

VOLUME NINETY - ONE

THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL



If You Have Never

Mary Kelly Oler

If you have never felt the joy
Of sharing a brother's loss;
If your own arms have not grown strong
By bearing another's cross;

If you have never brought a smile
To a face tear-stained and grim;
If your own hands have not held up
The light when the way grew dim;

If you have never told someone
Of a better life to be,
Then you have walked in a path unknown
To the Man of Galilee!



Examples of Conversions

	HEAR THE GOSPEL	BELIEVE FAITH	REPENT OF SINS	CONFESS CHRIST	BAPTISM
1	DAY OF PENTECOST ACTS 2:36-42	HEARD 2:37		REPENT 2:37-38	BAPTIZED 2:38-41
2	SAMARITANS ACTS 8:5-13	HEARD 8:6	BELIEVED 8:12		BAPTIZED 8:12
3	SIMON ACTS 8:13	HEARD 8:6	BELIEVED 8:13		BAPTIZED 8:13
4	ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH ACTS 8:36-41	HEARD 8:35		CONFESSED 8:37	BAPTIZED 8:38
5	SAUL - (PAUL) ACTS 9:1-9; 22:6-16; 26:12-19	HEARD 22:16			BAPTIZED 9:18
6	CORNELIUS ACTS 10:25-48	HEARD 10:33	BELIEVED 10:43		BAPTIZED 10:48
7	LYDIA ACTS 16:13-15	HEARD 16:13-14	BELIEVED 16:14		BAPTIZED 16:15
8	PHILIPPIAN JAILOR ACTS 16:25-33	HEARD 16:32	BELIEVED 16:31		BAPTIZED 16:33
9	THE CORINTHIANS ACTS 18:8	HEARD 18:8	BELIEVED 18:8		BAPTIZED 18:8
10	12 MEN AT EPHESUS ACTS 19:1-7	HEARD 19:5			BAPTIZED 19:5

PREACHING	HEAR	FAITH	REPENTANCE	CONFESS	BAPTISM
Romans 10:17 Galatians 1:6-9	Mark 4:23 Acts 10:22	Hebrews 11:6 Hebrews 5:4-9	Luke 13:3, 5 Acts 2:38	Romans 10:10 Matthew 10:32-33	1 Peter 3:21

Source: Bible Charts

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THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST SALUTE YOU
(ROMANS 16:16).



The Miserable Experiment

Louis Rushmore

Almighty God created the angelic host (Genesis 2:1; Isaiah 45:12; Nehemiah 9:6; Colossians 1:16), and many of them rebelled against their Creator (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:9). Consequently, it might seem that creating angels was a *miserable experiment*.

The Godhead created mankind (Genesis 1:26-27), and the first couple (Genesis 3:6), as well as the balance of humankind after them (Romans 3:10, 23), transgressed divine instructions provided to them. In such a condition, mortals were not suitable to be in the presence of a Holy God (Genesis 3:23-24; Isaiah 59:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 1:9). Creating mankind, then, also appears to have been a *miserable experiment*.

Subsequently in the course of punishing wayward humanity, God on more than one occasion modified the created universe into which He had placed mankind (Genesis 3:15-19; 7:11-12, 20-23; 11:1-9). All that God had created, which He had styled as “good” (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and “very good” (Genesis 1:31), became less than what it had been. The universe and every component part within it is winding down and slowly deteriorating. Even the created world and everything else that God made from nothing (Hebrews 11:3) appear to be specimens of a *miserable experiment*.

When God endowed angels and mankind with freewill, He gave to them the capacity to make choices for themselves (Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21). Unfortunately, some of the angels chose to defy God. Regrettably, every human who has attained the ability to discern between right and wrong, likewise, has chosen at one time or another in his or her life to disobey God. Not only is the universe wearing out, often humans expedite

its demise through the harvesting of the globe's resources without land reclamation, as well as generally through pollution of land, air and water. What a colossal *miserable experiment* it must be concerning the failures of angels and people, plus the ruination of our planet home.

The first definition of "miserable" is, "being in a pitiable state of distress or unhappiness" (Merriam-Webster). The word "experiment" means, "test, trial... a tentative procedure... an operation or procedure carried out under controlled conditions in order to discover an unknown effect or law, to test or establish a hypothesis..." (Merriam-Webster). The plight of the fallen angels, fallen mankind and the falling-apart universe may seem from mankind's perspective to be a pitiable state of distress and unhappiness resulting from a test in order to discover an unknown effect. However, from the divine perspective, such is not the case at all.

God was not experimenting when He created the angels, humans and the entire universe. Further, Deity was not attempting through creation to discover anything unknown to establish a hypothesis. Through divine foreknowledge rather (Isaiah 42:9; 46:10), God knew exactly what to expect from His creation, and yet, the Godhead chose to go through with creation anyway. In addition, God devised a plan of redemption whereby mankind could once more come into the presence of a Holy God (Titus 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:18-20).

Perhaps the pinnacle of what might seem to have been a *miserable experiment* was when God Incarnate was murdered by the very human creation that God sent His Son to rescue. What restraint in the face of such ungratefulness our Lord Jesus Christ showed while being crucified on Calvary's cross. He did not call down more than twelve legions of angels to destroy this world and mankind – this *miserable experiment* – and set Himself free (Matthew 26:53). The love of God and Jesus Christ exceeded wretched and sinful humanity all so that we would have the opportunity to be saved (Romans 5:8-10).

Dear Reader, resolve not to be a *failed* part of a *miserable experiment*. Human redemption is anything but a *miserable experiment*, but to carelessly disregard the efforts of God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf makes it all for us personally merely a miserable experiment. ***"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him"*** (Hebrews 2:3 NKJV). 



A Family of Addicts

Jerry Bates

There are a host of little known characters in the Bible, yet sometimes they are great examples. One such example is Stephanas, found only in two passages (1 Corinthians 1:16; 16:15-17). The second biblical citation reads, ***“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.”*** Notice that Paul said that the household of Stephanas had ***“devoted”*** themselves to the ministry. Stephanas was enthusiastically dedicated to God and His work. It could also be said that he was addicted, not just him, but his whole household. We often think that any addiction is bad. Multitudes of people today are addicted to various harmful or even evil things, such as drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, etc. Many would also think that an overcommitment to religion is likewise bad. The term “religious fanatic” carries a bad connotation. However, when we are truly committed to God and His ministry, addiction is good.

Stephanas did not look for an excuse not to be involved in the work of the Lord, nor did he expect others to do the work. He could not sit idly by while either the work was undone or others labored. Sometimes one may say in jest, “Work doesn’t bother me a bit. I can sit and look at it all day.” When it comes to religion, that humorous statement is true far too often. It seems that the majority of church members can sit and look at the work of the church all day, yet never try to do much. The old preacher joke is that 10% of the church does 90% of the work, and it seems that the joke is not far from the truth. Stephanas was undoubtedly part of the 10%.

Stephanas was one of the few who was personally baptized by Paul (1:16), and his house is said to be the “*firstfruits*” of Paul’s labors in Achaia. His family understood that faith without works is dead (James 2:20). They understood about priorities. Many intend to do things for God, but other things keep getting in the way. However, when a person is addicted or devoted to something, nothing gets in the way. A drug addict will do virtually anything to get his drug. Stephanas was part of the church in Corinth, a church with many problems. The congregation did not have enough concern for Paul, but Stephanas and two others did the work the entire church should have been doing (1 Corinthians 16:17). Their desire to help Paul and his ministry was their number one priority. Where is the



church in your list of priorities?

An addiction compels you to do something. It becomes something that drives you or constrains you. Addicts will often say they want to quit, but their addiction controls them. The love of Christ should compel us as well. ***“For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus; that if One died for all, then all died”*** (2 Corinthians 5:14). Paul said he was a debtor to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, to the wise and to the unwise (Romans 1:14). We are to be controlled by the Spirit. ***“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit”*** (Ephesians 5:18). When we place ourselves under the control of the Spirit, His Word, then we will be compelled to do things that may seem foolish to the world. We will be busy working for the Lord.

God and His church need many more to addict themselves to service. An addict does not wait for someone to offer to satisfy his addiction. He seeks it out. Thus, one devoted to the service of God does not wait to be asked to do something. God was a volunteer. God voluntarily gave His Son on the cross. Jesus voluntarily gave His life. When God needed a messenger, Isaiah said, ***“Here am I, send me.”*** David volunteered to fight Goliath. Nehemiah volunteered to go back and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. All of these people, and others as well, took it upon themselves to do what they knew was a duty. They considered it a privilege and would not shirk the work. Yet, many Christians will not do anything unless asked, and even then, they act as if they are doing you a favor by helping. We need to remember that we do not work for any man; rather, we are working for God.

The work of the church is for every member, not for “them” (whoever that might be). The unsaved always need to be taught. The sick, the mournful and the aged always need help and encouragement. We must do our duty and not wait for some “organized program.” We can rest assured that God will reward our labors. ***“For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister”*** (Hebrews 6:10). Alvin York, the great military hero of WWI, was once asked why he did the deeds of bravery that he performed. He simply stated in his Tennessee mountain English, “I seen my duty and done it.” Could you make that same statement regarding the work at your congregation? 



Real Peace

Byron Nichols

The desire for peace is a universal longing as people all over the world pray for and long for peace. The Bible has a lot to say about peace, so let's consider together some of what the Scriptures reveal about this very important matter.

The Bible Says to Strive or Seek for Peace.

Psalm 34:14 tells us, ***“Depart from evil and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.”*** This emphasis is repeated to the church in the New Testament as Paul urged, ***“Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another”*** (Romans 14:19). Paul recognized the value of peace as he showed to what extent our efforts should be to have peace. Notice what he penned in Romans 12:18; ***“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”*** What was he saying? He was saying, “Peace is so important and valuable that each Christian must work hard for peace to exist that if it does not prevail, it cannot possibly be because of a lack of dedicated effort on one’s part!”

Paul continued this emphasis as he closed 2 Corinthians in 13:11; ***“Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”*** One means of determining the value of something is by seeing the

amount of effort that is required to attain it. With this in mind, we can see, then, that peace has a very high value placed upon it by the Scriptures.

So, Peace Is Important, but What Is Its Source; How Do We Get It?

We read in Luke 2 of the birth of Jesus, and it is interesting that a multitude of the heavenly host praised God and said, ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”*** (vs. 14). Surely it is noteworthy that the coming of the Christ was so closely associated with peace. Luke also wrote the Book of Acts, and in 10:36 he stated that peace is preached through Jesus Christ. Thus, without Christ, there is no true peace. In Ephesians 2:14 Paul plainly affirmed that Jesus is ***“our peace,”*** having made peace possible through the shedding of His blood on the cross. In so doing, He destroyed the separation of the Jews and the Gentiles, making all one. Let’s also notice Paul’s comment in Colossians 1:19-20; ***“For it pleased the Father that in Him [Jesus] all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”*** So, we find that peace comes from the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God for the sins of the entire world!

Now We Come to the Ultimate Peace —the Peace within—the Real Peace.

As treasured as world peace would be, greater still is the peace that we can possess within us through a deep faith in God and a right relationship with Him. Neither peace nor turmoil in our nation or in the world as a whole dictates whether we have personal peace. If anything, the presence of turmoil around us can cause the faithful child of God to value even more highly his or her relationship with God and the fact that nothing or no one can take that peace from us.

Those who are committed to serving Jesus are blessed by the words of Romans 8:6; ***“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”*** Paul said to all who are striving to serve the Lord today, ***“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful”*** (Colossians 3:15).

Unfortunately, it is possible for us to unknowingly possess a peace of mind that is misleading and only temporary. We can deceive ourselves into believing that we are going to experience the eternal peace of heaven just because we **desire** that result. However, we read throughout the New Testament of well-meaning people who were sincerely trying to serve the Lord, but they found out that they were not a part of the church which Jesus promised to build (Matthew 16:18). After they were taught, many complied with the requirements of Christ to **believe** in Him as the Son of God (John 8:24), **repent** of their sins (Acts 2:38), **confess** their faith in Christ (Matthew 10:32), **be baptized** by immersion for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21) and **serve faithfully** till death (Revelation 2:10).

Please do not gamble with your soul and your opportunity for that everlasting peace. Obey the Lord as those did in the first century. **The commands and the benefits are still the same today.** **✝**





1932—2008

Don't Ever Belittle the Church

J.C. Choate

Have you ever heard anyone say, “One church is just as good as another” or “You don’t have to be a member of any church to be saved. Just repeat ‘The Sinner’s Prayer’ and you’ll be alright”? Or, worse, have you heard people belittle and mock “organized religion” as a farce, because of all the division and confusion in the teachings and practices of the religious world?

Before you get too caught up in rejection of the idea of “church,” think with me a **moment**: **Did you know that the church is called *the bride of Christ***? Marriage is a common and well-understood thing throughout the world. A man chooses one special woman to become his bride. He **marries** her. He gives her **his name**. He lives to **protect** her, to **provide** for her needs, to **love** her, and if he loves her enough, and if the need arises, **he will die to save her**. If necessity separates them for a time, his paramount thought is **returning to her**.

As the bride of Christ, the church is ***the church of Christ***, and the children of the union are “Christians.” Just as in physical marriage, no husband would allow his wife to wear the name or names of countless other men. The bride – church – of Christ is to wear her Husband’s name. ***“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”*** (Acts 4:12). ***“And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch”*** (Acts 11:26)

The bride is to love and obey her husband. ***“If you love Me, keep My***

commandments” (John 14:15). The clarification is further emphasized in Galatians 1:8, where it reads, “...*even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.*” The many doctrines and creeds created by men to govern the churches they have started are in direct violation of this Scripture.

The parallel between human marriage and the marriage of Christ and His church is beautifully described in Ephesians 5:22-33, where the church is urged to love and obey Christ, where the love and care of Christ for His bride are held up as examples to the human couple and where the willingness of Christ to lay down His life for His bride – because of His great love for her – is described. The relationship is worded this way:

“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water [baptism] by the word [in strict accordance with the Scriptures] that He might present her to Himself [He is coming again, to receive His bride to Himself] a glorious church [singular, one unified body, not thousands of denominations], not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

From this parallel between Christ and His church, and a husband and a wife, we can see that there is a very special relationship between the church and her Husband. He would be greatly offended if anyone mocked or belittled His bride – the very body of people for whom He gave His life on the cross. That blood makes the church a sacred institution, to be loved and honored as the spiritual body over which Christ is the spiritual Head.

Yet, there are many in the religious world who attempt to reduce the church to nothing more than a manmade organization that is of no importance. They will tell you that it is not necessary to even be a member of it to go to heaven. To justify all of these denominations, some explain that by putting all of them together, under a big “umbrella,” you end up with the church that we can read about in the Bible. Others go to John 15 and say that Christ is the vine and that the branches of that vine are the different denominational churches.

Some of these churches wear the names of their founders; some are named for the day on which they worship or after some belief or practice that is peculiar to them. These churches have all kinds of terms for membership, they worship in different ways (some of which are more

attuned to entertainment than to worship of God) and just about everything imaginable is taught and practiced by them. The amazing thing is that all of this is done in the “name” of Christ, with each one expecting the Lord to give His approval to these many kinds of “religious” teachings and practices – most of which have no foundation in Scripture at all.

How sad for the so-called Christian world to be badly divided and mixed up, making a mockery of the Lord and His way, minimizing the importance of His teaching and belittling His sacrifice for the church itself. Because of the way man has changed things and turned them around, “organized religion” amounts to nothing more than a big joke in the minds of many. The result of so much division, confusion and contradiction is that masses of people worldwide have rejected religion altogether and have become unbelievers in God and His Word.

However, nothing about the corruption of organized religion is “funny” when you stop to realize that all of the people in religious error will be lost because they have added to God’s Word or they have subtracted from it.

“For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).

Those who dare to change God’s message will also cause countless others to be lost because their followers have been deceived by their false teachings. Jesus Himself warned in Matthew 7:21-23,

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

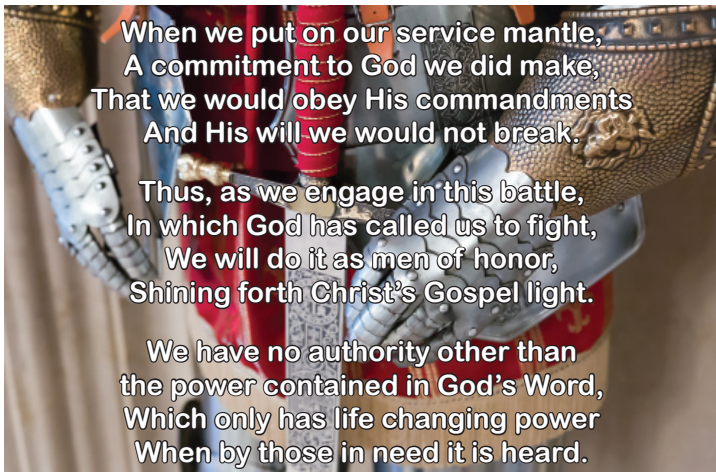
Those who would find fault with the Lord and His church and with anything that He teaches will live to regret it – actually, they will die to regret it – and there is nothing funny about that. 

Engaged in Battle

Raymond A. Leonard

We are in this fight together
In the service of the Lord.
We fight the force of evil with
God's Word, the Spirit's sword.

God has called us into His service,
His banner to hold up high,
As we preach and teach the Gospel,
That sinners need not die.



We must be persistent in the battle,
Our responsibility we cannot shirk.
We are fighting for eternal souls,
And evil does everywhere still lurk.

God has pressed us into this battle;
We are engaged in a righteous cause.
Pray that we never get so discouraged
That we want to quit or pause.✝

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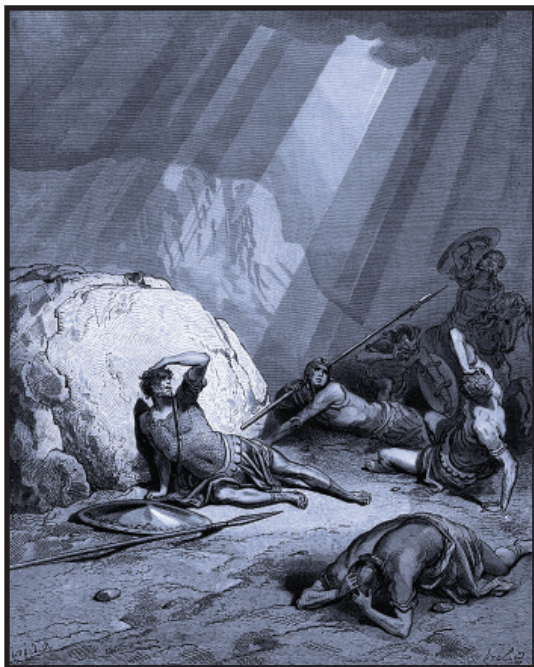
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You Can See Christ

Glenn Colley

That some would find it hard to follow a Savior they couldn't see is shown in 1 Peter 1:8, ***“whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”*** He leads and governs us with

the New Testament, which He left for us to follow (Hebrews 9:1-17).

It should be noted, however, that there is a sense in which we **can** see Christ today. In Acts 9:4, when Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, He asked, ***“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”*** How could Saul possibly persecute the Christ? Jesus had died and had been resurrected to His Father in Heaven in Acts 1, and yet, Jesus asked Saul why **he was persecuting Him**. The answer to this is simply found in Acts 8:3 where we read, ***“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.”*** The fact is, when Saul, or anyone else for that matter, hurts the people who wear Christ's name, he hurts Christ.

We can also see Jesus when we care for and love Christians. The concept will be expressed in the Judgment.

GOD

“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’” (Matthew 25:34-40)

The teaching is too clear to miss. To see the face of our Lord we must only look as far as our brother or sister sitting next to us. Whatever kindness we show to them is being received by Christ. When we see their faces, the faces of our brethren in need, there is a sense in which we are seeing the lovely face of Jesus.

It’s no wonder that the church is called the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23). We are not just His friends, but we are His body. We can see Him today. As the old song says, “Does Jesus care?...I know He cares.” 

Glenn Colley is the preacher for the West Huntsville church in Huntsville, Alabama, USA.

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Complete in Christ

David Deffenbaugh

Anyone who has ever worked a jigsaw puzzle only to find one piece is missing knows how much we care about completeness. It doesn't matter if 499 pieces of a 500-piece puzzle are there and in place. It doesn't matter that one can tell exactly the picture the puzzle makes and can admire its beauty. If one piece is missing, its incompleteness is what matters most.

People need completing too. Although our physical bodies are an incredible collection of various systems and processes, proclaimed by the Psalmist to be wonderful (Psalm 139:14), there is more to us than just our physical being. Man has always searched outside of himself for something bigger and more important than himself. His search is for completeness. Even in philosophical and educated Athens, Paul witnessed this desire as it manifested itself in the misguided attempt to worship unknown gods (Acts 17). Man's completion, though, can only be found in Jesus Christ. ***“For in***

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Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority” (Colossians 2:9-10).

Only Jesus can make us complete, because only in Jesus is all the fullness of Deity found. Read the beautiful and incredible description of just who and what Jesus is that is found in Colossians 1:15-19. There simply is no one who can compare. Certainly, many of man’s feeble efforts cannot provide for man the completeness only found in Christ – not philosophies, traditions, worship of angels, visions or self-made religion (Colossians 2:8, 18, 23). Instead, completeness is found in the salvation provided in Christ. Descriptions of that salvation serve as bookends to that glorious picture of Christ in Colossians 1:15-19 (see 1:13-14; 1:20-23). It is also found in one’s continued spiritual development.

Paul’s prayer for Christians is for them to be “filled” with knowledge of God’s will so they may *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord to please Him in all respects”* (Colossians 1:9). He continued to explain how this can happen: by bearing fruit, increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with power and giving thanks to the Father (Colossians 1:10-12).

Completeness is unquestionably important and only genuinely available in Christ. 

David Deffenbaugh preaches for the Southwest congregation of the Lord’s church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, USA.

Did You Know?

The Bible lands stretch about 2,200 miles from east to west (Rome to the Persian Gulf) and about 900 miles from north to south (Mount Ararat to Mount Sinai). A large part of that expanse is water (i.e., Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Dead Sea, Sea of Galilee, Gulf of Suez, Gulf of Aqaba).





The Peregrine Falcon

Brett Petrillo

It only weighs about two pounds, but when its eyes lock on its prey, it can slice through the air at 242 miles per hour. Being the fastest animal on the planet, the peregrine falcon is without a doubt one of the most awesome creatures. To achieve such speeds, it must be equipped with certain abilities.

1. Body Shape. When the peregrine falcon begins to dive, it naturally pulls its body into a perfectly aerodynamic shape, which looks kind of like a backward arrowhead. Once it is in this position, it bullets towards its prey at over 200 mph. Amazingly, testing has revealed that in high altitude air, a peregrine falcon could theoretically reach speeds of 174 meters per second, which is a blistering 389 mph. It's one thing to go fast, but it's another to control it. No problem here, either. All the peregrine must do is slightly alter its body shape and it can move side-to-side, slow down,

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speed up or whatever is needed to hit the target and keep itself safe.

2. Feathers. When reaching such speeds, it wouldn't take much to pluck out some feathers. For the peregrine, its feathers are extra-long to make it more aerodynamic, but also particularly stiff to handle the wind speed. However, it gets even more interesting. Only in the last year or so have scientists discovered that the peregrine falcon sticks up some small feathers in the center of its back while diving. These little feathers essentially cut through the air at the point on its back where it would normally meet the most air resistance and slow it down. With its body shape and feathers perfectly designed, the peregrine falcon is literally built for speed.

3. Breathing. If you have ever experienced a strong wind blowing in your face while running, you've probably noticed that it becomes much harder to breathe. Now imagine trying to breathe while having a consistent 200 mph wind in your face. For just about any other bird, it would make it impossible to breathe and would possibly even cause lung damage from the pressure. However, the peregrine is perfectly equipped with a little structure called a tubercle, which is a little round cone structure in the center of its nostril. When diving, this little structure slows the air that comes into the nostril and allows the peregrine to breathe easily, even at 200 mph.

4. Eyes. All this speed is pointless if the falcon can't see its prey from a very far distance away. Peregrine falcons have very large eyes with vision about eight times better than humans. This means they can spot their prey at about six miles away before they go on the attack. For our eyes to be comparable to the peregrine's, they would need to be three inches across and weigh four pounds each.

These features together make the peregrine falcon one of the most incredible predators on earth, and certainly the fastest. Each of these abilities must be in place for the peregrine to hunt and live. Whenever I come across an animal with superior abilities like this, it always raises objections in my mind towards evolution. For example, how did the peregrine know to evolve all of these abilities? Further, even if it were able

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to do so with millions of years of slight changes, where is the undeniable, documented proof of this occurring?

Yet, seeing an animal like this raises even bigger questions. Since humans are at the top of the evolutionary scale, why don't we have any of these awesome abilities? It would be very useful to have the eyes and the flying ability of the peregrine. It would be wonderful to be able to breathe underwater like a shark. It would be very handy to be able to regenerate entire limbs like some reptiles. It would be awesome to smell as well as a dog can, hear like an elephant or at the very least have the strength of the gorilla, who is supposedly a very close evolutionary "relative." But we don't have any of these abilities, and there is no documented evidence or proof to show how and why we suddenly lost them.

The gaps are too big and too many to tolerate in evolution. While certainly there is a level of faith needed, the plethora of evidence around us points to a divine Creator. We've never observed any animal changing its kind (Genesis 1:24-25). Everywhere we turn, we see design, order and reproductive consistency. Psalm 104:24 states, ***"O LORD, how many are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all; the earth is full of Your possessions."***

God has surrounded us with evidence of His power and might. May we have the eyes to see it, the softness of heart to accept it and the mouth to praise Him for it. 

Brett Petrillo is the youth/family minister of the Bear Valley church of Christ in Denver, Colorado, USA.



The Sea of Galilee (also known as Chinnereth, Genesareth and Tiberias) was the location of about 10 of the recorded miracles performed by Jesus. This body of water is approximately 12½ miles long by 7½ miles wide. Its average depth is 12 feet, but it is 165 feet at its deepest point. The surface of the Sea of Galilee is 700 feet below sea level.

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Scientific Truths in His Word

David Everson

There is indeed no one among us today who would say that God's inspired Word, the Bible, was given to us as a textbook on scientific principles. It is a record of God's dealings with man and our guidebook to eternal life. Yet, we should also not discount that as the Creator of the universe, when God comments about the physical world that, indeed, what He has said would be proven true by scientific standards. Many of these truths went against the popular "scientific facts" (opinions) of the time and were not proven to be true by fallible man for centuries after God first had them written. I would like to point out just a few of these truths that are revealed in God's Word. These truths should help reinforce our faith and help us to convince others that, **indeed, there is a God!**

We begin in the Book of Genesis, Chapter One, where God commands that all living things should, ***"Bring forth...after his kind."*** This marvelous pearl of wisdom and scientific truth was not realized by modern man until the 1850's when the great geneticist Gregor Mendel studied reproduction in garden peas. Even when this work was done and it was proved that all things can **only** reproduce living things like themselves, the popular scientists of his day rejected the significance of this great truth. Gregor Mendel died not knowing he would be called the "Father of Modern Genetics." Gregor Mendel may have described the mechanism, but God designed and revealed it several thousand years earlier!

Turning to the Book of Leviticus, we see a couple of amazing truths. In 17:11, it says this: ***"For the life of the flesh is in the blood."*** Blood is vital for life. Doctors and scientists today study this marvelous substance in great detail to learn better how it works and to make mankind healthier. However, the wisdom of man has not always agreed with God on this important fact. Blood was considered to be, more often than not, the

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problem when illness occurred. So, many times, it was taken out, because there was “too much” or it was “bad.” Bloodletting as a treatment for almost anything continued until the early 1900’s. Today, the important truth revealed by God so long ago also is now the wisdom of man.

Then, in many other references in the Book of Leviticus, God gave instructions and warnings about another long ignored scientific truth: bacterial infection and sanitation. God’s laws to the Israelites about clean and unclean animals, how to avoid disease by isolation and washing, helped them to stay healthy and therefore do the will of God. These important truths known by all civilized people are vital factors in extended lifespan and general well being. The scientific wisdom of God the Creator told to mankind so long ago can be found in the modern hospital operating rooms of the 21st century after being ignored and laughed at for hundreds of years by scientists!

Over and over again, we see the scientific truths revealed by God the Creator. Space will not allow a detailed account of all of these. Here are a few others that will fortify our faith in the God of the universe.

1. Circle of the earth (Isaiah 40:22) versus the belief that the earth was flat.
2. Stars uncountable (Genesis 15:5; Jeremiah 33:32) versus thinking that there were only 1024 stars.
3. Paths in the sea (Psalm 8:8) versus man never imagining such a thing.
4. Lightning and rain connected (Job 38:25-26) versus disregarding any connection.
5. Empty in the north sky (Job 26:7) versus thinking that stars were all over the sky.
6. Gravity supports the earth (Job 26:7) versus belief that Atlas held up the earth.
7. Seed of man in male and female (Genesis 3:15) versus thought that woman was just an incubator.

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8. Four corners of earth (Isaiah 11:12) versus no concept of magnetic pull.
9. Surgery possible (Genesis 2:21) versus supposing that cutting into the body was evil.
10. Genetic breeding traits (Exodus 30:27ff) versus belief that there was no way to control traits.
11. Foundations of earth (Isaiah 51:13) versus a simpler concept of the structure of the earth.

Indeed, we could go on and on, but these few should be enough to see that God is the Creator! As the Psalmist has said, ***“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork”*** (Psalm 19:1). 

David Everson is an elder in the church of Christ in Belington, West Virginia, and has many years of education in biology.



The Bible

Charles Cash

“All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be

thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

There is a Hebrew Bible in the Vatican that weighs 325 pounds, and it is worth, even by worldly standards, many times its weight in gold. Were it the only correct copy of the Bible in Hebrew, its value would be much greater. If it were the only correct copy in any language, its value would be incalculable.

The first Bible printed with movable type was completed around 1456 in Mainz, Germany by Johann Gutenberg, the inventor of the printing press. It is called *The Gutenberg Bible*. Only twenty of these Bibles survive, one of which was sold in 1978 for \$2,000,000.00. From Gutenberg to the early nineteenth century the total number of Bibles printed and distributed is not known because accurate records were not kept. However, fairly accurate estimates are available, beginning with the early 1800s.

The number of Bibles printed between 1816 and 1975 has been calculated by The Bible Society of the United Kingdom to be 2,458,000,000. The estimated number rose to nearly six billion by 1992. Worldwide sales of the Bible number more than 100 million each year, far more than any other book. Without any doubt whatsoever, the Bible is the best-selling book of all time. As of today, approximately 8 billion Bibles have been distributed throughout the world. These figures do not include the various digital versions of the Bible being used today by millions of people on computers, smartphones and tablets.

The complete Bible has been published in over 450 languages. The

THE WORD OF GOD

New Testament alone has been published in nearly 1,400 languages. The Gospel of Mark has been published in over 2,370 languages. Even though these figures represent less than half of the languages and dialects presently in use in the world, they nonetheless include the vehicles of communication of well over 90% of the world's population. In a world that now has more than seven billion inhabitants, there is approximately one Bible for every living person on earth. Unfortunately, there is an uneven distribution of Bibles among the nations of the world, especially in Asia and the Middle East. Some countries in the Western World may have more Bibles than people, such as in the United States. According to the Harper San Francisco Book Catalog, the American people annually spend \$425 million for Bibles, and the average American household has four copies.

Look back to the founding documents of the United States, such as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and it is evident that this nation, from its inception, was founded upon belief in God and the Bible. As we all know, there are people in this country, a minority, who are succeeding in slowly and methodically eroding that foundation. Sad indeed!

Bibles are plentiful. Whether a rare, antiquated Hebrew Bible or a common hardback variety available at any discount store or bookstore, the real value is in the message. Your Bible may be bound with soft, pliable Morocco leather and printed on the finest India paper, but it is far more than that. Through it God has spoken! **It is the Word of God!** If you avail yourself freely of the great treasures in God's Word, and measure its worth by its influence on your life and the lives of those around you, it is truly beyond all price. The Bible has always been, remains and will always be the Book of Books!

Jesus assures us, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away"* (Mark 13:31). His words have passed into proverbs, promises, doctrines and the avenue to God and the *"abundant life,"* but they have never passed away! They never will!

"Here is a book, the Bible, worth more than all others that were ever printed," observed Patrick Henry, "yet it is my misfortune never to have found time to read it." Hmmmmmm! Do we find time to read it? 

Charles Cash works with the Lord's church in Bella Vista, Arkansas, USA.

THE WORD OF GOD

What's in Between?

Edward Anderson

While discussing the culinary arts—we were really just talking about after-school snacks—a high school teacher asked if I had ever had a jam sandwich. I assured him I had often spread my mother's mouthwatering blackberry jam between two halves of a hot biscuit, fresh from the oven, spread with honest-to-goodness "pasteurized" butter, for a feast divine! However, he had something else in mind. He recalled when times were so hard that he would "jam" two pieces of bread together and eat them with nothing in between!



God's Word is food for the soul. *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). It has substance and sufficiency to furnish us completely in God's

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service (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God's Word will not disappoint the person with ***"an honest and good heart"*** (Luke 8:15). It will satisfy the hungry soul searching for truth (John 8:32; 17:17). It is versatile and adaptable for either the **newborn babe** in need of ***"the sincere milk of the word"*** (1 Peter 2:2), or it will serve as ***"strong meat"*** for those who ***"are of full age"*** (Hebrews 5:12-14).

The pantry of God's Word is always full. It is like the widow's barrel of meal and cruse of oil, which outlasted the drought (1 Kings 17:14). It is like the sandals of the Israelites which did not wear out after forty years of walking in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 29:5). It is like the loaves and fishes in the hands of the Lord as they kept feeding the hungry multitudes (John 6).

God's Word is sufficient food for every situation and lot in life. The Heavenly Father has stocked it well with everything we need for a healthy, spiritual diet. Properly and routinely ingested and digested, it will keep us humble and penitent, never letting us become puffed up with pride. It will invariably lead us to be more loving, kind, considerate, and good (1 Corinthians 13).

If you have been feeding upon the devil's junk foods and are bloated and burdened with sin, it is time to change your diet. ***"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul"*** (Psalm 19:7). Only Christ ***"has the words of eternal life"*** (John 6:68). His New Testament instructs us to **believe** in God and His Son (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24), to **repent** of all sin (Acts 3:19), to **confess Christ** as God's Son (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9-10), to be **baptized for the remission of sins** (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16) and to always **be faithful** in the Lord's service and work (1 Corinthians 15:58). 

Edward Anderson is the preacher for the Carthage Church of Christ in Carthage, Tennessee, USA.

**If you have been feeding upon
the devil's junk foods and are
bloated and burdened with sin,
it is time to change your diet.**

Verse Search



1 CORINTHIANS 7:1-16

Jerry Bates

1. Why should each man have a wife and each woman have a husband? (7:2)
2. Who has authority over one's body when he/she is married? (7:4)
3. Why does Paul say spouses may deprive one another for a time? (7:5)
4. What does Paul say that he wished all men to be in relation to marriage? (7:7)
5. Was this a commandment from the Lord or his inspired advice? (7:6)
6. For what reason did Paul say one should be married? (7:9)
7. "For it is better to _____ than to _____ with passion" (7:9)
8. What should a Christian do with his/her unbelieving spouse? (7:12-13)
9. What should one do if the unbeliever departs? (7:15)
10. "For God has called us to _____." (7:15)
11. Ideally, what can the believer do for his/her unbelieving spouse? (7:16)

(see the back cover for answers)

VERSE SEARCH

1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2 Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. 3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5 Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6 But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment. 7 For I wish that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that.

8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; 9 but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

10 Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. 11 But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife.

12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. 13 And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 15 But if the unbeliever departs let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. 16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

NOTE: This passage contains Paul's instructions regarding marriage to the Christian. In the Corinthian culture, fornication, adultery and homosexuality was commonly practiced, thus Paul addressed this problem. Paul thinks that it is better to remain unmarried; however, celibacy was certainly not necessary or morally better than marriage. He also realizes most people are not suited to remain unmarried due to lust.

A full discussion of all matters regarding marriage and divorce is not possible. God consistently teaches that He hates divorce and wants all husbands and wives to live together in love and harmony. Of course, such is not always possible; however, the only Scriptural reason given for divorce is fornication (Matthew 19:8-9).

Don't Go with the Goats!

Perry N. Hall

With very vivid description, our Creator, Savior and Judge revealed in Matthew 25:31-46 the very sobering, great and final judgment of all mankind. He showed that in the judgment to come that every human will be sentenced to a state of everlasting bliss or punishment. That great day and its administration of rewards have been committed by the Father to the Son of man (Acts 17:31). When Christ comes in His glory to judge the world, He will bring all His holy angels and sit upon His throne of glory. He presently



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sits upon the throne of His Heavenly Father, at His right hand. It is a throne of grace, to which we may boldly come. It is also a throne of government, the throne of His father, David, from which He rules with all authority His church or kingdom. He is a priest upon that throne.

The throne of glory upon which He will sit in the last day is His throne of judgment. There, He will separate the obedient from the disobedient of mankind. They dwell together now in the same nations, states, counties, cities, churches and families. Jesus said that He would separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats He will place on the left. He later declared in that same context that those on the left would go away into everlasting punishment.

Beloved, we must not go with the goats **now** if we do not want to go with them **in eternity**. Jesus revealed that He is the Good Shepherd and that He would give His life for the sheep. He also declared that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him. To them He gives eternal life.

Sheep are mild, submissive, patient, uncomplaining, useful and innocent. They also follow the shepherd! Goats are unsavory and unruly, butting against the will of the shepherd and all those that get in their rebellious way!

The disobedient, indifferent goats of this world are not really concerned about God, His will, their souls and the needs or the well-being of their fellowman. **Don't go with the goats!** 

Perry N. Hall is a Gospel preacher living in Tyler, Texas, USA.

Adam died at 930 years old. According to the genealogies listed in Genesis, Adam would have been alive when his great, great, great, great, great, great grandson Lamech was born (and for 61 years after)! Adam died 121 years before Noah was born.



SALVATION

Look on the Fields

Dayton Keesee

It is fundamental that Christ's mission among men was ***“to seek and save that which was lost”*** (Luke 19:10). Such seeking is a dedicated process. The original word (Gk. *Zeteo*) means “to seek [i.e., in order to find out] by thinking, meditating, reasoning... to inquire into... aim at, strive after... desire... require, demand” (Thayer 272).

Have you been thinking, meditating, reasoning, inquiring into, aiming at, striving after, desiring any “lost soul” recently? If we plan to follow in Christ's footsteps (1 Peter 2:21), should we be doing such activated thinking, meditating, inquiring, striving after some lost soul or souls? Did Christ really fulfil and demonstrate His mission?

A classic example (which affirms, “Yes, He did”) is found in John 4. It is interesting that His demonstration occurred (1) in an alien atmosphere – among Samaritans, (2) at a time when His apostles were spending their time thinking, acting and talking primarily about food and eating (John 4:8, 31, 33). (3) They were more concerned about correct cultural conduct than they were about converting lost souls (4:27); (4) They were considering it an inappropriate time to be involved with soul seeking – wrong place, wrong people, wrong time.

He gave them a mild rebuke when He said, ***“Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest”*** (John 4:35). The context of John 4 proves that Jesus knew what He was talking about. Right then, before their very eyes, among those Samaritans, that woman who was living with a man not her husband (4:17ff) and ***“many more believed because of His words!”*** (41ff; 1 John 4:14). Christ had both focus and faith as to His mission while His apostles were more concerned about **food** than **faith**, with a mindset on **delaying** more than **discipling**!

Do you suppose Christ might yet be saying to you or me, ***“Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest”*** (verse 35)? That looking is in the imperative mood (Gk. *Theasthe*

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of theaomai) and means to “view attentively, contemplate, to learn by looking, to perceive” (Thayer 284). Are you looking like that now as it relates to lost souls? Are you conscious of a “field” or of “fields” that are currently “white unto harvest”?

Brother Norman Gipson looked a bit haggard when he came among the faculty at Sunset School of Preaching in 1978, explaining that he had been up most of the night. After studying with a man, he returned home, writing the following song about his experience that evening:

Where Have You Been For So Long?

I talked to a man about Jesus;
He listened with wondrous surprise;
Then I felt the start of pain in my heart
When he asked with tears in his eyes;

Chorus

“Where have you been for so long?”
Why didn’t you come to my door?
Just living in sin so long I have been;
Why didn’t you tell me before?

Verse two:

I told him the Lord came from glory
To bring down salvation to men;
He joyfully heard the wonderful word,
Then wept as he asked me again:

Chorus

Verse three:

To all the whole world tell the tidings
That Christ is the Life, Truth and Way;
So when time is done and judgment has come,
No one in that throng may need say:

Chorus

Is someone waiting for **you** to come to his or her door?



Dayton Keesee is an elder in the Lord’s church in Choctaw, Oklahoma, USA.

SALVATION

If I Had Only One More Article

Bob Prichard

Over the years I have written hundreds of bulletin articles and newspaper articles. If things go as I plan, I will write several hundred more, but the day will come when I will write my last. What would I want to say to you if this were my last article?



As one of my favorite hymns says, “If you can’t sing like angels, if you can’t preach like Paul, then tell the love of Jesus, and say He died for all.” That is where I would begin. “When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died,” I can’t help but marvel about His love. I would want to remind you that you can have the same forgiveness that

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I have. Although we were unworthy, Jesus loved us enough to die for us. ***“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”*** (Romans 5:6-8).

If you realize what He has done for you, it will not be difficult to do what He asks in response. ***“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** (Matthew 16:24-26).

Denial of self is easier said than done, of course, but if you understand and appreciate what He has done for you, surely you will want to obey Him. Without Him you are lost, but with Him you will have heaven as your home (Mark 16:15-16). ***“Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death”*** (John 8:51). ***“If ye love me, keep my commandments”*** (John 14:15). Do you obey Jesus, ***“the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”*** (1 John 2:2)? 

Bob Prichard preaches for the Lord's church in Oxford, Mississippi, USA.

Did You Know? In New Testament times, Corinth was the site of the Isthmian games (similar to the Olympics) held every five years. Events included races, leaping, throwing darts, boxing and wrestling. Even warfare would be temporarily suspended for the sporting events.





Bible Find

Martha Rushmore

MARRIAGE

ACROSS

- 6 Obediently accompanied Abram Gen. 12:1-5
- 7 Bridal adornment Isa. 62:10
- 9 Spouses are not to do this Matt. 10:9
- 11 Relationship of a wife to her husband Prov. 12:4
- 12 Abraham's second wife Gen. 25:1
- 15 Had hundreds of wives and secondary wives 1 Kings 11
- 16 Married the wrong woman Gen. 29:15-30
- 17 Adulterer who murdered the woman's husband 2 Sam. 11



DOWN

- 1 Bridal adornment Isaiah 62:10
- 2 Command to husbands Ephesians 5:25
- 3 Whom wives are to love Titus 2:4
- 4 City where Jesus attended a marriage feast John 2:1-5
- 5 Bible word for engagement Matthew 1:18
- 8 Regarding his parents, a husband must do this Genesis 2:24
- 10 In the lineage of Jesus Christ Ruth 4:9-10; Matthew 1:5
- 13 Command to husbands Proverbs 5:18
- 14 Divorced because of her modesty Esther 1



THE CHURCH



The Persecuted Church

Gary C. Hampton

The Lord's letter to the church in Smyrna is filled with reassuring words for those who live in times when standing up for one's faith was being mocked. Smyrna was located 40 miles to the north of Ephesus. It was a town originally founded by Alexander the Great. There was a large library there that was later transferred to Alexandria. Smyrna was also the home of the Olympic Games. As early as 23 B.C., this city built a temple to Tiberius, the Emperor, and led the way in Asia for emperor worship under Domitian. There was a large population of Jews in that city. The church, suffering through threatened persecution and death, must have been reassured to know that Jesus is eternal and He has overcome the grave (Revelation 2:8).

THE CHURCH

How easy it is for those in suffering to feel all alone and as if no one cares. Jesus knows each person's past, present and future suffering, and He has promised to help bear those problems (Hebrews 2:17-19; 4:15-16; 1 Corinthians 10:13). The Lord also knew of their poverty; in fact, He had experienced similar conditions (Matthew 8:20). Christians are not to concentrate their efforts on obtaining material wealth (Matthew 6:19-20). The church at Smyrna was physically poor but spiritually rich. King Jesus also knew about the blasphemy or the speaking against that was coming out from those who said they were Jews. There was a synagogue there, but the Lord said it was Satan's, and not His. God's true Israel in the Christian Age is composed of those who are circumcised in heart (Revelation 2:9; Romans 2:28-29; Philippians 3:3).

Though severer trials were yet to come, and they would last a complete period, the church could be assured that the time would one day be over (2 Timothy 3:12; Philippians 1:29). The church's real enemy is Satan, the devil, which means accuser or slanderer (cf., John 8:44; 1 Peter 5:8; Luke 22:31). He would try them or tempt them to sin in the fullest possible way: imprisonment, exile or death. Christians are not to fear any of these things, for if they remained true to the faith, even if it would cost them their lives, eternal life would be their crowning reward (Luke 12:4-5; James 1:12; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; 1 Peter 5:4; 1 Corinthians 9:25).

Remember, this is the home of the Olympics, so having eternal life described as a victory crown would be quite meaningful. The brethren were urged to heed the words of this letter, and if they did, they would be immune to the second death (Revelation 2:10-11; 20:14; Romans 6:23). Such immunity is promised to those who overcome.

God's church in Smyrna experienced far greater trials than most of us have ever known or could even imagine. They remained faithful despite their suffering and were promised a crown if they remained faithful. Today's Christian should be encouraged by the example of those Christians to remain true to the Lord who bestows eternal life as a victory wreath. ✝

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

THE CHURCH

Is the Church Really That Important?

Patrick Morrison

Growing numbers of people are becoming disenchanted by the whole concept of “church” or “organized religion.” Thousands upon thousands are abandoning mainline denominations in order to pursue a Burger King-style Christianity. (In case you are wondering, Burger King’s motto is “Have it your way.”) Popular thought is that the church is not really important, that it is an unnecessary part of a real relationship with Christ, or it is nothing more than an obstacle to “authentic” spirituality.

It is true that, at times, we have done a great injustice to the world in the way that we live and act in the church, sometimes turning it into nothing but a business enterprise or a social organization. We are sometimes guilty of obscuring Christ by the way that we “do church.” There are times when our methods and our motivations are not what they need to be. There are hypocrites, there are disgruntled pew-warmers, there are unscrupulous business owners and there are worldly-minded, hedonistic pleasure-seekers in the church. Yet, there are also faithful, devoted, hard-working, Christ-following, humble, penitent, truth-loving, God-seeking, longsuffering, forgiving members in the church.

Just because we fail to live up to the ideal picture of what the church ought to be does not mean that no such ideal exists or should exist. No matter how much we may bungle it up, nothing we do or say will ever make the church irrelevant! It has always been and will always be integral to the salvation of our souls! There are a number of reasons why the church is important.

The church is important because it is HEAVEN-BORN. Much of the disdain for the idea of church today is because most are under the impression that it is merely a product of human origin. If that were the case, then we should all stand opposed to it! However, the church as we

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find it in Scripture (which church we are striving to be today) is of divine origin. The church is God's eternal purpose, fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:10-11). Any attempt to discard the church as unimportant is to declare that God's eternal plan of redemption in Christ Jesus is flawed! The Almighty determined that once the church was established that He would then place every saved person into the church of His dear Son (Acts 2:47). To declare the church as inconsequential, or even detrimental to real Christianity, is an insult to the wisdom of Jehovah!

The church is important because it is BLOOD-BOUGHT. It is hard for me to understand how so many can say the church is not important when it was so very important to Jesus! There are those who claim to love Jesus and want to follow Him, but refuse to hold dear that which He cherished unto death! He shed His precious blood to purchase the church (Acts 20:28). Jesus loved the church so much that He died for her (Ephesians 5:25)! How dare we belittle the glorious bride of our Lord! If we are going to emulate Jesus, then we must love the church just as He did.

The church is important because it is GLORY-BOUND. Jesus is the bridegroom, and the church is His bride (Ephesians 5:22ff). He has gone to prepare an eternal home for His precious bride (John 14:1-6), and He will return again one day to take her home to that prepared place. When the end comes, He will deliver up the kingdom to God (1 Corinthians 15:24). All of those in that kingdom, which is the church (Matthew 16:18-19), who have lived faithfully in service to the Master will live eternally in the presence of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and the redeemed of all the ages. Jesus must not consider the church unimportant if He will present her to the Father in the last day! 

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

The Church

Heaven-Born - Blood-Bought - Glory-Bound

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

NEW

Royce Frederick

We often like to have new things. God has some very important new things for us.

THE NEW BIRTH

“...‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God’” (John 3:3-5). A child is born when it comes out of its mother. A sinner becomes a child of God when he or she comes out of the water of baptism. When a sinner is *“baptized into Christ Jesus,”* he is *“buried”* in water, and then, he rises out of the water to *“walk in newness of life”* (Romans



DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

6:3-4; Acts 8:36-39). This is the new birth. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

THE NEW COVENANT

God foretold through the prophet Jeremiah, *“Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord”* (Jeremiah 31:31-32). When Jesus died on the cross, He fulfilled the Old Covenant, removed it and replaced it with His New Covenant (Matthew 5:17-18; Colossians 2:14; Romans 7:4-7; Hebrews 8:6-13; 9:15-17; Luke 22:20).

THE NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

No one knows when Christ will return. *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore... what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness...? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”* (2 Peter 3:10-13). The apostle John was given a vision of the eternal home of faithful Christians. *“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband...And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away”* (Revelation 21:1-2, 4). This earth will be totally destroyed, but what a glorious, eternal home awaits us on the new earth! 

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

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

John Calvin and Grace

Wayne Jackson

One of the most influential religious figures of his millennium was John Calvin of Switzerland. Calvin was born in 1509. At the age of fourteen, he went to Paris to study the classics. He was so austere that his fellow students nicknamed him “The Accusative Case.” In 1529, he commenced the study of civil law. Presently, though, Calvin became intrigued with the teachings of the German reformers, and so he gave himself to the study of religion. He broke with the Roman Catholic Church in 1533 after a religious “experience” during which he believed he received a commission from God to restore the Church to its original purity. By the year 1536, at the age of only twenty-six, he had completed the first edition of his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The initial edition was a small volume of six chapters; the final version (1560)—revised over the years—had grown to eighty chapters. To a significant degree, Calvin’s views, which were developed in northern Africa (A.D. 353-430), have formed the doctrinal basis of much of modern Protestantism.

In this article, we wish to briefly comment upon John Calvin’s influence upon the religious community on the subject of “grace.” His ideas are circulated in several denominations, and tragically, they appear to be finding their way into the thinking of some of our own people.

One of Calvin’s prominent errors was the notion that man is born totally depraved, having inherited both the effects **and the guilt** of Adam’s original sin. Even infants, therefore, have in them the seed of sin; indeed, their whole nature is a sort of a sin-seed so that they cannot be anything other than corrupt before God (*Institutes* ii.1.8). Hence, all men stand in need of the Lord’s grace. From this fundamental error others spring.

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Limited Grace

One of the corner-stones of Calvin's theology was the dogma of predestination. This is the notion that, consistent with His own sovereignty, God, before the foundation of the world, pre-determined who would be saved and who would be lost. In view of this, when Christ died, His death was efficacious **only** for the "elect." This concept of "limited atonement," hence, limited grace, is so foreign to the teaching of the Scriptures that it is difficult to see how anyone with an elementary knowledge of the New Testament could accept it.

Hear the testimony of Paul. *"For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men..."* (Titus 2:11). Because God loved the entire world (John 3:16), wants all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) and desires not a single one to perish (2 Peter 3:9), Christ died to be the propitiation for sins—**not just for the "elect,"** but potentially for the entire world as well (1 John 2:2).

Irresistible Grace

Calvinism argues that by a secret and special operation of the Holy Spirit, God's grace is poured forth upon the elect. Since the extension of this grace is an act of divine power, it cannot be resisted any more than the original creation could have resisted the creative might of the Lord.

However, the fact is that though God's grace is generously offered, it must be **received** by the sinner. *"...We entreat also that you receive not the grace of God in vain..."* (2 Corinthians 6:1). It is certainly possible to "receive not" that which is offered (John 1:11).

Unconditional Grace

Calvinists argue that grace is given to the elect **unconditionally**. If such is the case, then there is absolutely nothing that one must do in order to receive salvation – not even believe. One writer states, "We believe that there is no warrant whatsoever for the view that John 3:16 lays down faith as a condition to be performed by the lost person in order to attain spiritual eternal life." Again, we read, "God, without the use of the gospel or any

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other human means, will save all of his redeemed loved ones in every land and in every age.”

Paul declared that we have *“access by faith into this grace”* (Romans 5:2). In his discussion of grace in Titus 3, the inspired apostle stated that God, according to His mercy, saved us through *“the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit... being justified by His grace”* (5-7). Paul equates being *“saved by the washing of regeneration”* with being *“justified by grace.”* The *“washing”* is an allusion to man’s response to God by submitting to baptism. Grace is supplied by the Lord – independent of any merit on our part. Clearly, though, the *“washing of regeneration”* is a **condition** of our redemption. Yet, is that expression an allusion to baptism? Even Calvin admitted that he had “no doubt” that Paul was alluding to baptism, though he denied the connection between baptism and salvation.

Irrevocable Grace

Calvin maintained that the elect could be certain that God would never allow them to fall away from the faith. They would thus persevere unto the end. A sizable segment of Protestantism has adopted the doctrine to some degree or another.

However, the New Testament teaches otherwise. A child of God **can** fall from grace (Galatians 5:4) or fail (i.e., fall back from) the Lord’s favor (Hebrews 12:15; cf. ASV footnote). It is possible to deny the Master who bought you, and so to be destroyed (2 Peter 2:1). Thus, we must keep ourselves in God’s love (Jude 21) and give diligence to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10), lest our reception of divine grace be in vain (2 Corinthians 6:1).

Conclusion

While we acknowledge that John Calvin taught some truth, we must also recognize that he advocated much error. That error must be rejected. ✚

Wayne Jackson is the Editor of *Christian Courier* and lives in Stockton, California, USA.

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

2 Corinthians 6:11-18

11 O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. 13 Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open.

14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:

"I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."

17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate," says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters," Says the Lord Almighty.

What do the Scriptures say about Christians and non-Christians being bonded together?

Sometimes a person obeys the Gospel, and the husband or wife is not converted. As 1 Peter 3:1 admonishes, keep the marriage together, prayerful that a faithful example can eventually win the unbeliever.

—These words are for the unmarried, seeking a mate. **V. 12** warns that our own affections can create restrictions in our lives. **V. 13** admonishes us to have open minds to what follows:

Marriage was designed to be the union of two halves of a whole: **male + female = totality of humanness** — *physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, and SPIRITUALLY*. If there is no spiritual unity, none of the union can be complete. There will be no like-thinking, no like-values, no unity in preference of associates, and certainly there will be no oneness in spirituality. The contrast is made in **V. 14** between righteousness and lawlessness, between light and darkness; and in **V. 15** an even starker contrast is drawn between Christ and Satan, between the believer and the unbeliever.

Why is it so important that there be spiritual oneness in marriage? Because *our bodies* are the temple of the living God, and He promises to dwell in us and to be our Father. ***When the husband and wife are so joined with God, their marriage is fully blessed.***



Paul Holland

Adoniram Judson was a Baptist missionary of several generations ago. He stated, “It is a mistake to suppose that a dull and second-rate man is good enough for the heathen. The worst-off need the very best we have. God gave His best, even His only begotten Son, in order to redeem a lost world. The most darkened and degraded souls need the best thinking.”

It goes without saying that the world is lost. Men and women, families, young children and teenagers throughout the world are in sin and, blinded by their own religion, destined for eternal destruction. The best help we can give them does not come in a care package but in the Packaged Care—the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

While we plan and pray for the conversion of the lost locally, we cannot lose sight of the broader mission field. In fact, someone recently made the comment to me—**“You are either a missionary or a mission field.”** Evangelism is Christianity in action. Vance Havner said, “Evangelism is to Christianity what veins are to our bodies. **You can cut Christianity anywhere and it’ll bleed evangelism.** Evangelism is vascular; it’s our business. Talk about majoring in evangelism, you might as well talk about a doctor majoring in healing. That’s our business.”

Around 95% of the preachers in the churches of Christ live in the United States, but there are 190 countries in the world that need teachers of the Gospel. Other religious groups that are propagating error see it as their goal to make disciples. The Lord’s church must take the truth to those people. The world needs clarity. World Christian Database estimates there are 9,000 “Christian” denominations in the world. That is an ungodly shame.

No wonder other religious people look at “us” and say, “How can you expect me to become a Christian when you ‘Christians’ can’t even get together and decide what real Christianity is all about?” We need our feet firmly grounded in the Word of God and know that we know what we know. Then, we must either **take** the Gospel to foreign lands or **send** the Gospel to foreign lands. “Ready to go or ready to stay, ready my place to fill. Ready for service, lowly or great. Ready to do His will.” Are we ready?

It is possible to learn a foreign language. None of those on our mission team were natural-born linguists. It took us hours and hours of study. The love of Christ and the love for people we didn’t know motivated us. It’s possible to learn a foreign culture. Yes, they do things “strangely” over there, but usually it’s for a reason that we often don’t understand at first.

In today’s technological age, it’s far easier to keep in touch with family and friends than it was just a few years ago. Webcams allow us to see one another thousands of miles apart. Even college football is now streamed live over the Internet, and that wasn’t available until recently! Many of our modern conveniences we enjoy in America are available in some form in many places of the world. It is possible to live and thrive outside of America!

Consider the familiar passage about Jesus doing mission work and the

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

sacrifice He made for us. Jesus *“who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”* (Philippians 2:6-8).

You **should** do mission work. You **can** do mission work. **Will you do mission work?** 

Paul Holland works with the Swartz Creek Church of Christ in Swartz Creek, Michigan, USA.

Sowing the Seed of the Kingdom

Eddie Cooper

I'm sure you have heard the humorous story of the little boy who wanted to sing the song of the “dumb” brother. His mother questioned him about what song had anything in it about that. He replied, “Are you sowing the seed of the king ‘dumb’ brother.” That is not what brought this article to my attention. I just thought maybe some feel that sowing the seed of the kingdom is not very important. Yet, sowing the seed is the greatest of all works.

Read Matthew 13:24-30. In this brief parable, Jesus called the world a field in which good seed was sown. However, while men slept, the enemy came, sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. That's the way the devil works. All the good we do is given opposition by the devil to defeat it. Notice in this parable that even though good seed was sown, the devil did his dirty work. The question that comes to my mind is this: “Have we stopped sowing the seed of the kingdom? Have we forgotten our mission in the church?”

I was reminded recently, listening to a Gospel sermon, that we often underestimate the teachings of Christ. His teachings are pure, holy and good. His words bring life, good character, nobility and a likeness to the Teacher. The power of the seed is seen in the fact that men's lives are changed for the better. Men can become humble, truthful, loving, helpful, forgiving and kind. They are to be, according to the teaching of Jesus, *“the light of the world”* (Matthew 5:16) and the *“salt of the earth”* (Matthew 5:13). 

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

Impossible Silence

John Gipson

Should a person keep his religion to himself? Do you consider it “bad form” to talk about religion?

Most of us at one time or another have had to deal with someone who used little tact in their approach. To put it mildly, they were obnoxious! So perhaps then and there we decided that from now on we would be silent about our Christianity.

If that has been our choice, we have made a big mistake. Why? Because that’s incompatible with being a Christian. We have our marching orders from Jesus, and that involves teaching all nations – something the early Christians did with enthusiasm. Being silent was not, and is not, an option (Matthew 28:18-20).

The apostles had to deal with authorities who told them ***“not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.”*** Obey man or God? That was the question. God said speak; man said be silent. Do you remember their response? ***“But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard’”*** (Acts 4:19-20).

We should be thankful for their decision. As H.G. Wells once said, “The trouble with so many people is that the voice of their neighbors sounds louder in their ears than the voice of God.”

Remember the conduct of the early Christians when they were being persecuted for their faith. They were scattered abroad, but they were not silent. They ***“went about preaching the word”*** (Acts 8:4). We, too, need to understand that we are associated with God in a divine purpose and ***“we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard.”*** 

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

All Christians are Servants of the Lord

Dale Grissom

It seems to be difficult for some Christians to think of themselves as ministers of God. All Christians are servants; thus they are ministers. We have made a great difference between the ministers who preach the Gospel and receive support from the church and the brethren who do not receive support from the church. I believe this is one reason many will not accept the responsibility of being soul-winners.

Personal evangelism is a work that came into its own during the time of the early church when persecution fell upon the church at Jerusalem. We read about this in Acts 8:3-4. ***“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.”*** This is the reason the early church grew so fast.

During the last 30 years, we have become more like the early church in winning souls for Christ. For a number of years prior to this period, we had very few conversions except at Gospel meetings, at which time several might obey the Gospel. Thankfully, we are now evangelizing throughout the year, realizing the urgency of obedience.

Paul, speaking to the elders at Ephesus before he departed to Jerusalem, said in Acts 20:20, ***“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house.”*** Paul set the example for us to follow. We must teach publicly and from house to house if we expect to reach the people in our community with the Gospel. Personal work is the most effective way to reach lost souls. Many could be working in this way for the Lord if they only believed they could. 

Dale Grissom (1927-2014) was dedicated to personal evangelism and worked with the church of Christ in Dexter, Missouri, USA.

THE MARKS OF JESUS

Jim R. Everett

A body was stoned and left, for all appearances, as dead on the outskirts of the city of Lystra. Just shortly before the stoning, this man had been exalted and proclaimed as a god, but he refused the worship of the inhabitants. He and Barnabas scarcely restrained them from unwanted and undeserved adoration as gods. Instead of accepting exaltation as a god, he had tried to direct them to the one true God, ***“who left not himself without witness”*** (Acts 14:17).

The Jews whom Paul had enraged at Antioch made it their duty to travel some 130 miles, along with the angered Jews of Iconium, to stir up the people of Lystra. They did not feel it adequate merely to have Paul and Barnabas chased from their own cities, but they wanted Paul “marked” for preaching about Jesus.

Later, Paul described his scars thusly, ***“for I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus”*** (Galatians 6:17). Paul’s experience was not unlike another man who endured the pain and despised the shame, but looked beyond the suffering of the cross that men might be reconciled to God (Hebrews 12:1-2). Jesus’ body bore the marks of the nails in His hands and feet, and a Roman sword in His pierced side. The reason that Paul called the scars he bore the ***“marks of Jesus”*** was because they were identifiable with the righteous cause of Jesus; he shared in some small way the same kind of suffering that Jesus had endured.

If you are righteous, suffering will come (2 Timothy 3:12). In whatever form it takes, do not be terrified by the enemy. Rather, wear the ***“marks of Jesus”*** as a proud soldier displays his medals; the scars, considered as shameful by the world, are really to be considered as evidences of courage by the Christian. 

Jim R. Everett was an elder and preacher at the Cedar Park, Texas congregation.

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

Straddling the Fence

Olden Cook

When asked his position on a controversial issue, a politician once replied, “Well, I’ve got friends for it, and I’ve got friends against it, and I always stick with my friends!” Thus he straddled the fence well.

Many people are like this when it comes to Christianity. They stand against nothing and are for everything popular. They feel that by thus straddling the fence that they can be “on both sides,” not realizing that *“friendship with the world is enmity with God.”* Christians should let the world know whose side they are on, and with a solid front, face sin, worldliness and error.

Spiritually, there is no middle ground. Moses asked, *“Who is on the Lord’s side?”* (Exodus 32:26). Joshua challenged the people to *“choose ye this day whom you will serve”* (Joshua 24:15).

You cannot straddle the fence! When the church at Laodicea tried, Jesus said that He would spew them out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16). ✚



Olden Cook preached for several years.

How Do You Measure Up?

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you.

And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:7-18



Acceptable Worship

John Thiesen

What kind of worship is acceptable to God? Or, does it really make any difference to God how we worship Him? Jesus, in a conversation with the woman of Samaria, defined the kind of worship that pleases God and that He is actively seeking to find in people: ***“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”*** (John 4:24).

Worship That Is Genuine and True

Among other things that can be learned from Jesus’ words above, it is very plain: worship, to be acceptable to God, must be genuine, coming from the spirit (or heart) of the worshipper, and it must be according to God’s truth. Such worshipers are the true ***“circumcision”*** (children of Abraham through faith in Christ Jesus). The apostle Paul said, ***“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”*** (Philippians 3:3).

With Reverence and Godly Fear

For God to hear our worship, we must approach Him reverently. ***“...Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire”*** (Hebrews 12:28-29). This means that we are to worship God with the realization that we are in the presence of the mighty, awe-inspiring Jehovah God. While worshipping Him, our minds must be riveted on Him only. All the trivialities of everyday life, business, recreation and pleasure must be set aside while our hearts are under the surveillance of the Almighty. Like Moses, who stripped off his shoes at the burning bush because he was on holy ground, we are also on ***“holy ground”*** when we appear before God with the sacrifice of the

WORSHIP

fruit of our lips. We must cast off all mundane distractions and prostrate our hearts and minds before the presence of the Eternal One.

Decently and in Order

Orderliness is another feature of worship that is acceptable to God. ***“Let all things be done decently and in order”*** (1 Corinthians 14:40). There is to be no confusion produced by shouting, interruptions or more than one person speaking at a time, since one aim of the assembly is the edification (instruction) of the church (verse 26).

Humility

Another important ingredient for making worship acceptable to God is humility. ***“God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”*** (1 Peter 5:5). An illustration of this was given by Jesus in His account of the Pharisee and the Publican who went to the Temple to pray. The Pharisee, in his prayer to God, enumerated all of his own good qualities, grateful that he was not a sinner like other people, and he lauded himself for his fasting and meticulous tithing of all that he possessed (Luke 18:11-12). The publican, on the other hand, bowed his head in shame, struck himself on his breast and begged, ***“God, be merciful to me a sinner”*** (verse 13).

Jesus said of the publican, ***“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”*** (verse 14).

Application

Let’s strive to worship God genuinely and with a whole heart, reverencing Him with godly fear, in an orderly manner and with a humble, penitent spirit. If we do this, we can be confident that God will hear our prayers and accept our worship. 

John Thiesen (1934-2006) was involved in the Spanish translation of *The Voice of Truth International* and had served as a missionary for many years in Malawi.

WORSHIP

Four Attitudes Toward Giving

Wade Webster

When I was a student in the Memphis School of Preaching, James Dearman, one of my instructors, gave our class an outline on giving that I have used down through the years. The outline was taken from a statement that David made to Araunah when he offered to give the king his threshing floor and all that was needed for the king to make a sacrifice to Jehovah. The passage reads, *“And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver”* (2 Samuel 24:24).

From this passage, brother Dearman pointed out four attitudes that individuals often display toward giving.

The first attitude — “I will not offer.” Some folks are simply unwilling to give. They are spiritual scrooges.

The second attitude — “I will not offer unto the Lord.” Some folks are willing to give, but they are not willing to give to the Lord. They are willing to give to this club and to that cause, but they are not willing to give to the Lord’s cause.

The third attitude — “I will not offer unto the Lord that which costs me.” Some folks are willing to give unto the Lord, but they are not willing to give Him anything that costs them. They will give Him the scraps, but not the main dish.

The fourth attitude — “I will not offer unto the Lord that which costs me nothing.” There are those who sacrifice in their giving. They give up things that others enjoy so that they can give more to the Lord.

Which attitude best represents you and your giving? Do you refuse to give at all, or do you simply refuse to give to the Lord? Do you give the scraps, or do you give that which costs you? I encourage you to be like David and give only what costs you.



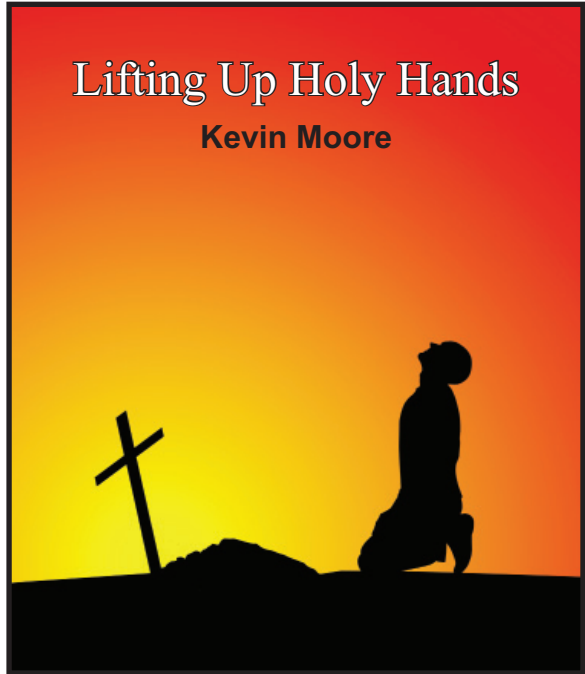
WORSHIP

“Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting”

(1 Timothy 2:8). In this verse, what is meant by *“lifting up holy hands”*? Many people place emphasis on the word *“hands”* and have the impression that Paul is addressing one’s posture when he prays. However, it is not what men do with their hands that Paul was concerned about in this verse, but rather the condition of their hearts and lives.

Throughout the Bible, various physical positions for prayer are described: standing (1 Kings 8:22), kneeling (Daniel 6:10), sitting (Luke 22:14, 17), lying down (2 Samuel 12:16), hands lifted (Nehemiah 8:6), hands not lifted (Matthew 26:39), facing a wall (2 Kings 20:2), bowed head (Exodus 4:31), eyes looking upward (John 17:1), etc. It is evident that there is no prescribed posture for prayer. The position of one’s body does not matter to God, but rather the condition of one’s heart matters to Him. *“Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil”* (1 Peter 3:11,12).

Since a person uses his hands for most physical activities (**work**, 1 Thessalonians 4:11; **fighting**, Psalm 144:1; etc.), the hands symbolize



WORSHIP

one's actions (Genesis 16:2; Matthew 6:3; Mark 9:43). A person's actions (good or bad) are directly related to the condition of his heart (Matthew 12:34-35; Mark 7:20-23). Those guilty of sin are said to have dirty "hands" (Isaiah 1:15; Ezekiel 3:18,20; James 4:8), and thus the removal of sin from an individual's heart/life is symbolized as the cleansing of one's "**hands**" (Deuteronomy 21:6-9; Psalm 26:2; James 4:8). When Pilate wanted to proclaim his innocence in condemning Jesus, he "**washed his hands**" (Matthew 27:24). David wrote, "***The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; According to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me***" (Psalm 18:20).

In the Bible, the physical lifting of one's hands in prayer symbolized the fact that he was offering a pure life to God, and thus his prayers should be unhindered. Whether a person's hands are lifted or unlifted, dirty or clean, has nothing to do with the acceptability of his prayers. It is the condition of an individual's heart and life that matters to God. Sin (the "dirt" of the soul) causes one's prayers to be hindered (Isaiah 59:1,2; Psalm 66:18), not the condition or position of his physical hands. God directed Isaiah to write, "***And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you: yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil***" (Isaiah 1:15-16). Thus, to lift up hands in prayer is to lift up and present one's heart, soul and life to God (Psalm 63:4; 86:4; Lamentations 3:41). If your spiritual "hands" are stained with sin, God will not hearken unto your prayers (Psalm 66:18). However, if a person's spiritual hands are cleansed from sin (Psalm 18:20, 24; 24:4), his prayers will be acceptable to God (1 Peter 3:12).

In 1 Timothy 2:8 the emphasis is not on "hands," but rather it is upon "**holy hands.**" When men pray, God wants their hearts and lives to be holy (Romans 12:1; Ephesians 1:4), regardless of their physical posture. A man with no hands can still acceptably pray to God as long as his spiritual "hands" are clean.



Kevin L. Moore is Associate Professor of Bible & Missions at Freed-Hardeman University, USA and does mission work in Porirua, New Zealand.

PROVERBS 17:22



Fellows, if your wife doesn't feel well, do what I do to speed her recovery; just offer to help with the housework. If you don't think there's such a thing as a miracle recovery, you ought to see my wife get well again every time I start to vacuum the windows.



I finally figured out why I am getting fat! I should have figured it out sooner.

It's the shampoo I use in the shower. When I wash my hair, the shampoo runs down my whole body. Printed very clearly on the shampoo label it reads, **"For extra volume and body."**

I have gotten rid of the shampoo, and I am going to start using Dawn dish soap. On its label reads, **"Dissolves fat that is otherwise difficult to remove."**

Problem Solved!



A man goes to see the preacher. "Preacher, something terrible is happening, and I have to talk to you about it."

The preacher asked, "What's wrong?"

The man replied, "My wife is going to poison me."

The preacher, very surprised by this, asks, "How can that be?"

The man then pleads, "I'm telling you, I'm certain she's going to poison me. What should I do?"

The preacher then offers, "Tell you what. Let me talk to her and I'll see what I can find out and I'll let you know."

A week later the preacher calls the man and says, "I spoke to your wife on the phone for three hours. You want my advice?"

The man said, "Yes," and the preacher replied, "Take the poison."



I wouldn't even think of revealing his name, but a preacher was forced to stop by a traffic cop to pull over for speeding. As the cop was about to write the ticket, the preacher said to him, "Blessed are the merciful, for

PROVERBS 17:22

they shall obtain mercy.”

The cop handed the preacher the ticket and said, “Go thou and sin no more.”



A surgeon was checking on a patient who had a hernia operation three days before. The doctor asked the man why he had not gotten out of bed.

“I hurt,” the man said. “You don’t know how it feels.”

“I know exactly how it feels,” the doctor said. “I had the same procedure last month, and I was back at work two days later. There’s no difference in our operations.”

“Oh yes there is,” said the patient. “You had a different surgeon.”



A five-year-old boy was with his parents as they witnessed the wedding of a family friend.

“Mommy,” he whispered, “why does the lady wear white?”

His mother smiled and whispered back, “Because she is very happy to be getting married.”

The little boy thought for a moment, then asked, “So why does the man wear black?”



A man and his wife were having some problems at home and were giving each other the silent treatment. The next week, the man realized that he would need his wife to wake him at 5:00 A.M. for an early morning business flight to Chicago. Not wanting to be the first to break the silence (**and lose**), he wrote on a piece of paper, “Please wake me at 5:00 A.M.”

The next morning the man woke up, only to discover it was 9:00 A.M. and that he had missed his flight. Furious, he was about to go and see why his wife hadn’t awakened him when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed.

The paper said, “It is 5:00 A.M. Wake up.”



There was a gentleman in the hospital bed next to mine. He was covered with bandages from head to toe. I said to him, “What do you do for a living?”

He said, “I’m a former window washer.”

I asked, “When did you give it up?”

He replied, “Halfway down.”



Wayne Barrier

A physical structure is no stronger than its foundation. We are reminded of this fact when earthquakes shake the ground and buildings fall. This principle also applies to our lives. Jesus taught in Matthew 7:24-27,

“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

Jesus was finishing His great Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew

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5-7. These chapters record a powerful summary of the core teachings of Christianity. Jesus gave essential guidance and commandments that can be followed to result in godly lives that assure our spiritual well-being and obedience to God. Paul referred to the teaching of Christ as a foundation for life as he stated in 1 Corinthians 3:11, ***“For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”*** Some key elements of this great sermon that create a foundation of rock include the following.

- **Matthew 5:1-12** The meek, humble, righteous, pure in heart, merciful, peacemaker and servant of God that is persecuted for righteousness' sake is blessed and favored.
- **Matthew 5:21-30** Sin comes from our hearts, and behavior reflects our hearts.
- **Matthew 6:5-13** God will answer the prayers of His children.
- **Matthew 6:19-21** One's treasure in life is not kept on earth, but rather, it is accumulating in heaven.
- **Matthew 6:33-34** We must seek first the kingdom of heaven and Christ's righteousness. As we do this, God will provide for our every need.
- **Matthew 7:13-14** The way to heaven is narrow and difficult, and the way to eternal destruction is wide and easy.
- **Matthew 7:15-20** Beware of false teachers.
- **Matthew 7:21-23** Only those who know and do the Father's will are saved.

There are many other teachings in this sermon. Read and study every verse of Matthew 5-7 to learn how to build your life on a solid foundation. The world is populated by billions of people with failing lives. The ultimate failure is death while outside of the body of Christ. Upon what kind of foundation is your life built? 

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

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Our Challenge

Greg Tidwell

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first’” (Revelation 2:18-19).

While our Lord would go on to admonish the church in Thyatira to greater faithfulness, the compliments with which He opened this section are profound. Praising their industry and tenacity, He crowned their achievements with this striking phrase: **“your latter works exceeded the first.”** What a dynamic congregation Thyatira must have been. Not content to embrace the comfortable complacency of past accomplishments, they pressed onward, achieving more for the cause of Christ.

The past exerts a tremendous force upon the present. At best, our experience can challenge us to reach further and accomplish more to the glory of God. Unfortunately, far too often we permit the past to be a hindrance rather than a help. Nostalgia for the past can serve as a barrier to progress. We must not dwell on past victories or defeats in a way that limits our effectiveness in the present and potentially for the future. Rather, following the example of the church in Thyatira, we should cultivate a mindset of love, faith and service that builds toward the future rather than resting on the past.

We are the heirs of a great inheritance. The deeds of the men and women who preceded us should be honored and cherished as reminders of dynamic accomplishments. They should move us forward. Our challenge is to build upon our heritage so that the latter works exceed the first. 

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

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THAT'S LIFE

Carroll Sites

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’ As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” (James 4:13-17 ESV)

We had nothing to say about when we were born into this life. We do not know the time when we shall leave this life in death. So, what becomes the highest priority is the time between birth and death—the day-to-day art of living.

Somewhere I read, “Life is the art of drawing without an eraser.” Mistakes made in the past—some things done that we should not have done and some things left undone that we should have done—cannot be changed. We have no eraser, so what are we to do? Put Christ in your life and keep Him there. With Him there, we can resolve to do better tomorrow—and we will.

The esteemed Peter Marshall made the emphatic statement, “If God does not enter your kitchen, there is something wrong with your kitchen. If you can’t take God into your recreation, there is something wrong with your play...” We all believe in the God of the heroic. What we need most these days is the God of the humdrum—the “common man,” the “man on the job,” the “everyday housewife,” the “highly educated” and the “uneducated.” He is there for every one of us, and He is “no respecter of persons.” With Him in our lives, we can make it—no matter what. As Philips Brooks once wrote, “Christianity helps us to face the music, even when we don’t like the tune.”

So, what are you making out of life? Better still, what are you allowing life to make out of you? Put Christ into your life today, and it will make a difference.



Carroll Sites is the evangelist for the Higden Church of Christ in Higden, Arkansas, USA.



SATAN —

Do You Recognize Him?

Betty Burton Choate

“Be serious! Be alert! Your adversary the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour” (1 Peter 5:7-9).

God warns us that we have a deadly enemy who incessantly seeks to destroy us. In Scripture, he is identified as “Satan,” “the Devil,” “the dragon,” etc. The list continues, and we understand even from the names that he is evil personified. Artists, painting their ideas of his appearance, usually portray him as a frightening red monster with horns, fangs and a menacing pitchfork. Admittedly, they are using paint and imagination to help us understand his evil intent.

Forewarned should be forearmed, but the problem is that no one ever sees that red monster, so he is able to sneak in – effectively disguised – and to create havoc in the lives of the unsuspecting.

Again, our Father warns us: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”* (Matthew 7:15). These words alert us to the fact that Satan is not only the father of all lies (John 8:44), but he is also a master of deceit. He knows that all of us would run from a wolf or a monster, but who runs from a harmless sheep? So what are some of Satan’s most common disguises?

◆ Often he approaches people through their appetites and pleasures; beer and other alcoholic drinks, and illicit drugs bring great pleasure to

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many people – and it is only the bite of the “morning after” or ruined health that alerts them to the fact that Satan was hiding in those “fun” things. Sadly, even gluttony is one of his tools. Foods can seem too appetizing to resist, and the resulting obesity that ruins health and shortens life is the price Satan imposes.

◆ Satan may come in the form of achieving a coveted goal through lies and other unethical dealings. Some entire cultures operate on the basis that no one can be trusted, stark evidence of Satan’s control of the general populace.

◆ Satan may entrap victims in the mires of lust through the “beauty” of some woman or the “sexual appeal” of some man, both flaunting their bodies with the single purpose of drawing weak people into illicit and immoral situations.

◆ Satan will use counterfeit “churches” and counterfeit “gospels” to blind people to the truth. Some of his most effective teachers are not those who preach atheism but those who claim to be preachers and leaders, but they are in false religions. Satan knows that the need for God is buried deep in every soul, and so, he fills that void with lies. The deceived soul confidently walks down the broad road to its promised end.

◆ Satan is also a subtle thief. He tempts Christians to give God whatever might be left of their income after the bills and personal indulgences have been covered. He tempts churches to spend perhaps 95% of God’s money on every local “need” – nicety, indulgence and physical extravagance, rather than on evangelism and benevolence.

◆ Satan destroys souls through creating discord and enmity among brethren. Sometimes, he uses personality differences as his wedge; sometimes he uses the desire for preeminence, or the problem may even be a turning from the Truth of God’s Word. Any of these can divide the church, and, inevitably, souls will be lost eternally as a result.

◆ Time-consuming entertainment can be spiritually deadly. No, Satan’s temptation in this case is not sinful activity, in itself. The sin comes because the entertainment becomes a distraction from God and a waste of time. Hours sacrificed every day to television, video games or any number

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of other “fun” things become robbery from God. Christians would do well to keep a log, tabulating the hours spent in prayer, study, worship and sharing the Gospel with others in one column, and the hours spent in entertainment in a parallel column. Over the course of a week, how does the time compare?

◆ One of Satan’s most effective tools is “busy-ness.” Christians have been left in the world to be instruments in bringing the Gospel to the lost. They know their purpose, and they intend to be tools in God’s hands. Yet first, a thousand necessary things have to be done, and so the days and weeks go by without any time left to do the *work*. Because the people succumbing to many of these temptations are not doing sinful things, they may go through life without ever recognizing Satan’s scheme **to keep Christians so busy with guests, ballgames, cleaning, TV, etc. that there will be no time left to study the Word or to share it with others.** When the conscience niggles, Satan soothes it with the expectation that *tomorrow...*

◆ Ultimately, any distraction or any personal dedication that takes precedence over God’s preeminence in the Christian’s heart is Satan’s tool. True, he would prefer that everyone be as evil as he is, but he knows that many want to **do** right and to **be** right; therefore, he is satisfied with his success as long as he has cooled people’s devotion to God to **lukewarmness**. Still, he wins.

Yes, Satan comes in many guises. Christians can defend themselves against his onslaughts by being vigilant, wearing the whole armor of God.

*“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with **truth**, having put on the breastplate of **righteousness**, and having shod your feet with the **preparation of the gospel of peace**; above all, taking the shield of **faith** with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of **salvation**, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the **word of God**; praying always with all **prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.**”* (Ephesians 6:14-18). ✚

Betty Burton Choate is the widow of J.C. Choate, co-worker with him in writing and in mission fields throughout their married life.

The Importance of Home Training

Ferman Carpenter



It is in the home that children should receive training that will establish the foundation for this life and the eternal life. Our children did not ask to be here; that's why parents are responsible for their very presence in this world. Therefore, the home and its influence will contribute greatly to whether they will be happy now and where they will spend eternity. Truly, being a parent is an awesome responsibility.

In order to do the job God wants done, parents must begin at the very start of life training their children. Far too often parents will wait until it is too late, and then wonder why they failed. A great lesson is taught by

THE CHRISTIAN HOME

Manoah, the father of Samson, when he learned that he and his wife were going to be blessed with a son. He asked, ***“How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?”*** (Judges 13:12). **He was concerned about his son’s future even before he was born.**

God tells parents to, ***“Train up a child in the way he should go”*** and ***“bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”*** (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4). It is significant that the Bible stresses the fact that parents, and not others, have the responsibility to ***“train up”*** and ***“bring up”*** their children in the right way. They are neither to delegate their responsibility to others, nor start trying to train their children after they have become teenagers. From the time they are babies, and for as long as they are under parental supervision, parents are responsible. **It is a continuous process.** Parents cannot **isolate** their children from temptation, but they can help **insulate** them from sin. That is why the parents’ responsibilities begin when children are babies.

To be sure, it is important that parents take care of their children’s physical needs, but not at the expense of their souls. Where does a child see his parents place the most emphasis? Is it in the physical things of life, or in the spiritual? What a parent teaches a child, by word and deed, is most likely what that child will become and teach his or her own children. If the emphasis is on the physical, then we cannot expect that child to fight the ***“good fight of faith”*** when faced with temptation. Christ said, ***“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other,”*** and ***“what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”*** (Matthew 6:24; 16:26).

Parents, nothing is more important than your child’s soul, for **only it is eternal**. If your children starve to death and spend eternity in heaven, you will have been most successful. On the other hand, if your children have everything this life can offer and are lost at the Day of Judgment, their lives will have been a miserable failure. That is why **parents must never forget the importance of home training.** 

Ferman Carpenter is the preacher for the Westside Church of Christ in Round Rock, Texas, USA.

THE CHRISTIAN HOME

What a Heritage!

Dwight Fuqua

Zacharias and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, were described this way.

“And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless”

(Luke 1:5). John was blessed to have such godly parents!

Godly parents are truly a blessing! Those who have parents who have brought them up or are bringing them up *“in the training and admonition of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4) have much for which to be thankful! What a heritage!

How would you describe a godly parent? God’s Word does it for us.



- Godly parents walk in the Lord’s way and *“command”* their children after them (Genesis 18:19).

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- Godly parents ***“make known God’s truth to their children”*** (Isaiah 38:19).
- Godly parents ***“charge”*** their children (1 Thessalonians 2:11).
- Godly parents ***“chasten”*** their children so that they will live the right way (Hebrews 12:7).
- Godly parents ***“train”*** their children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6).

Some of the Bible’s richest instruction to parents is found in Moses’ counsel in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Moses wrote:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Let’s summarize.

- Godly parents genuinely love God (vss. 4-6).
- Godly parents are devoted to their children and ***“diligently”*** teach them the way of the Lord (v. 7).
- Godly parents publicly stand for and live their faith (vss. 8-9).

Solomon wrote, ***“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children”*** (Proverbs 13:22). It is not just a physical inheritance. It is a heritage of faith. Oh, what a heritage! 

Dwight Fuqua preaches for the Findlay church of Christ in Sparta, Tennessee, USA.



5-MINUTE BIBLE STUDY

Paula Bates

Confession

1. For with the _____ man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth _____ is made unto _____. Romans 10:10
2. Confess your _____ one to another, that you may be healed. The effectual _____ prayer of a righteous man avails much. James 5:16
3. Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many _____ on him; but because of the _____ they did not _____ him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue. John 12:42
4. He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment and I will not _____ out his name out of the _____ of life, but I will _____ his name before my Father, and before his angels. Revelation 3:5
5. And that every _____ should confess that _____ is _____ to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:11
6. If we confess our sins he is _____ and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from _____ unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

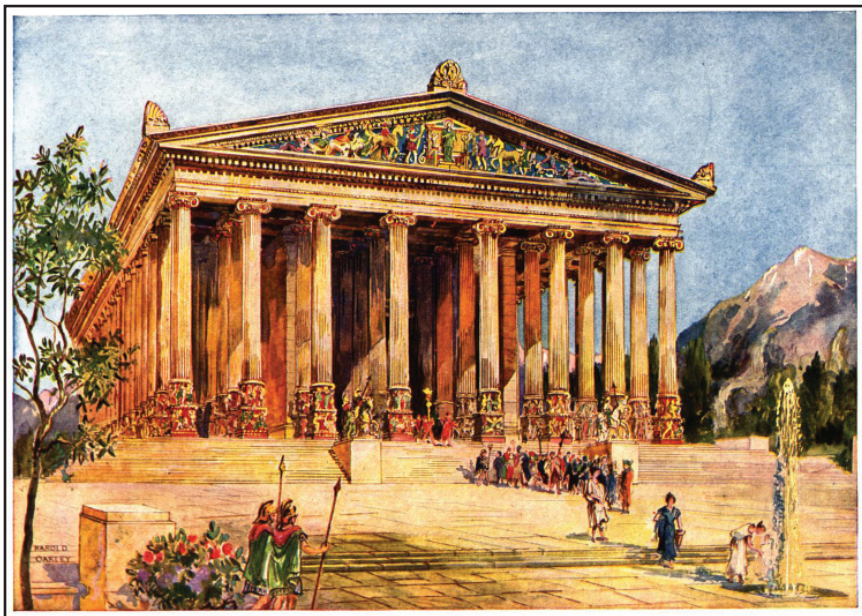


Answers:

1. Heart, confession, salvation
2. Faults, fervent
3. Believed, Pharisees, confess
4. Blot, book, confess
5. Tongue, Jesus, Christ, Lord
6. Faithful, all

Ephesians: Christ and His Church

Jim Laws



Ephesus was an important city, which boasted of being custodian of the Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The city was devoted to idolatry. During his second missionary journey, Paul visited Ephesus and left Aquila and Priscilla there (Acts 18:19-21). He returned to Ephesus two years later and ministered for three years, reaching the whole province of Asia with the Gospel (Acts 19). Some years later, while a prisoner at Rome, Paul wrote the letter to the brethren in Ephesus (Romans 3:1; 4:1). In fact, there are four of these prison epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

TEXTUAL STUDIES

Study with me this great book of the New Testament, Ephesians, noticing how Paul wrote concerning doctrine (chapters 1-3) and duty (chapters 4-6). Ephesians has become known as the superlative of Paul's letters; some have gone so far as to proclaim it as "The Grand Canyon of Scripture."

Ephesians 1

Paul expounded the doctrine of salvation by the grace of God, which the Father planned (1:4-6), the Son purchased (1:7-12) and the Spirit revealed (1:13-14). His prayer (1:15-23) expressed his desire that saints come to know something of the extent of our blessings in Christ. Salvation truly comes from God and is available to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Ephesians 2

Paul stated that the Ephesian Christians were once dead in their sins, but based on their obedient faith, they were alive in Christ. This new life in Christ sets one free from the bondage of sin (2:1-3). In Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile are now one since the barriers have been removed. Believers are members of the one body, citizens of one holy nation and living stones in one temple (1 Peter 2:1-10). All of these blessings are the result of God's love and mercy.

Ephesians 3

For this reason, Christ built His church (Matthew 16:18). His church is made for all who have turned to Him by obeying His Gospel message. God authorized Paul's great work to preach the good news to Jews and to Gentiles so that both groups could be a part of the same church, fulfilling God's eternal plan.

Ephesians 4

All Christians are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28), but we must work to make spiritual unity a reality in our daily lives. Unity will build the church; disunity, a work of Satan, will destroy it (4:1-13). Paul stressed that just as there must be spiritual birth, there, also, must be spiritual growth if we are to become more like Jesus (1 Peter 1:22-2:3). Because

TEXTUAL STUDIES

we are growing spiritually, we understand the need to speak the truth in love (4:15) and to live a life of integrity toward others (4:17-32).

Ephesians 5

In this chapter, Paul reminded about the sacrifice of Jesus, which should motivate us to live properly before Him (5:1-7). He takes us to the field to remind us that walking in the light will produce spiritual fruit (5:8-14; Galatians 6:14-18). He takes us to the market place, telling us to be good merchants by buying up every opportunity to do good and walk in wisdom (5:15-17). Finally, he takes us home, where he used marriage as a picture of our relationship to Christ (5:22-33).

Ephesians 6

The child of God who lives the message of the New Testament in his life will manifest “Christ-likeness” in the home, on the job, in school and on the battlefield of life. If children do not learn to obey at home, it is not likely that they will obey any other outside authority. Christian parents must prepare their children to face our common, deadly enemy, Satan, in any battleground of life. As all of us seriously consider our foe, we dare not neglect to ***“put on the whole armour of God”*** in preparation for the spiritual battle before us. So, arm yourself with the Word of God, and defeat your enemy. ✝

Jim Laws is the preacher for the Broadway Church of Christ in Tyler, Texas, USA.

Did You Know?

We are to wear the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11), not just part of it. The Greek word for armor is *panoply* (used in at least one song we sing). The word “stand” can indicate “hold up.” We are to “hold up” against the devil. The ***“wiles of the devil”*** means the ways he tempts us to follow him and forsake God. First John 2:16 tells about the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. These are the three ways Satan gets us to leave God. Every temptation we face will fit into one of these categories. James 1:13-15 further explains how this works. The devil places before us the things of this world that we want. When we give in and partake, the temptation turns to sinful actions, and unrepented sinful actions lead to spiritual death. The armor that we are to put on allows us to protect against the devil’s methods.



TEXTUAL STUDIES

The Gospel of Mark

David Shannon

In the Gospel of Mark, the words “*immediately*” or “*straightway*” stand out due to Mark’s frequent use of them. In the original Greek, this is the same word, *eutheos*. Let’s note a few examples.

Mark 1:20 “*And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.*”

Jesus’ desire for us to follow Him is immediate.



Mark 1:21 “*And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught.*” When Jesus had the opportunity to teach, He immediately took advantage of it.

Mark 2:8 “*And immediately when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, ‘Why reason ye*

TEXTUAL STUDIES

these things in your hearts?” Jesus immediately knows our hearts. Most only know our actions or words, but Jesus knows the heart! What does He think about your heart?

Mark 3:6 *“And the Pharisees went forth, and **straightway** took counsel with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.”* The Pharisees hated Jesus’ violations of their traditions of the Sabbath. They watched Him heal on the Sabbath and immediately decided to murder Him! When Jesus’ teachings violate our actions, thoughts or traditions, what is our immediate response?

Mark 4:15 *“And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh **immediately**, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.”* Some hear sermons and read the text of Scriptures, but they immediately forget instead to take it to heart and use it (Mark 4:24). Others accept the Word of God, but they allow cares or riches to choke out the Word and *“**immediately** they stumble”* (Mark 4:17).

Mark 9:24 *“And **straightway** the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.’”* The father of a convulsing child sought Jesus’ healing. Jesus stated the importance of belief. The father’s humility and desire for the Lord to help him grow was his immediate answer, *“**help my unbelief!**”* Let this be our fervent prayer!

Are your immediate actions, words and intents of the heart dependent on God? **Let’s serve Him immediately! Don’t wait!** 

David Shannon preaches for the Mt. Juliet Church of Christ in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, USA.

Did You Know?

The Sumer civilization, located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers near the Persian Gulf about 3000 B.C., is responsible for the numbering system we use for time and for measuring a circle (sexagesimal system). This system is based on 60.





Scavenger Hunt

through James

Rebecca Rushmore

(Answers inside back cover)

1. To whom is the Book of James written?
2. What feeling should Christians have when facing trials?
3. What makes one's religion useless?
4. What triumphs over judgment?
5. Who was called the friend of God?
6. Name the two large things James says are controlled by a small item.
7. To whom does God give grace?
8. To what is life compared?
9. What kind of prayer "avails much"?
10. Name the four Old Testament people given as examples in James.

Learning from a Good Man

Maxie B. Boren

It is refreshing from time to time to accentuate the positive and talk about good folks and good things they've done. It seems like we hear so much about the bad but not nearly so much about the good. We need to change that.

One person from long ago that has always been high up on the “exemplary chart” was the boy king, Josiah. He started his reign when he was 8 years of age and continued in that capacity for 31 years. He was the 16th king of Judah, from about 640 to about 610 B.C. The Bible tells us that ***“he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord... and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left”*** (2 Chronicles 34:2). **His heart was tender**, and he was humble before God (verse 19). I’m reminded of two passages: ***“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth...”*** (Ecclesiastes 12:1) and ***“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God...”*** (1 Peter 5:6).

Because of his humbly seeking after God, he (1) renewed commitment to keep God’s covenant, (2) eradicated idolatry, (3) broke down the houses of the sodomites and (4) put away all those who trafficked in wizardry, familiar spirits, etc. (2 Kings 23:1-7, 24). ***“And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might...”*** (2 Kings 23:25). 



Maxie B. Boren (1954–2016) was a Gospel preacher and an elder in the Brown Trail congregation in Bedford, Texas, USA.

BIBLE CHARACTERS

A Giant Slayer Almost Defeated

Steve Higginbotham

Second Samuel 21:15-17 tells us about a giant by the name of Ishbibenob. He was engaged in battle with another man. The record says that Ishbibenob's opponent "*waxed faint*" and would have been killed if it had not been for one of his faithful servants who came to his rescue to kill the giant.

Surprisingly enough, Ishbibenob's opponent was King David. This is the same David who had slain the fearful giant, Goliath. However, on this occasion, the giant got the best of David and almost killed him. Let us examine some spiritual applications that we can draw from this account.

We cannot live on past accomplishments. David was once known as the **great giant slayer**, but this did not help at all in his present



BIBLE CHARACTERS

battle. Likewise, Satan is not impressed by our reputation. We may have a reputation of being a godly elder, preacher, Bible class teacher or Christian, and yet, our reputation alone will not help us in our daily battles with Satan. Satan is not frightened off by our past accomplishments. Remember, he even dared to tempt the Son of God (Luke 4).

Satan does not give up after just one defeat. Although David defeated one giant, he would have to do battle with more giants in the future. At times, we may utterly defeat Satan, but let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that we have seen the last of him. Satan is portrayed as a hungry, roaring lion. Therefore, we can be sure he will attack us again (1 Peter 5:8).

We all need help at times. Although David was a mighty warrior—a giant slayer, he needed help in this particular battle. It does not matter who we are or what function we perform within the body of Christ, we all, at times, need the help of others. David was fortunate enough to have someone there to help him. We need to be ready to accept or offer help whenever it is needed (Galatians 6:2).

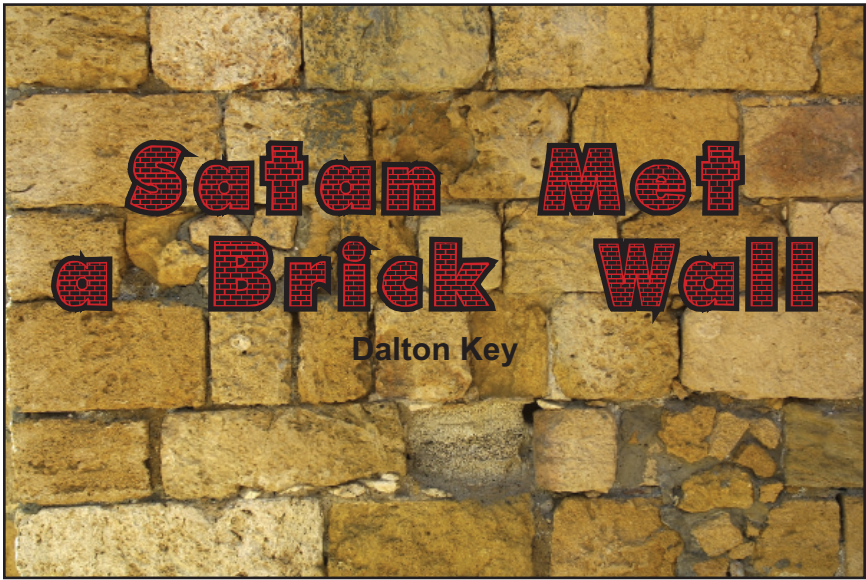
Our roles sometimes change. When David's men saw that he had almost been killed, they made him promise not to engage in battle anymore lest he should **quench the light of Israel**. David was no longer the mighty warrior he once was, but Israel still needed him. David just needed to change his particular area of service. Likewise, there comes a time when we need to recognize that we are not able to serve in the Lord's church in the same capacity we once did. This does not mean that we are to put ourselves on a shelf, but rather, we should just shift our area of service. We can never outgrow our usefulness in the church of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31).

May God help us to realize that we all will have giants to kill. Hopefully, the above points will help us to slay the giants that confront us throughout our lives. Leaders are giant-slayers! 

Steve Higginbotham preaches for the Karns Church of Christ in Knoxville, Tennessee, USA.

We all will have giants to kill!

BIBLE CHARACTERS

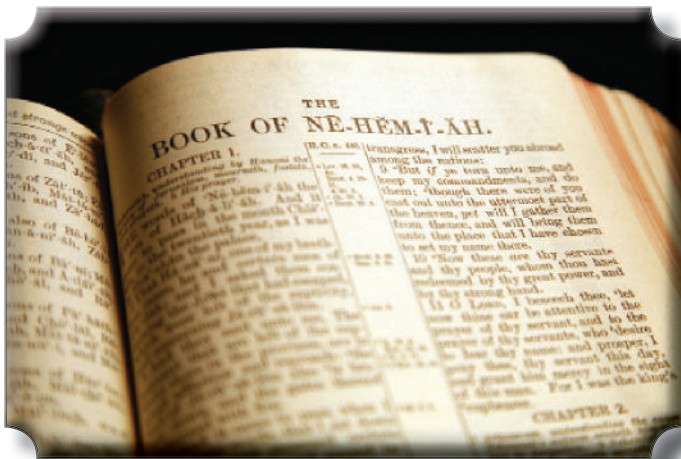


“And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9). Temptations to forsake good works have ever plagued mankind. Satan has always known that the quickest and surest way to bring a good work to a halt is simply by discouraging the workers. Our enemy, as ***“a roaring lion... seeking whom he may devour”*** (1 Peter 5:8), delights in shrouding any shining ray of hope with dark clouds of doubt and defeatism.

A wonderful biblical example of one who overcame Satan’s temptations to quit a worthy work can be found in the Old Testament record of Nehemiah. He had not been laboring long in rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem before Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, enemies of God’s people, heard of it and began a major campaign to halt the work. At first, they ridiculed the project. Tobiah dismissed the wall as being so weak that it would fall under the weight of a fox (Nehemiah 4:3). Yet, the work continued. These enemies then ***“conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it,”*** but still the work

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continued with the workmen holding a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other (4:8, 17). Sanballat and Geshem tempted Nehemiah to take a rest from the work to meet with them on the plains of Ono to talk the matter over, but the invitation was refused and the work continued (6:1-4). Finally, ugly and untruthful rumors were circulated in a last-ditch effort to discredit the work and the motive behind it (6:5-9). However, the work continued, and the wall was finished in just 52 days (6:15).



The keys to Nehemiah's success? Among others, note these. First, ***“they strengthened their hands for this good work,”*** believing that God would help them (2:18,20). Second, ***“the people had a mind to work”*** (4:6). Because the work was perceived as greater than the workers and because it was seen as a work of God to be aided by God, Nehemiah's fellow citizens ***“had a mind to work...”*** Thus, they were neither discouraged nor dissuaded.

Satan met a brick wall when he came up against Nehemiah and his workmen. May the same be true of his efforts against our good works as we labor for the Lord today. 

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

How Did God Give Them Up?

Dennis Gullede

In Romans 1, it is said of the godless classes that “*God gave them up to uncleanness*” (vs. 24), “*God gave them up to vile passions*” (vs. 26) and “*God gave them over to a debased mind*” (vs. 28). What do these statements mean? The phrase “*gave them up*” comes from a Greek word meaning to abandon, to give into the hands of another, to give over to one’s power to use. What does God do, or not do, when this occurs? The following passages offer some very interesting insights.

Ephesians 4:17-19. Paul used the same thought that he had employed in Romans 1:24, 26, 28 to describe what people do in surrendering themselves to a sinful lifestyle. The Gentiles had become calloused and apathetic, giving themselves up to unbridled lust. What God does, we might also do to ourselves.

Hosea 4:16-19. God let Israel go because they were joined to idols to the extent that attempts to bring them back were fruitless. Some people reach a point that they cannot (are unwilling to) repent. God told the prophet, “*Let him alone.*” Is there a point in the spiritual state of apostates when it is fruitless to try to reach them with the Gospel? Is there a point when we are to leave them alone (Matthew 7:6)?

Psalms 81:11-16. In giving His people over to follow the lusts of their own hearts, what did God do or not do? He withdrew from them His protecting and guiding influence. He would have subdued their enemies, but did not (vs. 14). He would have had such an influence upon their adversaries as to keep them at bay for as long as Israel was obedient to Him (vs. 15). He would have blessed them with prosperity (vs. 16). Does God deny His providential blessings to those people who are set against Him?

BIBLE QUESTIONS

Acts 7:39-43. Stephen described Israel's idolatry from the wilderness wanderings until the Babylonian captivity. Their full-blown worship of the *"host of heaven"* is described in Amos 5:25-27. It was the outcome for their rebellious attitude toward God. It was the climax of the idolatrous process they had begun in the wilderness of Judea. Once apostasy begins, there is no place for the backslider to stop. God will let it go unabated.

Ezekiel 20:25-26. God scattered His people among the pagan nations (vs. 23). Israel felt that it deserved the Promised Land and that God would never forsake His



Promised Land

people regardless of what they might do. As Israel went deeper into idolatry, the Israelites found themselves subservient to a religious code that was pagan and deadly. The Hebrew word for *"gave"* (*nathan*) is a judicial sentence passed upon Israel for their idolatry. This is more than God just allowing them to go that way. It is an example of the *"strong delusion"* and believing a lie that Paul warned about in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. Israel would not renounce idolatry and was drawn deeper into its power, **even to the point of child sacrifice**. Is this where we are today? Where our lawmakers have abandoned God's will for the sanctity of life, **we have gone so far as to murder our unborn.** ✝

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

BIBLE QUESTIONS

The Ten Commandments and the New Testament

Russell Bell

Question:

“Would you please furnish specific Bible texts for each of the other nine commandments?” **Answer:**

In a past article, I mentioned that nine of the original Ten Commandments are mentioned in the New Testament, but the fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy,” was not in the New Testament. The reader evidently recognizes the absence



of the Sabbath commandment in the New Testament and wonders if any of the other nine are absent. The answer is, “No.” Here are nine of the Ten Commandments in the New Testament. These Old Testament laws brought into the New Testament are not all word for word, but the clear teaching of them is there.

BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. No other God (Exodus 20:4).

“Concerning therefore the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; yet to us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we unto him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him.” (1 Corinthians 8:4-6)

2. No graven images (Exodus 20:4).

“Wherefore, my beloved flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14).

3. Do not take the Lord’s name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Matthew 6:9).

“Let no corrupt speech proceed out of your mouth but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may give grace to them that hear” (Ephesians 4:29).

4. Keep the Sabbath holy (Exodus 20:8).

There is no command, precept or example in the New Testament law for man to keep the Sabbath. This command was entirely omitted in the new covenant of Christ. The Lord’s Day, the first day of the week, was given to be observed (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

5. Honor father and mother (Exodus 20:12).

“Children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise)” (Ephesians 6:1-2).

6. Thou shalt not kill (Exodus 20:13).

“For let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evil-doer,

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or as a meddler in other men's matters" (1 Peter 4:15).

7. Do not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).

"Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

8. Do not steal (Exodus 20:15).

"Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need" (Ephesians 4:28).

9. Do not bear false witness (Exodus 20:16).

"Lie not one to another seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings" (Colossians 3:9).

10. Thou shalt not covet (Exodus 20:17).

"For this ye know of a surety, that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5). 

[Editor's Note: At least these New Testament passages validate the affirmation that nine of the original Ten Commandments have been reinstituted in the New Testament. Doubtlessly, the list could be expanded with similar additional references from within the New Covenant. Lastly, contemporary people are bound to implement those nine commandments, not because they were in the Old Testament, but because they are in the New Testament under which we live and by which we will be judged one day. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

Russell Bell is a Gospel preacher and a foreign missionary who resides in Topeka, Kansas, USA.

What is Right with the Church?

Mark N. Posey

TEXT: Ephesians 5:25-27

Introduction:

When sinful people try to damage the church, it hurts Christ and His people (Acts 9:4; Matthew 25:45). However, do not be discouraged. The church is so right it cannot be wrong, because it was built and founded by Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 3:11). Consider some reasons why the church is right! The church is right because...

1. The PRICE was right!

- The price paid for the church was the death of God's only begotten Son upon



CHARTS & OUTLINES

the cruel cross for man's redemption. SONG: "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:18-19).

- Paul said our Lord "purchased the church with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

2. The PLEA is right!

- We plead for the Scriptures as the final and authoritative rule in religion. We speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:1).
- We plead for a restoration of the New Testament system in every essential aspect. We must return to the Word of God in all essential matters, such as: the plan of salvation (Acts 2:38; 22:16), the plan for worship (Acts 20:7; 2:42), the plan for church organization (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13), and the plan for Christian purity (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-8).

3. The PROMISE is right!

- God promises Heaven to the church. Jesus said, *"If I go... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, you may be also"* (John 14:3).
- Heaven is reserved for the *"born again"* (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Conclusion:

If you love the church as Jesus did, make it your first priority (Matthew 6:33), and the Lord will grant unto you all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3).✝

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

The price paid for the church was the death of God's only begotten Son upon the cruel cross for man's redemption.

Forgetting God!

Text: Deuteronomy 32.15-18

Bobby Dockery

Introduction:

- A. Forgetfulness can be humorous... or tragic!
- B. The most catastrophic forgetfulness that can be imagined is to forget God!
- C. Let us look closer at the nature and causes of this spiritual condition.

Body:

I. Forgetting God is at the heart of every other sin.

- A. All sin, with its shame and heartbreak, stems from forgetting God!
 - 1. Selfishness is forgetting God in our dealings with others (Matthew 25:45).
 - 2. Pride is forgetting God in our estimation of ourselves (Luke 18).
 - 3. Worry is forgetting God's providence (Philippians 4:6).
 - 4. Envy is forgetting God's grace and blessings (Psalm 103:1-5).
- B. What sin can we name that does not stem from forgetting God?

II. Why do people forget God?

- A. It seems incomprehensible that people could forget God (Isaiah 1:3; Jeremiah 2:32).
- B. Why does it happen?
 - 1. Because of prosperity (Deuteronomy 32:15).
 - 2. Because the guilty conscience does not like to retain God in its thoughts (John 3:20).
 - 3. Because the world is antagonistic to the Father (1 John 2:15).

CHARTS & OUTLINES

III. There are many ways we can be guilty of forgetting God.

A. What are some of them?

1. When we are not thankful (Romans 1:21).
2. When we leave God out of our plans (James 4:13-15).
3. When we can't find time for God's Word (Hosea 4:6).
4. When we undervalue God's church (Acts 20:28).
5. When we fail to keep our promises to God (1 Peter 3:21).

Conclusion:

- A. Forgetting God leads to spiritual ruin (Psalm 9:17)!
- B. Our need is to remember God at every moment of life!



Bobby Dockery is a writer and preacher living in Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA, and has been heavily involved in mission work for many years.

**Forgetting God is at the
heart of every other sin.**

Did You Know?

The Egyptians described in the Old Testament were a very idolatrous people. They believed in gods or goddesses for the sky, the Nile River, the sun, birth, death and many other things. God sent ten plagues to encourage the Pharaoh to let His people leave Egyptian bondage. Each of the plagues showed that the God of Heaven was more powerful than the Egyptians' gods. One might say that the ancient Egyptians had forgotten the true God (Psalm 9:17; Romans 1:20-32).



Restoration Theology

Cecil May, Jr.

The necessity of baptism for the remission of sin and for salvation, the Lord's Supper in the assembly on the Lord's Day, male leadership in worship when both men and women are present, and a cappella singing distinguish churches of Christ from other contemporary religious groups. Many speak of these as "our faith tradition." Each one is, I believe, biblically mandated, and if they are biblical and not just manmade traditions, they are an important part of "*the obedience of faith*" (Romans 1:5; 16:26).

"Restoration" — "a return of something to a former, original, normal, or unimpaired condition; restitution of something taken away or lost" (*Dictionary.com*).

Biblical baptism is a burial (Romans 6:4), is in order to receive the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), is into Christ (Galatians 3:27), is for salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21) and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). That being so, people who are baptized believing they are already saved, in so believing they deny every biblical purpose for baptism. If they were not buried with Christ (immersed) in baptism, they were not baptized at all. Some profess to believe all of that but still consider people who have not been biblically baptized to be Christians. Are they not denying what they say they believe?

"Theology" — "study of divine things or religious truth" (*Dictionary.com*).

There is a New Testament doctrine of assembly. Christians are commanded not to neglect meeting together (Hebrews 10:26). Many refer

CHURCH HISTORY

to the assembly as “the worship service.” Others point out that the Bible never uses that expression for our assemblies. According to Scripture, our assemblies are for mutual encouragement (Hebrews 10:24-25). What is appropriate or inappropriate in the assembly is determined by whether or not it builds us up (1 Corinthians 14:3-5, 17). Our singing is not all praise to God; it is also to teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16).

However, a specific purpose of assembling on the Lord’s Day is to take the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20), which is certainly an act of worship. So are praying, singing, proclaiming God’s Word and giving acts of worship, all of which take place in the Lord’s Day assembly (1 Corinthians 14:15; 16:2). The assembly is not the only time Christians worship, and it is possible to be in the assembly and go through all of the right motions and yet not worship. Our hearts and minds must be engaged as well and our daily lives must be consistent with our profession. That is why George Bailey said, “Sitting in a church service no more makes you a Christian than sitting in a hen house makes you a hen.”

Specific things that are appropriate on other occasions are not to be done in the assembly. Those who had the gift of tongues were not allowed to exercise that gift in the assembly except under certain conditions (1 Corinthians 14:28). Women are not to speak out during the assembly (1 Corinthians 14:33-34). A common meal, one to satisfy hunger, is not appropriate in the assembly (1 Corinthians 11:21-22). The Lord’s Supper is a memorial, the bread calling to mind Christ’s body and the fruit of the vine leading us to reflect on His blood shed for our sins (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

May our faith work through love, in our assemblies and in our lives, in gratitude for what God through Christ has done for us. 

Cecil May, Jr. is Dean Emeritus of Faulkner University in Montgomery, Alabama, USA.

[Editor’s Note: The foregoing article relates to “Restoration Theology” because it speaks of and pertains to the church for which Jesus Christ died to establish, over which He is the Head, for which He will return to retrieve and about which anyone can read especially in the New Testament portion of the Bible. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]



Taking the Nation Back by Taking Jesus to the Nation

The elders of Elmore congregation (*Elmore, AL*) oversee an effort actively partnering with brethren from a growing number of congregations in the U.S. in the vision of the planting of germinal congregations of the church of Christ in Northeastern Pennsylvania and beyond.

Secret to Global Evangelism



Elders of the Elmore Church of Christ: Stan Taylor, Jimmy Davis, Terry Carlisle, and Marshall Reese.

Seeing Paul's mission-
al strategy through the
lens of his missionary
journeys, the aim of the
"Antioch Initiative" is
the making of disciples
of Jesus Christ who will
possess the spiritual
DNA of Jesus, able to
reproduce themselves,
perpetually leading to ex-

FROM THE HEART OF

ponential growth — disciples making disciples and church-plants growing to plant other churches (2 Timothy 2:2). **Dr. Dave Laton** (*a core member of the Antioch Initiative and deacon associated with missions at Prattville congregation, Prattville, AL*) wrote, “Discipleship is at the heart of who we are and what we do as faithful servants to the Master. On one level, we glorify God by our faithfulness, and on another level, we facilitate bringing others to know God — therefore replicating the process — who in turn further replicate the process.”

When a true disciple is produced in a location where there is no church, a congregation is on the brink of being birthed! No other blueprint will ensure the planting of germinal congregations. The secret to global evangelism has been hidden in plain sight, embedded in Jesus’ mandate, **“Go, and make disciples!”** Alan Hirsch offers the illustration of the octopus and the starfish. If an octopus suffers the severing of a tentacle, God has given the octopus the regenerative power to grow a new tentacle. Yet, if a starfish suffers the amputation of an arm, he, too, can grow a new arm, but a new starfish will be created from the starfish’s arm that was severed! Why? The severed arm possesses the essential DNA to produce a new starfish!

The production of disciples of Jesus who possess His DNA is the secret to global evangelism. Disciples cannot be mass-produced. Jesus invested three and a half years in producing eleven such men, and they, in turn, mentored disciples who could do the same. Woven into the strategic fabric of the **Antioch Initiative** is the intentional vision of disciple-making. **Arthur Barry** (*evangelist of Valley Cities congregation in Sayre — the 1st church plant of the Antioch Initiative*) indicated that his new congregation (*Valley Cities*) would like to plant a church in Towanda, PA (*the county seat of Bradford County*). Visions can only come true through prayerful intentionality. **All congregations of the church of Christ need to recapture the same intentionality. Imagine how a local congregational stratagem would be revolutionized if it was the leadership’s intention to train members capable of becoming the leaders in new church plants in needed areas in their regions.** Robert Schuller has been credited with

FROM THE HEART OF

saying, “Anyone can count the seeds in an apple, but only God can count the apples in a seed.”

A Bit of History

Inspired by Paul’s missionary journeys, in 2009 **Don Myers** (*Assistant Professor of Bible at Faulkner University and preacher for the Elmore congregation*) mentioned to **Brenda Johnson** of *Lads-to-Leaders* that he would like Faulkner Bible majors to have the opportunity to have field experiences related to church planting as part



Brother and Sister Don Myers

of the fabric of their preparation as evangelists of the good news. If an evangelistic spark could be ignited in their hearts, just what might result in the future through their ministries? Faulkner University continues to partner in this work by designating brother Myers’ summers for mission work, balanced with the elders of Elmore church which oversees the **Antioch Initiative**.

Sister Johnson indicated she and her husband **Roy** had lived in Kittanning, Pennsylvania during the time Roy worked with the Boy Scouts of America and that Pennsylvania was in great need of church planting. This conversation led to a group from Faulkner University (*including Brenda and her son*) traveling to Kittanning to explore the town of Butler, PA. The elders of Kittanning congregation were presented with a proposal to partner with Christians from Montgomery, Alabama in planting a congregation in Butler. Although this did not come to fruition, the vision had taken legs that would ultimately lead the Kittanning elders to oversee an evangelist in the first church plant of the **Antioch Initiative!** Don commented, “All the tumblers fell into place between the Elmore church and Faulkner for this outreach to be possible; hence, I believe the dial is being turned by God” (Philemon 15).

In May 2013, Don recruited five Faulkner students (*Thad Evans, Shelton Davis, Matt Stinson, Devin Morris, and Max Peters*) to travel

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to Kittanning to assist with a door-knocking effort in that town under the direction of the local evangelist, **Larry Krause**. Before the trip was planned, Larry committed to arrange a meeting of regional Pennsylvania elders and preachers to join in a brainstorming and prayer session with the Faulkner group. **Terry Carlisle**, elder of Elmore congregation, traveled with his wife **Winni** to Kittanning for that evangelistic outreach and to participate in the



Larry Krause and Jimmy Davis

brainstorming session. After that meeting, brother **Clarence McDowell** (now retired Pennsylvania church planter responsible for beginning the Kittanning congregation nearly 50 years ago) urged the group to consider Northeastern Pennsylvania as an area for church planting. Clarence specifically pinpointed Sayre as an excellent site, since Bradford County, Pennsylvania had no congregation and Sayre and Athens, Pennsylvania and Waverly, New York (referred to by residents as “Valley Cities”) were intertwined towns with a friendly, working-class citizenry of fourteen thousand people. Twenty-nine towns and commonwealths are within thirty miles of Sayre, which has the 254-bed *Guthrie Robert Packer Hospital* that is a primary stroke center and teaching hospital.

Out of those times of prayer and dialogue an expanded vision was born of planting the Lord’s church in four counties of Northeastern Pennsylvania, which at that time had no congregations — namely Bradford, Susquehanna, Wyoming, and Sullivan Counties. **Jimmy Davis** (elder of Elmore) made a subsequent trip to attend a strategy session for the planting of a congregation in Sayre. He was powerfully convinced that **the only way to recover our nation is to preach the Gospel and plant churches**. Jimmy brings a rich missional experience and business acumen into the core leadership of the **Antioch Initiative**, serving with

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his fellow missionally experienced elders — **Stan Taylor, Terry Carlisle, and Marshall Reese**. Set-backs, disappointments, and multi-colored challenges have been courageously met by these four men of God; hence, without their wisdom and resolution, this work would have frozen to a halt. Amazing to behold, brethren from numbers of states possessing broad-based mission experience and giftedness have joined hands and hearts in this cooperative work — praying, serving, and/or giving.

Results to Date



Members of the Valley Cities Church of Christ in Sayre, Pennsylvania

On October 19, 2014, the first church plant was launched in Sayre, representing the only congregation of the Lord's church in Bradford County, Pennsylvania, reaching out to its 63,000 residents and rallying many brethren from multiple states to assist **Arthur Barry** — evangelist of the Valley Cities congregation in Sayre — with campaigning, Vacation Bible School, and other outreaches. Arthur (*with wife Sandy*) is a wise, extremely experienced and well-versed man of God who was recommended by brethren in Horseheads, NY, leading



Arthur and Sandy Barry

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Members of the Tunkhannock Church of Christ

to his selection. On June 5, 2016, the second church plant was launched in Tunkhannock, which is the only congregation of the church of Christ in Wyoming County, reaching out to its 27,800 residents. Approximately 50 Christians from New York, Alabama, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Alaska, and Kentucky campaigned in rotational style for the entirety of the 2016 summer. Then in October 2016, a survey trip was made by **Jimmy Davis, Dr. and Mrs. Dan Wheeler,** and **Bill Garrett** to explore potential sites for a third work in Pennsylvania with hopes of launching in the summer of 2017.

Mission Philosophy

Using Pauline strategy, the core members of the Antioch Initiative have no intention of being anchored to the buying of church properties or the building of church buildings that would only promise to slow the rhythm of their church planting efforts. Temporary meeting places in modest facilities or homes are necessary (*Sayre church meets in a renovated engineer's office suite, and Tunkhannock church meets in a revamped plumber's shop*), but the long-range plans as to where those

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saints will meet and other decisions related to local congregational business fall under the decision-making obligation of the new church plants. From the first day of a new church plant, charter members are challenged to make decisions regarding their local church, encouraging the “new baby” to breathe and cry! Although leadership training is a critical component of the new church plants underscoring the need for recruitment of evangelists that are strong and grounded in the Word of God, empowering church plants to struggle with decisions and stepping forward to make sacrifices ensure that they will perform the Lord’s will, not sit back and let outside brethren do it for them. It would be a tragedy to support a mission work for a decade only to realize no one had risen to leadership and most remained spectators — not participants in the mission of Jesus. **Dr. Andrew Bowens** (*core leader of Antioch Initiative and deacon of Elmore church*) asked, “With nothing but the noblest of intentions, could it be that paternalistically driven mission efforts have unwittingly contributed to the smothering of indigenous leadership?” The **Antioch Initiative** has three goals for new church plants, namely that they be *self-led, self-propagating, and self-financed* as quickly and as early as possible. Realizing that it takes time for these goals to be reached, those leading these mission endeavors must be intentional and driven toward these objectives, insisting on the incremental assumption of responsibility on the part of members of new church plants.

Keeping the Cadence

One component of the church planting strategy is the utilization of Pennsylvania preachers, church leaders, and Bible teachers willing to serve as rotational preachers for new congregations until which time permanent evangelists can be located. **Bill Garrett** of Lewistown, PA (*core leader of the Antioch Initiative*) has been able to recruit several rotational preachers for the Endless Mountains plant in Tunkhannock. These wonderful servants of the Word drive anywhere from one to three hours, one-way, to teach and to preach each Sunday. In other words, one of the features of demographic study, foundational to the planting of new congregations in any particular city, is the willingness of brethren in the region to join the work and provide rotational teachers and preachers. Adding this component to the church

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Dr. Dave Laton of the Prattville, AL congregation

planting scheme means churches can be planted without full-time evangelists being immediately identified. This holds out the promise of a growing fraternity as these Pennsylvania rotational preachers, teachers, and leaders track their evangelistic enthusiasm back

into their own congregations. Such participation of indigenous brethren in practical distance of new church plants may hold one critical key to addressing the widespread landscape of weak and shrinking congregations of the churches of Christ joining hands to sustain new church plants in their regions until permanent evangelists are placed or developed within the membership.

Paul's tactic was to immediately go to Jewish synagogues to preach Christ when on virgin soil because people there were mighty in Old Testament Scripture, looking forward to the Messianic Kingdom. When Paul was able to affirm the truthfulness of their convictions and prove that the Messiah had been enthroned as King over God's church kingdom, Jews with expectant and believing hearts became Christians. Due to their knowledge of the Old Testament, some were able to quickly qualify for leadership under Paul's instruction and through impartation of supernatural gifts (*e.g. such as prophesy*) given by the Spirit through the laying on of

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his hands in the infant church. Since supernatural gifts of the Spirit are no longer in evidence today, the use of godly, mature men of God from regional Pennsylvania churches is the nearest parallel to the inclusion of the bedrocks of maturity and leadership in transitioning from rotational preachers to the placement of full-time evangelists.

Joining the Vision

The **Antioch Initiative** offers elderships around the U.S. opportunity to partner *in taking the nation back by taking Jesus to the nation*. Further, this offers congregations the chance to become involved in planting new congregations without traveling outside the U.S. and all that involves. What a grand way to expose Christian young people to the centerpiece of Jesus' mission — the salvation of the lost, the making of disciples, and the planting of churches — as we all join hands with an expanding group of passionate, evangelistic brothers and sisters from around the nation! Who can estimate the lifelong impression that might be made on a young person working side-by-side in a short term mission trip with passionate church planters?

Should an eldership affirm, "We are going to plant churches ourselves," we can only joyfully shout, "Praise God!" Yet, if any eldership would like to coordinate their dreams of church planting with the work overseen by the Elmore elders and a growing number of knowledgeable and experienced church planters, we say, "Praise God!" Each time a new eldership or partner joins this effort, our vision is broadened by their knowledge, mission experience, and passion.

Elderships are being sought who have the burning passion that the church has been given **the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion!** Faithful evangelists are being sought who will consider the Pennsylvania mission field. Just imagine the advantage and encouragement evangelists in the field would have in knowing that a team of gifted and experienced brethren stand ready to assist them and their overseeing eldership in the greatest work in the world — the advancement of the Gospel of Christ! Your fellowship in prayer and financial support is needed. 

For more information, contact Jimmy Davis at (334) 300-6987 or email jpdavis0699@gmail.com or visit Antioch Initiative at aicoc.org

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- * Does the church of Christ exist in your community, so that you can hear the Gospel preached? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- * Is there a source for buying Bibles in your community? Though the Bible has been translated into most languages, villages seldom have bookstores. For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- * If you have found the Truth and are a Christian, is there a bookstore from which you can order additional study materials? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.

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ANSWERS TO PUZZLES

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6. Avoid fornication
7. Marry, burn
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Scavenger Hunt (page 83)

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2. joy 1:2
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8. a vapor (mist) 4:14
9. "effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man" 5:16
10. Abraham, Rahab, Job, Elijah 2:21-24; 2:25; 5:11; 5:17-18

Bible Find (page 40)



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

The Focal Point for God from the Beginning:

Man sinned

**God promised One who would
crush the head of satan (Genesis 3:15)**

**Man continued to delve deeper into sin (Genesis 6:5)
God sent the flood, but saved the remnant of humanity
through Noah and his family (Genesis 9:1)**

**Man again fell into sin and the worship of idol gods.
In order to preserve a line through which man's Saviour
would be born, Abraham was chosen as the father of a
new nation, under God's new but transitory law
(Genesis 12:1).**

**Sin continued to grow, but God continued to prepare
for the coming of the Saviour into the world preserving
the Israelite nation again and again through the power
and intervention of The Angel of the Lord
(Exodus 33:2; Isaiah 63:9).**

**In the fulness of time, the Saviour was born (Galatians 4:4).
He did the work He came to do, He died for the sins of
humanity, and He overcame death — giving to humani-
ty the Gospel of salvation (1 Corinthians 15:3,4).**

**Then, to the church, His brothers and sisters, He said,
“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every
creature... (Mark 16:15,16).**

**God's entire work of the ages has been
entrusted to our hands!
Are we completing the work,
or does it die with us?**