16).

3. **He wants us to have the same goals:** To walk ***"with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"*** (Ephesians 4:1-3).

4. **He wants us to speak the same things:** ***"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"*** (I Corinthians 1:10).

5. **He wants us to recognize His authority:** ***"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth'"*** (Matthew 28:18). God seated Christ at ***"…His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named,***

not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things…" (Ephesians 1:20-22).

6. **He wants us to subscribe to a single standard of conduct in our lives, for the church and for the Gospel:** ***"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God"*** (1 Peter 4:11). ***"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son"*** (2 John 9).

These passages tell us that we can be one in the faith and that we can understand the doctrine of Christ.

Listen to These Men On Fundamentals of the Gospel

John Calvin (Presbyterian): **Mark 16:15-16**: "He commanded all who believe to be baptized for the remission of their sins. Therefore, those who have imagined that baptism is nothing more than a mark or a sign by which we profess our religion before men, as soldiers wear the insignia of their sovereign as a mark of their profession, have not considered what was the principle thing in baptism, which is, that we ought to receive it with the promise, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.' The word baptize means immerse, and it is certain that immersion was observed in the early church" (*Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter 13).

John Wesley (Methodist) said of **Romans 6:3** and **John 3:5**: "We are buried with Him, alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion …By water then, as a means of water baptism, we are regenerated or born again; whence it is also called by the apostle, 'The washing of regeneration' (Titus 3:5)" (*Notes on the New Testament*, 1825).

Martin Luther (Lutheran) said of baptism: "On this account I could wish that such as are baptized should be completely immersed in water according to the meaning of the word, and the significance of the

ordinance as also, without doubt, it was instituted by Christ" (*Works*, Volume 11, 76).

Timothy Dwight (Congregationalist; former president of Yale University) said of **John 3:5**: "To be born of water here means baptism, and in my view, it is necessary to our admission to the visible church."

Adam Clarke (Methodist), on **Romans 6:4** and **Colossians 2:12**: "It is probable that the apostle here alludes to the mode of administering baptism by immersion, the whole body being put under the water." Of the second passage Clarke continues: "Alluding to immersion practiced in the case of adults wherein the person appeared to be buried under the water, as Christ was buried in the heart of the earth, His rising again the third day, and their emerging from the water, was an emblem of the resurrection of the body; and, in them, a total change of life."

Lenski (Lutheran): "This baptism…as appointed for all nations bestowed the remission of sins. A refusal of baptism would be a repudiation of Christ and of all the gifts contained in His name. Baptism is pure gospel that conveys grace and salvation from God through Christ; it dare not be changed into a legal or legalistic requirement. This preposition (into, eis) connects remission so closely with baptism that nobody has yet been able to separate the two."

Barnes (Presbyterian): "Baptism is a willingness to be pardoned that way, and it is a solemn declaration of our conviction that there is no other way of remission. He who comes to be baptized, comes with a profound

conviction that he is a sinner, that there is no other way of mercy but in the gospel, and with a profound willingness to comply with the terms of salvation, and to receive it as it is offered through Jesus Christ."

Expository Greek New Testament: "As each individual was to be baptized, so each would receive the forgiveness of his sins."

Pulpit Commentary: "Peter preaches the word with power, the hearers are pricked in their heart, and by his direction they are baptized, and so put in possession of the promised salvation. Paul teaches that we are baptized into the death of Christ, and so are freed from sin. As our burial, a total immersion in water was followed by a total emergence, so our death with Christ to sin, which that immersion symbolized, is to be followed by our resurrection with Him to a new life."

Weekly Observance of Lord's Supper

John Calvin (Presbyterian): "Every week the table of the Lord should have been spread for the assemblies, and the promise declared by which, in partaking of it, we might be spiritually fed" (*Institutes*, Book VI, Chapter 18).

John Wesley (Methodist): "I also advise elders to administer the Supper of the Lord every Lord's Day. With respect to this, or any other command, he that, when he may obey it, if he will not, will have no place in the kingdom of heaven" (*Letters to America*, 1784).

August Neander (Lutheran; church historian): "The Lord's Supper was still a part of the divine worship every Sunday. The whole church partook after the amens of the preceding prayers. The deacons carried the bread and wine to everyone present" (*Church History*, Volume 1, 332).

Charles Spurgeon (Baptist) observed the Lord's Supper weekly with his congregation in the great London Tabernacle.

Ignatius, who lived from A.D. 30 to A.D. 107, said: "No longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life is sprung up again by Him and by His death."

From the Heart Of

The Name Christian

Martin Luther: "I pray you, leave my name alone; call not yourselves but Christians" (*Life of Luther* by Stork, 289).

John Wesley (Methodist): "I wish that the very name Methodist should never be mentioned more but be buried in eternal oblivion. Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christians might be forgot" (*Universal Knowledge*, Volume IX, 540).

Charles Spurgeon (Baptist): "I hope the name Baptist will soon perish but let Christ's name live forever."

Adam Clarke (Methodist): "Now as these had their names from those great masters because they attended their teaching, and credited their doctrines, so the disciples were called Christians because they took Christ for their teacher, crediting His doctrines, and following the rule of life laid down by Him."

Clement (early historian of Alexandria): "We give Thee thanks that we are called by the name of Christ, and are thus reckoned as Thine own."

Polycarp's dying words: "I am a Christian."

Singing Without Instrumental Accompaniment

John Calvin (Presbyterian): "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Baptists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this as well as many other things, from the Jews" (*Commentary on Psalm 33*).

Charles Spurgeon (Baptist): "Israel was in school and used childish things to help her to learn. But in these days, when Jesus gives us spiritual manhood, one can make melody without strings and harps. We do not need them; they would hinder rather than help the praise" (Psalm 33:2). "We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it" (*Girardeau: Instrumental Music*, 176).

From the Heart Of

John Wesley (Methodist): "I have no objections to organs in our chapels, provided they are neither seen nor heard" (*Adam Clarke's Commentary*).

Christians did not use instrumental music in the first century.

These Men Agreed with the Bible on These Subjects

On the subject of **immersion for the remission of sins,** this is what the Bible says: ***"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). ***"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life'"*** (Romans 6:4).

On the subject of the **weekly observance of the Lord's Supper:** ***"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight"*** (Acts 20:7). ***"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers"*** (Acts 2:42).

On the subject of **the name Christians:** ***"And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch"*** (Acts 11:26). ***"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"*** (Acts 4:12). ***"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus…"*** (Colossians 3:17).

On the subject of **instrumental music:** ***"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"*** (Colossians 3:16). ***"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"*** (Ephesians 5:19).

Editors Note: Guy Caskey (founder of Mission Printing) wrote this article which was originally published in the August 1994 issue of *To The Ends of The Earth*.

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Verse Search (Page 38)

1. Servant
2. So he could win others to Christ
3. Jew, law, law
4. No
5. Law of Christ
6. That he might save some
7. Gospel
8. One
9. Temperate, to obtain a perishable crown
10. Our crown is imperishable
11. Not with uncertainty
12. Discipline it and bring it into subjection
13. True

Bible Find (page 44)

Scavenger Hunt (page 86)

Answers:

1. Theophilus (1:3)
2. Annas and Caiaphas (3:1-3)
3. Galilee (4:14)
4. Peter (Simon), James, John (5:1-9)
5. prayed all night (6:12-14)
6. a centurion with a sick servant (7:1-10)
7. Moses and Elijah (9:28-36)
8. Samaria (17:11-19)
9. Mount of Olives (22:39-45)
10. Bethany (24:50-51)

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THEY ALL AGREE

Guy Caskey

Men who started religious movements, such as the Reformation, agreed with each other and with the Bible on first principle teaching that has to do with our becoming Christians and worshipping God. These men in the Reformation movement doubtless knew that:

1. God wants us to be united: ***"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us; that the world may believe that You sent Me"*** (John 17:20-21).

2. He wants us to walk by the same rule: ***"Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind"*** (Philippians 3:16).

3. He wants us to have the same goals: To walk ***"with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"*** (Ephesians 4:1-3).

4. He wants us to speak the same things: ***"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"*** (1 Corinthians 1:10).

5. He wants us to recognize His authority: ***"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth'"*** (Matthew 28:18). God seated Christ at ***"... His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things …"*** (Ephesians 1:20-22).

6. **He wants us to subscribe to a single standard of conduct in our lives, for the church and for the gospel:** ***"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God"*** (1 Peter 4:11). ***"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son"*** (2 John 9).

These passages tell us that we can be one in the faith and that we can understand the doctrine of Christ. [For quotes from Reformation leaders, see "From the Heart of…"]