
Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 1

January 1, 2006

Teaching Values: Showing Affection

The English word *love* includes a wide range of ideas either when used in every day conversation or as a translation in the New Testament. Webster defines *love* as "strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties; attraction based on sexual desire; affection and tenderness felt by lovers; affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests; warm attachment, enthusiasm or devotion; unselfish loyal benevolent concern for the good of another; a person's adoration of God."

Four Greek Words

There are four distinct Greek words translated by the English word *love*. *Ερως* is the word for the sexual expression of love; this word is not used in Scripture. However, the duty of spouses in this matter is expressed by the euphemism "render...due benevolence" (I Corinthians 7:4-5). This is also the Greek word from which we get our English word "erotic".

Στοργη is the word for the tender love and affection which exists between family members; it is the love of kindred. However, it is only used as a negative and translated as "without natural affection" (Romans 1:31; II Timothy 3:3).

This sin described the fallen Gentiles and the apostasy in the church. To be without the affection of family is a sin.

Φιλω is that love associated with friendship. It comes into English in *philanthropist* and *Philadelphia*. In the New Testament it is compounded with husband and children (Titus 2:4), man (Titus 3:4) and brother (Romans 12:10). In Romans 12:10 it is also combined with the word *στοργη*, the love of family, and translated, "kindly affectioned".

Αγαπω is the selfless love of marriage (Ephesians 5:21-31; I Corinthians 13:4-8). It is that disposition of the heart that seeks only what is in the best interest of another. This love is not reciprocal; neither does it depend upon any quality in its object in order to be present. This is the love with which God loves us (John 3:16).

Tenderness Expected in the Home

As evident from Romans 1:31 and II Timothy 3:3 tender feelings are expected to be found in the home. As a matter of fact to be without them represents an apostasy and characterizes a fallen condition.

Jesus expected men to love, have tender feelings, for their parents (Matthew 10:37), for

their spouses (Titus 2:4; Luke 14:26), their children (Titus 2:4) and their siblings (Romans 12:10; Luke 14:26).

The home is in need of serious repair when these tender feelings are neglected or absent (Proverbs 17:1; 15:17; 21:9, 19; 25:24). God wants and expects us to be affectionate toward our family members.

How to Express Affection

Sometimes we find it hard to express affection. It may be that we do not know how. The Bible gives us examples of several appropriate ways in which to show affection. Men in particular find it difficult to show our tender feelings. Granted we do not all have to be the same, and some of us will be more expressive than others, but we all should learn to show some affection.

Kissing. The Orientals are more comfortable with this form of demonstration than most Westerners it seems. Even today in the East, it is very common for men to "kiss" one another as a form of greeting. In the Bible parents kissed their children (Genesis 27:26; 50:1). Of course, husbands and wives kissed (Song of Solomon 1:2: 8:1); brothers and sisters kissed (Song of Solomon 8:1). Brothers kissed one another (Genesis

33:4). Kinsmen kissed (Genesis 31:55). And, grandparents kissed their grandchildren (Genesis 48:10). Family affection may be so strong as to see in-laws kiss (Exodus 18:7; Ruth 1:14). The kiss was even common among mail friends (II Samuel 19:39).

Hugging or Embracing. In Scripture it is very common to see kinsmen embrace (Genesis 29:13). Brothers embrace (Genesis 33:4). Certainly we would expect to see parents (Genesis 46:29) and children (II Kings 4:16) freely offering an embrace to one another. Husbands and wives or the betrothed are also shown embracing one another (Genesis 26:8; Song of Solomon 2:6; 8:3).

Gift Giving. A time honored way in which we may show affection is through giving gifts. These need not be expensive. Many of the gifts found given in the Bible prove the adage, "It is the thought that counts." Spouses gave gifts to one another (I Samuel 1:4-5; Genesis 24:22, 30, 47; Ezekiel 16:10-13). Parents gave gifts to their children as expressions of love and affection (Genesis 37:3; I Samuel 2:19; Luke 11:11-13). Siblings gave gifts to each other (Genesis 32:13). The Scriptures recognize the value of gifts in maintaining (Proverbs 18:16; 17:8) and restoring good feelings between the giver and the receiver (Genesis 32:20; Proverbs 21:14). "A gift is as a precious stone in the eyes of him that hath it."

Appropriate Praise. So often it is difficult for us to reward good behavior and gracious deeds with a word of praise. Yet, the Bible recommends praise for those that have done well

(Proverbs 23:15-16, 24-25, 25:11; 27, 27:2, 11). Specifically, husbands ought to praise a faithful wife (Proverbs 31:28). Children ought to speak praise of their parents (Psalm 127:3-5) and parents their children (Proverbs 17:6).

Learning to Be Affectionate

It is possible to learn how to become an affectionate person. Do not resist becoming such by saying, "I am not; therefore, I cannot." As with all things right, the Bible points the way.

The first step toward becoming affectionate is to *receive affection from others*. Jesus set the example in this, when the little children came to Jesus to be touched by Him, He refused them not (Luke 18:15-16). There is always time to hug a child. A very wise and experienced parent once told me when we first became parents: "A child only cries for one of four reasons: he's hungry, he's wet, he's hurt, or he wants to be held." Children need to be held, hugged and embraced. The Lord made time, and we must as well.

Next, you must *start showing affection*. Jesus returned the affection of the little children, "He took them up in His arms" (Mark 10:16). He received gladly and gratefully the gifts that were given to Him (John 12:7-8; Luke 7:37-38; Luke 8:1-3). Jesus clearly demonstrated his tender feelings for those whom He made His companions (John 11:5, 35-36; 12:1-8). Fathers "pity" their children, that is, they show passion (Psalm 103:13).

Finally, let your words convey your tender feelings.

True love can, should and must be demonstrated (I Corinthians 13:4-8; I John 3:18); however, the truth is fathers and mothers must *tell* their children that they love them (I Thessalonians 2:11; Titus 2:4). Spouses must do the same (Song of Solomon 8:6-7). Everyone wants to be told that they are loved. Learn to say it, show it and mean it.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** *Mark & Deidra Cone; Troy Lake, Daryl & Cindy May, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, Helen Rushing, Jyvonnie White.*
- **Resignation:** *Dale Hill* has resigned as an elder effective December 25. The Hills are moving to *Avinger, TX*. We wish them Godspeed.
- **Baptism:** *Mike Evanoff* was baptized Sunday night. Welcome to the Kingdom!

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 2

January 1, 2006

Teaching Values: Honesty

Webster defines *honest* as anyone “Characterized by or exhibiting truthfulness and integrity; INCORRUPTIBLE: not deceptive or fraudulent; marked by integrity or truth; fair or just in character and behavior, not cheating or stealing.” In the Bible *honesty* is “probity, integrity, trustworthiness, sincerity, uprightness, decency, morality, rectitude, goodness,” (II Timothy 2:1–2; II Corinthians 8:21); (Romans 12:17).”

The basic component of honesty is *truth*. Thus, in order to be honest one must tell the truth (Proverbs 14:25; 12:19). But honesty goes beyond truth telling and comprehends what is right and lawful (Daniel 6:12); whatever is without perversion (Matthew 22:16); is actual (Philippians 4:8) and sincere (Philippians 1:8). Ultimately; that which is honest conforms to the reality of the Word of God (John 17:17; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; I Timothy 1:10). As far as the Scriptures are concerned one is not fully honest or true who speaks or lives contrary to the Word of God (Luke 8:15; Acts 6:3; II Corinthians 8:21; I Peter 2:12; Psalm 119:118).

Bible Principles Concerning Honesty

First, one must recognize that he can never please God and be

anything other than honest. God hates lying (Proverbs 6:17; 12:22; Leviticus 6:2–7; 19:11–13). He regards those that do it as an abomination and evil (Psalm 5:6; Revelation 2:2) and He will destroy all liars in hell (Psalm 5:6; Revelation 21:8, 27; 22:15).

An honest man will be truthful in all his business dealings (Proverbs 11:1; 20:10). He will give what is due and more (Luke 3:13; 6:38; cf. Leviticus 19:35–36). He will be careful to pay his taxes (Luke 10:25). As an employee, he will be no purloiner, neither a thief of property nor time (Titus 2:9–10). He will be faithful whether his employer is present or not (Ephesians 6:6–8; cf. Luke 12:42–48). In all of his dealings he will do that which is expected in order to maintain his integrity and the integrity of others because it is the right thing to do (II Corinthians 8:21; Romans 12:17).

An honest man keeps his word (Proverbs 12:22). The law of truth is in his mouth (Malachi 2:6; Psalm 15:2). He does not promise and then not perform (James 5:12; Matthew 5:37). The truly honest man will not bear false witness, slander or otherwise malign his neighbor (Psalm 15:3). He does not assume an evil motive against

any man (Psalm 69:4; I Timothy 6:4). When he makes a bargain, even a bad one, he keeps his end (Psalms 15:4).

An honest man will does not steal (Ephesians 6:1–4; Leviticus 6:2–7). He recognizes that “finders keepers” is the way of the wicked (Exodus 22:9; Leviticus 6:3–4). He does not have to come face to face with a lock in order to respect another’s property (Proverbs 23:10; 22:28; Deuteronomy 22:17). Neither does an honest man steal through oppression by taking unfair advantage of the weak or poor (Job 24:1–12; Psalm 62:10; Proverbs 21:7; Ezekiel 22:29).

How Children Learn Honesty

In order to teach children to be honest there must be a “no tolerance policy” at home respecting lying (Deuteronomy 19:16–21; Psalms 119:128, 163). A liar must be held in contempt (Psalm 40:4; 101:7; Proverbs 13:5). Bearing falsehood is a habit that is often acquired in youth and practiced for a lifetime (Psalm 58:3). In order to stop it, there must be a known punishment for lying (Proverbs 19:5, 9). In our home it was certain that wrongdoing would be punished, but lying about wrongdoing would bring a

much more severe penalty (Proverbs 20:17).

Integrity is best taught by example. If you do not want children that are dishonest do not demonstrate dishonesty before them (Ezekiel 16:44). Too many parents believe they can exhort their children to “do as I say not as I do” (cf. Jeremiah 7:9–10). However, we must “walk within [our] house with a perfect heart,” if we expect to have any real success in building a godly character in them (Psalms 101:2–8). Lying to the boss, keeping what is borrowed, cheating on taxes, stealing from the office and like acts will only teach a child that dishonesty is the expected and accepted thing.

Another way to build an honest character is through teaching life lessons. Perhaps the most important of these concerns redemption. Every one of us needs to realize that the death of Jesus for the sins of the world was necessitated because the serpent told a lie and Eve believed and acted on it (Genesis 3:1–19). This sad event in the history of our race proves that honesty is the only policy.

Another is taught by the example of Abraham. He is remembered as the “friend of God” and the “father of the faithful” (James 2:23; Romans 4:16). However, this beautiful life is marred by the record of two sins, both of which were lies (Genesis 12:11–19; 20:2–18). From him we learn that lying diminishes the character of an otherwise great man.

Another important lesson to be learned from example is that lying often leads to other sins

with far graver consequences. No more horrific example of that is found than in the life of David (II Samuel 11–12). David tried to hide his adultery with another Uriah’s wife by lies and deception. Being unable to succeed, he resorted to murder. A noble man lost his life in order to cover a lie.

Why Be Honest

Honesty defines character and proves that one is trustworthy (Job 31:5–6; Luke 16:10). This is important and helpful because it establishes our reputation and brings us into the confidence of men to whom we may be helpful (Proverbs 25:19). Being trustworthy we are able to develop relationships that will help us in life (Proverbs 31:11).

An honest man is a truth lover (Psalm 119:163; II Thessalonians 2:10). This love of truth helps develop a mind that recognizes truth rejecting falsehood and error. Thus, the honest man is protected from deception and delusion (II Corinthians 4:2; James 1:22). He is constantly searching for what is true and right (John 7:17; Proverbs 23:23) and only speaks what he knows is the same (Ephesians 4:25; Psalm 8:7). Thus, truth becomes a lamp unto his feet and a light for his path (Proverbs 6:23).

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** *Leon & Terry Aldridge; Mark & Deidra Cone; Troy Lake, Daryl & Cindy May, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, Helen Rushing, Jyvonne White.*

- **New Address:** *Dale & Mary Hill* 500 South Main Avinger, TX 75630, (903) 562–1718. *Leon & Terry Aldridge* 300 George Ihlo Dr. Center, TX 75935, (936) 590–9555.
- *Gerry McDaniel’s* great granddaughter was still in the hospital Friday. The doctors said she had a virus and treated her for dehydration.
- *Floyd Bush* was released from Longview regional on Thursday. He was diagnosed with an infection and is on medication.
- **Upcoming Events:** Please obtain a copy of the *Upcoming Events Flyer* on the table in the foyer. This is a complete schedule of activities in 2006 of which the members here need to be aware. Please post this on your refrigerator or bulletin board at home and mark the family calendar with important dates you need to remember.

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 3

January 15, 2006

Teaching Values: Friendship

A friend is someone "attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard." A friend is a sympathizer, a helper or patron. Some synonyms for friend are: *comrade, chum, pal, boon companion, confidante and mate.*"

In the Bible a friend is a person whom one loves and trusts; a close companion or comrade (Genesis 38:12). Perhaps the most famous friendship in the Bible was that of David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1-4). Abraham was called God's friend (2 Chronicles 20:7), and God spoke to Moses "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). Jesus said we are His friends if we obey Him (John 15:14).

A Bible Example of Friendship

The friendship of David and Jonathan is perhaps the best known friendship in human history (1 Samuel 18:1-4). Why were these two men drawn to one another? A cursory observation might suggest that they were not suitable or likely to be friends. Jonathan was older than David. He was the son of a king, whereas David was the son of a poor shepherd. Jonathan was a mighty warrior and David an inexperienced youth.

However, these two men—and necessarily all men—could build a friendship because the essential ingredients were there for a lasting camaraderie.

First, David and Jonathan became friends because they held a common faith. Both of these men were committed believers in the Almighty (1 Samuel 14:6; 17:39). Jonathan took the garrison at Michmash single-handedly and David slew Goliath because both were confident that the battle belonged to God.

Second their friendship formed because they both possessed incredible courage (1 Samuel 14:7-13; 17:32-37). No doubt Jonathan saw in David many things that he knew were true of himself, qualities which are rare among men. Jonathan knew that David was a man he could trust and upon whom he could rely in difficult times (Proverbs 25:19).

Finally, and perhaps most important, this friendship was built upon an admiration for the wisdom each perceived in the other (1 Samuel 14:28-31; 17:38-39). In order for a friendship to thrive each must bring to the relationship something that strengthens the other (Proverbs 27:6, 17). Friendships are made for improvement, comfort and

achievement. Rarely do men become friends who do not perceive in another either an admirable quality they themselves have or one they desire to possess.

What Do Friends Do?

Friends help each other (Proverbs 17:17; 27:10). The whole design of friendship is to avoid being left alone when the times of hardship, trial and calamity arise (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). A man with a friend is a threefold cord.

Friends share everything. When Jesus told the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, He revealed a fundamental truth about friends (Luke 15:6, 9; Romans 12:15). Jesus illustrated this truth when he sent Peter to pay the Temple Tax (Matthew 17:27). Friends share the joys and the sorrows, the gains and the losses. Where I come from a friend is someone "who would give you the shirt off his back" and "the last dollar in his pocket."

Friends are loyal. They don't reveal secrets (Proverbs 11:13). They stick with you "rain or shine," in the good times and the bad (Proverbs 17:17). There's a great quote from James Bowie, hero of the Alamo. Bowie was complaining that his friends had forsaken him after a

terrible error in judgment on his part. His companion in the conversation asked, in amazement at Bowie's displeasure, "Well, you do know you were wrong." To this Bowie replied, "Well, yes, but that is when I needed them most!"

Friends offer comfort. Job lamented the fact that when his friends came to his aid in his time of calamity that rather than comfort him, they began to accuse him falsely of sin (Job 6:14-15). They were "miserable comforters," that is, they offered no consolation and showed no pity (Job 16:2, 20; 19:19). Job endured the failure of his relationships, as did David (Psalms 38:11) and, even, Our Lord (Matthew 26:56). From Jesus we learn what a real friend is (John 15:13). While others may forsake us, we always have a friend in Jesus (Hebrews 13:5-6). Jesus learned this from His Father (John 16:32). Friendship is intended to head us off from and bring us up out of the depths of despair and loneliness (Proverbs 27:17).

Friends give counsel. Advice is often worth what you pay for it, and it seems everybody has it to give away. Thus, a man needs good friends as a source of trustworthy counsel in which he has complete confidence (Proverbs 27:9). The good counsel of a friend can make all the difference in life (Proverbs 27:19). The value of this counsel is that it will be honest in its critique and intended for our good (Proverbs 27:6, 17:9a). And, a real friend will never counsel us to go contrary to the faith (Deuteronomy 13:6-9).

Teaching Friendship

Perhaps one of the greatest skills we will impart to our children is that of making friends. In order to begin, we must teach our child how to be a friend (Proverbs 18:24). This involves our helping him develop all those attributes of character that make him worthy of the friendship of others (Psalms 35:14). As a parent, you must lead your children to be trustworthy, kind, loyal, brave, men and women of faith and love.

You must impart to them an understanding of the difference between friendship and cronyism (Proverbs 6:1, 2; 19:4, 6-7; Luke 6:27-38). There are always people who will feign friendship for what they perceive you are able to give them (Proverbs 6:3; 14:20). In youth we often unwisely confuse popularity with friendship. We mistake pleasurable association with companionship. Being the center of attention and invited to all the parties does not mean one has friends.

Another important life lesson we need to impart to our children is control of the tongue, the lack of which often adversely impacts friendships (Proverbs 16:28; 17:9). They must learn not to gossip, but rather be one whose speech is always uplifting and wise (Psalms 141:3; Proverbs 22:11).

Finally, model this behavior before your own children (I Timothy 4:12). Let them see in you how a friend behaves and they will have ready made friends (Proverbs 27:10).

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** *Leon & Terry Aldridge; Floyd & Doris Bush, Mark & Deidra Cone; Troy Lake, Daryl & Cindy May, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, Chris, Tonya & Savannah Millican, Sam Pryor, Helen Rushing.*
- *Floyd Bush* is at home. He is undergoing an extended radiological test to determine if he needs surgery in the near future.
- **Upcoming Events:** Please obtain a copy of the *Upcoming Events Flyer* on the table in the foyer.
- **Gospel Meeting:** Our meeting with David Tant is just around the corner—March 5 through 10. Please get a copy of the meeting preparation sheet on the table in the foyer. Start now getting ready for the meeting.

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 4

January 22, 2006

Teaching Values: Kindness

To be *kind* means “having or showing a tender, considerate and helping nature.” Thus, one who is *kind* is friendly, generous, warmhearted, sympathetic, considerate, gentle, affectionate and forbearing. Synonyms for *kind* include: *philanthropic, benevolent, tenderhearted, compassionate, gracious*. In the Bible there are two Greek words translated as “kind”: *χρηστοτε* (Colossians 3:12) and *φιλανθρωπια* (Acts 28:2). These words describe an attitude of heart that results in a specific character of action (Luke 6:35; Romans 2:4).

Kindness Is Essential

One is not walking before God as he ought if he does not demonstrate kindness (or gentleness in the KJV). It is one trait which is characteristic of “the fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22). Its absence in our lives indicates we have yet to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts (v. 23). Kindness is an attribute of the new man who is risen with Christ (Colossians 3:1, 9–10). Kindness is acquired by the renewal of our minds through a knowledge of Christ in whose image we were created in regeneration (Colossians 3:12). Furthermore, “kind” is not something that you just are. Kindness must be demonstrated

or practiced. The worthy woman of Proverbs had the “law of kindness” in her mouth keeping her words in check (31:26). The men of Malta showed their kindness to the Apostle Paul (Acts 28:2). The servants of Christ prove themselves “by kindness” (II Corinthians 6:4–6). Solomon said: “That which makes a man to be desired is his kindness; and a poor man is better than a liar” (Proverbs 19:22). In other words, what counts is doing what you can, rather than saying what you would do.” The Apostle John put it this way, “My little children let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:17–18). There isn’t any kindness in the heart that says, “Be ye warmed and filled” but sends away the destitute with nothing (James 2:15–16).

Its Character

The key ingredient in kindness is love. Paul said that “love is kind” (I Corinthians 13:4). This must be true since love by definition must seek the good will of another. Kindness is the expression of that good will. This is true whether we speak of the kindness of God toward man (Titus 3:4) or that of man toward man (Romans 12:10; II Peter 1:7).

Kindness is always manifested without respect of persons. The Christian is not kind to some and not to others. He is certainly not kind on the basis of racial, social or ethnic considerations (James 2:1–9). We should show kindness in the same way in which the Father has shown His kindness toward us—to all men even the unthankful and evil (cf. Luke 6:35). When we withhold kindness from some men we become evil (James 2:4).

We can better understand the necessity of being kind to all men when we recognize that the grounds for showing kindness is grace or favor, rather than merit or worth. God did not show His kindness toward mankind on the grounds of the being particularly worthy of it; it was just the contrary (Titus 3:4–5). When did we ever merit the gift of God’s son (Ephesians 2:7). We can perceive the kindness of God in all His actions toward mankind and through these we are drawn to Him (Romans 2:4; Acts 14:17). It is being kind as the Father is kind that we are truly his children (Matthew 5:44–45).

Kindness is not fickle, that is, on again off again. When we behave in that fashion, we are behaving as the hypocrites do (Luke 6:33–36). God again is the

standard in this. His kindness is constant. It is the one thing on which men can always count (Isaiah 54:10). It is this assurance of the constancy of God's kindness that draws men to Him in repentance. Because we are unpredictable our relationships are hindered and even damaged (James 3:17), sometimes beyond repair (Luke 15:28; cf. I Timothy 5:1; I Corinthians 4:11-13).

Examples of Kindness:

Here is a list some of the many things which the Scriptures regard as exemplifying kindness. It is by no means an exhaustive list. However, it does help us broaden our perception of kindness and its importance.

One is *kind* when: (1) he is honest in his dealings (Genesis 21:23), (2) he rewards good received from another (Genesis 40:14), (3) he is sympathetic and comforting (Job 6:14), (4) he exhibits honorable behavior (Ruth 3:10), (5) he shares another's burdens (1 Samuel 15:6), (6) he shows friendship (1 Samuel 20:15, 16), (7) he honors the dead (2 Samuel 2:5), (8) he is merciful toward his enemies (2 Samuel 9:7), (9) he demonstrates loyalty (2 Samuel 16:17), (10) he shows gratitude (1 Kings 2:7) or (11) compassion (Jonah 4:2), (12) he is benevolent (Luke 6:35), (13) courteous (Acts 27:3), (14) hospitable (Acts 28:2) and (15) forgiving (Ephesians 4:32).

How to Teach Kindness

As parents we recognize that the two greatest sources of influence on our children is their contact with family members and companions (I Corinthians 15:33). Children are

prone to do what they see and live. If we are not kind in our dealings with our children, it should be no surprise if they learn to manifest a brutal spirit as adults. Likewise, if they are allowed to associate with peers who are known to be without compassion or proper regard for others that spirit will influence them (Proverbs 22:24-25).

Bible study is important in developing a kind heart in children (Colossians 3:10-12). The Bible is filled with stories and examples of kindness and these should be read to them from their youth and held before them as the standard of right behavior. By far the best example we have is the Lord Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:21-25) with whom we ought to become intimate respecting the His sinless life.

We learn to be kind by receiving kindness (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:38). The greatest kindness any of us has ever known is that of the Almighty through Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:3). In the difficult times in our relationships we must reflect on what we have received in order to properly judge what we should give (Ephesians 4:32). Young people need to be guided into a proper appreciation for the kindness of God that has appeared to us in order to be able to manifest a like kindness toward the world (Matthew 5:44-45).

And, as with anything, practice makes perfect, create for your family opportunities to practice the virtue of kindness (Romans 12:10-18). There are plenty of good works to be done (Titus 3:8, 14).

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

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- *Floyd Bush* was expecting to be released from the hospital by the weekend. Once recovered from pneumonia, he will have another day surgery to repair the lowest disk in his back.
- **Thank you:** Thomas Stewart, Herschel Morris, Joe Fomby & Sherman Pope for the work done maintaining and improving our physical plant. If you have not, check out the new classroom.
- **Gospel Meeting:** David Tant, March 5 through 10. Start now getting ready for the meeting.

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Volume 6 Issue 5

January 29, 2006

Teaching Values: Forgiveness

According to Webster to “forgive” is to “excuse for a fault or offense; to renounce anger or resentment against, to absolve from payment: pardon, pass over, clear, acquit, absolve, cancel, waive, exculpate.” In the Bible the word “forgive” is a compound of two Greek words. The first, ἀπό, is a prefix meaning “off,” i.e. away (from something near), in various senses (of place, time, or relation); it usually denotes separation, departure, cessation, completion, reversal, etc. The latter, ἴημι, signifies to send or send forth, in various applications. This is the word often translated “remit” or “remission.” It takes its significance from the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement which bore the sins of Israel “away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness...unto a land not inhabited” (Leviticus 16:21–22).

Biblical Principles Concerning Forgiveness

In the first place forgiveness is something that every Christian must practice. We are commanded to do so (Mark 11:25–26; Colossians 3:13). If we lack the capacity to forgive, we will find ourselves far short on the Day of Judgment (Matthew 6:14–15). It has been correctly observed that “charity” or true religion (I Corinthians 13:1)

“begins at home” (cf. I Timothy 5:4). Since forgiveness is certainly an integral part of the practice of Christianity where better to observe and learn the exercise thereof than in the family circle?

Believers must possess an inexhaustible capacity to forgive. The Lord taught this to Peter who asked, “How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him” (Matthew 18:21). We generally apply Peter’s words to other disciples. However, remember that Peter’s brother in the flesh, Andrew, was a disciple (Matthew 10:2). Isn’t this the case with most of us? Our spouse, our children, our parents and siblings are often “our brethren”. Thus, when Jesus said, “Not...until seven times, but until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22), He meant your “brother” at home as well.

In order for forgiveness to be truly efficacious it must be complete or total (I John 1:9). This is the basis of our confidence in Christ, “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.” God pardons us and forgets it. He buries it in the depths of the sea and removes it from us as far as east is from west (Micah 7:19; Psalm 103:12).

Concerning our relations with others the wise man said, “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends” (Proverbs 17:9). The ASV supplies “harpeth on” instead of “repeateth”. Signifying that it is not so much the revealing of a secret or personal matter (cf. Matthew 18:15; Proverbs 25:9–10), but the continual bringing up of an old injury or wrong suffered. This is what Paul had in mind when he used the words “implacable” and “trucebreakers” (Romans 1:31; II Timothy 3:3). The truly forgiving man has a very poor memory when it comes to the sins he has forgiven.

Therefore, in order to be the kind of person with which the Lord is pleased we must be “ready” or “willing” to forgive. This is God’s disposition toward us (Psalms 86:5). It was clearly demonstrated by the Lord, even as He was hanged at Calvary (Luke 23:34). With respect to the treatment we show those who harm and hurt us we must do good, show mercy and forgive, and that, abundantly (Luke 6:36–38).

In order for forgiveness to be truly effectual it must be of such a nature that our love for the offender is re-affirmed and his

contrite heart is comforted (II Corinthians 2:7–10). The process of forgiveness begins in rebuke that results in repentance (Luke 17:3–4) but it is not complete until there is a restoration, renewal and rekindling of affection. Jesus restored Peter (John 21:15–19), and He urged us to follow His example in order to “gain your brother” (Matthew 18:15–17).

A Biblical Example of Forgiveness

Perhaps, the greatest example of a forgiving man, after Jesus, is Joseph. His story demonstrates that the ability to forgive is something every man must acquire if he is to be a truly happy individual and successful in his family relations. I can think of no man who suffered more evil at the hands of his own flesh and blood than did he. His brothers were jealous of him because of his righteous character and the favor he enjoyed with his father, Jacob, and the Father, God. Their jealousy caused them to hate him and, eventually, to seek his murder. Their wickedness was thwarted by the Providence of God, but still he was sold into slavery, imprisoned and forsaken by his family on account of their lies to conceal their deeds (Genesis 37–50).

Joseph, because he was a man who embodied the principles of forgiveness, did not grow bitter and resentful against his brethren. Rather, when they were reunited his love for them was strong and his desire to help them undiminished. In dealing with them covertly he took great pains to discover their character and learn their

intentions. Once it was apparent to him that they were remorseful for their wickedness and transformed by repentance, he made himself known to them and announced his intent to bless them everyone.

What a remarkable man Joseph was. Lesser men would have seized the moment for revenge, doing so they would have destroyed themselves and their family. Yet, Joseph because he could forgive literally saved the lives of his brothers and their families laying the foundation for a great nation. But, beyond this, he was instrumental in restoring his brothers to God’s service saving their souls and those of untold others.

A Parable on Family & Forgiveness

Jesus often likened the kingdom to a family (Matthew 12:46–50). He chose this figure in order to illustrate the close and tender feelings that ought to exist between its citizens, as well as, the incredible love the Father in heaven has for all of us. One of the most impressive of the kingdom parables on forgiving is based on the family figure (Luke 15:11–32).

In the parable there are three principle characters: the father, an older son and a younger son. You remember that the younger son demanded his share of the inheritance and upon receiving it ran away and wasted it in a far country. Meanwhile the elder son stayed home and worked the farm.

When the younger son came to his senses he went home, ready to confess his wrongs and be treated as a servant in his father’s house. However, while

he was a great way off his father seeing him ran out to meet him and with warm embrace restored the son to his rightful place in the family circle.

The elder brother was resentful and jealous of the attention that this prodigal received, pouting he refused to join the joyous festivities. In answer to the complaints against the younger brother (all of which were true), the father said, “It was *right* that we should make merry and be glad.”

You see this father knew, as did Joseph, that in order to find joy and happiness in life every family must practice forgiveness or else be doomed to live estranged from those that are dearest to us in this world and from Him who taught us to forgive, in the world to come. Let us learn to forgive.

—Jeff Asher

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Kerry Henry (903) 836-4438
Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 6

February 5, 2006

Teaching Values: Respect

We live in a time when respect for others and their property is lacking. It is not uncommon for youths and even adults to show no deference to the aged, those in authority or those who sacrifice and serve in the community. In the Bible the virtue of respect is conveyed in the words "honor" and "esteem" (Romans 13:7; 1 Peter 2:17; Matthew 15:4; 1 Timothy 6:16; Philippians 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). Christians have the duty to honor those to whom honor is due, and as parents we have an obligation to train our children to render this respect.

Whom Shall We Honor?

The Bible is specific concerning who is worthy of honor, and why. As a matter of fact, the list is pretty long.

The Apostle Peter enjoins upon us the obligation to "honor all men" (1 Peter 2:17). This duty is apparent when one recognizes that as there is no respect of persons with God (Romans 2:11), there is to be no partiality demonstrated by His people (James 2:1, 9). We are everyone made in the image of our God and equal before Him and each other (Genesis 1:26). The deference and respect we show our fellows says a lot about the view we have of ourselves, and it will determine God's view of us in the judgment (Romans

12:13; Philippians 2:3; Luke 1:9–14).

We are enjoined to give honor to those who are the representatives of the civil government (Romans 13:7). God asks us to obey government because it is His minister to the saints for their good (Romans 13:4; cf. John 19:11). Thus, disobedience to government is disobedience to God.

There must be mutual respect between husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:33; 1 Peter 3:6–7). This respect is demanded by the nature of the marriage relation (Ephesians 5:29). Intimacy demands respect and trust (Hebrews 13:4). When these begin to wane greater sins are not far behind.

Likewise, there is to be mutual respect between employer and employee (1 Timothy 6:1–2; Ephesians 6:5–9). The believer who is a supervisor or business owner must regard his employees as worthy of fair dealing knowing God will hold him to account. By the same token, the servant or employee must render true service because he serves the Lord and not man.

The church is called upon to honor their elders "for their works sake" (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13). It is understood that

they are men of remarkable character and by such command respect, but they have humbled themselves and become the servants of all (Matthew 20:26–28) and have taken the additional burden of being responsible for the souls of the entire flock (James 3:1; Hebrews 13:17). Such sacrifice and service demands recognition.

Similarly, children are commanded to honor their parents (Ephesians 6:2; Matthew 15:4). This honor is due because parents have sacrificed so much for their children (2 Corinthians 12:14; cf. Hosea 11:3; Hebrews 12:8; Job 1:5). They are the guides, the providers and protectors of their offspring. Their love and sacrifice should command our respect; this is why God says, "It is right."

The aged are worthy of our respect (Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 20:29). However, it is again assumed that they command that respect by their character (Proverbs 16:31; Job 32:9). The aged have attained wisdom through their experiences and spirituality (Job 12:12). Their lives have been a blessing to their families and communities because of their accomplishments. Their posterity is indebted to them for their accomplishments. We do stand on the shoulders of giants.

Finally, or should I say firstly, the Scriptures enjoin the honor of God (Revelation 7:12). God is surely worthy of being honored because he is the Creator (Revelation 4:11). Without Him we are nothing. Our very existence and our eternal well-being are wholly dependent upon Him (Revelation 5:12). We honor God by keeping his commandments (John 14:15).

How Children Learn Respect

They learn through observation.

They learn how to honor their parents by observing how their parents honor one another (Ephesians 5:28, 29), and by seeing how their parents treat their grandparents (1 Timothy 5:4; Matthew 15:6). They learn how to honor government by observing how their parents respect the law (1 Peter 2:13–15; Luke 20:25; 1 Timothy 2:1–2). They learn how to honor their employers by observing how their parents honor theirs (Ephesians 4:28; 6:6–7; 2 Thessalonians 3:10). And, they learn to honor God by observing their parents do the same (Matthew 6:33).

They learn through instruction.

Parents have a duty to God and to their children to instruct them in the reasons for being respectful (Proverbs 1:8; 4:1; 6:20; Ephesians 6:1–4). These principles equip them for success in life and prepare them to assume their place in the kingdom. Parents harm their children by not instructing and re-enforcing these truths (Deuteronomy 6:7–9).

They learn by correction. While it is unfortunate, it is nevertheless

often necessary to apply correction. A failure to do this when it is called for encourages further disrespect (Ecclesiastes 8:11). For this reason then, God has allowed for government to punish evildoers (Romans 13:2, 4), the church to correct the unrepentant (Titus 1:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6), and parents to discipline their children (Proverbs 13:24).

Being Respected

We observed earlier that when God commands us to respect certain individuals it is assumed they are respectable. One of the difficult lessons to learn in life is that we are sometimes disappointed by those whom we have come to respect. Parents sin (Colossians 3:21); elders digress (1 Timothy 5:19–20); governments become corrupt (Psalms 9:17); men become wicked (2 Timothy 3:13). In times like these, we remember that the honor we give others, even the undeserving, is a reflection of the esteem with which we hold Christ (Ephesians 6:5–7).

Sometimes the young demand respect for themselves. They are certainly entitled to the same honor which others receive (1 Peter 2:17). However, the same assumptions hold for them as well, those honored are honorable and the respected are respectable. Paul admonished Timothy to let no man despise his youth (1 Timothy 4:12). In order to accomplish that task Paul urged him to be an example in all areas of life. If we want to be respected we must learn it and earn it.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** Leon & Terry Aldridge; Sue Blackmon; Floyd & Doris Bush, Mark & Deidra Cone; Mabel Hawley; Troy Lake, Wallace Little; Daryl & Cindy May, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, Kenneth Midyett, Betty Midyett, Chris, Tonya & Savannah Millican, Helen Rushing.
- **Gospel Meeting:** David Tant, March 5 through 10. Start now getting ready for the meeting.
- **VBS:** June 5–8 has been selected as the time for this year's VBS. The theme, *Stepping Out with Jesus*, has been chosen. We will study from the lives of Daniel, Jonah, Josiah and David. Speakers for the Adult studies will be D.J. Dickerson, Josh Best, David Watts, Jr. and Harold Hancock.

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 7

February 12, 2006

Teaching Values: Self-Control

Webster defines *self-control* as "control of one's feelings, desires or actions by one's own will; the power of controlling one's external reactions, emotions, etc.; equanimity." Roget lists as synonyms: restraint, self-discipline, willpower, mettle, resolve, composure and reserved.

The word *temperance* in the KJV conveys this idea of self-control and more. Unfortunately, it is usually now associated only with abstinence from alcohol or other intoxicants. The Greek word, *εγκρατεια*, is best translated by the word "mastery" which indicates full control over self and the things which one may desire.

Bible Examples of Self-control

There are numerous examples of men exhibiting heroic self-control in the Bible. Let's consider three of these.

Joseph was sold by his envious brothers into servitude in Egypt. As a youth he was purchased by Pharaoh's captain of the guard, Potiphar. Joseph served his master well and the entire house prospered (Genesis 39:5). After a while, Potiphar's wife began to seduce Joseph. She wearied him incessantly with her invitations to commit

adultery (39:7-10). His response was always the same—No!

The free thinkers and free lovers of today would "poo-poo" Joseph's Victorian morals. As Joni Meenagh said, "Teenagers are going to have sex; nobody can stop this from happening" (*SIECUS Report*, Apr/May 2003).

Their view of things is that teens do not and cannot have mastery over their desires. Yet, Joseph a teen away from home, on his own, with a willing partner refused to sin against God, his master, his master's wife and his own body (I Corinthians 6:18).

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah are four more youths that demonstrated incredible mastery over themselves (Daniel 1). These four teens were brought from Palestine to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

His intent was to train them for service in the government. One aspect of their training involved their diet which was provided from the king's table. For some reason this food and drink was regarded as unclean by Jews. It may have been unclean because of the kind of food it was, or it may have been so because it had been offered to idols (Leviticus 11; cf. I Corinthians 8) The drink may have been rejected because it was intoxicating (Proverbs 23:31; Isaiah 5:11, 22).

Again, these views would be ridiculed by most men today. The disbelief that youth can possess self-control is popular, even among the most educated. For example, Richard Keeling M.D. said, "Teenagers are going to drink no matter what the legal age is" (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 07/15/05). However, here are four teenagers that did not and they proved themselves the better for it (Daniel 1:12-16).

The greatest example of self-control found is that of Jesus. The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. The test began in earnest after Jesus had fasted for forty days and nights. Having had no food and no water Jesus was hungry (Matthew 4: 2). In this time of weakness, Satan came and tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread. But, our Lord refused because man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Luke 4:4).

It was only natural that Jesus should be hungry; there was no sin in hunger. Yet, Jesus understood that he must rely upon God for his needs to be supplied, and, so, He disciplined Himself. God had brought Him into the wilderness and God would provide (Psalm 78:19).

How foolish this seems to men today. The psychiatrist Theodore Rubin avers we are not human if we exhibit mastery, saying, "I must learn to love the fool in me...it alone protects me against that utterly self-controlled, masterful tyrant whom I also harbor and who would rob me of human aliveness, humility and dignity but for my fool" (*Love Me, Love My Fool*, p. 76). Well, Jesus was ever as much a man as lived (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15) and He gained the mastery over the flesh (Romans 8:3).

Learning Self-Control

Self-control is something which can be taught, learned, acquired and practiced. The Apostle Paul taught Felix the Roman Governor concerning the principles of self-control (Acts 24:25). Peter urged the Christians in Asia to supply or provide self-control in addition to their faith (2 Peter 1:6). The Hebrew Christians were chastened by Paul because they had not learned through the exercise of their senses to discern good from evil (Hebrews 5:13-14). Each of these examples demonstrates that self control is acquired through a rigorous spiritual education. We acquire it as we become more and more familiar with God's Word.

As suggested by the last text, joined with this instruction is a proper application. As we become skillful in the Word of God our "senses" are able to differentiate between that which is good for us and that which is evil. We are able to make the determinations that Joseph, Daniel and Jesus made. Paul, having acquired this

discernment said he buffeted, or disciplined his body daily and brought it in subjection to the will of his mind (I Corinthians 9:25). We must grow in wisdom to the point that we can apply the Word to the various situations we encounter daily.

Another means whereby we acquire mastery over the body is through planning. Paul urged that we make no provisions for the flesh (Romans 13:14). We must learn to avoid those things that tempt us to give in to our desires. Job made a covenant with his eyes (Job 31:1). Paul purposed he would not eat and drink (I Corinthians 8:13; Romans 14:21). The wise man said we should avoid wine altogether (Proverbs 23:31). Don't be like the drunken cowboy who after taking the pledge continued to tie his horse up in front of the saloon on Saturday. Before long, he was back in the saloon.

We acquire self-control through moderation (1 Corinthians 9:25). It is possible to get too much of a good thing (Proverbs 25:16). Learning to deny yourself or restrain your participation in even harmless and beneficial things brings a discipline to life that is helpful (Proverbs 20:13; 23:1-3; Philippians 4:12).

Finally, self-control is acquired only through a constant vigilance (I Corinthians 9:27). Paul "buffeted" his body; literally, he "beat down" the longings of the flesh. There is a constant conflict between the spiritual mind and the flesh (Galatians 5:16-17). Long term success is determined by the daily victories that result in a spiritual walk (Luke 9:23).

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** Terry Aldridge; Jeff Asher, Sue Blackmon; Floyd Bush, Mark & Deidra Cone; Dallas Crabtree, Alton Kendrick; Troy Lake, Wallace Little; Daryl & Cindy May, Deanna McKnight, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, Kenneth Midyett, Betty Midyett, The Millicans, Helen Rushing, Elizabeth Whiddon.
- Floyd Bush is home and doing well after out-patient back surgery last week.
- Mabel Hawley passed away Monday. Burial was Thursday at Bluff City, AR.
- Deanna McKnight underwent a biopsy Thursday. Results are pending.
- Terry Aldridge is home recovering from back surgery performed Monday. She is doing well.
- Jeff Asher leaves Thursday for the Philippines. He returns 2/28.
- **Gospel Meeting:** David Tant, March 5 through 10. Start now getting ready for the meeting.

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Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 8

February 19, 2006

Teaching Values: A Work Ethic

It is evident from the Scriptures that from before the foundation of the world God intended that men should be employed with useful and productive labor. It is a mistaken notion that considers work a punishment for Adam and Eve's transgressions. God in the creation announced that man was to "subdue...and have dominion" over all the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). In order to facilitate this objective, He planted a garden "eastward in Eden" and placed the man in it with this instruction: "dress it and keep it" (Genesis 2:8-15). While it may seem idyllic to some, God never intended for man to be at his leisure with nothing to do.

However, it is true that sin complicated man's existence in this world affecting his ability to fulfill his intended purpose. Because of sin, the earth brought forth "thorns and thistles" (Genesis 3:18). This caused man "in sorrow" to "eat of it all the days of thy life" (Genesis 3:17). That word "sorrow" literally means "worry, labor, pain, or toil." Sin brought a curse upon the earth and man with the curse came "strength labour and sorrow" (Psalm 90:10).

While some think work is an evil to be avoided if at all possible, God has ordained it

because it is good (Ephesians 4:28). The man that works is to be held in honor and esteem by his fellows (I Thessalonians 4:12); whereas, the idle man is worse than an unbeliever (I Timothy 5:8; cf. John 3:18; II Peter 2:20).

God has ruled that the man who will not work should not eat (II Thessalonians 3:10). Such a man is not worthy of the fellowship of the saved (3:11-12). The sluggard is contemned in the Scripture (Proverbs 10:26) and consigned a place with those whom the Lord hates (Ezekiel 16:49). God does not condone idleness knowing it breeds wickedness (Proverbs 18:9; 21:25; II Thessalonians 3:11; I Timothy 5:13; Ephesians 4:28); whereas, industry promotes thrift, self-reliance, charity and a worthy character.

The Joy of Work

As parents we must communicate to our children not only the necessity of working (Proverbs 13:4; 14:23), but also the benefits (Ephesians 4:28b). We make a terrible mistake if all we are able to instill in our children is an appreciation of employment for the sake of acquiring things (Proverbs 16:26). Work like everything else ordained of God is intended to affect our character. What we must

communicate to our children is the "good" in work and the joy that it brings.

The Joy of Self-Reliance. Work makes it possible for us to have sufficiency without relying upon another (I Thessalonians 4:12). The benefit here is that with favorable circumstances we may have more than enough (Proverbs 13:4; 27:23-27). It is a matter of simple economics, when we work there is increase (Proverbs 10:4; 12:11; 14:4); when we are idle there is want for ourselves and others (Proverbs 13:23; 20:13). Aesop understood this truth and taught it in his famed fable of the *Grasshopper and the Ant* (cf. Proverbs 6:6; Matthew 25:9).

The Joy of Independence. The self-reliant are autonomous. They do not seek the permission of others to act (Acts 5:4; Matthew 20:15); neither become slaves to other men (Proverbs 15:19; 22:7; Matthew 25:26-27). Rather, they rule themselves and their circumstances (Proverbs 10:4; 12:24). Industry gives men liberty (Proverbs 10:15; 11:28; Psalm 112)

The Joy of Satisfaction. All of us were raised hearing these maxims: "Take pride in your work;" and "any job worth doing is worth doing well." This "chimney corner scripture" is

based upon veritable truth (Ecclesiastes 9:10; Proverbs 10:4; 13:4; 18:9). The rewards in life are the result of the approval of others (Job 7:2; Matthew 25:21) Advancement comes as men recognize in you the ability to do the assigned tasks correctly (Proverbs 22:29). When we are slack and do less than that of which we are capable we are held back (Matthew 25:26–29). This principle is true in life, as well as, spiritual things. Always give your best.

The Joy of Self-Worth. However, one need not despair waiting for men to recognize ability. You should find satisfaction in knowing that you have done a good job (Ecclesiastes 5:12). Being a diligent worker and giving a full days work for a full days pay should build confidence and self-esteem (I Thessalonians 4:12). You are worthy of your wages (Luke 10:7; I Timothy 5:18). You have earned them and they are your due (Romans 4:4). Furthermore, the believer has the knowledge that God sees and whether or not our employer appreciates us, we will not lose our reward (Colossians 3:22–25).

The Joy of Philanthropy. When we have learned to work and begin to reap the fruits of our labors, we are then empowered by God to have the full blessing. The goal of our labor should not be to consume it upon ourselves, but to use it for good (I Timothy 6:17–18; cf. James 4:3). Jesus taught us that is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). The blessing in having is the power to give it away (Proverbs 11:25; 22:9; 28:27; Ephesians 4:28). There is no greater joy than that which comes from

knowing you have really helped a neighbor. Furthermore, the truly liberal soul opens himself up to other opportunities to be used to bless (II Corinthians 9:10; Proverbs 21:26). Through work we become a channel of blessing. There are so many good things which may be done with the fruit of our labors (I Timothy 6:18; Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:6).

Four Things that Teach a Biblical Work Ethic

More than anything else, a good example is important to children (Proverbs 31:27–28). Growing up where everyone works helps instill an appreciation for work. More than this, the habit of working together and dividing the labor in the home makes a good worker (Matthew 4:21–22).

In addition to this, idleness must not be tolerated (Proverbs 10:5; II Thessalonians 3:10) Whether it is a family garden, chores about the house or a part time job, young people need to learn to work (Lamentations 3:27).

A positive example must be joined to a good attitude about work. Children learn what they live. If the parents are shirkers, thieves and malingerers chances are the children will be as well (Ephesians 6:5–8; Titus 2:10; I Peter 2:18–21).

Children also learn to work by learning that employment is necessary to enjoying the pleasures of life (Proverbs 13:4; 16:26). Parents err in this regard when they do not expect youth to begin to earn some rewards. When everything is given that becomes the expectation. Such is unrealistic and harmful for all (Proverbs 10:5, 26; 15:19; 21:25).

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** Terry Aldridge; Jeff Asher, Sue Blackmon; Floyd Bush, Mark & Deidra Cone; Dallas Crabtree, Alton Kendrick; Troy Lake, Wallace Little; Daryl & Cindy May, Deanna McKnight, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, Kenneth Midyett, Betty Midyett, The Millicans, Helen Rushing, Elizabeth Whiddon.
- Jeff Asher is in the Philippines. He and Tim Coffey arrived safely and joined Wally Little for the trip to Zamboanga where they will conduct the seminar on Romans for about 80 preachers. They return on 2/28.
- **Thank You:** Thanks today to John Young, Gary Box and Kerry Henry for filling in for Jeff Asher during his absence.
- **Gospel Meeting:** David Tant, March 5 through 10. We have only two weeks left to prepare! Have you invited family, friends, neighbors? Make the effort this week to lead a soul to Christ during the meeting.

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 9

February 26 2006

Teaching Values: Chastity

Webster defines *chaste* as “not having engaged in unlawful sexual intercourse; virtuous; free from obscenity, descent; undefiled or stainless.” Roget gives as synonyms the words: pure, virginal, virtuous, unsullied, unblemished, innocent, good, wholesome, moral.” In the Bible the word translates *αγνός* which is properly “clean” and tropically, “innocent, modest, perfect, chaste, pure” in a moral sense. This word is derived from *αγος* (an awful thing) sacred (physically, pure, morally blameless or religious, ceremonially, consecrated. It is the word for *holy* and *saint*. Unfortunately, we live in a time when chastity is trivialized. Young men and women are ridiculed in movies, music and literature if they have maintained their virginity. Yet, our society is beginning to see the damage that has been done. However, it is a shame that chastity has to be “promoted” and “advocated” like a fad when it ought to be the expected norm.

Bible Principles that Relate to Chastity

In the first place, we need to recognize that God made us sexual beings (Genesis 1:27; Matthew 19:4-6). It is His intent

that men realize and fulfill their sexuality (Genesis 1:28; 8:17). Furthermore, our sexuality is for our good and our pleasure. When God announced His intent to make a woman, it was because it was not “good” for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Numerous times in the Bible God encourages man to find the joy of companionate marriage (Proverbs 5:18; Song 4:9-5:1ff). However, the true joy of our sexuality can be found only in marriage (I Corinthians 7:1-5; Hebrews 13:4). God has so designed man that he is intended only for monogamy. The Bible declares that anything else is “against nature” (Romans 1:26-27). To be promiscuous is to “sin against one’s own body” (I Corinthians 6:18). Contrary to popular belief, it is not “just sex”. There is a one flesh connection made that is corrupted and perverted through fornication. You cannot demean that and avoid the consequences. Therefore, God has said one should maintain virginity until marriage (Deuteronomy 22:13-21; I Corinthians 7:36-38).

Once married, faithfulness to one’s spouse is essential to a joyful sexuality (Matthew 19:5; Ephesians 5:31). Fornication is the only sin that God regards as serious enough to justify a

divorce (Matthew 19:6-11; 5:28-32). Marital infidelity strikes at the very heart of marriage. It violates a covenant which established trust and created intimacy (Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14-16).

Possess Your Vessel in Holiness

Paul states the issue plainly in I Thessalonians chapter four: *“Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness”* (vv. 1-7).

Whether one understands vessel to refer to himself or the spouse, the truth of the passage is the same, we are set apart unto our own spouse and none other (cf. I Corinthians 7:3-5). As

already noted fornication is a sin against our own body, but it is also a sin against our mate. We are not holy or chaste if we, as the wise man said, *“Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets”* (Proverbs 5:16).

How to Be Chaste

In the Bible we read about a man who had a friend that actually encouraged him to commit fornication (II Samuel 13:1ff). In our society today, the billboards, the TV, the literature is filled with inducements to this sin. There is incredible pressure on the young and the old to forsake holiness. How do we wage war against it?

Like the proverbial monkeys, we must protect our eyes, ears and mouth against evil. Protecting the heart will stay the feet (Mark 7:21; Matthew 15:18–19).

Job said that he had made a covenant with his eyes (Job 31:1). And, David purposed that he would set no wicked thing before his eyes (Psalm 101:3). A first step toward protecting the heart from adultery is to restrain our eyes from wandering and contemplating adultery (II Peter 2:14; Hosea 2:2). *What are you watching?*

We also need to guard our hearts from adultery by protecting our ears. Jesus said, *“Take heed what you hear”* (Mark 4:24). The music and literature of our day extols *“love”* (cf. Proverbs 7:18). The popular philosophy is that man was never intended to be monogamous. *What are you listening to?*

Closely related to that is our speech (Ephesians 4:29; 5:3–4).

Paul condemned *“foolish jesting”* and *“corrupt speech.”* There is a lot of conversation that goes on in the world that is filled with sexual innuendo. Most affairs begin with smutty talk at the water cooler and gossip about one’s mate to a stranger. The adulteress of proverbs chapter seven seduced her young fool with tales of her loneliness, flattery and the promise of love. *What are you talking about?*

Finally, remember David. He fell into adultery because he was not where he belonged. Had he been in the field doing his duty rather than in the palace he could have avoided adultery (II Samuel 11). Had Bathsheba stayed at home rather than going to the king’s rooms, sin would not have occurred. Often fornication occurs because we use foolish judgment and go to places where we do not belong (Proverbs 7:8ff). *Where are you going?*

When Purity Is Lost

Sadly, fornication occurs. While one will never be a virgin again once that choice is made, it is not impossible to regain purity.

God is merciful and will forgive (I John 1:7–9; 2:1–2). He will cleanse, restore to a pure condition, every one that will repent of sin and seek His pardon (Acts 8:22). Like the woman taken in adultery, the woman at the well, or the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears, you can be clean (I Corinthians 6:9–11). To these Jesus said, *“Go and sin no more”* (John 8:11). Once cleansed possess your vessel in holiness which pleases God.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** Terry Aldridge; Jeff Asher, Sue Blackmon; Floyd Bush, Mark & Deidra Cone; Dallas Crabtree, Alton Kendrick; Troy Lake, Wallace Little; Daryl & Cindy May, Deanna McKnight, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, Betty Midjett, The Millicans, Helen Rushing, Elizabeth Whiddon.
- When you read this I hope I am having a good night’s rest, so that about your bedtime we will be on the plane headed for home. We should touch down tomorrow (for you) about 2:30 PM. See you Wednesday night, if the Lord wills.
- **Thank You:** Thanks today to Jim Rhiddlehoover, Gary Box and Kerry Henry for filling in for Jeff Asher during his absence.
- **Gospel Meeting:** David Tant, March 5 through 10. Our meeting starts in a week. Are you ready? Have you invited your guests? Are you praying for David?

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 10

March 5, 2006

Keep Thy Heart with All Diligence

Solomon long ago recognized the importance of having the right kind of heart. He wrote, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Proverbs 4:23). The reason Solomon was so concerned about the kind of heart man had was because man will be what his heart is (Proverbs 23:7). Let us consider the heart and why we should keep or guard our hearts.

Why Keep the Heart?

First, let us understand that the heart that is under consideration here is not the blood pump, but the Biblical heart. The scriptures describe its function as that which: thinks (Matthew 9:4); reasons (Mark 2:8); understands (John 12:40); loves (Matthew 22:37); and wills or purposes (II Corinthians 9:7). These verses clearly show that the heart determines what kind of person we are. We should guard our heart above all things.

The heart of man is susceptible to change. This change is good if one's heart is not what God is pleased with and changes in order to please God. However, the heart that pleases God must be aware of evil and watches carefully lest it be turned away from God. This is what Solomon exhorts us to be mindful of and to guard our heart; lest it be

turned to do evil. Change in our heart can be so gradual that if we are not on guard, it can change without us being aware of it. Many people that we know at one time had good hearts have turned away from serving the Lord and doing His will.

Guard the Heart?

We need to make sure our zeal, intensity, and sincerity of our heart does not wane. Paul reminded the Romans to be "fervent in spirit" (Romans 12:11). Paul was telling the Romans that this was to be the life of a Christian, not on just special occasions. Christianity is not just something to be played at or a one or twice a week type of thing. Christianity deserves our fervent, earnest, zealous service at all times. In Rev. 3:16-19, the Christians in the church at Laodicea lost their fervor and zeal in serving the Lord. They were rebuked and told to change and serve the Lord faithfully. We must not allow our service to Christ to become old and just common place with no zeal or fervor of the heart being present. Let us guard our hearts from the things that cause our zeal to grow cold and keep our hearts fervent.

Keep the Affections

Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth,

where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:19-21). Jesus is reminding His followers to keep their hearts' affections in the right place. Paul exhorted the church in Colossae to do the same thing when he wrote, "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). We must guard our hearts and keep them focused on the things which will enable us to go to heaven. If we focus our attention on heavenly things, we will not have time to focus on the earthly things. In life, it is so easy to lose our focus and forget what our purpose on earth is, that is to "fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). Let us guard our hearts from losing focus of the eternal things.

Be Reverent & Tender

The heart that is not kept reverent and tender is not one that can please God. Reverent attitude of heart means that one will have deep respect, honor and standing in awe before God. The one whose heart is

lifted with pride and arrogance cannot please God. The Pharisee in Lk. 18:9-14, prayed to God with a heart filled with pride and arrogance, but the publican prayed at the temple as well with a tender and reverent heart. Jesus commended the publican's attitude of heart, "I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The Pharisee's heart was not kept reverent and tender. The publican had a heart that was kept reverent and tender. A heart like that of the Pharisee will become hardened and will not correct the errors in life that need correcting. Let us keep our hearts reverent and tender so that they can be easily shaped, molded by the truth, sensitive to what is right and wrong and sub-missive to the will of God.

Let us not neglect our hearts, but keep them "diligently" so that they will be hearts that will be pleasing to God. Is your heart one that God approves of?

—David A. Cox

The Beauty of Holiness

"Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2).

God is to be worshiped in the "beauty of holiness," both the beauty of our gratitude for His holiness and the reflected glory of His holiness in our own lives. We were made to experience beauty, and the highest beauty available to us is the beauty of holiness.

Unfortunately, holiness does not have the best of reputations. Those who strive for it are thought to be anxious, repressive, and slightly neurotic. Yet however many unhealthy people there may be in the world, such an image is an unfair caricature of the genuine seeker of God. If we do fit the stereotype of the emotionally strung-out saint, we've probably not made our way very far down the path of real sanctity. Far from being incompatible with health, holiness may be defined as wholeness and health in the most comprehensive sense, as is indicated by the very etymology of the words. "The old word for holy in the German language, *heilig*, also means healthy. And so *heilbronn* means holy-well, or healthy-well. You could not get any better definition of what holy really is than healthy — completely healthy" (Thomas Carlyle).

But if the holy life is not below the level of normal, there is also a sense in which it is not above. We don't help ourselves by thinking of holiness as an extraordinary state of being, not meant for most of us. In the Scriptures, obedience is presented as the ordinary thing. It is simply the intended, normal mode of human living. If anything is to be called extraordinary, that would be un-holiness. Holy means that we're living a life where all the parts of our being are in their proper, normal place. Holiness is quite ordinary in that it is "the symmetry of the soul" (Philip Henry). And what a beautiful symmetry it is!

The human spirit was created to thrive on God's beauty. When we long for our God and reach for Him, when we devote ourselves with a whole heart to showing forth His goodness, we come closer to a beauty that from the beginning was meant to surround us and delight us.

—Gary Henry

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- **Gospel Meeting:** Our meeting with David Tant starts today and continues through Friday. Please greet brother Tant and all our guests sincerely and with gratitude.

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 11

March 12, 2006

Why I Believe Jesus Lived

I am sure you have heard of the recent flap in Europe that has made all the wire services concerning how the Catholic Church has been sued by an Italian atheist and must appear in court and prove that Jesus Christ is an historical figure. Here are the facts as reported by the Associated Press:

“Lawyers for a small-town parish priest have been ordered to appear in court... after the Roman Catholic cleric was accused of unlawfully asserting what many people take for granted: that Jesus Christ existed.

“The Rev. Enrico Righi was named in a 2002 complaint filed by Luigi Cascioli after Righi wrote in a parish bulletin that Jesus did indeed exist, and that he was born of a couple named Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem and lived in Nazareth.

“Cascioli, a lifelong atheist, claims that Righi violated two Italian laws by making the assertion: so-called “abuse of popular belief” in which someone fraudulently deceives people; and “impersonation” in which someone gains by attributing a false name to someone.

“Cascioli says that for 2,000 years the Roman Catholic Church has been deceiving

people by furthering the fable that Christ existed, and says the church has been gaining financially by “impersonating” as Christ someone by the name of John of Gamala, the son of Judas from Gamala.

“He also asserts that the Gospels—the most frequently cited testimony of Jesus' existence—are inconsistent, full of errors and biased, and that other written evidence from the time is scant and doesn't hold up to scholarly analysis.

“Prosecutors, who in Italy are obliged to investigate such complaints, initially tried to have the case dismissed, saying no crime could be verified. But Cascioli challenged them, and Judge Gaetano Mautone set a hearing...to discuss preliminary motions...to have the court appoint technical experts to review the historical data and determine if Christ really existed.”

Luigi Cascioli's attack against the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth is nothing new. His is just another in a long series of attempts to turn prospective believers away and undermine the faith of those that already believe. However, such attacks as these should not be dismissed. A strong defense should be made in order to

demonstrate that Jesus of Nazareth should not be classed with Santa Claus and the leprechauns. Rather, Cascioli should be made to appear as he is a hater with an agenda, just as those who deny that there was a holocaust in Europe that resulted in merciless deaths of millions of Jews, gypsies, and other ethnic minorities have an agenda of hate. The historical evidence is there for all to see, but these types only distort, deny and misrepresent.

To take the position that Jesus never even existed is to deny the overwhelming historical evidences contained both in biblical and non-biblical literature. I believe that Jesus lived because: (a) the testimony of the eyewitnesses cannot be successfully refuted; (b) the testimony of historians, government officials and others, even those opposed to Christianity establish a historical presence of Jesus; and (c) the testimony of reason when applied to the generally accepted character of mythology disputes the argument that the story of Jesus is myth or legend.

Eyewitness Testimony

The writers of the New Testament have testified that they saw Jesus, heard Him, and touched Him (1 John 1:1; et al.).

If there were eight or more independent writers who were responsible for twenty-seven independent letters or books which were all authenticated as having been written within a certain period of ancient history, and if each writer claimed to have personally seen Julius Caesar, would any serious historian question that Julius Caesar was an actual historical figure? Honorable historical research would demand that the historian presume that the eyewitnesses were telling the truth unless it could be established that they lied or until they were discredited as witnesses. We even insist upon those guidelines for accepting evidence in courts of law.

Were the New Testament writers lying? There was simply no reason for them to lie. They could not expect to receive spiritual reward for lying and from a physical point of view their reward was ridicule, persecution, and martyrdom. These men and their teachings were rejected by Jews, Greeks, and Romans alike. They gave up virtually all material gain and most of them died for a lie, if they lied! It is incredible to believe that they suffered so much for a known untruth. On the other hand, these men were honest to a fault. They did not hesitate to tell of their own mistakes and stupid blunders. They even told of their lack of trust in Jesus and lack of conformity to His teachings. They were not fanatics. Their words were intelligible and presented with quiet dignity and simple forthrightness. They gave their testimony from an objective point of view with

strong conviction of its truthfulness.

Can the New Testament writers be discredited? That too is impossible by any acceptable standards of ethical inquiry. There are multiple witnesses and their testimony is never contradictory. It is true that not all give the same degree of detail. As in any investigation, one gives his testimony and others provide additional information, but they all testify as eyewitnesses to His presence and each witness complements, rather than disputes, the testimony of the others. When they do speak of the same events, they independently confirm what the others affirmed. Their written works were penned over a period of several decades and, therefore, no claim can be made that they got together and conspired to perpetrate a hoax. These men simply told it as they saw it. Not one of them can be justly discredited. Remember, to deny the fact that Jesus lived would require not only that one of them be discredited, but that they all be discredited!

—Jeff Asher

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- **Gospel Meeting:** Our meeting with David Tant was a great success. Attendance was good and many visitors were present, several from the community came. Realize that the meeting is not over. We must follow up on the good influence Brother Tant has had through preaching the Gospel. Contact your guests by sending a thank you note. Invite them back. Use this opportunity to ask for a Bible study in their home or yours.
- **Baptisms:** *Emily Dickenson* was baptized on Tuesday night of the recent Gospel Meeting. *Jake Goolsby* was baptized the next night. We welcome both of these wonderful young people into the Kingdom of Christ.
- *James Burke* is in the rehab center at Mother Francis Hospital in Tyler. He received a pacemaker on Wednesday. His condition is improving daily.

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 12

March 19, 2006

Why I Believe Jesus Lived (2)

The ancient historians testify to the presence of Jesus among the Jews in the first century A.D. Statements from Polycarp, Eusebius, Irenaeus, Ignatius, Justin, Origin, and a host of others could be produced in abundance. It is sometimes said, however, that these men were believers in Christ and, therefore, their testimony is not convincing. Friendship does not deny truthfulness but we will turn our attention to the "non-Christian" writers who affirm that Jesus lived.

Josephus

Flavius Josephus was a Jewish historian who was born in A.D. 37. He was commander of Jewish forces in Galilee and was captured by the Romans. He wrote his *Antiquities of the Jews* about A.D. 66. One major reference to Christ which he makes (*Antiquities*, Book XVIII, chapter 3, p. 11) has been disputed. However, since the 1970's historical scholarship has moved toward recognition of the disputed passage as authentic though possibly redacted in some versions of the text. Belief in the authenticity of the text was bolstered in 1972 by the discovery of an Arabic translation of the text by Professor Schlomo Pines of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He believes the Arabic text

comes as close as historical research can make possible to the actual words of Josephus concerning Jesus (*The Historical Jesus*, Gary Habermas, p. 193).

That quotation as translated into English reads as follows: "At this time there was a wise man that was called Jesus. His conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted many wonders."

However, another quotation from Josephus is not contested. It is found in a discussion of the high priest Annas who ordered James the brother of Jesus put to death: so he assembled a council of judges, and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, whose name was James (*Antiquities*, Book XX, Chapter 9, p. 140).

Mara Bar-Serapion

Mara Bar-Serapion, who lived about A.D. 73, wrote a letter to

his son from prison. That letter is now in the British Museum. In it he asked:

What advantage did the Athenians gain in putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men.

The quotation above indicates that Mara did not regard himself a Christian, but rather compares Jesus as an equal to the other philosophers and wise of the ancient world. Yet, it is proof of His life and influence beyond Palestine.

The Talmud

The Talmud, the writings of the Jewish fathers and definitely opposed to the Christians, was written over a period of several hundred years (between A.D. 100 and A.D. 500). It speaks of the Romans hanging Jesus on a cross:

"On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshua (of Nazareth) ...they found naught in his defense and hanged him on the

eve of Passover" (*Babylonian Sanhedrin*, 43a).

Tacitus

Cornelius Tacitus was a Roman historian and governor of Asia in A.D. 112. Moses Hadas calls him "the greatest historian of ancient Rome." Tacitus alludes to the death of Jesus while discussing Nero's reactions to Christians in Rome at the time of the great fire.

"Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also" (*Annals XV*, 44).

Suetonius

Another Roman historian that records evidence of the life of Jesus of Nazareth is Gaius Suetonius Tranquillas. He was chief secretary to the emperor Hadrian (AD 117–138). Twice he mentions Jesus in his histories. The first time is in a section concerning the emperor Claudius (AD 41 to AD 54). He wrote of his actions against the Jews: "Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of the name of Christus, he expelled them from the city."

The reference is to riots that broke out in Rome in AD 49. As a result the Jews were banished from the city. This fact is confirmed in Acts 18:2, "After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth. And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius

had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them."

The second reference is to those Christians that were tortured by Emperor Nero: "After the great fire at Rome...Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief." Here Suetonius confirms the existence of Christians in the first century.

Lucian

Even Lucian, a second century satirist who spoke scornfully of Christ and Christians did not deny His the existence. In writing about Peregrinus, an itinerant philosopher who at one time experimented with Christianity, Lucian said concerning the Christians: "They therefore still worship that great man who was crucified in Palestine, because he introduced into the world this new religion...these miserable men have no doubt that but they shall be immortal, and live forever; therefore, they contemn death, and many surrender themselves to sufferings. Moreover, their first lawgiver has taught them that they are all brethren, when once they have turned and renounced the gods of the Greeks and worship that master of theirs who was crucified and engage to live according to his laws."

Well, for one who was no friend of Christianity that is a pretty fair and accurate report. There is nothing in this statement that does not square with the facts, as far as it goes. He even gives some basis for the resurrection in his statement in that he acknowledges the disciples of

Christ believed themselves to be immortal once they had accepted the Gospel.

Conclusion

Again, let us ask: If a multiple of eyewitnesses affirmed that they saw Julius Caesar, his admirers and followers testified that he dwelt in Palestine, and even those who opposed him recognized that he existed, would we deny that he ever even lived? The evidence is simply overwhelming! These are the same ancient historians who are responsible for our knowledge of the ancient world. If they were irresponsible in reporting about Jesus, can we accept their credibility in reporting on other historical figures? Denying the fact that Jesus lived undermines the trustworthiness of our knowledge of essentially all other characters of history in that time period.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 13

March 26, 2006

Why I Believe Jesus Lived (3)

We have already considered the reports of the major historians of the late first and early second century. Now, let's consider what some of the professed enemies of Christianity at that time had to say.

The Epicurean Celsus

The most vehement of the ancient enemies of Christianity was Celsus an Epicurean philosopher of the mid-second century. What remains of his writing is found only in the eight books of Origen written in the third century as a full refutation and defense of Christianity. Origen has quoted from Celsus extensively and fully. He notes that Celsus quotes from the Gospel records of the life of Jesus, that is, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; thus, he recognizes the existence of those books and attributes their authorship to the disciples of Christ (*The Christian Preacher's Companion*, p. 89).

Most notably Celsus mocks the redemptive mission of Christ and perverts such passages as Luke chapter 19, verse ten and Matthew chapter nine, verse 13 which affirm that "Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Celsus arrogantly queries: "But why was he not sent to those who were free from sin? What harm is it not to have sinned? God accepts an unrighteous man, if he humbleth himself for his wickedness: but a

righteous man, who has practiced virtue from the beginning, if he looks to him he will not accept."

Origen finds numerous references in Celsus to the details of the passion of Christ which are not refuted or rejected but are rather used by him to impugn the divinity and dignity of the Christ. He ridicules the virgin birth, the crucifixion and the resurrection. His conclusion about Christianity is that Christians expect to see God with the eyes of the body, and to hear his voice with their ears, and to handle him with their sensible hands. Thus, he does not deny the claims of the disciples, just their conclusions about Divinity.

Now, what do these quotations from Celsus demonstrate? In the first place, these quotations from Celsus prove the existence of an established canon of the New Testament by the middle of the second century AD, not more than 75 years after the completion of its composition. Celsus neither attributes nor objects to anything concerning Christ or His church on the basis of the spurious books which the church has historically rejected. Furthermore, Celsus' objections are not based upon any disputation of the facts concerning Christ. He could not produce any documents or relevant testimony that could possibly impeach the testimony of the disciples. His is a work dedicated to twisting and

maligining the record. His entire inquiry is limited to what the documents say and, as already noted, he does not accurately represent these. Thus, Celsus, though an enemy of Christ, by himself settles the matter of His existence and the question of the view the early church held of Him. The Jesus of history is the Jesus of the New Testament.

Porphyry of Tyre

Porphyry of Tyre was a third century philosopher that wrote a fifteen volume work *Against the Christians*. Nothing remains of these volumes today except a few fragments that may be quoted from the Christian writers that refute him. We know of three replies that were made to it by Methodius, Eusebius and Apollinarius; however, all of these are lost. Jerome, Eusebius and Augustine also quote from Porphyry by which they demonstrate that he had a thorough acquaintance with both the Old and New Testaments. He wrote against the books of Daniel and Genesis. It can be shown that he quoted from Matthew, Mark, John, Acts, Galatians and, perhaps, several other New Testament Epistles. Theodoret observed that Porphyry "read the Scriptures very carefully when he was composing his work against us" (Campbell, p. 127).

Eusebius in *Evangelical Preparation* quotes from Porphyry in his "very

words" saying: "And now people wonder what this distemper has oppressed the city so many years, Esculapius [the God of Healing] and the other gods no longer conversing with men. For since Jesus has been honored, none have received any public benefit from the gods" (ibid.). Thus, we see according to Porphyry that Christians were numerous in the Roman Empire and that he joined in the popular cant against them, making them the scapegoat for the problems of the nation. In all of the attacks he made which survive, there is not one that challenges the historical fact that Jesus actually lived.

With the testimony of Porphyry we are able to resolve the debate over whether or not Jesus is the product of myth or deceit. Porphyry is a second century opponent of Christianity. If Jesus is a Man of myth rather than history we would expect Porphyry to be attacking the myth and presenting the historical evidence to the contrary. Rather, we see this opponent using the documents, all of which are in the same form as we have them today, trying to prove that the evidence is otherwise, or inconsistent. Thus, his attempt is to prove Jesus a fraud and a fake, not a myth or a legend. His attack is not against the credibility, genuineness or integrity of the Scriptures. The place of Jesus in history was accepted by those who would be recognized as credible and erstwhile opponents of Christianity. Why would anyone write a fifteen volume reply to what would have been commonly known as a recent hoax in his day?

Julian the Apostate

Flavius Claudius Julianus, "was born in Constantinople in about 332 A.D. He was created Caesar in

November of 355 and became the sole Augustus in 360, upon the death of Constantius II. In June of 363, after less than two years of rule, he was killed in battle against the Persians" (Arthur Noot, *The Journal of the Society for Ancient Numismatics*, Vol. VIII, No. 4).

According to Arthur Noot, "Julian was a great general—a man of learning—a fine writer—possessing many qualities of a wise, energetic, and excellent prince, but his religious views as reflected on his coinage reveal him to be one of the weakest, most fantastic, and mischievous of mankind." Under the reign of Julian coins were struck which displayed his contempt for Christianity. He stamped his imperial coinage with representations of Serapis, Isis, and Anubis in order to revive Egyptian idolatry.

Julian's mother was a Christian, but she died in his youth. He was given by his father to the care of tutors and under their influence he was seduced away from Christianity. His apostasy became an organized program to destroy Christianity; however, his designs were never realized due to the short length of his reign.

The most significant statement to come from Julian is this one quoted in Cyril, a late fourth century Christian apologist: "But Jesus having persuaded a few among you, and those the worst of men, has now been celebrated about three hundred years; having done nothing in his life worthy of remembrance; unless anyone thinks it a mighty matter to heal the lame and blind people, and exorcise demoniacs in the villages of Bethsaida and Bethany."

This statement demonstrates that Julian did not and could not

refute his former religious connection on the grounds that the historical claims for Jesus of Nazareth were a hoax. On the contrary, in this and other quotes Julian grants that Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus, and enrolled during the governorship of Cyrenius, and was actively preached during the reigns of Tiberius and Claudius. He even admits that Cornelius and Sergius Paulus were notable Romans converted to Christianity. He affirms that Jesus worked miracles and quotes all four Gospel accounts and the Book of Acts as the only reliable source concerning Christ and His doctrine. This, perhaps one of the best qualified opponents of Christianity, never argued that Christ did not exist

—Jeff Asher

(Be sure and continue to listen to KGAS and KMHT on Sundays for additional historical proofs for the life of Jesus of Nazareth.)

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 14

April 2, 2006

Why I Believe Jesus Lived (4)

In our studies, we have been considering the non-biblical, historical evidence for the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. We have considered the testimony of the historians of the first and second centuries AD. We have even considered statements from the opponents and enemies of Jesus. Today let's consider yet more evidence that comes from non-biblical sources. This is testimony from officials of the Roman government. Their testimony is important because they were men who had access to official documents and records.

Pliny the Younger

Caius Plinius Ceilius Secundus, better known as Pliny the Younger, was a Roman author and administrator who served as governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. He was the nephew and adopted son of a natural historian known as Pliny the Elder. He is best known for his letters and has been called "one of the world's great letter writers, whose letters have attained the status of literary classics."

Ten books of Pliny's correspondence are extant today. The tenth book, written around AD 112, speaks about Christianity in the province of Bithynia and also provides some

facts about Jesus. Pliny found that the Christian influence was so strong that the pagan temples had been nearly deserted, pagan festivals severely decreased and the sacrificial animals had few buyers. Because of the inflexibility of the Christians and the emperor's prohibition against political association, Governor Pliny took action against the Christians. Yet, because he was unsure how to deal with believers, if there should be any distinctions in treatment or if repentance made any difference, he wrote to Emperor Trajan to explain his approach.

Pliny dealt personally with the Christians who were turned over to him. He interrogated them, inquiring if they were believers. If they answered in the affirmative he asked them two more times, under the threat of death. If they continued firm in their belief, he ordered them to be executed. Sometimes the punishment included torture to obtain desired information, as in the case of two female slaves who were servants in the church. If the person was a Roman citizen, they were sent to the emperor in Rome for trial. If they denied being Christians or had disavowed their faith in the past, they "repeated after me an

invocation to the gods, and offered adoration to Trajan's image." Afterwards they "finally cursed Christ." Pliny explained that his purpose in all this was that "multitudes may be reclaimed from error." Since Pliny's letter is rather lengthy, we will quote the portion which pertains directly to an account of early Christian worship of Christ:

They [the Christians] were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.

At this point Pliny adds that Christianity attracted persons of all societal ranks, all ages, both sexes and from both the city and the country.

From Pliny's letter we find several more facts about Jesus and early Christianity. (1) Christ was worshiped as deity by early believers. (2) Jesus' ethical teachings are reflected in the oath taken by Christians never to be guilty of a number of sins

mentioned in the letter. (3) We find a probable reference to Christ's institution of communion and their benevolence in Pliny's remark about their re-gathering to partake of ordinary food. (4) There is also a possible reference to Sunday worship in Pliny's statement that Christians met "on a certain day." Concerning early Christianity, (5) we see Pliny's method of dealing with believers, from their identification, to their interrogation, to their execution. For those who denied being Christians, worship of the gods and the emperor gained them their freedom. (6) Interestingly, Pliny reports that true believers could not be forced to worship the gods or the emperor. (7) Christian worship involved a service, (8) which included singing hymns. (9) These Christians apparently formed a typical cross-section of society in Bithynia, since they were of all classes, ages, localities and of both sexes. While Pliny does not relate many facts about Jesus, he does provide a look at a very early example of Christian worship. Believers were meeting regularly and worshipping Jesus.

The most significant aspect of this report is its early composition. Pliny is a first century man, born near the end, but still during, the lifetimes of some of the apostles and first disciples. His opposition to Christianity is based on the fact that it is a religion that competes with and displaces Roman paganism. His report documents that Christianity was well established in Asia Minor—just as the Book of Acts records (see: Acts 19). How could this

have been the case if the preaching of the Gospel did not present historically verifiable evidence?

The Emperor Trajan

Pliny's inquiry of the Emperor received a reply which is published along with his letters, although Trajan's response is much shorter:

The method you have pursued, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those denounced to you as Christians is extremely proper. It is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the fixed standard in all cases of this nature. No search should be made for these people; when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our gods) he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance, even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion. Information without the accuser's name subscribed must not be admitted in evidence against anyone, as it is introducing a very dangerous precedent, and by no means agreeable to the spirit of the age.

Trajan responds that Pliny was generally correct in his actions. If confessed Christians persist in their faith, they must be punished. However, three restrictions are placed on Pliny. (1) Christians should not be sought out or tracked down. (2) Repentance coupled with worship of the gods sufficed to clear a person. Pliny expressed doubts as to whether a person should be punished in spite of repentance and only recounts the pardoning of persons who had willingly given up their

beliefs prior to questioning. (3) Pliny was not to honor any lists of Christians which were given to him if the accuser did not name himself.

While Trajan does not indicate anything about the life of Jesus, his instructions to Pliny further substantiate that Christianity was well established throughout the Empire. Had it been otherwise, I doubt there would have been so much leniency and passivity. These facts do not square with the view that Jesus is a myth or legend. We are talking about the attitude of the world's most significant political power just a few short years after the death of Jesus and while many of the first disciples—some very likely eyewitnesses of the resurrection—were still living (I Corinthians 15:1-11).

—Jeff Asher

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 15

April 9, 2006

Why I Believe Jesus Lived (5)

When we began our inquiry into the non-biblical historical evidence for the existence of Jesus of Nazareth I mentioned the fact in addition to the materials we have already considered, there were materials that came from Christian sources. These materials are definitely evidence in favor of a real, historical Christ. However, friendship to a cause does not impeach a witness. There are occasions when it is altogether appropriate to call "character witnesses". The evidence I will present today comes from men who were persuaded that Jesus of Nazareth is the resurrected and glorified Messiah and Son of God. Their testimony should be considered on its merits and judged according.

Clement of Rome

One of the most important apostolic documents, Clement of Rome's letter to the Corinthian church is generally considered to be the earliest extra-New Testament Christian writing. Clement was an elder in the church at Rome and wrote his Corinthians about AD 95 to help end a dispute between the church members and elders at Corinth.

Although Corinthians is largely doctrinal and moral in nature, it contains at least one important

historical reference to Jesus and earliest Christianity:

The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the Apostles are from Christ. Both therefore came of the will of God in the appointed order. Having therefore received a charge, and having been fully assured through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and confirmed in the word of God with full assurance of the Holy Ghost, they went forth with the glad tidings that the kingdom of God should come. So preaching everywhere in country and town, they appointed their first-fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe.

In this passage, Clement of Rome claims several facts. (1) The gospel or good news of the Kingdom of God was the major Christian message. (2) This gospel had been given to the apostles by Jesus Himself even as it came from God. (3) Jesus' resurrection provided the assurance of the truthfulness of these teachings. (4) With the additional certainty of Scripture, the apostles spread the gospel.

(5) Wherever the gospel was preached and local congregations were started, leaders were chosen to minister to the believers.

This certification of a chain of authority from God to Jesus to the apostles to the early Christian elders is interesting not only in that it was the basis for early doctrinal proclamation and church organization. Additionally, Clement of Rome anchors this authority in the belief that Jesus was raised from the dead and in the Scripture. A miraculous event in history was thus taken as the basic sign of authority behind the preaching of the earliest Christian message.

The significance of this statement rests in the fact that Clement is one whose lifetime overlapped that of the Apostles and prophets through whom the Word of God came. His is a life that must have had opportunity to critically examine whatever claims were presented. It is of particular note that Clement rests his conviction in the truthfulness of the Gospel in verifiable miraculous events—the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the miracles of the apostles. Remember, this letter was written in AD 95—sixty years after the resurrection and

still within the lifetime of some of the eyewitness of that event.

Clement affirms that the elders of the Corinthian church were made such from among the firstfruits of the Apostles. At Corinth, this would have been Crispus, Gaius, Stephanas, Epäenetus and their households (I Corinthians 16:15; Romans 16:5). These men would have witnessed the miracles of Paul and may well have been endowed for a time with spiritual gifts (II Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:8–13). It is not unreasonable to think then that the elders of the church at Corinth were eyewitnesses to the miracles of Paul, himself an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (I Corinthians 15:1–8). Clement, thus, asserts the authority of the Gospel on the basis of his firsthand knowledge of eyewitness accounts. This is impressive testimony.

Ignatius of Antioch

Another early leader in the church was Ignatius, an elder in the church in Antioch of Syria. Ignatius was according to the later church fathers a student of the Apostle John who also appointed him to the eldership. Ignatius was condemned to death in Rome where he died a martyr for Christ. On the way to his execution he addressed seven letters to six churches and one individual, Polycarp, also a former student of the Apostle John. These letters reveal much about the early church, being written about AD 110–115. They also contain several historical references to Jesus.

In a letter to the church at Tralles in Asia Minor Ignatius states: "Jesus Christ who was of

the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born and ate and drank, was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate, was truly crucified and died in the sight of those in heaven and on earth and those under the earth; who moreover was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him, who in the like fashion will so raise us also who believe on Him."

In this portion, Ignatius affirms several facts concerning Jesus. (1) He was of the lineage of David and (2) born of Mary. (3) As such, he really lived, ate and drank on the earth. (4) Jesus was crucified and died at the hands of Pontius Pilate. (5) Afterward God raised him from the dead, (6) as an example of the believer's resurrection. Again we perceive how the resurrection was the chief sign for believers, in this case that they would be raised from the dead like Jesus.

Again, we are talking about a letter written to a church only 80 years after the resurrection of Jesus. While we are getting further away from the original events, the existence of this church indicates that Christianity is spreading, not receding. The New Testament accounts of the history of the church in Asia Minor, according to the book of Acts, indicate that the Gospel was met with significant opposition (see Acts 19 and I Peter). However, this letter also indicates that that opposition had been unsuccessful in thwarting that spread. If as the detractors indicate the Gospel is such an obvious myth, we would expect that the opposition would

eventually get the truth out exposing such a colossal hoax. Ignatius a man on his way to be executed writes a letter in which he restates the certainty of those things which he has believed—remarkable testimony indeed.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** Terry Aldridge; Cyndi Asher, Sue Blackmon; Floyd Bush, Mark & Deidra Cone; Dallas Crabtree, Alton Kendrick; Troy Lake, Wallace Little; Daryl & Cindy May, Deanna McKnight, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, The Millicans, Helen Rushing, Elizabeth Whiddon.
- Helen Hyatt, Cyndi Asher's mother, passed away Wednesday. At this writing arrangements are pending. The Ashers are in Pine Bluff, AR with the family.
- **Thank You:** Thanks to Jim Rhiddlehoover, Gary Box, John Young and Kerry Henry for filling in for Jeff Asher during his recent absences.

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 16

April 16, 2006

The Preacher and His Work

What is a “preacher”? What are the duties of a preacher? What exactly is a preacher supposed to do? Most everyone has a notion or opinion and will readily give it, but what does God say?

The Lord's Herald

There are three terms in the New Testament that describe God's worker known as a preacher. These words are not only descriptive of the worker, but the work God expects of him. These terms are: **minister**, **preacher** and **evangelist**.

“Minister” means one who serves, a servant. A preacher is a minister or servant of Jesus Christ (I Timothy 4:6). His work is to serve the Lord's Word, the Gospel to all men (Acts 6:4; Romans 15:16). A “good minister of Jesus Christ” must also “put the brethren in remembrance of these things...” (I Timothy 4:6). A preacher is to “take heed to the ministry which (he) has received in the Lord, that (he) fulfill(s) it” (Colossians 4:17).

The word “preacher” means a herald, a public proclaimer from the king who authoritatively declares the king's law to the people which must be obeyed. The Lord authorized (I Timothy 2:7; II Timothy 1:11) and sent out His preachers or “heralds” into all the world (Romans

10:14-18). Their sole work is to proclaim His message, the gospel (II Timothy 2:1-7; 4:1-5) and only His message (Romans 10:15; 15:19; Galatians 1:6-10; I Thessalonians 2:9).

An “evangelist” is a messenger of good. Christ gave evangelists (Ephesians 4:11-12) to bear His good message, the “gospel” which means “good news.” Paul warned preachers to “do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry” (I Timothy 4:5). A preacher is to “*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (II Timothy 4:2).

Diverting Christ's Heralds

The work of a preacher is short and simple in its description, but large and vital in its scope. Men dissatisfied with God's simple work, have devised many other roles and work for their “preachers.” By this device, Satan delays, distracts and diverts the important work of the King's royal heralds into a thousand channels. Simply preaching the Word is not sufficient work for preachers, according to some men. As churches have expanded their work and mission beyond what the Lord gave, they have expanded the “job description”

a preacher. Preachers are to be pastors or “shepherds” and counselors, busy visiting, overseeing and guiding “the flock.”

Some want preachers to be superintendents and caretakers, managing and supervising the church building and facilities. This man-made work has become so bloated that in recent years it has been divided up among several specialties: the “Youth Minister,” the “Singles Minister,” the “Outreach Minister,” the “Pulpit Minister” and more.

A gospel preacher is not a “**pastor**,” **shepherd**, **elder** or **counselor**. A pastor is a shepherd, the office of an elder, or overseer. His is a different office with a different work. A pastor's work is to shepherd and oversee the flock, watching for their souls (Acts 20:17, 28; Hebrews 13:17). A preacher appoints men qualified to do the work of a shepherd, he does not do their work; he has sufficient of his own (Titus 1:5-9; I Timothy 3:1-7).

A gospel preacher is not a caretaker of the church property or work. A preacher is not to leave the Word to serve tables, but give himself continually to prayer and serving the Word (Acts 6:1-4).

The Preacher & the Church

Much of the error concerning preachers and their work comes from a wrong view of the relationship of the preacher and the local church. Many consider the preacher as an employee of the church. As such the church is an employer that determines the scope and duties of his work. This view is expressed in the statement: "We pay the preacher and we tell him what to do."

The Lord's command to pay preachers for preaching (I Corinthians 9:14) does not make them church employees. Such support is compared to that of God's priests (I Corinthians 9:13-14). The priests were supported by the people's offerings to the Lord as the Lord's servants, not the people's hirelings (Numbers 18:1-20).

A preacher is not an employee of any church, but a servant of the Lord (I Timothy 4:6). He is accountable to the Lord, entrusted to do the Lord's work and not "entangle himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (II Timothy 2:3-4).

The Scriptural relationship between a preacher and the Christians that support him is that of fellow-workers in the Lord. The Lord commands the preacher to preach the gospel and those who hear him to support him in his work. Together they have "fellowship in the gospel" (I Corinthians 9:6-14; Philipians 1:5-7).

—Wayne Greeson

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** *Terry Aldridge; Cyndi Asher, Sue Blackmon; James Burke, Floyd Bush, Mark & Deidra Cone; Dallas Crabtree, Edith Kendrick; Troy Lake, Wallace Little; Daryl & Cindy May, Larry and Deanna McKnight, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, The Millicans, Helen Rushing, Elizabeth Whiddon, John & Chris Young.*
- **Gospel Meetings:** The *Stanley Church of Christ* starts a meeting today with *Ardie Brown*. Services continue through Friday at 7:30 P.M. *Southside* in Mt. Pleasant starts a meeting today with *Sewell Hall*. Services are at 10:00 A.M. Tuesday through Thursday and at 7:30 P.M. Monday through Friday.
- **Report:** We want to thank *Gary Box* for his excellent report last Sunday night on his recent trip to the Philippines. Gary is to be commended for taking vacation time to travel and work as he does with these brethren. We are thankful that we can have fellowship with him in this labor of love.
- **Out of Town:** *Sherman and Cheryl Pope* are in Houston attending the wedding of a grandchild. *Jim and Lorene Rhiddlehoover* are in Illinois visiting their children and grandchildren. *Kerry Henry* is preaching in Pineland, TX the next two Sundays.
- **Hospital:** *Mrs. Betty McKnight*, mother of *Larry McKnight*, is in the Good Shepherd Hospital in Longview

recovering from open heart surgery.

- *Dallas Crabtree*, nephew of *Tanya Millican*, has been determined not to have cystic fibrosis. However, doctors remain uncertain of the cause for his anemia and immune system deficiencies at present.
- *Helen Rushing* of Many, LA. is in the Willis Knighton Hospital in Shreveport undergoing chemotherapy.
- *James Burke* will see his cardiologist Tuesday.
- *John Young* has several interviews during this week for prospective jobs. Some of these are in the area while others are not. Let's be praying for a good outcome for John and the family.
- **Business Meeting:** The men are asked to remain after the service tonight for a brief meeting with the elders.

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 17

April 23, 2006

Another View of the Thief on the Cross

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, if thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:39–43)

It is unfortunate that this thief is often only considered in light of the debate over the necessity of water baptism. There are a great many worthwhile lessons that can be learned from him beyond whatever applications his circumstances have relative to that question. I propose we take another look at this thief on the cross making an examination of him from a different perspective in order to stimulate a better understanding of some fundamental concepts of human nature and behavior. I believe we can see in him something of what is in us all.

However, in our consideration of him nothing must be allowed to overshadow the Son of God. Our attention would never have focused on this thief were it not for Jesus. The agony, physical trauma, spiritual anguish and terrible death of Jesus of Nazareth can be viewed and perceived only as its cause is properly

envisioned—namely, sin. The cross is the consummation of God’s eternal plan for the ages, the plan for human redemption. In the death of Jesus is epitomized the love of God: *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16). Our view of this thief must be in complement to Christ, the cross and the love of God. We only desire to sharpen our perception, enrich our understanding and deepen our appreciation for the great sacrifice which was made at Calvary as we consider the thief who also died there that day.

Who Is This Man?

He was a child of God generally as is every man. The natural law of procreation makes us all the children of Adam, and, therefore, the children of God (Luke 3:38). With respect to our origin we are all created in God’s image, and made living souls. This thief was endowed with all the inherent qualities of manhood.

He also had a mother and a father, a fact admitted by the natural process of life. There is no reason to suspect that this man was an illegitimate cast off growing up without love or guidance, or, that he in any way was deprived of his basic needs, emotional or physical. In all probability he had the same basic opportunities common to all including love, food, clothing,

shelter, and general education. He may have even been nurtured “in the admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:1–4). He most certainly was a Jew; therefore, he was subject to the stringent instruction and discipline outlined in the Law of Moses.

We have every reason to believe that he was loved by his mother who as she nursed him dreamed in hope of his growing into a strong, confident and successful man. She, above all, surely prayed for him to be faithful to God (cf. Judges 13). I do not believe these assumptions are unfounded, but logical implications. This man was not always a criminal. He started life at the same point we all do, in complete innocence.

What Made Him What He Became?

Yet, we must keep in mind that he was a self-admitted criminal, tried and convicted, condemned to death by crucifixion. Who shall we blame for his life of crime? Was the society of his day to blame, the political system under which he lived, the culture into which he was born, the legal system that prosecuted him? Where does the blame for his behavior belong?

Some would mistakenly conclude that this thief was “born to steal.” Some would draw this conclusion on the basis of environment; others would come to that conclusion on the basis of genetics. However, while family

and environment may contribute to delinquency, neither of these mitigates against personal accountability. The scriptures place the blame on the individual: *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father"* (Ezekiel 18:20). His parent's failures, as such, did not make this man a thief. There is no denying that the mistakes of parents affect their children, but children cannot lay off on their parents responsibility for what they have become—good or bad. The capacity to rise above parental failure is within every individual.

What made this man a thief, is what makes every man whatever it is he becomes—individual choices, attitudes and conduct. The thief was what he was, guilty before God and man, due to choice. In the final analysis this is the case with everyone; there is no other answer logically, intelligently or scripturally. We are what we choose to be.

What Caused Him to Turn to The Lord?

Certainly, what he had been taught as a child had something to do with it. He could not have been a Jew and not known of the promised Messiah (Luke 3:15). However, careful attention on the part of parents in this area is no guarantee. Parents may, *"bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4), set an example of godliness as did the grandmother and mother of Timothy (II Timothy 1:5), and while the likelihood that a child will walk in the paths of righteousness is certainly increased, it is not guaranteed. Sometimes after all is done there remains only the hope that the rebellious child will have time to repent and change course. The wise man said, *"Train up the child in the way he should go: and when he*

is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). We can take comfort in this general rule and be content with the adage, "where there is life there is hope."

Maybe what he had seen and heard that very day caused his turn to the Lord—the bruised and bleeding body of Jesus, the cruel mockery of the mob and the inhumanity of the soldiers. Beyond that, it may have been the incredible self control and dignity whereby Jesus bore it all without a single sinful action. Perhaps it was the condescending love of Jesus expressed in the words, *"Father, forgive them."* An objective look at himself in comparison to Jesus, recognizing His innocence and admitting his own guilt, such introspection would compel him to view himself as he truly was—a criminal before God, standing in need of pardon and forgiveness. Thus, his plaintive cry: *"Lord, remember me."*

Finally, in this, another view of the thief, let us note the result of his turning to the Lord. He had immediate blessing for Jesus said, *"Today."* His was a relationship of security as promised by the Lord, *"thou shalt be with me."* Be with me where? *"In paradise."* What comfort to the oppressed spirit and guilt ridden soul of this man. But, what of you and me? When men turn to the Lord today in obedience to the gospel the results are identical—immediate security and finally the presence of the Lord.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** Terry Aldridge; Cyndi Asher, Danny Anderson, Sue Blackmon; James Burke, Mark & Deidra Cone; Dallas Crabtree, Edith Kendrick; Troy

Lake, Wallace Little; Daryl & Cindy May, Larry and Deanna McKnight, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, The Millicans, Helen Rushing, Elizabeth Whiddon, John & Chris Young.

- **Gospel Meetings:** The Greggton Church of Christ in Longview starts a meeting today with *Larry Bilbo*. Services continue through Wednesday at 7:30 P.M. *Herty Church of Christ* in Lufkin starts a meeting April 30 with different speakers. Preaching begins at 7:00 P.M. Monday through Friday.
- **Out of Town:** *Kerry Henry* is preaching in Pineland, TX today and next Lord's Day. *Jeff Asher* will be leaving after service this morning traveling to Indianapolis where he will be working with *John Welch* in a debate on water baptism.
- **Medical Testing:** *Danny Anderson* underwent tests this week. Results are pending.

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Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 18

April 30, 2006

Even While Enemies

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:8).

Love is easy if it is convenient, if it is to your benefit, if love brings delight. What about when none of those things are present? Remember this hard admonition: *“Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you” (Matthew 5:44).* This is exactly how God loves, and He expects us to do the same. In this we are able to imitate God, *“That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”*

Jesus died for us while *“we were still sinners,”* while we were *“enemies.”* What tremendous love that the Father would send his Son to save the very ones that murdered Him.

Furthermore, God did not love in the first century only. Jesus did not quit loving when he

ascended to heaven. Even now, God loves his enemies. Men come before God scared. They have glimpsed the gates of hell, heard the screams of the damned and felt the despair of the banished. Fear of judgment and punishment compels them. They dread *“the terror of the Lord”* (II Corinthians 5:11). Seeing what eternity holds for the lost sparks their repentance.

Others view the cross and see a dying Savior sacrificed because of their sin because God’s love is too great to abandon them to hell. Such love compels men to repent and turn to God. They do not *“despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance and longsuffering,”* but are living proof that *“the goodness of God leads...to repentance”* (Romans 2:4).

God is not finished loving yet. He loves Christians. Jesus’ sacrifice continues for Christians— and His love reaches and forgives even Christians who are bumbling, weak, ignorant and character flawed. God still loves them in spite of their flaws. They are his sons. They are committed to do right; they often fail. On

occasion, they fall on their face, and rise weeping shamed by their sin. God still loves them—still forgives his struggling and faltering sons.

“But 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” (I John 1:7). The Christian’s rule of life is to *“walk in the light.”* He is committed. He disavowed his old rule of life to *“walk in darkness,”* a lifestyle which accepts and permits sin. For those *“in the light,”* fellowship with Jesus is a reality even though they fail to measure up.

They still need the *“blood of Jesus Christ”* to *“cleanse...from all sin.”* Christians both have sinned and they do sin (1 John 1:8, 10). Is theirs a lost cause? No. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:10).* Those struggling, faltering Christians do not give up on God; God surely does not give up on them. He is faithful. His love is boundless, *“the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him” (Psalm 103:17).* His

forgiveness is sure and abundant.

A throng gathers at God's throne in robes washed white in the blood of the lamb, not washed once or twice, but many times. When you forget that God still loves you—that Jesus' sacrifice still cleanses you—that Jesus still intercedes for you in heaven, then despair will inevitably overwhelm. Complacency settles in, and eventually worship becomes an empty ritual. However, you never lose God, nor your fervor, nor all his benefits until you forget his love—which makes us love him, thank him and serve him.

God loved us when we were unlovable. He still loves us while we are unlovable. However, he does expect us to become lovable, good people of character resembling our Savior. Consider some Christians—not just babes—but old soldiers who are selfish, grumpy, ill tempered, mean spirited, sharp tongued, malicious, or hard hearted. It is hard to love them, right? However, God does and we should. Yet, we know something is wrong; they have not allowed God to change them—make them into His image.

God loves good men in a special measure: *"For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God"* (John 16:27). Christians likewise love good people more than mean people—yes, such are in the Church. We treasure each brother for the worth of his

soul. However, with good people, we also appreciate them, enjoy them and delight in them—as does God.

—Joe Fitch

Why Not Be a Christian?

Is it because of ridicule?

"Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed" (Luke 9:26).

Is it because of the inconsistencies of professing Christians? "Every man shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

Am I not willing to give up all for Christ? "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Am I afraid I shall not be accepted? "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

Is it for fear that I am too great a sinner? "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin?" I John 1:7).

Is it for fear I shall not hold out? "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

Am I thinking that I will do as well as I can, and that God ought to be satisfied with that? "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

Is it because I am postponing the matter without any definite

reason? "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1).

—Jim Sasser

FYI: for your information

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- **Gospel Meetings:** Herty Church of Christ in Lufkin starts a meeting today. Preaching begins at 7:00 P.M. Monday through Friday.
- **Last Sunday Singing:** Gary Box will conduct our singing class at 5:00 P.M.

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 19

May 7, 2006

The Work of an Evangelist (1)

I have heard of people who quit attending a local congregation on the complaint that the preacher did not visit them. This excuse not only betrays weakness of faith, it also reveals a denominational attitude toward preachers. We need to ask ourselves if we want the preacher to do the work God has assigned him or to do the work sectarians assign their pastors. Thus we inquire, what is the scriptural work of an evangelist?

What Is an Evangelist?

Hopefully you have noticed that I have used the terms “preacher” and “evangelist” interchangeably to describe the same man. Paul solemnly charged Timothy both to “Preach the word” and to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:2, 5). A “preacher” is a “crier” or “herald,” and an “evangelist” is “one who announces glad tidings.” These are two descriptive titles for the same work. Paul also encouraged Timothy to “be a good minister of Jesus Christ” (1 Timothy 4:6). Since the term “minister” means “servant,” all Christians are ministers (Matthew 20:25-28), but preachers have “the ministry” (service) “of the word” (Acts 6:4; cf. 2 Timothy 4:5).

Denominational people think that a traveling preacher is an evangelist, whereas a preacher who works with a local church is a pastor. But “Philip the evangelist” apparently preached

in the same place for at least twenty years (Acts 8:40; 21:8).

The Work Is Not

Many Christians expect preachers to take the lead in calling on the sick. The apostles, who were also preachers (2 Timothy 1:11), refused to “leave the word of God and serve tables,” even though there was a legitimate benevolent need in Jerusalem that threatened the unity of the church (Acts 6:1-2). Other than the fact that ministers of the gospel should be an example in all good works (1 Timothy 4:12-16), preachers have the same benevolent obligations as all other Christians (e.g., James 1:27).

Preachers should certainly teach the word “from house to house” (Acts 20:20) as a very effective means of reaching the lost. And preachers have the same obligations to practice hospitality that all other Christians have (1 Peter 4:9). But the idea that a preacher and his wife should regularly entertain the members and go around to visit them is a false concept rooted in the sectarian pastor system.

What the Scriptures Say

The New Testament pattern for the work of an evangelist is exceedingly simple. Two passages, each involving the apostle Paul, summarize the work of a preacher.

Acts 20:18-35 records the beloved apostle’s farewell address to the

elders of the church at Ephesus. In it he reminds them of the work he did among them and thus sums up, by his own example, the work of a preacher. He reminded them how he “kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). He attested his own work thus: “Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:26-27).

The work of a preacher is the preaching and teaching of God’s word, both publicly and from house to house. He must not hold back any truth spiritually profitable to his hearers but boldly declare the whole counsel of God. Only thus can he be free of blame before God if any of his hearers are lost.

Paul’s charge to Timothy, which in principle applies to every gospel preacher in every generation, must be the core and sum of our every conscious endeavor as men of God. It constitutes our commission as soldiers of Christ. Paul ordered Timothy with these words: “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (II Timothy 4:1-5).

To underscore the importance of his charge, the inspired apostle brings as witness God, the Creator of all, and the Lord Jesus Christ, our King and the One before Whom we shall stand to be judged on that last great day. But, as this command was to Timothy in his role as a preacher, it with equal force applies to all ministers of the gospel in each subsequent age.

Timothy's work, and that of every other gospel preacher, is amazingly simple—"Preach the word!" It is not to teach human philosophy, spout personal opinions, delve into politics, and entertain with jokes and funny stories, or salve consciences with positive "pop-psychology" that promotes "self esteem." It is to preach the word. If our sermons are anything other than explanations and applications of Scripture, we fail to fulfill our responsibility as evangelists. We must fill our minds with the love and knowledge of God's word and proclaim that word to all who will hear.

Our work is to "convince, rebuke, and exhort." We must convince sinners of the guilt of sin (cf. John 16:8), chide them for these sins, and seek to lead them to repent, obey, and live faithfully to the Lord. In the immediate context Paul had reminded Timothy that the Scriptures fully equip us for this work (II Timothy 3:16-17).

We must suffer long with the sloth of men in responding to the truth we proclaim and teach them gently and patiently that they might obey.

Many, including some brethren, are unwilling to receive all the truth. They cannot "endure sound doctrine" because they love their sins. They want to hear things that please their ears. Thus, they find teachers who will not preach unpleasant truths. Once people refuse the truth, false teachers will fill the void with the doctrines of men.

What should we do in the face of such unwillingness to hear all the word? We must watch for false teachers and false doctrine, warning brethren of their errors. Persecution will come from those who do not love the truth, but we must willingly endure it. Despite all temptations, persecutions, and oppositions, we must continue to do our work as evangelists. Only thus shall we be faithful in our service to God as preachers of the gospel.

—Keith Sharp

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** *Terry Aldridge; Danny Anderson, Sue Blackmon; James Burke, Mark & Deidra Cone; Dallas Crabtree, Troy Lake, Wallace Little; Daryl & Cindy May, Betty McKnight, Larry and Deanna McKnight, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, The Millicans, Helen Rushing, Bud Stephenson; Wanda Stewart; Elizabeth Whiddon, John & Chris Young.*
- **Gospel Meetings:** *Rice Road in Tyler May 7-12 w/ Wayne Fancher at 7:30 P.M. M-F.*
- *Frances Staples* writes "I arrived in VA safely...It was good to be with all of you." Her address

and card are posted on the bulletin board.

- *Danny Anderson* got a favorable report concerning his recent round of tests.
- *Bud Stephenson, Wanda Stewart's* brother came home from the hospital this week with a diagnosis of lung and esophageal cancer. His condition is grave.
- *Elizabeth Whiddon* remains in treatment at MDA for pancreatic cancer and asks for your continued prayers on their behalf. *Helen Rushing* starts a new round of chemotherapy at WK in Shreveport next week and asks for your prayers. *Sue Blackmon* is much improved and is very appreciative of your prayers. *Betty McKnight* is in the Briarcliff Nursing Facility receiving cardiac rehabilitation. *Larry and Deanna* are thankful for your prayers on their behalf.
- **Out of Town:** *The Young's* are at their son's graduation in CO. *The Henry's* are in Houston.

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 20

May 14, 2006

The Work of an Evangelist (2)

God ordained the work of an evangelist (Ephesians 4:11). All aspects of the Lord's will for the church are to accomplish His purpose (Ephesians 3:8-12). Thus, there is aim or purpose in the work of a preacher. An evangelist has six goals he should seek to accomplish in his work.

Toward God: Please

As of any other servant of God, the first obligation of a minister of the gospel is toward God.

"For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

A servant seeks to please his master. As Christ is our Master, we must seek to please Him. Of course, we would wish that our work is pleasing to those who hear us, and we should not be unnecessarily offensive, but we must always remember that ultimately we serve God rather than men.

Toward Sinners: Reconcile

It is God's purpose in Christ to reconcile the sinful world to Himself by the preaching of the gospel (II Corinthians 5:18-20). Though the apostles are the ambassadors of this passage, preachers are to proclaim this same apostolic doctrine

(Galatians 1:8-9). The purpose of preaching to the world is to lead them to the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26) that they might be forgiven (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 3:19) and thus be reconciled to God.

Toward Brethren: Edify

The word of God is able to build Christians up, that they might receive the inheritance of eternal life (Acts 20:32; II Timothy 3:16-17). Thus, preachers should teach brethren with the aim of developing in them "the divine nature," so they might attain unto the heavenly kingdom (2 Peter 1:2-11).

Toward Faith: Guard

In every generation false teachers arise bringing heresies that test who will be faithful to the Lord (I Corinthians 11:19; II Peter 2:1-3; I John 2:18-19). They will overthrow the faith of some (II Timothy 2:16-18). The soldier of Christ must guard the faith against all error, whether from within or without (Jude 3; II Timothy 4:3-5).

Toward the Faithful: Teach to Teach

I believe the greatest measure of a preacher's work is the ability of a congregation to prosper spiritually while he is away and after he is gone. A church which

cannot effectively function without the evangelist there has not sufficiently matured. They should develop men and women to teach Bible classes, including home Bible studies, men to lead the worship assemblies, and men to preach. Thus, the wise preacher will diligently heed the apostle's admonition:

"And the things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (II Timothy 2:2).

The word "men" of this passage is from the Greek term "anthropos," which means "without distinction of sex, a human being, whether male or female" (Thayer. 46). Thus, the evangelist should carefully cultivate the knowledge of God's word and the ability to teach that word in faithful men and women, that they might in turn teach others.

Toward the Congregation: Set in Order

But even though an evangelist might equip faithful Christians to teach, lead in worship, and preach, he still has not completed his obligation to the local church. The church is not complete until it has elders to shepherd the flock and oversee

the work of the church and deacons to serve the congregation (I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 20:17, 28-31; Hebrews 13:17; I Peter 5:1-4; Acts 6:1-6). Therefore, the faithful minister of the gospel will make it a long term goal to obey Paul's admonition to Titus:

"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you" (Titus 1:5).

No local church is fully set in order until it has qualified elders and deacons appointed and serving in their divinely appointed roles.

Conclusion

As to his personal distinction, a preacher is no more important and to receive no more honor than any other Christian (I Corinthians 3:5-7; Matthew 20:25-28; 23:5-12). But there is no more vital work than the proclamation of the gospel. It is God's means to save the lost and to build up His church (I Corinthians 1:21; Acts 20:32). Those who love God's word love the men who proclaim it (Romans 10:15), and those who hate truth hate those who preach it (John 17:14-18). Even as the prophets of old were men of God (I Kings 13:1)—men whose life's work was the service of God—so evangelists are men of God (I Timothy 6:11). God has only one Son, and He was a preacher (Luke 4:18).

The Lord's church needs good men who will devote their lives to proclaiming the gospel (Matthew 9:36-38) and good brethren who will hold up their hands in the thickest fight

(Philippians 4:10-17). Thus, we will save both the lost and ourselves and glorify God.

—Keith Sharp

FYI: for your information

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- Wanda Stewart has been at home sick the last two weeks. She is taking breathing treatments. Bud Stephenson, Wanda's brother came home from the hospital last week with a diagnosis of lung and esophageal cancer. His condition is grave.
- **VBS:** Our annual VBS is scheduled for June 5–8, M–TH at 7:00 P.M. This year's theme is *Stepping Out with Jesus*. Students will enjoy a group Bible story time with songs and Bible drills. Adults will engage in a period of congregational singing followed by a guest speaker. These will include: Harold Hancock, D.J. Dickerson, David Watts, Jr. and Kerry Henry. The teen study led by Jeff Asher will answer the question: *How We Got the Bible?* Flyers are available on the table in the foyer.
- **Gospel Meetings:** Jeff Asher will be preaching Monday and Tuesday evenings this

week in Mesquite, TX. Tim Coffey will be preaching Wednesday and Thursday nights.

- Helen Rushing started a new round of chemotherapy at WK in Shreveport next week and asks for your prayers. Betty McKnight is in the Briarcliff Nursing Facility receiving cardiac rehabilitation.
- **Out of Town:** Joe & Nell Fomby are in Snook, TX visiting their children and grandchildren. Gary Box is preaching in Many, LA today.
- **Radio Program:** For the next several weeks I will be preaching on the *Cases of Conversion in the Book of Acts*. Thus far, we have studied the Conversion of the Three Thousand and the Conversion of the Samaritans. Next week: Simon of Samaria.

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 21

May 21, 2006

What About Dancing?

The Junior-Senior Prom in almost every high school across America serves as the instrument that rudely awakens every family of Christians to this moral question when their teenager is faced with the decision of whether to go to the prom or to stay away. And I believe that this type dance is the one that provides the greatest difficulty for Christians who must face the question regarding the dance. Unprepared parents may tend to ignore the information available from the Bible as well as secular sources regarding the dangers of dancing in order to maintain the popularity and social status of their children among their peers. This kind of social pressure cannot be emphasized too strongly, for I believe that it is the real issue for most Christians. This article will provide biblical information regarding the modern dance. I hope you will study the material honestly and conscientiously.

Biblical Dances

In Exodus 15:20 we read of dancing done by Israelite women on the other side of the Red Sea as a means of expressing their joy over freedom. And, in II Samuel 6:12-14 we read of David dancing before the Lord as the Ark of the Covenant was carried to Jerusalem. There seems to be a similar type of "dance" referred to in Psalm 149:3 and 150:4 which carries the concept of religious enthusiasm. However, these do

not fit the mold of the modern dance, inasmuch as there is no hint of mixture of the sexes, nor is it done for pleasure of the senses.

Other references to dancing are found in Exodus 32:19, 25; I Corinthians 10:7; Matthew 14 and Mark 6, which describe a sensual, sinful dance condemned as the "play" of the lascivious. Such dancing can easily be seen as the ancestor of the kind of dancing done by millions across our country. In the dance the sensual Salome, the daughter of Herodias, performed before Herod, Herod and those with him became so enamored by the birthday celebration that he offered her anything up to half of his kingdom. This resulted in the pitiful request to have John the Baptist's head delivered on a charger! It is apparent from the remorse Herod displayed as he saw the results of his ill-conceived offer that John was not the only one who had lost his head.

Dangers of the Modern Dance

Many men lose their moral control by the passions and lusts aroused by the modern dance. The dancing of men and women today incites lust and passion in every conceivable way. Whether it is the slow dancing of closely held bodies as they sway to the music or the wild gyrations of the body in mock imitation of the sex act, dancing encourages lustful

thoughts and is a prelude to fornication itself.

In accentuation of the dance, lights are turned down low, sensual, rhythmic music beats out suggestive tunes, women wear scanty, revealing clothing, and drugs and alcohol are almost always offered to eliminate any inhibitions (moral pangs of conscience) the participants might possess. The worldly people recognize the value of this "atmosphere" and shamelessly acknowledge its purpose, while some Christians naively deny it.

But Christians cannot afford to be part and parcel to the worldly influences around us. We have vowed before God and men that we are Christians dedicated to offering our bodies as "living sacrifice[s]" (Romans 12:2) to our Maker and do so by keeping our bodies and minds clean and pure (I Corinthians 6:18). The promises received by the faithful Christian are sufficient motivations to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1).

Revelry & Lasciviousness

Biblically, the modern dance and its accompaniments are condemned in the words "revelries" and "lasciviousness" found in Galatians 5:19-21 and elsewhere in the New Testament.

Liddell & Scott (renowned Greek scholars) describe "reveling" as "a

joyful festivity, with music and dancing; a carousal, merry making." *Webster's Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged* defines "revels" as "the entertainment (as dances, games, pageants, and masques) provided at a revel" (1967 ed., p.1942, 2nd appearance, definition 2b). Bible scholars and secular authorities are agreed on the meaning of "reveling" and include dancing as part of its contents. The apostle Paul warns us then in Galatians 5 that those "who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (verse 21). Are a Junior-Senior Prom, Victory Dance, or Homecoming Celebration and its few hours of worldly honor and reveling worth the cost of an eternal soul? "Lasciviousness" is equally condemned in the Bible and also includes dancing in its contents. Thayer (another Greek scholar) defines the word as "unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness...wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females" (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. 79-80). The same *Webster's Dictionary* cited above describes "lascivious" as "lewd, lustful...: tending to arouse sexual desire; libidinous, salacious" (1274). One only needs to listen to the comments and descriptions of the worldly regarding popular dancing to know that it fits the bill of sin once more. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says, in fact, "The end product is doubtless the same—physical pleasure in the activity of dancing and sexual awareness of a partner, whether embraced or half-consciously observed." ("Dance, the Art of", 1985 edition. 16:990).

The Christian who chooses to ignore the evidence and dance

regardless must again ask himself if the few moments' pleasure is worth the eternal price. Let us not think that God will kindly overlook our worldly compromise with a nod and wink.

—Wayne Goff

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** *Terry Aldridge; Danny Anderson, Sue Blackmon; James Burke, Floyd Bush, Mark & Deidra Cone; Dallas Crabtree, Troy Lake, Wallace Little; Daryl & Cindy May, Betty McKnight, Larry and Deanna McKnight, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, The Millicans, Lorene Rhiddlehoover, Helen Rushing, Bud Stephenson; Wanda Stewart; Elizabeth Whiddon, Bob & Jay White, John & Chris Young.*
- *Wanda Stewart* has been at home sick the last three weeks. She is taking breathing treatments. *Bud Stephenson, Wanda's* brother continues at home battling lung and esophageal cancer. His condition is grave.
- *Cyndi Asher* was released from ETMC Wednesday morning after muscle spasms. She has been at home from work through Friday; her condition is much improved.
- **VBS:** Our annual VBS is scheduled for June 5–8, M–TH at 7:00 P.M. This year's theme is *Stepping Out with Jesus*. Students will enjoy a group Bible story time with songs and Bible drills. Adults will engage in a period of congregational singing followed by a guest speaker. These will include: Harold Hancock, D.J. Dickerson,

David Watts, Jr. and Kerry Henry. The teen study led by Jeff Asher will answer the question: *How We Got the Bible?* Flyers are available on the table in the foyer.

- *Helen Rushing* continues her chemotherapy treatments at WK in Shreveport and asks for your prayers.
- *Floyd Bush* is in Good Shepherd Hospital in Longview. He is battling heart disease and his condition is serious.
- **Out of Town:** *Chris Millican and Family* are in San Antonio. *Beka Asher* is in Dallas. *Richard and Vickie Singletary* are away on a GISD school trip.
- **Radio Program:** For the next several weeks I will be preaching on the *Cases of Conversion in the Book of Acts*. Next week: Saul of Tarsus.

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Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 22

May 28, 2006

Conversion of the Three Thousand

People who are concerned about spiritual things are interested in this subject of conversion. It is very common to have someone volunteer “their testimony” and “give their experience” regarding their conversion. Very often these accounts involve describing the degradation of their former spiritual condition, depicting how immoral, how drunkenly depraved or how dishonest, the person might have been. A direct, miraculous and, therefore, irresistible intervention of the Holy Spirit is usually also a part of these “testimonials.”

Subjectivism

I cannot refute such narratives as this. I believe those that relate them are honest and sincere. Whatever they experienced was very real and meaningful to them. However, these tales are all subjective and unsubstantiated. This kind of testimony would be inadmissible in a court of law. Surely you can see how it could not be expected to persuade others. Whatever the experience was to those who had it; it is meaningless as proof of anything, especially conversion.

There are also accounts of conversion given in the New Testament, and there is a vast and obvious difference between the accounts of conversion men compose today and those accounts of conversion given in the book of Acts. So, in which should your confidence be

placed? Which accounts should you seek to learn and to imitate? The accounts given in the New Testament are worthy of immeasurably more confidence. They are the record of people being instructed and directed in what they did by men who received their instruction from the Holy Spirit. The record itself is the work of a man inspired, controlled, by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we have, as it were, a double assurance of Divine approval. How far superior is the record of the New Testament to the recollections of one who may, by his own admission, have been emerging from a drunken stupor, or under the control of a craving for some narcotic, or in some similar circumstance, when his purported “conversion” took place. Therefore, in this lesson and in those to follow, we plan to study the various accounts of conversion given us by God, in the book of Acts. We will identify and seek to understand only those steps in conversion given according to the New Testament.

The Gospel on Pentecost

The first such account is found in Acts chapter two. It tells of the conversion of three thousand people on the first day of Pentecost following the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord. In fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32, we read in Acts 2:4 that “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to

speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance”.

Beginning with verse 14 of Acts 2 we have the record of the sermon preached by the apostle Peter, as the Holy Spirit gave him utterance. This sermon is climaxed by Peter with an assertion and a charge, in verse 36: “*Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified”.*

Meditate for a moment on the impact that such a charge must have had; put yourself in the place of one of those present, try to sense that horrified realization: “I have murdered the Son of God!” Such meditation makes their question in verse 37 the more significant: “*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do?*” The people, having heard the Gospel, were “pricked in the heart,” which tells us that they believed, because “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Romans 10:10). So, these people heard the gospel, and they believed it. Having believed, they wanted to know, “What shall we do?”

What Is Required?

First, these people who have heard the gospel and have believed in Christ must repent. Repentance, according to Matthew 21:28–29, is an act of the will—a change of mind. You will

remember that Jesus describes the son who did the will of his father as the son who changed his mind from "I will not" to "I will."

The Pentecostians are charged then with the necessity of changing their mind about the way they had lived; they must repent. Then, these believing penitents must manifest the submission of their will to the Will of God by being baptized, according to the authority of Christ. This act of faith was to be accomplished unto, or "in order to," the remission of sins. The word "remission" means dismissal, or release: their faithful obedience to the instruction given them by the apostle Peter would effect their release from the consequences of their sins.

A Recapitulation

In summation, these steps were involved in the conversion of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost: first, they heard the truth, the gospel; then, having believed the facts of which it is composed, they repented of their sins and were baptized in order to receive the remission of those sins. Acts 2:41 states *"They then that received his word were baptized, and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls."*

Let it be emphasized that this is a case of conversion stamped with the approval of God: there can be no question but that these people were truly forgiven, that they were released from the penalty for sins. They acted in response to the revealed will of God. It necessarily follows that, any accountable being in this dispensation does what they did, for the same reasons, you too will obtain remission of sins and the Lord will add you to the church of Christ: for God is no respecter of persons (cf. Acts 10:34).

Answering Objections

Many preachers teach and most denominations believe that baptism is what they call a "Christian duty," that is, that one is saved and afterward is baptized for some reason other than the remission of sins. They tell us that baptism is not essential to salvation, but it is essential to obedience. Now think a minute, isn't that just plain foolishness? That which is essential to obedience is essential to salvation. Hebrews 5:9 makes it plain:

"[Christ] having been made perfect...became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation". Baptism is not a "Christian duty"; it is rather an act of obedience required by God on those who would be converted. It stands between the alien sinner and the remission of his sins, Peter said in Acts 2:38, *"be baptized ...unto the remission of your sins."*

Some insist that the word which is translated "unto" in Acts 2:38 should be translated "because of", so that baptism would then be "because of" the remission of sins: be baptized because your sins have already been forgiven. In response let's notice Matthew 26:28, and the statement of Jesus that *"this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many unto remission of sins."* Acts 2:38 says be baptized unto the remission of sins; Matthew 26:28 says the blood of Christ is poured out unto the remission of sins. In both verses the same preposition is used, and translated "unto". If it means "because of" in Acts 2, by what rule of Bible study or syntax does it not mean "because of" in Matthew 26? If it means that one is baptized because his sins are forgiven, in Acts 2, why does it not mean that the blood of Christ was shed because sins had already been remitted, in Matthew 26? Of course, such a

doctrine would make the death of Christ absolutely unnecessary. The truth is that this preposition is used literally hundreds of times in the New Testament, and in every instance it obviously looks forward, to that which is not yet obtained.

Now, which will you believe? The record of the New Testament given by inspired men of what was actually said and done that resulted in the conversion of three thousand devout men, or will you believe the subjective testimonies of those who must struggle to explain away the plain words of the scriptures and the plain commandments of Christ?

FYI: for your information

VBS: Our annual VBS is scheduled for June 5–8, M–TH at 7:00 P.M. This year's theme is Stepping Out with Jesus. Please join us every evening for Bible study and praise.

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 23

June 4, 2006

Conversion of the Samaritans

Our study today involves the conversion of the men of Samaria: *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women"* (Acts 8:4-12).

Philip the Evangelist

This Philip is the same man named in chapter six as one of the seven men responsible for the daily administration of benevolence by the church in Jerusalem to the widows who were properly their responsibility.

When Philip got to Samaria, he *"proclaimed unto them the Christ."* The preaching of Philip was

altogether different from the preaching of today. What is called "preaching" today is so often nothing more than a composition of pleasant platitudes designed to tickle itching ears; or a promotion for social programs and entertainment. These things are advanced by preachers of every description as fine accomplishments for churches today. For those churches created by man for the ends and interests of man, they may well be fine accomplishments: but, for the church Christ created, they constitute an arrogant perversion of the divine mission.

Preaching Christ

Every gospel preacher, every Christian, needs to recognize that which is to be proclaimed is Christ. When men cease to be concerned with heaven as a prepared place for a prepared people, they turn their efforts to making "heaven on earth"; and it will never happen. We must preach Christ so that men may be prepared to get to heaven: for without this preaching they cannot be saved.

That Philip preached "Christ" is of significance from another standpoint. In evangelistic efforts, the preacher is necessary; but when he becomes more important than that which he is to preach, he is too important. It is common today to read that "Doctor" somebody who is president of this university or that one, or who is

the author of this book, or that one; who is a member of this council, or that foundation, will "address the assembly" or "bring the message" (rarely ever do these simply "preach a sermon"). Such is in decided contrast with the precautions employed and enjoined by the apostle Paul, who said, *"And I brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God"* (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

The preaching of Philip did not consist of unsupported assertions. The New Testament was not a "written-down", published volume to which he might go for authority; but the record tells of the certifying proof he offered. The Scripture says that the multitude gave heed to the things spoken by Philip; when? When they heard what he preached, and saw the signs, that is, the miracles which he did. These miracles were not an end in themselves; they were not a "come-on"; they served the purpose set forth in Hebrews

2:3-4, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard; God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will."

The miracles were not performed to make the world a better place in which to live, but to certify the gospel: to convince men of the way to heaven, and the need to follow that way.

The Church, Authority & Water Baptism

Do you wonder what Philip preached, when he preached Christ? According to Acts 8:12 "preaching Christ" involves preaching the kingdom of God, which is the Church of Christ, as Jesus identified it in Matthew 16:18 -19. Men often rant that they want us to "preach Christ and not the church;" however, it cannot be done.

It also requires preaching "the name of Jesus Christ". This would require demonstrations of the authority of Christ. Paul wrote in Colossians 3:17, "And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Thus, to act in the "name" of Jesus is to act by the authority or direction of Jesus. We cannot act in the name of Christ, unless we are acting by the instruction which Jesus Christ has provided. It does not matter how good something may seem to be, in the wisdom of men: if Christ has not authorized it, we cannot do it in the "name of Christ."

Preaching Christ also involves preaching baptism. To those who teach that baptism is not essential to salvation, this is most disturbing; but it is the truth.

How do we know that Philip preached baptism to these people? The record states that when they heard Philip preach Christ, they were baptized. If Philip's preaching did not include commanding them to be baptized as the way God had appointed that they should manifest their faith unto the remission of their sins, their behavior is completely irrational. So, when they heard they believed, because faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). Thus, when they believed Philip preaching Christ, they were baptized, for such is included in preaching Christ.

There were no babies baptized, just "men and women." God has never instructed that an infant be immersed for the remission of sins. To begin with, a baby has no sins. Furthermore, those who were baptized first believed: they heard testimony, in the preaching of Philip; they saw supporting, accrediting evidence, the signs he performed; and upon evaluation of this divinely approved testimony they accepted it, they believed; and such analysis and response is impossible for an infant. No babies were baptized; none have ever been baptized in harmony with the will of God.

Christ Saved Them

The men and women who believed and were baptized, according to Acts 8:12 were saved. We know this to be so because Jesus promised it. In Mark 16:16, Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." He said, believe and be baptized to be saved; the Samaritans believed and were baptized, thus, they were saved.

The people whose conversion is recorded in Acts chapter eight, like those in Acts chapter two, first heard the gospel preached. They obeyed the commands of

the gospel, and they received the remission of their sins and the hope of everlasting life.

To be a Christian you must do as they did: you must hear the gospel of Christ; you must believe and obey it, and having done so you will receive the remission of your sins and the hope of glory. You cannot substitute the wisdom of men for the wisdom of God: you must do what God has commanded of you.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **VBS:** Remember June 5–8, M–TH at 7:00 P.M. Please join us for Bible study and praise.

- **Prayer List:** Terry Aldridge; Danny Anderson, James Burke, Floyd and Doris Bush, Dallas Crabtree, Troy Lake, Deanna McKnight, The Millicans, Lorene Rhiddlehoover, Helen Rushing.

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 24

June 11, 2006

The Conversion of a Sorcerer

Among the many that were converted in Samaria was a man by the name of Simon. He was a man who had practiced the occult arts of sorcery. He is obviously singled out by the Holy Spirit in order to convey some very important lessons. This being the case, we want to now consider Simon and his conversion individually. Read again the conversion of Simon recorded in Acts 8:9–13:

“But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.”

Philip the evangelist preached Christ to Simon and the other Samaritans. As verse 12 shows, preaching Christ involves preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, and baptism. Because “*belief cometh of*

hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” as Romans 10:17 teaches, when Simon receptively heard this preaching it produced belief in him, just as the same preaching produced the same effect in the other Samaritans. When Simon believed, he was baptized for the remission of his sins as instructed.

Following his conversion, Simon observed the power exercised by the apostles, as they bestowed the Holy Spirit in miraculous measure on those converted. Succumbing to temptation, he offered the apostles money, “*saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit.*” Peter rebuked him severely for this and describes him as one who was perishing, whose heart was not right before God, who was guilty of wickedness, and needed to be forgiven. Notice these charges, and the remedy presented, in Acts 8:20–22:

“But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”

From this we learn what requirements are necessary for the forgiveness of sins committed by the child of God. These are

different from those for the forgiveness of one who is not a child of God. The one who is not a Christian must hear the Gospel, believe it, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ and be buried with Him in baptism for the remission of his sins. The Christian who sins on the other hand, must repent of his sins, and pray God that they be forgiven him, as Simon was instructed to do. The erring Christian is not baptized again; the alien sinner, the non-Christian, cannot pray sins away.

Conversion Denied

The effort to defend the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy has caused some to deny that Simon was saved in the first place. If Simon was saved, then according to this very popular doctrine, he could not be lost, or be in danger of being lost; however, the record plainly shows that he did sin and put his soul in jeopardy. Therefore, the effort is made to show that Simon was not saved.

It is suggested that Simon did not really believe; or, that he did not have what is described as “*saving faith,*” yet, the Bible shows that Simon did indeed have saving faith as did the rest of those converted Samaritans. The text states explicitly that “*Simon himself also believed.*” The Samaritans believed, and Simon *also* believed. The belief of Simon was

no different in quality than the belief of the other Samaritans whose conversion is recorded. All efforts to disparage Simon's faith must necessarily reflect on the faith of the rest.

Furthermore, to deny Simon's salvation is to reflect on the integrity of the Lord. It was He that promised, in Mark 16:16, that *"he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."* Simon also believed; *"and being baptized, he continued with Philip"*. Simon believed and was baptized: therefore, Simon was saved.

Misused Scripture

Several passages of Scripture are misused by those who aver that it is impossible to fall from grace. Probably the most frequently cited text is I John chapter three, verse nine: *"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."* The contested phrase is, *"he cannot sin."* It is held that this phrase denotes an absolute impossibility: that it is just beyond the ability of the child of God to sin

Is this a justifiable conclusion? Does the expression, *"he cannot sin,"* indicate that it is beyond his ability to sin? It certainly does not. To insist that it does, contradicts what John had already said earlier in this epistle. Consider, I John 1:8 and following:

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness... these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

It is irrational for any man to insist, in the face of such testimony, that the child of God is

incapable of sin and the jeopardy it brings.

The point under consideration in I John 3:9 is not that the child of God is irresistibly prevented from the commission of sin; but rather, that the one in whom the word of God abides, whose life is controlled therefore by the direction of God, does not walk in the practice of sin: he is not a habitual sinner. The habit of his life, his practice, is the effort to obey God, to walk in the light.

What's the Point?

What is the point to all this? Are we denying that the faithful enjoy security with God? Not at all; but we deny that this security is unconditional. God does not promise that those who are once saved can then be immoral, dishonest, unrighteous, and still expect to go to heaven. This is the feature of this doctrine that makes it so distressing: if a man feels that, having been saved, he can do whatever he wants without jeopardizing his soul, he has little or no real compulsion to do what is right and abstain from evil.

The prescription for eternal security is found in II Peter 1:10, *"Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never stumble"*. What is the promise? *"Ye shall never stumble"*. Who shall never stumble? The one who does *"these things,"* the things listed in verses 5 through 7 of that chapter: virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and love. *"These things"* prevent one's being idle, barren or becoming spiritually nearsighted. Such an one will never stumble. This is the security God provides: His unflinching protection to those who follow the Lord, who do *"these things."*

Men would have us believe that a child of God cannot fall from grace; yet the Bible declares that it can happen, warns against it, tells how to avoid it, and provides the remedy for it for the ones who will repent. If Simon did not obey the instruction given him by the apostle Peter, though he had been forgiven in the past in his original obedience to the gospel, he was lost eternally.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** *Terry Aldridge, James Burke, Floyd Bush and family, Dallas Crabtree, Troy Lake, Deanna McKnight, The Millicans, Paul Ragland Helen Rushing.*
- **Out of Town:** *Joe & Nell Fomby* are in Snook for the next several weeks helping family.
- **Thanks:** To all the teachers, helpers and students for making the VBS such a great success.

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 25

June 18, 2006

A Nobleman's Conversion

"And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an Eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

"And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. And the Eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the Eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he

answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the Eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the Eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing."

(Acts 8:26-39)

The Role of Spirit

The first thing that gets our attention is the role of a direct, divine intervention in this man's conversion. Many today claim to have been acted upon directly by the Holy Spirit in order to effect conversion. However, what did the Holy Spirit do in the case of the Eunuch? Verse 26 says that an angel of the Lord instructed Philip to go from Jerusalem to Gaza. Verse 29 states when he got there, the Holy Spirit told him to join the Eunuch in the chariot. This Philip is the same man who worked miracles and was full of the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:6; 6:3); thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the Holy Spirit was guiding him as he was "preaching Jesus" (8:35). After the Eunuch was baptized, the Holy Spirit led Philip to preach among the Philistines from the city of Azotus until he reached Caesarea.

According to the Bible, the only person acted upon directly and miraculously by the Spirit was Philip—an inspired preacher of

the Gospel. There was no direct operation of the Holy Spirit on the Eunuch, none at all.

The sword of the Holy Spirit is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). By it men are shown what sin is, as Paul said, "I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:7). Therefore, "by the law," that is, by the Word of God "is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). The Gospel is filled with "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16); it is "quick, and powerful, and shaper than any two-edged sword." Its power is such that it "pierces" the soul and judges the thoughts and intents of the human heart (Hebrews 4:12-13). The Gospel of our salvation is so powerful that it reveals to us exactly what we appear to be before God (James 1:21-25). It will make us sorry for our sins, and, if we will allow it, bring us to repentance (II Corinthians 7:8-10). Not only this, but the wonderful Word of God will assure us of God's goodness and mercy (Romans 2:1-16), showing us the way to reconciliation and redemption (Romans 10:1-17). This is the power that resides in the Gospel.

How did the Holy Spirit bring this nobleman to repentance and faith in Christ? Not by a direct, supernatural, irresistible

operation on the heart. What we have witnessed in this case and every previous example is the Holy Spirit exerting His influence through “the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16) which He has put in the Gospel.

Preaching Christ Involves Baptism

When Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans, they were baptized (Acts 8:12). When Philip preached Christ to the Eunuch, his response was, “Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” Thus, preaching Christ demands preaching baptism, for baptism is a requirement for obtaining the blessings in Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3).

Some seek to substitute sprinkling or pouring water upon one as baptism from Eunuch’s example. They give emphasis to the statement in Acts 8:26, “the same is desert.” Building on this, it is contended that sufficient water was not available to immerse a grown man. However, a “desert” is defined as an unoccupied region. The fact that the way the Eunuch traveled was desert does not imply arid conditions. The Bible specifically states that there was enough water for immersion when it says that both went down into the water, and then came up out of it. Sprinkling or pouring would not require this.

Furthermore, the language used demonstrates that the action involved could only have been immersion of the Eunuch and not the sprinkling or pouring of water upon him. It is said that “he baptized him.” Obviously, such could be said if one understood that “he immersed him.” But, it is absurd to say that “he sprinkled him” or “he poured him.” Consider this text in Leviticus 14:15-16, “And the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and **pour** it into

the palm of his own left hand: and the priest shall dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle of the oil with his finger seven times before the LORD.” Re-read the above text, substituting the word “baptize” for the words pour, dip and sprinkle. Any who want to know the truth will see that it just doesn’t work.

What Is Hindering You?

After Philip preached the Eunuch asked, “What doth hinder me to be baptized?” If you have not been baptized for the remission of your sins, something is hindering you; have you thought about what it is? The answer is found in Philip’s answer to the Eunuch, and it includes every possible excuse or reason that might be advanced. Philip said, “If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest.” None who do not believe in Jesus will be baptized into the name of Christ. This is why Jesus said, in Mark 16:16, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned”. Our Lord recognized that those who did not believe on him would not be baptized, and thus there was no need to say “he that disbelieveth and is not baptized shall be condemned.” Unbelief is the basis of all rebellion; it provides the ground for false teachers who say that salvation is by faith only; it encourages the so-called “good moral man,” who thinks that he is so good he does not have to obey the Gospel; it pacifies the indifferent man who thinks that religion is for the weak or the soft-headed. You may offer many excuses for refusing to be baptized; but the real reason is unbelief.

The record states that the Eunuch, following his baptism, “went on his way rejoicing”. Why? It was because he had been saved. He had been without hope and without God; but now, having

obeyed the Gospel, he had the right to expect that which he desired. Notice, however, that the Eunuch did not rejoice before baptism. Before he was still in his sins; even though he had faith, he was still guilty, before God, because of his sins. Even though he had repented—changed his mind about sin—he was still guilty. However, once he obeyed Christ in baptism he rejoiced because his sins were forgiven. There is no occasion for rejoicing, before one has completed his obedience to God.

The rejoicing in the sure knowledge of a right relationship with God can be your rejoicing. If you will obey the Gospel, as did the Ethiopian Eunuch, by hearing and believing the Gospel, by repenting of your sins, by confessing your faith in Christ, and being buried with him in baptism for the remission of your sins, joy will be yours. What hinders you to be baptized?

—Jeff Asher

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 26

June 25, 2006

Crispus & the Corinthians Converted

"But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was constrained by the word, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. And when they opposed themselves and blasphemed, he shook out his raiment and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and went into the house of a certain man named Titus Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians, hearing believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:5-8).

Crispus, a Jewish Ruler

First notice, that Crispus was converted. He is described as a ruler of the synagogue, and from this we gain some idea of his importance and the significance of his being singled out. Those in high places, then and now, are not often moved to respond to the call of the Gospel. Among the few who were called, are men like Cornelius and Crispus.

That which hinders obedience by those of elevated rank is not inadequacy in the Gospel call. The problem seems to be the greater degree of pressure from the things which they possess, their position, and wealth, and pride of place. This was the problem which overcame some of Crispus' peers. They are remembered in Scripture as having faith alone,

faith too weak to confess Jesus as the Christ (John 12:42, 43).

The damning explanation, *"they loved the glory of men more than the glory that is of God,"* may well describe many today who are uneasy with their condition, religiously. They may recognize that the church of which they are members is not the church of the New Testament, or that it has departed into apostasy to follow human ends and interests rather than divine: but through fear of the loss of friends and family, or prestige, or financial comforts they refuse to make the necessary changes in their life or church membership. The truth is they love *"the glory that is of-men more than the glory that is of God."*

Also notice the fact that Crispus and the aforementioned Titus Justus, as well as, Saul of Tarsus, Cornelius and the Ethiopian Eunuch about whom we have already studied, were all religious persons. As the pseudo-religious jargon of our day might word it, Crispus was already "churched." His conversion from what he already was religiously, to become a member of the church purchased by the blood of Christ, stands as a testimonial and rebuke to those who think that all attention should be devoted to the irreligious, the "un-churched."

Just as surely as no religious effort is soul-damning in the sight of God, so also is *wrong* religious effort. This wrong effort was

defined by Jesus when He said, *"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from ye, ye that work iniquity"* (Matthew 7:21-23).

Faith Plus

The record states that many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized, but of Crispus it says only that he believed. This affords an excellent opportunity to see the use of "faith" or "belief" in the comprehensive sense, that is to say, that saving faith always involves: mental acceptance which prompts a repentance of sins, the confessing of belief in Christ as the Son of God, and an immersion in water for the remission of sins.

We know that Crispus was baptized, even though the Acts text does not specifically state it. How do we know that? Paul, in writing Corinth, said *"I thank God that I baptized none of you, save Crispus and Gaius; lest any man should say that ye were baptized into my name"* (I Corinthians 1:14-15). Thus, we are assured of the baptism of Crispus. And once again we see that none are called believers who are not surely baptized believers.

Those who deny the necessity of baptism as a condition of salvation must be embarrassed to find it at every turn, in every case of conversion God has preserved for us a record that conversion always results in a baptism for the remission of sins.

How any could ever associate the word nonessential with baptism is beyond me. The Apostle Paul did not think it nonessential. He wrote: *"Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life"* (Romans 6:3-4).

Those who advocate salvation by faith alone or at the moment of belief would have us understand that which effectually makes us partakers of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is unnecessary. Is that which the Holy Spirit says saves us, a nonessential (I Peter 3:21; Mark. 16:16)? Consideration of these facts helps one to understand more fully why Peter instructed the devout men of Jerusalem to repent and be baptized unto the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38); why he commanded Cornelius and his household to be baptized (Acts 10:48); and why every case of conversion recorded in the book of Acts invariably included the baptism of the penitent, confessing believer for the remission of sins.

Were Babies Baptized?

This statement that Crispus "believed in the Lord with all his house" indicates he was joined in what he did by all that were in his household. Thus, he, and they, believed. They heard the Gospel, evaluated it, and accepted it.

The fact that processes beyond the capacity of infants to accomplish are involved in "believing" in response to testimony, makes it certain that there were no infants in the household of Crispus.

The fact that belief always preceded baptism in the New Testament makes it certain that no infant was ever baptized at the direction of an inspired man, not in the house of Cornelius, nor that of Lydia, nor of the Philippian jailor. Acts 8:12 makes this plain: *"But when they believed Philip preaching good tidings concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."* When were they baptized? When they believed, they were not baptized before or with out belief. This of necessity excludes infants.

The fact that baptism has as its design the remission of sins makes it certain that no infants were baptized at the direction of an inspired man, because babies have no sins of which to be forgiven. Jesus' estimate of the innocence of infants is expressed in Matthew 19:14 when He said, *"Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven."* That they must be pure and free of sin is indicated by the fact that every citizen of Heaven must be like them. In Matthew 18:2-3, He declared, *"Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."*

Friend, if you have been comforted by the assurance that you were "christened" as a baby, you need to think about these things. The Philippian jailor recognized that salvation is personal; so he asked, *"What must I do to be saved?"* You cannot depend on what someone else did

for you. Peter exhorted those present on Pentecost, *"Save yourselves from this crooked generation."* The so-called "baptism" of infants is the invention of men that ought to be regarded as all traditions which supplant the commandments of God, *"Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up"* (Matthew 15:9-13).

Since there are none that are righteous, not one (Romans 3:12), what should you do to be saved? You should do what Crispus and the Corinthians did: you should hear the Gospel, and believe it, for *"belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"* (Romans 10:17) and *"without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing to him"* (Hebrews 11:6). Then in faith, as they did, *"Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins."*

—Jeff Asher

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 27

July 2, 2006

The Conversion of Saul of Tarsus

In this study we will investigate the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, who was known later, and more prominently, as Paul, the Apostle. Before looking at the details of his conversion, let's consider what the New Testament says of him prior to his life in Christ.

The Persecutor

Saul was a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, brought up or educated at the feet of Gamaliel, the leading Rabbi of that day (Acts 22:3). Of himself Paul wrote, *"Though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh: if any other man thinketh to have confidence in the flesh, I yet more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless"* (Philippians 3:4-6). From these verses we learn that, prior to his conversion to Christ, Saul of Tarsus was a man commanding the respect of his peers: he was educated, he was of pure racial stock in a time when this was of pre-eminent importance, he was a Pharisee and, in his pursuit of this religion he was most enthusiastic. He said, in Acts chapter 26 verse 5, *"after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a*

Pharisee". Paul was not merely called a Pharisee, he *lived* a Pharisee, and there is a difference.

In our earlier reading of Philippians 3:6, did you notice that which Paul cited as proof of his zeal? He persecuted the church. This accords with the statement of Acts chapter 22 verses three and four, *"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God, even as ye all are this day: and I persecuted this Way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women."*

Paul's early appearances in the divine history are in the role of persecutor. It is stated that they cast Stephen out of the city *"and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul"* (Acts 7:58). Acts 8:1 then informs that *"Saul was consenting unto [Stephen's] death."* Following this a general persecution of Christians arose forcing the dispersal of believers from Jerusalem all over the known world; and, not incidentally, causing the spread of the Gospel throughout (Acts 8:4).

Saul next appears in Acts 9:1, where he is described as

"breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord;" he was energetically pursuing the persecution of all he was able to find. As if with every breath he drew he found new enthusiasm and strength to carry on with that which he had begun in Stephen.

A Query

Right here, I would ask you to ponder a question: Was Saul *right* in persecuting the Christians? Was he *justified* before God, as he persecuted the church of Christ? I think most of us find it obvious that he was not. But, he thought he was right, and he was of easy mind and comfortable conviction concerning his behavior. He later said of himself at that time in his life, in Acts 23:1, he had *"lived before God in all good conscience until this day."* Imagine that, the conscience of the man who breathed threatening and slaughter toward Christians was clear and clean, it did not trouble him. However, he was guilty before God; he still had sins to be forgiven.

Your conscience may be clear and untroubled; but that is no assurance that you are right with God. Conscience reacts to conditioning, to knowledge: a cannibal feels no guilt in his

conscience as he gnaws on his victim; his information is that such behavior is normal and proper. Does this justify cannibalism? Saul thought that it was right to persecute Christians; did this absolve him from guilt? To the contrary, it manifested for all time the insufficiency of the conscience as a guide in things pertaining to God; so that those who say "let your conscience be your guide," know nothing of what they affirm.

The Conversion Account

There are three New Testament texts where somewhat detailed reference is made to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. These are: Acts 9:1-19, Acts 22:4-16 and Acts 26:9-20. Now would be a good time to read these verses.

Immediately, the question comes to mind: Why did Jesus appear to Saul? Was this appearance necessary to his salvation? One might think so, many have. Yet, a personal appearance by the glorified Christ is not necessary to salvation. Do you remember the Lord's words to Thomas when He appeared to him? Jesus said, "*Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*" (John 20:29). Why not let the Lord tell us why he appeared to Saul? Jesus told the persecutor, "*Arise and stand upon thy feet: for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that*

they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me," (Acts chapter 26 verses 16 through 18). Now, why did Jesus appear to Saul? The passage just read states that it was to appoint him a minister and a witness of the things he had seen, and would see, concerning Jesus Christ. Simply stated, Jesus appeared to Saul in order to qualify Him to be an apostle. In order to be an apostle of Christ, one must be a witness of the resurrection. When the replacement for Judas was chosen according to Acts 1:22, the prospective candidates must have been "*a witness with us of his resurrection.*" Therefore, this appearance of Jesus to Saul was necessary in order that he might be an apostle and "his witness unto the people" (Acts 13:31).

Well, if not by this means, how, then, was Saul saved? The answer is obvious and simple; Saul was saved just like every other man and woman of whom we have inquired. He was saved like the three thousand were saved, on Pentecost; just like the Samaritans were saved; just like Simon was saved; just like the Ethiopian eunuch was saved; and just like you are to be saved.

This was how Saul was saved: he believed, he repented of his sins, and he was baptized to gain the remission of his sins. In connection with this matter, it is of interest to note that Jesus did not even tell Saul what he must do to be saved. As in every case in the inspired history, the information as to what one must do to be saved came through a human agent. Therefore, in Acts

22:10 we read, Paul is speaking, "*And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.*"

Saul was assisted into Damascus by the men that were accompanying him. He was, at that point, a believing penitent; his repentance was the more manifested by the three days in Damascus, in which he neither ate nor drank. He was not, however, a child of God: his sins had not been forgiven; so, when Ananias came to him, his instruction was pointed: "*And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name*" (Acts 22:16).

What are you waiting for?

—Jeff Asher

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Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 28

July 9, 2006

The Conversion of Cornelius

The Centurion Cornelius is another magnificent example of God's wonderful plan of salvation. Let's read Peter's account of it from Acts 11:11-17, "And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

A Good Moral Man Needing Christ

The conversion of Cornelius is significant for many reasons; one outstanding reason is the description given of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-2): "Now there was a certain man in Caesarea, Cornelius by

name, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, who gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always."

So often the effort is made to justify another on the basis of his being a "good moral man," in the eyes of the world. Cornelius, was certainly such a man. He is a fine example of morality; but, he needed to be saved and was told to send for Peter, "who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved, thou and all thy house."

Thus, the conversion of Cornelius should be of interest to one who is a good moral person, one who pays his debts, treats his family properly, obeys the law of the land, and is good to his neighbors. If you have not obeyed the Gospel of Christ, regardless of how "morally good" you are, you are lost, just as was the good man, Cornelius. There is no such thing as a man being too good to need Christ. The example of Cornelius, forever settles the question respecting morality and the need for the remission of sins.

A Praying Man Needing Salvation

The conversion of Cornelius is significant because it answers all the questions men have about the relation of prayer to salvation. Some believe and teach that an alien sinner can "pray through" to salvation, and the case of Cornelius is cited as an example

of this. Indeed, Cornelius was one who prayed frequently; in fact, he was in prayer when an angel of God appeared to him and told him "Thy prayers and thine alms are gone up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:34). However, do these words suggest that Cornelius had succeeded in praying through unto salvation from his sins? On the contrary, the angel next instructed him to send all the way to Joppa for a preacher to tell him words whereby he and his entire household could be saved. Cornelius' prayers were heard, they went to God up for a memorial; but neither of these facts suggests that his prayers obtained the forgiveness of his sins—indeed the facts indicate that they did not.

All Must Obey the Gospel

The conversion of Cornelius is significant it further confirms a matter observed in other cases of conversion (Acts 10:3-8). Whenever the Lord, or the Holy Spirit, or an angelic messenger was involved in a conversion, invariably they directed the sinner to a preacher who would tell him what he must do to be saved; or they directed the preacher to the person in need of salvation in order to tell the sinner what he must do; or both. But, *never* did the Lord, the Holy Spirit or an angel tell the sinner directly what he must do to be saved. This is true in every case of conversion recorded in the New Testament.

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and man has been entrusted with the responsibility by God of proclaiming that Gospel—and nothing but that Gospel. The Apostle Paul declared in Galatians 1:8, “*But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.*” In the wisdom of God, the preaching of the Gospel was made the responsibility of men.

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Once Peter arrived he began to preach the Gospel. Before he finished the Spirit of God intervened with a miraculous demonstration (Acts 11:15). From this, we learn that the remarks recorded in Acts 10:34–43 were not the entirety of what Peter intended to say to those people. We also learn that the experience here was the same as that on the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

For what purpose did the Holy Spirit fall on these people? Some assure us that it was to save them, and that none can be saved today who do not have a similar baptism in the Holy Spirit. Is this what the Bible teaches? It is not. Acts 11:14 affirms that Peter would *“speak words whereby they would be saved; God is not like man, so that He first determines that one thing will save, and then substitutes another. Further, Peter afterward commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, which is baptism in water for the remission of sins; this would have been unnecessary had they been saved by their baptism in the Holy Spirit.”*

For what purpose did the Holy Spirit fall on them? We can only appeal to the Bible for the answer: “*While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them that heard the word. And they of the*

circumcision that believed were amazed, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?” (Acts 10:44–47).

Consider Acts 11:15–18 quoted above. From these verses it is plain that these manifestations were to convince Peter, and those who were with him, and those of Jerusalem, and all who had nurtured thoughts of the inferiority of Gentiles, that “*to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life.*” It had no other revealed purpose. It had happened before in the case of the apostles. It has not happened since, so far as the divine record reveals. Cornelius and his household still needed to be saved when it was finished. We know they still needed to be saved, because “*he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*” (Mark 16:16) and Peter “*commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ*” (Acts 10:48). Since they had not been baptized in response to the divine command, they had not been saved. Their baptism in the Holy Spirit did not change the Lord’s command, for it was following this that Peter commanded them to be baptized. The only baptism that has ever been *commanded* is baptism in water for the remission of sins. Cornelius and his household heard the Gospel, they believed it, repented of their sins and were baptized for the remission of their sins; and these are the steps in which you also must walk, for the remission of your sins.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

• **Prayer List:** Terry Aldridge, Gary Box, Duffy & Kathy Breaux, Melissa Briggs, James Burke, Floyd Bush and family, Mark & Deidre Cone, Dallas Crabtree, Troy Lake, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, the Millicans, Paul Ragland, Helen Rushing, Bob & Jyonne White.

• **Out of Town:** Jeff Asher starts a meeting today in Indianapolis. Matt Dickenson left Wednesday with David Tant for two weeks of evangelistic work in Jamaica.

• **Baptized:** Bob Kaatz was immersed into Christ last Sunday evening. We rejoice with Heaven for him.

• **Welcome:** We are pleased to have Roy Fenner and his family with us today. We share with Brother Fenner in his work at Highlands, TX. He will teach the auditorium class and preach at both services today.

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 29

July 16, 2006

The Conversion of Lydia

The conversion of Lydia is recorded in Acts 16:11–15, “Setting sail therefore from Troas, we made a straight course to Samothrace, and the day following to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is a city of Macedonia, the first of the district, a Roman colony: and we were in this city tarrying certain days. And on the Sabbath day we went forth without the garden by a river side, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down, and spake unto the women that were come together. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there. And she constrained us.”

Spiritual & Religious

Lydia is described as a business woman, a seller of purple fabrics, a resident of the city of Thyatira and a woman who worshipped God. Lydia did not regard the business of making a living as being of even equal importance with the business of making a life, so she habitually worshipped God.

It is of special interest to notice that she first encountered the apostle Paul and his companions as she assembled

with other women at the place of prayer along the riverside on the Sabbath Day. Paul did not assemble with these Jews to observe the Sabbath as a day possessed of any significance with God now. His purpose in joining them was to find those who, though not informed as to the truth concerning Jesus Christ, were of devout disposition; and those who were acting upon the promise of Jeremiah 29:13, “*And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*” This desire to do God’s will accounts for Lydia’s conversion. Without a similar desire, no man will be converted to Christ (I Corinthians 1:26-28). Thus, Paul, “*sat down and spake unto the women that were come together.*”

Her Heart Opened

Observe that Lydia “*heard us: whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things that were spoken by Paul.*” For what reason, did the Lord open Lydia’s heart? The Bible says, “*To give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul.*” Did the Lord open Lydia’s heart to save her? No. The Lord opened Lydia’s heart that she would give heed, attend to, that which was spoken, and that which was spoken was the Gospel of Christ, and it could save her (Romans 1:16).

Well, *how* did the Lord open Lydia’s heart? Did he open her heart by some irresistible, direct operation? Notice that Lydia first *heard*, then the Lord opened her heart. The Lord did not enable her to hear; she had already heard. In Romans 10:17 we are told that “*belief cometh of hearing;*” that which the apostle preached, Lydia heard, and this hearing caused belief, or faith. This faith in turn prompted her to obey, to give heed, to attend to the instruction given by the apostle.

Romans 10:10 says that “*with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.*” This is the process involved in the statement here concerning Lydia. Having *heard*; that which she *heard* opened her heart. Now, the words spoken by the apostle Paul were the words of Christ (I Timothy 6:3). Therefore, what she *heard* were the words of Christ, and the effect they had on the heart of Lydia is properly attributed to the Lord. The Lord Jesus opened her heart with the Gospel. This experience is no different from any other case of conversion recorded in the Scriptures. Men and women who hear the Gospel proclaimed, and act in harmony with its precepts, do as Lydia having had their hearts opened by the Lord; but this “opening”

is accomplished by the inspired words of the Gospel.

This is why, when Peter on Pentecost said, *“Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified”* (Acts 2:36), the reaction of his audience was so profound. Do you remember what was said: *“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do”* (Acts 2:37). Friend, the word of God *“is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword”* (Hebrews 4:12); It will convict and convert the sinner. Thus, our concern must be to preach the word: to constantly and tirelessly speak those words whereby men may be saved.

Your concern, and the concern of every accountable person, must be to desire and love the truth, and determine to know and to do the truth. You must, as the Scripture says, *“receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls”* (James 1:21). The truth is not irresistible, it can be rejected. This is what Stephen was talking about when he charged those to whom he spoke in Acts chapter seven with resisting the Holy Spirit, as did their fathers; he explained what is meant by resisting the Holy Spirit in verses 52 and 53, *“Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? and they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous one; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers; ye who received the law as it was ordained by angels, and kept it not.”* How did they resist the Holy Spirit? The resisted

Him by persecuting the prophets, by killing the prophets and by refusing to keep the law which they had received. The Holy Spirit is involved in conversion by convicting of sin through the words which He inspired men to record, and which we know as the New Testament. There is no direct operation of the Holy Spirit in conversion.

Infant Baptism?

Is the conversion of Lydia and her “household” an example of the practice of infant baptism? Notice what one must *assume* if he asserts that Lydia’s household included children. First, he must *assume* that Lydia was married; second, he must *assume* that she had children; third, he must *assume* that these *assumed* children of her *assumed* marriage were infants too young to believe; fourth, he must *assume* that these *assumed* children were baptized, for the Bible says nothing to indicate that such was ever the case. Acts 2:38, 22:16 and I Peter 3:21 are just a few of the passages which teach that baptism’s purpose is salvation, the remission of sins; Yet, babies are not lost; babies have no sins to be forgiven, or remitted. Baptism is for the remission of the sins of the believing penitent. All those included in the statement that Lydia *“was baptized, and her household”*, were therefore believing penitents—not innocent infants.

If you would be saved today, you must be saved by responding to the same teaching: hearing and believing the Gospel, repenting of sins, confessing faith in Christ and being buried with him in

baptism for the remission of your sins. Are you a child of God? You may answer yes, *only* if you are obedient to God. Let the word of God open your heart, as it opened the heart of Lydia.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

• **Prayer List:** Terry Aldridge, Gary Box, Duffy & Kathy Breaux, Melissa Briggs, James Burke, Floyd Bush and family, Mark & Deidre Cone, Dallas Crabtree, Troy Lake, Jeff & Bonnie McKnight, the Millicans, Paul Ragland, Helen Rushing, Bob & Jyvonne White.

• **Gospel Meetings:** It’s not too early to plan for our fall meeting with *Tim Coffey*. Mark your calendar for November 26 through 29, 2006.

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Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 30

July 23, 2006

The Conversion of a Philippian Jailer

"But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison—house were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened; and every one's bands were loosed. And the jailor, being roused out of sleep and seeing the prison doors open, drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. And he called for lights and sprang in, and, trembling for fear, fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house. And they spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God".

The Question

Examine now this question asked by the jailor. I call attention to the direction of the jailor's question. He sought his answer from men inspired by the Holy Spirit in the things they taught. To find the answer to the same question today, one must still turn to inspiration. However, we do not need to seek out an apostle or

prophet. We may know the inspired answer by turning to the inspired Book, the New Testament of Jesus Christ. It and it alone, is the product of those inspired men who preached on Pentecost and in that Philippian jail.

In the day of the jailor's conversion, inspiration was in men. In this day, inspiration is in the Book. There are no men alive today who are inspired of God. The revelation of God's will is complete, in the New Testament. We neither need nor have available revelation from God other than that found in the New Testament.

The sentence of heaven on this matter is revealed in Jude 3, *"Beloved, while I was giving all diligence to write unto you of our common salvation, I was constrained to write unto you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints."* If you or I want to find the right way today concerning conversion, we must do as did the jailor and go to the right source. Now, I ask you today, can you find the way you are following outlined in the New Testament?

Notice also that the aim of the jailor's question was salvation; he asked, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* Those who share with the jailor this desire for eternal life will do well to consider what the jailor asked, and how he was answered by God; and then

measure themselves and their course of conduct against that answer.

The importance of salvation is seen in the realization that the primary purpose of our life on earth is to be pleasing to God. Ecclesiastes 12:13 states succinctly our mission in life, *"This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."* The jailor was putting first things first.

In the jailor's question, the use of the word "what" indicates, first, that he thought that there was something he must do to be saved; and, second, that he recognized his personal helplessness. It is significant that the inspired men did not see fit to correct him in this matter. This indicates that, in the sight of God, there is something man must do to be saved. The Apostle James recognized this truth when he wrote, *"Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith" (2:24).* There is something man must do to be saved, something more than passive mental acceptance of Jesus as Savior.

The jailor asked, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* The word "must" denotes compulsion, force, that which is essential. This is the way the Lord used it when saying *"Ye must be born again" (John 3:7).* The word involves the recognition of some things that are unavoidable. The jailor wanted to know what

things were imperative in order to gain salvation; we should, with him, know that some things we must do, if we are to get to heaven.

Some people teach that a man has nothing to do in the matter of his salvation, that the final destiny of man was determined long before he came to exist: that whether he would be saved or lost was predetermined. If this is true, there would have been no point in the jailor's question. More to the point, there would have been no truthfulness in Paul's answer. Our faith *must* be obedient if it is to save (Hebrews 5:9).

Next notice that the jailor's question was personal; he asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord we persuade men" (II Corinthians 5:11). Beyond persuasion the preacher is unable to go. The decision regarding salvation is personal; it is individual. It is one you must make for yourself. No matter how strongly your father, or mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, the preacher or a friend may desire to see you saved; only you can believe. No one else can obey the gospel for you.

In our analysis of the jailor's question, we come finally to the word which arouses the most heated and vigorous objection: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" A very popular doctrine denies that there is anything that one must do to be saved. This idea comes from a misunderstanding of the nature of "saving faith," and possibly a desire to obtain something for nothing.

The faith which saves, according to Hebrews 11 and James 2, is the faith that obeys. This "obedience of faith" is what Paul preached unto all the nations (Romans 1:5).

We are, as Romans 5:1 states, justified by faith; but this faith cannot be separated from the works of God, because faith without works is barren and dead.

Some men once asked Jesus, "What must we do, that we may work the works of God?" Notice with care the Lord's reply: "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6:28-29). Belief is itself a work, and it demands certain other works as manifestation of its existence.

They Were Baptized

As we bring the study to a close, notice Acts 16:33-34 which says the jailor "took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, immediately. And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God." The jailor and his house had heard the gospel preached, their belief is undeniable, their repentance is manifested in the washing of the stripes of Paul and Silas; and they were baptized. Notice that the rejoicing follows the baptism. This is entirely natural, for baptism is the turning, converting point: the point at which man's sins are forgiven. Prior to this act of obedience he is still guilty of sin, and has nothing of which to rejoice. However, after baptism where their sins were remitted, they rejoice in their salvation in Christ. The record summarizes all this by saying that they had "believed in God."

The joy of salvation can be yours today if you like this jailor will believe and be baptized immediately.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

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• **Gospel Meetings:** Curtis Pope will be with the Hubbard St. Church in Lindale July 23-28. Bobby Thompson will be with the Hwy 79 Church in Henderson July 30-August 3. Both meet M-F @ 7:30 PM. Jeff Asher will be with the Eastside Church in Russellville, AR August 6-11.

• John Lasater will be with us on August 6. John serves as an evangelist with the church in Bulverde, TX. We are thankful to be able to share with John in that work. While here he will give us a report and preach (Acts 14:27).

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 31

August 6 2006

Conversions at Ephesus

“And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve” (Acts 19:1-5)

You have just read the specific details of the conversion of the Ephesians. But this certainly is not the entirety of what the New Testament has to say about the matter. After John 3:16, Ephesians chapter 2:8-10 is probably the best known text of the Bible. It is a text that speaks to the conversion of the Ephesians. The Bible says of their conversion: *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast: for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”*

The conversion of the Ephesians is a pattern for salvation by grace through faith. Whatever was involved in their salvation cannot be construed as anything other than “the grace of God.” To attribute to their obedient faith the denigrating epithet of “works” would be to deny the Scriptures and blaspheme the Holy Spirit. Therefore, let us study and learn what it means to be converted, that is, saved by grace through faith.

Saved by Grace

The word “grace” means “favor;” we often refer to God’s grace by the redundant term “unmerited” favor. We do so to stress the free nature of salvation and to disabuse the mind of any false notions connoted by the colloquial expression “he owes me a favor.” When the terms are used properly, one cannot “owe” a favor—that which is owed is a debt, and justification is not a matter of debt (Romans 4:4-6). Thus, when we speak of the “grace of God”, we are speaking of the favor or blessing which man did not deserve, but which God still gave. Salvation is by *grace*. It is as the Apostle Paul said, in Titus chapter two, verse 11, “For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men”.

Unfortunately, the fact that man, who does not deserve it, has been favored by God with a way to be

saved, has been seized upon and twisted by men so that, according to their teachings and notions salvation is *wholly, entirely, of* grace: controlled in provision, and bestowal, by the Heavenly Father with no human factor entering in. This is not the truth. It has been said that such doctrines do not rely on the grace of God, they presume upon it. To assert that salvation is *wholly of grace* is to assert that all men will be saved, for Titus 2:11 states that the grace of God has brought salvation to all men. However, all men will not be saved. Matthew 7:13 says, “Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby”. Therefore, it is obvious that something more than the grace of God is involved in salvation by grace. How can the confusion be dispelled? It is certain that the wisdom of man will never dispel it. In fact, the confusion came because the wisdom of man was cleverly or thoughtlessly substituted for the wisdom of God; and that confusion has been perpetuated in the Manuals, Creeds, and Disciplines which curse the world today.

Look again at the words of Ephesians chapter two. In that passage, we notice that Paul’s statement of verse eight, “by grace have ye been saved through faith.” One readily sees that

salvation by grace is here affirmed as being *through faith*; and that therefore it *cannot* be wholly of grace. Therefore, faith provides the access, opens the door, to the grace of God which is available to all men (Titus 2:11).

What is faith? Men say that it is mental acceptance, without any human work connected; "faith alone" is their motto. They refer for proof to Ephesians 2:9, which says that this salvation by grace through faith is "not of works; that no man should glory" or boast, and they assert that this eliminates all human effort. However, they misunderstand what is said here from at least two points.

First, they make the verse exclude all human activity. But like the Pharisees, they err not knowing the Scriptures (Matthew 22:29). In John 6:28–29 we read "They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that *we may work the works of God*? Jesus answered and said unto them, *This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent*". Thus, if the "faith only" exegesis of Ephesians 2:8–9 is correct, and *all* human activity is excluded, then faith is excluded for it is described by Jesus as "work" which men must do. This would contradict the clear language of Ephesians 2:8, which say that salvation is *through faith*. Salvation is through faith; faith is human activity or work; therefore the phrase, "not of works," found in Ephesians 2:9 cannot be properly understood as a general exclusion of human activity.

The second mistake is a failure to appreciate the qualifying words in Ephesians 2:9. The apostle did not say that salvation is "not of works" and then stop. He described the specific works that are not involved in man's salvation, as being works about which man could *glory* or *boast*.

The kind of works that are not involved in the salvation of men are works which might leave the impression that they themselves had somehow accomplished the salvation, and which might thereby cause men to brag or boast about themselves and their works.

An excellent illustration of this is found in the account of the healing of the leper, Naaman, II Kings 5:1-14. When you read that account, you recognize that there is nothing Naaman could boast about in his healing, though he *did* work. You will remember that he dipped himself seven times in the river Jordan, as God directed but who thinks that dipping in water is a cure for leprosy? Naaman's faith, manifested by its perfecting obedience, gained for him access into God's grace, the purification of his flesh. Naaman was cleansed by the grace of God when he faithfully obeyed God; but in all his work there was nothing he did of which he might brag, or boast. God expects those who want salvation by grace to perform by faith the works He prescribes.

What the Ephesians Did

Now, let's see what the Ephesians did, as they were saved "by grace through faith." Apparently these were people who had been baptized with John's baptism after the Great Commission went into effect on the day of Pentecost. The apostle, learning that they had been baptized with an invalid baptism, told them that John had said "unto the people that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus." Please take special note that Paul told the Ephesians that John said they should *believe on Jesus* (Acts 19:4). Now, look to the next verse, Acts 19:5, and see how these people responded when they learned they should *believe on*

Jesus: "And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus". So then, working the works of God, which Jesus said was believing on him whom he sent, John 6:29, includes being baptized: because when the Ephesians heard that they should believe, they were baptized! Thus they were saved, for Jesus had promised, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned," Mark 16:16. The faith that saves is *always* the faith that obeys.

The Ephesians, according to Acts 19:1–5, heard the gospel, believed it, and were baptized. The apostle Paul said they were saved by grace (Ephesians 2: 8). Have you been saved by grace? Your answer must be, "no", unless you, as did the Ephesians, have been obedient to the Lord in baptism.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 32

August 20, 2006

The Message of the Cross

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God; it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” (I Corinthians 1:18-21)

What Is the Message?

The church at Corinth was divided into factions each with its own heresy and false prophet. This divided condition revealed their carnality (3:1) indicating their esteem for the wisdom of men above the Gospel of Christ (I Corinthians 4:6).

In the text, Paul contrasts the *“wisdom of words”* with *“the preaching”* (KJV) or *“the message”* (NKJV) of the cross (cf. 1:17). Men, in general, have long held that the message about Jesus’ death is one of folly—too incredible and ridiculous to believe. Thus, men have rejected the simple Gospel of Jesus.

However, Paul affirms that the Gospel is a revelation, a message, of salvation from God which centers in the cross of Calvary. The crucifixion of Jesus is an historical event with spiritual implications and eternal

consequences. The *“message of the cross,”* the Gospel, relates the significance of the event to the men and women unto whom it is preached. The message involves more than the mere facts of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The *“message of the cross”* answers more than the questions who, what, when, where and how. It answers the all important question—WHY?

Man Is a Guilty Sinner

The problem of sin is universal. All men are guilty (Romans 3:23).

Furthermore, the fault lies with man; he is to blame. His sin does not result from the transmission of depravity through generation (Romans 7:9; Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Deuteronomy 24:16; II Kings 14:6). Neither is it because of inability due to an inherent imperfection in man when compared to the perfect standard of God’s righteousness (Ephesians 5:17; 3:1-4; I Corinthians 15:34; I John 2:1). Rather, man is a sinner by the choice of his will (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:9-18; Genesis 3:1-7; I Corinthians 10:13).

The Father sent His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross because of the wicked rebellion of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

God Is Just

It is the righteous character of God that required the death of Jesus as a propitiation for humanity’s sins (Romans 3:24-26).

The great dilemma caused by our transgression is this, “How can a just God be merciful and pass by our sins?”

It is the death of Jesus which provides the solution (I John 1:7; 2:2; I Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Corinthians 1:30-31; Romans 5:18-19). His death on the cross satisfies God justice and assuages His wrath against sinners rendering the objects of His anger acceptable to Him (Colossians 1:20-21; Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:13-16; I Timothy 2:4-6; Hebrews 9:28; Matthew 20:28; Titus 2:14).

Men have a hard time accepting this unspeakable gift. They marvel at it, and many reject it knowing that it is more than they would do. However, we must come to know God as a God of holiness, righteousness and justice. These attributes cannot wink at sin forever. There must be atonement for sin (Hebrews 9:22).

The Cross Invites All

In the cross we see the means by which all of us may be saved. The death of Jesus is universally offered to mankind (Titus 2:11; I Timothy 2:4-6; John 3:16; Revelation 22:17). Election is not limited to a few, but to all who believe in Jesus (Ephesians 1:3-10; John 3:16; Acts 17:30-31; II Peter 3:9; I John 2:2). This universal offer of salvation is made through the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47; Romans 1:16-17).

The Love of God

God loved each one of us before anyone of us existed (Ephesians 1:4; I John 4:19). His love of us was based on nothing lovely or worthy foreseen in anyone of us (Romans 5:8–10). Rather, what God foreknew of us is that we would sin (I Peter 1:20).

I know God loves me because He let Jesus die for me (John 3:16; I John 4:9, 16). Greater love has no man than this, than a man lay down His life for His friends (John 15:13–14; I John 3:16). Jesus has done just that for us (v. 15).

This love of Christ is what draws us to the cross (John 12:32). It is not martyrdom, pity or sympathy that draws me to Him, but the fact that He has loved me since before the foundation of the world.

Man Is Helpless to Save Himself

If man could do it himself there would have been no need for Jesus to die. Law makes no provision for the forgiveness of sins (Galatians 3:20–22; Romans 8:3; Galatians 3:12–13). Once a man sins, he is without hope on his own. This does not prove that man could not keep God's law--it just proves that he did not keep it.

Once sinners we cannot earn salvation. There is nothing that we can do and nothing we can bring to remit sin (Galatians 3:21; Hebrews 10:1–4). In order to earn it, it is necessary to put God in our debt (Romans 4:2–5; Romans 10:5; Galatians 3:10–12). Absolute sinlessness is the only way to accomplish this. Therefore, we will never have God owing us anything, regardless of how well we may afterward live (Hebrews 7:26; 4:15; 9:24; I Peter 1:19; 2:22; 3:18; II Corinthians 5:21). The reality is that we are always the unprofitable servant (Luke 17:10).

Trust and Obey

One other thing the cross declares is that true faith or trust requires obedience. Jesus said, "I will put My trust in Him" (Hebrews 2:8-13), and, then, He went to Calvary and died (Philippians 2:8). By his obedience, Jesus became the author of eternal salvation to all that obey Him (Hebrews 5:8-10).

Similarly, we trust Christ when we do what He commands (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). He promises to save the penitent believer when he is baptized (I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3-4). A believer is trusting in Christ's death when he is immersed; he is not trusting in the water, not his own obedience, not the preacher (Colossians 2:11-12; Ephesians 5:26; Titus 3:5).

What does it mean to trust someone? It certainly does not exclude obedience, or doing, or use, or cooperation. As a matter of fact, it requires it.

How can one trust in riches without using them (I Timothy 6:17)? How can one trust in armor without using it (Luke 11:22)? How does one trust in the flesh without using it (Philippians 3:4)?

If you were trapped in a multi-story building during a fire and the only way out was to jump through a window into a fireman's net on the ground, would your rescue be any less of grace or trust when you jumped? What would others think of the man who boasted about saving himself from the fire after such a rescue?

If we truly trust Jesus and his death, we will do what He has commanded in order to benefit from that death.

This is the message of the cross.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

• **Prayer List:** James Burke, Floyd Bush and family, Dallas Crabtree, Troy Lake, the Millicans, Paul Ragland; Helen Rushing.

• **Out of Town:** Jim & Lorene Rhiddlehoover are in Dallas and should return this afternoon.

• **Youth Class:** Class will resume the first Sunday after *Labor Day*.

• **Thanks:** We want to thank Matt Dickenson for the excellent report on his recent trip to Jamaica and an excellent sermon. Also, thanks to John Young for taking the class on Wednesday night while Jeff Asher was away in Arkansas.

• **Joined with the Disciples:** Nancilee Kaatz and Lycia Evanoff have asked to be identified as members of this congregation.

• **Congratulations:** Joe & Nell Fomby have a new great grand-daughter

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 33

August 27, 2006

Glorying in the Cross

“As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Galatians 6:12-15).

The Judaizers

Early in the history of the church, a sect arose teaching, with respect to Gentile converts, “it was needful to circumcise them and to command them to keep the Law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). Paul and Barnabas opposed this heresy at Antioch and Jerusalem as being contrary to the Gospel (Acts 15:1-2; Galatians 2:1-2).

These “Judaizers” eventually infiltrated the Galatian churches and subverted many of the members away from “the grace of Christ” to “another gospel” (Galatians 1:6). They “compelled [the Gentile Christians] to be circumcised” (Galatians 2:3). They “withdrew and separated” themselves from uncircumcised Gentiles at mealtime, an act of exclusion (Galatians 2:12; 4:17). They taught the observance of “days, and months, and times, and years” (Galatians 4:10).

Our text above is Paul's last word at this “sect of the Pharisees” in the Galatian letter.

“To Glory” Defined

Let's focus on the statement, “*God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

The word “glory” (kauchaomai) means to “vaunt (in a good or a bad sense), boast, glory, joy, or rejoice” (*Strong's Concordance*). The Bible uses the word in both senses with approval and disapproval accordingly. In the OT men are warned against falsely boasting about one's gifts, powers or accomplishments (Proverbs 25:14; 27:1-2; I Kings 20:11). Boasting is viewed as a serious spiritual fault of the foolish and ungodly man (cf. Psalm 73:3-11) expressing a desire to stand on his own abilities and accomplishments rather than depending upon God (Proverbs 27:1, cf. James 4:13-16; Psalm 10:1-6; etc.).

In the NT self-glorying takes on a new shade of meaning. Now, it refers to actual believers in God that are seeking acceptance from God, but their approach to Him is flawed (Romans 2:17-25). For Paul “glorying” is reliance upon “works of righteousness which we have done” (I Corinthians 1:29; Titus 3:5). It is seeking approval by our own deeds (Romans 3:27-4:5). Paul categorically rejected the idea there was anything of merit in sinners that can be the

ground of justification (Ephesians 2:8-9).

However, in both Testaments there is approved a glorying of men which is in God and His accomplishments of which they are the beneficiaries (Jeremiah 9:23,24; Psalm 34:2; cf. 44:8; 64:10; 105:3; 119:164; Isaiah 62:9; 64:11; I Corinthians 1:27-31; 4:7; II Corinthians 5:12; 9:2; 10:8-18; 11:18, 30; 12:1-9; Romans 5:3; II Thessalonians 1:4-5).

They Glory in the Flesh

To understand Paul's boasting it must be contrasted with that of the Judaizers. Paul says they “*glory in your flesh,*” that is, they rejoice in your conformity to their demand of circumcision (Galatians 6:13; cf. Philippians 3:1-5). Their religious course was determined by a worldly self-interest and party advantage (Galatians 6:12). Their motive was to avoid persecution. The Judaizers sought compromise with the Legalists in Judea in order to avoid suffering for truth.

What made their defection so intolerable was the necessary consequence of their doctrine. In requiring circumcision they became “*debtors to do the whole law*” (Galatians 5:3). However, man cannot atone for his sins by law keeping (Galatians 3:10). He must have a sin offering (3:13). The effect of their doctrine was damnation, “*ye are fallen from grace*” (Galatians 5:4). The

Pharisees were glorying, boasting and trusting, in their own works for acceptance with God rather than in Christ (cf. Isaiah 64:5-6).

Our Glory Is in the Cross

Galatians is designed to reaffirm the Gospel—that one is justified “by the faith of Jesus Christ...and not by the works of the law” (Galatians 2:16). Therefore, Paul gloried in “the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” because it is the means of God’s grace in redeeming sinful mankind (Galatians 6:14).

Throughout the epistle Paul “glories” in the cross—

1:4, “Who gave himself for our sins that He might deliver us...”

1:23-24, “They had heard only, that he which persecuted us...now preacheth the faith which he once destroyed. And they glorified God in me.”

2:20, “The life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

3:13, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law having been made a curse for us...”

4:4-5, “God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law...”

5:1, “Stand fast...in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free...”

6:14, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord...”

For Paul the only ground for glorying concerning our justification is “the cross our Lord Jesus Christ.” Without the cross we are nothing and can do nothing respecting our justification before God.

Do You Have Whereof To Glory?

In this text Paul establishes the criteria for boasting—a *new creature*. The effect of the cross upon the believer is a transformed life. That new life begins with the new birth (John 3:3-5) which is completed in obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3-17). It is in the new birth that we are crucified with and made alive in Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:20). We become children of God by faith (Galatians 3:26-27).

For the *new creature* or *new man* old things are passed away and all is made new (II Corinthians 5:17). Paul expresses this as “the world is crucified unto me” (Galatians 6:14; cf. 5:13). We no longer have any fruit in our former works (Romans 6:21); we are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world (Colossians 2:20).

The believer is “crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20) and is dead to sin in Christ. In the words of that wonderful old hymn, *A New Creature*, we are “dead to the world, to voices that call...living anew, obedient but free; dead to the joys that once did enthrall...yet ‘tis not I, Christ lives in me.” The world and its allurements no longer have dominion over us (Romans 6:7, 14). Being dead with Christ we are raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4, 8); we are “crucified...unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).

Herein lays our exultation and joy. Like Paul, we rejoice in our release from the bondage of sin and thank God that at Calvary Jesus delivered us from the body of this death (Romans 7:24-25).

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

• **Prayer List:** James Burke, Floyd Bush, Dallas Crabtree, Troy Lake, the Millicans, Lori and Bill Pryor, Helen Rushing.

• **Congratulations:** Casey and Earl Fannin are the proud parents of a baby girl Paige Lynn born Wednesday August 23, 2006. Baby, mother, father and grandparents (Richard and Vickie Singletary) are all doing well.

• **Tests:** Lori Pryor will have a stress test this week.

• **Out of Town:** The Henrys are in Many, LA. Kerry is preaching. Wally Little is traveling with Ernesto Canon and Bot Hayuhay.

• **Gospel Meeting:** Tim Coffey is in a meeting at the Loop Church of Christ in Lufkin, TX starting today through Friday.

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 34

September 3, 2006

Even the Death of the Cross

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:5–8)

Paul writes concerning the humility of heart necessary to maintain the unity essential to the accomplishment of God’s purpose in the Philippian church (2:12-16). The example Paul gives them for emulation is that of the Christ (2:5-8). If each member of the local church had the concern that Jesus had for others above Himself, there would be no dissension in the church and the gospel would be preached to the whole world.

The Last Half of Verse Eight Examined

Paul sees a unique significance in the death of Christ. He writes, *“Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”* The significance is not just that He died. Paul found the significance in how he died, *“even the death of the cross.”*

“Even” is an adjective used in this sentence much like an intensifying adverb (it is, as one grammar teacher told me, a “poking” word). Paul does not develop the significance which he

sees. His point is something else, humility of heart. However, this “death of the cross” is expressive of this essential humility. He does not tell us how it is expressive of this humility because he is writing to an audience which understood the point without its being developed further.

The Death of the Cross Explored

The Death of the Cross Was Divinely Determined. Jesus did not die by mistake or accident (Acts 2:22, 23). It was predestined (Ephesians 1:3-7) and foreordained (I Peter 1:18-20). God’s plan from before the foundation of the world was that Jesus should die in order to save man (Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 21:27).

God gradually revealed this plan through His prophets (Acts 13:27, 29). The Lord knew what was determined for Him how that He should die, and He taught men so (John 2:19, 21; Matthew 12:39, 40; 16:4, 21; 17:22-23; 26:2). He knew and expected all of these things to be fulfilled in Himself (Luke 24:25-27; 44-46).

The death of Jesus on the cross established His divinity: He fulfilled every prophecy concerning the death of the Messiah; therefore, the method of His death is one more proof of His claims to be the Son of God. When joined to His resurrection from the dead, it is formidable proof of His divinity.

The Death of the Cross Was a Cruel Death. Jesus had been living in anticipation of it (Matthew 26:2). He went to the garden in fear of it praying to avoid it (Matthew 14:34-41; Hebrews 5:7; Luke 22:44). He was arrested around midnight and kept awake all night (Luke 22:47), taken by a mob to the priests and abused (Matthew 26:67, 68), then finally to Pilate in the early morning (Luke 23:1-5). Pilate sent Him to Herod and He was abused even more (Luke 23:6-11). Finally, He is returned to Pilate where He is mocked, scourged and further abused by the crowd (Mark 15:16-20). At last He is lead out to be crucified (John 19:14, 17; Matthew 27:32) so weak he is unable to bear the cross. Around 9:00 a.m. (Mark 15:25) Jesus is crucified at Calvary where He hangs until after 3:00 p.m. (Mark 15:34). In the intervening nine hours Jesus is railed against by the Roman soldiers, Jews and even the thieves crucified with Him (Mark 15:29-32).

Crucifixion is an exceedingly cruel method of execution. It is intended to be a slow, painful and merciless method of execution—in every sense it is “cruel and unusual” punishment. Crucifixion is death by suffocation caused by the precise placement of the arms and legs suspended on the cross in such a way as to make respiration exceedingly difficult. The scourging prior to crucifixion

weakens the victim and intensifies his suffering by the necessity of raising and lowering the torso across the rough hewn surface of the upright. Eventually, fatigue, dehydration and shock make it impossible to continue moving in order to breath and the victim perishes, drowning in his own body fluids.

It is in this scene of suffering wherein the "pathos of the cross" is found. It is intended to touch the heart, and it does. However, we must take care not to make our appeal only to the emotions. The method of Jesus' death says more about the men who did it, than it does about him who died from it (Acts 2:43; 3:13, 14; 5:28; 7:52; 10:39).

The Death of the Cross Was a Cursed Death. Crucifixion is the form of execution under Roman law reserved to those condemned for murder, theft and insurrection (Matthew 27:44; John 18:40; Luke 23:19). Jesus was crucified among thieves (Mark 14:27). Jesus was crucified rather than Barabbas the rebel (Mark 15:7; John 18:40). Jesus was delivered to Pilate because He was a king other than Caesar (Luke 23:3 John 19:12-19).

The Jews regarded crucifixion as the penalty due to those who were cursed of God—they were worthy of condemnation (Galatians 3:13; Deuteronomy 21:23). Therefore, it was a death fitting for a blasphemer (Luke 23:70, 71; Mark 14:61-61; Matthew 26:63-66).

The Death of the Cross Was a Forsaken Death. Jesus came to His own and they received Him not (John 1:11; Isaiah 53:3). Neither the nation (cf. Matthew 21:9; 26:2; 27:25) nor His family (John 7:5; Mark 6:3; John 19:26) believed on Him. In the end His disciples forsook Him (Matthew 26:56).

Jesus was even forsaken of the Father (Matthew 27:45-46; Psalm 22:1) in His death. Not that Jesus was made a sinner for us (cf. Galatians 2:17; II Corinthians 5:21). Rather, that God allowed Him to die in our stead (I Peter 2:22, 24). It was not that God "could not look on a sinner," but that God was able to save Him and did not for our sakes (Hebrews 5:7).

The Death of the Cross Was an Atoning Death. The death of Jesus is the atonement for sin (Isaiah 53). God is satisfied, appeased (Isaiah 53:12) and propitiated (Romans 3:21-26) by the sacrifice of His Son at Calvary. Sin is expiated by the death of Jesus (John 1:24), that is, the sinner is redeemed or ransomed (I Peter 1:17-21; Matthew 20:28; Acts 20:28).

The sacrifice of Christ is the resolution of the sin dilemma (Romans 3:26): How can God pass by the sins of mankind and remain both merciful and just?

The problem is illustrated in this parable of the "Just King." An ancient king decreed that whoever was guilty of adultery in his kingdom should lose both of his eyes. To embarrass the king and test his faithfulness to his word, his enemies ensnared the king's son in adultery. When the youth was brought before the king and the witnesses heard, it was undeniable that the crime had been committed. The king was truly pained because he loved his son and did not desire to make him forever blind. But his love for righteousness and the rule of law was even greater and he could not forsake these. Therefore, the king ruled: the Law requires two eyes; I shall take one from my son and one from myself, and the law will be satisfied.

Paul describes God as both just and justifier (Romans 3:26). Not willing to punish mankind as he deserved and unable to sacrifice the righteous requirement of the law (Romans 8:4) God allowed Jesus to die in my place. His soul (life) was "an offering for sin" with which the Father was "satisfied." And so "by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (Romans 5:19; Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 5:8, 8).

Will You Trust in the Death of Jesus?

Believe in the power of Jesus' death (Romans 10:9-10; 3:25). Repent of the sin that necessitated Jesus' death (Acts 3:19-23). Confess your faith in the deity and Lordship which Jesus' death proves (Romans 1:4; 10:9-10). Be baptized in water into Jesus' death for the remission of sins (Romans 6:1-11).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 35

September 10, 2006

The Blood of the Cross

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: 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: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

(Colossians 1:12-20)

The above text is part of Paul's expression of his desires and prayers for the Colossian church (1:3, 9). In verse 12 Paul enters into a lengthy doxology thanking the Father for having translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son (1:12-20). The title for this article comes from a phrase within that doxology.

The term "fulness" refers to the blessings of salvation that the

Godhead has to offer (cf. Colossians 2:9-10; Eph. 1:3, 23; 3:19; John 1:14, 16). Those blessings dwell or reside "in Christ", that is, in the saved relationship made possible by him (cf. Colossians 1:13-14). Paul affirms that this relationship is effected through "the blood of his cross" (1:20).

What Is the Blood of His Cross?

In the Bible blood is the element in which "life" is resident (Genesis 9:3-7; Leviticus 17:10-14; Deuteronomy 12:20-25). Thus, to "shed blood" was to kill a man or an animal (Genesis 9:6; Leviticus 17:3-4).

Blood was given as the element of atonement upon the altar (Leviticus 17:11; 16:5, 15-16, 30) because "the blood of it is for the life thereof...the life of all flesh is the blood thereof..." (17:14); "it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul..." (17:11).

The blood sacrifices of the Old Testament were only representative (typical) of the death of Jesus on the cross (Hebrews 9:9, 22-10:1). This is so because of the inadequacies animal sacrifice with respect to sin. Animal blood could not take away sin (Hebrews 9:9; 10:1-4). However, God used their blood to instruct man that the shedding of blood—the taking of a life—was essential to the remission of sins

(Hebrews 9:22). Thus, the "blood of the cross" is a metonymy of cause for effect respecting the sacrificial death of Jesus (Colossians 1:21-22; cf. Romans 3:25; 5:9-10).

Two Errors

Two erroneous positions are taken with respect to the blood of Christ. Some mistakenly contend that the death of Jesus in its effects is directed strictly toward man. That is, the death of Jesus has no effect upon God. However, it is a propitiation, "something that propitiates; especially a conciliatory offering; to gain, win or secure favor" (cf. Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The death of Jesus satisfies the justice of God (Romans 3:23ff). Others incorrectly view the death of Jesus as a *quid pro quo* ledger book transaction. His righteousness is transferred to us while our sins are transferred to Him. However, this cannot be so. In the first place, it makes Christ a sinner, which He is not (Hebrews 7:25-28). Christ accepted the penalty for our sins, but he did not become a sinner (1 Peter 3:18).

Power in the Blood of His Cross

Great power is attributed to the death of Jesus at Calvary: there is remission of sins (Matthew 26:28); justification (Romans 3:25-26); redemption (Ephesians 1:7; Col.

1:14); forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7; Col. 1:14); reconciliation (Ephesians 2:13; Col. 1:20); sanctification (Heb. 10:29; 13:12), and cleansing (Revelation 7:14).

The death of Jesus also procures for the believer tremendous blessings: spiritual life (John 6:53); salvation (Romans 5:9); membership in the Church (Acts 20:28); guiltlessness (Heb. 9:14); peace (Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 2:14-16); intercession (Hebrews 10:19), and fellowship (1 John 1:7)

How to Reach the Blood of His Cross

It is clear that obedience to the Gospel brings us to the blood of His cross (I Peter 1:2, 22-23; I John 1:6-7; Hebrews 10:26-29). This obedience specifically includes water baptism for the alien sinner. The relation between baptism and the death of Jesus eludes the minds of many. Not because it is difficult to understand, but because so many are prejudiced against baptism or obedience in general.

Baptism is into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3; John 19:34) and for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Matthew 26:28). Sanctification (Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 13:12) and cleansing occur in baptism (Acts 22:16; Revelation 1:5-6). One is baptized because he is seeking a good conscience (I Peter 3:21; Hebrews 10:19-22). In baptism we are saved (I Peter 3:21; Romans 5:9).

This obedience in baptism results in our being added to the church of Christ. It puts us into the church of Christ which is the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18, 24) which He purchased with his own blood (Acts 20:28). Those purchased by the blood are those that are saved (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14), and those that are saved are the church (Eph. 5:23; Acts 2:47).

The blood of His cross is yours today, if you will obey Him who died on the cross.

—Jeff Asher

Wash Your Hands & Live Longer!

Yes, it seems that a study was done recently that concluded those who wash their hands regularly were less likely to contract illness, were less likely to stress their immune system, and therefore were more likely to live longer. Logically, that certainly makes sense, doesn't it? But did we need someone to tell us this? Apparently we are living in a society that is becoming increasingly unconcerned about their health, or unaware of the dangers of unsanitary habits.

Biblical Hand Washing

But did you know the Bible teaches that hand washing will help you live longer? For example, if Aaron and his sons, as priests, did not wash their hands and feet in the bronze laver in front of the tabernacle before entering it, they could die! Ex. 30:19-21.

Leviticus 15 taught ceremonial uncleanness due to bodily discharges that were resolved by the washing of hands. One might suggest that not only was this requirement religious but it might have helped Israel in the matter of spreading fewer germs as well.

Unsolved murders required the elders of the nearest city to the body of the murdered man to go out and offer animal sacrifice and wash their hands declaring their innocence from shedding that man's blood! Deut. 21:1-9.

The Pharisees held a tradition requiring the washing of hands ceremonially to be acceptable to

God, Mk. 7:3. But God did not require this!

But the most important hand washing of all is the putting away of sinful practices by "cleans(ing) your hands, you sinners..." (James 4:8). If it is accompanied by purifying your heart as well, then you shall live eternally in heaven! Now, don't you want to go wash your hands just now? Job 17:9; Isaiah 1:16; 1 Tim. 2:8; 1 Jn. 3:3.

-- Wayne Goff

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** James Burke, Floyd Bush, Dallas Crabtree, Troy Lake, the Millicans, Helen Rushing.
- Tonya Millican will undergo induced labor on September 13.
- **Thanks:** A special thanks to Bot Hayuhay and Ernesto Cañon for their reports on the Philippines and words of exhortation.
- **Out of Town:** Cyndi Asher is in Pine Bluff, AR. The Popes leave this PM for Colorado.

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 36

September 17, 2006

How to Have a Good Day

Have you ever had a bad day? Do you ever have those days when nothing seems to go right? Does it ever feel like the pressures of life pile up some days? If you haven't, you're unlike the rest of us. We all have those days.

We can make our days truly good (1 Peter 3:10–11). If we determine to have a good day—we will. This doesn't mean that we won't have trials and difficulties. There will still be those days when we don't feel so good. There will be times when we are sad and even depressed. We will be sick some days. Things will not always go right or the way we would expect. When we have such days, this does not mean that it is always our fault or that we have sinned. What it does mean is we are alive and facing life. Furthermore, even on those days that are less than perfect, we have some control and the power to make it a "good" day.

Begin the Day with Prayer

First, I strongly urge you to begin each day with prayer. What better way can you think of to start the day off right? Jesus taught that men "ought always to pray" (Luke 18:1). How refreshing it is to spend

some time with God in prayer in the morning.

The reasons for this practice are obvious. We have so much to pray for when we rise to begin a new day. We ought to start by thanking God for a good night's rest and another day in which to glorify Him and be a blessing to others. We should pray for God's protection and care throughout the day. We will need his help in overcoming temptations that we will face. Remember that Jesus taught us to pray: "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13). When we first awaken would be the time to pray about the concerns of the day. Perhaps you have a difficult co-worker or employer and need patience to control frustration and anger. It could be that you need help in accepting constructive criticism. Maybe there is a particular temptation that has been pulling at you. The beginning of the day is the time to ask God's help and strengthen your resolve to resist the Evil One. This is also the time to pray for the needs of others. The Bible says "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). By praying for those whom we know are in need of God's blessing we accomplish at least two things.

First, we intercede on behalf of those who have need and turn heaven's attention in their direction. Peter said, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers" (1 Peter 3:12). Second, we give our day the proper aim and a higher purpose by focusing on others rather than ourselves. The day is always better when we have helped another soul. Start the day well by doing something for another—praying for a brother.

Like David we should pray: "*My voice you shall hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto You, and will look up. For You are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with You...I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy: and in reverencing You will I worship toward Your holy temple. Lead me, O LORD, in Your righteousness because of my enemies; make Your way straight before my face*" (Psalm 5:3-8).

Remember Where You Are Headed

The second ingredient in the Bible's recipe for a good day is the right perspective of life. We need to learn to look at life like Abraham did. When that great man of faith set out for the Promised Land, a journey

which was difficult and perilous, he did so looking “for a city with foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). Abraham was trusting in things that are eternal. He had seen the one true God and put his faith in Him to accomplish what would certainly be a blessing to himself, his family and, ultimately, all of mankind (Acts 7:1-8). Abraham left Ur to meet the challenges of the day, but he was not headed for Canaan—he was headed for heaven. Paul urges all of us to look at life as did Abraham in Hebrews 13:14: *“Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.”*

When we are renewed each day by our faith in a faithful God we can enter the day offering God the praise from a thankful heart. The disciple that has and maintains a countenance filled by the bright prospect of heaven will fill not only his own day with good things, but that of his neighbor as well.

When we awake in the morning we should put on the glasses of faith and view the world through Paul’s statement, *“For here have we no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.”* Then, we will realize that nothing in this world is continuing or abiding. All is temporary. All that really matters is being right with God. Everything else is not all that important. Whether or not I have a fine home, a late model car, the latest fashion or a

sizeable bank account doesn’t matter. Whether or not I have a good education, am popular, have a lot of abilities or am successful in business doesn’t really matter. So what if I have little or no money, fewer talents than others or wear second-hand clothes, it’s not going to ruin my day and bend me out of shape to the point that I behave badly. My Father owns the world and I am a child of the King, I will not shame Him or myself.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

• **Prayer List:** James Burke, Floyd Bush, Dallas Crabtree, Troy Lake, Helen Rushing, Bob & Jay White.

• **Congratulations:** Dalton Millican was born Wednesday September 13 at 2:45 PM. He weighed in at over 8 pounds and was 21 inches long. Dalton, mother, father and “big sister” are all well and very proud of this new addition to the Millican family.

• **Gospel Meetings:** Curtis Pope will be with the ice Road Church of Christ in Tyler, TX September 17-22. Lawrence Kelley will be with the Southside Church of Christ in Mt. Pleasant, TX the same week.

• **Gospel Singing:** The Timberline Drive Church of Christ will conduct their annual fall singing Saturday September 23 at 5:00 PM. R.J. Stevens and several other area song-leaders will conduct the singing.

• **Tuesday Night Study Series:** The White Oak Church of Christ is conducting their fall studies

on Tuesday nights. This year’s theme is the Book of Hebrews. The next class will meet on September 26 and be conducted by Larry Bilbo. The class topic is “Spiritual Immaturity” (Hebrews 5:12-14).

• **Surgery:** Jay White will undergo major surgery in the near future. She has not been feeling well for sometime. Doctors are hopeful for a positive outcome and complete recovery. Jay is asking for the prayers of the saints on her behalf.

• **Youth Class:** We have resumed our Sunday PM youth class and continue the study of the Gospel of John. If you have not been attending now would be a great time to join us. We meet on the front row at 5:15 PM every Sunday except the last one of the month.

• **Singing Class:** Remember next Sunday at 5:00 PM.

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 37

September 24, 2006

How to Have a Good Day (2)

Accept that None Are Perfect

Another essential ingredient in this recipe for a good day is accepting our own imperfections. We must realize that some of us just have fewer or differing abilities than others. This is quite clear from the parable of the talents as recorded in Matthew 25. Not everyone is a five talent man. But, neither is the one talent man necessarily a failure.

None of us know all there is to know. We still have things to learn and improvements to make. Just think how boring life would be, if all were just alike and there was nothing left to learn. Our imperfections and mistakes, if we will let them, can become stepping stones to bigger and greater things. Thomas Edison had the proper outlook on this matter. He tried hundreds of times before achieving success in making a filament for the incandescent light bulb. After another failed attempt, someone asked if he would give up. He responded by saying, "Why? I have just learned another way not to make the light bulb." Trial and error is how we learn. When you begin the day, put your past "failures" in perspective and learn from them.

We not only learn and grow in our jobs and professions; we must also learn and grow as human beings. It is not the setbacks we

face in making a living that ruin our days; it's our mistakes at making a life that hurt us most. We are all prone to mistakes in our relationships as friends, spouses, parents, and children and, even as, Christians. None of us is perfect to the extent that he never makes mistakes—never commits a sin. If we let them, such can look like monumental failures. No man is infallible; we will make mistakes and even sin (I John 1:8). However, some of the greatest men that ever lived rose from the ashes of mourning in sackcloth to achieve greatness on behalf of God.

One such man that comes to mind is Saul of Tarsus. He was a very popular young man in the religious circles of his day. He was well-educated, zealous for his faith and capable of shouldering a lot of responsibility. He was known as one upon whom his superiors and religious elders relied. That hardly sounds like a man that was a failure, or prone to mistakes. However, in reality he was involved in a colossal mistake which resulted in a terrible tragedy where many innocent people lost their lives. You see, Saul was a persecutor of Christians. He consented to the death of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. He led an "Inquisition" against the Jews that believed on Jesus, causing many to be put to death. In this he was self-assured and over confident.

When he learned the truth of his incredible error, he was naturally devastated and overcome with remorse. However, the Lord Jesus would not allow him to be overcome with too much sorrow (II Corinthians 2:5-11). Rather, He assured him of His grace and sent him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. This great persecutor became the Apostle Paul.

Listen to how Paul began his days, and learn about the power of grace in our lives: *"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life"* (1 Timothy 1:12-16).

We must understand that we sin, but those sins need not lead to failure. God is faithful and just to forgive His children of their sins according to I John 1:6-10, *"if we confess our sins."* Once we have been shown our error and turned from it, we must learn not to

dwell upon those past mistakes, but rather look to the future, as did Paul, *"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 3:13-14).

Realize There Will Be Problems

Another important ingredient in our recipe for a good day is the realization that there will be problems. Everyone has problems. Everything is not going to be as I want it. There will be disappointments and changes of plans. There will be those times when things just don't fall in place. Everyone shares in these experiences and disappointments. Our days will be good when we recognize that problems are not out of the ordinary.

Now, I am not saying we ought to begin the day worrying about problems that may arise. Jesus commanded us not to worry, *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"* (Matthew 6:34). But even in this admonition not to worry is the recognition that every day has *"its own trouble."* Jesus warned us that we must be vigilant and ready to meet the challenges of the day. We cannot do that by "borrowing trouble" from tomorrow and being anxious about things which may never happen. But, we must remember as the wise man said *"time and chance happens to all men"* (Ecclesiastes 9:11). When these "expected" unexpected things happen, we must not let the props be knocked out from beneath us allowing bitterness and anger to take control of us.

James reminded us of a great man that endured the trials of life:

"Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (5:11). Job faced problem on top of problem. He lost his family, his health, his wealth, his friends and the loving sympathy of his wife. Yet, *"in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly"* (Job 1:22). In the midst of all his suffering Job continued to have "good days" because his faith in God was steadfast. He could declare with confidence, *"I know that my redeemer liveth"* (Job 19:25). When the trials of life are upon us we must remember that in that storm the Lord will be with us. He has said, *"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee"* (Hebrews 13:5).

The words of Annie Johnson Flint say it well:

God hath not promised skies always blue, flower strewn pathways, all our lives through; God hath not promised sun without rain, joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

But God hath promised strength for the day, Rest for the labour, light for the way, Grace for the trials, help from above, Unfailing kindness, undying love.

God hath not promised we shall not know toil and temptations, trouble and woe; He hath not told us we shall not bear many a burden, many a care.

God hath not promised smooth roads and wide, swift, easy travel, needing no guide; never a mountain, rocky and steep, never a river turbid and deep.

But God hath promised strength for the day, rest for the labour, light for the way, grace for the trials, help from above, unfailing kindness, undying love.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

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• **Thanks:** Gary Box is filling the pulpit today while Jeff Asher is away in a Gospel Meeting in El Dorado, AR. Please express your appreciation and thanks to Gary today.

• **Out of Town:** The Henrys are in South, TX. Jeff Asher is in AR. Ernesto Cañon & Bot Hayuhay are in Memphis, TN and return to the Philippines next week.

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 38

October 1, 2006

How to Have a Good Day (3)

"He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it."

I Peter 3:10-11

These words of Peter instruct us in the basic principles to be observed by every believer in order to insure that we have good days. We are studying specific applications of these principles to daily situations in order to make our lives both pleasing to God and joyful to ourselves. Let's consider another application.

Be Angry & Sin Not

The next thing essential to producing a good day is the ability to control anger. When we are faced with difficulties and disappointments, and we will be, it is easy to let our tempers get out of hand and "fly off the handle." Learning to control anger when assailed by the frustrations of life does not come easy. We must continually work at it. Nevertheless, God requires it (Ephesians 4:26-27).

When we are temperate or cool-headed things go better throughout the day. We will get along with others and avoid making foolish mistakes. Solomon recognized the truth of

this saying: *"He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly; and a man of wicked devices is hated... He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly"* (Proverbs 14:17, 29). When we do not learn to control anger, we are more and more likely to compound our troubles by making avoidable mistakes and rash decisions. We all have had the sad experience of having done something in anger only to regret it later.

Anger Is a Weakness

Because we do not control anger we give an advantage to those who would abuse us and profit by our mistakes (Proverbs 16:29). Solomon observed that *"he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city... He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls"* (Proverbs 16:32; 25:28). Solomon also said, *"Anger rests in the bosom of fools"* (Ecclesiastes 7:9). Uncontrolled anger causes us to alienate people who would otherwise want to be our friends and help us in our troubles. Anger is foolish because it gets us into trouble and often leaves us there alone and helpless. We should know, as did the wise man, that *"a stone is heavy, and*

sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both; wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous" (Proverbs 27:3-4). Men will not suffer a fool or an angry man.

Anger can take over one's life (Proverbs 15:18). When this happens the prospects for joyful living are nearly destroyed. Therefore, we must learn to bring anger under control. The first step is to recognize that anger is contrary to God's will and way. The Apostle James wrote, *"The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God"* (James 1:20). Harboring anger and resentment in the heart is a sin. Those who indulge their anger are in danger of losing their own souls. Jesus said, *"Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment"* (Matthew 5:22). Now, I know that most of us think that our anger is justifiable, but really think about this a moment. Do the little mistakes and foibles of folks we encounter really justify the rage we often express? Think of all the swearing, yelling, gesturing and even physical abuse that we are heaping on each other daily. We are not resolving our conflicts and overcoming our frustrations and the result is a world filled with rage.

Therefore, we must resolve our conflicts with others. Jesus said, *"Be reconciled to your brother"* (Matthew 5:24). If we know that we are at fault we need to go and make it right. If we have been wronged we must encourage the other to make it right (Matthew 18:15). While we may not get a satisfactory resolution we can be satisfied that we have tried to live in peace while finding peace. How do we find the wisdom and courage to do this? We will find it in remembering the example of Jesus Christ. The Lord was willing to forgive even those who crucified Him at Calvary. Remember how He prayed, *"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."* We must seek forgiveness and forgive—*"let all...anger...be put away from you...forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you"* (Ephesians 4:31–32). When this is difficult; and it often is, we must remember that we are forgiven of God, and it is the merciful that obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7; 6:14–15; James 2:13). How can we remain angry while claiming to serve a forgiving God?

How to Overcome Anger

We will also come closer to success in overcoming anger when we avoid the people and situations that promote anger. Solomon urged us to not make friends with an angry man and observed that *"the beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with"* (Proverbs 17:14; 22:24). We know that there are some people and things that just frustrate and provoke everyone of us. The wise man will give

these a wide berth. Many of us are frustrated by our jobs. We need to seriously analyze what it is that is making us angry and get help. Some of these problems could be improved or eliminated with better communication, organization or training. We must not let pride get in our way and cause us to continue in wrath and anger (Proverbs 21:24). Because we have frustration on the job that we do not overcome, we often bring our anger home and inflict it on the family. I am reminded of the man who was having a bad day at the office. His boss chewed him out pretty good. He in turn fussed at his subordinates in the office. One of these workers went home and nagged the wife for not having dinner ready, and she in turn being angry at her husband scolded little Suzy for not picking up her toys. Suzy then ran out in the yard and kicked Buster the cat. You tell me, who kicked Buster?

Ultimately, we must learn to just let some things go and pass as not worth the cost of being angry. The Lord said, *"Avenge not yourselves give place unto wrath"* (Romans 12:19). Solomon said, *"The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression"* (Proverbs 19:11). If we would just take a moment to evaluate the real worth of the thing about which we are angered I am persuaded most of these things would never get a second thought. Remember, *"He that is slow to anger is better than t he mighty."*

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

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• **Tuesday Night Study Series:** The White Oak Church of Christ is conducting their fall studies on Tuesday nights. This year's theme is the Book of Hebrews. The next class will meet on October 10 and be conducted by Jack Holt. The class topic is "The Old & New Covenants" (Hebrews 8 & 9). Sessions begin at 7:30 PM.

• **Youth Class:** We have resumed our Sunday PM youth class and continue the study of the Gospel of John. If you have not been attending now would be a great time to join us. We meet on the front row at 5:15 PM every Sunday except the last one of the month.

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 39

October 8, 2006

How to Have a Good Day (4)

The Apostle Peter has given us some guidelines for achieving the goal of not just one good day, but a lifetime filled with good days. He said, *"He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it"* (I Peter 3:10-11). We have been studying specific applications of the principles outline in this text to daily situations which we all encounter in order to make our lives both pleasing to God and joyful to ourselves. Let's consider a few more.

Exercise Patience

An essential habit we must acquire if we are to be assured of having "good days" is the spiritual quality of patience or endurance (II Peter 1:5-10). I am talking about the ability to bear up under our problems and trials without complaint.

The children of Israel serve as a negative example of patience—they were murmurers and complainers the whole time they were in the wilderness. They complained about the water, they complained about the food, they complained about the leadership of Moses, they complained concerning the difficulties and hardships of the

journey. These foolish and selfish people did not comprehend that God had brought them into the wilderness for their own good in order to strengthen and equip them for the conquest of Canaan. I suppose God could have taken them directly into the land and miraculously slaughtered all their enemies without their having to do one single thing. Yet, you and I both know that rewards undeserved are rewards unappreciated.

I remember as a boy there were chores that my Dad would have us do around the place: yard work, picking up and hauling off. These chores would at times interfere with our sports and fun. As we got older we were expected to get a part time job and take responsibility for the fuel in the cars we drove, for our recreation and even some of our living expenses. Sometimes we would chaff under this responsibility and complain. When we did, he would just say, "I know, but we're building character." As I look back, those responsibilities and tasks were not that hard, but they prepared me for bigger and harder tasks in the future. There are many things in life I could not have accomplished had I not, as the prophet says, borne the yoke in my youth (Lamentations 3:27).

The point is, if we are going to have good days we must endure the hardships that come along with a spirit of determination and confidence. The child of God should possess this spirit regardless what the difficulty might be. In our trials we are encouraged by this promise: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"* (I Corinthians 10:13). The God of heaven assures the faithful disciple that wherever He leads us, even though the way is dark and the road difficult, we will pass through triumphant. Therefore, rather than murmur and complain we ought to pray and praise and at the end shout with the satisfaction of victory.

Be Anxious for Nothing

Another thing essential to a lifetime of good days involves ridding our lives of worry. Jesus said, *"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"* (Matthew 6:31). Too many folks spoil happiness by worrying about things that don't really matter, or things that cannot be helped or

changed, and about things that never happen. As one preacher observed, "Most folks I know crucify themselves between two thieves—the thieves of time—yesterday and tomorrow." They worry about what did happen; what could have happened and what might happen. And, being consumed with worry, they let today—the only day they have any power over—go to pot!

Worry doesn't do one bit of good. Jesus said that a man cannot add one cubit to his stature by worrying about it (Matthew 6:27). If you can do something about the matter, do it and quit worrying. If not, what will worrying about it accomplish? We must learn to cast our cares upon God (1 Peter 5:7). We do not know what tomorrow holds, but we know Who holds tomorrow! God knows what our needs are and He has assured us He will provide. What we need to do is learn to work like everything depends on us and pray like everything depends on God. Paul said, "*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:6–7). When we are doing all we can do and trusting God to do all He will do, we ought to be confident in the face of whatever life has to offer. We serve a God that knows our needs before we ask (Matthew 6:8) and that is capable of giving far beyond what we are able to ask (Ephesians 3:20). That being the case we know that whatever comes our way can be met,

overcome and ordered for our good and His glory.

As I have suggested, the secret to a worry free life is learning to live in what have been called "day tight compartments," in other words, living one day at a time. There is no difficulty, no problem and no circumstance that cannot be handled one day at a time. There is no bad habit we must overcome or temptation to sin that we must resist that we cannot do it one day at a time. Yes, we must learn to live in the present. As Paul expressed it, "*forgetting those things which are behind...I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 3:13–14). Paul did not dwell on the failures and mistakes of the past and he did not fret over the uncertainties of the future—he pressed forward. Paul lived in the present.

I know that there are misfortunes, tragedies and failures in all our lives that we will never completely forget. However, we do not have to be consumed by these things. David made about as horrible a blunder as any man could make. He committed adultery and murdered the woman's husband in order to keep her. Ultimately, David was smitten in conscience and repented. In his remorse he wrote the 51st Psalm declaring, "*My sin is ever before me.*" In these words he does not confess that he continually dwelled on his sin and being consumed by them was unable to find any joy in living. Quite the contrary, David trusting in God's grace and mercy declared: "*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold*

me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness."

The memory of his sins was a motivation for David to find the real joy of life—service to God in righteousness. He had been in the grip of sin and experienced the sorrow and grief of rebellion against God. His sin was "*ever before*" him as a signpost pointing out the way to real happiness and satisfaction in living. David would forever dedicate himself to telling others what God had done for him and how He would do the same for them.

We can have joyful days all of our lifetime if we will learn to endure trials and stop worrying.

—Jeff Asher

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Preacher

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 40

October 15, 2006

The Last Words of Jesus (1)

During His personal ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ chose many varied and picturesque places from which He did His preaching and teaching. For example, while traveling through Jericho, He chose one of its crowded streets as His pulpit. On another occasion, while near the shore of the Galilean Sea, the people pressed upon Him to such an extent that it became necessary for Him to step into Peter's boat, shove out into the sea, and teach the people from the bow of that craft. The greatest lesson which ever fell from the lips of any man is recorded in Matthew chapters five, six, and seven. It is often referred to as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus' pulpit on that occasion was a ledge on the side of a mountain. Our Lord, while in Samaria, taught an unnamed woman near the Jacob's well. He did most of His preaching and teaching at Jerusalem in the temple near the gate called Beautiful. The last sermon which Jesus presented was from a pulpit which men will always remember—the pulpit of the cross—an unlovely thing made of two rough cut and un-hewn pieces of wood bound together with cords or spiked together with Roman steel.

While on the cross, the Son of Mary uttered seven statements. He had something to say.

It is significant that in the four thousand years of recorded Jewish history, the dying words of only three men are recorded. They are Jacob, Moses, and Stephen. Jacob was the first Israelite, Moses the first lawgiver, and Stephen the first Christian martyr. Jesus was more than Jacob, more than Moses, and more than Stephen. He was more than all three of those men combined. He was the personal representative of all humanity; therefore, it is fitting and appropriate that His dying words are recorded for us in the Bible.

His words, unlike the words of other dying men, never died. The words spoken by the Lord from the cross had a part in turning the first century world upside down. Thanks be to the good providence of God, we have those words recorded in the Bible for our mutual edification and benefit.

In this article we will begin to consider the seven statements spoken by Jesus from the cross. There was never a pulpit like the pulpit of the cross. There was never an audience like that assembled at Calvary. There was never a preacher like the dying Christ.

"Father, Forgive"

The first statement from the cross was spoken to Jesus' enemies. The second was spoken to a sinner, and the third was spoken to a

saint. It is a fact of human psychology, which none can successfully deny, that when a man is at the point of death, he wants to speak to those who are near and dear to him. It is significant to me that Christ spoke first to His enemies. The hypocritical Scribes and Pharisees in the audience expected Him to say something. Men always spoke when dying by crucifixion. Sometimes a man dying on a cross would curse his executioners, curse those who were witnessing his death, curse mother and father, curse the day he was born and spit upon any near him. Occasionally, one dying by crucifixion became so vituperative that his executioners pulled his tongue out and cut it off at the roots.

All those present expected Jesus to say something. The hypocrites who had a part in putting Him to death probably thought, "He said, 'Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. If a man smite you upon one cheek, turn the other. If a man take away your coat, give him your cloak also. If you are compelled to go with a soldier one mile, be willing to go with him two.' But He will forget all of that nonsense now. Don't you know He will denounce us? Don't

you know He will have some hard things to say now?"

Yet, when Jesus spoke, He spoke words of mercy. He said, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." Forgive whom? Forgive the Jews who clamored for my blood. Forgive Herod who robbed Me in the garment of a fool. Forgive Pontius Pilate who denied God in the flesh to maintain popularity with the people. Forgive those who smote Me on the face in the palace of Caiaphas. Forgive the soldiers who suspended Me on the cross. Why? "They know not what they do."

When was that prayer answered? It was not answered while Jesus was on the cross. It was not answered during the three days He was in the tomb. It was not answered during the forty days He sojourned with His apostles after His resurrection. It was not answered during the ten day period after His ascension and before Pentecost day. If you will look in Acts 2, you will find it answered. The apostle Peter, on the great Pentecost day, stood before a vast audience of people and said, "Ye men of Israel hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." Some fifty days before, many of those hearing Peter had said of the Son of God, "Crucify him, crucify him! Let his blood be on our heads and the heads of our children." But, when they

realized they had put to death the promised Messiah for whom they had been looking over a thousand years, when they understood they had killed the innocent and spotless Son of God, they came like broken hearted lambs and said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" It was then that Peter said unto them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

This is one of the most powerful passages in all of God's word. I have been preaching since 1978. Yet, I have never been interrupted by one wanting to know what to do to be saved. However, the first time the gospel was preached as an accomplished fact, the preacher was unable to finish his sermon. They stopped him with "What are we going to do?" In response to their inquiring cry he said, "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins." That is as powerful as anything in all of God's word. The Scripture says that three thousand of them gladly received the word and were baptized. That is when the Lord's prayer was answered. He prayed, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." Fifty days later three thousand of them surrendered their wills to the will of Christ and were baptized. Then, they received forgiveness.

He Prayed for Us Also

You and I had a part in the crucifixion of Jesus. We are as responsible for the death of Christ as were those Jews who cried out against Him and the Roman soldiers that drove the nails into His hands because He died for our sins. They were sinners, I am a sinner and you are a sinner. Jesus died for us all—He died for sinners. Friend, when Jesus was

praying that God forgive, He was praying for you and me, as well as those enemies of His that stood around the cross wagging their heads and casting insults into His teeth. Now, if those who actually betrayed and conspired against Him, and those who actually drove the nails into His hands were forgiven all their trespasses, you and I may be forgiven. The question is: when did God answer Jesus prayer? He answered it on Pentecost. Those who had crucified and slain Jesus were forgiven when they repented and were baptized. They asked: "What shall we do?" Peter answered: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." That's the answer. What must we do? We must repent of our sins and be baptized as well. Friend, will you obey Jesus today?

—Jeff Asher

Northside Church of Christ

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James Burke (903) 889-3318
Kerry Henry (903) 836-4438
Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 41

October 22, 2006

The Last Words of Jesus (2)

We are considering the last seven sayings spoken by our Lord Jesus from the cross. These are some of the most powerful and precious words the Master ever uttered. They are words of comfort and compassion; they are words of eternal consequence and saving grace. Please consider carefully this next saying uttered by Jesus at Calvary.

"With Me in Paradise"

After having spoken to His enemies, Jesus turns and speaks to one of the two thieves crucified with Him that awful day. A tradition grew up in the early church concerning the two thieves crucified with Christ. According to the legend, when Jesus, Mary and Joseph were returning from Egypt, they traveled a dark road past a robber's camp one night. Two of the thieves awakened. One said, "Let's wake the others, so we can rob this party." The other said, "No, allow them to pass in safety." An argument followed. Finally, the one pleading for their safety said, "I will give you money, if you will leave them alone. After all it's just a man, his wife and boy." The transaction was made and the argument ended. They went back to sleep. The legend concluded that when Jesus died,

the robber who had pleaded for Him was crucified at His right hand, and the one who wanted to rob the Master's family was crucified at His left hand. We have no way of knowing who these two thieves were, and it is very doubtful that this story has any basis in fact. However, there can be no doubting that the thief crucified on the right hand new Jesus before the day was over!

While Jesus was on the cross, He was abused. People standing at the foot of the cross mocked Him saying, "If thou be the Son of God, why don't you come down from the cross? You said you could destroy the temple and build it again in three days, why don't you save yourself? You saved others, but yourself you cannot save." The thieves railed against Him, too. However, one of the thieves had a change of heart. He turned to the other robber and said, "You and I suffer justly for deeds we have done, but this man has done no wrong." Then, he turned to the Master and begged, "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." I wouldn't have been surprised had that been Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead, or had it been the widow of Nain whose son

Jesus had raised, or had it been Bartimaeus whose sight Christ had restored, or had it been Peter whom Jesus had saved from drowning in the Galilean Sea. But the only individual on that occasion who had the intestinal fortitude to own him as King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Captain of Salvation and Savior of the soul was a thief! As the end drew nearer for Jesus His silence deepened. He said almost nothing to Pontius Pilate. He did not open His mouth when brought before Herod Antipas. He made no attempt to reply to those who abused Him, but when the thief spoke, the silence was broken. The Son of God turned to him and said, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Was the Thief Saved?

I have heard people argue whether the thief was saved or not. Ladies and gentlemen, I believe with all my heart that he was saved because Jesus said both He and the thief would be in Paradise that very day.

What is the meaning of this word *Paradise*? It originated with the Persians, and it literally means a beautiful garden. According to this, Jesus said to the robber, "Today you are going with me into a beautiful garden." Obviously this is a

euphemism for the comfort the righteous receive in death.

The Bible teaches that when people die, whether righteous or wicked, they go to *Hades* which means “unseen.” It is not to be confused with *Gehenna* which is properly translated as *Hell*. *Hades*, fortunately, is divided into two regions or conditions. On the one hand, there is the waiting place for the righteous dead; on the other hand, there is the waiting place for the wicked dead. If I correctly understand the scripture, Jesus was telling the thief that he was going with Him to the waiting place for the righteous dead. They were going to Paradise together.

In Luke chapter sixteen we read about the death of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man lifted up his eyes being tormented in the flames of *Hades*. He was on the side of *Hades* reserved for the wicked. Lazarus was comforted in Abraham’s bosom. He was in the Paradise part of *Hades*. This is where Jesus and the thief went that day (Acts 2:27, 31). Surely the thief was saved!

Saved Like the Thief?

Someone raises the question, “Can I be saved like the thief?” Well, do you want to be on a cross, turn to the Lord and beg for mercy? “That isn’t what you meant? What you meant was “Can I be saved without being baptized?”

In the first place, one cannot prove that the thief was or was not baptized. There is more evidence in favor of his having been baptized than there is for his having not been baptized. Matthew 3:5–6 states that all of

those in Jerusalem and Judea went out to be baptized by John in the river Jordan. The thief may have been one of those baptized by John. If I were to risk my salvation on it I would be certain I could prove it.

However, I am willing to grant that he was not because that isn’t the real issue. In Hebrews 9:16–17 the scripture says: “For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” When a man makes a will, the will doesn’t go into force until after he dies and the will is published. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not make the new covenant binding until it was preached on Pentecost fifty days after his death. First, He had to die to seal the New Covenant with His own precious blood. Then, His Will must be declared publicly. This thief lived and died before Jesus every required any to be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:26-41). However, you and I live since the Gospel has been fully revealed.

In order to demonstrate this point let me use an illustration that is readily understandable. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln never paid income taxes. Now, suppose I wrote the IRS the following letter:

Dear IRS:

Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, and Lincoln never paid the income tax. Since they did

not have to pay it, I’m not going to pay it either.”

Do you think I would get by with it? Well, of course not. Those men lived before the income tax became the law of the land. You and I have to pay the income tax because the US Constitution has been amended since their time. If we can understand that, we can understand the question of baptism. The thief lived and died before baptism was required. But, under the New Covenant, Jesus says we are to believe and be baptized in order to be saved (Mark 16:16).

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

• **Prayer List:** James Burke, Floyd Bush, Dallas Crabtree, Wilma Crabtree, Troy Lake, Helen Rushing, Jay White.

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Kerry Henry (903) 836-4438
Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 42

October 29, 2006

The Last Words of Jesus (3)

We are considering the dieing words of our Lord Jesus. Never were such wonderful things spoken so eloquently from such a pulpit as the cross of Golgotha. Please consider carefully this next saying uttered by Jesus as he hanged between heaven and earth for the sins of the world.

"Behold Thy Son"

The third saying was spoken by Jesus to His mother, Mary, the wife of Joseph. It was probably uttered about noon. The crowd had dwindled away; the shouting had ceased, but the soldiers were still there sweltering in the noon day heat. Likely, the centurion in charge of the affair was sitting on his horse as motionless as a statue. Mary was still there. I know some people venerate and adore Mary, but I don't subscribe to such a view; however, Mary was one of the best women who ever lived. She was blessed among women. We need to preach about her; we need to respect her memory. When Jesus suffered and died on the cross, He died as her Savior as well as yours and mine. But the flesh that hung on the tree had been in her womb. That was her son. She couldn't wipe His feverish brow with a damp cloth, and she couldn't give Him a drink to cool His parched lips and burning tongue. All she could do was watch Him die. She saw blood, sweat, and tears stream down His face. She watched

warm blood pulsate through His wounds every time His great heart beat.

A lot of things must have flooded Mary's mind as she witnessed the crucifixion. She probably remembered His birth in Bethlehem's stable and fleeing into Egypt when He was a baby. She probably recalled the popularity which was His for a season and the events which attended His death. I am certain the words of Simeon were in her thoughts. When Jesus was taken into the temple, Simeon told Mary that because of Him a sword would pierce her soul. That sword pierced her soul the day Jesus died. Our Lord spoke to His mother. He said, 'Woman, behold thy son.' The first time I read that, I read it carelessly and had the idea He was saying, 'Mary, look at me. I am dying on a cross; I am fulfilling the mission for which I came into the world.' But of course, that isn't what He meant. 'Woman, behold thy son.' In other words, from this day forward John is to be considered as your son. Then, He said to John, 'Behold, thy mother.' From that day Mary stayed in the house of John. Jesus was speaking as a son; He was committing the care of His mother to one of His disciples. He had brothers in the flesh, half-brothers, but He did not commit the care of that holy woman to

them. Do you wonder why? They were unbelievers; that's why. When my children were young, my wife made a provision in our will for their guardianship should we be killed. While both of us had siblings that were able and would have been willing to care for our girls, we chose rather to have them reared by godly Christians. We felt it was more important to have them brought up Christians who would encourage their faith than by relatives who were not believers. Someone might say, 'I thought blood was thicker than water.' It may be thicker than water, but it is not thicker than the ties that bind us in Christ.

I want to say a word about our responsibility to our parents. Jesus felt the responsibility and made arrangements for his mother Mary's care. I am afraid some of us think the primary responsibility for the care of our parents belongs to the federal government, a state agency or some nursing facility five hundred miles away. If an older person needs and wants to go to a skilled nursing home that is well and good. But trying to shove an elderly parent off on somebody else is sinful. The Bible still says if a man doesn't provide for his own house, he is worse than an infidel, having denied the faith. There is not a church in this vicinity that would fellowship an

infidel. Yet, we will fellowship those who have shirked their responsibility to their mothers and fathers. Some no good children hit the ceiling if they have to spend a few hundred dollars a month to help care for their own parents. Ungrateful offspring argue among themselves concerning who will provide for an aged mother or father. A Christian lady who was past seventy had a telephone in her home. That was the only communication she had with the outside world. Her children, some of them members of the Church, had an argument among themselves about who was to pay the telephone bill. Guess what happened. She lost the telephone. Listen, it is our duty to care for our aged parents. If they want to go to a home for the aged, that's all right, but they shouldn't be shoved into one. Jesus saw that His mother was provided for. He committed her care to one of His disciples.

What is most striking in this moment is that Jesus, surely enduring the most unimaginable pain, is able to take His mind off of Himself and His needs and wants in order to think about His mother and her needs. So often when we are squabbling with our family over who will take care of a parent, what we are actually doing is being selfish. We are fighting to get what we want in time, or money or convenience. I hope when the time comes we will remember who diapered and bathed and fed us when we were helpless infants, who it was that sat up with us when we were sick, clothed us when we were just helpless children, who it was that worked long hours and sacrificed personal pleasures so we could be educated, who prayed for us when we were in trouble or had crisis, or were facing the threat of

death, who it was that sat at our bedside and read to us from the Bible and listened to our prayers so we could become men and women of faith and courage. Jesus hanging on the cross and suffering terribly still remembered his widowed mother.

—Jeff Asher

What Can Older Saints Do?

The current Bulletin of the American Association of Retired Persons has a review of a new book entitled, "The Longevity Factor: the New Reality of Long Careers and How It Can Lead to Richer Lives." The author concluded that people can "remain creative and productive at older ages."

Louis Harris, founder of the public opinion research firm that bears his name, retired after 36 years and then started a new company. At the age of 74 he manages this new company. Celeste Holm continues as an actress at age 73, Norman Cousins became a faculty member of the medical school of the University of California when 64 years old, and financier John Loeb, at 92, is still active.

The apostle Paul wrote the books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, "being such a one as Paul the aged," (Philemon 9). At an even later date he wrote II Timothy. We do not know when we will die or lose our ability to think, but we do know that we are to be "faithful unto death," (Revelation 2:10.) There is to be no retirement from spiritual service!

Older Saints can: (1) Serve as encouragers to the young by commending the young who do well; (2) visit, call, or write to those who are sick or who have missed an assembly; (3) open their houses for Bible classes and places of recreation for young and old, and (4) aged men can be sober-minded, sound in faith; aged women can be teachers of that which is good, train the young women to love their husbands, to love their children and to be workers at home (Titus 2:1-5).

—Lynn D. Headrick

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** James Burke, Floyd Bush, Dallas Crabtree, Wilma Crabtree, Troy Lake, Helen Rushing, Travis Wall, Jay White.
- **Youth Class:** We do not meet on the fifth Sunday of the month.

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Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 43

November 5, 2006

The Last Words of Jesus (4)

We have been considering the last seven sayings spoken by our Lord Jesus from the cross. Never were such words of hope and deliverance spoken from so elegant a pulpit as these words spoken by Jesus as He was suspended between heaven and earth with men and angels watching. Friend and foe were gathered there as our Lord revealed much about Himself, about mankind, about redemption and eternity. Please consider this fourth saying of Jesus from the cross.

“Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?”

The fourth saying was probably uttered about three o'clock in the afternoon or at what was called “the ninth hour” in the Jewish system of timekeeping. Darkness covered the face of the earth from noon until 3:00 p.m. It was a supernatural and universal darkness that befell the globe and shrouded mankind as his sins had already done.

On April 19, 1995 the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed by domestic terrorists and 168 men, women and children were mercilessly murdered, but the sun shone in all of its power and force. At the time it was the largest terror attack in the history of the United States. We were living in Amarillo, Texas at the

time and the blast was felt 250 miles away. I wept as I watched the images on the television. Not six years later two jumbo jet aircraft were hijacked and forcibly crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City. Nearly three thousand were murdered in that hateful attack. I wept in horror as I watched the towers crumble like “a house of cards” to the ground. The carnage and destruction were overwhelming. Our entire nation was stunned beyond belief. But the following day the sun was shining in all of its brilliance and glory.

Undeniably, these were two of the darkest, cruelest days ever known to man, certainly for any American, but, the sun was still shining. Yet, the day that Christ died, the sun hid its face in shame. Nature itself was touched by the awfulness of that crime. How did the hypocrites feel when the sun went down at high noon? Perhaps they said, “Maybe He was the Son of God. Maybe we have made a mistake. Maybe He was what He claimed to be.”

In that darkness Jesus uttered this pathetic cry, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” These Hebrew words mean, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” There is a lot of confusion about what Jesus meant by these words. Some have the idea that the Father transferred the sins of mankind to Jesus by which He

actually became a sinner; thus, Jesus somehow died a “spiritual death” alienated from God. However, that cannot be true because II Corinthians chapter five and verse 21 states: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” This passage clearly says that Jesus “knew no sin.” He was indeed sinless—spiritually alive—not spiritually dead. Therefore, the fact that God “made him to be sin for us” cannot mean he became a sinner because it is self contradictory. Rather, it means that Jesus became an offering for sin on our behalf. The prophet Isaiah explained 750 years before Christ came, “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin” (Isaiah 53:10). Thus, as Peter quoting Isaiah said, “By His stripes we are healed” (II Peter 2:24). From the time of the first sacrifice offered in Eden’s hinterlands God has been teaching us “without shedding of blood [there] is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). The death of Jesus appeased and assuaged the just wrath of God against our sinful race. As the prophet said, “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:11).

Now, I believe I have an explanation for of this expression, it may not satisfy all the questions you might raise. But it will, nevertheless, certainly help us see Jesus as He was here in the earth and give us a great deal of comfort at the same time. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus had prayed fervently and earnestly that if it were possible, to let the cup depart from Him. Sweat came from His body as if it were great drops of blood. The Bible says that He was "very heavy" and "exceeding sorrowful" (Matthew 26:37-38). These are some of the strongest words in the Greek language for anxiety and distress. Jesus, like any rational human being, did not welcome or embrace an untimely and exceedingly cruel and painful death. He was asking the Lord to deliver Him from the experience if it were possible. He prayed three time for this and the Bible says He prayed with "strong crying and tears" (Hebrews 5:7). The Bible also says that God was able to deliver Him from this awful death and heard the prayer of Jesus (Hebrews 5:8-9). However, God did not deliver Jesus, because to have done so would have made redemption impossible; you see, the Bible says it was necessary that Christ die in order to effect the forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:23). The words Jesus spoke, "My God, My God why hast thou forsaken me," are actually a quotation from Psalm 22 and verse one. It is a vividly detailed prophetic word picture of the crucifixion. Read the Psalm and see that while it begins with words of despair it ends in triumphant confidence: "For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from Him; but when He cried unto Him He heard" (v. 24). What you and I should learn from these

words of Jesus is that sometimes the answer to our prayers is "No!" Furthermore, we may in our trials be overwhelmed and discouraged as Jesus was, but we must not lose heart; rather, we must continue to trust God who will even bring us through those darkest of hours. Jesus' enemies thought that God had left Him alone in His most desperate hour, "we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" (Isaiah 53:4). But, God was still there, watching and attending His Son, and giving Him the victory over sin and death. Even so, there is nothing that man may do to us that will separate us from the love of God.

—Jeff Asher

What Young Saints Can Do

Young people can be very active in serving God. Paul wrote, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an ensample to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity" (I Timothy 4:12). Indeed, young people can be very active spiritually.

Jesus did all of His work before He was 34 years old. A little Jewish girl pointed Naaman to the prophet of God (2 Kings 5). Joseph determined to live a pure life and not commit fornication or "sin against God" at about the age of 17 (Genesis 39).

Young saints can: (1) Attend and prepare for Bible classes; (2) participate actively in all aspects of worship; (3) set an example of pure conduct at school, sports events, and all other places, and (4) teach their friends how to become Christians.

We can work for the Lord without being motivated by gimmicks. It is an insult to the intelligence of young people and an affront to

the Word of God to say that the church must provide, from its treasury, social and recreational activities for the young and the old in order, as some say, "to keep them faithful." This is how some brethren try to justify building and maintaining a social and recreational center called a "fellowship hall." We are kept faithful by loving God and keeping His commandments; by always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Yes, regardless of our age, we can be faithful to God and we can utilize our abilities to be zealous in engaging in the multitude of good works which are open to us.

—Lynn Hedrick

FYI: for your information

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Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 44

November 12, 2006

The Last Words of Jesus (5)

In this study let's consider the final three sayings of Jesus from the cross. Friend and foe were gathered there as our Lord revealed much about Himself, about mankind, about redemption and eternity. Let's listen to Him as He speaks His very last words of hope and promise to those present and to all who gather at the foot of the pulpit cross.

"I Thirst"

The fifth saying was not an expression of reproach for His disciples most of whom stood afar off. He did not denounce His executioners. Neither did He speak a word of love to John, nor did He offer an expression of farewell to His mother. He said very simply, "I thirst."

Most Christians are very sensitive to the question of Jesus deity. We are very much aware and believe assuredly that He is God and was with God in the beginning. Jesus could have at any moment said, "In the beginning I was with God and I was God and all things were made by me and without me was not anything made that was made." He could have said, "In the beginning I created the heavens and the earth. At my fingertips tumbled worlds and planets. I threw the stars into their orbits and the spheres into

space. At one time the world was like a trinket on my wrist." However, these are not the words that fall from His lips as He was hanged at Calvary.

There is the temptation to view Jesus as only divine. However, Jesus was God *and* man. And the words that He managed to utter as His very life was drained from Him give us a reassurance and comfort that is almost beyond words. It is because, at this moment, the fifth saying of Jesus was the simple declaration, "I thirst!"

I am glad that statement is in the Bible. You and I are not attracted to Jesus simply because of His fidelity to duty and His nobility. We are drawn to Christ because He made Himself one of us. He lived as we live. He was tempted as we are tempted. He knew what it was to be hungry, thirsty, weary, and worn. He knew what it was to be angry on occasion. That means when we call upon God in prayer, we have an individual at God's right hand that knows and understands us. He is happy to represent us. It is as the hymnist wrote: "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear; what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer."

The Lord wanted a drink and was given vinegar mingled with gall. I used to think that was barbarism, but, really, it was a show of mercy. That mixture was intended as a sedative to deaden His senses to pain. However, He refused to drink it. Why? Because He had to experience anguish and pain to atone for our sins. They gave Him another drink just before He died and He took it. It didn't make any difference by that time for His agony was over.

"It Is Finished"

The sixth saying uttered by the Lord was "It is finished." The scheme of redemption was completed. The old covenant with its ceremony, animal sacrifices, and human priesthood was finished. The purchase price for the church was fully paid. The sealing of the New Covenant was accomplished. The last great spiritual battle was fought and won. It was a very unusual kind of battle. When David went to battle Goliath, he had five stones; but the day Jesus died, He had five wounds in His body. It was not a battle where you could hear steel ringing against steel, but if you listened carefully, you could hear the incessant dripping of the blood

of the Son of God. It was not a battle where you could see the sun glistening upon the armor at noon time, but where the body of the Son of God hanged like purple rags in the sky. It was a battle in which he who slew the foe actually lost the day.

I can imagine that Satan and all his cohorts laughed with a hellish glee, but they were the ones who were defeated. Jesus entered into the strong man's house and spoiled his goods. He destroyed the power of Satan through His death. Yes, the battle was over; it was finished.

"Into Thy Hands I Commend My Spirit"

Finally, the seventh saying from the lips of Jesus, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Like a planet that had almost completed its orbit, He was ready to return. Like the prodigal son who went into a far country, He was ready to arise and go to His father. He could have said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of authority which the father will give me," but He said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." He was a loving, dutiful Son down to the very end. He commended His spirit into the hands of the Father.

The Lord's disciples were crushed by His death. They saw his lifeless body sag against the ropes and their eyes filled with tears. Likely, they turned and slowly made their way home. They thought, "He who came to give Israel hope is dead, dead,

dead!" But, I am grateful to God, that isn't the end of the story. Christ was buried in the rich man's tomb, but by the power of God, He was raised on the first day of the week! He was victorious over death and triumphant over the Hadean world. In His resurrection, He planted the rose of immortality upon the bosom of every grave. We must speak of a risen and living Lord.

His work is finished, but what about ours? He laid the foundations; we must build thereon. He built the ark of safety; we must enter therein. He has knocked at the door; we must open and allow Him to enter.

If you and I are to be saved, we must experience what He experienced. He went into the Garden of Gethsemane and we must go to the garden of sorrows. Can you be truly sorry for the way you have lived? He was crucified, so we must be crucified. We must crucify the lusts, passions, and selfish ambitions of the flesh; that is repentance. He was buried and we must be buried. Have you been buried in the watery grave of baptism? You can be buried with your Lord in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4; Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15-16; I Peter 3:21).

In order to be freed from your sins, you must climb Calvary's hill. You must bow at the foot of the cross and say, "Lord, I put you there. You died for me." That is going to be hard. The hardest thing you will ever do is make a break with Satan and sin. But, it was harder to hang on the cross! The issue is

between you and Jesus. You can reject the Son of God and the Savior of the world. If you live as though Christ never died, one day you will die as though Christ never lived. I am hoping that this has touched your heart and will lead you to become a Christian. Come today and confess Jesus' name and be baptized.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

• **Prayer List:** James Burke, Floyd Bush, Dallas Crabtree, Wilma Crabtree, Mary Hill, Troy Lake, Helen Rushing, Jay White.

• **Gospel Meeting:** John McPherson will be with North Desoto in Stonewall. LA November 12-17.

• **Our Gospel Meeting:** Tim Coffey will be with us November 26-29 (Sun.-Wed.).

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Kerry Henry (903) 836-4438
Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 45

November 19, 2006

“In the Beginning God...”

The Bible opens with the affirmation: “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep*” (Genesis 1:1). These words answer one of the most important questions that mankind has pondered, “From whence came all this.”

However, men have had difficulty with the first chapter of the Bible. The unbelieving and the unwilling have proposed they be understood as an allegory or a myth by which ancient man explained what he could not discern with the eye and comprehend with his limited knowledge of the universe. To these they are the reflection of ignorance and superstition. Others have proposed that they are a figurative explanation of the process which Nature’s God employed to accomplish this wonderful universe in which we reside. Frankly, at best these are weak attempts at harmonizing the theories of finite intelligence with the Infinite Mind. At worst, they are insolent mockery and rebellious rejection of the Divine Will.

For the purpose of this study let’s consider a few of the things that others find so hard to accept about the Creation account.

The Gap Theory

It has been popular at times to suggest that there is an immense

“gap” of time between “the beginning” mention in verse one and the creation of light on the first day. This explanation has been around a long time. Robert Milligan in 1868 (eleven years after *Origin of the Species* was published by Charles Darwin) wrote: “When this beginning was, or how long it occurred before the Adamic epoch, we have no means of ascertaining with any high degree of certainty. But geology makes it quite probable; if not indeed absolutely certain, that it occurred many ages previous to the historic period” (*Scheme of Redemption*, p. 24). In 1913 (just a few years before the Scopes Monkey Trial in Tennessee) David Lipscomb wrote: “The Bible gives no clue to tell how long this world existed before the six days work of fitting it up for a habitation of man...I believe life had existed on the earth previous to the six days work of Genesis one. The Bible no where contradicts this” (*Sin & Salvation*, p. 370). These quotations illustrate that modern advocates of a “gap” advocate nothing new. They also illustrate how men of faith can by learning and the pressure to appear in step with the most modern of ideas and thought feel pressured to make the Bible harmonize with human theories. However, there is no need to twist the Bible in order to make it fit. The outcome is calamitous.

In the first place, there is nothing in the language of the Bible to lead to the conclusion of a gap between verse one and the remainder of Genesis chapter one. The first verse is an affirmation that God created all the matter and energy out of which He would form the universe and its inhabitants. Moses affirms that God created and then made and formed from that over the next six days. The word *barah* (create) is used in conjunction with *asah* (made) and *yatsar* (formed) in these first two chapters (cf. 1:1, 7, and 2:7). There are no primordial ages, nebular clouds or big bangs in Genesis chapter one.

In the second place, Jesus comprehended “*the beginning*” as including all six days of creation. In Matthew 19:4, He said: “*Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female.*” Man and woman were made on the sixth day (Genesis 1:31; 2:21–22); therefore, the Lord put no “gap” between the beginning and the days of creation.

Modern opinions concerning the age of the earth are just that—opinions. There is no hard evidence that the earth is millions or even billions of years old. The Gap Theory interpretation is a contrived and forced interpretation of the text.

What will these exegetes do should the hard evidence prove that the earth is indeed very young (in relative terms)? Will the Bible then be wrong because it advocated a "gap of time"?

Six Literal Days

Throughout Genesis Chapter One, Moses makes reference to "the evening and the morning" being "a day" (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Conservative Bible scholars understand Moses to be referring to a literal 24 hour day. Liberal Bible scholars have posited that Moses allegorizes in these verses in order to present to the primitive world an explanation their limited understanding of nature can comprehend. The days, therefore, are not literal days but ages of time in which the evolutionary process was completed.

It is often pointed out that "day" (*yowm*) is used figuratively of an age or event, as in Isaiah 2:11 or 11:10. This figurative usage continues in the New Testament with the Greek word for "day" (*hemera*), as in Matthew 26:29 or Hebrews 3:8. However, context always determines whether a literal or figurative use is in view. In the case of Genesis Chapter One, Moses obviously understood the days as literal because of his statement in Exodus 20:11 concerning the hallowing of the Sabbath: *"For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."*

Allegorizing Genesis Chapter One solves nothing. If it is an allegory, it certainly cannot be construed as a proper representation of present day

evolutionary theory. If the days are understood as ages of time then that solves nothing respecting the conflict between the biblical explanation of origins and the modern theory. God is still represented as starting and directing the process; it is not a random or chance happening under the influences of wholly natural phenomenon.

Neither does it help the Christian perspective. Allegorizing the Creation narrative and embracing evolution undermines the redemptive message of the Bible. Man becomes something other than the fruit of the creative genius of God, the origin of sin is relegated to myth, the institution of marriage is undermined, Jesus is reduced to a liar and the founder of a religion designed to perpetuate myth and superstition.

A Mature Creation

It is often asserted that there must have been long ages of time since the formation of the universe because the geological record and the evidence from astronomical observation demand it. However, that is not the case.

The data from radiological dating, the observable strata of the earth, the presence of oil and gas, and the fossil record do not require long periods of time in order to explain them. In the first place, the so-called geologic column does not exist at any one place on the earth. There are examples of the layers being reversed and fossils being present in the "wrong" strata or mixed together. Further, current data indicates that oil and gas may have been formed much more rapidly than previously believed. Likewise, light theory has changed and is

changing. The measurable speed of light may not be a constant over time. Furthermore, there are new theories explaining how light travels. Thus, the great distances of space may not indicate eons of time. In short there are alternate explanations for the data.

Regardless of these issues, all of this may be explained by understanding that God created a mature universe. Adam and Eve were created mature (Genesis 1:28, 2:25); why not the rest of the universe? When God planted the garden in Eden and placed there trees bearing fruit (Genesis 2:9), had Adam cut one down would it have had rings? Mature trees only bear fruit after several seasons of natural growth. However, the trees in Eden bore fruit at the end of the first week. Likewise, the earth was created fully mature having all the natural resources necessary to sustain man over time.

—Jeff Asher

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 46

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The One Body

The apostle Paul began his letter to the Ephesians by setting forth God's plan to redeem mankind through Jesus Christ. The strength of this plan is demonstrated by the exaltation of Christ far above all principalities and powers (Eph. 1:19-21). With this in mind, Paul then shows the significance of the church as the accomplishment of God's plan. He explains that though Christ has been given the position of head over all things to the church, he describes the church as "the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23). Just as Jesus "fills up" or accomplishes God's entire plan of redemption, the church is that which "fills" or accomplishes Christ's purpose as the Redeemer. In other words, the church is the fulfillment of Christ's work in the scheme of redemption. Is it any wonder then that such a precious object should be described as the "body" of Christ? Later in the Ephesian letter, the Spirit shows further why he chose to use the figure of a body to describe the church; "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church" (Eph. 5:29). There is a great deal of significance in this word "body", so let us take a few moments to look further into what the Holy Spirit says about the body of Christ.

In the same Ephesian letter, after calling the church "the body,"

Paul says there is "one body" (Eph. 4:4). In this sense, the body refers universally to all believers and is not limited to any particular congregation. However, the fact that Paul said there is "one" body conveys the idea of unity among those believers. The religious world may teach that the body of Christ is composed of believers from all denominations and "faiths," but this is in contradiction to the statement that there is "one body" and "one faith" (Eph. 4:4,5). One body should have no schism in it (1 Corinthians 12:25). However, religious denominations are divided and splintered by various doctrines and forms of worship. With respect to physical bodies, though there are different types of flesh (1 Corinthians 15:39), one body will have the same flesh throughout. The members of a body may have diverse functions, but they are composed of the same flesh. Likewise, the composition of Christ's body is consistent, that is, believers are united by following the directives of "one Spirit." In other words, those in the body of Christ believe alike in matters of doctrine and worship.

If members of Christ's body can be separated by doctrine and still be part of one body, why could not the Jew and Gentile remain distinct groups and yet be one body? Paul explains to the Ephesians that Jesus had to

"abolish in his flesh the enmity" between Jew and Gentile before he could reconcile them unto God in "one body" (Eph. 2:11-22). Jesus had to break down the "middle wall of partition" which consisted of covenants and "the law of commandments contained in ordinances." Of two races, he made "in himself of twain one new man". The fact that Jew and Gentile had to be brought together before they could be reconciled unto God demonstrates that Jesus cannot tolerate division in his body, especially doctrinal division.

With what we have just observed about the one body still in mind, let us examine Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." We might add briefly that the baptism in this verse is not "in" the Holy Spirit, it is "by" the Spirit - he is the agent not the element.

Therefore, the baptism in this verse is water baptism; that commissioned by the Lord and taught by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 8:12, 16, 36-39; etc.).

However, the point I would like to emphasize is this, Paul says *we are all baptized into one body!* We've seen that the one body in Eph. 4:4 is composed of believers, not denominations or religious "faiths." However, those who

discount baptism as essential for salvation claim that they baptize persons in order to induct them into their denomination. If this is the case, then their baptism creates religious division. Paul stated that Jew and Gentile are brought *together* into *one body* when baptized and not separated into differing groups. From this we must conclude that the religious denominations are either no part of the "one body" or else their "baptisms" are not that which was commissioned by Christ and commanded by the Holy Spirit. An examination of the scriptures shows both to be the case.

There are other features of the one body which we could discuss, but for now this identifies the essential character of the one body and the necessity of participation in it.

What is the Church?

We often say that the church was established on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection. This statement is correct if we understand what we say.

However, this statement has given the wrong impression to some because of a misconception about the word "church." If we understand what the church is, it will be difficult for us to misunderstand how it was established.

The term "church" is used to translate the Greek word "ecclesia" which identifies a "called out" body of people. Inspiration chose to use the word "ecclesia" 115 times in the N.T. where three times it refers to a secular assembly, once to the Jewish "assembly" in the wilderness, and the remainder of times it refers to the people of

God. "Church" is a collective noun like "herd" or "flock," but with reference to the people of God it identifies the type or class of people. The important thing to remember is that the word always refers to people. At times "church" refers to all who are metaphorically "assembled" in Christ (Hebrews 12:23; Matthew 16:18). At other times it refers to the people of God in an area (Acts 9:31). In other instances "church" refers to Christians who have joined themselves together in a certain locality (1 Corinthians 1:2). Although the local church is treated as an entity (Acts 11:22), that entity is never considered a unit of a larger body. The unit of the church is always the individual saint whether referring to a particular locality or to a broader application. The word "church" may even refer to the regular assemblies of saints (1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:34), but in whatever way it is used, you will never find the word identifying anything other than people. In Acts 5:11 we find that "great fear came upon all the Church," but even in this sense the word is used to identify Christians distributively.

With the definition of "church" understood, let us consider the idea of the church as an institution. How often do we hear someone say that the church is "people" and then claim that the church is an "institution" to which Christ adds? A well-known book describing the Church states, "All Spiritual Blessings are in Christ...Christ's body and the Church are one...Therefore through the Church we enjoy every spiritual blessing provided for us in Christ Jesus." Does this not give the impression that we view the church as something other than people? What organization or

foundation was established on the day of Pentecost? None. A new class of people was simply created by their reconciliation to God. The church is an institution in much the same sense as marriage. Marriage describes people who have entered into a new relationship to one another. The church describes people who have entered into a new relationship with Christ. The ability to have this new relationship was established or "instituted" on Pentecost. It was instituted when Jesus was proclaimed as "Lord and Christ." Those who submitted to His authority being obedient to His will were forgiven and by that fact entered into a relationship with Christ. The church of Christ was established when the authority of Christ was established and men and women became the "people" of Christ.

—Tim Coffey

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 47

December 3, 2006

Creation: The First Day

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day" (Genesis 1:1-5)

The Creation of All Matter & Energy

The first day begins with the creation (*barah*) of all matter and energy out of which God makes (*asah*) and forms (*yatsar*) the universe and all things therein (Nehemiah 9:6).

On this first day God formed the earth and set it upon its axis and began its rotation (Isaiah 44:24). This is indicated by His "dividing" the darkness from the light. All know the revolution of the earth determines the phases of the day (John 11:9).

The light created on the first day was energy in all its visible and invisible forms (Psalm 74:16). This energy was later formed by God into the Sun and the stars which brighten the earth and the heavens (Genesis 1:14-16).

That light radiating energy must have pre-existed by the admitted even by the evolutionist in his "Big Bang." There must have been a source of energy from which the stars, including our sun was formed. This is what the Scriptures affirm.

The fact that the earth was said to be "without form and void" does not indicate that it was shapeless or even gaseous. Rather, the phrase has reference to the habitability of the planet (Isaiah 45:18). At the end of the first day, the earth was not ready for man. It was not yet "good," let alone "very good." The light was good and on the third day the dry land was good (cf. Genesis 1:4; 10). The emphasis in these verses is obviously on the preparation of a suitable environment for mankind. This was not accomplished until the end of the fourth day when there was a breathable, stable atmosphere, dry land and sufficient light and water to sustain life.

The facts from the first three days indicate the earth was created a sphere. It begins to rotate (1:4-5); God stretches out the firmament or the expanse above it (1:6; cf. Isaiah 40:22), and He calls the dry land to come forth separating the seas

into their beds (1:9-10). These things could not have occurred in this succession if the earth were not already a spheroid planet.

The incomplete state of creation on the first day is also indicated by the "brooding" of the Spirit of God upon the face of the waters (Genesis 1:2). The Holy Spirit is here figuratively represented as a mother bird hovering over her chicks nursing them and protecting them (cf. Deuteronomy 32:11; Matthew 23:37). It is an obvious indication of the "infant state" of the world at the end of the first day. Furthermore, the Spirit is represented as the Divine Being that "garnishes" the heavens (Job 26:13; cf. Psalm 104:30). To garnish, beautify or make fair suggests adding the finishing touches. In that the Holy Spirit is often represented as the finger of God (Exodus 31:18; Luke 11:20; Matthew 12:28), it is reasonable to assign Him a place in making and forming of the creation.

Spiritual Truths Derived from this First Day

Throughout the Bible there are numerous analogies made between the creation of the world and the spiritual realm. These analogies do not imply that the creation accounts

should be regarded only as figurative or interpreted looking for some secret or higher meaning. They are just common analogies which men often make when objects or events are compared.

The first observation to be made is that there is no creation apart from the command of God. It was first, "God said," then "there was." Nothing is apart from God's will and command. So also in the spiritual realm, all depends upon the Word of God. Nothing is created apart from it. The child of God is "created in Christ Jesus" through faith (Ephesians 2:8-10). However, "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). Again, the new man "after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). Yet, that righteousness of God is revealed in "the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:15-17). Likewise, the new man is created by Christ, but he is "renewed through knowledge" (Colossians 3:10). There is no creation in the spiritual realm that is not through the power of the Word of God (I Corinthians 1:18).

Paul, in II Corinthians 5:17, continues to speak of the regenerated man as a "new creature" or "new creation." We remember this truth when we sing in one grand, old hymn "we are His new creation by water and the Word." Yet, when we consider regenerated man, we recognize that he is at "birth" an infant (I Corinthians 3:1) or a novice (literally "neophyte," I Timothy 3:6). Thus, much like the earth on the first day of creation God is not through with the project. There

is the need for the finishing work of the Spirit of God which is accomplished through His Word (I Peter 1:2; 2:2). The Holy Spirit nurtures the babe in Christ with the Gospel (I Thessalonians 2:7-8) and beautifies His creation by the power of the Word (Hebrews 5:12-14; Romans 16:25; II Timothy 3:15-17).

Another analogy found between the creation of the world and the spiritual realm is that between the light God created on the first day and Jesus Christ. This analogy is developed in John 1:1-12.

We understand that without light there could be no life on Earth. Even those creatures that live in the darkest recesses of the planet, in the crevices of the rocks and the caverns of the sea, these are dependent upon the light. Change the tilt of Earth's axis or the diameter of its orbit and the planet would freeze or scorch. But, as it is the tender rays of the sun pour upon the earth and life thrives and the bounty of the earth blesses all mankind (Deuteronomy 33:14; Psalm 19:6; Ecclesiastes 11:7; Matthew 5:45).

Similarly, Jesus is presented to us as The True Light of Men that lights every man in the world. He is the source of all spiritual life (John 1:4). However, some men have preferred darkness over light (John 3:19). These, because they love evil, will not come into the light and have life (John 3:16-18). It is not that the Light has not shined, but that the minds of men are blinded by Satan (II Corinthians 4:3-4) causing the

light that is in them to remain darkness (Matthew 6:23).

With the end of the first day God saw that the light was good (1:4). Jesus, God's Son, the Light that lights the whole world is surely good. Many doubted and wondered about Him because He did not come with the splendor which men expected (John 1:46). Yet, He truly was the Light of the world that is Life. Will you love the Light rather than darkness? Then come to Him in faith doing the truth of His word (John 3:16).

—Jeff Asher

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Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 48

December 10, 2006

Creation: The Second Day

"And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day."

(Genesis 1:6-8)

The Formation of an Atmosphere

The second day in the creation week involved the formation of an atmosphere for the earth. The KJV calls this atmosphere the "firmament." *Strong* says the Hebrew word (*raqiya`*) properly means "an expanse" and designates "the visible arch of the sky." Moses uses a word which represents the heavens from the perspective of man upon the earth. The heavens are spread out above and around us (Isaiah 42:5; 45:12; Jeremiah 10:12; Job 9:8). For this reason, the firmament is often represented as a curtain, scroll or tent that is spread out about the earth (Isaiah 34:4; 40:22; Psalm 104:2).

This atmosphere was "made," (from the Hebrew word *asah*, see: Genesis 1:7, 11–12, 16, 25–26, 31). The heavens were "made" just as the lights of the

heavens and man himself was made. God fashioned or formed these from that matter and energy which He created (from the Hebrew word *barah*) on the first day (Genesis 1:1-3).

The word "firmament" comes from the Latin. It suggests a solid structure such as a prop or support. It is not intended to convey solidity or an impenetrable barrier, but rather the figurative idea of the foundation of God's chambers as in Psalm 104:3 and 13. Jehovah is represented in Scripture as sitting above the earth (Isaiah 6:1; 40:22; 66:1; Ezekiel 1:26; 10:1; 43:7; Matthew 5:35; Psalm 11:4) and walking upon the clouds (Nahum 1:3; Revelation 1:7; Job 22:12-14; Psalm 104:3). The chambers of God are represented as being at rest upon the firmament or heaven, our atmosphere. This explains the poetic language in the Bible suggesting that the heavens bear up the waters (Psalm 104:3, 13; Jeremiah 10:13) and that rain flows from his chambers (Psalm 104:13).

Moses' language in Genesis conveys the function of the atmosphere in the water cycle. The firmament is said to separate terrestrial waters, those under the firmament, from atmospheric waters, those above

it, as in Job 26:8. Solomon was aware of the water cycle (Ecclesiastes 1:7) as was the Psalmist (135:7), Isaiah (55:10) and Jeremiah (51:15–16). The atmosphere's role in the processes of the evaporation, condensation and precipitation of water is essential to life on the earth (Psalm 147:8). Again, we observe God making the earth habitable for life, man in particular.

Some have mistakenly concluded that Moses wrote of water held in space beyond the breathable atmosphere (see: Bert Thompson in *The Global Flood of Noah*, pp. 24ff). However, we know that no such water exists today. One explanation for the absence of this water has been that it was the water that came to earth when "the windows of heaven were opened" during the flood (Genesis 7:11; 8:2). However, the waters above the heavens are spoken of as existing after the flood (Psalm 148:4). This seems an insurmountable difficulty to explain considering the evidence. However, when all the facts are taken into account and the language is properly understood, it is evident that Moses and the other Old Testament writers are speaking of the water held in the

atmosphere which from the perspective of the earth would indeed be above the firmament (cf. Job 26:28; Proverbs 30:4). Others have theorized some sort of vapor canopy existed because Genesis 2:5 states God in the beginning had not caused it to rain. As a matter of fact, Jehovah is not said to have "caused" rain until Genesis 7:4 when He brought the flood. However, the language of Genesis 2 does not necessitate the conclusion that it did not rain for over 1500 years because the text speaks of a time "when there was no man to till the ground," an obvious reference to the fourth and fifth days of the creation week (Genesis 1:28–29; 2:15).

Was It Good or Not?

It is interesting to note that at the end of the first day God "saw the light, that it was good" (1:4). At the end of the third day after separating the seas from the land and making the plants and vegetation "God saw that it was good" (1:12). However, at the end of the second day, God made no comment on the goodness of the creation at that point. I believe that is significant because it indicates God's purpose in the creation.

It is obvious that God was fitting the earth to be inhabited by mankind. At the end of the first day light which was essential to that existence was finished and it was, therefore, "good." With the completion of vegetation, the earth was then "good" since it was at that point habitable. However, at the end of the second day the earth was not habitable; it was not, therefore, "good." There was still work to do.

Though the creation was incomplete at this point, the atmosphere was nevertheless essential to our successfully inhabiting the earth. It provides the very air we breath (Acts 17:25; Job 12:10). Without it the simplest and most important routine tasks would be impossible. The slightest change in our atmosphere would render life difficult if not insupportable. However, the precise balance that exists makes it possible for man to flourish and prosper (Isaiah 30:23).

Spiritual Truths Derived from this Second Day

The heavens are a continual reminder of God's power & providence. God can shut up the heavens and He can open them wide to bless mankind (Jeremiah 14:22; II Kings 17:1-18:45). God's control of the heavens reveals His love and concern for all mankind (Matthew. 5:45; Isaiah 44:3-4). It is a demonstration of His impartiality and a manifestation of His loving grace (Psalm 103:11). Furthermore, it is a continual reminder to us that we are truly dependent upon God and that He alone is worthy of, and ought to have, our praise and devotion (Jeremiah 5:22--24).

The very breadth and height of the heavens signify God's majesty and greatness (Isaiah 55:9; Psalm 57:5, 11; 113:4). With respect to Christ as a sufficient Redeemer they signify the abundant propitiation that He has made for our sins (Hebrews 7:26–28; cf. I John 2:1–2). We even sing, "Were the skies of parchment made....nor could the scroll contain the whole,

though stretched from sky to sky..."

The goodness and grace of God are represented by the heavens (Hosea 14:4–5). Just as the rain pours down from the chambers of God above the heavens to nourish and heal (Psalm 104:13), so does His truth, grace and salvation pour down to redeem mankind (Isaiah 45:8; Psalm 50:4; Deuteronomy 32:2). We look to heaven for our daily bread (Matthew 6:11; Isaiah 30:23), and we must look to heaven for our spiritual bread—Jesus Christ (John 6:32–33).

May we every day with thanksgiving in our hearts look up to the heavens and praise God. The brilliant blue sky, the refreshing rain and the very air we breathe ought to be constant reminders of God's providence, His loving mercy and His redeeming grace.

—Jeff Asher

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Jim Rhiddlehoover (903) 693-3084

Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 49

December 17, 2006

Creation: The Third Day

“And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day.”

(Genesis 1:9-13)

Calling Forth Dry Land

The third day did not involve the creation of the earth or water since these were created on the first day (1:1). Rather the third day brought a separation of the waters into the bed of the seas allowing the dry land to appear. The receding of the waters is vividly described by Jehovah himself in Job 38:4–11. Later, the Psalmist describes Jehovah as forming the land with His hands (Psa 95:3-5) and commanding the seas to recede to the place He decreed for them (104:6-12).

The formation of the seas is an incredible demonstration of the

power of God. Not only did He make a place for them but He set a boundary which they can not pass (Job 26:10; Psalm 104:9). This boundary is not the coastline or an invariable sea level, but it is such a boundary that the earth will never be covered again with water as it was in the beginning. This promise is a calming reassurance to those who are troubled by disaster theories predicting global devastation through climactic change (Genesis 8:22; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 119:89-91). Further assurance is given to us every time we behold the rainbow in the sky (Genesis 9:8-17). The only time the waters covered the earth after the third day was when God intervened and brought the flood upon the earth (Genesis 6:17). With the making of the rainbow covenant God promised never to do that again.

The formation of the dry land was further divine preparation of the earth as a habitation for man (Psalm 115:16; Proverbs 8:31). Whereas the planet was not called “good” at the end of the second day, God now says it is good. The land which He brought forth was dry, but not arid (Psalm 119:64). God created

an earth which was ready to be fruitful.

Vegetation Created

The third day is not complete until after the creation of vegetation which God commanded the earth to bring forth (1:12). The trees, the shrubs and the grass spring from the rich soil of the earth bearing their fruit and their seeds which shall provide food for man and the beasts of the field and the creeping things.

Just as God circumscribed the seas by His decrees, so now He commands the fields to not only produce but to reproduce (1:12). God establishes the law of procreation. Everything will reproduce “after his kind.” This immutable law of life has been in effect since the third day of the creation week. It has not, does not and will not change. Men have long observed that “every tree is known by his own fruit” (Luke 6:44). Men do not gather “grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles” (Matthew 7:16).

With the creation of vegetation God beholds what He has made and says it is “good” (1:12). It is now good because it is ready for man. God has provided light, air, dry land, water and food in abundance. Creation is not

complete, but the earth is ready to receive him.

Spiritual Truths Derived from this Third Day

I think it is more than mere coincidence, that the third day is associated with resurrection. Observe that the dry land appeared on the third day. It was covered by the deep, but at the command of God the waters fled away and it came forth teeming with life (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:6). The sign of Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly (Matthew 12:40). It is interesting to note that Jonah in describing his Creator attributes to Him authority over the seas and the dry land (Jonah 1:9). After God spoke to that "great fish" which He had prepared, he vomited Jonah out onto the "dry land" on the third day (2:10). The prophet spoke of his deliverance from the sea as a resurrection from Hades (2:2, 6). The body of our Lord spent three days and three nights in the heart of the earth while his Spirit was in Hades (Acts 2:24, 27). On the third day God called Him forth from the grave alive and declared Him to be His Son (Romans 1:4).

There is a further analogy to be made between the appearance of the dry land and water baptism. When God called forth the dry land it appeared full of His mercy (Psalm 119:64). The earth was prepared to bring forth the fruits that God desired. Similarly, those baptized into Christ have been created in Jesus Christ unto good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). We are baptized into Christ and raised to walk in "newness of life"

(Romans 6:3-4). We are to be "fruitful" unto every good work (Colossians 1:9-10). Our "fruit" is unto holiness the end of which is everlasting life (Romans 6:20-22).

Another analogy exists between God's law of procreation established on the third day and the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus made this comparison in several parables which He spoke. In the parable of the Sower, Jesus said that the word of God is like seed (Matthew 13:19; Luke 8:11; Mark 4:14). When this seed is sown in the hearts of men it produces "the kingdom of heaven." In another parable, the seed is likewise sown (Matthew 13:24-30). However, an enemy came at night and sowed "tares," that is, weeds in the field where the good seed had been planted. When it became evident that the field was producing both wheat and tares, the landowner deduced on the basis of God's law of procreation that an enemy had indeed planted another seed. From this analogy we learn that the word of God produces "children of the kingdom" and the false doctrines of Satan produces "children of the wicked one" (Matthew 13:38).

This divine law of procreation is also used to teach in the Scriptures that God will render to every man according to his deeds in the judgment (Romans 2:6). In Galatians 6:7-8, Paul affirms that those who "sow to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption" and those who "sow to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life." Every seed brings forth after its kind (Job 4:8; Proverbs 1:31; 22:8; Hosea 8:7).

One another analogy that comes from the law of procreation is used in the New Testament to encourage faith in God. The Apostle Paul urges men to sow bountifully in order to reap bountifully (II Corinthians 9:6). Here the Apostle is encouraging the Corinthians to give liberally (sow) recognizing that it is God that gives the increase in the harvest (cf. I Corinthians 3:6). His point is that if they truly trust in God to multiply their seed they will not be stingy. This verse is often misapplied to teach a *quid pro quo* system of health and wealth. Rather, Paul is urging all to cast their bread upon the water (Ecclesiastes 11:1) in order to have it returned to them (cf. Proverbs 11:24).

Every day as we behold the wonder of the fields, orchards and forests let's remember God's purpose for our own lives and His promises to us.

—Jeff Asher

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Preacher

Jeff Asher (903) 694-2049

Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 50

December 24, 2006

"Let There Be Peace on Earth"

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

(Luke 2:9-14)

What Peace?

There is a very popular song by this title. One phrase in the song expresses a desire for worldwide peace by pleading "let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me." It is a sentiment that holds sway with many. It is particularly so when we are, as a nation, embroiled in military conflicts about the globe. The human heart yearns for tranquility and security free of turmoil and threats.

At this time of year when many celebrate the birth of Jesus, the announcement of the angels is often quoted on greeting cards and banners as an indication that the advent of the Son of God into the world promised this long sought tranquility among the nations. These words

are often joined to those of the prophet Isaiah who promised that Messiah's kingdom would usher in a period of peace when "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4).

What is the peace of which the angels sang and the prophet preached?

Wars & Rumors of War

In Luke 21:9 Jesus said, "But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by." The indication from Jesus is that His advent was not expected or intended to effect world peace. Furthermore, Jesus says that wars, commotions and turmoil shall characterize the human experience until the end of the age. As a matter of fact, Jesus specifically said: "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Jesus is the most controversial figure in history. His life and doctrine led to his own murder, and it has engendered hatred and persecution against His disciples for centuries.

Well, If Jesus did not come to effect worldwide tranquility, what did He come to give the human race that they could possibly need more?

Peace with God

The Lord, as He stood in the shadow of the cross, announced that the "peace" which He came to leave was not peace in the world, but peace in the soul. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid...These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 14:27; 16:33).

The peace promised by Jesus Paul describes as the peace of God "which surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). It is the peace of the soul which results from justification by grace through faith (Romans 5:1). It is that inner peace which comes from knowing that one is "walking after the spirit" and "minding the things of the spirit" (Romans 8:5-9).

Jesus Is Our Peace

The great need of humanity is peace with God (Romans 5:1). Since the Garden of Eden, man

has been in a state of rebellion against God through sin (Romans 8:7). Our sins and transgressions have alienated us from God (Isaiah 59:2). The just and holy One cannot, and will not, fellowship the sinner (1 John 1:5-10). Something must be done to atone for the sins we have committed against Him. Sin is any transgression of the law of God (1 John 3:4). When we sin, we in reality commit a crime against God. His divine sense of justice requires that these sins or "crimes" cannot be overlooked (Amos 7:8; 8:2; Habakkuk 1:13). Justice requires the punishment of evil doers, but God's desire to be merciful allows forgiveness (Ezekiel 18:20-23; Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18). However, grace and mercy cannot make a mockery of righteousness. This is the great dilemma: "How can a just God acquit the guilty?" (Romans 3:23-26).

God's righteousness is satisfied in the sacrifice of His Son Jesus upon Calvary (Isaiah 53:11-12). The Scripture calls this selfless sacrifice "the propitiation for our sins" (Romans 3:25). According to Webster to propitiate is "to conciliate an offended power, to appease." Thus, a propitiation is "a conciliatory offering." The life of Jesus offered in our stead is just such a conciliatory sacrifice. God is satisfied with that; it is more than enough (1 John 2:2).

It is the fact that Jesus has made this sacrifice for our sins which causes Paul to write of Him in Ephesians 2:14, "For he is our peace." The crucified Son of God is the means of making peace with God. However, it is not just that Jesus died which

effects peace with God; every sinner must believe in Him as the Son of God who died for the sins of the world in order to receive the atonement or reconciliation (Romans 5:11). Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of "the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:25-26). To those who remain in unbelief Christ has died in vain (Galatians 2:21).

The Blessed Peacemaker

In the song mentioned earlier, there is a line expressing the desire that peace on earth "begin with me." The intent of the songwriter was to convey the idea that world peace could be achieved if each individual would recognize a universal brotherhood of man. While it is certainly true that we are all made in the image of God and are obligated to love all men (Romans 13:8); recognition of our common Father in creation does not achieve the peace which is promised and desperately needed. Only reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ can accomplish real peace.

Above the entry of the United Nations building in New York are inscribed the words of Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers..." If making peace is to "begin with me" I must first make peace with God by coming to Him through Jesus Christ in genuine faith. Then I must start sharing the Gospel of peace with my fellow man (Ephesians 6:15; Romans 10:15). Only then will I be at peace with God and man.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

• **Prayer List:** *James Burke, Floyd Bush, Dallas Crabtree, Mary Hill, Troy Lake, Dan Melhus (Gospel Meeting), Cheryl Pope, Helen Rushing, Wanda Stewart, Jay White.*

• **Out of Town:** *The Ashers are in Arkansas. The Henrys are in Louisiana.*

• **Preaching Today:** *Gary Box and Leon Taylor are filling in for Jeff Asher, who is preaching in Russellville, AR. Kerry Henry is preaching today in Many and Stanley, LA.*

• **Gospel Meeting:** *Our next community-wide effort in the Gospel is March 4-9 with Dan Melhus from Port Neches, TX.*

• Welcome to all our visitors who have blessed us by your choice to assemble with us today.

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Words of Life

Volume 6 Issue 51

December 31, 2006

Creation: The Fourth Day

“And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And 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. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.”

(Genesis 1:14-19)

God Makes the “Lights”

From that matter and energy which God created on the first day He formed the “lights,” not light itself, which was created on the first day, but the luminary bodies. Specifically, God forms the sun, moon and stars. However, the activity of this day included all the celestial bodies and phenomenon of space.

There are five planets (2 Kings 23:5) that are visible from earth at certain times of the year: Jupiter (Isaiah 65:11), Venus (Isaiah 14:12), Mars (2 Kings 17:30), Saturn (Amos 5:25-26)

and Mercury (Isaiah 46:1). These are sometimes called “stars” in the Bible because they appear in the sky with brightness similar to that of the stars. The remaining planets are not mentioned because they are not visible with the naked eye from the earth.

Their Function

Two great purposes are assigned the heavenly bodies: (1) to give light and (2) to measure time (Genesis 1:16-18). With respect to their functions the stars, moon, sun and planets are spoken of in Scripture from the perspective of the earth. Like all of God’s creation they were made for man and his benefit (Psalm 8:3-9). The sun and the moon are referred to as “great lights.” When compared to the rest of the “host of heaven” from earth, they are the brightest. The fact that the sun is called the “greater” and the moon the “lesser” is not a technical description of either their composition or function. The Bible is not intended to serve as an Astronomy textbook; therefore, it does not use the words “star,” “planet” or “moon” with the same precision.

The emphasis in Genesis is that “the host of heaven” is made; it is under Jehovah’s power and

moves at His decree (Psalm 19:1-7). They were not to be worshipped, but to reveal the One God who should be worshipped (Psalm 19:3; 68:33). Furthermore, the omens of the astrologers are to be ignored (Jeremiah 10:2). Man’s destiny is in the hand of a merciful God (Psalm 136:5-9), not the routine movements of the planets and the circuit of the stars.

The division of the day is an indication of God’s mercy (Psalm 136:8-9; 104:19-23; Ecclesiastes 5:12; Matthew 5:44-45). These two divisions imply the necessity of both work and rest (Genesis 2:15; Psalm 127:2; Proverbs 6:9-10; John 9:4). Those who know the Maker of the lights are able to enjoy the blessings which they provide (Proverbs 3:24; Psalm 121:4). The seasons likewise provide for man’s needs by regulating the growing cycle and alerting him to the time to break up, plant and harvest (Leviticus 26:3-6; Deuteronomy 11:14; 28:12; Acts 14:17).

God wants us to be conscious of time and the proper use of it. The sun marches through the heavens with night following day, as if it would never stop its procession (Psalm 19:1-6). Yet, God controls the time. He who created time can stop time

(II Kings 20:9-11; Joshua 10:13), as well as, order it to His purpose (Galatians 4:4; Ephesians 1:10). God will also bring time to an eternal conclusion (II Peter 3:1-12; Job 26:10; Revelation 10:6). Hence, we are told to number our days (Psa. 90:12) and redeem the time (Ephesians 5:16; Romans 13:11; Colossians 4:5; Hebrews 5:12). We ought to be concerned about the present (Ephesians 2:2, 11-12; II Corinthians 6:2; I Timothy 6:19) since this is the only time over which God has given us any authority (Matthew 6:31-34). The use we make of time says a great deal about our spirituality (I Peter 4:2-3; James 4:14).

Spiritual Truths Implied by Creation

The wonder and the beauty of the heavens give light upon the earth, not just physical light but spiritual light as well (Romans 1:20; Acts 17:24-29). Let's consider a few things the sun, moon and stars reveal about their Maker.

Certainly the power of Jehovah is displayed in the heavens (Job 38:33; Jeremiah 31:35). God placed these orbs in their circuit and none can move them. The "signs of heaven," eclipses and comets for example, further demonstrate His wisdom and design. The Israelites were instructed not to fear these because they were the intricacies of His great design (Jeremiah 10:2). Yet, the heathen were often excited by them. These phenomena, after many years of observation, are explicable and predictable stellar events which display the

minute workings of the great cosmic machine.

However, God has exhibited His power numerous times by actually manipulating the movements of the planets (Joshua 10:13; II Kings 20:9-11; Exodus 10:21; Matthew 2:19; 27:45). Consider the power, if you can, of Him who can halt the sun and moon (II Peter 3:10-12; Hebrews 12:25-29).

The daily rising of the sun, the movements of the tides, the changing of the seasons, even the predictable appearances of comets and the eclipses of sun and moon are proof of the faithfulness of God (Jeremiah 33:25-26). We often treat these events as commonplace because each day they occur in the expected way. Yet, they do so because at God's command (Hebrews 1:3). As the Psalmist said, "He spoke and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:6-11). God's words never fail. If He is faithful in governing the universe, shouldn't we expect faithfulness in all things (Matthew 24:34-35; II Peter 3:5-7)?

The prophet describes the Messiah as the "sun of righteousness" with healing power in his rays (Malachi 4:2). Sunlight is essential to a healthy life. Men need the sun's rays in order to sleep properly and to ward off depression. Sunlight actually activates certain vitamins which help the body to heal. Jesus is that healing sun for a sin sick and dying world lost in the despair of the darkness of sin perishing in the shadow of death (Matthew 4:16; Luke 1:78-79).

Like the sun described by the Psalmist (19:5-6), Christ ran his

ordained race brilliantly. With the glory of the Bridegroom He came (John 3:28-34) increasing in glory as He made his appointed journey. In His procession there was nothing that was hidden from Him (John 15:22-24; 8:12; 1:4-5). The light which He gave exposed men's deeds and opened their eyes (John 3:19-21) provided they were willing to see (II Corinthians 4:4).

Every morning when we see the sun rise we ought to remember that our God is faithful to His word and expects it to be kept by His creation. On those rare and wonderful occasions when the sun is darkened, we are thankfully reminded that our God is in control. When we feel the warmth of the sun, we should be humbly aware that nothing is hidden from the Sun of Righteousness.

—Jeff Asher

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