Volume One Hundred and Seventeen

The Voice of Truth International

My Ship of Life

Cliff Holmes

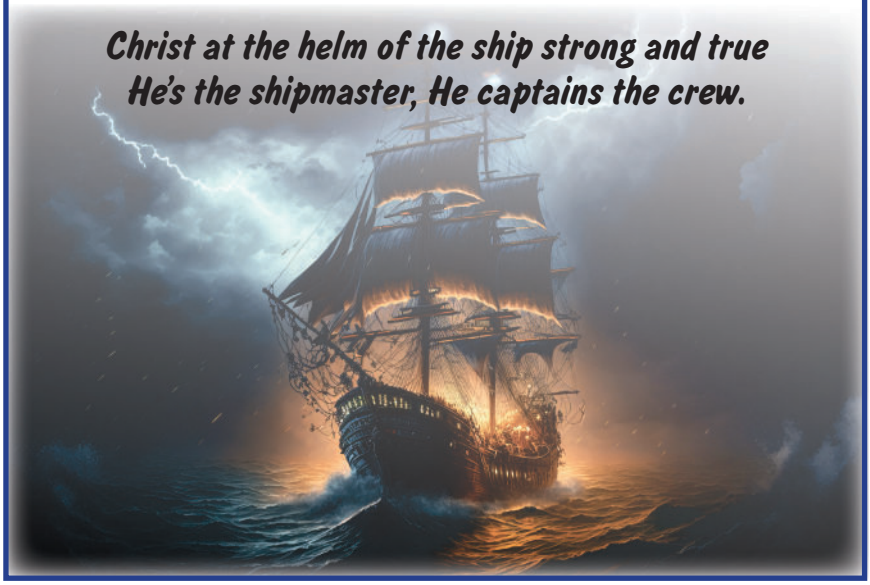
My ship sails over life's darkening main
Traversing lightning, thunder and rain.

Through threatening waves goes the strong prow
As in deep prayer on bended knee I do bow.

My Bible, the rudder, a strong mighty force
Guiding, correcting and righting my course.

With daily devotion from God's Holy Word
Urging me onward to serve my Dear Lord.

Christ at the helm of the ship strong and true
He's the shipmaster, He captains the crew.



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

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Location, Location, Location

Louis Rushmore

Location, location, location. "The point is that *location* is so vital to real estate, it takes up the top three spots on the list of things you must consider" (Charron). "In a nutshell, location, location, location means **identical homes can increase or decrease in value due to location**. The saying is repeated three times for emphasis, and it is the number one rule in real estate, though it is often the most overlooked. You can buy the right home in the wrong location" (Weintraub). A dictionary definition for "location" reads, "1a : a position or site occupied or available for occupancy or marked by some distinguishing feature… b(1) : a tract of land designated for a purpose" ("Location").

Irrespective of where we live on the Earth – possessor of expensive real estate or owner of none – there are only two locations fitted for the eternal habitation of souls. Our Lord Jesus Christ said that He is preparing a ***"place"*** – a location – in ***"His Father's house"*** for His followers. ***"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also"*** (John 14:1-3 NKJV). That eternal abode has been in preparation ***"from the foundation of the world"*** (Matthew 25:34). The **other** eternal homeplace is ***"the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"*** – Hell (Matthew 25:41).

Both eternal locations or places **are prepared** accordingly for the respective future residents. The number one rule for each precious soul to consider regarding his or her investment in eternal real estate, certainly, is location. Both Heaven and Hell are available for occupancy and possess their distinguishing features, and God designated each for a purpose. At the Second Coming of our Lord, He will appear ***"in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power"*** (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

Hell is a bad neighborhood, to say the very least about it. There will reside all manner of ungodly and wicked souls. ***"…The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death"*** (Revelation 21:8). ***"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God"***

(1 Corinthians 6:9-10). ***"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"*** (Galatians 5:19-21). Even sins that are no longer viewed as criminal acts, as well as sins that have attained a status of social acceptability, will lead their practitioners to spend forever in a painful existence among the worst sinners who ever lived.

Heaven, however, **will present unimaginable joy and happiness without end** to faithful children of God. There is hope as long as one lives and Jesus Christ delays His return. Christians at Corinth had been sinners of the most horrible sort, but they changed. The apostle Paul concluded his list of sins with acknowledgement of the transition that had occurred in the lives of the Corinthian Christians. ***"And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God"*** (1 Corinthians 6:11). They had been washed from their sins by the blood of our Lord (Revelation 1:5). They had been sanctified – set aside for use by God (2 Timothy 2:21). They had been justified, whereas before, they were condemned (Romans 5:9-11).

Location, location, location. In what neighborhood would you find your eternal home if you were to die within the hour? **In what eternal habitation have you been investing?**

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Spiritual Stability!

Jerry Bates

We want to think that the earth is a strong, stable place on which to build and to live. When we build houses, we want to build on a solid foundation so the building will stand for many years. However, sometimes this earth is not very stable. We have all heard of earthquakes, some very severe, and we've at least seen pictures of the destruction left by such natural activities. One place in Italy near Naples, Pozzuoli, is especially prone to tremors. I read that in the last year, 1254 tremors occurred at or near it. Most of those could not be felt; nevertheless, they were measured. Obviously, even the earth in that location cannot be said to be very stable.

When it comes to our spiritual condition, we should be firm and stable, too. Stable means to be firmly established or not changing or fluctuating. God wants us to be established, to be firm and to be secure. The apostle Paul sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to **establish** them and to encourage them concerning their faith (1 Thessalonians 3:2). A few verses later Paul wrote, ***"And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints"*** (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 NKJV). It is obvious that Paul very much desired the spiritual growth and stability of the Thessalonian Christians, and we should desire the same for ourselves. Though, how does this occur?

Ultimately, of course, this spiritual growth and stability comes from God, since everything of a spiritual nature comes from God. However, this stability is not something that naturally comes to all Christians or is supernaturally given by God. There are several things that contribute to this

spiritual stability. **First and foremost, knowledge of the Word of God contributes to spiritual maturity.** The Word is our spiritual food, and no growth can occur without food. Peter encouraged first century Christians (and indirectly us as well) to ***"desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby"*** (1 Peter 2:2). Since growth occurs through the agency of the Word, this implies that without knowledge of God's Word, growth cannot occur. We find in 1 Thessalonians 3:2 that Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica to ***"establish"*** them. This could only be done by the instruction of God's Word done by Timothy. In Acts 15, the church in Jerusalem sent Paul, Barnabas, Judas or Barsabas and Silas to Antioch. In verse 32 of that chapter we read, ***"Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words."*** Notice that the brethren were encouraged and strengthened by the words of God's prophets. In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul discussed the purpose of the leaders of the church: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (elders) and teachers. Their purpose was for the ***"perfecting"*** (growth or maturing) of the saints (v. 12). They were to do this by their teaching ***"till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting"*** (vs. 13-14). Paul wanted the Ephesian church to be established, to be firm and not to be tossed about like leaves being blown by the wind. Again, this was accomplished by ***"…speaking the truth in love…"*** (vs. 15).

Secondly, this stability is accomplished by our association with fellow Christians. When Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, he was facing great affliction and distress, and yet, when he heard of their faithfulness, he was greatly comforted (3:7). We sometimes feel that in this world, everyone is out to get us or to take advantage of us, but that should not be true in the church. Many verses talk about the strength that we should give to others and receive from them. ***"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"*** (Galatians 6:2). ***"Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification"*** (Romans 15:2). We are told, ***"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep"*** (Romans 12:15). The church is compared to the physical body. ***"And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members***

rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). An old popular hymn, "Blest Be the Tie That Binds," certainly carries this thought in the 3rd stanza. "We share each other's woes, our mutual burdens bear; and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear." It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to faithfully live the Christian life without the support of our fellow Christians.

The third way by which we can stand secure is through our relationship with Jesus Christ and the hope that gives us. One of the things that strengthens us is the hope of something better. Soldiers will continue to fight under almost impossible odds as long as they have hope of an ultimate victory. Take away their hope, and their courage quickly fades away. We have a hope that is as sure as our God and Savior Jesus Christ. The Thessalonians were discouraged because some of their friends and family had died before Christ returned. They were wondering if that meant their hope was for nothing. Paul addressed that misconception in chapter 1 Thessalonians 4. After promising them that those dead in Christ would rise first and meet the Lord in the air (4:16-17), he concluded in verse 18, ***"Therefore comfort one another with these words."*** The hope of a future resurrection for all provided great comfort and strength to the Christians.

The book of Hebrews was written to a group of Christians who were discouraged and tired. Toward the end of chapter 6, they were reminded of the hope they had in Christ. ***"Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul…"*** (vs. 17-19). Just as anchors hold ships firm and secure in the midst of the waves, so our hope in Christ makes us firm and secure even amidst the many trials of this life.

We have seen three things by which we can be firm and secure: our knowledge of God's Word, our association with fellow Christians and our hope we have in Christ. With these things, we can be **established** or firmly planted. Do you feel you are using all the helps that God has given you to be a stronger, more mature Christian? Resolve today to take advantage of these great gifts God supplies to those who love and obey Him. ✠

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

If Christianity Is True, Wouldn't You Obey It?

Shane Fisher

The Laws of Thought

Laws of thought are built upon a fundamental foundation in which we can interact with each other in a reasonable discussion. The **law of identity** is "whatever is, is." A = A. A car is a car. A boat is a boat. The second law is called the **law of excluded middle** where "everything must either be or not be." Either it is a car or it is not a car, but it cannot be both. The third law is called the **law of non-contradiction**, which is "two or more contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time." For example, a person could not affirm in the same breath, "I know the God of the Bible exists and that the God of the Bible does not exist." Both statements cannot be true at the same time and in the same respect.

A Supreme Being Exists

Going back to the law of excluded middle, a Supreme Being either exists or a Supreme Being does not exist. There are several pieces of evidence that affirm a Supreme Being exists. **First, there is the design argument.** Design demands a Designer. Look at a mousetrap. It has several parts that all fit together nicely: a platform, cheese, catch, spring, hammer and a hold-down bar. All of these parts are needed together in the order and arrangement for the purpose of catching a mouse. A person with reasonable intellect would conclude rightly that it was designed. If it was designed, it was made by a designer even though they never even met the designer! One of the greatest designs in the universe is the human body. Who would ever think that it would

come from chance and random forces? Psalm 139:13-14 states, "***For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well***" (NKJV).

A second piece of evidence is cause and effect. For every effect, there must be an efficient cause. "What caused the universe to come into existence?" There have been three options proposed. First, the universe has always existed – it is eternal. This option can be struck out because as Robert Jastrow stated, "modern science denies an eternal existence to the Universe" (30). The second law of thermodynamics, which states that energy has been running down, demonstrates that the universe has not always existed.

The second option is the universe popped into existence from **nothing**. This would violate the common sense principle. "From nothing, nothing comes." Imagine I tried to sell you a pound of nothing. Would you buy it from me? I am hoping you would not be that gullible. The same would go for this ridiculous notion that everything came from nothing!

The third option is that the universe came into existence from a Cause that was outside of space, time and matter. This resembles Genesis 1:1, which reads, "***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth***." Romans 1:20 declares, ***"For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse"*** (ESV).

The third piece of evidence is objective moral laws and values that would demand an ultimate moral Lawgiver. Do you critique the actions of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and other dictators? If so, then you ultimately have to appeal to a supreme moral law that is above us all, which demands a moral Lawgiver. Putting all of this evidence together, it shows that the Person is wise and intelligent who designed the universe. The Person is powerful, resourceful and eternal, as well as outside of time, space and matter Who caused the universe to come into existence. Morality would demonstrate this Person to be just and fair. That fits a great description of Who we call God.

Would this Supreme Being Want to Reveal Himself?

The answer is either "yes" or "no" based on the law of excluded middle. I want you to imagine if parents never revealed themselves to their child they just had together. They never clothed, fed or nurtured it. They never stood

over the crib to kiss the baby goodnight. How much greater if the "***Father of spirits***" (Hebrews 12:9 NKJV) had never revealed Himself to us? Acts 14:17 states "***Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness***." Acts 17:26-28 records:

> ***And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, "For we are also His offspring."***

Based on the earlier characteristics of this Supreme Being, it would be right for us to assume this Being would want to reveal Himself. If the Being wanted to reveal Himself, how might He do so? He could do so **temporarily**, and the Bible reveals that is exactly what He did through His own voice, dreams, visions and manifestations of Himself (Hebrews 1:1). However, to do so temporarily, it would be there for a moment, and then it would be gone. Yet, He also could do so in a **permanent** way – through a *written record*.

There would need to be a claim that a book came from God, and the Bible claims over 3,000 times to be from Him! However, just because it makes that claim does not prove that it is true! Evidence is needed for such a claim, and the Bible exactly provides that!

Predictive prophecy is one of the great evidences of the inspiration of the Bible. It needs three ingredients: (1) significant timing, (2) specific details, and (3) 100% fulfillment. To give one example out of the hundreds of prophecies, think about Isaiah 52:13-53:12, which gives specific details of the hometown raising, rejection, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It was written 750-700 years before Jesus was born. Sometime a little bit after 30 A.D., Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch who was reading from this portion of Scripture, and Philip preached to him that Jesus was the fulfillment of that passage (Acts 8:30-34). However, a skeptic might pose the question, "How do we know that this was not written down until after the events occurred?" Good question!

In the 1940s, the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered in caves at Qumran. Among them was the Isaiah scroll that is fairly intact, which has been

dated to 200 years before Christ was born. So, we can trust that Isaiah's writings had been copied faithfully for centuries and furthermore that what he wrote in prophecy did come to pass!

There is another way **permanently** this Supreme Being has revealed Himself – coming in *human flesh* (John 1:14, 18). There was a necessary claim made by Jesus that He was Deity (John 8:56-58). Again, though, a claim needs to be backed by evidence. Is Jesus of Nazareth a (1) legend, (2) a lunatic, (3) a liar or (4) the Lord?

Was Jesus a legend? There are some who claim Jesus was a historical myth, but there are writers who lived close to His time that state He did exist: Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, Celsus, Josephus, the Talmud, Tacitus and Bar-Serapion.

Was Jesus a lunatic? What crazy person could come up with the greatest teachings in the world such as the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12)? What crazy person could come up with some of the greatest narratives that have influenced generation after generation, such as telling of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-36) or the Parable of the Lost Sons (Luke 15:11-32)? Why is it that there is no higher moral example or person who influenced the course of human history other than Jesus?

Was Jesus a liar? If he is a liar, then He is the worst liar there has ever been. Audiences in the first century A.D. were willing to admit that He performed genuine miracles, even if some of them attributed the power of the Holy Spirit to the power of Satan (Acts 2:22; Mark 3:22-30).

Was Jesus the Lord? This remains the only sound and viable option because Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies (Luke 24:44-45). There is sufficient evidence He rose bodily from the dead because of the reliable eyewitness testimonies. It helps to understand why the disciples turned from being cowards to becoming courageous and why James and Saul of Tarsus became Christians, etc. With all of the evidence presented, I would like for you to honestly answer the question now: "If Christianity is true, wouldn't you obey it?" Your answer will decide where you spend eternity.

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1932-2008

The Object of Our Worship

J.C. Choate

Since creation, man has worshipped everything under the sun and even the sun itself. There are millions of gods and goddesses around the world. Fabulous temples have been built by their devotees, and yet, the majority of men seem unhappy with their religion. Why? What is wrong?

What is wrong is that the masses of the people have not yet come to believe in the one and true living God. Christ pointed to Him when He said, ***"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"*** (John 4:24 NKJV). God, then, is supposed to be the object of man's worship. Only when he learns this and directs his worship to Him can he find the peace and the comfort of soul for which he has searched so long. In this short lesson, we want to discover Who God is and why we should worship Him.

God Is the Creator of All Things.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). What proof is there otherwise? Just look around and see what God created. The earth and all things therein serve as ample proof for God's existence. Something cannot come from nothing, and therefore, someone had to create it. David declared, ***"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork"*** (Psalm 19:1). Compare Romans 1:20, which reads, ***"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."*** Who can dispute that? Who will dispute it?

God created man and woman in his own image. ***"Then God said, 'Let***

Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:26-27). ***"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being"*** (Genesis 2:7).

God Sent His Son Jesus to Save Man from His Sins.

Scripture reveals the purpose of the Lord's coming. ***"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved"*** (John 3:16-17). Paul wrote, ***"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"*** (Romans 5:8). Again, he penned, ***"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"*** (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Regarding salvation, he stated, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast"*** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

God Has Blessed Us with All Blessings – Physically and Spiritually.

James recorded, ***"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning"*** (James 1:17). Paul noted, ***"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ"*** (Ephesians 1:3).

There Is One True and Living God.

In speaking of the oneness of God, Paul declared, ***"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"*** (Ephesians 4:6). He continued in another epistle, ***"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus"*** (1 Timothy 2:5).

God Is a Spirit.

We have already read John 4:24 where it is plainly stated that God is Spirit. In other words, God is not flesh and blood. He is not physical. He is not material. When we, therefore, learn that He is Spirit, then we can understand Him better inasmuch as we will think of Him as being on another plane and **not on the level of man**.

God Is Love.

John stipulated, ***"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"*** (1 John 4:8-11). Therefore, if we do not have love, then we cannot know God, for God has revealed Himself through love.

God Is Living Today.

Peter confessed or acknowledged Christ to be the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). Paul talked about the church of the living God (1 Timothy 3:15). Again, he spoke of those who turned away from their idols to obey and serve the true and living God (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Some have declared

God is dead, but they are the ones who are dead spiritually. God lives. Christ taught, ***"'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living"*** (Matthew 22:32).

With God, All Things Are Possible.

When Jesus talked to the people about who could be saved, He said, ***"…With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"*** (Matthew 19:26).

There Is None Good but God.

"So Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God'" (Mark 10:18).

No man Has Seen God.

John wrote, ***"No man has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared Him"*** (John 1:18).

In Summary

We could go on and notice that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35) Who knows all works from the beginning of the world (Acts 15:18), and He will eventually judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ (Romans 2:16). God can give eternal life (1 John 5:11). Certainly, more could be said about God.

The God of Whom we speak knows all, sees all, hears all, is everywhere at the same time, is all powerful and is without beginning or end. There is no one to be compared to Him. He is the Creator of all. He is the one that is to be worshipped, praised, honored and glorified both now and forevermore.

God wants our worship, but He would never force us to pay homage to Him. Those who choose to worship Him, though, will be blessed accordingly. However, He will not accept just any kind of worship. If we are going to worship Him, then it must be on His terms and not merely according to our desires. God has revealed the type of worship He wants in His Word. We can glean from the New Testament portion of the Bible how God has authorized mankind to worship Him, today. ✝

J.C. Choate, now deceased, was the Founding Editor of *The Voice of Truth International*.

Is Christ Divided?

Byron Nichols

The Bible is full of questions, some promoting very simple answers from regular readers of the Scriptures, but there are some other questions that call for a response only after giving more serious thought and study. The question "Is Christ divided?" is one calling for an answer based on having carefully and honestly weighed what the Bible makes known on the subject.

Paul asked this vital question in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, and the reason he asked it was because he was gravely concerned about the fact that even though the congregation in Corinth was young in the Lord, it was already becoming less and less what Jesus had in mind for His church when He gave His blood to purchase it. Notice how it had affected Paul.

> ***Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"*** (NKJV)

I have read these powerful questions many times. These are questions that still can create some uneasiness as they are read. Surely those Corinthian disciples who were honest with themselves (and with the Lord) became quite ashamed that they had been slighting the Son of God. The Heavenly Father had sent His Son to save any and all who would listen to and learn from the lessons

delivered by Him, the only one Whose blood could wash away their sins.

The church had only been in existence approximately 25 years, and in some cases, it was already showing its humanity more than its spirituality. Paul was troubled so much by the divisions existing in Christ's church in Corinth that he began pleading with them to put an end to their lack of respect for God and for His Son. How dare them to esteem Paul, Apollos, Cephas or anyone else as highly as that One Who purchased His church with His blood, in keeping with the will of His Father in Heaven! Paul was indeed a great servant of God and Christ, but he refused to let anyone believe that he was anything higher than a **servant** in the kingdom of King Jesus Christ.

Jesus said in John 14:6, ***"…I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*** This hardly leaves an option to choose an approach to God through anyone but Jesus Christ. No one, not even the apostles, had or ever will have that position and relationship with God. There was and still is no room in Christ's church for anyone who thinks he is qualified to have a role similar to that of Christ Himself.

Christ's Church

Jesus made clear that ***"…I will build My church…"*** (Matthew 16:18). Most of us have heard the statement all of our lives that "One church is just as good as another." From the bottom of my heart, I wish that that statement were in keeping with Christ's statement. However, without any intent whatsoever to offend anyone, doesn't this statement contradict what Jesus stated about His church? How can Christ be the Head of a religious body that incorporates countless doctrinal contradictions and practices, as well as with hardly any of these groups even identifying with His name? Surely Paul would repeat his question, today – ***"Is Christ divided?"*** (1 Corinthians 1:13).

In John 17, Jesus prayed for His disciples, and in verses 20-21, He said to His Father, ***"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."*** Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:4-6, ***"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*** In these three short verses, the inspired writer Paul used the little word **"one"** seven times. Surely Paul, being guided by the Holy Spirit, was led to give great emphasis to the importance of **unity rather than division** among God's people.

The Holy Spirit directed Luke as he wrote the book of Acts. Jesus had

earlier promised, ***"…I will build My church…"*** (Matthew 16:18). Please notice that He didn't say, "one of My churches." His promise became a reality as a result of Peter and the other apostles preaching on the Day of Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2. Peter's sermon opened the eyes of many who were present, resulting in their pleading, ***"…What shall we do?*** (v. 37). Then, Peter told them exactly what to do to be saved from their sins and to become children of God (vs. 38-40). We learn from verse 41 that about three thousand obeyed. In verse 47, we find that those who were being saved were added to **the church**, this obviously being the church that Christ had promised in Matthew 16:18 to build, the church belonging to Him, the only church in existence for many years and the only church of which Christ is the Head. **Christ is not divided!**

Why Is There Division?

Reasons why so much division exists in the ever-increasing number of religious organizations could be quite numerous, but much of it is the result of doctrines and practices that have been initiated **without biblical authority**. It is wonderful that many people sincerely desire to be pleasing to God and to Christ! However, it can become easy to initiate doctrines and practices that may very well appeal to many people, but we are obligated to base our beliefs and our practices on what the Scriptures reveal as being **authorized**. It is essential that we remember that the Bible speaks of only the one church, the church which Christ purchased with His blood, the church which is revealed to us in the New Testament and the church of which Jesus is the Head.

One of the primary reasons that the only church we read about in the Scriptures grew so rapidly is made clear to us in Acts 17:11. Many people were quite willing to listen to sermons being preached by men like Paul and Silas, but they were not willing to immediately believe everything that others might tell them. We find that ***"these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, to find out whether these things were so."*** If only this attitude were prominent in today's religious world!

None of the religious division that is so evident today can possibly meet with the approval of Christ. **Christ is not divided!**

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[Editor's Note: It is not only possible to be a member of the one church about documented in the New Testament and for which Jesus Christ died and shed His blood, but it is obligatory. Our Lord summarized His plan of salvation and the means of becoming a Christian and a member of His church. ***"He who believes and is baptized will be saved…"*** (Mark 16:16). ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

"Two Immutable Things"

GOD PROMISED AND **GOD SWORE** IN

To Bless *All* Nations

"Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed *it* by an oath, (18) that by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us.*"

Heb 6:17-18

TO ALL WHO HAVE **BELIEVED, REPENTED, AND ARE BAPTIZED** INTO

CHRIST

All Promises……2 Cor. 1:20
All Blessings…….Eph. 1:3
New Creature……2 Cor. 5:17
Made Alive……1 Cor. 15:22
Reconciliation…Eph. 2:13-16
Salvation……2 Tim. 2:10
No Condemnation...Rom. 8:1
Rejoicing Always….Phil. 4:4
Completeness……Col. 2:10

IN CHRIST

Original chart by Dillard Thurman, Charting the Old Paths, 1965, p. 52. Edited By RC Lupo 05/09/23

Not Separate Institutions After All

THE CHURCH AND KINGDOM HAVE THE SAME MARKS OF IDENTITY

IDENTIFYING MARK	KINGDOM	CHURCH
1. BEGINNING DATE AND PLACE	*Isa. 2:2-3*	*Acts 2:1-47*
2. BOUNDARY OF TERRITORY	*Dan. 2:44*	*Mark 16:15*
3. OWNER OF INSTITUTION	*John 18:36*	*Matt. 16:18*
4. RULER OVER ITS INHABITANTS	*1 Tim. 6:15*	*Eph. 5:23*
5. GOVERNING LAW IN REALM	*Isa. 2:3*	*Acts 2:38-47*
6. CHRIST GAVE THE KEYS	*Matt. 16:19*	*Matt. 16:18*
7. THE TERMS OF ENTRANCE	*John 3:5*	*Acts 2:38-47*
8. THOSE HOLDING MEMBERSHIP	*Col. 1:13*	*Col. 1:2*
9. THE MEMORIAL SUPPER SET	*Matt. 26:29*	*1 Cor. 11:20-27*
10. ITS GLORY AND EXALTATION	*Isa. 2:2-3*	*Eph. 3:21*
11. REWARD FOR THE FAITHFUL	*Matt. 25:31-34*	*1 Cor. 15:58*
12. TIME OF DELIVERANCE	*1 Cor. 15:24*	*1 Thes. 4:16-17*

Original chart by Dillard Thurman, Charting the Old Paths, 1965, p. 130. Present chart edited By RC Lupo 05/09/23

The Power of God

Jeremy Wade Barrier

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Romans 1:8 NKJV). The apostle Paul really wanted to preach the Gospel in Rome. This is unmistakable. When he wrote his letter to the Romans, several distinct details jump out in the first 17 verses. Foremost, the typical characteristics that demonstrate that Paul was writing a letter to the churches of Rome are distinct. For instance, he mentioned three key details. First, the author is ***"Paul a bondservant of Christ Jesus"*** (1:1). Second, the recipients are those ***"who are in Rome"*** (1:6-7). Third, he offered them a **greeting** when he stated, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:7). Embedded within this skeletal core of the letter, and overflowing into the next **thanksgiving** section of the letter in 1:8–15, Paul made himself clear in noting that he had been intending to come to Rome for quite some time! He made his case by noting that he was thankful to God that their faith has been made known to ***"the whole of the world"*** as they were no doubt citizens of the *center of the center* of the ancient world, living in the glorious capital of the Roman Empire.

Then, building on this exclamation of thanksgiving, Paul stated that he, with God as his witness no less constantly, remembered the Romans in his prayers (1:9-10), as he sought to visit them. This longstanding desire of Paul to go to the *ends of the earth* for the sake of the Gospel most certainly included his desire to go to the one place where all roads of the world inevitably led – Rome. In fact, he had been attempting to go to Rome on several occasions but had been prevented (1:13). Paul really wanted to proclaim the Gospel and impart spiritual gifts to Christians in Rome, but that day had not yet come!

What is amazing to me is that through the divine inspiration of God, Paul so carefully laid a foundation in these first 15 verses for his coming to Rome, preaching in Rome, working and imparting ***"fruit"*** to the Romans, and most importantly expressing to them the *power of the Gospel of Christ.* From a practical perspective, ministers of the Gospel today sometimes face

difficulties in the carrying of the Gospel throughout all of the world, and Paul's words serve as a source of strength and inspiration. His letter to the church at Rome reminds us that the Gospel is the *channeling of God's power* to all of humanity through his emissaries. An encouraging reality, no doubt!

As Paul made his declaration regarding the Gospel, it is also quite clear that his apostleship, mentioned in 1:1 (i.e., ***"…called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God…"***) is not just a *personal or singular revealing* of the will of God alone, but it is rather an outpouring of God's justice upon all of the world! In other words, Paul's concern was that he might have an opportunity to proclaim *how the righteousness of God is to be offered to humanity*. Of course, we are talking of the message of salvation. We know in saying this that Paul was eager to share with his hearers how God makes a path available to both Jews and Greeks! As the prophet Habakkuk stated, ***"…the just shall live by his faith"*** (Habakkuk 2:4).

The major point here is that ***"the power of God"*** is God's ability to save all who believe (Romans 1:16), regardless of whether or not they are Jews by birth. The Gospel is for everyone.

Paul was eager to go to Rome and to proclaim this powerful message of God to the Romans, who for various reasons had probably allowed small, internal differences and disagreements to come between one another in their city. The implication is that the message of God could not be proclaimed from a unified beacon, the church, as long as dissension persisted. The ramifications were that one of the most important cities for the proclamation of the faith was being stifled. A real tragedy!

I am inspired by Paul's opening verses to the Romans. While the time had not yet come for Paul to enter Rome, we know he anticipated that moment as one which would hopefully happen soon (Romans 15:22-29). As we reflect upon these beautiful verses, from time to time, it will be helpful to ask the question, "Am I hindering or helping God's good news to go out into my community and into the world beyond?" This type of question helps to focus our minds and our actions as we seek to follow in the steps of Christ Himself.

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God – As He Has Made Himself Known

David Deffenbaugh

Bigfoot? UFO's? The Loch Ness monster? Questions regarding the reality of such a phenomenon are very much a part of our popular culture. The same body of *evidence* is to the minds of many people so questionable as to produce nothing but skepticism, while to others, it is so compelling as to demand that there is *something* there. If each would just *show themselves*, then we could know. It is all a matter of them making themselves known. The fact is they have not, and it is entirely possible, if not likely, that they have not because they are not.

By absolute contrast, God has made Himself known. He has done so in a general way, through creation. As Paul explained, ***"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that***

are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:20 NKJV). Yet, many people have drawn the wrong conclusions based on their observations of the created world. Sometimes they have sought to worship the creation instead of the Creator. ***"And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage"*** (Deuteronomy 4:19).

God has made Himself known even beyond His creation. Most notably that has been done through the Bible. It is the Bible that tells us that Jesus came as God in the flesh, that He is the ***"image"*** of God (Colossians 1:15) and ***"the express image of His person"*** (Hebrews 1:3). We know Jesus as He is revealed in Scripture. Further, the Bible is the means God has used to make known His mind to man.

> ***But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*** (1 Corinthians 2:10-13)

Is it possible that God could have made Himself known in other ways? Certainly, but the question is, has He? If He has, how would we know? The fact is, God has not only made Himself known, but He has also revealed to man just how He has made Himself known. It is not only futile but absurd for man to seek to know God in ways He has not revealed Himself. Therefore, we must know God as He has made Himself known.

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5-Minute Bible Study

The Holy Spirit

Paula Bates

1. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His _____ and do those things which are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment that we should _____ on the name of His _____ _____ _____ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him. And by this ____ _____ that He abides in us, by the _____ whom He has given us. 1 John 3:22-24
2. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God _____ in us, and His _____ has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He is us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have _____ and _____that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever _____ that Jesus is the Son of God, _____ abides in him, and he in God. 1 John 4:12-15
3. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who _____ Him." But God has _____ them to us through His _____ . For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the _____ things of God. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10
4. But you are not in the _____ but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of _____ , he is not His. And if Christ is in you the _____ is dead because of _____ , but the Spirit is life because of _____. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give _____ to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. Romans 8:9-11

Answers:

1. Commandments, believe, Son Jesus Christ, we know, Spirit
2. Abides, love, Spirit, seen, testify, confesses, God
3. Love, revealed, Spirit, deep
4. Flesh, Christ, body, sin, righteousness, life

Words of Eternal Life

Roger Wright

Preachers and church members often ask why people don't seem to be interested in spiritual things anymore. The problem of apathy toward the things of God is not really a new problem at all.

The children of Israel who experienced the first Passover, crossed the Red Sea on dry land and ate the manna from heaven constantly complained and wished to go back to Egypt. In the days of Ezra, the people neglected the Temple of God to work on their own houses. In Jesus' day, the people ate the bread and the fish that the Lord multiplied but had no appetite for the Bread which came down from Heaven. One after another, they went away (John 6:66-69).

Jesus must have been heartbroken when He asked His disciples if they

would go away too. Peter boldly spoke, ***"…Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"*** (John 6:68 NKJV). How much better to fill our souls with the Word of the Lord than to fill our stomachs with food. Job said, ***"…I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food"*** (Job 23:12).

How hungry are we for the Word of the Lord? We rarely miss filling our bellies at least three times a day. Are we hungry enough to eat and to drink from the Word of God at every opportunity? Do we attend each session of our Gospel meetings? Do we attend all of the Bible classes? Do we listen to sermons from the Bible? Do we read and study our Bibles at home? Do we pray for wisdom, understanding and faith to apply God's Word to our lives?

The only way for us to have eternal life is through the Scriptures – the Word of God – by which we come to know the saving message of Christ. People around us are spiritually starved and spiritually dying, and yet, they don't know it. Let this not be said of us. Jesus is the Bread of life (John 6:48). Having Jesus in our hearts and in our lives is vital to sustaining spiritual life. There is no other One Who can give us eternal life. **Make it your aim to make the most of every opportunity to take in the message of Christ for the eternal life He offers to you.**

Roger Wright is the preacher for the Sylvia Church of Christ in Dickson, Tennessee, USA.

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Searching for Truth

Barry O'Dell

Merriam-Webster.com defines "the truth" as "the real facts about something: the things that are true." For many, when it comes to understanding the Bible, truth is subjective. In other words, the "truth" one holds is based on personal experience, feelings or opinions. Because of this approach to Scripture, many are frustrated in the search for truth to the point of giving up. Is there such a thing as **absolute truth? Is there a way that is right and cannot be wrong? Can we know for sure what God expects His people to do and to believe?** When addressing these questions, it is important to understand the following about truth.

1. According to God's Word, the Truth is not found in one's personal feelings about a matter. Just because something is believed to be true does not make it true. When Joseph's brethren dipped his coat in the blood of a kid of the goats, they were able to convince Jacob that his son was dead (Genesis 37:29-34). He was convinced that his son was dead based on the evidence presented. Though all his sons and daughters attempted to comfort him, he refused to be comforted (Genesis 37:35). In Jeremiah's day, a false prophet by the name of Hananiah caused Israel to ***"trust in a lie"*** (Jeremiah 28:15 NKJV). Absolute, objective truth is not determined by what one believes to be true.

2. According to God's Word, truth is not determined by what the majority believes to be true. Jesus taught that a majority of people choose to enter the wide and broad way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). God instructed Israel that it was not to ***"…follow a crowd*** [***"multitude"*** KJV] ***to do evil; neither shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice"*** (Exodus 23:2).

3. According to the teaching of Christ, Truth is not found in tradition. Practicing or teaching something for a time does not mean that God approves of what is practiced or taught. When confronted about the tradition of

handwashing, Jesus told the Pharisees, ***"…Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"*** (Matthew 15:3). Of those traditions Jesus said, ***"…Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted"*** (Matthew 15:13).

In the search for the Truth, one cannot depend on personal feelings, prevailing thought or human traditions. **God's inspired Word is the only source for absolute, objective truth.** Jesus told the Jews who believed on Him, ***"…If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"*** (John 8:31-32.) John 17:17 informs us that God's Word is the Truth. Our loving God has provided us with a book that is without error, without contradiction and that gives us ***"… all things that pertain unto life and godliness…"*** (2 Peter 1:3). Truth does not change with time, just as much as 2 + 2 will always equal 4! Likewise, the Truth revealed in God's Word will never change or become antiquated.

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How Do You Measure Up?

...and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

1 Corinthians 11:24-29

He Also Made the Stars

Rodney Nulph

On a night so clear it seemed as though you could reach out and catch a handful of moonbeams, a little girl studied the stars and said, "Daddy, if Heaven is so pretty on the **wrong** side, think of what it must look like on the **right** side!" I can't wait; can you? Just imagine the beauty and joy of Heaven. Yet, while we are watching and waiting for Heaven (Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 3:12), God is so kind to allow us to have so much beauty here. Late the other night, I was able to see the **wrong** side of Heaven's beauty in the innumerable host of heaven (Jeremiah 33:22). I could not help but to be captivated by God's amazing creation, and I thought about what Moses wrote. ***"God made two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also"*** (Genesis 1:16 NKJV). Have you ever wondered why? Why did God make the stars? I am certain my finite mind will not know all the reasons, but I can think of a few.

God made the stars because it was logical. God is a God of logic and reason! His amazing creation should cause us to **know** that God exists. Anyone who honors the law of rationality (to justify conclusions with adequate evidence) is truly ***"without excuse"*** (Romans 1:20). Any rational, clear-thinking person, seeing the stars, must truthfully see and recognize that ***"the heavens declare the glory of God"*** (Psalm 19:1). It is estimated that there are 25 sextillion stars, and yet no two stars are alike in density, gravitational pull or volume. Each star has its own ***"glory"*** (1 Corinthians 15:41). If a man lived 70 years and each night counted 1,000 different stars, he would **never** be able to count them all! God, Who created the stars, knew that and reminded Jeremiah of this amazing evidence (Jeremiah 33:22). The orderliness of creation shows perfect and amazing design! Go ahead; honestly look around, and you too will come away knowing that there is an Infinite Designer who is logical and loving.

God made the stars because it was practical. Moses' inspired pen revealed, ***"Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament***

[***"expanse"*** ESV] ***of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth'; and it was so"*** (Genesis 1:14-15). Did you catch that? The stars, among the other lights in the heavens, set the seasons, days and years for life upon earth. These same lights also very practically illuminate the earth. Just the other night as I viewed heaven's host, I could see well enough to walk around without any artificial light. Also, by way of practicality, in the northern hemisphere, latitude lines are determined by the angle of Polaris (the North Star). Early mariners relied heavily upon heaven's hosts to navigate the ocean. Both longitude and latitude lines are determined by the stars. Talk about practicality!

God made the stars because it was spiritual. When David looked at the heavens, he could not help but wonder why such a perfect and awesome God would care for sinful mankind (Psalm 8). The heavens cause us to look within our very souls and praise the One Who is in control (Psalm 8:1; 9). Ironically and no doubt providentially, when the Magi of old considered the spiritual and wanted to see Jesus, they were led by a star (Matthew 2). Jesus is called the Star of Jacob that would heal the world's spiritual ills (Numbers 24:15-19). As Jesus closed the Revelation, He called Himself ***"the bright and morning star"*** (Revelation 22:16). Early astronomers referred to Venus as the morning star because of its unique brightness; it is the brightest entity in the sky next to the sun in appearance in the heavens. Stars light the physical, just like Jesus lights the spiritual (John 8:12). He is the Star of salvation, and all that is spiritual!

The **wrong** side of Heaven makes me long for the **right** side. ***"To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing"*** (Isaiah 40:25-26). Take a moment, and look up to see, ***"The heavens declare the glory of God"***! Mankind, truly, is ***"without excuse."***

Rodney Nulph is a Gospel preacher and the Associate Editor of Gospel Gazette Online magazine. He resides in Beavertown, Pennsylvania, USA.

The Butterfly Fish

Dave Everson

Nothing is more beautiful during the late spring and summer than the appearance of butterflies that float so gracefully around the flowers in our gardens and yards. Indeed, some of them have such amazing lives, but I would like to turn our attention to the butterfly fish!

Butterfly fish live in freshwater streams in the rainforest of Congo, Africa. The fish is relatively small, being no more than five to six inches long. Butterfly fish normally are very slow moving and prefer to spend their time lying around near the surface in floating plants. They are like many slow-moving surface-dwelling fish in that they are able to use their swim bladder to breath air by gulping air at the surface. When seen from above, the widespread pectoral fins of the butterfly fish look just like the decorative wings of its namesake insect, the butterflies. The fins are a silvery brownish green and patterned with dark markings.

Yet, these fins have other uses than just being decorative and given

to this fish by the Creator. When it is attacked, it jumps up and seemingly flies out of the water as a predator attempts to eat it. The large pectoral fins (the fins located on the sides of a fish) flap and glide up out of the water and away from danger. You can relate this to the jumps out of the water of the flying fish in the oceans. People who have witnessed these jumps say that the nearest thing to this fish's appearance is the flight of a butterfly.

Besides using the pectoral fins as wings to escape from predators, they also help this fish leap from the water to capture terrestrial insects from above the surface of the water. This feature gives the butterfly fish an advantage over fish that must wait for the insects to fall into the water. The butterfly fish's eyes are upturned so it can see only things above it, and its mouth turns upward to eat insects from above. In addition, the brain of the butterfly fish has extra bundles of neurons for viewing objects above it. So, when the Creator designed the butterfly fish, allowing it to use its fins for multiple purposes, He showed His amazing engineering design ability and created the complete package to fill its niche in creation.

When evolutionary scientists try to explain the existence of the butterfly fish, they must also explain the fact that they have also been found in the fossil record in a completely unchanged appearance. They call these creatures that are found as fossils and yet that are alive today in the exact same form, living fossils. According to the old earth dating methods of evolutionists, butterfly fish have remained unchanged for 100 million years! This fish, as well as all living fossils, baffle evolutionary scientists, and they must come up with special exceptions to their natural selection process to theorize this.

The butterfly fish stands as proof of the marvels of the creation that we can see that fortifies our faith in our Creator. ***"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him"*** (Colossians 1:16).

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

[Editor's Note: As with so many other organisms, evolutionists cannot explain how something such as the butterfly fish could avoid being eaten to annihilation, starving to extinction or being deprived of oxygen while waiting to evolve unique characteristics over an imagined span of millions of years. Design in the universe demands a Designer God (Romans 1:20). ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor**]**

Seven Times Seventy

Words and Music
by: Paul Mays

How man - y times should we for - give? How man - y stars in the sky?

7th Time Only

We must be rea - dy for the Lord, to dwell in the sweet by and by.

Bro-ther sins a-gainst you, then re - pents,

1.If a bro-ther sins a-gainst you, then re - pents, let's be will - ing
2.If you want to be for - giv - en, by the Lord, for - give oth - ers
3.So be kind to one a - noth er, just as God, in Christ Je - sus

let's be will - ing to for - give. Se-ven times se-ven-ty,

to for - give. Se-ven times se-ven-ty,
that's His word! Se-ven times se-ven-ty,
for - gives you. Se-ven times se-ven-ty,

Je - sus said, Don't hold grud - ges, peace in-stead.

Je - sus said, Don't hold grud - ges, peace in stead.
Je - sus said, Ten - der heart - ed, Spir - it led.
Je - sus said, Love each oth - er, words in red.

Paul Mays is a Christian hymn writer who resides in Roanoke, Virginia, USA. Visit https://www.youtube.com/user/neanderpaul to listen to the hymns.

Hymns

Be Still And Know

Words and Music
by: Paul Mays

mf *mp*

1.Be still and know that I am God. I will be ex - alt - ed, a-mong the na - tions.
2.The peace of God that pass-es all, all our un - der - stand - ing, shall keep our hearts and,
3.Let ev' - ry man be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to, be slow to an - ger.
4.My soul will wait for God a - lone. For my hope is from Him, He's my sal-va - tion.

f *mp*

I will be ex - alt - ed, in the earth.
Minds up - on Christ Je - sus, who is Lord.
For the wrath of man is, not of God.
God will be my strong - hold, I'm un - moved.

mf *mp*

The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Ja - cob is our re-fuge.

Jesus Is Waiting to Add You

Words and Music
by: Paul Mays

1.If you are not part of His one church, Je-sus is wait - ing to add you.
2.If you are not washed in the Lamb's blood, Je-sus is wait - ing to add you.
3.If you've not gone down in the wa - ter, Je-sus is wait - ing to add you.
4.If you have not o - beyed His Gos - pel, Je-sus is wait - ing to add you.

There is no oth - er way to be saved, Je - sus is wait - ing to add you.

Are You Afraid to Die?

Ernest S. Underwood

The evolutionist boldly proclaims, "There is no God." By this statement, he egotistically claims absolute knowledge of everything. If he does not so claim, how does he know the very thing that he admits to not knowing is not or could not be the Almighty God of the Bible? So, the two statements exhaust the entirety of the subject (i.e., "There is no God" and ***"The fool has said in his heart there is no God…,"*** Psalm 14:1; 53:1). With this in mind, and with the fact that the evolutionist has exactly zero (0) proof for his position, let us consider the **fact** that all humanity – male and female – who has ever lived on this earth, which was created by God, will one day meet Him to be judged. In the Book of Revelation, the apostle John wrote:

> ***Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.*** (20:11-15 NKJV)

Now, let's look at that question asked above: "Are you afraid to die?" The Bible plainly tells us, whether one knows it or not, that death is a certainty to all; death awaits everyone [unless the Lord Jesus returns first ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]. The old, the young and the infant die. Christians and non-

Christians, including haters of God, die. The writer of the book of Hebrews stated this fact in a rather blunt way. He wrote, ***"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment"*** (Hebrews 9:27). He did not say that before one dies there will be several warnings, and neither did he say that when one dies, if he has not been obedient to God, He will just let him go out of existence. Furthermore, did the writer of Hebrews say that God would give anyone a second chance after death – as some denominational churches teach today? It's death followed by the Judgment. **Period!**

Friend, get up right now, go to your bathroom mirror, look yourself squarely in the face, and then say with a calm voice, "You, there in the mirror, you are going to die one day, just as surely as you are looking at your own image." Let that sink in. Now, ask yourself, "Am I in a right relationship with the God Who created me in His image, or am I at this point in life one who has not been obedient to the Creator?"

The Judgment will be according to one's works, whether or not he or she was in this life obedient from the heart to God's commands. Each of us will hear Him say, ***"Well done, good and faithful servant… enter into the joy of your lord"*** (Matthew 25:21) or ***"Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"*** (Matthew 25:41). Don't have the attitude that was displayed by a young female on a placard in a protest march. It read in bold words, **"Bound for Hell, and Proud of It!"** Take a wild guess to what God will say to her if she doesn't repent of this ungodly attitude, according to what He has said that He will say on that great and terrible day!

Not saved, but want to be? Then, study the following outline of a sermon that has in one way or another been preached thousands of times by faithful preachers of God's Word. Then, obey what it teaches. This sermon never has been preached by a preacher of any denominational church.

What Must I Do to Be Saved?

Introduction:

1. This question was asked essentially four times in the New Testament.
2. In this lesson we shall read each occurrence within the context where

it is found, and then, examine the context and the answer given in each account.

3. It is our sincere hope that each one will listen with a view to eternity, and that each member of the Lord's church will learn this lesson so well that he or she can teach it to a friend.

Scriptures:

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. (Acts 2:36-41)

As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:3-6)

And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus. Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.'

Salvation

And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, "The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:11-16)

So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household. (Acts 16:31-34)

Discussion:

1. Remission of sins follows repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38).
2. About 3,000 souls received the Word and were baptized on the birthday of the church (Acts 2:41).
3. Saul of Tarsus (Paul) was told to go into Damascus to await being told what he **"must do"** (Acts 9:6).
4. He was told to be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16).
5. The belief or faith that saves involves being baptized (Acts 16:31-34).
6. Rejoicing comes after baptism (Acts 16:31-34).

Invitation:

1. The question that each person must ask himself or herself is, "Have I applied these passages about salvation or redemption to myself?"
2. Further, ask yourself, "Am I ready to convey the good news of the saving Gospel to others (e.g., family, friends, classmates, coworkers, etc.)?
3. Remember, **the eternal disposition of your soul depends on the choices made in this life – and there are no second chances.**

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

Free Doesn't Mean Cheap

Patrick Morrison

Perhaps you have been to a yard sale or a flea market where a vendor was trying to get rid of his wares and was willing to throw something in for free to *sweeten* a deal. Most of the time whatever is thrown in for free is of little value. Consider that the Bible says two sparrows were "sold for a farthing" (KJV) or "a copper coin" (NKJV) (Matthew10:29), and five sparrows were "sold for two farthings" or "two copper coins" (Luke 12:6). The sparrow was so insignificant, one was thrown in for nothing.

However, free doesn't always mean cheap or unimportant. We live in a land [USA] of abundant freedoms and treasured privileges. This nation affords us the freedom to express ourselves in unique ways. We have been granted the freedom to assemble, freedom of speech, freedom to worship as we see fit, freedom to vote for our government officials and other freedoms and blessings too numerous to mention. I hope that we realize how fortunate we are to live in this great nation, for many do not enjoy the blessings that we do, freedoms that we often take for granted. These freedoms came at a terrible price; many men and women gave their lives so that we might enjoy and maintain these privileges! As the old adage reminds us, "Freedom isn't free," nor is the price to obtain and maintain freedom cheap.

The Bible teaches us that salvation is God's free gift to man. ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"*** (Ephesians 2:8 NKJV). ***"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift ("free gift"*** ESV) ***of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"*** (Romans 6:23). Salvation is offered freely to all men: ***"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely"*** (Revelation 22:17). God graciously offers man pardon and forgiveness, not because man deserves such or because he has somehow put God in his debt, because God loves us (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10) and because He desires that none be lost (1 Timothy 2:4).

Just because salvation is free doesn't mean that it is cheap. The greatest price that could be paid was paid for our sins. ***"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"*** (1 Peter 1:18-19). Jesus gave His life on Calvary's cross so that we might be reconciled unto God in one body (Ephesians 2:16). For that body, His church, Jesus gave His life's blood (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25). Salvation is free, but it is not cheap!

Sadly, many treat salvation as though it were insignificant. Some never come to realize their need to be saved from their sins. Some scoff at the idea of one dying in order to wash their sins away. Still others come to know the joy of salvation, only to turn from it and live as though it means nothing to them. Man may count salvation as immaterial, but God has put a great price tag on it. There is a great difference between cheap and priceless, and that difference is the blood Jesus shed so that you and I might be saved!

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Bible Find

Martha Lynn Rushmore

Across

1 The apostles spoke in what as the Spirit gave them utterance? 2:3
4 Of what were the apostles accused? 2:13-15
7 The apostle Peter stated that baptism was "for the _____of sins." 2:38
9 What did the apostle Peter instruct the multitude to do? 2:38
11 How many thousands were baptized on the Day of Pentecost? 2:41
12 The apostles were recognized by their speech as what? 2:7

Down

2 The apostle Peter told the audience to save itself from a "perverse _____." 2:40
3 Which Old Testament prophet did the the apostle Peter cite in his sermon? 2:16
4 The new converts "continued steadfastly in the apostles' _____." 2:42
5 Who added the saved to the church? 2:47
6 The church began on what holy day? 2:1
8 What did the apostle Peter instruct the multitude to do? 2:38
10 Where did the Christians continue daily with one accord? 2:46

See inside back cover for the solution.

The Missing Person

Brett Petrillo

On New Year's Day, 20-year-old Nicholas Simmons went missing. His family did everything they could to find their son. They contacted the police and even started a Facebook page. Unfortunately, since Nick had left his wallet and cell phone at home, no one could find him. For days, they diligently searched for him, all to no avail.

As the bitter cold swept through the country, a photographer took pictures of some weather-beaten homeless people on the New York streets. One photo depicted a young man huddling under a thick blanket with his face pressed against a steam grate. He was soaking in every bit of warmth coming from the grate as he battled the freezing cold. This person was Nicholas Simmons.

This very picture showed up in *USA Today*. Nick's mother was looking through the newspaper when she saw the picture and realized it was her son. After communicating with the photographer, the newspaper writer and the police, Nick's family was able to find him.

For some reason, Nick decided to leave home on New Year's Day. Captain Patrick Phelan of the Greece Police Department said there was a discussion between Nick and his parents that may have led him to leave home. We don't know why Nick went missing or what caused him to leave. No matter the reason, one thing is clear, though; Nick had a loving family who desperately wanted him to come back.

It's always heartbreaking when a person goes missing, especially when a person goes missing from the church. Like Nick, sometimes a person leaves because of an argument or a disagreement. Perhaps someone said something cruel or hurtful. Maybe the person just didn't want to be part of the church family anymore. Whatever the reason, it's extremely tragic to see people walk out the door and possibly never come back.

It's hard to know why a person may have left the church, but we can't just let them go. As the church family, it's our responsibility to try to bring him or her back. If it was something we did, let's go and make it right. If we can help, offer encouragement, give him or her a hug or do whatever it takes. Let's bring the missing back to the Lord.

Physically and spiritually, people go missing, and it's terrible on every level. Like Nick's family, let's make it clear to the spiritually missing among us that they have a family who loves them and anxiously wants them to come back (Luke 15:11-32).

Brett Petrillo is a minister for the Bear Valley Church of Christ in Denver, Colorado, USA.

Did You Know

The book of Esther does not explicitly mention the name of God.

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

Shepherds and the Congregation

Mark T. Tonkery

Hebrews 13:17 reads, ***"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you"*** (ESV). It is essential that each congregation of the Lord's church continue to appoint men who will lead the congregation as shepherds or elders. First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 both give the qualifications of the men who are to fulfill this function of leadership in the church. As important as it is to find men who are mature Christians and who meet the biblical standards of leadership, one must keep in mind that this is only one part of what helps a congregation function as God designed. Another part of having a faithful congregation is having faithful followers.

Hebrews 13:17 states that the congregation must be one that faithfully follows godly leadership. This passage teaches members of a congregation are to follow in such a way that they help their elders enjoy their job as shepherds. This is done in part by being good followers.

I am sure we have been in a situation at one time or another, such as at school or at work, when it seemed that there were **too many coaches and not enough players.** In situations like that, nothing gets accomplished, and the same is true in a congregation. If a congregation did not have leaders to lead and followers to follow, the congregation would debate every idea and situation that came along, and nothing would be accomplished.

Wise shepherds are open to suggestions and advice. ***"Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed"*** (Proverbs 15:22). Yet, despite all the counsel and advice elders may receive, they still need to make decisions and give direction to the congregation. Sometimes shepherds must make hard choices (e.g., how to deal with the pandemic). It is during difficult decisions that elders need the understanding of the congregation and **good followership** so

that as Hebrews 13:17 says, ***"Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."*** Of course, Hebrews 13:17 does not encourage following an eldership that wants to deviate from God's Word of truth and lead people away from God. However, as an eldership follows Christ, the congregation should follow the direction of its eldership.

Being good followers helps the church to function with unity, with a single mind and helps the whole congregation to function in brotherly love (1 Corinthians 1:10). **It is essential to have godly men shepherding the congregation, but it is also essential that we have faithful members following Christ and their elders as they strive to help each member on his or her journey to Heaven.**

Mark T. Tonkery is a Gospel preacher for the Norval Park church of Christ in Zanesville, Ohio, USA.

Robison's Rubies

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah lamented about his corrupt society, ***"…from the least of them even to the greatest of them, Everyone is given to covetousness; And from the prophet even to the priest, Everyone deals falsely"*** (Jeremiah 6:13 NKJV). In other words, he was accusing them of being a bunch of greedy liars. Greed is a problem that has always plagued mankind. While money is not inherently evil, ***"…the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil…"*** (1 Timothy 6:10). The same verse states that those who follow their greediness ***'pierce themselves through with many sorrows.'*** Deceit is part of the problem. People will lie and cheat to get ahead, and sometimes, even religious leaders do so. **God help us when such is the norm in any culture!**

Rebecca Rushmore

(answers inside back cover)

1. In what did Paul encourage the Christians at Corinth to be joined together?
2. According to Paul, who gives the increase in the spiritual harvest?
3. What was the condition of the formerly immoral members of the church at Corinth?
4. How long is a wife bound to her husband?
5. Who travelled with a believing wife?
6. Why did Paul tell the Corinthians to imitate him?
7. Of faith, hope and love, which is the greatest?
8. If the Corinthians wanted spiritual gifts, what did Paul tell them their motivation should be?
9. What is the Gospel?
10. In whose house in Asia did the church meet?

What We Should Expect from Preaching

Hiram Kemp

Few things are as misunderstood as preaching. Some view preaching as the **main event** in the worship service each week. Others view it as the preacher's attempt to keep the congregation awake for thirty to forty minutes. The truth is that preaching is neither entertainment nor a spiritual pep rally where the preacher tries his best to keep the congregation interested in the things of God. Biblical preaching is not boring preaching. However, many people today often listen to preaching, expecting things the Bible never promises to deliver. Others have their expectations too low when it comes to preaching. They are content to hear a few stories, several jokes and very little if any Scripture expounded at all. God chose to communicate His will through preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21; Titus 1:3). **Preaching is important to God, and therefore, it should be important to us. Those who preach will be held to a higher account by God and should be sure they remember to do what pleases God (James 3:1).** What should we expect from preaching? Let us be sure our expectations are God-centered and not manmade (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

Expect to Hear the Truth

Preaching is supposed to communicate the truth of God's Word (John 17:17). Paul told Timothy to preach the Word, which contains the truth from God (2 Timothy 4:2). Many times, we focus on style and personal preference (which are not bad in and of themselves) to the extent that we forget to consider whether we heard the truth or not. When someone stands up to preach, those who are listening should be following along in their own Bibles and making sure that what is being said aligns with the Scriptures (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22; 1 John 4:1). This does not simply mean that the preacher's words are found in the Bible. He may quote Scripture and refer to passages and still not preach the truth (Matthew 4:5-7).

This does not mean every preacher should be held in suspicion or that we

should not give anyone the benefit of the doubt, but it does mean **we should be discerning as listeners**. That being said, we should expect to hear the Bible quoted and expounded. **Preaching cannot be true if it is devoid of Scripture.** I realize there is no *divine quota* of verses used in a sermon to make it scriptural, but we should not try to see how little of the Bible we can preach. It is impressive to read Peter's sermon in Acts 2 (the first recorded Gospel sermon) and notice that more than half of his words were direct quotations from the Old Testament.

The most important question at the end of a sermon is not, "Did I like what the preacher said?" or "Was he funny or interesting?" The most important question is, "Did he share the truth of God's Word?" The truth is not always pleasant initially, but it must always be spoken. Jesus promised that continuing in the truth of His Word would make men free (John 8:31-32). It must not be made to mean "hearing what we have always heard in the way we have always heard it." Truth is the entirety of God's Word taught clearly, even when it involves things we have not been taught before or things we have neglected (Acts 20:26-27).

The truth must be spoken in love so that it can build up those who hear it (Ephesians 4:15). We must not use truth as a cloak for our rude or unChrist-like behavior (2 Timothy 2:24-26). People should not leave the sermon wondering what the preacher believes. **Regardless of the subject of the sermon, those listening should expect to hear the truth from God's Word proclaimed.**

Expect to Be Encouraged

Preaching will not always make people feel good, but neither should it always make people feel bad. Paul did say that preaching should exhort, and exhortation involves encouragement (2 Timothy 4:2). Those who hear a steady diet of all that they are doing wrong and a God who cannot be pleased will soon become hardened or possibly give up altogether (Matthew 23:15).

A preacher is not soft or unsound because he encourages. A preacher is unsound if he never encourages; the key is to be **biblically balanced**.

The Gospel is good news, and we must not forget that. We should not comfort those in sin or make those who are lost feel as if they are saved. Still, those who are saved must not leave the assembly thinking that they

are lost. Biblical encouragement is not to be equated with the *health and wealth* Gospel or a mere *feel-good message*. **Preaching that encourages its listeners is preaching that reminds listeners of all that God has done for us in Christ, God's longsuffering and God's awareness of our efforts to walk in the light.** Christians are supposed to encourage each other daily, and this must not be forgotten in preaching (Hebrews 3:13).

Expect to Be Challenged and Corrected

Every preacher has heard the famous post-sermon remark, "You stepped on my toes." We should expect to be challenged in Christianity. Jesus challenged those who heard Him to take up their crosses daily (Luke 9:23). Maybe preaching today is not demanding too much from Christians but rather not enough. While encouragement is necessary, we must not expect to be coddled and told that we are doing everything right (Psalm 141:5). We should expect deep preaching that helps hearers graduate to the meat of the Word and not the same elementary things that leave congregations on the milk (Hebrews 5:11-14). First-principle lessons are good and can be preached deeply and engagingly, but we need to be sure to grow into spiritual maturity (Hebrews 6:1).

If we hate correction, we will not make it far in any area of life. This is true in Christianity as well (Proverbs 15:10). Timothy was to ***"reprove"*** and ***"rebuke"*** with all the patience he could because correction had to be given (2 Timothy 4:2 KJV). Those who do not want the preacher to preach on social drinking, immodest apparel, jesting, covetousness, racism, prejudice, abortion or any other topic that offends them misunderstand preaching. False teachers are often popular because they tell people what they want to hear, or they avoid saying things that people need to hear (Galatians 4:16; 2 Timothy 4:3-4). King Ahab hated Micaiah (the Lord's prophet) because he did not tell him what he wanted to hear (1 Kings 22:8). Ahab, like many today, did not understand that **preachers do not originate the truth; they simply echo the truth God has given** (1 Kings 22:18).

Preaching should correct us where we are wrong, and we should welcome it as we desire to be the people God would have us to be. The preacher should be correcting himself, too, as he preaches, knowing that he is not above sin or weakness (1 John 1:8, 10). Let's not water down preaching

to the point that we are afraid to call out sin for what it is for fear of offending anyone. God intends for preaching to be challenging so that it can get to the heart of the listeners where His Word can produce necessary change (Acts 2:36-37).

Expect to Hear Christ Magnified

You cannot read the sermons recorded in the book of Acts and find sermons that fail to exalt Jesus. His death, burial and resurrection are the focus of the messages proclaimed by the apostles and preachers throughout the first-century church. Paul's main goal in preaching was ***"Jesus Christ and Him crucified"*** (1 Corinthians 2:3). Preaching should point people to Jesus. This does not mean one cannot preach from the Old Testament, but remember that the Old Testament properly handled gets people to Jesus (Luke 24:44). Those who listen to sermons should leave having heard more about Jesus than about sports teams, politics, the latest controversy in the news or the preacher's favorite movie (2 Corinthians 4:5).

Preaching that is done without Jesus being the focus is not true biblical preaching. If it is simply "do more and try harder" with little to no focus on Jesus' finished work on the cross, it misses the heart of the New Testament. We should expect to hear a preacher lift Christ up and point people to Him (John 12:32). Christ must not merely be mentioned or tagged on to the end of the sermon for invitation purposes, but instead He should be the central theme in the message because He is the central theme of the entire Bible (John 5:39-40). **Expect to hear Christ magnified, and hold those who preach to you accountable for doing so.**

Summary

Preaching changed the world in the first century, and it still does the same thing today. Sometimes, we are disappointed with preaching because we want the wrong things from it. We must not desire to have our ears tickled, but instead, we ought to desire to have our hearts stirred. Preaching is God's weapon of choice in getting the Gospel into people's hearts. Let us expect nothing more and nothing less than God does.

Hiram Kemp preaches for the Lehman Avenue church of Christ in Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA.

What is prayer and why should we do it? It is nothing less than breathing out the soul's most innermost needs into the ear of our loving Heavenly Father. It is the language of our hearts, and it is not confined to mere words. To have the ear of Almighty God is not only a glorious privilege but also a vital line of communication with our Creator.

When hearts are overburdened with care and the darkness of despair threatens to consume our very being, we must remember that God is there. A Christian needs prayer as much as he needs food and water to survive. Prayer can be offered anywhere, not just in one place – eyes open or closed, hands folded or not. The important factor is that we understand our supplications are going to the same God who delivered Daniel from the lion's den and David from his foes. The great King of the Universe who heard the saints of old hears us, too. The knowledge of this should fill us with confidence and lift our spirits.

Prayer can be improved, and, like any skill, practice makes perfect. It must always be trustful and submissive, never arrogant and demanding. There are two occasions in the Holy Bible where we read of disciples asking their leaders how to pray. In Luke 11:1, we read, ***"Now it came to pass as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples'"*** (NKJV). Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, taught, ***"And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they***

think that they shall be heard for their many words" (Matthew 6:7).

Now, prayer was not intended to be repeated over and over. When a prayer is prayed, it is heard and answered. We may wonder if it is answered when we don't get the answer we want, but God, as any loving parent has the right, knowing the outcome, sometimes says, "No" or "Wait awhile." We must trust His decisions and take comfort in the sure knowledge that He sees what we do not.

It is interesting how in Scripture we are given encouragements to pray. For example: ***"You will make your prayer to Him, He will hear you, And you will pay thy vows"*** (Job 22:27). ***"For the people shall dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; You shall weep no more. He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; When He hears it, He will answer you"*** (Isaiah 30:19).

We find many prayers recorded in the Bible and shared with us for our learning. These are given for our encouragement and as patterns to follow. We need only note the examples of Abraham, his servant Eliezer, Gideon and King David through his many Psalms to see God's faithful answering of heartfelt prayer. In Isaiah 40:31, the prophet wrote, ***"But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint."*** Prayer is the foundation on which our faith grows. It is powerful and ever needful in a world full of the darkest spiritual powers that seek to harm our souls. It is no wonder that Peter advised us, ***"casting all your cares upon Him…"*** (1 Peter 5:7). It is a guide and a framework that can be used to model our prayers, to make them as effective as we can.

Remember, God already knows our needs. He hears our innermost groans (Romans 8:26) and provides the comfort of that wonderful privilege of calling the Sovereign of all things, ***"Father."*** Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6, ***"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."***

In the light of this by no means exhaustive study on the issue of prayer, why not lay your fears, tears and concerns at the feet of God on His throne? He loves us, and, in that knowledge, we may find the rest and peace that our Holy God wants to give us. This is why we pray.

George McNulty is a Gospel preacher who resides and labors for our Lord in Ireland.

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

(1 Thessalonians 4:14-18)

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Of course, there are many varying beliefs about life and death among the billions of people who have lived and do live in this world. Some are convinced that humans are no more than animals and that death is the end of the story.

Others believe in reincarnation: that with the death of the physical body, the soul is reborn over and over again. If the life lived was evil, the soul will be reborn in a lowly body, perhaps even as a worm! However, if the life was "good," the new body and its advantages will be a step up toward becoming so good that it never has to be reborn again. Instead, it will be reabsorbed into the entity of "god."

We can be thankful that God's Word – the Bible – tells us clearly what happens to the soul and the body after death. **At our Lord's return, the body and soul will be raised.**

"…We shall not all sleep, but **we shall all be changed** – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be **raised incorruptible,** and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

As Christians, we must live every day, preparing for eternal life.

A Credit to Her Name

Aaron Cozort

Many of us know and realize that some of the greatest advice we've ever received came from a significant mother or grandmother in our lives. Although Scripture regularly records the instruction, admonition and wisdom of fathers (as given to them through God), it is often the wisdom of mothers that guides their children throughout their entire lives.

What makes the wisdom of mothers so different from the wisdom of fathers is not the quality of wisdom. Perhaps the difference is the willingness of mothers to offer that wisdom through the emotional connection they have with their children. It is not just the words that we remember, but it is the tone, the emotion, the care, the concern, the expectations and ultimately the love with which the words were wrapped that make their wisdom enduring. Proverbs 31 describes such a mother

who was a credit to her family and her name.

This woman answered the unending curiosities of a child. ***"What, my son? And what, son of my womb? And what, son of my vows?"*** (v. 2 NKJV). We know that children constantly ask questions and expect their parents to know **all** the answers. A gift of a mother is heartfelt interest in a child's questions. No matter how outlandish they might be, she will respond with some nugget of wisdom that will provide direction and understanding – all described in a way that a child can learn. However, the child is not a youngster anymore. He's a King – a grown man – and yet, his mother's wisdom from his childhood reverberates into adulthood and sets standards and expectations.

A mother warns about dangers. Any mother who is a credit to her name warns her children about dangers ahead (vs. 3-9). She does so because she has seen the outcome and knows the end of those who do not heed such warnings.

She warns her children to be careful with whom they spend their time, and most importantly, to whom they give their heart (Proverbs 31:3). To her son, she says, ***"Do not give your strength to women…"*** This mother knows that a man's heart is fragile, and his strength can be increased by the woman at his side or shattered just as easily.

She warns her children to not drink alcohol or take mind-altering substances (Proverbs 31:4-7). Especially for anyone who has responsibilities, these substances are stumbling blocks and the cause of incalculable sorrows. How many humans live today in fear, shame or sorrow over what happened to them when drunk or was done to them by someone who was drunk? A mother who is a credit to her name warns her children to not drink alcohol.

She warns her children about justice (Proverbs 31:8-9). Her children know they are never to neglect the cause of the defenseless, let alone to take advantage of it. They are to advocate for and judge on behalf of righteousness. She teaches her children to plead for those who do not have the standing that they do. There are those who do not have the words to plead their own causes. **We need more mothers who are a credit to their name**.

Aaron Cozort preaches for the Church of Christ in Collierville, Tennessee, USA.

Don't Get Caught Napping

Ralph Clevinger

On March 25, 2022, #2 Texas played #16 Texas Tech. The game went into extra innings after Texas Tech tied the game at four runs. In the bottom of the tenth inning, Aaron Nixon walked Kurt Wilson. After a walk and a sacrifice bunt, Wilson made it to third base. Nixon proceeded to strike out the next two batters. He had two strikes on the batter when Wilson stole home for the win. How did Wilson steal home on a right-handed pitcher? Every time Nixon got a sign from the catcher, he would look at the ground for roughly three seconds. Nixon's loss of focus allowed Wilson to rush home. Wilson was so prepared to steal home that Nixon looked up in time to see him slide across the plate. Three seconds looking at the ground earned Wilson a loss for the game.

How often do we lose focus on our spiritual walk with the Lord? It is so easy to get wrapped up with everything going on around us that we take our eyes off Jesus. Notice the encouragements given in the New Testament. ***"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life"*** (John 3:14-15 NKJV). ***"Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"*** (Titus 2:13). ***"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"*** (Hebrews 12:2). ***"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"*** (Jude 21).

As those who follow Jesus, we must pay attention to our spiritual lives. We cannot allow the cares and the temptations of this world to hinder our daily walk with the Lord. We need to maintain our focus on the Savior and to strive to live according to His Word. If we try to go it alone, we may find ourselves lost when this life ends. Let us be watchful over our lives and be prepared for the Lord's return.

Ralph Clevinger preaches for the Greenville Church of Christ in Greenville, Tennessee, USA.

They Did Not Know the Lord

Ken Forrest

Moses was a great leader of God's people, keeping them aware of God and His will for their lives. Joshua succeeded him, and he also led the people in the way of the Lord. Under the leadership of these two men, Israel was freed from slavery in Egypt, led across the Sinai desert and ushered into the Promised Land of Canaan. However, when Joshua died, a great change took place in Israel. ***"When all that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord nor the work which He had done for Israel"*** (Judges 2:10 NKJV). God had convincingly led Israel through one of the darkest periods of its history. Yet, they did not know the Lord.

Why did they not know Him? Why did their parents not tell them? Hardly had Israel left Egypt when the Israelites began to complain and

to forget what God had done for them (Exodus 15:23; 16:1; etc.). In reflection, the psalmist wrote, ***"They soon forgot His works; They did not wait for His counsel, But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, And tested God in the desert"*** (Psalm 106:13-14).

The potential threat of forgetfulness is as real today as it was for the Israelites. In order to minimize the threat, each member of the Lord's church must get involved. Not only are we told to ***"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God…"*** (2 Timothy 2:15), but we also have the responsibility to continually remind ourselves of what we have learned. We do this through our regular assemblies (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:25), as well as by our joint commemoration of the Lord's death ***"on the first day of the week"*** (Acts 20:7). When our children and the children of others see us faithfully attending all the services of the church and eating the Lord's Supper each week, they see the importance of the knowledge of God in our lives.

The apostle Paul exhorted, ***"Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong"*** (1 Corinthians 16:13). We must remind ourselves continually of what God does for us. We must instill that knowledge in our children and in the generations that follow. Then, perhaps, we can avoid what happened in Israel. ***"Another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD."*** God forbid that it should happen to us!

Ken Forrest preaches for the Booneville Church of Christ in Booneville, Mississippi, USA.

[Editor's Note: It has happened already! Our children know more about and spend more of their time and money on the personages and the things of this ungodly world (1 John 2:15-17) than do they have a meaningful knowledge of Almighty God, their Creator, Lawgiver and someday their Judge. Losing our children to the world, evidenced by assemblies overpopulated with senior saints and underpopulated by their offspring and their offsprings' offspring, has affected virtually every congregation of the Lord's church. History repeats itself, it is said, and it is true religiously as well. It's time for history to repeat itself with a religious revival (Josiah, 2 Kings 22-23; Restoration History). The churches of Christ need to be converted (again) to Christ (Matthew 6:33; 16:16) and to renew their (biblical) conviction (Acts 4:19-20). ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor**]**

Did You Know?

If you could travel at the speed of light (about 168,000 miles per second), it would take you about 100,000 years to fly across the Milky Way (our galaxy).

I Turned Away from Him

Angela Chapman

I turned away from Him,
Backslid from the Holy One.
Went back to my lifestyle of sin.

I now talk, think and behave like the world.
I easily blend in,
By the world's charms I am thrilled.

I take pride in my achievements and possessions.
After all who wouldn't?
Accumulate material goods without question.

Life is all about everything I see.
My heart takes delight in physical pleasure.
My motto is: just let me be.

The preacher and the elders came to my home.
They were concerned for my soul.
I wish they would leave me alone.

"Fall from grace?"
I cruelly scoff.
Even at the look of sorrow on the preacher's face.

"Impossible!
God will let me in the pearly gates.
The idea of apostasy, inconceivable!"

They claim I've trampled the Son of God underfoot,
Despised His holy blood,
But I shut out their input.

Then, I show them the door,
Practically push them out.
Their pleas for repentance I ignored.

But hey! It's all good.
God's grace covers me!
As it very well should.

And I have plenty of time to repent.
My life is full of numerous days.
On my conscience God's Word can't even make a dent

I head off to work,
Money now my goal.
On my face there is a smirk.

When bam! I am hit head-on!
By a drunk driver weaving in and out of traffic.
Now my fragile life is almost gone.

My lungs fill with blood.
A coherent thought won't come.
The paramedics did all they could.

Wait! I'm not ready to die!
Give me one more day!
Oh, why did the drunk driver hit me? Why?

I wake up in the hadean realm,
Flames licking my body.
By remorse I am overwhelmed.

Now Judgment Day is here.
My heart is now pounding.
I have everything to fear.

I stand before Jesus Christ,
The Holy One I betrayed.
To Him I wasn't very nice

Tears stream from His eyes.
He must now send me to my fate.
I fell for the "once saved always saved" lie.

I'm now in Hell forever.
No second chances here.
Yes, in deceiving souls the devil is very clever.

Into Heaven I did not go,
Didn't walk through the pearly gates,
And all because I turned away from Him.

Reputation Monitoring

David R. Kenney

For some time, I have heard advertisements for online reputation monitoring services. In fact, I was once invited to join a job search or networking service trying to differentiate itself with "online reputation tracking." I wonder if we have given any thought about monitoring our online reputation **as Christians**.

Social Media is like any new mode of communication in that it is what we make it to be. Regardless of whether you are online via social media or not, we all have a responsibility to manage our reputations! What we say, do or post online reveals something about our characters and reputations. Human Resources literature abounds with warnings to be careful what one reveals about oneself online as it may hurt the reputation of the company for which one works, or it may severely impact the success of one's new job search. One wonders if Christians have given any thought about their online reputations in regards to their membership in the Lord's church and loyalty to the Lord.

Some time ago, I posted this comment on Facebook: "One wonders since employers monitor employees' Facebook accounts if elders are monitoring the sheep's Facebook accounts? Any thoughts?" That generated all types of responses, including some strongly stating such was entirely unethical and even downright immoral. Yet, one wonders about such thoughts since, after all, the person posted the material to be seen in the first place! I find it ironic that some were highly offended at the thought, which makes one wonder exactly what they are posting that might lead to offense? After all, **they** posted it!

Elders, as shepherds, have the responsibility of watching over the sheep. Let me give you an example. I have been invited to join various Facebook groups with names such as "Gospel Preachers" or "Church of Christ." There are several of them – some good and some not so good. After some discussions with those professing to be Gospel preachers on some of these

groups, I came to the quick realization that one can easily disguise oneself as a wolf among the sheep online, but their agendas quickly surface to those who know the agenda. Sadly, some are fooled by such.

Based on this experience and seeing people's faith potentially impacted negatively, I posted the following, which I would like to share with others here.

> We have known for years that just because a building says "Church of Christ" on the outside that the contents may not match. The same is true of Facebook Groups. Parents, you need to warn your children about wolves in Facebook groups including ones with the name "Church of Christ." There is no "doctrinal evaluation process" for these groups. I have had some very pointed discussions and debates with some among those groups who are not of the restoration plea and reject the New Testament pattern. Elders and preachers, you would do well to advise your membership as well. We need to make sure a new generation and the next generation are taught principles of sound Bible interpretation, ascertaining

Bible authority and other fundamental matters. They need to be taught how to answer false doctrines and to refute those points that seek to crumble their faith. They need to know that some will not be convinced and need to be abandoned. Abandoned? Yes – see Matthew 10:14, Mark 6:11, and Luke 9:5. Protect the flock!

Another reason this is important relates to the positive force for the cause of Christ we could utilize if we sought to do so. We have the ability to let our Christian lights shine to the world, but do we really want our lights shining or not? Or, would we rather "let someone else do it"? Think very seriously about the implications of the answer you may be affirming in your heart! Here's a simple test. Go to Google.com. Type your name in quotation marks (e.g., "David R. Kenney"). Look at all the information that pops up under "All" and "Images" when you hit the "Enter" button. Do you like what you see? Are you embarrassed by what you see?

Here is a question that I have heard preachers asked as I was growing up, and I ***really*** want you to think about the answer in the online context. If you were being tried for being a Christian based on the results from this simple test, would there be enough evidence online to convict you? Remember, a lack of evidence does **not** lead to a conviction! Do you want to be a Christian or not? May we affirm with strong voice to the call Moses made generations ago, ***"Whoever is on the LORD's side – come to me!"*** (Exodus 32:26 NKJV). Whose side are we on? Sadly, the Israelites' hearts were more in Egypt than in Canaan. Are our hearts more in this world or in the Canaan of Heaven? ✠

David R. Kenney is a preacher who resides in Bedford, Ohio, USA. His "Kenney's Pennies" also appear in *The Voice of Truth International*.

Kenney's Pennies

"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge" (Psalm 19:1-2 NKJV).

Are we listening?

Be Like Peter

Thomas Baxley

What comes to mind when you think about Peter? Do you associate him with his lows or his highs? Jesus did have to pull him out of the water, but never forget that Peter actually had the faith and the courage to step out of the boat in the first place (Matthew 14:28-29)! Peter did deny Jesus three times, but he was able to bounce back, and he is the one recorded doing the majority of the preaching in the first few chapters of Acts, including preaching to the very crowd that crucified Jesus (Acts 2)! I want to be more like Peter. There are things I want to accomplish and steps I need to take that are outside of my comfort zone; I want to have his faith, boldness and courage. I know that things will not always go as planned, and there will be times I will fall on my face. I also want his ability to bounce back after failures and defeats. I want to meet life head-on and succeed. I want to be a little more like Peter.

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

Christians Are a Peculiar People

Sunny David

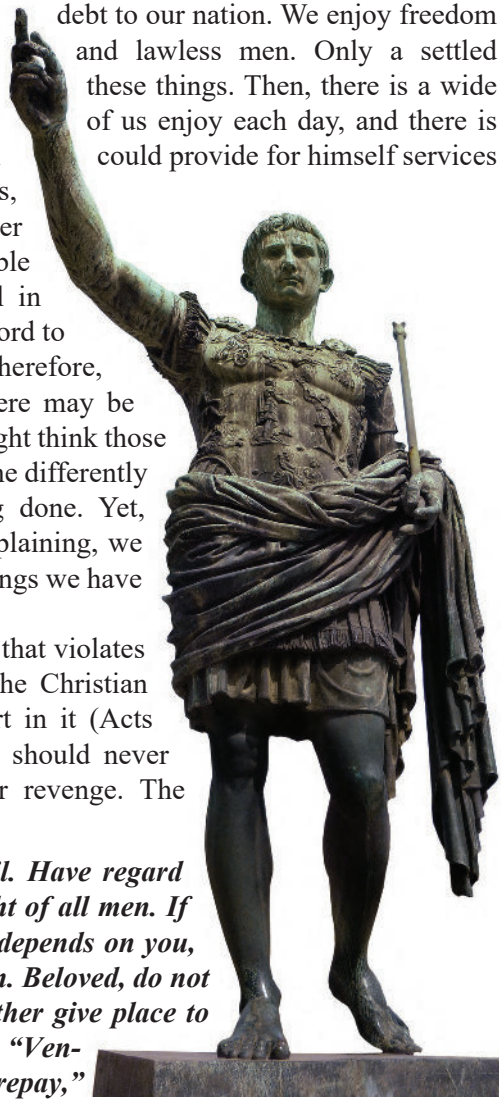
In one of his epistles to Christians, the apostle Peter wrote, ***"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar*** [***"special"*** NKJV] ***people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light"*** (1 Peter 2:9 KJV). How are Christians different or distinct from all other people of the world? They breathe the same air, eat the same food, drink the same water and enjoy the same sunshine. Then, how are they different, peculiar or special? Christians are different because they do not follow the standard set by the world; they are trying to follow the steps or teachings of Christ (1 Peter 2:21). He taught that His followers are in the world but are not of the world, as He was not of the world when He was on earth (John 17:14-16). They are urged to not be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2).

By becoming Christians, they have put off the old man of sin and have put on the new man, which is Jesus Christ, when they were baptized into His death (Romans 6:3-4; Ephesians 4:17-24). Philippians 3:20 says our citizenship is in Heaven. Sure, on earth we are citizens of the countries in which we live, and as Christians, we are to live as responsible people in our nations. Our first responsibility, however, is to God, as Christ taught in Matthew 6:33. We must, therefore, try to live our lives daily on earth in such a manner that through our actions and words, God's name may be glorified (Matthew 5:16).

As Christians, we are also responsible to our fellow beings. Jesus taught, ***"Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them…"*** (Matthew 7:12 NKJV). We want others to speak well of us and to do good for us, and so, we should do likewise to others. We don't want others to mistreat us, and so, we should not mistreat them. We don't want others to cheat us, to lie to us

or to harm us in any way, and so, we must avoid harming them in any way.

As Christians, we owe a debt to our nation. We enjoy freedom and protection from evil and lawless men. Only a settled government can provide these things. Then, there is a wide range of public services all of us enjoy each day, and there is no way that each individual could provide for himself services such as water, electricity, roads, sewage, etc. This places us under obligatory debt. As responsible citizens, we know that to fail in good citizenship is to fail the Lord to whom we belong. We must, therefore, adhere to civil obedience. There may be things we do not like, or we might think those things should be handled or done differently than they are presently being done. Yet, instead of grumbling and complaining, we should be thankful for those things we have and enjoy each day.



Of course, if there is a law that violates the law or the will of God, the Christian should resist and have no part in it (Acts 5:29). However, the Christian should never take thought of vengeance or revenge. The Bible teaches:

> ***Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him;***

If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:17-21)

As Christians, we are taught to believe that the government is divinely ordained of God. This means we are to discharge our duty as law-abiding citizens, even if evil men are serving in high places. We believe that God is supreme and nothing is hidden from His eyes. As obedient children of God, we try to live peaceably with all men, taking no thought of vengeance or revenge. We trust in God, and even if a tyrant like Nero, under whose reign both the apostles Peter and Paul lived, is on the throne, we must follow what God has taught us in the Bible. Again, we read:

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men – as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. (1 Peter 2:13-17)

God-fearing and law-abiding Christians, therefore, will never join those who are involved in civil disobedience. We may disagree when a law is contrary to the law of God and is against the people in general. In such a case, we can work to change that law so that it conforms to the divine law and for the betterment of all people, especially when we have the opportunity to exercise our constitutional right to vote. However, we must never seek to bring such a change by becoming lawbreakers.

Sunny David lives in New Delhi, India, and he is a Hindi-speaking TV evangelist and an elder for the Lord's church.

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Here Am I! Send Me

Emily Fisher

The prophet Isaiah witnessed the God of Glory on His throne in a vision (Isaiah 6). Imagine this majestic scene.

> ***In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew and one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.*** (Isaiah 6:1-4 NKJV)

As the Lord of hosts gave Isaiah a glimpse into His heavenly temple – observing the multi-winged creatures, the doors shaking as the message rang out and the encompassing smoke – it caused him to reflect upon some things. What can we today learn from this vision?

Who God Is

This scene truly showed Isaiah **Who** God is (verse 3). Like the prophet, we also need to recognize the Lord's nature. This requires study and application of His complete Word (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16; 2 Peter 1:3). From a similar vision given by our Lord Jesus to His servant John, we learn that God is holy and worthy of honor and glory (Revelation 4:8-11). The One, True, Holy God demands our reverence because we were created by Him (1 Peter 1:14-16; Hebrews 12:28-29; Psalm 99).

Who I Am

Seeing the glory of the Holy God caused Isaiah to examine himself in this light and to confess his sinfulness. ***"So I said: 'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of***

unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts'" (Isaiah 6:5).

As we come to know our Lord, we should realize our spiritual state (Luke 5:8; 18:13; Romans 3:23; 5:8). Men or women, rich or poor and darker complected or lighter complected, we all stand equal as sinners before the Holy God. He does not want us to stay in our sins but calls to us through His Word – to repent, to obey and to enter into His everlasting kingdom (Luke 13:3; Mark 16:16; Matthew 7:21).

God's Mercy

In a merciful display, God forgave Isaiah of his sins. ***"Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged'"*** (Isaiah 6:6-7).

Christ Jesus, God in the flesh and our Great High Priest, made freedom from sin possible (John 1:14; Acts 4:12; Hebrews 7:25-27). The Spirit through the writer of Hebrews stated:

> ***God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high…"*** (Hebrews 1:1-3)

My Responsibility

"Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me'" (Isaiah 6:8). As the Lord called out, Isaiah realized his responsibility. Being redeemed by the blood of Christ should cause us to see our responsibilities (2 Corinthians 5:10-12; 1 John 4:19). Our love must compel us to share

this good news with others, warning them that sin leads to death and hell fire (Romans 6:15-19; Matthew 25:41). May we have courage like Isaiah and prayerfully respond, ***"Here am I! Send me."***

God's Mission

The throne room scene does not end there. The Lord told Isaiah what he was to go tell the people, though not quite what we would expect. ***"Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed"*** (Isaiah 6:9-10).

Being privileged to have the completed revelation of God – the New Testament – we have an advantage over Isaiah. We can look back through history and see that first-century Israel did not understand the Gospel of Christ. Indeed, as a whole, the nation rejected the Messiah about which their Scriptures prophesied in detail. It is interesting that these verses in Isaiah 6 were quoted by Jesus and recorded in Matthew 13:13-15, Mark 4:11-12 and Luke 8:10 right before He explained to the disciples the Parable of the Sower. Also, the apostle Paul in Acts 28:25-27 reminded his Jewish listeners of this prophecy as he informed them that ***"the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"*** (Acts 28:28). Now, through the one spiritual body of God's Son, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, His mission is being carried out (Ephesians 3:10). Some will believe the message and obey – praise God! However, many will not believe, but that does not negate our responsibility to teach. Thus, we press on, sowing the seed, carrying out the Lord's mission and remembering the Holy and Glorious God we serve (Luke 19:10; Matthew 28:19-20).

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Do I Have It in Me?

Robert Johnson

What is going on in our world? Päivi Räsänen, a former Finnish interior minister, is on trial in Finland for quoting Bible verses that state those who practice homosexuality are sinning. A BBC report stated, "The court will have to decide whether citing the Bible can be considered a crime in some cases in Finland." Räsänen has said, "I hope that today it can become clear that I have no wish to offend any group of people, but this is a question of saving people for eternal life." Some have termed her trial a modern-day inquisition. In Canada, a bill is under consideration that would make it a criminal offense for parents to help their children accept their biological gender. Under this legislation, parents could spend up to five years in jail if they do not affirm their child's gender transition. In the United States, the equality act would disallow any appeal to religious beliefs by American churches and ministries who wish to follow biblical sexuality standards in employment and other practices (https://www.denisonforum.org/columns/daily-article).

Faith in God has always been under attack by Satan, as well as by those captivated in the depths of sin. In this current assault on biblical values, this generation is being challenged like never before. When the truth of Scripture is denied and replaced by one's own feelings, sin is the only system left by which to live. What does it bring to life? Paul reminds us we are either slaves of sin or of righteousness (Romans 6:16). Sin just creates more sin, going from bad to worse and beyond (Romans 6:19), with all the consequences that accompany it. Submission to God, however, enables sanctification, which leads to eternal life (Romans 6:22). As the devil is the author of evil, and is actively engaged to destroy everyone (1 Peter 5:8), we should not be surprised our world is bent on destruction.

So, what do we do? How do we live in such an environment as this? One thing we can do is pray to God, who is still over all His creation. We can pray for those in a position of power (1 Timothy 2:1-2) that they could see what the consequences of sin are. We should pray for strength to continue living a

Christian life (2 Timothy 1:8), to allow others to see the power of the Gospel at work in our lives (Romans 1:16) and the beauty of life in Christ compared to the despair of sin (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). We should live courageously since the ultimate victory is in Christ for those who faithfully live for Him (Romans 8:31-32; 1 Corinthians 15:57; 2 Corinthians 2:14). We must not be overcome by evil but overcome it with good (Romans 12:21), taking an unwavering stand in Christ and the life we are called to live in Him. ***"Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus"*** (Revelation 14:12 ESV).

We must not hide in the shadows and allow sin to dominate, because it will dominate without the influence of what is holy. We must have the kind of faith that stands firm in the truth, living it throughout our lives, no matter what the world does or does to us. It's the only path that leads to eternal life. ***"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death"*** (Revelation 12:11 NKJV). We all will face death, as it is the consequence of sin (Romans 6:23) and the appointment that awaits us all until the Lord returns (Hebrews 9:27).

The world is dominated by sin, not because of it being a more powerful force than the will of God, but due to apathy. **We sing "Soldiers of Christ arise and put your armor on," but have we, or will we?** In our corner of the world, do we stand for truth? It can still make a difference if we are willing to do so (Ephesians 6:12-13). ***"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"*** (1 Peter 3:14-15).

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

Kenney's Pennies ***"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!"*** (Romans 11:33 NKJV). It is interesting to realize that God's creation and His Word are merely a sampling of Who He is! God is infinite, but we are finite!

1. What did Paul plead for the Corinthians to not do? (6:1)
2. When is the time to accept Jesus? (6:2)
3. In verses 3-10, Paul gave several examples of when his endurance was demonstrated? What was the purpose of giving this long list of examples?
4. Paul said that he lived as a _____ of God. (6:4)
5. How had Paul spoken to the Corinthians? (6:11)
6. How had their hearts for Paul been restricted? (6:12)
7. Christians are not to be _____ yoked with unbelievers. (6:14)
8. Can a believer in Christ have any true fellowship with unbelievers? (6:14-16)
9. Who or what is the temple of God? (6:16)
10. Who is God walking among? (6:16)
11. What relationship is the Christian to have with the world? (6:17)
12. What will God do to us if we remain separate from sin or the unclean things of the world? (6:17)
13. Who is now God's chosen people? (6:16)
14. What relationship do Christians have with God? (6:18)

(See the back cover for answers.)

Verse Search

1 We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to
receive the grace of God in vain. **2** For He says: "In an acceptable time I
have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold,
now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

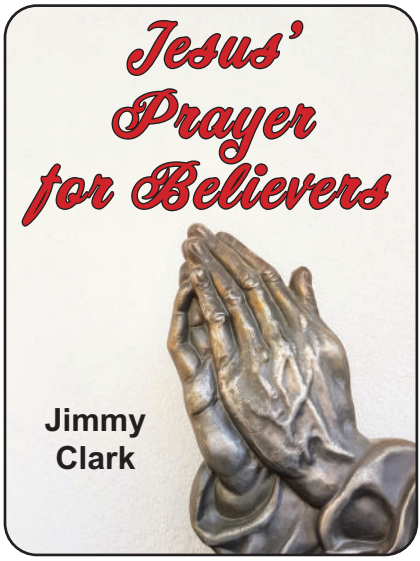
3 We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be
blamed. **4** But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God:
in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, **5** in stripes, in
imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; **6** by
purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit,
by sincere love, **7** by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor
of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, **8** by honor and dishonor,
by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; **9** as unknown,
and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet
not killed; **10** as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many
rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

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."

Notes: In this section, Paul was defending his ministry. Many among the Corinthians were attacking Paul, his ministry and his status as an apostle. Thus, Paul reminded them of how he had lived. He had always lived in such a way that his ministry could not be blamed.



"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21 NKJV). These passages should be familiar to any strong Bible student. These words are fundamental to the blessing of unity with the Father and with the Son as well as with all who believe. This prayer has some powerful thoughts for all who claim to believe. Consider three.

Unity through the Apostles' Words

Jesus specifically gave the means by which believers would be unified. ***"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word***" (John 17:20). Jesus prayed for the apostles as His own believers and then for those who would come to believe through the apostles' words. Those words that came from the apostles, which would produce unity, would be and are the inspired Word of God, not their mere human points of view. This is seen in the context of this prayer in John 14:23-26, 15:26-27 and 16:12-13. The idea that religious people who claim to believe in Jesus can be united biblically through different faiths is denied categorically in 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:4-6 and 2 John 9-10. What the apostles said (1 Corinthians 2:12-13) and wrote (1 Corinthians 14:37; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:15-16), guided by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21), was and is of God, not of men. There can be no unity among believers apart from "their word" (John 17:20).

Unity Tied to the Association with Deity

The Word of God through the apostles is the message that brings unity with the Godhead. John wrote further, ***"That which we have seen and heard declare we to you, that you also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ"*** (1 John 1:3). There is no doubt that the apostles were in the right relationship with God. Paul wrote of God's divine economy, ***"And God hath set some in the church, first apostles"*** (1 Corinthians 12:28). Paul wrote to Timothy, ***"Take heed to thyself, and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you"*** (1 Timothy 4:16). He would follow that with the words, ***"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing…"*** (1 Timothy 6:3-4). **Unity with God demands unity with the teaching** (John 13:23-24).

Unity Turned toward Affecting the World

Jesus stated of this unity, ***"that the world may believe that You sent Me"*** (John 17:21). The unity of believers in the same truth makes a bold statement to the world. False teaching creates confusion (James 3:15-16) and is not of God (1 Corinthians 14:33). The world needs a clear message unmixed with the doctrines of men. That message needs to be distinctive and wholeheartedly made a way of living by its adherents. The claim that one can believe whatever and still be right with God is scoffed at by the unbelieving world and condemned by the Bible (Matthew 7:21-23; 15:9). Truth is consistent with itself and not self-contradictory.

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[Editor's Note: Contradictory tenets held by believers and churches claiming membership in Christendom fuel criticism by agnostics, atheists, other world religionists and people who feel alienated from the confusing array of organized religion. Divisiveness within the Lord's church likewise adds to the same reluctance of precious souls to obey the Gospel of Christ. Despite membership in the churches of Christ, failure of Christians to implement biblical doctrine in their lives also discourages potential prospects for conversion, as well as those who have already submitted themselves to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The need for Christian unity cannot be overemphasized. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor**]**

The Place of Baptism in God's Plan

Bobby Dockery

The subject of baptism is one of the most controversial subjects in the religious world. Almost every religious group claiming to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ believes in and practices some form of baptism; even some non-Christian groups practice it. However, there is widespread disagreement among men over the significance of baptism in God's plan for man's salvation.

"What does baptism do?" "Is baptism really necessary?" "Have I been properly baptized?" All of these questions are directly concerned with "The Place of Baptism in God's Plan." Let us examine the significance of

baptism as set forth in the Scriptures.

Baptism puts a person into Christ. ***"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"*** (Romans 6:3 NKJV). The apostle Paul contended that baptism produces a union between Christ and the believer. ***"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"*** (Galatians 3:27). ***"…We have become united with Him…"*** (Romans 6:5 ASV). Being baptized into Christ means that we are given access to the following things found in Christ.

1. **Salvation.** ***"Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory"*** (2 Timothy 2:10 NKJV).
2. **Redemption and Forgiveness.** ***"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins"*** (Colossians 1:14).
3. **Every spiritual blessing.** ***"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing… in Christ"*** (Ephesians 1:3).

To be **in Christ** is to obtain the blessings that are **in Christ**; Salvation, redemption, etc. are **in Christ**. Therefore, we are baptized **into** salvation, **into** redemption, etc. This gives us a powerful insight into the place of baptism in God's plan. **Baptism stands between man and Christ, as well as between man and all that is "in Christ!"**

Baptism links a person with Christ's death. ***"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death"*** (Romans 6:3). To be baptized into Christ's death is to become involved in Christ's death. In baptism we die with Christ. ***"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him"*** (Romans 6:8). In baptism, we reenact the death, burial and resurrection of Christ; we obey the "form" (Romans 6:17) or **pattern** of the Gospel, which is Christ's death, burial and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). In baptism, we become the people for whom Christ died, for whom His blood was shed, and we obtain the right to all that His blood has made possible (1 Peter 1:18-19). We now have a second reference point to help us locate the place of baptism in God's plan. **Baptism**

is what ties us in with the death of Christ; it stands between us and the right to share in the victory won by Christ at Calvary!

Baptism causes a person to die to sin. ***"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life"*** (Romans 6:4). We are not only baptized into Christ's death, but it is also baptism that signals the believer's break with sin. Paul said that in the act of baptism, we actually die to sin. In baptism, the old man of sin is crucified, and the body of sin is destroyed (Romans 6:6). We are freed from sin (v. 7), and we become dead indeed unto sin (v. 11). In baptism, as famed Bible scholar F.F. Bruce wrote, "The old order of living comes to an end, to be replaced by the new order of life-in-Christ." Thus, Paul gave us a third perspective on the place of baptism in God's plan. **It is baptism that stands squarely between the old life of sin and the newness of life in Christ.**

Baptism is not a matter of indifference to be taken lightly. It is a solemn act of obedience to God. Christ emphasized the importance of it by being baptized Himself to fulfill all righteousness. ***"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord"*** (Acts 22:16).

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

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Bible Word Scramble

Rebecca Rushmore

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

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Genesis 35:11 18th word _____

John 8:33 3rd word _____

Acts 2:29 23rd word _____

Acts 7:8 13th word _____

Acts 7:9 1st word _____

Acts 7:10 19th word _____

Romans 9:10 7th word _____

Hebrews 7:1 16th word _____

Hebrews 7:4 13th word _____

Bible text: New King James (NKJV)

(See the back cover for answer.)

Teacher: "Missouri is the 'Show Me' state; Florida is the 'Sunshine State.' Does any one know the motto of Washington D.C.?"

Teacher: "No one? Does anyone wish to venture a guess?"

5th grade student: "Is it the 'Plausible Deniability' state?""

A teacher gave her class of second graders a lesson on the magnet and what it does.

The next day in a written test, she included this question:

"My full name has six letters. The first one is M. I am strong and attractive. I pick up things. What am I?"

When the test papers were turned in, the teacher was astonished to find that almost 50 percent of the students answered the question with the word "Mother."

My Grandpa used to sit in a rocking chair. He had a recliner, but didn't use it because it wasn't comfortable for him.

So one night when we were over there, Dad tried putting shims under the recliner feet to change the angle, to see if that would make it better for him. While we were doing that, Grandma was rummaging around in the closet and knocked over a box of marbles.

That is forever stuck in my mind as the night Grandpa was off his rocker and Grandma lost her marbles.

Two police officers, who are part of a task force, arrive at a cattle ranch.

The officers told the rancher, "We need to inspect your ranch for illegally-grown drugs."

The old rancher replied, "Okay, but don't go in that field over there."

One of the officers verbally exploded saying, "Mister, we have the authority of the state government with us."

Reaching into his rear pocket and removing his badge, the agent

proudly displayed it to the farmer. "See this badge? This badge means we are allowed to go wherever we wish on any land. No questions asked nor answers given! Have I made myself clear? Do you understand?"

The old rancher nodded politely and went about his chores. Later, the old rancher heard loud screams and spied the two officers running for their lives, and close behind was the rancher's bull.

With every step the bull gained ground on the agents. They were clearly terrified. The old rancher immediately threw down his tools, ran to the fence, and yelled at the top of his lungs, "Your badges! Show him your badges!"

A woman had an attack of laryngitis and lost her voice completely for two days. To help her communicate, her husband devised a system of taps. One tap meant, "Give me a kiss"; two taps meant, "Yes," seven taps meant "No" and 95 taps meant, "Take out the garbage."

One day long ago, a Czechoslovakian came to visit his friend in New York. When asked what he wanted to see, the Czechoslovakian replied, "I would like to see one of the zoos in America."

To his delight, the New Yorker took him to the zoo. While they were touring the zoo, and standing in front of the gorilla cage, one of the gorillas busted out of the cage and swallowed the Czech whole.

Shocked, his friend from New York quickly called over the zookeeper. He explained the situation and asked the zookeeper what he planned to do. The zookeeper asked the man, "Okay, which gorilla did it? Was it the male or the female?"

Pointing out the female as the culprit, the zookeeper then opened up the mouth of the female, looked inside, but found no signs of the Czech.

The New Yorker shrugged and said, "Guess the Czech is in the male."

At my age, rolling out of bed in the morning is the easy part. Getting off the floor is a whole other story.

I pulled into a gas station to get some air for my tires. The air machine now costs $1.25! Unbelievable. Well, I guess that's inflation for you.

Animals vs Christ

Mark McWhorter

"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. …But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:4, 12 NKJV). The author of Hebrews spent a great amount of Scripture demonstrating that Jesus and the New Covenant are better than Moses and the Old Covenant. Christ's priesthood is better than the priesthood of the Old Testament. His promises are better. His sacrifice is better, which is the point of Hebrews 10:4 and 12.

The Mosaic Law prescribed daily sacrifices, weekly sacrifices, monthly sacrifices, annual sacrifices and special sacrifices. A vast number of animals were killed during the approximately 1,500 years between Mt. Sinai and the day of Jesus' death. It is impossible to know exactly how many animals were sacrificed under the Law, but we can look at some

numbers to get just an idea of the enormous amount.

Numbers 7 tells us that at the dedication of the Tabernacle, 36 oxen, 144 sheep and 72 goats were killed over a twelve-day period. At the dedication of Solomon's Temple, 220,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep were killed. The historian Josephus records that at one Passover, 256,500 animals were sacrificed, though some modern commentators believe that Josephus exaggerated many of his numbers. They say that it would only have been possible to sacrifice around 27,000 in the allotted time, which would still have been a lot of animals. However, an ancient Jewish commentator states that King Agrippa wanted to know how many animals were sacrificed at the Passover. He had a count done, and they stopped counting at 1.2 million.

Yet, all of those animals could not take away sins! Only Jesus could do that. He died once for all mankind. All the millions and millions of gallons of blood shed during the Mosaic period could not match the effectiveness of the blood that Jesus shed in His scourging and crucifixion.

We are so very blessed by the sacrifice that Jesus gave. Through Him, we have remission of sins. Study your Bible. Learn all about the scheme or plan of redemption. Learn how to contact the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Romans 6:3-5), and if any of this is hard to understand, ask an adult to help you.

Mark McWhorter has written daily devotionals for youth for decades. He lives in Pell City, Alabama, USA.

Kill Me Now!

Rebecca Rushmore

"God, please just kill me now!" Does it surprise you that the sentiments behind this statement, if not the exact words, were uttered by at least four of God's Old Testament prophets? Why would Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah make such devastating statements? What was God's response? How does any of this apply to you and me today?

The Statements

Numbers 11 records one of many occasions the children of Israel grumbled and complained as they wandered in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. This time, the Lord destroyed some of the people by fire for their complaining. However, God's children did not learn their lesson. They complained about the food God provided for them. The text records:

> ***Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased. So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now – if I have found favor in Your sight – and do not let me see my wretchedness!"*** (Numbers 11:10-15)

Moses was discouraged, frustrated and maybe a little depressed because of the children of Israel. He was tired of dealing with their complaints and their disobedience. His solution was for God to put him out of his misery.

In First Kings 18, Elijah demonstrated God's power to King Ahab and the Israelites in a contest with the prophets of the idol Baal. After a resounding victory, Elijah slaughtered the false prophets, as commanded by God and in accordance with the Law of Moses (Deuteronomy 18:20). In retaliation for the slaughter of the false prophets, Queen Jezebel promised to kill Elijah and actively sought him (1 Kings 19:1-2). Elijah ran away to Beersheba in Judah and left his servant there. ***"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, 'It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!'"*** (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah was discouraged, frustrated and maybe a little depressed over the sins of the Israelites and the wickedness of her King and Queen. His solution was for God to put him out of his misery.

In Jeremiah 20, the prophet was put in stocks for a day for prophesying that Judah would fall to Babylon as a punishment from God for disobedience. After being released, Jeremiah again told of the coming destruction of Judah. The prophet then described the persecution he had endured on behalf of God (Jeremiah 20:7-12). After a brief praise of God's power (vs. 11-13), Jeremiah expressed his regret that he was ever born.

> ***"Cursed be the day in which I was born! Let the day not be blessed in which my mother bore me!" (v. 14). "Because he did not kill me from the womb, That my mother might have been my grave, And her womb always enlarged with me. Why did I come forth from the womb to see labor and sorrow, That my days should be consumed with shame?"*** (vs. 17-18).

Jeremiah was discouraged, frustrated and maybe a little depressed over the continued sins of Judah and her unwillingness to repent. His solution was to wish he had never been born.

After trying to run away from God's command to preach to the city

of Nineveh, Jonah repented and did as God commanded (Jonah 1-3). The people of the wicked city heard Jonah's message from God and repented (3:10). However, Jonah was unhappy that God did not destroy Nineveh (4:1). In fact, Jonah was so angry and unhappy over God's righteous decision that the prophet prayed to God, ***"Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"*** (4:3). Jonah was discouraged, angry, frustrated and maybe a little depressed when events did not go according to his wishes. His solution was for God to put him out of his misery.

God's Response

God told Moses to gather seventy men, elders of the people, to help him (Numbers 11:16-17). Moses needed support and help to deal with the possibly millions of Israelites. God's reasoning for the gathering of the men was ***"they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone"*** (vs. 17). God recognized the need for a support system and the delegation of responsibilities.

After Elijah made his sad declaration, he went to sleep. The Lord provided Elijah with food and drink, allowed Elijah to sleep and then provided sustenance again. Afterwards, Elijah traveled to Mt. Sinai where God again demonstrated His power (1 Kings 19:5-12). There, Jehovah gave Elijah a couple of jobs to do – God put him to work (vs. 15-16). One of the jobs was to recruit a helper. Again, God recognized a need for his prophets to have a support system and a way to share responsibilities. God also gave Elijah a **reality check**. Part of Elijah's complaint was the lack of any faithful Israelites. God reminded Elijah, ***"Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him"*** (v. 18).

God's response to Jeremiah's lament is not given. However, Jeremiah 21 begins with the prophet doing his job. He got to work.

The Lord confronted Jonah's attitude. ***"Then the LORD said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'"*** (Jonah 4:4). God then taught Jonah a lesson using a plant He caused to grow, provide shade and then die in the morning sun (4:6-11). The Lord made it clear He was displeased with Jonah's

selfish, pouting attitude when the people of Nineveh repented. Jonah's focus was in the wrong place.

You and Me Today

Just like the prophets of old, we also may become discouraged, angry, frustrated and maybe a little depressed. Sometimes these feelings result from the circumstances around us. Like Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah, we may feel discouraged when others do not live the way we think they should live or feel frustrated when others do not make changes in their lives that we believe are best for them. Like the prophets, we may feel alone in our struggles to live as faithful children of God in this often immoral world. Many other circumstances of life may bring us feelings of depression or despair. **The same things God told His prophets to do in times of discouragement are the same things we should do today.**

Get busy. Elijah and Moses were given jobs to do. Getting to work allows us to focus on something besides the circumstances that trouble us. Find something to do around the house or at the church building. Send cards or make phone calls to the sick and the shut-in. Offer to babysit so a couple at church can have a **date night**. Help a Bible class teacher prepare materials for class. The options for getting to work are endless.

Develop a support system. God provided Moses and Elijah with support systems. Moses gathered seventy men to help guide the people. Elijah sought Elisha to help him in his work. While we may feel alone, we are not alone. Neither are we the only ones to ever experience feelings of discouragement, depression or despair. Reach out to trusted friends and family members. Let them know you are struggling and need their support. Allow others to help you, and be honest about your feelings and struggles. Paul wrote in Galatians 6:2, ***"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."*** **Allow others to help bear your burdens and be willing to provide that same comfort to others in need.**

Pray and study. Though not specifically given this instruction in the texts under consideration, God's prophets spent much of their lives talking and listening to God. Today, we listen to God when we study His Word

(2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17). God listens to us when we pray (Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). When our focus is on God, we will not have time to concentrate on our circumstances.

Do a reality check. When Elijah felt alone, God reminded him there were over seven thousand faithful Israelites. Frequently in distress, we exaggerate how bad things are. Stop and think about what is real. Count your blessings (Ephesians 1:3). If necessary, ask your support system to help you take a realistic look at life and the things that trouble you.

Check your attitude. Jonah felt angry and discouraged because his attitude was wrong. Jonah wanted the people of Nineveh to be punished, and when God did not destroy the city, Jonah pouted and wallowed in self-pity. If one's attitude or view of a situation is unrighteous, it is imperative to fix the mindset. Focusing on the right things will help.

> ***Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things.*** (Philippians 4:8).

Get professional help. Not all feelings of depression, discouragement and despair result from our circumstances or attitudes. In some cases, depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in the body. Also, traumatic experiences often result in feelings of depression and despair. These situations may require prescribed medications to restore the proper balance or to ease anxieties resulting from trauma. Seek professional counseling if you have feelings of despair that do not go away with efforts like those listed above, that persist for an extended length of time or that negatively impact the ability to function in daily life.

At least four of God's prophets experienced a period of depression, discouragement, frustration or despair. God gave them what they needed. God will provide for us what we need if we will but seek Him (Matthew 6:25-34; Matthew 7:7-8).

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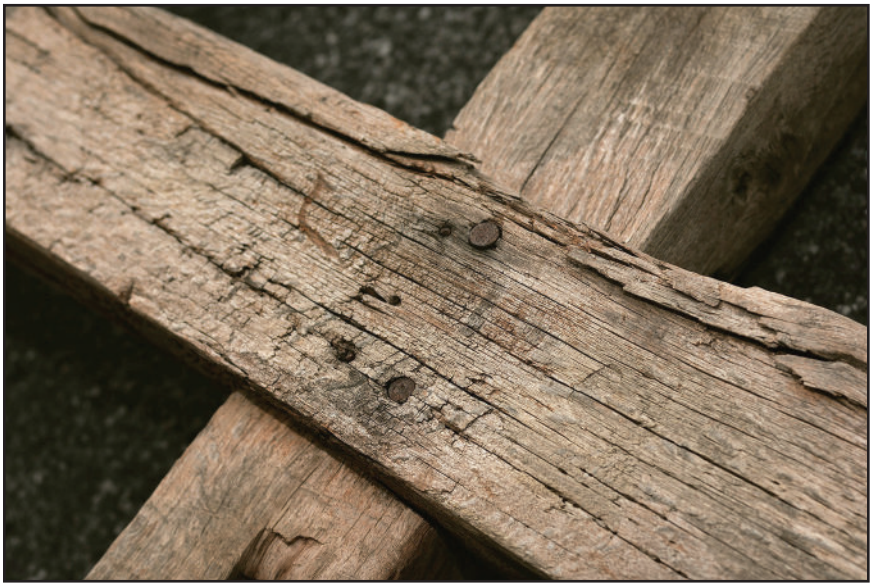
Explain "Take Up His Cross and Follow Jesus"

Garland M. Robinson

Mark 8:34 reads, "***…Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"*** (KJV). Jesus here bade all to follow Him but acknowledged there is a price to be paid. Because most are unwilling to pay the price, they choose to follow their own way and be lost. ***"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it"*** (Matthew 7:13-14).

"His cross" here is not the Lord's cross, but rather, it is **our own cross!** It involves a denial of self. The most important thing in the world after becoming a Christian is no longer oneself but God's will. We practice self-discipline. Romans 12:1-2 declares, ***"I beseech you… that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*** Included here are both inner and outer struggles pertaining to living the Christian life. Whatever burdens, trials or hardships come our way as a consequence of following Christ are to be patiently borne. Second Timothy 3:12 tells us, ***"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."*** When we endure whatever crosses we must bear, Jesus said, ***"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"*** (Matthew 5:10).

Christians neither look for hardships and tribulations in life, nor do they create them, but they patiently endure them when they come. Throughout all personal adversities, they continue to live faithfully unto the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58) and seek to please Him instead of themselves. ***"For even Christ pleased not himself"*** (Romans 15:3).



There is much to do in God's service, and as followers of Christ, we are to take the initiative and go to work for the Lord. **There will be some pain along the way, but the reward is out of this world!** Won't you take up your own cross today and follow Jesus? He said, ***"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"*** (Matthew 11:28-30).

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The churches of Christ

Encourage you to

"Study to show thyself approved"
2 Timothy 2:15

&

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve"
Joshua 24:15

Heaven

God wants you there	Hebrews 2:10
A place of rest	Matthew 11:28
No earthly woes	Revelation 21:1-8
Eternal life	Matthew 25:46
For the obedient faithful	Matthew 25:31-40

Hell

God doesn't want you there	2 Peter 3:9
Lake of fire	Revelation 20:14-15
Torment	Revelation 14:11
Eternal destruction	Matthew 10:28
Eternal punishment	Matthew 25:46
For the disobedient	2 Thess. 1:7-8
For those that quit	2 Peter 2:20-21
For the ungodly	I Peter 4:18
Names not in Book of Life	Revelation 20:15

The Bible

Is the inspired Word of God	2 Timothy 3:16
Has all truth	John 16:13
No other Gospel	Galatians 1:8-9
Will last forever	Matthew 24:25
Can be twisted	2 Peter 3:16
Must be studied	2 Timothy 2:15
Tells about life	2 Peter 1:3

Obedience

Must obey God, not man	Acts 5:29
Obey Gospel or be lost	2 Thess. 1:8
Christ saves the obedient	Hebrews 5:8-9
Faith requires obedience	Romans 16:26
Not by faith alone	James 2:24
Must do God's will	Matthew 7:21
Not hearers only	James 1:22
Reward for obedience	John 3:22

Sin

Sin is disobedience	1 John 3:4
Sin is unrighteousness	1 John 5:17
Sin is failure to do good	James 4:17
Sin separates us from God	Isaiah 59:1-2
All have sinned	Romans 3:23
Penalty for sin is death	Romans 6:23
Sin can be forgiven	Acts 2:38
Sin can be washed away	Acts 22:16

How to Be Saved

Hear The Word of God	Romans 10:17
Believe The Word of God	Hebrews 11:6 Mark 16:16 John 8:24
Repent of sins	Acts 17:30 Luke 13:3-5 Revelation 2:5
Confess	Romans 10:9-10 Matthew 16:16
Be Baptized	Acts 2:38 Acts 10:48 1 Peter 3:21
Live Faithfully	Revelation 2:10

Examples of How to Be Saved

Day of Pentecost	Acts 2:36-42, 47
Simon the sorcerer	Acts 8:4-13
Ethiopian Eunuch	Acts 8:26-40
Saul (Paul)	Acts 9:1-20 Acts 22:3-16 Acts 26:12-19
Cornelius (1st Gentile)	Acts 10
Lydia	Acts 16:13-15
Philippian jailer	Acts 16:23-34
Crispus & Corinthians	Acts 18:8
"Certain disciples"	Acts 19:1-7

chart by David Conley

The Church

Built by Christ	Matthew 16:18
Built during first century	Matthew 16:28
Began Day of Pentecost	Acts 2:1
Church is the body of Christ	Ephesians 5:30
Only one church	Ephesians 4:4
People make up the church	1 Cor. 12:12
Jesus adds to the church	Acts 2:47
Baptized into the church	1 Cor. 12:13
	Romans 6:3-4
	Galatians 3:27
Many congregations	Galatians 1:2
	Revelation 1:20

Worship in the Church

Preach / Study God's Word	2 Timothy 4:2
	Acts 5:42
	Acts 8:4
Pray	Acts 2:42
	1 Thess. 5:17
	1 Timothy 2:8
Sing	Ephesians 5:19
	Colossians 3:16
Give	1 Cor. 16:1-2
	2 Cor. 9:6-7
Lord's Supper (communion)	1 Cor. 10:16
	Acts 20:7
	1 Cor. 11:17-24

Worship Attendance

Church assembled	Acts 11:26
Don't forsake	Heb. 10:25-26

Work of the Church

Worship	John 4:24
Preach Gospel	Mark 16:15
Edify	1 Thess. 5:11
Benevolence	James 1:27

Church Organization

Christ is the Head	Colossians 1:18
Autonomy of congregations	1 Peter 5:2
Elders in each congregation	Titus 1:5-9
Elders also called pastors	Ephesians 4:11
Elders also called shepherds	1 Peter 5:2-4
Elders also called rulers	Hebrews 13:17
Elders also called overseers	Acts 20:28
Elders also called bishops	1 Timothy 3:1
Deacons are servants	Acts 6:1-6
Deacons in each church	Philippians 1:1
Ministers	2 Timothy 4:5
Ministers are preachers	Romans 10:14
Ministers are evangelists	2 Timothy 4:5
Ministers are teachers	2 Timothy 1:11
Ministers are other servers	Philippians 2:25
	Ephesians 4:12
	Colossians 4:17

Christian Living

Things a Christian Does

Adds Christian graces	2 Peter 1:5-11
Obeys civil government	Romans 13:1-4
Wears "armor of God"	Ephesians 6:11-20
Has fruit of the Spirit	Galatians 5:22-23
Loves & prays for enemies	Matthew 5:44-48
Loves fellow Christians	1 Peter 1:22
Does not love worldly things	1 John 2:15
Is a "living sacrifice"	Romans 12:1-2
Overcomes evil with good	Romans 12:21
Treats people right	Matthew 7:12
Does good to all men	Galatians 6:10
Worships God	John 4:23-24
Keeps self unspotted	James 1:27
Sets a good example	Titus 2:7-8
Grows	2 Peter 3:18
Bears one another's burdens	Galatians 6:1-2
Seeks God's things first	Matthew 6:33
Takes the Gospel to others	Mark 16:15
Does the Father's Will	Matthew 7:21
Will be saved	1 Peter 1:9

Things a Christian Does NOT Do

Forsake the assembly	Hebrews 10:25
Steal	Ephesians 4:28
Defraud	1 Thess. 4:6
Get Drunk	1 Cor. 6:10
Lie	Ephesians 4:25
Gossip in other's matters	1 Peter 4:15
Commit adultery	Matthew 5:27-32
Hate one another	1 John 3:14-15
Offend others	Romans 14:21
Sow Discord	1 Peter 3:8
Neglect salvation	Hebrews 2:1-4

First Corinthians 13: Examining Alternative Views of "That Which Is Perfect"

Brian R. Kenyon

Paul wrote, ***"Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away"*** (1 Corinthians 13:8-10 NKJV). ***"That which is perfect"*** must refer to the completed, written revelation of God (James 1:25). This is so because of the following reasons. **First**, that which is ***"in part"*** clearly refers to the miraculous gifts, represented by ***"prophecies… tongues… knowledge."*** **Second**, since ***"that which is in part"*** is compared with ***"that which is perfect,"*** then to whatever ***"that which is in part"*** refers must be the same subject as ***"that which is perfect,"*** only to a lesser, partial degree. Otherwise, the comparison would be senseless (like comparing apples with oranges). **Third**, the illustrations Paul used to emphasize growing from immaturity to maturity involve intellectual processes (1 Corinthians 13:11) and being able to see something vaguely as opposed to seeing it clearly (1 Corinthians 13:12). **Fourth**, Paul designated the seeing vaguely time-period as ***"now"*** (in Paul's day of the miraculous) but ***"then"*** (a time in Paul's future) clear vision and knowledge would be available. Twice in 1 Corinthians 13:12 is the ***"now… but then"*** construction used.

Thus, when ***"that which is perfect"*** (the completed, written revelation of God) came (and it did at the end of the first century), ***"that which is in part"*** (the miraculous gifts) was done away. Not only does Scripture affirm this, but objective observation also shows this to be true. To speak in tongues, as per the miraculous gift, one would speak a real foreign language that

he never before studied. This was what ***"tongues"*** in the New Testament were! The first Day of Pentecost following the Lord's resurrection is an example of tongue-speaking that nobody today can replicate (Acts 2:6-11). All, however, do not agree ***"that which is perfect"*** refers to the completed, written revelation of God. See below the examination of the two most popular alternatives to this view, adapted from Wendell Winkler (226-234).

Does "That Which Is Perfect" Refer to Jesus and/or Heaven?

Probably the most popular alternate view says ***"that which is perfect"*** refers to Jesus at His Second Coming and/or the perfect state of affairs ushered in thereby (i.e., Heaven). Practically all denominational groups, especially those that still think they have miraculous gifts, adhere to this position. There are three reasons why this position cannot be correct. **First**, the term translated ***"perfect"*** (*teleion*) is neuter gender. While not impossible (1 John 1:1), if the ***"perfect"*** were referring to Christ, we would expect the masculine gender ("he which is perfect"), not a neuter pronoun ***"that"*** appearing in the phrase ***"that which is perfect."*** Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit to use the neuter gender.

Second, understanding the ***"perfect"*** to refer to Jesus or a state of affairs ushered in by Him would be to assign a meaning of ***"perfect"*** (*teleion*) that is not found in the context. Remember, ***"that which is perfect"*** stands in contrast (antithesis) with ***"that which is in part."*** Since ***"that which is in part"*** is quantitative in character, referring to amount, then ***"that which is perfect"*** must also be quantitative for the contrast (antithesis) to be compatible. To understand ***"that which is perfect"*** as a state of affairs is to assign a qualitative meaning, referring to perfect quality, to a term that is clearly in context quantitative (referring to the amount of information).

Third, the word ***"perfect"*** (*teleion*) is nowhere used by Paul or any other New Testament writer to refer to the Second Coming or to a state of affairs resulting from it. The Greek word translated ***"perfect"*** is found eighteen other times (Matthew 5:48; 19:21; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:6; 13:10; 14:20; Ephesians 4:13; Philippians 3:15; Colossians 1:28; 4:12; Hebrews 5:14; 9:11; James 1:4 [twice], 17, 25; 3:2; 1 John 4:18),

and nowhere does it ever refer to a perfection of quality!

Does "That Which Is Perfect" Refer to the Mature Church?

Some understand ***"that which is perfect"*** to refer to the maturity of the body of Christ. One writer says ***"that which is perfect"*** refers to maturity in terms of the unification of Jews and Gentiles in one church (McRay 168-183). Another defines it as "the ultimate goal, aim, and end that Paul seeks to accomplish in bringing God's people to the fullness of spiritual growth and maturity" (Spain 14). This position also cannot be correct for the following three reasons. **First**, it makes the mistake of understanding ***"perfect"*** as qualitative (referring to perfect quality), rather than quantitative (referring to amount). As stated before, the miraculous gifts were perfect quality, even though they were only a partial quantity (amount) of God's revelation!

Second, the criteria for gauging the maturity of the church are vague. Concerning the "unification of Jews and Gentiles in one church" view,

Corinth already had Jews and Gentiles in her membership (1 Corinthians 5:7); thus, why tell them about it? Concerning the "fullness of spiritual growth and maturity" view, how exactly would the church know that she had grown enough spiritually: by numerical growth, geographical spread or what?

Third, if the ***"perfect"*** were the maturity of the church, would it not have been possible for a mature church to become immature? This is exactly what happened to several churches in the New Testament (Galatians 1:6-7; Revelation 2-3). If a mature church slipped back to immaturity, this view would require re-opening the door for miraculous gifts to bring that church back to maturity. Indeed, the implications of this view do not harmonize with the context of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 or with the total teaching of the Bible.

Conclusion

Those who think miraculous gifts still exist are deceived. Scripture affirms that the age of miracles ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). The Spirit inspired Word that God gave us is much more valuable than miraculous spiritual gifts. These gifts could only give partial glimpses of God's will. However, the Bible, God's completed revelation, gives everything we need to know. The Word of God has been confirmed (Hebrews 2:3-4); it has been ***"once for all delivered to the saints"*** (Jude 3); it is able to make us ***"wise unto salvation"*** (2 Timothy 3:15); and obedience to it results in being ***"born again"*** (1 Peter 1:23). Let us follow what God has revealed in His Word and ***"be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"*** (1 Peter 3:15).

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Noting Your Bible

The Glory of God in Christ

In a previous issue, we saw God's glory manifested from creation through His covenant with Israel pointing to the Messiah. Now, through the body of the Messiah, Christ's church, His glory is shown to the whole world. Let's note what the New Testament says about the glory of God.

1. If you are able to pick up where we left off in the last study in Isaiah 6, do so. Otherwise, begin this subject in the front of your Bible: "**God's Glory (see John 12)**."
2. Turn to John 12 and read the overall context, noticing how many times ***"glory"*** or ***"glorified"*** is mentioned. Note especially verses 37-41, containing Isaiah's prophecy. You may find it noteworthy that all four Gospel accounts record Christ quoting Isaiah 6:9-10, and Paul referred to it in Acts 28:26. Highlight John 12:41, and write, "**Jesus is Yahweh (see John 1)**."
3. At John 1, read the whole chapter, and highlight verse 14. Note, the word ***"dwelt"*** is the word for tabernacle. Jesus is the true temple of the fullness of God's glory (John 2:19-22). Write, "**(see 2 Peter 1:16-19)**."
4. Turn to 2 Peter and note, "**Peter recalled what he saw when Christ shone with glory (Luke 9:28-36)**." The apostles were privy to certain things while Christ was on this earth, and certainly this was to prepare them for what they were to do, namely, to go into all the world preaching Jesus by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and to record the confirmed Word in completion (2 Peter 1:19-21, 3 and 3:2). Write, "**(see John 2:11)**."

5. Go back to John and underline in 2:11, ***"signs"*** and ***"manifested His glory."*** Scripture makes it clear that Christ's miracles are evidence of His Deity, pointing to Him as the God of Glory (see 1 Corinthians 2:8). Note here also, John 11:4; 17:1-5; 20:30-31. Write, "**(see Romans 6:4)**."
6. In Romans 6, underline ***"raised from the dead by the glory of God,"*** and highlight verses 3-9. Christ's greatest miracle was His own resurrection, conquering death! This is why we can ***"rejoice in hope of the glory of God"*** (Romans 5:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:35-58; Philippians 3:21). Write, "**(see 1 Timothy 3:16)**."
7. Turn to 1 Timothy 3 and highlight verse 16; reference next to it "**(see Luke 24:26)**."
8. At Luke 24:26, note that, **"Christ had to suffer to reach glory and did so in order for us to follow in that glory (see Hebrews 2:9-10)**." You may want to make some additional notes. The apostles preached this Gospel (Acts 17:2-3; Romans 16:25-27; 1 Peter 3:18-22). We fall short of God's glory, but if we have obedient faith in Jesus, being buried with Him through baptism, His blood makes atonement for our sins (Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-11; 1 John 1:5-10).
9. Go to Hebrews 2:9-10 (take the time to read the whole book of Hebrews) and write, "**Christ was made perfect through sufferings, and we, as His body (church), must also go through suffering (see 1 Peter 5:10)**." See also 2 Timothy 3:12.
10. The book of 1 Peter has the theme of suffering for the glory of Christ. (Again, reading the whole book is best.) Underline 5:10 and reference the preceding chapter 4:11-19, noting, "**When we suffer for doing good, our response should be to rejoice; this is one way we bring glory to God (see 2 Corinthians 3:18)**." Our godly behavior during trials may even cause others to glorify God (Luke 23:47).
11. Turn to 2 Corinthians 3 and read chapters 3-6, noting the word ***"glory."*** God gradually revealed His glory through Israel and the law of Moses, but Jesus succeeded where they failed, bringing true liberty in the ***"light of the gospel of the glory of Christ."*** Underline 3:18 and next to it reference 4:16-18. Note here also, Romans 9 and Colossians 1:26-27. Now, under the law of Christ, Jew and Gentile make up the temple of God.

Next to 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 write, "**(see 1 Corinthians 6:15-20)**."

12. Read the 6th chapter of 1 Corinthians. The apostle Paul had to remind the Christians at Corinth in both letters that those in Christ are the temple of God, and thus can have no fellowship with darkness, but rather be light to the world in order to glorify God. Write, "**(see Jude 24)**."
13. Underline Jude 24 and 25 and write next to it, "**(see Revelation 21)**."
14. Read Revelation 21, noting the glory of God in the Lamb's bride – the New Jerusalem – the church. Also reference here Ephesians 5:27.

Again, this only skims the surface of the glory of God in Christ in the New Testament, and it is such an enriching study that we can glean from it for years and years.

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Sin and Blood

Betty Burton Choate

God's creation was perfect from the beginning. He designed a perfect universe, a perfect heaven and a perfect earth, perfect vegetation, perfect birds of the air and perfect fishes of the sea, perfect nutrients for food for every living creature, perfect animal life – and last of all – the perfect crown of creation, human beings made ***"in His own image"*** (Genesis 1:27)!

"In His own image." What does that mean? Humans were given the ability to think, to talk, to love, to work and to live. What does it mean to live? A human has a living spirit, placed within the physical body that was formed as the house in which it is to live. That living spirit is God's crowning gift of immortality! Yes, God, Himself, is eternal, having had no beginning and for Whom there will never be an end. Humans are created beings, and so, they had a beginning. When God breathed into that first physical body ***"the breath of life"*** (Genesis 2:7), man became an immortal soul that will never cease to exist. The wonder of creation was intended to live in fellowship with his Creator throughout the never-ending ages.

However, man was also given another critical gift – the ability to choose! If he chose to live in obedience to God, he would never die. Yet, God had warned him that there was one tree placed in the Garden from which he was not allowed to eat – the fruit that would enable him to judge between ***"good and evil"*** (Genesis 2:9). The warning included the pronouncement that if he ate of that tree, he would die!

We know the recorded history. Eve was deceived by Satan, she ate of the fruit and Adam – who was there with her and did not raise one word of objection – took the fruit she offered him and ate it (Genesis 3:6). So, the deed was done. Sin entered into that perfect creation and opened the door to all the horrors that have plagued mankind since that day.

The Scriptures say that, aware and ashamed of their nakedness, Adam and Eve clothed themselves with fig leaves. (Have you ever felt fig leaves? They

itch terribly, so that was the second bad decision our first parents made! Ha!)

Instead, God clothed them with skins. Of course, He could have made the skins out of thin air, because God can do anything, but it is more probable that the first death was of animals that God Himself killed in order to cover the shame of sin! Had you considered that the blood of a sacrificial lamb was even offered that day in anticipation of the ***"once and for all"*** (Hebrews 9:12) shedding of the blood of the Lamb – Jesus Christ – for humanity?

We don't read in Genesis of any instructions that God gave to Adam and Eve about what they could do to cleanse themselves of the guilt of sin, but we do read of offerings that were made to God. ***"…Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering…"*** (Genesis 4:2-5).

Nothing more is said about offerings made by the generations following. What was the spiritual state of the descendants of Cain, as listed in Genesis 4? What about the other sons and daughters born to Adam and Eve, as mentioned in Genesis 5:4? It was when another son – Seth – was born and grew to maturity that we read, ***"…Then men began to call on the name of the Lord"*** (Genesis 4:26). Of his descendants, we know that Enoch ***"walked with God"*** (Genesis 5:22) and Methuselah and Lamech were listed as ancestors of Noah. Of the total population during Noah's lifetime, Genesis 6:11-13 says, ***"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. And God said to Noah, 'The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with violence through them; and behold, I will destroy them with the earth.'"***

However, because Noah was ***"a just man"*** who ***"walked with God"*** (Genesis 6:9), Noah, his wife and his three sons and their wives were saved in the ark that God told Noah to build. What do we read that Noah did immediately after the flood? ***"Then Noah built an altar to the Lord,***

and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar" (Genesis 8:20). It would seem from this description that the making of sacrificial offerings to God had been a practice from the beginning, and that God had already designated the types of ***"clean"*** birds and animals He would accept.

Sadly, in the centuries following the flood, and with the spread of humanity, the human population corrupted the practice of making sacrificial offerings by devoting them to many idol gods and goddesses, which were imagined into existence and to which all kinds of sacrifices – including human sacrifices – were made. Historical records indicate that humans were accustomed to offering the flesh and blood of living creatures as a means of atoning for their sins.

Because of the widespread corruption of humanity, God designated the descendants of Abraham as those with whom He would work directly in order that through them He could keep His promise to bring the Seed of woman Who would overcome Satan (Genesis 3:15). We read in Genesis 12:7 that Abram built an altar to God near Shechem, and again in verse 8 that near Bethel he built another altar to the Lord. **Throughout, the Old Testament records that sacrificial offerings were made by all who were faithful to God.**

We read in Galatians 4:4-5, ***"...when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."*** What was accomplished through Christ's coming? ***"But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption"*** (Hebrews 9:11-12).

> ***And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things***

> ***themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another – He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.*** (Hebrews 9:22-28)

What was the major change that took place in ***"the fullness of the time"***? Before His return to Heaven, Jesus told His followers to ***"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"*** (Mark 16:15). God's work of outreach to humanity was no longer limited largely to the descendants of Abraham but was to spread throughout the world and throughout time. No longer would the faithful build altars and offer blood sacrifices, as in the Patriarchal age; no longer would designated ***"priests"*** at the synagogues and in the Temple at Jerusalem burn sacrifices for the faithful, as in the Mosaic age under the ***"Law of Moses"*** (Joshua 8:31). This new law of Christ was not confined to faithful patriarchs or to the descendants of Abraham. This new law was given to every soul in all the world, for all time.

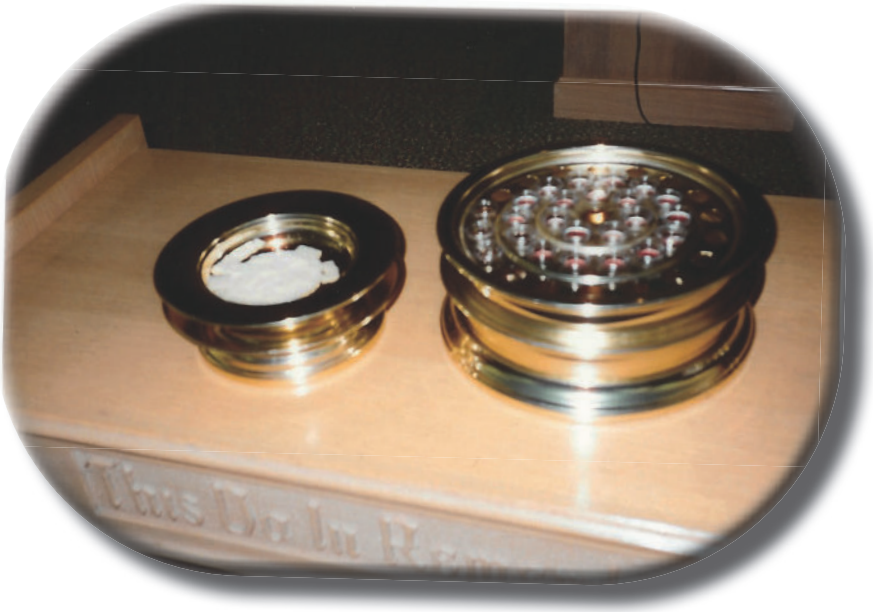
As a result, the coming of Christ as the sacrificial Lamb changed forever the way humans approach God. In the centuries since the offering of Himself for us, it is not through the building of an altar and the shedding of the blood of an animal sacrifice that we are cleansed of our sins. First John 1:7 says, ***"…if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."***

If the building of altars and the sacrifices of lambs were still required of every faithful soul, what problem would that create? Do I have property on which I can build an altar? Do I have flocks of sheep from which I can choose a lamb to offer? Would most of the faithful followers of Christ throughout the world be able to be obedient to such a command? No!

God, in His wisdom and foresight designed the plan that every Christian can obey. **Our Lord became the Sacrificial Lamb for all of humanity, for all of time.** That part of the work is finished. What is asked of us, as Christians? We are to memorialize that sacrifice. **Every first day of the week, we partake of unleavened bread in remembrance of the body that was given for us, and we drink of the fruit of the vine as our memorial to the blood that was shed on the cross for us!**

"Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'" (Matthew 26:26-28).

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



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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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My Ship of Life

Cliff Holmes

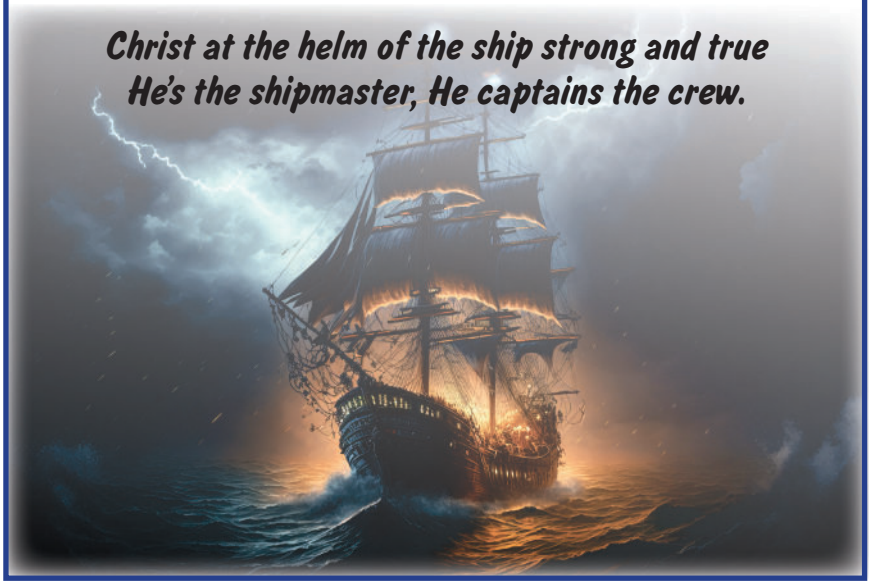
My ship sails over life's darkening main
Traversing lightning, thunder and rain.

Through threatening waves goes the strong prow
As in deep prayer on bended knee I do bow.

My Bible, the rudder, a strong mighty force
Guiding, correcting and righting my course.

With daily devotion from God's Holy Word
Urging me onward to serve my Dear Lord.

Christ at the helm of the ship strong and true
He's the shipmaster, He captains the crew.



(6) Inasmuch as there is none like You, O Lord (You are great, and Your name is great in might),

(7) Who would not fear You, O King of the nations? For this is Your rightful due. For among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like You.

(10) But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth will tremble, and the nations will not be able to endure His indignation.

(11) Thus you shall say to them: "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens."

(12) He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens at His discretion.

(13) When He utters His voice, There is a multitude of waters in the heavens: "And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasuries."

Jeremiah 10:6-7, 10-13