

Volume One Hundred and Nine

The Voice of Truth INTERNATIONAL

*God's world has rivers and deserts and
flowers and trees, and sometimes He
covers it with a "blanket" of snow.....*

I AM A SOLDIER



I am a soldier in the army of my God. Jesus is my commanding officer. The Bible is my code of conduct. I am a volunteer in this army, and I am enlisted for eternity. I will either retire in this army at the Lord's return or die in this army, but I will not get out, be talked out, or pushed out. I AM A SOLDIER.

I am a soldier. I am not a baby. I do not need to be pampered, petted, pumped up, picked up. I AM A SOLDIER.

No one has to call me, remind me, write me, visit me, entice me, or lure me. I AM A SOLDIER.

No one has to send me flowers, gifts, food, cards, candy, or give me handouts. I AM A SOLDIER.

I do not need to be cuddled, cradled, cared for, or catered to. I am committed. I AM A SOLDIER.

I cannot have my feelings hurt bad enough to turn me around. I cannot be discouraged enough to turn me aside. I cannot lose enough to cause me to quit. I AM A SOLDIER.

When Jesus called me into this army, I had nothing. If I end up with nothing, I will still come out ahead. I will win!

"Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier"

(2 Timothy 2:3,4).

“THE FREE GIFTS OF GOD”

Ephesians 2:8-9; James 1:17

**THAT WHICH MAN CANNOT
SUPPLY/DO FOR HIMSELF.**

← NO CONTRADICTION →

**THAT WHICH MAN MUST
SUPPLY/DO FOR HIMSELF.**

AIR = GIFT OF GOD: ACTS 17:25

BREATHES = PHYSICAL LIFE

WATER = GIFT OF GOD: GEN. 1:6-9

DRINKS = PHYSICAL LIFE: ACTS 23:12

FOOD = GIFT OF GOD: MAT. 6:11, 26

EATS = PHYSICAL LIFE: 2 TH. 3:10

COAL = GIFT OF GOD: JAM. 1:17

FOR BY
GRACE HAVE
WE BEEN SAVED

MINES-BURN-WARMTH = PHYS. LIFE

CHRIST = GIFT OF GOD: TIT. 2:11;
EPH. 2:7; ROM. 5:15; JOH. 3:16

BELIEVES = **ETERNAL LIFE**: JOH. 8:24;
ACTS 8:37 & 16:31; HEB. 11:6

GOSPEL = GIFT OF GOD:
ROM. 1:16

OBEYS = **E. L.**: MAR. 16:16; MAT.
7:21; ROM. 6:17; 2 TH. 1:7-9

SALVATION = GIFT OF GOD:
JOH. 3:16; ROM. 5:8-11

ACCEPTS = **E. L.**: MAR 16:16;
2 PE. 3:9; HEB. 5:9; REV. 22:14

GOD'S PART **MAN'S PART**

IT IS THE
GIFT OF GOD

SEE REV 22:17

God's Two Churches

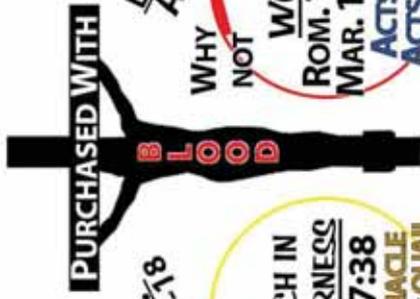
TYPE
FIGURE

ANTI-TYPE
TRUE

Hebrews 8:6-13

LAND OF PROMISE
DEUTERO. 27:2-3

HEAVEN
1 THESS. 4:13-18



EGYPT
EXO. 4:30-31
EXO. 12:1-28
1Co. 10:1-2

WORLD
ROM. 10:5-17
MAR. 16:15-20
ACTS 2:38;
ACTS 22:16;
GAL. 3:27

CHURCH IN WILDERNESS
ACTS 7:38
TABERNACLE
MANA & QUAIL

CHURCH OF CHRIST
MAT. 16:18
ROM. 16:16
ACTS 2:47
HOUSE OF GOD
BREAD OF HEAVEN

WHY NOT
DIRECT WAY?
ANY WAY?
DEATH'S R. HEB. 9:27

- OUT OF EGYPT ← A Call → OUT OF SIN
- OF MOSES ← The Law → OF CHRIST/GOSPEL
- SIN ← Failure → SIN
- REPENT & PRAY ← Return → REPENT & PRAY
- CANAAN ← Reward → HEAVEN

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



Stumbling Over Simplicity

Louis Rushmore

The apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for stumbling over *“the simplicity that is in Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11:3 NKJV). Chapter after chapter of the epistle of 1 Corinthians shows in how many areas of Christianity those first century brethren stumbled over simplicity.

The apostle used the debacle with Eve in the Garden of Eden to illustrate the nature of stumbling over simplicity. The New Testament is longer and more comprehensive than the simple instructions God gave the first pair, but nevertheless, they stumbled over simplicity. After all, how hard could it have been for Adam and Eve (1) to tend or to till the Garden, (2) to keep or to guard it (Genesis 2:15) and (3) to refrain eating from a single tree (Genesis 2:17)? That’s it! What could have been simpler?

There are several notable biblical examples of stumbling over simplicity. One such instance pertained to a Syrian commander named Naaman. He was a leper, and desiring to be healed, Naaman traveled to meet the prophet Elisha. However, the prophet did not respond as Naaman expected.

Then Naaman went with his horses and chariot, and he stood at the door of Elisha’s house. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.” But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, “Indeed, I said to myself, ‘He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.’ Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, bet-

ter than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage. And his servants came near and spoke to him, and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. (2 Kings 5:9-14)

The stumbling over simplicity nearly foiled any hope Naaman had of being healed from his leprosy. Not only Adam and Eve as well as the Corinthian church but everyone to some extent stumbles over simplicity at some time.

One of the most far-reaching occasions of stumbling over simplicity in the world today pertains to evolution versus creation. The **theory** of evolution fails the foundation principles of science because



it cannot be examined in a scientific manner (i.e., observing evidence as well as recreating a result in a controlled environment). Yet, almost every aspect of life has been affected by evolutionary theory (e.g., education, the back of cereal boxes, toys, media). Morality based on the no God evolutionary theory is debased, since thinking that we are merely descendants of a freak cosmic accident makes us creatures without intrinsic value and responsible to no one for our actions.

Conversely, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to pen the obvious regarding origins.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in

unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man — and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. (Romans 1:18-23; cf., Colossians 1:14-17)

Everything exhibiting design signals a designer. We know with surety that buildings, airplanes, ships and automobiles have discernible design, and therefore, we know without a doubt that designers are responsible for their existence. Further, we know that men and women are the designers of such things. At the same time, we look at this beautiful earth with all of its component parts – including our own bodies – and we realize three very important things. First, mankind is incapable of designing and bringing into existence such things as our planet, trees, animals and people. Second, the earth and everything on it as well as what we view in the night sky evidences intricate design. Third, consequently, there is a Master Designer of the created universe.

Although the existence of God can be discerned from observation of the created universe, specifics regarding God, His promises and what He requires of humans cannot be known from observing the natural universe. Hence, God provided inspired instruction about three religious periods of human history: Patriarchy (commencing with Adam and Eve), Judaism (inaugurated by Moses) and Christianity (brought about by the sacrificial death of God the Son). Everyone now living lives under the scope of the Gospel or the New Testament in Christianity.

We might imagine if we were in the Garden and enjoying a personal relationship with God that we could have refrained from violating three simple instructions. The truth is, however, that everybody commits sin sometimes (Romans 3:10, 23). Fortunately, under the New Testament to which everyone living today is amenable, God provided simple solutions

to the sin problem for non-Christians and erring Christians, too.

Jesus Christ Himself summarized the plan of salvation when He said, **“He who believes and is baptized will be saved...”** (Mark 16:16). That’s as simple as $1 + 2 = 3$; what could be simpler? Yet, most of the world stumbles over this simplicity regarding the salvation of their souls. How tragic and completely unnecessary!

Happily, God also provided a means by which erring Christians can solve the sin problem in their lives. The apostle John penned by inspiration, **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”** (1 John 1:9). Simple, right? Yet, many wayward children of God stumble over simplicity regarding their own salvation.

Though we humans view various types of sins differently (e.g., immorality, murder, lying), there is a sense in which God views all sins alike (Revelation 21:8). No matter the sin, God will forgive whomever turns from those sins (repents) and obeys the Gospel. That was so with the Corinthians.

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

Self-inspection or examining one’s self is an important periodic procedure that each of us, regardless of who we are, needs to undergo. **“Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you are disqualified”** (2 Corinthians 13:5). For what are you guilty of stumbling over simplicity? Christian living? Christian service? Your home? Your job? Congregational peace, work, attendance, giving or leadership? Are you a scofflaw? Stumbling over simplicity is always unnecessary, not beneficial, unwarranted and tragic. **Let each of us try harder not to stumble over simplicity!** †





Are You Holy?

Jerry Bates

Ephesians 1:3-14 is one long sentence in the original Greek language, and in this passage, Paul summarized the great benefits we have obtained through Jesus Christ. While we certainly cannot give a detailed discussion of this whole passage in a few words, I want to consider verse four. *“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”*

This verse introduces the concept of being chosen by God or predestined as mentioned in verse five. The word “predestination” is controversial and often misunderstood. Many look upon this as a statement that God chose certain **individuals** to be lost or saved before they were ever born. This notion contradicts several passages that declare that God does not want anyone to be lost. *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). Notice that God does not want any to perish.

The doctrine of predestination as commonly understood in the religious world holds that God has already arbitrarily declared that many would be lost, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. This doctrine also has God treating people differently, but the Bible teaches that God does not show partiality (Acts 10:34). James declared that if anyone shows partiality, he has committed sin (James 2:9).

Paul was not declaring that God has arbitrarily decreed certain individuals to be lost or saved, but rather, he asserted that before the foundation of the

world (i.e., before man was ever created) God pronounced that He would have a certain **class of people** He would call His own and grant them eternal life. This special group would be His children through Jesus Christ, and Jesus would be the only One through whom anyone could become part of this group. In Christ is found *“every spiritual blessing”* (1:3), and God has foreseen that only those in this group would be able to enjoy these spiritual blessings. Through belief and obedience to the truth, God chooses us to be sanctified and become His children (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14).

Furthermore, Paul proclaimed in verse 4 two other benefits of being part of this group. Those who have been chosen by God enjoy the blessings of being holy and without blame. When we read this verse, many may think that this means we should live holy and unblameable lives. Indeed, that is not necessarily a false conclusion since it is taught in many other places in Scripture. In Ephesians 4:1, Paul beseeched Christians to *“walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”* Notice the words of Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:7, which read, *“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.”* Truly, God desires that we *“should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age”* (Titus 2:12). We should be holy because God is holy (1 Peter 1:16). Thus, we see that God does want His people to live holy lives.

While this is true, that is not what Paul taught in Ephesians 1:4. Paul was not discussing how Christians should live; rather, he described the spiritual benefits that Christians enjoy *“in Christ.”* To be *“in Christ”* is to be part of His body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). *“Holy”* is the same word translated *“saints”* in verse one and refers to something or someone who is sacred or devoted to God’s use.

“Without blame” means to be free from blame or accusation like a sacrificial animal was to be without blemish (Leviticus 22:21). In Christ, we are viewed by God as being holy and without blame. On our own, we were unholy and lost. We have nothing with which we can commend ourselves. However, **once we are *“in Christ,” everything changes.*** When we are baptized into Christ, we *“put on Christ”* like we would put on a set of clothes (Galatians 3:27), and we are clothed in righteousness. We are clothed in righteousness because our garments have been washed with the blood of Christ (Revelation 7:14).

Paul proclaimed in Ephesians 5:27 that Christ will present the church



before God without *“spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”* Paul stated similar words in Colossians 1:22, where he wrote, *“in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.”*

This verse states one great truth that we as Christians often overlook. On our own, we are not worthy to even approach God, because we are mired in the guilt of sin. On our own, we can never

overcome sin. We can neither atone for previous sins nor even stop sinning. We will continue to sin on occasion, regardless of our efforts to do otherwise (1 John 1:8-10). Yet, even while being in that situation, God views us as being holy and without blemish. If we are *“in Christ,”* righteousness and holiness is placed on us, and God views us in that light. All our sins and the guilt of sins are washed away. Once again, we become pure like little children. What a great blessing this is!

This means that we must be sure we are *“in Christ.”* The Bible declares that we are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-4). When we submit to that simple act, God transfers us into the church, the body of Christ, and we are clothed with righteousness. All the years of wasteful living in sin can be instantly forgiven when we are baptized into Christ. Only God can make us holy and without blemish, and God has promised to do exactly that by virtue of being *“in Christ.”* Are you *“in Christ”*? †

Jerry Bates is a missionary, Gospel preacher and one of the editors of the quarterly magazine *The Voice of Truth International*. He resides in Winona, Mississippi, USA.



Paradoxes of Christianity: So Close Yet So Far Away

Shane Fisher

The dictionary defines a paradox as “a proposition or statement that seems self-contradictory or absurd yet in fact expresses a possible truth” (www.dictionary.com). Paradoxes are used frequently throughout the Bible to help us meditate on deeper truths. The paradox to be explored herein is that there are people who are so near to the truth, and yet at the same time, they are so far away from the truth. This paradox will be illustrated by five points: (1) Moses, (2) Judas Iscariot, (3) the older brother, (4) the Pharisee and (5) the audience in Acts 2.

Moses

We are familiar with Moses, the leader of Israel. In Numbers 20:1-13, Israel was thirsty and complaining about it. God commanded Moses to take the rod and speak to the rock before the congregation. Moses called the congregation rebels, placing emphasis on Aaron and himself instead of God, and he struck the rock twice. Water did gush out. However, God rebuked Moses and Aaron. Moses did not believe God, and he did not hallow God in the eyes of the congregation of Israel.

There are many applications to take from this account: (1) for a person not to believe in God, all a person has to do is to not obey God (John 14:15; 15:14); (2) if a person does not do what God exactly says in the way that God said to do it, he is not hallowing God; in fact, he is rebelling against God (Luke 6:46); (3) Even though Moses repented, died in faith and will be in Heaven (Hebrews 11:13-16, 23-29), he still suffered earthly consequences — not being allowed

to enter into the land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 34:1-4). **Moses was so close to Canaan yet so far away.** For us, sin has lasting and eternal consequences (Revelation 21:8). We ought to take heed because we can miss the heavenly land of Canaan due to our unfaithfulness (Hebrews 3-4).

Judas Iscariot

We are familiar with the disciple who betrayed Jesus — Judas Iscariot. It was awful what Judas did. In Matthew 27:3-5, we learn he was remorseful, and he even returned the thirty pieces of silver and confessed he sinned by betraying innocent blood. Yet, he hanged himself. Peter gave an account of what happened to Judas in Acts 1:16-26. **Judas could have been so close to being fully restored (like Peter was, John 21:15-19), and yet he was so far away.** He did not have that godly sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:8-11). He will tragically go to perdition (John 17:12) because he did not make the corrections he should have made.

The Older Brother in Luke 15

We are familiar with this famous parable that Jesus gave, which often is titled, “The Prodigal Son.” There are, in fact, two sons that were lost. The younger one returned home, and his father celebrated his return. However, the older brother was not there. Luke 15:25-31 states:

Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, “Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.” But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, “Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.” And he said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.”

Notice how the ending of the story is left open. We do not know the outcome of the story, whether the older brother accepted the invitation to come in and join the celebration. If the older brother did not come in, then, he was still outside the father's house. **He was so close yet so far away.**

The Pharisee in Luke 18

Luke 18:9-14 states:

Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Notice the narrow focus of the Pharisee was not on God but on himself. He did not trust in God; he trusted in himself. If he had honestly compared himself with the holiness of God as Isaiah did (Isaiah 6:1-7), then, he would have come away seeing his own sinfulness and his need for the mercy and grace of God to forgive him of his sins.

Notice the focus of the tax collector. He would not even lift up his eyes into Heaven where God dwells. His focus was on God, not on himself. He recognized the holy transcendence of God. Notice that he was standing afar off because he recognized the fact that he was a sinner. He understood the desperate need of being justified by God. **May we learn the same lesson that even though this Pharisee seemed so close to God, he was spiritually very far away;** even though the tax collector stood afar off, confessing and repenting of his sins, he was, in fact, justified by God. Let us not trust in our own goodness or try to justify ourselves. Let us humbly be obedient to the Gospel of Christ, which is God's way of justifying sinners today (Romans 5:9-10).

The Audience on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2

In Acts 2:14-36, Peter presented a powerful sermon to those people

in Jerusalem. There were about 3,000 souls who responded that day by being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:41). Have you ever wondered about the approximate number that might have been in that audience? Although no exact number can be given, we know there were more than 3,000. The festival of Pentecost was one of the three annual Jewish festivals that Jews attended from all over the world (Acts 2:5-11).

It was incredible. (1) The miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit that was seen and heard by the audience (Acts 2:33), (2) Solid arguments were made by Peter from the Old Testament (Acts 2:16-21, 25-28, 34-35), (3) Jesus, a true prophet of God, performed wondrous signs and miracles in public that could not be denied (Acts 2:22-24) and (4) There was evidence of the reliable eyewitness testimony of the apostles. **In spite of all the evidence presented, there were many in that audience who were so close yet so far away.** There was so much evidence, and yet, they denied where that evidence clearly led.

Likewise, we can present abundant evidence for the Christian worldview regarding the existence of God, the global flood, the inspiration of the Bible, the deity of Christ, etc., and yet, it all comes down to the honesty and the acceptance of a person's heart whether he will be open to the evidence or be closed to it due to his own pride and stubbornness. **The problem is the receptivity of the person's heart, not the evidence** (Luke 8:5-18).

Conclusion

Have you done what God says in the way God said to do it? Will your godly sorrow lead to repentance? Do you trust in your own self-righteousness? Do you compare yourself to others? Do you understand the evidence for the Christian worldview, know it to be true, and yet, still do not act in responding to the Gospel of Christ? **You are so close to the truth, and yet, you are so far away from the truth.** Do not allow that to be the case any longer. Love God, trust God and obey God. His way is best. If you obey the Gospel, then, you will be near God and His presence. James 4:7-8 states, ***“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”*** †

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1932—2008

Is the Majority Always Right?

J. C. Choate

To those that read the Bible and know God's will, the question arises as to why so many accept false teaching. Why are they so easily deceived and led astray? Can't people see the difference between truth and a lie?

Of course many want to be deceived. They look for a teaching that agrees with what they already believe and the kind of life they want to live. Others are impressed by some personality to the point that they think that this is the truth and if they do not accept it, then they are rejecting the truth. Paul said that there were people *“who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever”* (Romans 1:25).

A good example of how people can be influenced is found in the music world. You can take a mediocre piece of music or a song and play it enough to turn it into a number one hit. Another example is where someone with money can take an unknown and give him enough publicity to turn him into a world-renowned personality.

One can be trained to like a fruit or vegetable by eating it often enough. We know in the fashion world, in sports or with any product or activity, it can become popular when enough publicity is given to it and enough use it or do it. Politicians are notorious for running commercials that are lies, but when aired enough, they have the desired effects of acceptance.

That is certainly true in the religious world. I wonder how many times the story has been told about the thief on the cross being saved without baptism to try to prove that one can be saved today without baptism? How

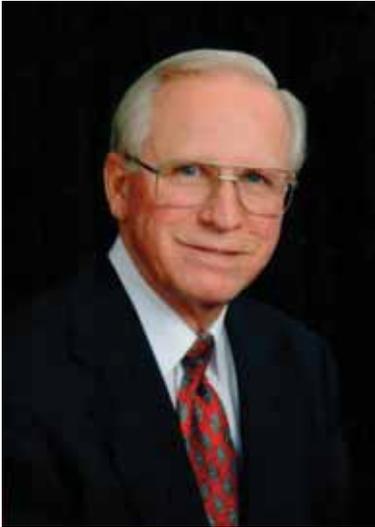
many times have you heard that one church is as good as another, one can be saved by faith only, babies are born in sin and thousands of other things?

False teachings are well known and accepted because the majority of preachers and teachers are proclaiming them all over the world in a popular manner. They are well-packaged in printed form, on radio and TV, in beautiful meetinghouses, through schools and hospitals, and in many other ways that are appealing to the masses.

On the other hand, the Lord's church is small in comparison. We don't have one of those charismatic, world-renowned "evangelists" who draw thousands to their meetings. When we preach the truth and condemn error, asking that people return to the Bible for God's guidance, we are often rejected, criticized and portrayed as a little group that thinks it is the only one going to Heaven. (It doesn't matter what *we think* or *what you think*; the only thing that matters is what the Scriptures teach.) Sometimes even weaker brethren succumb to these criticisms and rejections by giving up and joining the opposition. This is sad, indeed, since being in the majority in number does not make anything right. Christ warned, ***"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it"*** (Matthew 7:13-14).

We must remember that the Lord's word is truth. ***"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth"*** (John 17:17) and ***"...you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"*** (John 8:32). Christ also said, ***"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"*** (John 14:6). Finally, our Lord warned, ***"He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day"*** (John 12:48).

Keep in mind that even though the majority may believe and practice something, that does not make it right. Don't follow man and his teachings, since in all probability, they are wrong. Hear the Word of the Lord, believe it and obey it. Only then will you be right. Remember that God's way is right even though the majority may be against it. Do it God's way if you want to be right and to be saved eternally. 



Some Questions to Consider

Byron Nichols

Like various other religious groups, Churches of Christ have been losing members, and attendance has decreased in the United States over the past several years. In view of this very important continuing trend, I'd like to suggest that

we need to give some serious thought as to why this has been happening.

It is true that some congregations have grown in attendance. What are some possible factors? Is it because of their greater community outreach and evangelistic efforts? Or, have they made a change in the type of preaching from the pulpit? Could it be that they have decided to soften their presentation of the Gospel in an effort to attract greater numbers? Or, have they changed their stance on things like instrumental music, special musical performances or the role of women and preadolescent children in leading worship in exchange for greater public appeal and acceptance?

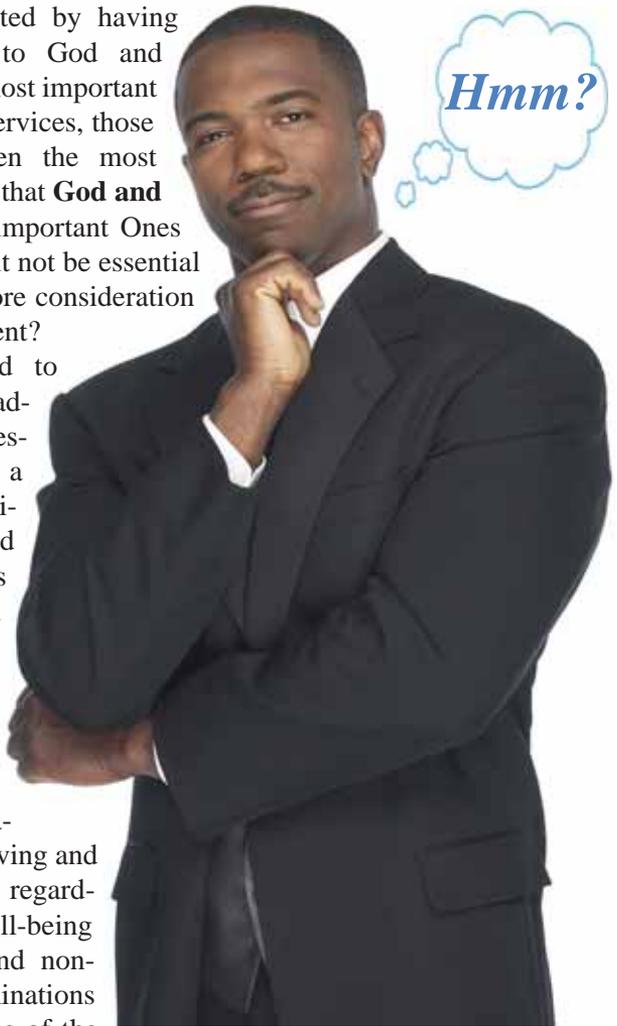
It is often affirmed that the church cannot grow unless we make some changes. Granted, some changes might be valid and beneficial, but we surely must be careful about what we change. Have the Bible plan of salvation and the Gospel been changed over the years? Has the "Great Commission" expired since Jesus declared it in the first century? It might be well to review Paul's words in Galatians 1:10, "***For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ.***"

Are our worship services of such a nature that both the leaders and the

followers are benefitted by having been drawn closer to God and Christ? Who are the most important ones in our worship services, those who should be given the most attention? Could it be that **God and Christ** are the most important Ones present? If so, would it not be essential that **they** be given more consideration than anyone else present?

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves some additional serious questions. Has there been a lessening of the qualifications for elders and deacons, in some cases even adding women to such roles of leadership and responsibility? Is it possible to teach, preach and practice what the Bible has made mandatory and yet still be loving and sincerely concerned regarding the spiritual well-being of both Christians and non-Christians? If denominations (or even congregations of the Lord's church) are growing numerically by implementing and practicing things that are questionable when compared with what is clearly taught in God's Word, should we be willing to compromise our convictions in an effort to minimize the otherwise resulting strife?

If others are not justified in some of their efforts to bring about growth,



does that justify us to make little or no effort to help the church grow otherwise? In Acts 8:4, we find early Christians who were persecuted and forced to leave their homes. They didn't compromise their faith in order to "get along." Instead, "*Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.*"

How are we doing in the matter of teaching the Bible to our children, both in the children's Bible classes and in our individual Christian families? Does it disturb us when we learn that for several years many first-year students in our Christian colleges and universities have been tested and have scored quite poorly on tests regarding basic Bible knowledge? Does this perhaps tell us that congregations need to take our Bible classes more seriously? Does it tell us that these college students had not been benefitted by exposure to sufficient Bible teaching in their family life back home?

The 1970's was an exciting time for Churches of Christ because we were acknowledged as being the fastest growing church in America. How did this happen? Well, it didn't "just happen"! There were widespread efforts to share the Gospel with neighbors, friends, family members, etc. There was a great increase in Gospel meetings and participation in joint teaching and preaching efforts with other area congregations. The concept of "the church" was not restricted to "our congregation," but the perception of the church was much more universal, and there was rejoicing over the successes being experienced by other congregations. Why not? Isn't the Lord's church one big family?

Surely, we want the Lord's church to grow numerically, and may the Lord give us guidance in determining how to accomplish growth that is in keeping with His will. May He help us realize and endorse the fact that numerical growth will not in itself produce *spiritual* growth, but that *spiritual* growth will help to also produce *numerical* growth. Can we have both kinds of growth and be pleasing to the Lord? Yes, indeed! How strong is our desire for both kinds of church growth?

Hopefully at least some of these questions will stir us to think and study carefully to verify what is right and to shy away from anything that conflicts with what the Scriptures teach or authorize. 

Byron Nichols is Editor Emeritus of The Voice of Truth International. He resides in Springfield, Missouri, USA.

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5-Minute Bible Study Our Invisible God

Paula Bates

1. No one has _____ God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the _____, He has declared Him. John 1:18
2. But he said, “You cannot see My _____; for no man shall see Me, and _____.” Exodus 33:20
3. He is the _____ of the invisible God, the firstborn over _____ creation. Colossians 1:15
4. “And the Father _____, who sent Me, has testified of me. You have neither heard His _____ at any time, nor seen his _____. But you do not have the word abiding in you, because whom He sent, Him you do not _____. John 5:37-38
5. If He goes by me, I do not _____ Him: If he moves past, I do not _____ Him. Job 9:11
6. No one has seen _____ at any time, if we love one another, God abides in us, and His _____ had been perfected in us. I John 4:12



-
- Answers:**
1. Seen, Father
 2. Face, live
 3. Image, all
 4. Himself, voice, form, be-
lieve
 5. See, perceive
 6. God, love

Do We Love God?

Therman Hodge

As Christians, we often talk of our love for God, but what does it really mean to love Him? Is your love just a feeling or an emotion? Is love a circumstance in and out of which we fall? Or, does true love for God involve action? Jesus made a statement in John 14:15 that tells how our love for God must be demonstrated. ***“If you love me, keep my commandments.”*** We can deduce from this statement that love is not just some feeling or emotion, but rather a true love requires obedience to the will of Jesus Christ. The following questions, which when answered, will test if we really love God as we say that we do.

Do we put God first in our lives? If we truly love God, then we will do much more than just say it. We will seek to put Him first in our lives. Matthew 6:33 records Jesus saying, ***“Seek ye first the kingdom of God.”*** This means we are to **place God in the #1 position in our lives**. He comes before our families, our jobs, our hobbies and everything else that we do. He is the center of our consideration. He is at the center of all that we do.

Do we enjoy giving gifts to God? This deals with our giving. We are afforded an opportunity to give a portion of our



God

blessings to God as a sacrifice every first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). People will sacrifice everything they own for the well-being of their children, but why? The answer is because they love them. However, when it comes to sacrificial giving to God, folks have a tougher time doing that. Why? Perhaps it is because they do not love God as they should.

Do we enjoy talking to God? Most people enjoy communicating with those they love, and thus they communicate with their loved ones often. They email them; they call them; and they go to see them so they can talk with them in person. Yet, many find it a struggle to pray to God each day, and when they do pray, they struggle for words to say to Him. Perhaps this is because some people do not have a relationship with God. Building a relationship with God requires communication on our part to Him. If we do not communicate with Him on a regular basis, then do we really love God? I believe we know the answer.

Do we desire to listen to God? Many will declare how much they love God, and yet, they don't listen when He speaks. God speaks to us today through His Word. If I want God to communicate with me, I must read and study His Word (2 Timothy 2:15). When I read God's Word, I understand Him better and also grow closer to Him. Thus, my love for God grows stronger.

So, the next time you tell someone how much you love God, remember that loving God involves much more than just saying it! *“Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, ‘Which is the first commandment of all?’ Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment”* (Mark 12:28-30). 

Therman Hodge is a Gospel preacher and a short-term missionary to several countries. He resides in Meridian, Mississippi, USA.

God

The Resurrection "Cover-up Story"

Royce Frederick

The religious leaders had worked very hard to have Jesus executed by the Roman government. He was finally in the tomb, and they were determined to keep Him there. With the permission of the Roman governor Pilate, the enemies of Jesus sealed His tomb and placed soldiers there to guard it.

However, early on the first day of the week, some of those soldiers came to the religious leaders and disturbed them with the **bad news** that Jesus was no longer in the tomb. The leaders quickly decided to try to cover up the truth by giving the soldiers a bribe. They:

...gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, "Tell them, 'His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure." So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. (Matthew 28:12-15)

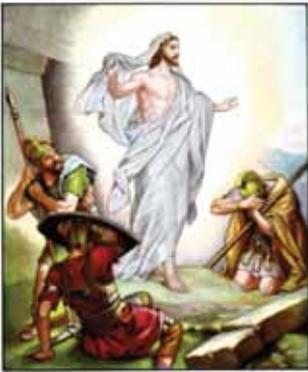
The religious leaders could not keep the tomb of Jesus sealed and occupied. So, they tried to seal the lips of the soldiers. Notice how ridiculous their **cover-up story** was.

- The penalty for falling asleep during guard duty was usually death. Therefore, we should become highly suspicious at the open claim by the soldiers that they had fallen asleep.
- Our suspicion should be further aroused by the governor's failure to execute the soldiers.
- We should also be suspicious at the absence of outrage by the religious leaders. We would expect them to demand the execution of the soldiers.
- The "guard" or "watch" of soldiers at the tomb included several soldiers (Matthew 28:11-12). It is strange for some of the soldiers to

God

claim that they were all asleep at one time.

- It is totally unreasonable to believe that the disciples could roll away the large stone and steal the body of Jesus so quietly that a group of sleeping soldiers would not be disturbed.
- It is absurd for the soldiers to claim that they knew what happened and who did it, while at the same time claiming they were asleep.
- With the Roman soldiers as **witnesses**, our suspicion should be raised even higher by the fact that no attempt was made to arrest the disciples on the charge of grave robbing.



There was no dispute at all concerning the fact that Jesus of Nazareth actually lived, that He died on the cross and that His tomb became empty. Even the bitter enemies of Jesus did not deny these facts. Instead, those enemies tried to explain how His tomb became empty. Their ridiculous **cover-up story** serves as testimony from His enemies that the tomb of Jesus did indeed become empty! It is not surprising that thousands of people believed the testimony of the **witnesses** who saw the risen Lord, rather than believing the **cover-up story** (Acts 2:32-41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7). †

Royce Frederick was the Editor of *International Gospel Teacher* and lived in Fort Worth, Texas, USA until he passed away in 2021.

~ Robison's Rubies ~

Some people might find it difficult to believe in a book that records events that happened that are outside their experience — like the lame immediately walking or the dead raising. Sure, someone should be skeptical of such claims. Yet, if the evidence mounts up in favor of the record as it stands, shouldn't one open his or her mind to the possibility that it is an accurate record? Just because I have never seen a particular thing happen doesn't mean it never happened. Further, if I can reason to the point that there must be a God Who created the world, then, as Paul asked, "Why should it be thought incredible... that God raises the dead?" Many have investigated the Bible as skeptics and came away as convinced believers.

Evidences



Luck or Design?

Thomas Baxley

Renowned atheist Bertrand Russell was asked what he would say to God if he had the chance, to which he responded, “Why did you make it so hard to find you?” Is God really that hard to find? People often announce that they’ve “found God.” However, is He really hiding? I submit to you that God is not hiding and that evidence for Him is all around and overwhelming. Yet, we simply must be honest to see it. For example, why does life only exist on planet earth? Is it luck as atheists claim, or is it by design of a supreme, supernatural being (God)? Why is it that only our planet is the perfect distance away from the sun, has the perfect rotation speed, has perfect axis tilt, has the perfect atmosphere, etc.? How many “perfections” do there need to be before men for them to be willing to admit that this goes beyond luck and is designed? The evidence supporting Genesis 1:1 is present, but we have to be honest enough to admit it (Romans 1:20). ✝

Thomas Baxley preaches for the Highway Nine Church of Christ in Piedmont, Alabama, USA.

Evidences



Disguised Squirrels

Dave Everson

God designed amazing features and abilities when He created animals. Among reptiles that have the ability to shed skin as they grow are rattlesnakes. They keep the rattle, the pit organ with its infrared heat detectors and Jacobson's organ with its advance sense of smell. The rattlesnake hunts many different small animals, but among its common food are ground and wood squirrels. These small rodents have been designed to cope well with the attacks by their mortal enemy. Let's look at the ways God has designed the squirrels with the ability to avoid being lunch for the rattlesnake.

California ground and wood squirrels have been given very sly ways to avoid being detected and eaten for lunch. These squirrels have been observed practicing unique camouflage techniques. One just recently

Evidences

observed in these squirrels is snakeskin eating and skin bathing. In a recent report in the journal *Animal Behavior*, Donald Owings and Barbara Clucas detail the practice of skin eating. It seems that in order to give the squirrels a fighting chance against the extraordinary hunting abilities of the rattlesnake, God has given the squirrels a few tricks of their own.

The squirrels were observed picking up shed skins of rattlesnakes and eating them, then licking their fur, which is thought to transfer the smell of the snake to the fur of the squirrel. Snakes have really poor eyesight. This would confuse the snake's sense of smell by "snake smell" on what must surely act and look like a squirrel. However, the snake's ability to see is very poor, and so it is probably of little help in the hunting strategy. In addition to the bath in snake solution, these amazing squirrels will also roll in areas where rattlesnakes have been lying. This also transfers snake smell to the fur of the squirrel and helps to confuse the hunting ability of the rattlesnake.

The squirrels can also avoid a lethal snake strike by changing the temperature of their tails. Since the rattlesnake is using its heat detector to find its prey, the target will be the area of the body that the snake "sees" as the hottest. If this is the tail, which has less muscle and blood vessels, any poison that the snake gets in will have less effect on the squirrel. An attack on a squirrel's tail would also give it a head start in an unexpected direction. Some types of squirrels even have partial immunity to snake poisons.

So even in the behavioral abilities of the squirrel, we can see the marvelous design of the Creator. Let's always give God the praise for the things that He has done for the animals of the world and marvel at it, too.✚

David Everson is a retired biology teacher and conducts creation science seminars. He is also an elder in the church of Christ in Belington, West Virginia, USA.

DID YOU KNOW?

Jonah and Nahum prophesied against Nineveh. Jonah went to Nineveh, but Nahum prophesied from Judah.

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



The Word Of God

Truth Will Prevail

Cecil May, Jr.



A truth undergirding the call for freedom of speech is that truth is shown to be truth when it is arrayed against error or untruth. When one idea feels it has to shout down another so that it cannot be heard, it is admitting its view cannot stand the light of truth.

Charles Krauthammer, a favorite writer of mine, now deceased, said, “I believe the pursuit of truth and right ideas through honest debate and rigorous argument is a noble undertaking.” Long ago, a call went out to opposing ideas, saying, *“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord”* (Isaiah 1:18). ✝

Cecil May, Jr. is Dean-Emeritus of the Bible Department at Faulkner University in Montgomery, Alabama, USA.

The Word Of God

ABSOLUTE TRUTH? ABSOLUTELY!

Robert Johnson

A recent Barna survey examined the question of truth in American culture and how people responded to the concept of absolute truth. 91% of all US adults polled believe the best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself. 84% said the highest goal of life is to enjoy it as much as possible. 86% said to be fulfilled in life, one should pursue the things he desires most. 79% stated people can believe whatever they want, as long as those beliefs don't affect society.

The results for those who consider themselves practicing Christians are not much different. 76% believe to find oneself is to look within oneself. 67% said one should enjoy life as much as possible. 72% said one should pursue the things he desires most. 61% think a person can believe whatever he wants as long as it doesn't affect society. Interestingly enough, these topics were entitled, "The Morality of Self-Fulfillment."

In a summary statement of this, David Kinnaman, President of Barna group, said, "Millions of Christians have grafted New Age dogma onto their spiritual person. When we peel back the layers, we find that many Christians are using the way of Jesus to pursue the way of self... While we wring our hands about secularism spreading through culture, a majority of churchgoing Christians have embraced corrupt, me-centered theology" (*The End of Absolutes: America's New Moral Code*).

Of course, not everyone falls into these categories, but the survey does offer some insights worth considering. Our culture is willing to allow anyone to believe whatever he wants, as long as he doesn't disturb society by what he believes. Seeking self-gratification is the highest good one can pursue. This creates quite a challenge when it comes to evangelism since people believe one shouldn't affect society. Someone can hold private beliefs, but he shouldn't express them publicly because that might create

The Word Of God

an adverse reaction. One is reminded of the charge brought against the preaching of the Gospel, *“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also”* (Acts 17:6). Is it possible, in a climate where we are not to upset society, the proclamation of the Gospel has become taboo? We must have the conviction of the apostles when they asserted, *“We must obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29).

Another disturbing factor these statistics reveal is how close the philosophy of the world is mirrored in Christianity as a whole. One could say this reflects denominational religion, but is the Lord’s church immune from the influence of the society in which it exists? Paul warned, *“Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elemental forces of the world, and not based on Christ”* (Colossians 2:8). He reminded Timothy not to preach the desires of those who abandon sound doctrine, but to preach the Word and fulfill his ministry (2 Timothy 4:1-5). Our pursuit must be to perfect holiness, which means we live counter-cultural lives and show Christ living in us. **We will not change the world for Christ if all the world sees in us is a mirror of itself.** *“But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has been crucified to me through the cross, and I to the world”* (Galatians 6:14).

God is truth, and no lie is in Him (Titus 1:2). If God is truth, then His Word is truth, unconditionally and unquestionably. In the end, it doesn’t matter what the world thinks or how it lives, but what matters is how we respond to the Truth of God. The Gospel is still God’s power of salvation for everyone, and to good and honest hearts, it can bear fruit. For this to happen, we must be absolutely convicted in truth. We must be the light of the world, living it, teaching it and convicted of it. This is what makes a difference in us and in others. **Is God’s Word absolute truth? Absolutely!** That’s not the issue. The issue is whether or not we allow it to make a difference in us so that also it can make a difference in others. *“For God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Corinthians 4:6). 

Robert Johnson preaches for the Lord’s church in Longview, Texas, USA.

The Word Of God

All Things

Emily Fisher

I forgot my Bible! My husband and I had loaded the car with some things at my parents' house, and I, in the hustle and bustle of moving things, had laid my Bible on a table and then placed something on top of it. Those things on top of my Bible were not coming with us, and thus, I forgot my Bible and left without it. This Bible is a wide-margin, note-taking Bible with lots of verse references with which I do most of my study, and as circumstances would have it, we were not at my parents' house again for several months! Now, I was not without a Bible for those months since I have other Bibles at home, but it bothered me that I had laid something on top of God's Word and consequently forgot it was there. Since then, I try not to lay anything on top of a Bible!



This made me think about how often we let things obscure our vision of the Word. The cares of this world are “on top of” our Bibles instead of the other way around. If we are forgetting to read and study the Holy Script, then we are most likely distracted by the things of this world. More times than we often realize, our culture and worldly influences (money, our appearances, and entertainment choices take up much of our time) preoccupy our time rather than thinking on spiritual matters. This leads us to wonder about our underlying attitude toward the Bible. Do we really believe it is

The Word Of God

God's Word? Do we think of Scripture as the Sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17) that must be studied diligently, handled properly and applied humbly?

We in the 21st century often do not fully comprehend what it was like for our 1st century brethren. Those saints did not have the complete, written Word of God as we do today. They did have the Old Testament Scriptures, but the New Testament would not be fully transcribed until A.D. 70 or at the latest A.D. 96. The 1st century Christians had copies of the inspired letters of the New Testament writers that would have been circulated to neighboring congregations (i.e., the epistle to the Colossians, 4:16). How precious and of utmost importance these letters must have been to young, growing churches! They should still be of utmost importance to us today! However, in the age of digital information, too often, we take written literature for granted. Yes, we can read the Bible on our phones, but can we really study and meditate on God's Word through a device that is notifying us of incoming calls, messages, etc.? I am not saying do not read the Bible on your phone, but rather, we should spend time totally engrossed in the Scriptures with as little distractions as possible. This is a goal all of us must discipline ourselves to do and for which we need to strive on a regular basis.

Is Scripture precious to us? Jude 3 says, "***the faith was once for all delivered to the saints.***" The Faith is the system of doctrine, the Gospel of Jesus Christ made known through the inspired apostles' writings. It was not fully revealed previous to the 1st century, but as Paul made it clear, "***the mystery... has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel***" (Ephesians 3:1-13). Peter put it this way:

Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully... searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating... To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven

The Word Of God

— *things which angels desire to look into.* (1 Peter 1:10-12)

Peter also said, *“His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue”* (2 Peter 1:3). Do we comprehend these passages? God’s revelation to mankind is complete, finished in Jesus Christ, revealed to the apostles by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (see also 1 Corinthians 2:6-16). All humans, no matter their ethnicity, gender, social or economic status, have been given **all** that we need to be reconciled to God, found in the body of Christ and to live faithfully before our Creator. That calls for rejoicing and thanksgiving!

How thankful we should be to have the complete, written volume of Scripture! We are not in the dark waiting on further revelation from God in order to learn how to obtain salvation and to live. We have it! Are we using it? Obeying it? Putting it in our hearts? **Where is your Bible right now? †**

Emily Fisher is a missionary, a staff writer for *The Voice of Truth International* and works with World Evangelism. She resides in Winona, Mississippi, USA.

Cecil's

COMMENTS

With All Your Mind

Jesus said, *“The great and first commandment”* is *“you shall love the Lord your God with all*

your... mind” (Matthew 22:17-18). The current spiritual battle is not fought with carnal weapons (swords, guns, bombs) but with ideas from the Word of God. *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:4-5 NKJV). The war against the lies of secular humanism will be won by truth. The battles fought with evil and wickedness will be won by righteousness and peace. The battles fought by stirring up hatred will be won by love.

Salvation

Welcome to the Family

Aaron Cozort

Many people all around the world today are lonely and desire to be a part of a real family. They do not have families. For some reason or another, their families are gone. Jesus had a family in the physical sense, yet His family rejected Him at the beginning. Instead, He invites you and everyone else to be a part of a different family.

Who belongs to the family of Jesus? Who does Jesus consider to be the most special to Him? Who gets the priority of Jesus' attention?

In Mark 3:35, Jesus said, ***“For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.”*** The relationship of Jesus' real family revolves around a person's obedience to



His Father. Jesus made it clear that He will choose those who obey God above any physical bond on this earth. John 1:12-13 reads, ***“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”***

Jesus elsewhere said that this birth comes by water and the Spirit – baptism. May I encourage you to be a part of the family – to obey God? If you have become obedient to God, may I welcome you to the family?✝

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Salvation

One Is Saved When He Obeys Christ's Command to Be Saved

Sunny David

Recently in a Bible class, someone put forth this question: “How do I know I am saved from my sins?” This is a very important question for every one of us. You see, if we are not saved on earth, we will not be saved in Heaven, since only the saved ones will enter Heaven. So, how does one surely know he is saved?

There are plenty of people who would explain this by saying that one’s feeling is the evidence or the proof of one’s salvation. In other words, they believe, when a person accepts Jesus Christ as one’s personal Savior, and then, this brings good feeling into one’s heart because he feels that he has been forgiven. Yet, the question is, “How can one know if his feelings are right or wrong?” One’s feelings are the result of one’s education or knowledge. Someone may feel happy upon learning certain news, but if he had not learned the truth or if he had been misinformed, then, his feelings would be wrong. His happy feelings would not change the truth, like in the case of the rich fool about whom we read in Luke 12:15-21.

There is no place in the Bible where we are taught by a command or an example that one is saved by his feelings. In fact, the Bible teaches the very opposite to this view in Matthew 7:22-23. Here the Lord said, *“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.’”* First John 3:4 says, *“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.”* **The emphasis of Scripture is not on feelings but rather on doing what the Lord has said one must do to be saved (Mark 16:16).**

In addition, there are those who emphasize having an **experience** of a new birth. They believe that a person who has had what he believes to be some kind of a **supernatural** or a **miraculous** experience of a new

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birth is saved. This so-called experience of new birth also includes in it a mental acceptance of Christ as one's personal Savior, which results in a good feeling. The experience is brought about by an extraordinary sudden event, **better felt than told**, as people say, such as a dream or a vision. Such later becomes a testimony of this so called "born again" individual.

For instance, some time back, a young man who claimed to be a preacher visited me and told me how he was saved. He said:

Years ago, I attended a meeting where a preacher told how Jesus died for our sins. He exhorted people to accept Jesus as their personal Savior and said that those who would want to be saved should raise their hands so that he would pray for them to be saved. I accepted Christ and raised my hand, and after the prayer, I felt I was saved. That night I could not sleep, and as I lay in the bed, my sins began to come before me one by one, as though I was seeing a movie. Then, I saw Christ on the cross, and I began to cry. The following morning, I felt so good and happy.

Many other such examples could also be cited, but all such **experiences** are based on one's own thinking and imaginations. Stories like these may sound good, and men may want to hear them, but such have nothing to do with one's salvation from sin and the real new birth as Christ taught in John 3:3, 5. Christ there said, "***Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.***" He didn't teach one must have an **experience** of a new birth, such as coming through a dream or a vision, but rather He taught one must be born of the water and the Spirit. That means one must be baptized in water, as the Spirit directs through God's Word. In Mark 16:16, Christ said that to be saved, one must both believe and be baptized. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12:13, said, "***For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.***" Peter preached to people, "***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).

Thus, the Bible, God's Word, is very plain in telling us how we can surely know that we are saved. Just as we know that Christ died on the

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cross for our sins (Romans 5:8), that He rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-4), that He will come back one day to judge the world (Acts 17:30-31) and many other things by reading the Scriptures, the Bible contains God's inspired Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17) about how one can surely know he is saved. The same Bible also tells us that the Christ who died on the cross to save us from sin is the Author of eternal salvation unto all those **who obey Him**, and not just believe in Him (Hebrews 5:8-9). This definitely indicates that there are certain specific commands of Christ that must be obeyed to be saved. It is just that simple.

As already observed, Christ, the Author of salvation, requires all who want to be saved to believe in Him and to be baptized (Mark 16:16). The baptism for the remission of sins must be preceded by repentance of sins (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3) and confession of Christ as the Son of God (Acts 8:36-38; Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10). Thus, the assurance of salvation as promised and provided by Christ comes to an individual on the basis of one's faith in Christ and obedience to His commands, and not by feelings or a supposed supernatural experience or even by faith only (James 2:24-26). The Scriptures reveal how one can surely know that he is saved — by doing precisely what our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 16:16) and the inspired apostles taught (Acts 2:38; 22:16). **One is saved from his past sins when He obeys Christ's command to be saved.** †

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Verse Search



1 Corinthians 16:5-23

Jerry Bates

1. How long did Paul say he might stay with the Macedonians when he passed by? (16:6)
2. How long did Paul say he was going to stay in Ephesus? (16:8)
3. Why was he going to stay there for that long? (16:8)
4. Who was going to visit the Macedonians shortly? (16:10)
5. What did Paul encourage them to do to him when he came? (16:11)
6. Who was unwilling to visit the Macedonians at that time? (16:12)
7. Watch, stand _____ in the _____, be _____, be _____ . (16:13)
8. Who were the first converts in Corinth? (16:15)
9. To what had they devoted themselves? (16:15)
10. What other brethren had come to Corinth? (16:17)
11. What had they done on behalf of the church in Corinth? (16:17-18)
12. Who sent their greetings to the church in Corinth? (16:19)
13. In whose house did one congregation of the church meet? (16:19)
14. How did Paul say the Christians should greet one another (16:20)
15. Who wrote the salutation of this letter? (16:21)
16. Who did Paul say should be accursed? (16:22)

(See the back cover for answers.)

Verse Search

5 Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia) **6** And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. **7** For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.

8 But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. **9** For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

10 And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do. **11** Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren.

12 Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time.

13 Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. **14** Let all that you do be done with love.

15 I urge you, brethren — you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints — **16** that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us. **17** I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. **18** For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. **20** All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

21 The salutation with my own hand — Paul's.

22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!

23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

NOTE: This passage concludes the first epistle to the Corinthians. Paul gave some final exhortations and greetings to the church. One particular family that Paul mentioned was the household of Stephanas. We do not know more about this family than this one mention; however, what is said here should encourage each of us to emulate it. That family had devoted itself to the ministry of the saints. The word “devoted” could be translated “addicted.” The word “addicted” often carries a bad connotation because we usually use it for addiction to drugs, cigarettes or other substances. However, the word simply refers to someone being completely devoted to something, in this case, God. This should describe all Christians. We should be completely devoted to God, His work and to serving our fellow Christians.

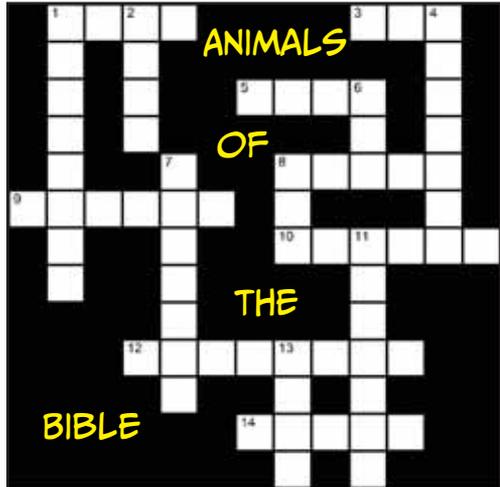


Bible Find

Martha Rushmore

Across

1. This animal shall graze with the cow. Isaiah 11:7
3. Men are able to lap water like this animal. Judges 7:5
5. Israelites were permitted to eat this animal. Deuteronomy 12:15
8. Israelites were forbidden to eat this animal. Deuteronomy 14:7
9. This animal talked. Numbers 22:28
10. Some people are like this inwardly. Matthew 7:15
12. Sons are like this animal in a net. Isaiah 51:20
14. A nursing child shall play by the hole of the what? Isaiah 11:8



Down

1. This animal ate grass like an ox. Job 40:15
2. Ships of Tarshish carried these animals. 1 Kings 10:22
4. Israelites were allowed to eat this animal. Deuteronomy 14:5
6. This animal had to be 3 years old. Genesis 15:9
7. He was most crafty. Genesis 3:1
8. He shall graze with the bear. Isaiah 11:7
11. He has spots. Jeremiah 13:23
13. What kind of carcass was found? Judges 14:8

The Church

THE BLESSINGS OF GODLY LEADERSHIP

Hiram Kemp

God is a God of order and structure (1 Corinthians 14:33). In His infinite wisdom and knowledge, He has always provided guidance and direction for His people. From the time of creation, God has led mankind and given commands and prohibitions for the overall good of humanity. While God possesses all authority and He is the One who governs the world, He often delegates authority to other individuals (Psalm 62:11). God has chosen certain people or groups to represent Him to lead His people. Ungodly leadership can be a hindrance to the work of the Lord. We should be thankful for godly leadership whenever we see it (Isaiah 9:16). In both the Old and New testaments there are examples of godly leadership and how it benefited the people of God. **We should study the lives of godly leaders from the past, appreciate the godly leadership provided in the present and be sure to continue to develop godly leaders for the future.**

MOSES: LEADING THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

Moses is no doubt one of the greatest leaders the world has ever seen. He knew God in a way that few others ever have (Exodus 33:11; Deuteronomy 34:10). Though Moses grew up in the palace of Egypt, there came a day when he surrendered the pleasures of Egypt in order to stand with God's people (Hebrews 11:24-27). God called Moses at the burning bush near Mount Horeb to lead God's people out of Egypt and into Canaan (Exodus 3:1-10). Though Moses was fearful initially, he soon garnered the necessary courage to stand before Pharaoh and perform the signs that led to the deliverance of God's people.

Moses was a great leader and a blessing to God's people because he was a meek and a selfless man (Numbers 12:1-3). The children of Israel were habitual complainers and grumblers, and yet, Moses always interceded with God on their behalf. He was willing to be blotted out of God's book if God was not going to preserve Israel (Exodus 32:30-32). Moses was wise enough to delegate to others when certain jobs were overwhelming. He sought out others who could judge smaller cases when he was busy with more pressing

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matters (see Exodus 18). He also trained Joshua to take his place when he was forbidden from entering into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 31:1-8). Israel had many great leaders, but Moses must always be mentioned among the greatest of her leaders. While Moses enjoyed a special relationship with God, he never allowed that relationship to make him arrogant or superior to others. He spent his time serving the people even when he was unappreciated.

DAVID: A MAN AFTER GOD'S HEART

After Saul failed as the king of Israel, God promised that the new king would be a man after his own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). As God looked on the hearts of Jesse's sons, He chose David to be the new king in Israel (1 Samuel 16:7, 11-13). David was a great king for many reasons. He was a king that would engage in battle with the people and not simply sit back and watch others do the work. He was close to God as he prayed frequently, and he wrote many of the Psalms that would be sung and prayed by Israel (2 Samuel 23:1; Psalm 55:17). David's reign is described by the Holy Spirit in a positive light as his reign is summarized in Kings and Chronicles (1 Kings 2:10-11; 15:5; 1 Chronicles 29:26-30).

David was the standard to which other kings were to look and to follow. In the years following his reign, kings were said to be righteous if they followed God like David and wicked if they did not follow the good example set by David (1 Kings 11:6; 15:3).

David was far from sinless. Anyone familiar with the account of David and Bathsheba knows well about his adultery, orchestrating the death of Uriah and his abuse of power (2 Samuel 11). However, David was also extremely penitent when he fell (Psalm 51). He was not above making mistakes, but when he did, he was willing to repent, ask for forgiveness and do his best not to commit the same mistakes again. He was loved by the people he led, but he was also loved by his God. David was a great king and a godly leader.

JESUS AND THE APOSTLES: NEW TESTAMENT LEADERSHIP

Of course, when leadership is considered, Jesus is in a class all by Himself. No one ever spoke like Him (John 7:46). No one could do the miracles that He did (Mark 2:12; John 9:32). Jesus led the apostles and showed them how to be

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great by serving others rather than themselves (Mark 10:43-45). After Jesus' sacrificial death, burial and triumphant resurrection, He possessed all authority in Heaven and in Earth (Matthew 28:18). He is the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). We are to follow His leadership from Earth all the way to Heaven as He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

Jesus gave His apostles authority on earth. After He ascended back to Heaven, the Holy Spirit was to descend on the apostles in a miraculous measure (Matthew 16:19; John 16:13; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4). The apostles would be leaders in the church, write the New Testament as they were led by the Holy Spirit and serve as pillars in the church (Ephesians 2:20). The apostles showed great leadership as they helped the church through problems (see Acts 6 and 15). They were willing to teach, suffer and give their lives for the cause of Christ. Knowing they would not live on Earth forever, they appointed elders in local congregations to shepherd and lead God's people (Acts 14:23).

THE LEADERSHIP UNDER WHOM WE SERVE

Because Jesus is the Head of the church, we look to Him for guidance (Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:18). The elders of local congregations have biblical authority over congregational matters of judgment. They are to provide leadership, spiritual nourishment and an example for members of their congregation to follow. Additionally, they must give a godly defense of the truth (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:9-11; 1 Peter 5:1-4). The eldership is made up of a plurality of men who meet the qualifications and is not to be dominated by one man above the others (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-8). Alongside the elders, deacons are special servants who assist the congregation in various capacities to ensure the work of the Lord goes forth (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

We all have a role to play whether we are elders, deacons or members in general (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Every Christian is to abound in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). Nevertheless, godly leadership is a blessing to be enjoyed. Thank God for it. As we look to Scripture and notice godly leadership and how God's people flourished, may we do all we can to stand with our leaders so that we might do the same. 

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What Color Was the Dust of the Earth?

Cliff Holmes



“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). *“Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature”* (Genesis 2:7).

When God created mankind, male and female, did He show any concern as to what color the dust was? The dust could have been black as coal, tan as desert sand, red as clay, yellow as an Asian desert or white as sand by the seashore. What seemed to be of greater importance to God was that He was making man in His own image. He was more concerned that His creation was to be pure, perfect and sinless. The breath of life that He

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breathed into man was pure, holy and spotless, and no hue found within the color spectrum can describe the color of the human soul. However, coming from God, it was as He is – pure, clean and without blemish.

When Satan came upon the scene, he brought with him temptation. He placed the temptation before the woman (and her husband who was with her), and they **both** yielded to the temptation. Then, the spotless soul of man was stained with a blackness that he could not wash away no matter how he tried.

The hatred and animosity between mankind today is not due to the color of one's skin. It is because of the envy, jealousy, deceit and malice with which mankind has allowed himself to become entangled, and now he finds himself unable to extricate himself from it. **Skin color is just an excuse for having ill will toward a fellow man who was created by God just as you were.**

If we allow ourselves to have anger, animosity and even resort to violence against our fellow human beings, then we are not worthy of the effort that God put forth to create us in the first place. God is love, and God loves us so much that He sacrificed His own Son to get us out of the snare with which Satan has trapped us all.

We must love all men, though we hate sin, envy, deceit and violence wrought by others. Put a stop to the rancor, anger, violence and devastation we see in our streets today. If we cannot be at peace with one another, and love one another, then I ask you, how can we say we love God? 

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Cecil's

COMMENTS

A corollary of racism is stereotyping. Some whites are bigots, and therefore, every white is a bigot. Some blacks are thugs, and therefore, every black is a thug. Murders of many innocent people have occurred because of stereotyping. A Jew kills a Palestinian, and so, Palestinians kill many Jews. A Sunni Muslim kills a Shiite Muslim, and so Shiites kill many Sunnis, and vice versa.

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Doctrine To Live By Liberal, Conservative or Biblical?

Brian R. Kenyon

Immediately after Jesus promised to build His church, He told Peter, ***“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven”*** (Matthew 16:19). Lest someone misunderstand this verse to indicate Peter had some kind of supremacy in the church, note that all the apostles were given this instruction about ‘binding’ and ‘loosing’ (Matthew 18:18). Most English translations do not clearly express the true force of the verb tense and meaning. The *New American Standard* does well by translating, ***“...whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”*** This translation indicates that the apostles were only to ***“bind”*** and ***“loose”*** what God had already ***“bound”*** and ***“loosed.”*** It has never been the case that the apostles ***“bound”*** and ***“loosed,”*** then God ratified it in Heaven. Rather, no apostle, no preacher, no elder, no deacon, no one has the right to ***“bind”*** or ***“loose”*** anything that God has not already ***“bound”*** or ***“loosed”***! May God grant us wisdom in properly ascertaining what God has truly bound and loosed!

Terminology Challenge

When it comes to religion, the terms “liberal” and “conservative” can take on various meanings, depending on the context. For example, in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century theological circles, a “liberal” referred to one who held to the view of inspiration that says the Bible merely contains the Word of God; thus, some of the Bible is not actually the Word of God. That is, within the Bible one can find the Word of God through reflection and meditation. This view, of course, is false because it would mean humans subjectively decide which parts of the Bible are actually the words of God and which parts are not. It would also be different for each individual, depending on his reflection and meditation.

When the term “liberal” or “conservative” is used in our religious

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culture, different things may come to mind. For example, those who labeled themselves “conservative” (while others may refer to them as “non-institutional” or “anti”) might think a congregation like the one of which we are members is “liberal” because we support orphans from the church treasury. However, some church members might reserve the term “liberal” only for those who allow such things as mechanical instruments in worship or women preachers in mixed assemblies. This can sometimes be confusing, but there is a better way in using Bible terminology to describe both extremes.

“Conservative”?

Sometimes what people call “conservatism” (or “non-institutionalism” or “anti-ism”) may simply be defined as that which binds where God has loosed. This, of course, is sinful. Examples of this can be found in the New Testament. Paul spoke of those who were *“forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth,”* and he referred to such teachings as *“deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy”* (1 Timothy 4:1-3). Any dietary distinctions of the Old Law have been done away in Christ (Leviticus 11:4; cf., Acts 10:9-16; Colossians 2:13-14). This, of course, does not mean a person has to eat *“meat”* (KJV). People are acceptable to God whether they eat only vegetables or include meat in their diets (Romans 14:1-4). While there are occasions that call for the abstinence of meat (1 Corinthians 8:13), to say it is always sinful to eat meat is sin because it binds what God has loosed. The same is also true about marriage. There are occasions when it is best for scripturally eligible couples not to marry (such as during the *“present distress”* of 1 Corinthians 7:26, 28). However, even during those occasions, Paul said it was not sinful to marry (1 Corinthians 7:2, 9, 28, 36). Some religions forbid marriage for scripturally eligible couples, which, of course, is sinful because it is binding what God has loosed! There are some today who take their judgments on such matters as supporting missionaries or orphans and bind them as if they were God’s exclusive pattern. However, if God has not bound those judgments, those who make

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such a test of fellowship sinfully bind where God has loosed.

“Liberal”?

Sometimes, what people call “liberalism” may simply be defined as that which loosens what God has bound. This also, of course, is sinful. This is exactly what Satan convinced Eve to do in the Garden. Indeed, Satan changed God’s “*you shall surely die*” (Genesis 2:17) into “*You will not surely die*” (Genesis 3:4), and even before he added that “*not,*” he faked an expression of surprise and changed God’s “*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat*” (Genesis 2:16) into “*You shall not eat of every tree of the garden*” (Genesis 3:1). In the end, Satan convinced Eve to loose what God had bound, inducing her to eat the fruit (Genesis 3:6). Loosening where God has bound can also be summarized in 2 John 9, “*Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.*” Generally, the verb “transgress” means to go beyond the boundaries God has set. Certainly, this includes compromising His commands. When people loose God’s authority to sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to Him (Ephesians 5:19) into using mechanical instruments in worship, they have loosed what God has bound! When people loosen God’s mandate, “*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man*” (1 Timothy 2:12; cf., 1 Corinthians 14:37) into allowing women preachers, they have loosened what God has bound!

Let’s Just Be “Biblical”

There is a better way! God neither wants His people to loose what He has bound nor to bind what He has loosed! Rather, we need to just stick to the premise God told the apostles. “*Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven*” (Matthew 18:18). **The children of God ought to only bind and loose as God directs.** Then, we will be neither “liberal” nor “conservative” but simply “biblical”! Can we get any better than simply following God’s Word, without addition or subtraction? †

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Criticism and Love

T. Pierce Brown

Sometimes when I write an article, I ask my wife Tomijo to read, criticize and evaluate it, or make whatever suggestions she thinks might improve it. Sometimes I even follow her advice, and when I do not, I still value it. A few moments ago, I took three recent articles to her, in which she found a sentence she thought could be improved. I confess that even gentle criticism from a loving wife, though requested, may sometimes hurt a little, but Solomon said it properly in Proverbs 27:5-6. ***“Better is open rebuke than love that is hidden. Faithful are the wounds of a friend.”*** I then picked up a book I had been reading. My attention was caught by a paragraph that says, “There is a substitute for criticizing. It’s called love. Love heals. Love protects. Love builds up. And more changes come with love than with criticism.” I agree with what I think is the general intent of the author of the paragraph, but having just asked a loving wife to criticize some articles, I felt constrained to write another one dealing with some implications of the first two sentences of the above paragraph.

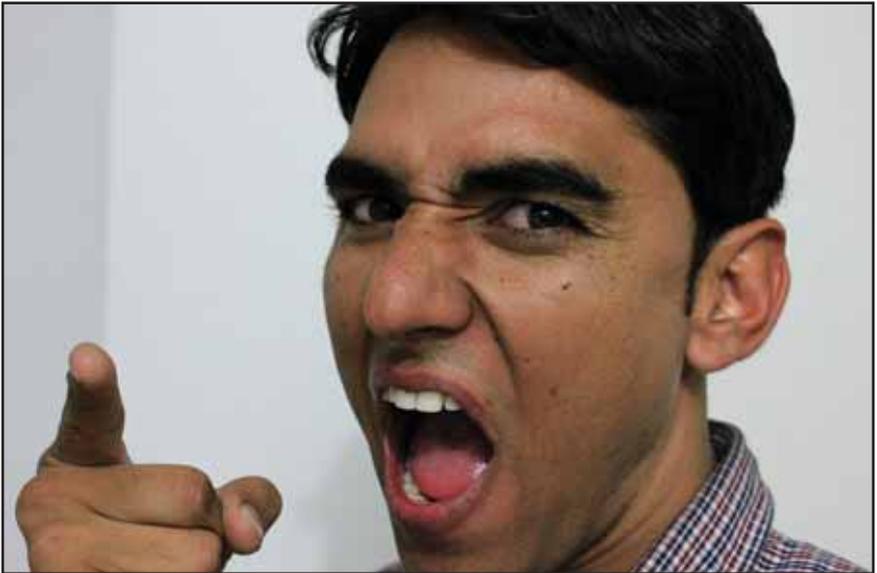
If one thinks of criticism as a destructive, negative or nagging action, which it often is, then the statement may have validity. However, we have no right to assume that criticism and love are antithetical or mutually exclusive, or that one needs to be substituted for the other. Can my wife find fault with my articles and still love me and demonstrate that love? Can you? Do I need to assume that if you write or call me and say, “I think your article would be a little better if you had...” that you are mean or hateful and not a loving Christian?

There is no doubt in my mind that much of my preaching would have been more effective if it had been better balanced by praising things that were good and worthy of praise, instead of being weighed more heavily in pointing out faults, shortcomings and sins. However, one does not have to practice negative, hateful or destructive criticism in order to criticize.

If we use Christ or His inspired apostles as examples, we need to

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be aware that love is not a substitute for criticism. Love may require criticism at times. In some of my graduate study I became aware of some experiments which showed that students whose papers were marked with a check mark by the answers that were done right did better than those who merely had a big red X by the ones that were wrong. However, I still have not learned how to get a person to correct what is wrong without letting him first know what it is. The problem is not in the criticism, per se, but in the way the criticism is given and taken.



A wife might say to a husband, “Darling, I think this tie would be better with that blue suit than the green one you have on.” That would be far better than if she said, “You blind idiot. Don’t you have enough sense to know that a green tie does not go with a blue suit?” Of course, it is possible that a husband would react to either kind of criticism in anger, but that would not be the fault of the critic but of the husband. If we are properly balanced, as Christ was, we will try to learn to give criticism in love and to do it in such a fashion that the one who receives it knows we love him and wish the best for

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him. We will also try to take criticism, even request it at times, for we know that loving friends have often helped us to be better and do better.

Many parents have done much damage to their children by assuming that love is a substitute for criticism or corrective discipline. Hebrews 12:6 says, ***“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”*** Many preachers have allowed souls to stay lost because they refused to obey the apostolic injunction in 2 Timothy 4:2 to ***“Preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”*** If those of us who delight in sarcastic, bitter criticism would simply ask ourselves, “If it were my precious wife or a dearly loved son who has fallen into this error that I am condemning, what sort of words would I use to point it out and correct it?” greater good might be done.

Teachers especially need to be aware that in a Bible class, care needs to be taken to be sure that the correction of errors in understanding or conduct are made in such a fashion that the desired results are accomplished. A teacher who corrects and criticizes by ridicule or sarcasm has no place in a classroom. Also, a teacher who believes it is always improper to criticize and that loving a child is all that is necessary has no place there. †

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[Editor’s Note: *Mean-spirited criticism* undercuts and derails attempts to defend “sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). Instead, no less resolute, the Holy Spirit-guided apostle Paul wrote about the need for “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). Neither the pulpit nor the Bible classroom ought to be the platform from which a preacher or a teacher unleashes *harsh, unloving and caustic criticism*. No less is true of any child of God in whatever venue in which he or she may find himself or herself (e.g., restoring the fallen, personal evangelism). The way in which one criticizes exhibits something about his or her demeanor, motive and objective (e.g., reform, reclaim or discard). *“Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted”* (Galatians 6:1 NKJV). Likewise, the way in which parental correction manifests itself reveals the demeanor, motive and objective of mothers and fathers. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]



Did You Know?

The Old Testament allowed the death penalty for approximately sixteen different violations of the law. The death penalty was required for premeditated murder. See Exodus 21-22; Leviticus 20, 24; Deuteronomy 13, 17, 22.

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

(Romans 6:1-10)

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

Denominational doctrines usually include the need for the sinner to **believe** in Christ, to **turn away from a sinful life**, and to **confess his faith** to others, but the act of **baptism** is refuted as having nothing to do with one's salvation.

Why? Because Satan knows that this is the culminating act through which the sinner **dies** to his sin, is **buried in the waters of baptism** as Christ was buried in the tomb, and is **resurrected** from the watery grave to walk a new life in the Lord, as Christ was resurrected from His grave to be our eternal Brother Who will never again be subject to death.

Satan doesn't care what we believe or even if we try to live an exemplary life, following the example of Christ. His goal is to keep us from being born anew of the water and the Spirit (John 3:5) into the family of God, through putting on Christ in baptism: "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Galatians 3:27).

We must not be deceived by Satan's lies and lose our souls.

Patience

Wayne Barrier

Patience is a required trait and behavior for one to be a faithful Christian. We are struggling with this requirement today. We are accustomed to having our wants and needs immediately and are stressed and frustrated when we are required to wait. Many things in everyday life are instant and immediate that once were not that way. Communications, news, business services, fast food, travel, career change, etc. are quick and easy today. We seldom are required to be patient. This may not be a good thing, considering the teaching of the Bible concerning patience.



Jesus stated in Luke 21:19, ***“By your patience possess your souls.”*** Patience is an essential element required for one to behave acceptably as a Christian. Consider Romans 5:3-4, ***“and not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, know that tribulation produces perseverance [patience];***

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and perseverance, character; and character hope.” James 1:2-4 states, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

Patience is required for one to possess all the traits to make one’s call and election sure (2 Peter 1:4-6). First century Christians were commended for their patience (1 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:4; Colossians 1:11; 2 Timothy 3:10). Leaders are commanded to be patient (Titus 2:2) in order to be sound and acceptable. Through patience we can inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:12) of God for a better life.

Paul’s plea to the Ephesians to *“be worthy of their calling as followers of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:1-2) and to receive all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3) includes the teaching that one must be patient, along with humility, gentleness, love, kindness, tenderheartedness and honesty.

In summary, we must develop patience if we hope to sustain effective saving faith to please God and to project the image of Christ as we live in a troubled and difficult world. Behaving appropriately as Christians will result in increased influence on others for good and improved quality of our personal lives. The teaching of Scripture about patience is not a suggestion but rather a requirement to be faithful. †

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

Kennedy’s Pennies

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NKJV). This was written by a person who was *“in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.”* If the apostle Paul could do this, then what or who inhibits us from serving our Lord?



Christianity In Action

Be Thankful and Stay Thankful

Marilyn LaStrape

Only God knew what the year 2020 was to bring. However, we are still thankful to be alive. In his book, *Always Near – Listening for Lessons from God*, Bill Bagents wrote this about being thankful:

In every situation, there are blessings to be found. It's always healthy to see them. In every situation, at least on some level, there are reasons to be thankful. If nothing else, we can be thankful that things aren't worse or that the challenges didn't come earlier. There's great wisdom in choosing to be grateful that things are as well as they are. We can be thankful that we never face trouble alone (Heb.13:5-6). We stay thankful that God's ultimate deliverance is just as certain as His grace, mercy and love (2 Cor. 4:17-5:8; 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Psalms for Women – God's Gift of Inner Beauty, Peace, and Happiness contains topics with passages from Psalms. One topic is entitled, "Our Thankfulness and Praise to God." It states in part:

We should open all our prayers with the praise and thanksgiving that are God's due. When we wake in the morning and before we fall asleep at night, praise and thanksgiving should be our first and last thoughts. For whatever our circumstances may be, God has in fact given us the gift of life in the here and now and the promise of life everlasting in the future.

We must **be** thankful and **stay** thankful for God being on His throne reigning over His creation. He is in ultimate control of everything and everybody. "***The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His sovereignty rules over all***" (Psalm 103:19). Hallelujah and Amen!

We must **be** thankful and **stay** thankful for the safety of our family members. Our immediate family members are not only our greatest God-given blessings, but also their safety is our greatest concern. How thankful we are to Almighty God for all aspects of our safety every day! "***I will both lie down in peace and***

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sleep; For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (Psalm 4:8).

We must **be** thankful and **stay** thankful for our physical health and mental well-being. Yes, for many of us, the physical fitness of our 20’s is a distant memory. Mentally, we are not as sharp as we once were. However, we are forever grateful for the measure of physical and mental health that we still enjoy. *“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers”* (3 John 2).

We must **be** thankful and **stay** thankful for our material possessions. We must understand we are always better off than someone else. We must never take the place we live, the car we drive, the clothes and shoes we wear or the food we eat as a given. They can – and so can we – be gone in a micro-second. Solomon was God’s example to us of the one who had it all. *“Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun”* (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

We must **be** thankful and **stay** thankful above all for our spiritual blessings. Obeying the Gospel and being translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light is a spiritual blessing. Forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus Christ is a spiritual blessing. Praying with the assurance that our prayers are being heard and answered is a spiritual blessing. Worshiping in spirit and in truth is a spiritual blessing. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”* (Ephesians 1:3).

“Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men” (Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31)! In his book, *The Songs and Devotions of David, Volume 5, Psalms 90-108*, page 308, Tom Wacaster makes several observations on these verses from Psalm 107 that are noteworthy. He writes, “The quadruple refrain, ‘*Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness*’ should capture our attention. This should be the desire of every saint in every generation. Implied is the obligation we have to tell others of God’s goodness. No wonder the Psalmist wrote, ‘*Let the redeemed of the Lord say so*’” (107:2). 

Marilyn LaStrape is a Christian writer and author who resides in Hewitt, Texas, USA.

Worship

Practical Suggestions Concerning Prayer

Ronald D. Reeves

Several years ago, I read and appreciated some practical suggestions as penned by an unidentified author. Mixing his commentary with mine, here are some suggestions worth considering.

- **Pray immediately upon rising.** There's no better way to begin the day.
- **Pray before every meal.** It is good to acknowledge the bounty from God's hand.
- **Pray at set times.** Let not the busy world crowd out our communion with God.
- **Pray at odd times—whenever you feel the desire.** When the desire comes, pray.
- **Pray immediately before retiring.** Address the cares and toils of the day.
- **Pray when you feel discouraged.** Great comfort comes from knowing that God listens to our prayers in times of crisis.
- **Pray when you are happy.** Thank the Lord for the good times in life.
- **Pray aloud.** It makes prayer more real.
- **Pray silently.** God has ears with which to hear anyway.
- **Pray simply and naturally.** Make prayer a heart-felt petition.
- **Pray fervently.** Prayer thus becomes more powerful.
- **Pray until prayer becomes a habit.** It's a habit that the Lord promotes and blesses.



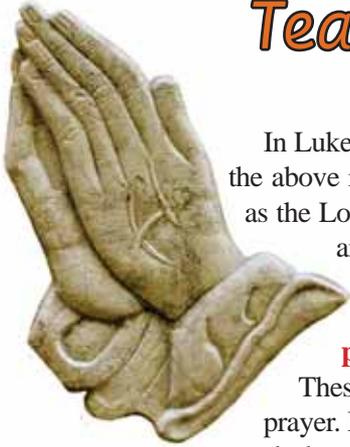
Yes, as another said, prayer is indeed our personal barometer that measures our personal relationship with the Lord. Use it readily and often. ✝

Ronald D. Reeves is a longtime preacher who lives in Arkansas, USA.

Worship

Teach Us to Pray

Arlis D. Richardson



In Luke 11:1, Jesus was asked by one of His disciples the above request. The answer is often referred to today as the Lord's Prayer, and it is answered in Luke 11:2-4 and Matthew 6:9-13. However, it is improper to refer to this as **The Lord's Prayer**. Our Lord Jesus prayed often, but our texts show this is **a pattern for prayer** and **not an actual prayer**.

These two texts show the importance of proper prayer. If His disciples saw the need of being properly taught how to pray, shouldn't modern man learn how to pray properly? Many times today, men are asked to lead public prayer, but too often, some give little thought, it seems, to the model Jesus gave. Some even use prayer time as a time to preach instead of praying. Shame on such!

[I'm not amused when one leading prayer begins quoting Scripture to God! ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

The so-called Lord's Prayer is not to be recited, but the principles in it are to be followed. The prayer is a pattern! Let's now note the example given by our Lord. I'll be using the text in Matthew 6:9-13. ***"Our Father which art in heaven..."*** Note **prayers are to be addressed to the Father** in Heaven. They are not to be addressed to Jesus, and our Lord emphasized this in John 16:23, where He said, ***"And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."***

Then, Jesus explained in verse 28, ***"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father."*** The total context reveals that Jesus was speaking of the time when He would be back in Heaven. His whole time upon earth in reference to prayer was that such should be addressed to the Father, and in these latter passages, strong emphasis is given to that. In verse 27 He stated, ***"For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out***

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from God.” Let those who lead prayer be ever mindful of this, as well as those who serve as song leaders. Yes, some songs are prayers set to music, but a musical prayer addressed to other than the Father is just as unscriptural!

Now for the second main point of the model prayer, *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”* When Jesus was giving the prayer pattern, the kingdom had not yet come. It now has become a reality; so, that part of the model prayer cannot be followed exactly. Yet, I see nothing improper in praying for the kingdom today.

Let us consider the remainder of that model prayer. *“Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.”* Certainly, as Jesus pointed out, our Heavenly Father knows what we need before we ask, but He wants to know that we love and trust Him enough to express our desires for physical nourishment to Him. He also wants us to ask His help in being kept away from temptations. However, God does not send temptations. *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempted he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed”* (James 1:13-14).

Finally, note verses 14-15, which Jesus used following the model prayer. *“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* Now there is a profound statement and one we need to have ever before us in our relationships. The question was recently, “Are you sure you are going to make it to Heaven?” Well, have you forgiven those who have trespassed against you? Are your sins truly forgiven? Or will some grudge against another keep you away from having your sins forgiven?✝

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

Editor’s Note: To whom are we going for instructions on how to pray, and whose model for prayer are we implementing daily in our lives? So much of what passes for prayer in our time conflicts with how Jesus taught the apostles to pray. Why is that? Let’s learn from Jesus how to offer acceptable and proper prayers. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

proverbs 17:22



A politician visited a remote, little, rural village and asked the inhabitants what the government could do for them.

“We have two big needs,” said the village headman. “First, we have a hospital but no doctor.”

The politician whipped out his cellphone, spoke for a while, and then said, “I have sorted it out. A doctor will arrive here tomorrow. What is your other need?”

“We have no cellphone reception at all in our village.”



Taylor was desperate for business, and was happy to be appointed by the court to defend an indigent defendant. The judge ordered Taylor, “You are to confer with the defendant in the hallway, and give him the best legal advice you can.”

After a time, Taylor re-entered the courtroom alone. When the

judge asked where the defendant had gone, Taylor replied, “You asked me to give him good advice. I found out that he was guilty, so I told him to split.”



Mother decided that 7-year-old Cathy should get something ‘practical’ for her birthday.

“Suppose we open a savings account for you?” mother suggested. Cathy was delighted.

“It’s your account, darling,” mother said as they arrived at the bank, “so you fill out the application.”

Cathy was doing fine until she came to the space for “Name of your former bank.” After a slight hesitation, she put down, “Piggy.”



A girl was doing a crossword puzzle. “What’s a 7-letter word for ‘easily perceived or understood’ that starts with ‘O’?”

“Isn’t it ‘obvious’?”

“It should be, but I can’t figure it out. That’s why I’m asking.”



proverbs 17:22

The insurance agent was having quite an easy time selling Mrs. Cunningham insurance on her husband's life. In fact he thought it was too easy.

When all the details were finalized, Mrs. Cunningham casually asked, "Now, if my husband should die tomorrow, what would I get?"

"That would depend entirely," the insurance man replied, "on how the evidence is presented to the jury."



A man stepped onto the overnight train and told the conductor, "I need you to wake me up in Philadelphia. I'm a deep sleeper and can be cranky when I get up, but no matter what, I want you to help me make that stop. Here's \$100 to make sure."

The conductor agreed. The man fell asleep, and when he awoke, he heard the announcement that the train was approaching New York. Furious, he collared the conductor. "I gave you \$100 to make sure I got off in Philadelphia!"

"Wow," another passenger said to his traveling companion. "Is that guy ever mad!"

"Yeah," his companion replied. "But not half as mad as that guy they forced off the train in Philadelphia."



A married couple was enjoying a luxury cruise until their liner was shipwrecked, and they were washed ashore on a desert island, the only survivors.

Day after day, they looked hopefully out to sea in the hope of spotting a passing vessel, but none came. As boredom set in, they started to think about their home back in Arizona.

The wife asked, "Did you remember to pay the final installment on the Chevrolet before we came away?"

"No, honey, I clean forgot. Sorry."

"Did you remember to pay the electric bill before we left home?"

"No, I completely forgot. Sorry."

"Did you remember to pay the gas bill?" "Sorry, honey, forgot."

"And did you remember to pay the six-monthly tax bill?"

"I knew there was something important I had to do. I'm really sorry honey."

"Well, at least there's one good thing," sighed the wife.

"What's that?"

"They'll find us."



How Do You Measure Up?

The Tragic State of Many in the World Today

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due..

Romans 1:20-27

Bring Him to Me

Edward L. Anderson

In Mark 9:19, Jesus said to a father seeking help for a son tormented by an evil spirit, “**Bring him to me.**” The disciples had been approached first by the man, but they had been unable to cast out the “*dumb spirit*” (v. 17), which had tormented the boy from childhood (v. 21). Jesus healed the man’s son (v. 27), much to the dismay of His disciples (v. 28). The father, no doubt, rejoiced and was forever grateful, as surely also was the son. **It is always a mark of wisdom to seek the help of the Lord.**

Bring your child to the Lord. “*Lo, children are an heritage [inheritance] of the Lord*” (Psalm 127:3). Fathers, “*bring them [your children], up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). Have them in “*subjection*” (1 Timothy 3:4, 12) so that they might be “*faithful children*” (Titus 1:6). Further, fathers, love your children’s mother, too (Ephesians 5:25)! Mothers, love your children and their father (Titus 2:4). Like Hannah, bring your child to Shiloh and present him or her to the Lord (1 Samuel 1), and that child will more likely bring you joy and not tears.

Bring your cares to the Lord. Jesus warned, “*Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life...*” (Luke 21:34). If you have no “*cares,*” you are an exceptional exception! The Greek is *merimna*, meaning division or distraction. Be forewarned. The Word of Christ can be and often is choked out by such “*cares*” (Luke 8:14; Matthew 13:22; Mark 4:19). What can we do? What are we to do? “*Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Bring your commitment to the Lord. A wise adage needs to be applied to the Christian’s life: “Anything worth doing is worth doing right.” There is no more noble life than that lived in service to “*the King of kings and the Lord of lords*” (1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 16:19). Commitment is

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evidenced by one's loyalty to a cause. It is demonstrated by faithfulness, devotion and steadfastness. Slothfulness and slackness are never complimented or condoned but often condemned (Proverbs 22:13; 26:13; Ecclesiastes 10:18; Matthew 25:26). Hebrews 6:12 reminds us not to be "slothful" (KJV) or "sluggish" (NKJV) in our service to the Lord.

Essentially, Jesus lovingly said, "Bring Me your sins and I will forgive you; bring Me your cares and I will carry them for you; bring Me your life and I will bless, keep and crown you." 

Edward L. Anderson is the preacher for the Carthage church in Carthage, Tennessee, USA. He has served there many years.



Did You Know?

Noah was 84 when Enos died (his great, great, great, great, great grandfather).

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Seven Desires of Every Heart, Part 2

Wayne Burger

Studies show that there are seven desires in every heart. In other words, all people have seven needs to really feel fulfilled and satisfied. We may not have ever sat down and thought about what our basic needs are, but they are there anyway. What we are going to see is that Christ and His body provide all of these needs. Whether or not people realize it, they need Christ and the church. Being a Christian does not keep one from the pleasures of life, but instead, it actually gives one the pleasures of life. We need to help people see that Christ and His church meet their basic needs.

Peter explained, *“Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence”* (2 Peter 1:2-3). Jesus Himself said, *“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”* (John 10:10). It is only logical that God provides for our needs because He created us in His image. He knows us better than we know ourselves, and He loves us so much that He provides for all our basic needs.

Each person needs to be heard and understood. Being heard and understood gives one a sense of worth. Being in the body of Christ gives an individual the opportunity to be among people of like-mind and people with the same purpose and goals in life. Therefore, when one is in the body of Christ, he or she can be surrounded by people who understand. The world may laugh and ridicule us because of our beliefs, but in Christ we understand and support each other. This is why James urged us to *“confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much”* (5:16).

Paul also encouraged Christians to know and to encourage each other. He said, *“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord”* (Romans 12:10-11). In another place he said, *“Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love,*

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united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves, do not merely look out for your own personal interest, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:2-4).

These passages are great promises that we can be heard and understood. Yet, at the same time, there are great challenges for us to be the one who hears and understands. Are you being heard and understood? Are you one who listens so as to understand your brethren? Let’s fulfill this important need in the lives of our brethren!

God Hears and Understands

As important as it is to be heard and understood by brethren, **it is even more important to be heard and understood by God!** Numerous passages assure us that God hears and understands us. One of my favorite psalms is 139, which says, *“O Lord, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O Lord, You know it all”* (vs. 1-4). Peter gave us another aspect of God’s understanding when he exhorted, *“Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you”* (1 Peter 5:7). The Hebrew writer encouraged Christians with this conclusion: *“Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* (Hebrews 4:16).

Holy Spirits Help

God even understands when we don’t understand. Speaking of the help that the Holy Spirit gives with regard to us being understood, Paul said, *“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words”* (Romans 8:26).

Our basic need of being heard and understood is best found in Christ’s spiritual body on earth, the church. Not only will we have God who understands, but we will also have thousands of brethren who hear and understand. 

Wayne Burger has been preaching since 1962. He is currently a teacher at Bear Valley Bible Institute and also preaches for the church in Conifer, Colorado, USA.

The Christian Home

Becoming as Little Children

Martha Lynn Rushmore

I found this sermon outline in one of my late husband Bob Noland's books. It was written by Tom W. Butterfield, who passed away many years ago. He was one of the great preachers of the Upper Ohio Valley. He spoke the Word plainly and simply as told us in Scripture. Even young children understood the lessons he taught.

Little children are **innocent**. Jesus would have not used little children as examples if they were guilty of sin. He would not have used them in Matthew 19:14 if they were anything except pure. Jesus taught the disciples in Matthew 18:1-3 that they were to become as little children in order to enter the kingdom of Heaven. This applies to us today. Children are blameless until they attain the age of accountability, knowing right from wrong.

We are not born in original sin. This is where false teachers say we are born as sinners, bearing the guilt of the sin of Adam and Eve and thereby inheriting their sin. We are born innocent at birth. A little baby only knows three things. He knows if he is hungry, if his diapers needs to be changed or if he hurts. Since babies cannot talk, they cry to let us know they need something.

How can these babies believe that Jesus is the Son of God (Mark 16:16; 9:23)? How can they repent of sins (Luke 13:3, 5)? Can they confess Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 10:9-10)? Can these little ones choose to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)? The answer to all these questions is, "No!" They have no understanding about any of these things.

Well, then, why do parents want their little ones baptized (sprinkled or poured water upon)? Neither sprinkling nor pouring are Bible baptism. Either is just a little water sprinkled or poured on the little one without any biblical significance. Usually when this happens, the babies cry. They do not like it. These acts are the choices of parents only – not of the babies. These parents want their babies baptized (so-called) because of the false belief that babies are born in sin.

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Let us look a little deeper. What is baptism? It is a burial in water. In Acts 8:38, Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water and Philip baptized him. Why would they both go **into** the water if Philip were going to pour or sprinkle water on the eunuch? Baptism means to dip, to plunge, to bury or to immerse. These words all mean to be completely covered with water. If you bury a person who has died, do you just sprinkle or pour a little dirt on the deceased? Of course not. The body is completely covered.

Little children are **forgiving**. They can argue with each other. One child might say something like this, “I hate you and I am never talking to you again.” Within five minutes or less, they will resume playing again as best friends, and the argument is all forgotten. This is one way we as adults are to be as little children. Are you forgiving? Do you say to yourself, “I am going to forgive this person, but I will not forget?” Is this really forgiveness? I think not. I understand as humans it is hard to forgive and to forget.

Children are very **inquisitive**. They learn by asking questions (Exodus 12:26). They want to learn. Young children are so very curious and are like sponges. They absorb everything they hear. Young ones can learn a lot if

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parents are prepared to answer their questions. We as Christians should also be inquisitive. We need to study God's Word as the Bereans did in Acts 17:11. They studied daily.

Little children are **grateful**. If they are taught at a young age to say "please" and "thank you," this will come naturally to them as they get older. We as adults are to be grateful to our Heavenly Father for all He has done and continues to do for us. We are so richly blessed (Colossians 3:15; Ephesians 2:4-7). We have an awesome God, and He provides what we need, as He does for the flowers and the birds, too (Matthew 6:26-34). So, let us be thankful and prayerful to God and tell Him how very appreciative we are for His loving care and for giving us what we need and much more (Philippians 4:6).

Children are **imitators** of their parents. Little ones learn by watching their parents. If you do not want your children to lie, then do not lie to your boss that you are sick, when really you just want to take a day off of work, even though you are feeling fine. Another example is when the phone rings and you do not want to talk to the person calling. Do not have someone tell the caller that you are not home. The child sees your actions, and he knows you just told a lie. This shows children that it is okay to lie.

Children are entitled to **good examples** (2 Timothy 1:5). If we want them to do right, then we must do right. We must be imitators of God as His children (Ephesians 5:1-2). Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:1 that we are to be followers of him as he was following Christ.

If we want our children to grow up following the Word of God, we **must** do our best to do what God's Word commands us. Of course, this is not a guarantee that they will stay faithful. According to Psalm 22:6, they will always know what they have been taught. With the right example and a lot of prayers, the likelihood is that our children will obey (Romans 8:16-17) the faith and remain faithful (Revelation 2:10). Remember, though, they have freewill to make their own choices – right or wrong. 

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HELPING CHILDREN SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

Rebecca Rushmore

In recent years, there has been a lot of talk about the success of children in the schools. Most parents want their children to receive a good education in order to be successful in life. Teachers also want children in their classrooms to do well. The question then arises, “How do we help children reach their full potential and learn all they can?”

The first thing parents, teachers and even children need to understand is that everyone can learn. Life is a learning process. Babies learn to get the attention of adults. As children grow, they learn to feed themselves, dress themselves, walk and talk. Each of these events is an area of learning. Just like children do not all begin to walk or to talk at the same age, children do not all learn to read, write and do arithmetic at the same age. Anyone can learn. The apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:13, ***“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”*** All things include the ability to learn.

Next, consider that not everyone has the same ability to learn. While everyone is capable of learning, not everyone can be a rocket scientist. The parable told by Jesus in Matthew 25:14-30 is a good example of this principle. In this illustration, a man divided his goods among his servants in preparation for taking a long journey. The key verse for our purposes is verse 15. It reads, ***“And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.”*** Notice the phrase ***“according to his several ability.”*** The servants were not given the same responsibility but were given jobs based on what was possible for them to handle. In the same manner, children have different capacities for knowledge and application of that knowledge in a specific area. For example, a child with an IQ of 60 will be very concrete in his thinking. An abstract concept like algebra or physics may be very difficult for him to grasp, but he may excel in work

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where he can use his hands to build or to fix things.

Since children are different in their abilities to learn, it is important that parents and teachers do not compare children or place unreasonable expectations on them. Remember that each child is unique in his abilities. When comparisons are made, children may feel that they are not good



enough or cannot do anything right. Constant bombardment with messages bearing expectations a child cannot personally achieve hurts self-esteem and can lead to poor achievement. Expectations set beyond a child's ability set him up for failure. Repeated failure can lead also to poor self-esteem.

Expectations that are too low can also be a problem. When nothing is expected, nothing is the result. Children who are told they cannot learn or do a certain task begin to think they are unable to take care of themselves or to achieve anything meaningful on their own. Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21 instruct fathers to “*provoke not your children*” to wrath or anger. The verse in Colossians states that to do so will discourage them; Ephesians includes nurturing and admonishing as a better method of raising a child. When expectations are unreasonable or children are treated differently when compared to others, the parent or teacher is in danger of provoking the child to wrath.

Whether in the classroom or in the home, children can learn and achieve. It is not always easy for either a child or adults who are trying to help. There is no one way to help all children. Each adult and child must work together to find the best way for the unique person God created. Below are a few practical suggestions that can be applied at home or possibly in the classroom.

- 1. Offer praise and encouragement liberally.** Adults like to hear they have done a job well, and children are no different. Praise even small steps toward a goal. Simple rewards like stickers, the child's choice of a movie or a dinner one night, or a special outing can make a big dif-

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ference. We are all hoping to hear the ultimate praise from Jesus and receive the greatest of rewards, “*Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ...enter thou into the joy of thy lord*” (Matthew 25:21).

- 2. Break large jobs into small, manageable tasks.** A new skill may seem overwhelming when looking at the big picture. Simplify the steps and work at mastering one step at a time. Jesus did not teach the disciples everything at one time. His lessons began with simple messages and increased in difficulty as the disciples were ready to understand them. Compare the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 with teachings of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Judgment Day in Matthew 24-25. Some of the material was even given after Jesus went back to Heaven (John 14:26).
- 3. Teach good study habits.** Second Timothy 2:15 states, “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*” Parents need to show children how to study the Bible. Good study habits include a planned time, an area free from distraction and focus on the task at hand. Teach children that just like Bible study time needs to be structured and organized, school related study times should be structured and organized as well. Both types of study should be done to the best ability of the individual. When children see a skill can be used in more than one area of life, the skill is reinforced and is often easier to maintain. Classroom teachers can also plan study time and teach study skills.
- 4. Become familiar with the child’s learning style.** There are a couple of different theories about learning styles. Each has its own name and different learning style. The principle is basically the same. Children and adults do not all learn in the same way. One child may do well listening to lectures while another child may understand better when he can practice a skill repeatedly. Some learn best when they see illustrations and others learn by associating music. Not all styles of learning can be easily accommodated in a classroom. However, teachers can be creative and use a variety of teaching methods to help meet the needs

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of each student. Parents can use the learning style of a child when assisting with homework or other learning activities.

- 5. Make use of available resources.** Many of the new textbooks have websites designed for the students to use as an additional source for reteaching, practice or challenge work. There are several agencies available for tutoring, assessing needs and providing general help for parents, students and teachers. The Internet also provides numerous sites offering ideas as well as support for teachers and parents. Local libraries, guidance counselors and phonebooks are good places to start looking for these sources of help.
- 6. Whatever you choose to do, be consistent.** Both in the classroom and in the home, children need to know the boundaries and the consequences for breaking those boundaries. Children need to know that they are loved no matter what they do. Inconsistent enforcement of schedules, boundaries and consequences can erode the feeling that they matter in the lives of the adults. It can lead to conflict and inhibit effective learning. Throughout the Bible, God demonstrates limits and consequences. God keeps His promises (2 Peter 3:9). The best thing we can do for our children is to do the same (i.e., keep our promises).

Successful children do not just happen. Proverbs 22:6 states, ***“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”*** Moses instructed the Israelites to teach their children at every opportunity (Deuteronomy 6:6-7). Parents who are actively involved in their child’s education and who work with the teachers will promote positive educational achievement. Teachers who use every offered resource, including willing parents, will realize a successful teaching environment. Children who participate in making decisions for their education will be better invested and more likely to succeed. Successful children are the result of hard work from the parents, teachers and students. The most successful accomplishments will include God through the Bible as the guide. 

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

Rodney Nulph

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). To rightly divide the Word of Truth, one must use certain principles of interpretation. Sadly, some approach the Bible in a completely different way than they would approach any other book. While the Bible is certainly not just “any other book,” the rules of interpretation are universal in nature. Context is key when it comes to understanding any communication. This is certainly true when it comes to rightly dividing the Bible. How does one go about **properly** interpreting God’s Word in its context?

Firstly, there is the **age context**. When one begins to study the Bible, the first thing necessary for an honest interpretation is to determine in which age was the penman writing. There is the Patriarchal Age (creation to Sinai). Key figures during this dispensation were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There is the Mosaic Age (Sinai to the cross), which included great men like Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah and Jesus. Lastly, there is the Christian age (cross to Judgment Day), which included people like Paul, Peter, John and Luke, as well as includes you and me. At one time, God spoke in different ways (directly to the fathers in Patriarchy; through the Law of Moses in the Mosaic Age or Judaism), but now God speaks to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-3). Therefore, religious authority to which we must turn is not what Moses said or what Elijah preached but what Jesus commands (Matthew 17:5).

Secondly, there is the **historical context**. One reason why some have a difficult time understanding God’s Word is that they try to view the Bible through the “lens” of today, instead of looking through the lens of history. Looking through first century glasses really aids in our understanding of first century things. There are five great questions that help aid in the historical context. Question #1: Who is speaking? Question #2: To whom is it being spoken? For example, when Jesus said, *“You are of your father, the devil”* (John 8:44a), He was not speaking to you or to me, but Jesus

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was addressing the unbelieving Pharisees (John 8:13). Question #3: From where was it being spoken? For example, when John said, **“I was in the spirit on the Lord’s Day”** (Revelation 1:10), he was not in some “mystical trance,” but rather, John was in exile on an island called Patmos. Although he could not be present with the saints on Sunday, his spirit or his mind was with them. Question #4: When was it being spoken? For example, when Jesus said to the thief on the cross, **“Today, thou shalt be with me in paradise”** (Luke 23:43), the new covenant had not yet been ratified (Christ was still alive), and therefore, the thief did not have to obey the Great Commission command (Luke 24:47) to **“repent and be baptized”** (Acts 2:38), which command was given **after** Jesus’ death, not before! Question #5: Why was it being spoken? For example, why did Paul ask the Corinthians, **“What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?”** (1 Corinthians 11:22). Was there some law against eating in the meeting place? When one studies the context, Paul was correcting their **misuse** of the Lord’s Supper, not addressing eating in the meetinghouse at all.

Thirdly, there is the **textual context**. There are essentially three areas to consider in the realm of textual context. There is the **immediate context**. What is happening in the preceding and following paragraphs? There is the **remote context**. What is going on in the entire chapter? There is the **book context**. What is the context of the entire book in which this paragraph falls? We must be willing to search out the textual context of anything we are studying! **Context is key when it comes to rightly dividing God’s Word.**

Rightly dividing God’s Word takes initiative and effort. Study is not for the faint of heart but rather for those who **really** desire to know truth. There is a story told of a seasoned Gospel preacher who was preaching a meeting in a distant town. Following his sermon, a woman approached him and said, “I would give my life to know the Bible like you do!” To which he replied, “That is exactly what it cost me.” Truth is costly and **cannot** be obtained by accident. God rewards those who **“diligently seek Him”** (Hebrews 11:6). **Seek Him daily, study His Word regularly, and see your life change before your very eyes!✝**

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A Faithful Christian

David Q. Fisher

“Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:22-24 NKJV). It is difficult to fully appreciate the Christians of the first century. I assume for most of us, we see their world with eyes informed by our world. Life for us is about freedom of choice, to come or go, to pursue or sit still, to live here or there, to be involved in this program or that at church, or to be involved in none at all. Are we able to comprehend what it was like to be a slave and a Christian in the Roman world? Christians today are often judged to be faithful to God in Christ in very similar ways to being judged successful in business, sports or economically. Busyness in various church programs, not only loyal attendance but being out front in some form of service in worship



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or Bible class, and known conversions as the result of a Christian's efforts are all good things. I appreciate, applaud and encourage all who can be so described. Yet, there is something about Paul's words to the Christian slaves of Colossae that further informs me about what it is to be a faithful Christian.

A slave's life was not his own. His life belonged to his master. Imagine how limited his life choices were. The apostle encouraged Colossian Christians to seek things above (3:1), to put to death all that was worldly and sinful in their hearts and lives (3:5-11), and to clothe their lives with the qualities of heart and life that come from above, where Christ is (3:12-17). Paul urged them, *“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him”* (3:17). **The opportunities of Christian slaves were basically limited to doing what they were bound to do by their masters. The apostle Paul transformed those duties into service to Christ. Their faithfulness as Christians was in heartily doing the work their masters commanded them to do. Their faithfulness to Christ was giving their all to their work as slaves in loyalty to Christ and with the qualities of heart and life that come from Christ.**

I certainly am not minimizing the importance of our fellowship with God's people and our work together. What Paul's words tell me is that **being a faithful Christian is about the way we live our lives in every setting of life.** Faithfulness, as we judge it in relation to church involvement, is truly faithfulness only if life is faithfully lived in service to Christ. A Christian whose life's circumstance limits his or her opportunities for church involvement is a faithful Christian as he or she lives life within that circumstance in service to Christ, with the qualities of heart and life that come from Christ. †

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[Editor's Note: This an outstanding article, which captures the apostolic message to the original recipients and subsequently makes the correct and fundamental application to saints now living. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

Did You Know? Elijah, Amos and Hosea were God's prophets to the Northern Kingdom.



An Instructive Comparison of Timothy and Titus

Kevin L. Moore

Both Timothy and Titus were trusted companions of the apostle Paul, each of whom he regarded as a true “son” or “child” [*téknon*] in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4). While indicative of a close relationship, this may also suggest Paul’s role in having led them to Christ. Circumcision was a key issue when both Timothy and Titus were first introduced in the biblical record (Acts 16:3; Galatians 2:1-3). They labored as Paul’s coworkers (Romans 16:21; 2 Corinthians 8:23), and he had enough confidence in them to be his personal delegates (1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Corinthians 12:18). Both served as capable evangelists in areas where false teachers had to be confronted and the local church needed to be more firmly established and organized (1 Timothy 1:2-3; Titus 1:4-5). Inspired correspondence from the apostle Paul, addressed to each of these men, is preserved in our New Testament.

Despite these similarities, however, there are significant differences between Timothy and Titus. (The name *Títos* (Titus) is of Latin derivation and was common among the ancient Romans. The name *Timótheos* (Timothy) is a Greek name with a Jewish connotation, meaning “of value to God.”)

- Timothy played a major role in the historical narrative of Acts (Acts 16:1-20:4ff.), while Titus is not named at all. It has been suggested that perhaps Luke (the author of Acts) and Titus were brothers, which, for modesty’s sake, would explain why neither name appears in the document.
- Timothy was half-Jew and half-Greek (Acts 16:1); Titus was a full-blooded Greek (Galatians 2:3).
- Paul determined that Timothy ought to be circumcised (Acts 16:3), though he adamantly opposed Titus being circumcised (Galatians 2:3). Since Timothy was half-Jewish, this was culturally expedient, thereby enhancing his effectiveness in advancing the Gospel among fellow ethnic Jews (cf., 1 Corinthians 7:19; 9:19-23). Titus, on the other hand, was a

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Gentile, whose concession to this Jewish rite would have compromised the Christian faith and set a dangerous precedent (Galatians 2:3-5).

- Timothy appears to have been somewhat timid, sickly and subject to disregard. The Corinthians were instructed, ***“if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear ...let no one despise him”*** (1 Corinthians 16:10-11 NKJV); Timothy himself was admonished, ***“Let no one despise your youth...”*** (1 Timothy 4:12); ***“use a little wine for your stomach’s sake and your frequent infirmities”*** (1 Timothy 5:23); ***“For God has not given us a spirit of fear [timidity]... Therefore do not be ashamed...”*** (2 Timothy 1:7-8). Titus, on the other hand, was apparently just the opposite. The Corinthians were told, ***“he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him”*** (2 Corinthians 7:15); ***“being more diligent, he went to you of his own accord”*** (2 Corinthians 8:17; cf., 12:18).
- Timothy, it seems, needed elaborate commendations from Paul (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10-11; Philippians 2:19-24; 1 Thessalonians 3:2), probably to help bolster his confidence and promote acceptance and respect. Titus, however, did not need such hefty commendations (cf., 2 Corinthians 7:15; 8:17; 12:18).
- There is no clear record that Timothy and Titus were ever together in the same place at the same time, although Macedonia while 2 Corinthians was being drafted is a possibility.
- Timothy was named as co-sender of more Pauline letters than any of the apostle’s other coworkers (2 Corinthians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Philemon 1), while Titus is the explicit co-sender of none. The only writings in the Pauline corpus wherein Timothy was not named are the letters to the Galatians, the Ephesians and Titus, two of which mention Titus by name. The only Pauline document to record the names of both Timothy and Titus is 2 Corinthians. Paul’s mention of ***“all the brothers with me”*** in Galatians 1:2 could have included one, the other or both.
- In the New Testament canon, two letters are addressed to Timothy and only one to Titus.

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- Timothy was commissioned to help build up a local church on the mainland of Asia Minor (1 Timothy 1:2-3; 2 Timothy 4:5), while Titus worked with multiple churches on the island of Crete (Titus 1:4-5).
- According to tradition, both Timothy and Titus died at an advanced age, although Timothy reportedly suffered a violent death as a martyr, whereas Titus died of natural causes.

The point of these comparisons is to illustrate the fact that no two people in the Lord's kingdom are exactly the same, yet all have the potential for great usefulness in the Lord's service. Whether one is timid and vulnerable, like Timothy, or bold and commanding, like Titus, God can and will accomplish incredible things through anyone who steps out in faith as His faithful servant. †

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Robison's Rubies

Baptism is a commandment of God (Mark 16:15-16). If we love God, we will obey His commandments (John 14:15). Why would anyone want to leave out something that Scripture identifies plainly as a commandment of God? In baptism, one receives the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). In baptism, a person is saved and added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:41, 47). In baptism, one is buried with Christ in the likeness of His death and raised in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:3-6); a burial indicates immersion. Baptism is not the only commandment of God, but it is one. It needs to be studied, properly understood and obeyed by those who seriously want to seek the Lord. Remember Jesus' own words, ***“He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but He who does not believe shall be condemned.”***

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Fear: A Lesson from King David

David Myers

We all know the Bible character King David, and from him one can learn lessons about fear, worry and anxiety. Throughout his life, David had to deal with situations that would naturally bring about these three emotions in anyone. One emotion that he knew about especially was fear. His whole life had been turned upside down when his son Absalom stole the allegiance of the nation of Israel from him and was attempting to take the throne for himself. David didn't know who was loyal to him and who was against him. His only option seemed to be to run for his life. He said to his servants, ***“Arise, and let us flee, or we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly and bring disaster upon us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword”*** (2 Samuel 15:14).

As David was fleeing for his life, he wrote in a Psalm, ***“I cried to the Lord with my voice, and He heard me from His Holy Hill”*** (Psalm 3:4). All believers must remember that worry is a burden God never meant for us to bear (Matthew 11:28-30). David looked to God in the midst of fear. God showed him grace and restored him to his throne.

In Psalm 4:4-5, 8, David showed a very important lesson for how we should handle stressful events in our lives, which can bring up emotions of fear and worry. We can discover from David how to release those emotions into God's strong hand. He will help us through our trials and emotional moments. First, he said, ***“Be agitated, and do not sin. Meditate [think] within your heart on your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD”*** (Psalm 4:4-5). Then, David said, ***“Lie down in peace, and sleep, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety”*** (Psalm 4:8).

Each Christian can say to the Lord at the end of the day before he sleeps, “Thank you Lord, that we, like King David of old, do not have to be weighed down by fear and worry. Help me Lord to place my concerns in Your care so that I do not fear tomorrow, in Jesus name, Amen!” (See 1 Peter 5:6-7).✝

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Curiosity Saved Zacchaeus!

Alvin Jennings

Zacchaeus may have been a little man, but don't sell him short! He is more than a minor character in the Bible. He stood above the crowd in his curiosity. He ran ahead of the multitude and climbed a tree so he could see Jesus as He was passing by. Curiosity brought "*salvation to his house*" (Luke 19:1-10).

What about you? Are you curious about things in the realm of religion? Have you read much of the Bible? Have you wondered about the account of creation, the miracles, the virgin birth of Jesus and His resurrection, the Bible's claims about an eternal Heaven and Hell?

Evidently Zacchaeus had heard some amazing things about Jesus: About 5,000 people following Him by Lake Galilee, about healing lepers, about Him walking on the Sea of Galilee, about Him raising the dead and healing two blind men. Yet, Jesus associated with sinners and was their friend. It was enough to make a man curious.

Jesus was used to being the object of curiosity. As an infant, He aroused the curiosity of the Magi (Matthew 2:2) and the angels (Luke 2:15; 1 Peter 1:10-12), and Simeon couldn't wait to hold Him when He was brought to the Temple as an infant (Luke 2:28). As a boy, learned teachers in the Temple found Him interesting (Luke 2:47). Interest never waned, and even near His death, King Herod wanted to see Him because he had heard marvelous things about Him (Luke 23:8). Still, after 2,000 years, He is the most talked about human ever to reside on Planet Earth!

The Ethiopian was curious enough to investigate Isaiah 53 and even to invite a stranger to explain its meaning to him. Afterward, he left the encounter rejoicing because he had learned the way of salvation through Jesus (Acts 8:32-40)! People in Thessalonica were called "*noble*" for investigating the apostle Paul's message regarding Jesus (Acts 17:11).

Zacchaeus was curious about this man of whom he had heard — Jesus Christ. Maybe you have heard of the church of Christ, and you are curious about it. Maybe you wonder about these questions:

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Is there only one true church that God approves? Jesus said, **“I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”** (Matthew 16:18). The church is the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23), and Jesus is not a polygamist.

Why do we teach that baptism is necessary for the remission of sins? **“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). Also, see Romans 6:3-4.

Why not baptize babies? Babies are not “born *with* sin,” and do not yet have the mental capability to choose to sin. Jesus said in Matthew 19:14, **“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”**

Why do we take “the Lord’s Supper” every Sunday? We do so because of the example of the church in the New Testament: **“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).

Why not have pianos in our worship? Though David added instruments to temple worship in the Old Testament, they are never mentioned in the New Testament — only singing — vocal chords — the instrument God created (Ephesians 5:19).

Why have elders to oversee the church instead of a “reverend” or a “pastor”? No man should presume to claim the respect ascribed only to God: **“...holy and reverend is his name”** (Psalm 111:9; Titus 1:5-9).

Why do we not teach, “Once saved, always saved”? The warning is given in 1 Corinthians 10:12, **“...let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”** Also Revelation 2:10 promises, **“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**

Why do we teach that there is an eternal Heaven and Hell? In Matthew 25:46, after Jesus’ lengthy sermon about life and judgment, He declared, **“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”** †

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Does 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 Allow a Guilty Party to Remarry?

David Fanning and Shane Fisher

The short answer to this question is, “No.” 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 states, “*Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.*”

These verses are abused to assert that if a person was put away for the reason of fornication (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:9), then 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 justifies such a one the right to remarry without committing the sin of adultery. Those who promote this error are misinterpreting the passage and forcing the following false idea upon it. “*If you are married, do not divorce. But you (the guilty party who was put away for the reason of fornication) will not sin if you do marry (again).*”

In the historical context, Paul was answering several questions the Corinthian brethren had concerning marriage. The overall context was in view of “*the present distress*” (1 Corinthians 7:26) and the time “*being short*” (1 Corinthians 7:29). Was it wise for them to get married at such a distressing time since there was so much turmoil happening around them? Paul wanted to reassure them that if a person was scripturally eligible for marriage and married during that turbulent time, then they could do so without sinning against God. If a father arranged for his virgin daughter to marry, she had not sinned. It certainly could be that they might suffer during that time, and Paul did not desire to see that happen to them.

In conclusion, God’s Word is truth and will never contradict itself (John 17:17; 10:35; Titus 1:2). First Corinthians 7:27-28 cannot be made to contradict Matthew 19:9. It does not give justification for a guilty party to remarry. ✝

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Bible Questions

What Relationship Does Fasting Have to Christianity?

Louis Rushmore

Amusing myself at least, I have contemplated from time to time that contemporary Christians often add an “e” to “fasting,” resulting in “feasting.” Certainly, the favorite type of fellowship freely observed by Christians today involves a fellowship *meal*. We love to cook, and we love to eat! First century fellowship, though, also included being “*fellow workers*” (Romans 16:3), “*fellow prisoners*” (Romans 16:7), “*fellow citizens*” (Ephesians 2:19), “*fellow heirs*” (Ephesians 3:6), a “*fellow soldier*” (Philippians 2:25), a “*fellow servant*” (Colossians 1:7) and a “*fellow laborer*” (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Christian fellowship includes a partnership with the Godhead (1 Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 2:1; 1 John 1:3), a partnership in the Gospel (Philippians 1:5), a partnership in worship (Acts 2:42) as well as a partnership with the children of God (Galatians 2:9; 1 John 1:7). Fellowship may also include participation in the sufferings of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:10).

Fasting, however, differs from feasting and other aspects of fellowship. “Fasting, deliberate abstinence from food for stated intervals, and undertaken as a religious exercise, has long been practiced by man” (Woods, Volume 1, 252). “...Fasting is a Bible subject. It is mentioned quite frequently in the Scriptures” (Ashlock 2). In practice by the Jews during the time of the ministry of Jesus Christ, our Lord regulated the action rather than implemented it as a feature of Christianity. Regarding Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus “...removed fasting from the realm of public activity and classified it as a matter of private devotion” (Woods, Volume 2, 146). “Fasting for the Christian is strictly a voluntary matter” (Jackson 2).

That fasting was not intended to be observed under all circumstances, and that its chief purpose was to strengthen us in times of trial and adversity, and on occasions of sorrow and grief, is evi-

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dent from an induction of passages dealing with the subject in the New Testament (Matthew 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 1 Corinthians 7:6; Acts 13:2; 2 Corinthians 6:5). (Woods, Volume 2, 146)

We may, therefore, properly conclude that (1) Christ did not enjoin fasting upon the church as a public duty; in his reference thereto, he merely regulated a practice already obtaining among the Jews; (2) he taught that (a) it is to be observed, if at all, in private; (b) without revealing it to others; and (c) for the good of one's own soul. Fasting is not an ordinance of the church; it is not commanded in the Christian dispensation nor are there penalties given for failure to conform therewith; there is no special virtue in it so that all disciples must engage therein; one may find it a blessing, another may not. (Woods, Volume 2, 147)

Dozens of instances of Old Testament and New Testament biblical words translated as some form of fasting, in addition to other references, reveal that God's people practiced fasting from the time of Moses onward. "We must discern from the New Testament whether or not fasting is a command for Christians for all time" (Ashlock 2). Especially some of the New Testament citations about fasting are memorable, such as Jesus fasting for 40 days after His baptism (Matthew 4:2), Zacchaeus fasting twice weekly (Luke 18:12), Cornelius fasting (Acts 10:30) and fasting by prophets when Saul and Barnabas were selected as missionaries (Acts 13:2). Yet, "it does not appear that our Lord instituted any fast days for the church, nor did he indicate that the disciples were, by divine direction, to continue to observe the regulations touching fasts which obtained during the former dispensation" (Woods, Volume 1, 253-254).

Furthermore, when the Pharisees criticized Jesus and His disciples for not fasting, our Lord spoke parables about not patching old garments with new cloth as well as not putting new wine in old wineskins (Luke 5:33-39). "Is there not here the clear intimation of our Lord that the Pharisees were in error in suggesting that the old patch of Jewish practices should be affixed to the new garment of Christianity; or that the old wine of the ancient order should be poured into the new receptacle of the gospel

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dispensation?” (Woods, Volume 1, 254). **There are reasons for which individual Christians may fast in “private devotions”** (Woods, Volume 1, 255), **but fasting is not a church ordinance.**

“Fasting was practiced in connection with great and important events. ...Fasting was observed in connection with the solemn task of appointing elders to oversee the flock of God (Acts 14:23)” (Jackson 3). “Proper fasting” has several benefits, providing “a token of deep sincerity” and opportunities for “concentration” (Jackson 3). Biblical purposes of fasting show sincerity of repentance for sin (1 Samuel 7:6; Daniel 9:3-5; Ezra 10:6; Nehemiah 1:3-4), encourage one to think on the will of God and strengthen a person’s self-control. Fasting permits people to distance themselves from seeking the things this world has to offer and instead to focus on God and His Word. Sometimes even the children of God need an interruption to the normalcy to which they have become accustomed in this physical world to redirect their attention to the spiritual world for which every child of God hopes; fasting can help us with that.

Though not contending that fasting should be a public church function, some brethren in years past firmly affirmed that fasting was an individual Christian “duty.”

I think the Scriptures teach very plainly that it is the duty of Christians to fast. The Savior, in the Sermon on the Mount, gives directions for giving alms (Matt. 6:1-4), for praying (verses 5-15), and for fasting (verses 16-18). The three duties are treated here exactly alike, as though they are equally binding. ...scriptures give no specific time for fasting yet they show that Christians should fast when tried and tempted, when affliction and sorrow come upon them, when they grow cold and lukewarm in the service of God, when the flesh gains the ascendancy and they become forgetful of their duties to God and indifferent to their spiritual condition or that of the world. ...it should be done quietly, as a service rendered to God, not to be seen of men. ...The object of fasting was to give spiritual strength in times of weakness, temptation, and trial. ...In seasons of sorrow and distress for sin, in temptation and trial, when

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we are deeply and earnestly seeking help from God, we should come and with our prayers fast. (Lipscomb and Sewell 228-231)

“Religions and philosophies that practice fasting include: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Taoism, Jainism, and Hinduism” (“Fasting Around the World”). Despite as widespread over so long a time that people have practiced fasting, **the New Testament Scriptures neither command fasting nor stipulate consequences for not fasting. If anyone fasts today, it is a private, personal matter and neither announced nor practiced publicly.** “...Fasting is in the matter of private, personal devotions...” (Ashlock 2).

“Individual fasting is regulated by Jesus as recorded in Matthew 6:16-18. And we read in Acts 13:1-3 that members of the church in Antioch fasted, so we find no fault in this practice” (Elliott 17). Even long after the commencement of Christianity, the apostle Paul apparently entertained personal fasts (2 Corinthians 11:23-33). “If we fast, we are not to do anything in order to impress others that we are fasting (Matthew 6:16-18)” (Olbricht 9). **Though fasting is not commanded under Christianity, the New Testament assumes that from time to time Christians will and ought to fast privately.** †

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Like the Sadducees

Jerry Joseph



The Sadducees were one of the Jewish sects in the New Testament. They, along with the Pharisees, originated in the intertestamental period. They were not as large a group as the Pharisees, but they did wield a great influence upon the people. In the early history of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, a great rivalry existed between them as to from which group one would claim the office of High

Priest. The Sadducees won control. However, because of their opposing teachings, the rivalry did not end.

The Sadducees, in spite of their relationship with the priesthood and the Temple, must be considered as extremely liberal in their teachings. They differed from the Pharisees in the things they believed and taught. Let's notice some of these things.

The Sadducees **denounced** the resurrection, angels and spirit. “... *Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees confess both*” (Acts 23:8). “*The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection...*” (Matthew 22:23). There are references in the Old Testament to angels, spirit and resurrection (Genesis 16:7; Exodus 23:20; Psalm 31:5; 49:15; 104:4; Ecclesiastes 12:7). Therefore, the Sadducees did not believe what was set forth in the Old Testament.

They **discarded** the oral traditions of the Pharisees. The Sadducees

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demanded that only the written Law (Pentateuch) was authoritative and they rejected oral traditions of the Pharisees. This, of course, conflicted with the teaching of the Pharisees who taught that God had given both the written and the oral law. We must discard anything that is in opposition to God's Will and demand only what the Lord has authorized should be accepted (Colossians 3:17).

They **denied** what the Scriptures taught about the soul, punishment and reward. They neither believed the soul continued to exist after death nor that people would suffer punishment or receive reward after death. They believed that punishment and reward was in this life only. We must accept what the Bible teaches about the soul, punishment and reward (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Matthew 16:24-27; 25:31-46).

They **demonstrated** deism in their words and way of life. They believed that God was neither too interested in man's life nor too concerned about one doing good or refraining from evil. The Bible teaches God has always been concerned about what man does, how he lives and the condition of his soul. That's why, beginning with Adam and Eve, God has always had a plan for mankind. God is so concerned that He demands obedience to His Law (Ecclesiastes 12:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; James 1:21-22).

They **determined** to discredit the proclaimers of truth. In this way, they were much like the Pharisees (Matthew 22:23-33; Acts 4:1-4). Even on occasion, the Sadducees and Pharisees overlooked their differences to join forces in attacking Christ (Matthew 16:1).

Today, there are those who are determined to discredit the proclaimers of the Truth any way they can. When the Truth is **hitting too close to home** and the Truth cannot be answered, some will then attack the attitudes and the motives of the faithful proclaimer by accusing him of being **too harsh** and **unloving**. What a shame! Today there are still some Sadducees, at least in belief and practice! 

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[Editor's Note: While Truth must be proclaimed, it does matter also in what manner it is presented, "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]



Bible Word Scramble

Rebecca Rushmore

Write the first letter of each word indicated in the passages below.
Then, unscramble the letters to find the theme of the verses.

Exodus 28:1 31st word _____

Numbers 18:20 11th word _____

Isaiah 61:6 18th word _____

Malachi 2:7 28th word _____

Luke 1:8 15th word _____

Hebrews 2:17 1st word _____

Hebrews 5:5 11th word _____

Hebrews 5:6 4th word _____

Hebrews 7:11 14th word _____

Revelation 1:6 18th word _____

Bible text: New King James (NKJV)

(See the back cover for answer.)

Potential Danger in All Our Blessings

Louis Rushmore

Thesis: To emphasize that the proper attitude toward and use of physical blessings is essential to salvation.

Song: “O Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

Introduction:

1. Things that are neither good nor bad have the potential of being used for good or for evil.
 - a. For instance, the airplane is neither good nor bad, but it can be used for rescue and medical missions or travel, but it can be used for war.
 - b. Fire has no moral quality either, but it can be used for warmth and cooking, or it can destroy.
2. Blessings enjoyed by Christians, which blessings have no moral quality (they are neither good nor bad), can be abused to the harm of one's spiritual health.

Body:

- I. **Great intellect, higher education and abundant knowledge can be a curse to a Christian.**
 - A. We do not mean, as opponents to Christianity sometimes charge, that Christianity only appeals to poorly educated people.
 - B. Christians must be humble and teachable like children, Matthew 11:25; 18:3-4.
 - C. A person must correctly exercise intellect in Christianity, Matthew 22:37; Philippians 1:9; Colossians 1:9.
 - D. Yet, worldly wisdom can puff one up and cause him to be arrogant, 1 Corinthians 1:21; 3:18-21; 8:1.
- II. **Time can be a blessing or a curse depending on how it is used.**
 - A. One's time can be used to serve God or Satan, but not both, Matthew 6:24.
 - B. We must buy back wasted moments by the efficient way in which we use time presently, Ephesians 5:16.

Charts & Outlines

III. Wealth can be a blessing or a curse.

- A. Wealth can ruin one or by its correct use help one prepare for a blissful eternity, 1 Timothy 6:10, 17-19.
- B. Treasure in Heaven is more important than earthly riches, Matthew 19:21.
- C. Our Lord compared riches to thorns that can choke the Word of God out of us, Luke 8:14.
- D. Christians must develop contentment in place of coveting this world's riches, Hebrews 13:5.

IV. Authority can be a blessing or a curse.

- A. The abuse of authority spelled the ruin of a Christian named Diotrephes and troubled the church, 3 John 9-10.
- B. If we have any authority in various areas of life or the church, we have an obligation to use that authority righteously (e.g., elders, deacons, teachers, preachers, bosses, officers, husbands, wives, etc.), Proverbs 29:2.

V. Great beauty or personality when diverted to sinful use becomes a curse.

- A. Great beauty may lead one to immodesty and immorality, 1 Timothy 2:9-10; Prov. 7:10.
- B. An outgoing personality may lead a salesman or a preacher to deceive people, Leviticus 19:36; Amos 8:5; Romans 16:17-18.

VI. Great popularity, reputation and worldly honor may lead to compromises of truth and character.

- A. A good name is a worthy pursuit, Proverbs 22:1.
- B. However, it is never right to follow a majority in unrighteousness to preserve one's popularity, Exodus 23:2.
- C. Godly men and women do not seek the praise of men in place of the praise of God, John 12:42-43.
- D. Often, the pursuit of worldly distinction interferes with the pursuit of godliness, 1 Corinthians 1:26.

VII. Even a good moral life and devotion to duty may cause one to despise "publicans and sinners," Luke 18:9-14.

VIII. Fine clothes, cars, homes, meetinghouses, etc. can be dan-

Charts & Outlines

gerous, if we depend on these things rather than on personal faith, devotion, godly lives, saving souls, etc., 1 John 2:15-17.

- IX. Loyalty to home and duty led the elder son to despise his wayward, prodigal brother, Luke 15:11-31.
- X. Great talent and a good voice, etc. can ruin a preacher if it keeps him from studying and working for the Lord, 2 Timothy 2:15.
- XI. Good health or youthfulness now may keep some from obeying the Gospel.
 - A. There is no promise of a tomorrow for any of us, irrespective of how young we may be, Proverbs 27:1; James 4:13-15.
 - B. Aware that of our eventual demise or that Jesus Christ could return possibly within our lives, we ought to live godly now, 2 Peter 3:9-11.

Conclusion:

- 1. The physical blessings of which we have been recipients are nearly innumerable.
- 2. Especially Christians must exercise caution regarding our earthly blessings lest they draw us away from God.
- 3. Blessings also increase our responsibilities!
 - a. A good job, for instance, increases one's responsibility to give heartily to the church so the Lord's work can continue.
 - b. Worldly honor increases one's responsibility to influence the world with the Gospel.
- 4. Blessings are like an automobile, neither good nor bad, but someone behind the steering wheel determines the use and the course.

Invitation:

- 1. In addition to the physical blessings that God showers on the just and on the unjust, He reserves spiritual blessings for those who are in Christ, Matthew 4:45; Ephesians 1:3.
- 2. Put on Christ today in baptism to begin enjoying spiritual blessings, Galatians 3:27.
- 3. Others present may have discarded their spiritual blessings and need to return to the Lord, 1 John 2:1-6. 



Rebecca Rushmore

(answers inside back cover)

1. To whom did Luke address the letter?
2. Who was Caesar when Christ was born?
3. Who was Caesar when John began his ministry in the wilderness?
4. How old was Jesus when He began his ministry?
5. How did the scribes and Pharisees feel when Jesus restored a man's hand on the Sabbath?
6. What did Jesus do the night before he chose the twelve apostles?
7. To whom did Jesus refer as his mother and brothers?
8. Of the ten lepers cleansed by Jesus, what was noted about the one who returned to thank Him?
9. In what city did Jesus meet Zacchaeus?
10. What is another name for Passover?

Did You Know?

Daniel and Ezekiel prophesied to the Jews who were captive in Babylon. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi prophesied to the Jews who returned to Jerusalem after the exile.



God's "More Excellent Way"

Betty Burton Choate

Throughout the world, and in every religion, there is the belief in the miraculous, the supernatural. Followers of animism, Satanism, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and almost all denominational groups claim that the power to do miracles is available today for the use of those who have enough faith to command it. Such people look in disdain on those who deny the miraculous, convinced that their religion is powerless and dead.

Is the God of Heaven Performing Miracles Today?

This question should be considered from five standpoints.

1. What has been the work of the Holy Spirit?

During the Old Testament period of time, when God sent a new messenger or a new message, He often — but not always — confirmed the authority of the new spokesman through the use of miracles done by the power of the Holy Spirit. The accounts of Moses, Elijah, Elisha and others of the great figures of Israel are evidences of this fact.

Yet, there were many godly men of the Old Testament period who did not perform a single recorded miracle: Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jonah, Jeremiah and countless others would be in this list. Obviously, God's greater work was through the lives and messages of His servants, without emphasis on the miraculous.

Historically, God has dealt with man primarily through **providential care** — *the use of events, people, governments, nature and all other natural-appearing tools at His disposal*. This does not mean that God was not working in the lives of His people but only that He was not working contrary to the laws of nature, which He, Himself, set in motion as the primary governing power in the physical world. The very word "miracle" brings to mind the extraordinary, the exception to the rule. If miracles had

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been God's day-to-day method of dealing with man, they would be the norm, not a subject of awe and acclaim!

2. What Has Been the Purpose of God's Use of Miracles?

When **John** came on the scene at the end of the Old Testament era, there is no record that he had been given miraculous power. John was a prophet — the long-promised forerunner of the Messiah — but **he did no miracles.**



Jesus, bodily personifying the God-head, healed the sick, raised the dead and controlled nature. He proved by the things He did that He is truly Lord of the universe.

Jesus promised **His apostles** that they would receive **the baptism of**

the Holy Spirit which would:

1. enable them to perform all types of miracles (Acts 2:4; 3:6),
2. empower them to remember all that Jesus had taught them (John 14:26).
3. enable the apostles to give individual miraculous gifts to others, through praying for particular baptized believers and laying their hands on them.

The primary purpose of the miracles performed by the apostles was *not the healing of a physical body* but **the confirmation of the message being preached**, the producing of faith in the hearts of those who heard and saw. Mark 16:20 explains, ***“And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.”***

John 20:30-31 also states clearly that God's purpose in using miracles and in recording them was to produce faith in Christ. ***“And truly, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples...but these are written***

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that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

3. Who Was Able to Perform Miracles in the Early Church?

- **The Apostles** could do **all the different types of miracles**, from speaking in languages which they had not studied to raising the dead.
- **Disciples** on whom the apostles had laid their hands (Acts 6:6; 8:15) were given **individual miraculous gifts**, of the nine that are named in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10.

However, we learn from Philip’s experience in Acts 8:6 and 14-18 that, **even though Philip himself** (one of the seven on whom the apostles had laid their hands, imparting the power to do some miraculous things, Acts 6:6) **could perform miracles in order to prove to the listeners that he was speaking the message of God, he could not give to anyone else the power to do miracles!** Peter and John — apostles — had to come all the way from Jerusalem to give miraculous gifts to selected Christians, so that they could provide leadership and guidance in the infant church, which, as yet, had no New Testament for guidance.

Can we do a simple subtraction problem? If apostles and those to whom they gave individual miraculous gifts were the only ones mentioned in the early church as having miraculous power, and if the ones who had been given the gifts by the apostles could not pass those gifts on to the next generation of believers, what happened? **Take the apostles away from the earth and take the recipients of special gifts away, and who is left to do miracles?** Doesn’t two minus two equal zero?

4. Did the Apostles Promise Miracles to their Audiences?

Careful reading of the New Testament shows the absence of grandiose promises as made to today’s general audiences by so-called miracle workers. They say, “God can give you wealth! Why ask for a Chevrolet when God wants you to have a Cadillac? God can heal you of every disease! He has promised healing! All you have to do is claim what is already yours! If you have faith, God will heal you NOW!”

However, when Peter and John healed the lame man at the Gate

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Beautiful (Acts 3), they did not tell him beforehand what they were about to do, and they did not ask if he had any faith at all in Jesus Christ! Do they sound even remotely like modern-day Pentecostal preachers? No!

When **Timothy** had stomach problems, Paul gave him medicinal instructions (1 Timothy 5:23). When **Trophimus** was too sick to travel, Paul didn't remind him that he could be miraculously healed if his faith was strong enough (2 Timothy 4:20). Instead, he left him in Miletus until he could recover from his sickness. When **Epaphroditus** was so sick he almost died, there is no indication from the record in Philippians 2:25-30 that he, Paul or the Philippian Christians ever considered the possibility that he could have been healed through a miracle.

What Is “the More Excellent Way” than Miracles?

Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth, “*And yet I show you a more excellent way*” (1 Corinthians 12:31). He had been discussing the individual miraculous gifts that the various Christians had, and the fact is that these were only “*in part*” — one person had miraculous faith, another had miraculous knowledge, while some other member of a congregation had the gift of prophesying or proclaiming God's Word. This meant that they were all dependent on each other for knowledge and growth.

Some say we are the ones who are handicapped if God has taken away the use of miracles in this age. Lock up your Bible and see how crippled you are in your own spiritual growth! Try teaching the truth to an unbeliever, without the words of that Book as authority behind what you say! No, first-century Christians, even with their spiritual gifts as aids, were at a real disadvantage compared to us in this age of plenteous copies of God's Word!

Further explaining his prophecy, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:10 that *something “perfect”* (not *someone*; he was not speaking of Jesus' Second Coming) would be coming, and miraculous gifts would cease at that point in time. The only perfect thing in this world is God's Word! By the time it was completed, the apostles and those with special gifts were at or near the end of their lives. Thus, the miraculous age came to a close.

Why? Because God was handicapping Himself to work without

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miraculous power? No! Because God knew that His Word, coupled with faith on our part and providential care on His part, was by far the safer and better way for us to live in this world.

God knew the ability of magicians such as Simon the sorcerer who deceived many into thinking that he had real powers from God (Acts 8:9-10). God also knew and had forewarned of the *“lying wonders”* that Satan would be able to perform. *“For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect”* (Matthew 24:24). So, just the fact that a person claims to do wonders and miracles does not prove that he works by the power of God.

Jesus also warned in very clear language:

Not everyone who says to Me “Lord, Lord,” shall enter the kingdom of 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 stern words warn us to be wary of those who claim to do wonders in the name of Christ. Jesus’ own emphasis was not what men might appear to be able to do, but whether they were teaching the will of God, as it is revealed in His Word. Again, we see that God has made His Word the final authority, not the claims of wonders and miracles. In this way, He has protected us from the danger of being deceived by people who are no more than magicians and flimflam workers.

What Would Be the Consequence If God Were Working through the Miraculous Today?

People would legitimately be confused about just which “god” is God. Not only do “Pentecostals” pray for miracles, but Hindu “holy men” also claim the power from Shiva and others of their pantheon of gods. Animists use charms and “voodoo” to perform “miracles.” People of all kinds of religious beliefs call on all kinds of gods and goddesses to do “wonders,” and they have multitudes of followers who believe devoutly that the wonder-workers are displaying the genuine power of God. On

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whose doctrine do we stake our souls?

God's Word is the authority. He tells us what to do and how to please Him. There is no need for a miracle to prove His Word because it was fully confirmed almost 2,000 years ago at the time it was written.

What would be the consequence if God were working through the miraculous today? Ultimately, according to the promises, requirements and procedures followed by "faith healers" in this age, there would be a great loss of faith. Why? Because healers promise anything, if the recipient has "enough faith." But there are sincere people with real health problems, and they are not "healed," even though they try, try and try to believe enough to squeeze out the miracle. What do you think it does to their faith when their blinded eyes never see or their missing legs are not restored? They must live out their lives, convinced that their faith is too weak to drag a miracle out of God. So, what must they fear concerning their salvation?

What would be the consequence if God were working through the miraculous today? No true Christian could be allowed by God to be sick, to have severe problems or to die, because whatever miracle God did for one He would be compelled to do for all, or be shown as a respecter of persons. Let's just suppose for a few minutes that God's primary concern really is the healing of these physical bodies, and He really has promised that I have only to believe and He will heal my disease. So, how many times must He heal me? If I ever become sick to the point of death, does that mean that my faith failed, and that I am dying in jeopardy of being eternally lost, since I evidently don't have enough faith for God to heal me this time? Or, does it mean that, at the last, God failed?

A man recently told me he knew of another man who had been raised from the dead, but the resurrected man has since died again! What happened? Why did God raise him once, yet in a few months allow him to die again without raising him back to life?

How many times would we expect and demand that God heal us and raise us from the dead, if this was His standard way of dealing today with sickness and death? Would the case ever develop when we would not expect another miracle? Would not the ones who had mighty faith just live

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forever in this world? Yet, if that could be so, why did the apostles and early Christians die? Surely, their faith was every bit as strong as ours can be! Where are they? Can we not see how ridiculous it is to make God's emphasis the healing of these physical bodies?

What would be the consequence if God were working through the miraculous today? Actually, we would be in a real mess of claims and counter-claims among all peoples of all religions, and we would not know what to believe!

We would probably have major problems with jealousies and accusations of partiality on God's part. The Christians at Corinth evidently looked at each other's special gifts and felt some jealousy, since Paul reasoned with them about not allowing a schism to develop in the body (1 Corinthians 12:15-31). Since people usually doubt God rather than themselves, humanity as a whole would lay the blame for sickness and death at the feet of God, not on their own weak faith! The result would be that disappointed expectations of miraculous healings would become the basis of blaming God and of turning even further from Him, instead of producing faith.

5. What Was Jesus' Emphasis When He Promised the Power of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles?

In John 14, there are three references to miraculous powers resulting from the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

1. He said that *“the Father who dwells in Me does the works...believe Me for the sake of the works themselves”* (14:10-11). In this instance, Jesus was saying that His miraculous works were a means to an end, not the end itself. The works were done for the purpose of producing faith in Christ.
2. Jesus promised, *“He who believes in me...greater works than these he will do...”* (v. 12). What could be a greater miracle than Jesus' raising of Lazarus? Yet, the apostles did do far greater works because of what was made possible when Jesus ascended to the Father. Through their preaching of the Gospel and opening the kingdom to

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believers, they brought about the eternal salvation of souls! This has been God’s ultimate goal of the ages, not the healing of the human body! When people are so shortsighted that they make physical healing the great and mighty power of God, they have missed God’s point. Jesus came to seek and save the lost, not to heal the sick. He, Himself, said even during His personal ministry that the sick need a physician — not a “faith healer”! (Matthew 9:12)

3. The only other reference to the miraculous in John 14 is verse 26. ***“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.”*** Though indeed it would be a mighty miracle for a preacher today to be able to remember all that Jesus taught — all that the Holy Spirit recorded in the New Testament, which is the product resulting from His teaching them ***“all things”*** during that miraculous age — this passage makes no mention of healing sick bodies or raising the dead! Again, Jesus’ concern was for the message of salvation that His followers would be preaching.

Yet, who among modern “faith healers” has full, miraculous and infallible knowledge of all that Jesus said and of all that the Holy Spirit recorded in the Scriptures? Can these men quote all the Scriptures?

Further, there is tremendous difference in doctrine among those who claim to do miracles. What’s wrong? Is the Holy Spirit teaching conflicting doctrines?

What about the “Miracles”?

Many who believe that miracles are being performed today would swear and declare that they have seen “healings.” Let us not forget two important facts about the human and his mind.

1. Medical doctors say that approximately 80% of the physical maladies about which people complain originate in the mind. If they originated there, they can be cured in the same way.
2. Doctors also confirm that the mind is legitimately a powerful force in controlling the wellness and well-being of the physical body. Happi-

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ness, hope, faith and determination — all of these attitudes can actually be forces at work in healing physical diseases. On the other hand, stress, worry, fear and other negative mental conditions can greatly harm physical health through the toxins they cause to be secreted into the body. Yet, these sicknesses and recoveries are not miraculous; they are the normal mechanisms God put in place when He created man.

Conclusion

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit worked in four ways:

- Through Jesus, giving Him unlimited power to do the work of God.
- Through the apostles, enabling them to preach the whole Gospel without the use of the written New Testament as reference, to confirm their message through miracles and to give individual spiritual gifts to others.
- Through selected Christians who were given those special miraculous powers, to teach and to sustain the church during its infant state, before the completion of the written Word.
- Jesus categorized saving souls as being greater than restoring health or raising a dead body back to physical life.

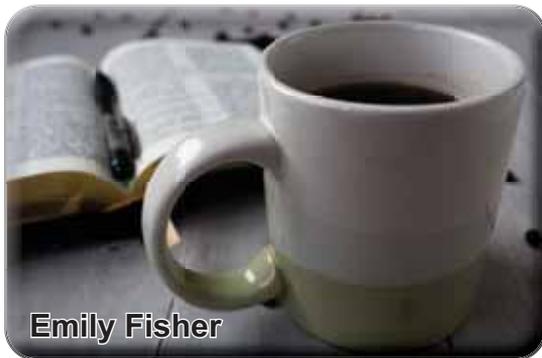
It is evident from a careful study of the Scriptures that miracles were used to confirm the message of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the New Testament, and that they ceased when that work was completed. This does not mean, however, that God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are not working today. God hears and answers the prayers of His children, using His power in providential means (1 John 5:14-15). Jesus intercedes for us at God's right hand (1 Timothy 2:5). The Holy Spirit imparts the Truth through the revealed and confirmed Word of God. This is God's *"more excellent way"*. 



Did You Know?

Noah's father, Lamech, was 56 when Adam died. Jacob was 15 when Abraham died. Terah, Abraham's father, was 128 when Noah died.

Noting Your Bible



The Lord's Church

It is pertinent that Christians be able to convey to others the concept of what the New Testament church is by going to the source that tells us all about Christ's church. God's Word, the Bible, tells us what He wants and expects concerning His church. If we are a part of His church, we should be able and willing to study with those outside of it in order to bring them to the Truth.

1. In the front of your Bible for quick reference, write, "**The Lord's church, Isaiah 2:2-3.**" Turn to Isaiah 2, and write, "**The church was prophesied (see Daniel 2).**"
2. Turn to Daniel 2 and in the context of verses 31-45, write, "**The kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome fell. The Lord's kingdom (established during Roman kings) will last forever (also 2 Peter 1:11) (see Joel 2:28-32).**"
3. In Joel 2:28-32, note, "**Fulfilled on Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.**" You may want to make a reference to all four of these passages since they are easy to remember: Isaiah 2, Daniel 2, Joel 2 and Acts 2.
4. Turn to Acts 2:33, writing, "**Promise of Holy Spirit, just as Jesus had told them, signifying the kingdom under the Messiah's reign (also 1:4; Mark 9:1; Luke 24:49) (see Hebrews 12:22-29).**"
5. Note in Hebrews 12, "**Because of Jesus the church is registered in Heaven (see Matthew 16:16-20).**"
6. Turn to Matthew 16:16, and write, "**Christ is the Builder of the church (see 1 Corinthians 3:11).**"

7. Next to 1 Corinthians 3:11, write, "**see Isaiah 28:16.**"
8. In Isaiah 28, note, "**Christ is the Cornerstone (see 1 Peter 2:4-10).**"
9. In 1 Peter 2, write, "**The church is built of living stones = holy priests = believers (see Acts 11:26).**"
10. Turn to Acts 11:26 and write, "**Christians make up the church (see Revelation 1:5).**"
11. Turn to Revelation 1:5, and write, "**Those who have been washed in His blood are in the church (see Acts 20:28).**"
12. In Acts 20, note, "**The Lord bought the church with His blood (see Romans 16:16).**"
13. Next to Romans 16:16, write, "**The church belongs to Christ (see Ephesians 5).**"
14. Turn to Ephesians 5, and next to verses 23-32, write, "**Christ is Head of the church (see 1:22-23).**"
15. In Ephesians 1, write, "**Christ has one body = one church (also 2:16; 4:4; Colossians 1:13-18) (see 1 Corinthians 4:17).**"
16. Write next to 1 Corinthians 4:17, "**By inspiration Paul taught the same doctrine everywhere (also 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:3-16) (see Acts 2:47).**"
17. Lastly, turn back to Acts 2 and write, "**The Lord adds the saved to the church (see verses 36-42).**" Beside those verses, note, "**Repentance and baptism are commands to obey in order to be forgiven = to be saved = to be added to the church.**"

Have you been added to Christ's body, His church?



Emily Fisher is a missionary, a staff writer for *The Voice of Truth International* and works with World Evangelism. She resides in Winona, Mississippi, USA.



Did You Know?

John recorded six miracles of Jesus not found in the other Gospels: healing a nobleman's son of fever (2:1), healing a man at Bethesda (5:1), healing a man born blind (9:1), raising Lazarus from the dead (11:43) and a second catch of fish (21:1).

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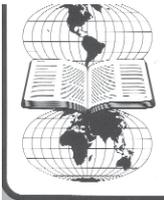
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What Can You Do to Help Spread the Word?

- * For just a moment, put yourself in a village in Africa, or even in a large city in India, or in the jungles of South America. You are an immortal soul, living in a perishing body. How will you knowledgeably prepare for the judgment and eternity that awaits us all?
- * Does the church of Christ exist in your community, so that you can hear the Gospel preached? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- * Is there a source for buying Bibles in your community? Though the Bible has been translated into most languages, villages seldom have bookstores. For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- * If you have found the Truth and are a Christian, is there a bookstore from which you can order additional study materials? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.

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

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Answers to Puzzles

Verse Search (page 40)

1. He was going to spend the winter with them.
2. Until Pentecost.
3. A very effective door had been opened to him.
4. Timothy.
5. Send him on his way in peace.
6. Apollos.
7. Fast, faith, brave, strong.
8. Household of Stephanas.
9. Ministry of the saints.
10. Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaicus.
11. Supplied what was lacking and refreshed Paul's spirit.
12. Churches of Asia.
13. Aquila and Priscilla.
14. Holy kiss.
15. Paul wrote it with his own hand.
16. Those who did not love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bible Word

Scramble (page 93)

priesthood

Bible Find (page 42)



Scavenger Hunt (page 97)

1. Theophilus (1:3)
2. Caesar Augustus (2:1)
3. Tiberius Caesar (3:1-2)
4. about 30 (3:23)
5. "filled with rage" (6:6-11)
6. prayed all night (6:12-13)
7. those who hear and do the Word of God (8:21)
8. He was a Samaritan (17:16)
9. Jericho (19:1-2)
10. Feast of Unleavened Bread (22:1)

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