
Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 1

January 7, 2007

Creation: The Fifth Day

“And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.”

(Genesis 1:20-23)

God Creates the Whales & Birds

It is difficult to comprehend the life with which the waters abound. From the microscopic organisms to the great whales which feed upon them, to the birds which fish in them, the seas are teeming with life. Therefore, think of not only the life that the seas hold, but the life that it sustains (Genesis 9:2-3; Matthew 4:18-21). Truly the waters have brought forth abundantly and the entire planet is dependent upon them for what they provide.

Moses describes the formation of not only fish, but all aquatic life forms: fish, mammals,

amphibians. Similarly, he assigns the seas as the place of origin for the birds and the insects.

The words “winged” and “fowl” suggest that which has wings, but not exclusively the idea of feathers. Many of the commentators, therefore, see the creation of the insects on the fifth day. For instance, Matthew Poole said of the life created on this day: “The moving creature, or, creeping thing [is a] word which belongs to all those living creatures who move with their bellies close to the element they move in. Hence it is used both of birds which fly in the air, Leviticus 11:20, and of things creeping upon the earth, as Genesis 1:24, and of fishes that swim in the sea, as here.” There are two Hebrew words translated “creeping thing” in the Old Testament. *Sherets* in Genesis 1:20 is used elsewhere of insects (Leviticus 11:21-25), whereas, *remes* (Genesis 1:26) is used to describe what we generally regard as reptiles (cf. Genesis 6:20; Ezekiel 38:20). However, either word is sufficiently broad to include some varieties of what we call insects.

While the “waters” or the “Seas” are said to have been the place of origin for the birds and

insects (Genesis 1:20, 22), they are also said to have been formed from the “ground” (Genesis 2:19). There is no contradiction in this. The Earth and Seas are distinguished from one another as a domain for certain of God’s creatures (Genesis 1:10, cf. v. 22). The Sea was their place of origin, whereas, the “ground,” literally “soil,” is the material from which they were formed. We know that there is soil associated with both the “Earth” (Genesis 2:6) and “Seas” (cf. Exodus 14:16, 22). Thus, to speak of forming the birds and other winged creatures from the “ground” is in perfect harmony with what is said elsewhere when we understand that they were formed from the bed of the seas (Genesis 1:9). Thus, as far as the “winged fowl” are concerned the sea was their place of origin and the earth is their domain (1:22; 6:7; 9:2).

It is interesting to note here that the evolutionist in his phylogenies of species always has the reptile being the precursor to the bird; yet, Moses has the bird antecedent to all land creatures. This is just one more instance of evidence which demonstrates that the creation narrative cannot be reconciled with an evolutionary

model of origins. The so-called missing link, archaeopteryx, is actually a bird and not a flying, feathered reptile (<http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/diapsids/birds/archaeopteryx.html>). There is no fossil evidence of any transition from reptiles to birds (*Nature*, Vol. 322, 1986; p.677).

The word for "whale" in Genesis 1:21 according to *Strong's Concordance* is *Tanniyim* which signifies a marine or land monster, such as a sea-serpent or dragon." According to *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, "the word *tannin* seems to refer to any great monster, whether of the land or the sea, being indeed more usually applied to some kind of serpent or reptile, but not exclusively restricted to that sense (Ex 7:9,10,12; De 32:33; Ps 91:13). The *American Tract Society Dictionary* states, "The largest known inhabitant of the sea, Job 7:12, put by our translators for a Hebrew word including all the huge marine monsters, as in Genesis 1:21. In Ezekiel 32:2, referring to Egypt and the Nile, it doubtless means the crocodile; as also in Psalm 74:13; Isaiah 27:1; 51:9; Ezekiel 29:3, where it is translated 'dragon.' The 'great fish' that swallowed Jonah cannot be named with certainty. The Greek word in Matthew 12:40 being also indeterminate. Whales, however, were anciently found in the Mediterranean, and sharks of the largest size." My personal conclusion is that the word is sufficiently broad to include those creatures of enormous size whose remains are found fossilized throughout the world (Job 41:1; Psa. 104:25). The term "leviathan" is used in conjunction with it and designates any large creature

that moves by wriggling or writhing the body, an apt description of many of the dinosaurs of the sea which are now extinct. The point being, on the fifth day God created all the creatures of the sea large and small.

With their creation God establishes a "law of procreation" for them both (1:22). He decreed that the sea and land creatures multiply and fill the earth after their kind. The power to procreate came from Him who had the power to create (1:22). Life begets life; God created life and then ordained that created life should be sustained through reproduction. Therefore, fish beget fish, birds beget birds, amphibians beget amphibians and insects beget insects; everything brings forth after its own kind (cf. I Corinthians 15:39).

Spiritual Truths Implied:

There are several great truths about God implied from creation on the fifth day. First, men ought to marvel at God's wisdom and power (Job 12:7-10). One cannot behold the creatures of the sea and air and not be impressed. The sheer abundance and diversity of life reflects an incomprehensible intelligence and imagination (Psalm 104:24-25). The intricacies and delicate interdependencies of plants and animals reveal a magnificent design. As Job asks, "What would one add?" How could it be improved? God has made provision for every conceivable need of the planet.

When one contemplates the wonderful perfection of the creation, he should be moved to

fear God (Ecclesiastes 3:14). The complexity and diversity of the creation should point us to God because it certainly manifests His awesome characteristics (Romans 1:20). As David recognized when faced with the wonders of creation, "What is man that you are mindful of him...how excellent is Your name" (Psalm 8:4, 9). Only those who will not to retain God in their knowledge are unimpressed with these things (Romans 1:23; cf. Ezekiel 8:10). Finally, we should learn to trust God (Matthew 6:26; Luke 12:24). Since He cares for the birds, surely He will take care of us (Matthew 10:29). With all the uncertainties in life, one thing is certain, God is there and not even the sparrows fall to the earth without the Father's knowledge. Yes, He cares for us (I Peter 4:19; 5:6-7).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 2

January 14, 2007

Creation: The Sixth Day

“And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.”

(Genesis 1:24-26, 31)

The Living Creatures

On the sixth day God “made” and “formed” both the lower animals and man from the dust of the ground (1:25-26; 2:7, 19). However, only man is said to have been made in the image and likeness of God (1:26).

The “living creatures” include all animal life from the least to greatest. The term “cattle” refers to any large quadruped; here it probably is intended of the grazing animals. The “creeping thing,” would be any rapidly moving animal, reptiles in particular, but all animals that crawl and run on the ground. The “beast of the field,” refers to strong or wild beasts, these would be what we regard now as animals of prey.

God extended the “law of procreation” to all the animals (Genesis 1:11-12, 21-22). As with the plants so with them, He made them after their kinds and decreed that they reproduce according to them (1:24). Thus daffodils bring forth daffodils not cabbages. And dogs bring forth dogs not cats. While there may be variation within “kinds,” there has never been a transition from one “kind” to another. A horse will mate with a donkey and produce a sterile mule, but never has such a mating produced a camel.

Man Is in God’s Image

Man stands out as unique within the total creation, and, particularly that of the sixth day. While modern taxonomy includes mankind with the lower animals within the group known as mammals, the Bible is careful to note that man is distinct from and superior to the lower creation. As already noted only mankind is in the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26).

The Bible teaches that God in heaven is Spirit (John 4:24; 1:1-3, 14; Philippians 2:5-8); He does not have flesh and bones as men do (Luke 24:39). Thus, that which is in the image of God is not the flesh of the body which He formed (Genesis 2:7; James 2:26), but the everlasting spirit

which God formed within man (I Corinthians 2:11; Zechariah 12:1; Daniel 7:15). This spirit is endowed by the Creator with intelligence, will and emotion which it freely exercises after its own choice (Matthew 22:37).

God created mankind as male and female (Genesis 1:27). Human sexuality pertains to more than just reproduction. God created mankind with gender needs (Genesis 2:18), and He ordained marriage in order to meet those needs (2:24-25). Man is in need of “a help meet,” that is, a help suitable, someone to give companionship (Genesis 2:18; I Corinthians 11:8-9) and spiritual encouragement (I Peter 3:7), as well as, a mate for producing offspring (Genesis 1:28; 2:20).

The Garden of Eden

Genesis chapter two records the planting of Eden (2:7-25); it was a wonderful Paradise or “garden” wherein grew every tree which God ordained for food. God placed the man whom He formed in this garden to dress and keep it. One purpose in planting this garden was to provide man a place in which to begin his dominion of the earth.

These first two chapters are often construed by the willfully ignorant and prejudiced as

being contradictory. Yet, there is perfect harmony between them when all facts are considered. In Genesis chapter one the emphasis is on the “generations of the heavens and of the earth” (2:4-7); in Genesis chapter two the emphasis is on the “generations of Adam” (5:1-2). They are written from two different perspectives. The account of the first seven days in chapter one is intended to give the chronological account and establish the divine origin of the universe. The Eden account is intended to set the stage for the narrative of the first sin, man’s estrangement from God and the consequent ostracism from Eden and the tree of life. The Bible is literature, and like all literature, context, theme and emphasis must be considered when making interpretations. Some of the same events are told and retold in these first chapters from different perspectives in order to place the emphasis on equally important truths.

Spiritual Truths Implied

Perhaps the most important lesson to learn from our creation is its purpose. One of the great questions of life which we all ponder is: “Why am I here?” The Scriptures teach that men have been created in the image of God in order to worship Him. Neither the inanimate creation nor the plants and the animals possess the capacity to worship, though they are figuratively portrayed in Scripture as offering it (Psalm 148:1-10). Within the material creation only mankind can truly worship God because he is in the image of God. Jesus said that those who worship God must do so

“in spirit.” Man alone possesses a spirit with which to worship the Spirit (John 4:23; Philippians 3:3; Romans 1:9).

Solomon recognized this truth when he concluded that “the whole of man” is to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). For this purpose God put “eternity” into our hearts, that is, God has placed in us a capacity to seek out and understand things which are eternal in nature (Ecclesiastes 3:11-14).

From the events of the sixth day we learn that men are superior to and have dominion over the animals (see: Matthew. 12:12). God created the animals and gave them to mankind for their use and good (Genesis 1:28-29; 9:2-3). This includes their skins and flesh (Genesis 3:21; 9:3). For this reason it is not a sin to kill an animal for food or clothing.

Man is “better” than the animals because he alone is in the image and likeness of God (Matthew 12:12; Genesis 1:26; 9:6). This is why it is wrong to murder another human being and right to put to death the murderer (Genesis 9:5; 4:9-10; Leviticus 24:17; II Samuel 4:11). This is why the life of an unborn child is sacred and that of an animal is not (Exodus 21:22-23, 29-36; Jeremiah 19:4). This is why the sick and the ill should not be left to the “mercy” of unbelieving doctors (Psalm 35:13; I Timothy 1:9). There is within each of us that which is in the very image of God which He created and which only He has the right to take.

The sixth day also saw the institution of marriage which by divine design is monogamous and permanent (Ephesians 5:31-

32; Romans 7:2; Genesis 2:24-25; Mt. 19:1-11). Hence, adultery, fornication, homosexuality and polygamy must be contrary to God’s very nature and law (Leviticus 18:22; Deuteronomy 23:18; 24:4; etc.). The spiritual importance of this truth is found in our relationship to Christ in the church (Ephesians 5:23-27). If marriage is not honorable and esteemed as permanent with God (cf. Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:6) then there is no basis for our having any eternal hope. If it matters not to Him that men put asunder for any and every cause, why should we expect His promises to the church to matter more (Matthew 25:10; John 3:29; Revelation 19:6-9)?

When we behold the wonders of creation we ought to be humbled by our exalted position within it and thank God for His every mercy and abundant grace.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 3

January 21, 2007

The Lord Does Not Expect...

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

(Micah 6:8)

The Text in Context

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah who prophesied during the days of the divided kingdom, specifically during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (1:1). Like Isaiah, he rebuked Judah for their rebellion against Jehovah. In the sixth chapter Jehovah, through the prophet, enters into debate with the nation and asks, "What have I done to thee?" Next, He reminds them of His abundant grace toward them in bringing them out of Egypt into Canaan. At that point, the prophet inquires how any could stand before God? What does he require? Should thousands of sacrifices be offered with ten thousands of oblations? No. God requires only this: obedience, mercy and humility before Him.

The text suggests to us, in the first place, that God does have expectations of man. He does not want sacrifice because to desire that is to desire what necessitates them—sin (cf. Psalm 40:6; 51:16-17; Matthew 9:13; Hosea 6:6). God wants us to

"walk in the light" (I John 1:7-10). In the second place, the text makes it clear that God does not expect certain things of us. In particular, His expectations are not more than what any man can deliver.

Let's consider some things which the Lord does not expect of us.

Us to Figure It Out Alone

Many have the idea that God is an unconcerned clock-smith who made and wound the clock only to set it on the shelf to run on its own. Their concept of the Deity precludes any real interest in the goings on of His creation.

Yet, Jehovah has a very keen interest in us (Jeremiah 10:23). He does not expect us figure it out on our own; neither has He left us without a guide. In the Garden of Eden, God gave man specific instructions (Genesis 2:17); He has continued to reveal Himself and His will through chosen prophets at critical times. Furthermore, in these revelations He has demonstrated that all things are under His control and unfold according to His eternal plan and purpose (Ephesians 1:3-11; 3:10-11; Acts 2:23). Ultimately, God completed His revelation of Himself and His will for mankind (John 16:13; Jude 3).

Thus, God has not left us alone to wander aimlessly without direction from Him. In the Bible we have "the mind of Christ" (I Corinthians 2:16), that is, we can know and understand what Christ wants us to do (John 7:17; Ephesians 3:1-4). The Bible is a mirror to the soul that shows us what we truly are, what we must become and how we can accomplish that desired transformation (James 1:21-25). The Word of God is powerful enough to convict us of sin and bring us to repentance (Heb. 4:11-12); we need only be willing (Romans 2:1-11).

Us to Know It All

Sometimes someone will say, "I don't know enough" or "No one knows it all." Surely, this is a legitimate concern. Ignorance of the Word has led to the down fall of nations (Hosea 4:6). Yet, it is to believe a lie spawned by the devil to think that one must understand everything in the bible before he is able to please God.

The truth is there are some things which must remain a mystery (Deuteronomy 29:29). God has given us sufficient information about them, but He has not given us a complete picture (e.g. Revelation 10:3-4). Other things have just not been revealed at all (e.g. Matthew

24:36). These things we will never know with any certainty, nor must we know them. However, we still must study (Hebrews 5:12-14). God will not accept willful ignorance. We can know, understand and perform what we are supposed to do (I John 5:3). The word of God as we noted above is powerful. It will accomplish in us what God desires, if we will study and meditate upon it (Isaiah 55:10-11; II Timothy 2:15; 3:15-17). We will always struggle with our own weaknesses and limitations, but we must remember that we are the creature striving to understand our Creator (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Us to Be Free of Burdens

Some folks have gotten the mistaken idea that becoming a Christian means all your troubles will go away. I have even known some to induce the vulnerable, because they are struggling with trials, to submit to baptism with such a promise as this. However, this is just wrong!

The truth is: one's problems may increase when he obeys the Gospel. This why Jesus said one should count the cost (Luke 14:27-33). There will be persecutions (II Timothy 3:12; Matthew 13:21). There will be trials (I Corinthians 7:28). There will be hardships (II Corinthians 8:2) and sacrifices (Mark 10:28-31). The forgiveness of sins and ardent discipleship does not even deliver one from the consequences of his transgressions (Galatians 6:5).

We must accept that God allows trials (I Peter 1:7; James 1:2-3). He does not send them upon

the righteous, but He does allow them to come. His intent in this is our perfection and ultimate salvation (Revelation 2:10; Romans 2:7, 10). He has promised to help us in them (II Peter 2:9; Psalm 33:20) and will deliver us from the evil one while enduring them (Matthew 6:13; I Corinthians 10:13). Thus, we learn not to pray for lighter burdens, but for greater strength to endure them.

Us to Save Ourselves

I have heard from those needing to obey the Gospel, "Preacher, I'm not good enough!" My response to that is "Who ever was?" The truth is that we all have sinned (Romans 3:23). There is not one of us that can stand before God and demand that He accept us on the basis of our performance (Isaiah 64:6; Titus 3:3-5; Romans 3:10-12). Furthermore, we can never work our way to heaven (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:27-28). Once we are guilty, no amount of obedience will merit any standing before God (Galatians 3:10-12; Ezekiel 20:11, 21; Deuteronomy 27:26; 28:15; Jeremiah 11:3). It is sinlessness that renders a man just; that let's you and me out of the running.

Salvation is by grace (Ephesians 2:5); it is a gift (Ephesians 2:8; Rom. 6:23) which none deserve (Titus 3:5). Being unable to save ourselves God interceded and did what we could not do. By His unimaginable love the gates of Heaven opened and the Son of God stepped down to this low world of sin and sorrow in order to die for our sins (Philippians 2:5-8; II Corinthians 9:15; John 3:16). By his mercy He saved us.

Too Much from Anyone

As noted in the text from Micah, God requires obedience, righteousness and mercy. This is not too much.

His commandments are not burdensome (I John 5:3). When compared to the incredible load of sin which we have borne, His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30; Acts 15:10-11; Galatians 5:1).

Obedience to His Will brings great reward and eternal happiness (Psalm 19:11; 16:11). Righteousness makes life not only pleasing to Him but better for self and others (I John 3:7-24). Having received mercy, we should learn to show mercy and insure mercy unto ourselves in the judgment (Matthew 5:7; Hebrews 4:16; II Timothy 1:18).

Will you trust today? He has shown you what is good and he has given you every assurance that He will keep His word.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 4

January 28, 2007

Are You Neglecting to Assemble?

Church attendance is an indicator of one's spiritual health (Acts 2:42-47). Forsaking assembling is a symptom of "heart trouble" (Hebrews 10:22-25). One whose love for the Lord is weak (Matthew 6:24, 33) will allow other things to come before worshipping Him and encouraging the brethren.

Let's consider some of the things we accomplish when we neglect or forsake assembling with Christ and His Church.

We Disobey Christ

Upon becoming a Christian we were taught by the authority of Christ to assemble with the saints (I Corinthians 11:18, 20). We must, as Jesus said, "Observe all things whatsoever" He has commanded (Matthew 28:20). Since Christ has commanded it, we disobey Him when we fail to assemble.

Disobedience to Christ is a serious matter. We can not truly say that we reverence Him as the Lord when we do not do what He says we should do (Luke 6:46). Neither can we expect God to pass over our neglectful disobedience because it seems trivial to us when compared to other sins (Hebrews 2:2-3).

Therefore, whether or not we assemble with Christians as we should is a reflection of our regard for the authority that the Father has placed in the Savior's hands. Paul taught that the Father "hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church" (Ephesians 1:22-23). When we refuse to obey Christ in this matter of assembling with His people we are rebelling against the very authority of Heaven.

We Despise His Blood

The Church is composed of those whom Christ has redeemed with His own blood (Acts 20:28). Forsaking them is a rejection of His death and suffering for mankind. This is one reason why Paul spoke of assembling with God's people in a context about willful sin (Hebrews 10:25-29).

How can those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ (I Peter 1:18-19) claim to have reverence for Him who shed that blood while at the same time rejecting others who also are so redeemed (I Corinthians 11:22)? The duty of those who have been sprinkled with the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:22;

9:14) is to "consider one another" and "provoke unto love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24). If we despise the church, we despise Him who redeemed it and we despise our own redemption. That has very serious consequences: "There remains no more sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:26).

We Refuse to Offer Spiritual Sacrifice to God

Peter said, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Christ Jesus" (I Peter 2:5). Christians are priests in the Temple of God, which is the Church of Christ. Our spiritual sacrifices are offered in the worship we bring to God when assembled with the saints (Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 13:15). While it is possible in some contexts to worship God alone (James 5:13-16), it is nevertheless true that there is some worship which God requires that necessitates His people being assembled (I Corinthians 11:18-34; Acts 20:7). Under the law it was a very serious matter to refuse to bring the prescribed offerings (Malachi 3:8; Deuteronomy

14:22–23). God would not even accept the crippled, the blemished or the injured at the altar of the Temple (Leviticus 22:20), why would we think that God would accept the same kind of half-hearted sacrifice today in the true Temple? Our worship is a reflection of the condition of the heart of the worshipper (Philippians 3:3; Romans 1:9; 7:6). When we are careless and indifferent toward it, we reveal what manner of servant we are (I Corinthians 11:30; Matthew 25:21-23).

We Fail to Proclaim the Lord's Death

Saints come together on Sunday to eat the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). Of this Paul wrote, "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he comes" (I Corinthians 11:26). We cannot fulfill this obligation except we "come together" (11:20).

The Lord's Supper is not an empty ritual. It serves several very real and important spiritual functions. Among these is the "showing" or proclamation of the Lord's death "until He comes." The Supper is a declaration by the church that they are fully trusting in the death which Jesus died for the remission of their sins (I Corinthians 10:16–17). Their perpetual observance of it also declares their confident expectation that Christ is coming again to receive His church unto Himself (cf. I Thessalonians 4:13-14, 17).

When we forsake assembling with the saints we stop declaring the death of Jesus. What does this say about our

faith and confidence in the death of Jesus Christ? The man who will not remember the one who died for his sins, must not think much of the man or the sacrifice (Hebrews 10:29).

We Rob God of Glory

Those who reject the Church of Christ by forsaking her assemblies deny Jesus the glory that He should receive from the Church and through the activity of the Church in the world. Paul confessed, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end" (Ephesians 3:21).

Jesus said that God is glorified in the good works that we do (Matthew 5:16). As a Christian I am to be full of good works (Titus 2:14). However, these good works must reflect that I am expecting the return of Christ (Titus 2:12–13). Morality is essential (I Corinthians 6:10). Concern for one's neighbor is expected and required (Matthew 5:43–48). However, these things do not reflect the image of Christ in one who never assembles with his people, who does not support by his time, talents and offerings the work of evangelizing or who remembers the Savior who died for Him by his public worship.

There is not anything that will come between us and the love of Christ (Romans 8:38–39). He will not forsake us (Hebrews 13:5); however, we can forsake Him. When we do we are alone and helpless in this world. "If ye forsake him, he will forsake you" (2 Chronicles 15:2). Dear brother, do not forsake the assembling of the saints together.

—Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Prayer List:** *Gary Box, Floyd & Doris Bush, Dallas Crabtree, Joyce Delgado, Troy Lake, Helen Rushing, Wanda Stewart.*
- **Gospel Meeting:** Our Gospel Meeting with *Dan Melhus* is just a month away. Mark March 4 through 9 on your calendar today and plan to be present at every service.
- **Philippines:** *Wallace Little* leaves this week for the Philippines and will remain there teaching in the Cainta preacher training program through May.
- **Budget & Financial Statements:** *Jim Rhiddlehoover* has posted the annual report on the bulletin board and left copies of the budget on the table in the foyer.

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 5

February 4, 2007

Some Things Money Can't Do

Some people say that "money talks, it can do anything". Relatively speaking, this may be so in many respects. However, this is not true in the absolute. In fact money (and the love of it) has many weaknesses. Let us now consider some things that money cannot do.

Can't Buy a Good Name

A good name is of great value. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1). We are further told, "a good name is better than precious ointment" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). A good name cannot be purchased with silver and gold, and riches and a good name do not necessarily go hand in hand. A rich person may have a baneful name and a poor person a good name.

Can't Buy Wisdom

Wisdom and understanding are precious. "How much better it is to get wisdom than gold, and to get understanding rather than silver" (Proverbs 16:16). We are further told: "For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it" (Proverbs 8:11). Job said, "It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof" (28:15). If

we lack wisdom, we are to ask of God in faith (James 1:5-6).

Can't Train Up a Child

It is of utmost importance that our children be properly trained. Paul says, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). God expects and demands of us that we rear our children in righteousness. No amount of money can assure one that his child will be properly disciplined. Every parent has a solemn responsibility to his children. Every child has the right to be properly taught (and cared for).

Can't Buy a Quiet Spirit

Our attitude and disposition will determine our eternal destiny. We learn from I Peter 3:4 that the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit "is in the sight of God of great price." The riches of a Rockefeller are worthless as far as buying a meek and quiet spirit. This must be developed by the individual from within.

Can't Remove Sin

Sin is a mean and ugly thing. It is dark and bleak. It will destroy one here and ultimately lead to eternal ruin unless it is removed. Peter tells us, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye

were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from you fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18,19). John said: "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Revelation 1:5). No amount of money can remove the smallest sin. It takes the precious blood of our blessed Saviour.

Can't Ward Off Death

Death is dreaded and would be avoided by most people if it were possible. All, whether rich or poor, must die. It is a universal appointment. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Money is indeed weak and worthless as far as defying or warding off death is concerned.

Can't Free a Soul

We learn from Lk. 16:19-31 that a rich man died, and was buried, and hell (Hades) he lifted up his eyes, being in torments. Although he pleaded for mercy, he was told that a great gulf separated him from the righteous and neither could cross over to the other. In other words, it was now too late to

avoid or to get out of torment. He could not buy nor pray his way out of Hades.

Can't Profit in the Day of Wrath

Although one may enjoy the provisions of material riches during his lifetime on the earth, he can take none of them with him when he dies. Neither can they be of further use to him. The wise man tells us that "Riches profit not in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivereth from death" (Proverbs 11:4). It's not what we possess, but it is how we possess it, that will count in judgment. Not what we have, but what we are will profit in the day of wrath. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matthew 16:26)?

—Carroll R. Sutton

You Were Late!

We had visitors at worship services on Sunday morning. It would have been nice for you to meet and welcome them into our midst. Unfortunately, you couldn't do this because *you were late!*

Our visitors needed help finding the proper classrooms for their children. Someone should have helped them. You couldn't *you were late!*

Our visitors didn't have a class book which would help them follow along in our study. It would have been nice for someone to make sure they got a copy before class or maybe to share their own book with them. You couldn't help them *you were late!*

Our visitors needed help finding the proper page in their Bible. They did not have years of Bible study behind them. You could have helped them, but you were still on your way to services. *You got up late, left home late and walked into the meetinghouse late.*

Before we started Bible class, one of the brethren fervently prayed and mentioned by name some who were sick. I know you didn't hear him and couldn't say "Amen" to his prayer *you were late!*

When Bible class began the teacher announced the page in the class book where the brethren would be studying today. Of course, you couldn't hear him either. *You were late!*

When you finally stumbled into the classroom you had no idea what the class was discussing. You would have known if you would have gotten up on time and left your house when you should have in order to get to services on time, but *you were late!*

The person beside you on the pew missed part of what was taught because they were trying to help you find the proper page in the class book and in your Bible. It was a shame that you had to disturb them, but *you were late!*

Not only were you late, but so were your children. They got to disrupt their classroom just like their parents did. It's nice to see that your children are being trained to put God first and worship "in Spirit and in truth."

By getting to services late you got to show your children how much the Lord really means to you. If someone important had

announced their intention of visiting with us on Sunday, you would have made sure that you were here on time. But, since it's only the Lord Jesus Christ who has announced His intention of being with us (Matthew 18:20), you felt no need to get here on time, *so you were late!*

By showing up late every Sunday you don't have to worry about your children getting to know others who are interested in spiritual things. Why, if they got to class early your children might even look at the bulletin boards their teacher decorated with Bible scenes or have time to review the class book their teacher spent weeks preparing.

One advantage of coming in late is that your car is closer to the parking lot exit you can get home sooner and complain about not getting anything out of services.

—David Padfield

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 6

February 11, 2007

“The People Had a Mind to Work”

One of the most impressive stories in the Bible is that of Nehemiah returning from captivity in Babylon to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. It would seem that several things about this story ought to be of great encouragement to us; also of great help in getting started doing the work that needs to be done today.

It is quite obvious that Nehemiah was motivated by a report of despair and affliction among those who had already returned to Jerusalem. He was motivated enough to refrain from saying, “Somebody ought to do something about this,” but to say instead, “What can I do about this?” One of the first things he did was to pray about this problem, to recognize the many sins and failures of his generation, and to ask for God's blessings and mercy. Then we learn in chapter two that Nehemiah somehow found the courage to express before king Artaxerxes his feelings and his desire to go back to Jerusalem. There is an old saying, “Nothing ventured, nothing gained.” It simply means that until we try to do something we usually do nothing. Nehemiah found the courage to ask for the king's blessings to return home, and to receive needed supplies for

rebuilding the wall from the king's forests.

When Nehemiah finally arrived in Jerusalem and had surveyed the condition of the city, he called the people together and said to them: “Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hand for this good work” (Nehemiah 2:17-18). It seems that a key element in Nehemiah's success was in showing the people the need for this work, and in getting their agreement to his plan. Perhaps we all are often too impatient in wanting things to be done, and to be done right now. Thus, we act without showing others the need for action, and getting their agreement to help.

To be sure, Nehemiah faced opposition. However, despite the mocking of Sanballat and Tobiah, Nehemiah and the people prayed to God and pressed on in the work. All of us want to be liked and respected, and we certainly

don't want to be mocked or ridiculed. But, unless we press on in doing right, in spite of whatever opposition may come, nothing of God's work will ever get done.

Next comes the verse that I like most in this story. “So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: *for the people had a mind to work*” (Nehemiah 4:6). When God's people have a mind to work there is no stopping them. In chapter 6 of Nehemiah we read this: “So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God” (v. 15-16). What could we do if we all “**had a mind to work;**” if we all had a willingness to spend and be spent in laboring for the Lord?

While so many of the examples we get from the Jews are ones that we must not follow, one in the book of Exodus stands out as being good to follow. In Exodus chapter 35 God had given instructions to Moses about collecting the items needed to build the Tabernacle

in keeping with the pattern already given. Beginning in verse 21 we read: "And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments." Then in verse 29 we read: "The children of Israel brought a willing offering unto the Lord, every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which the Lord had commanded to be made by the hand of Moses." These people in fact gave and gave until they had to be restrained from giving, "For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, *and too much*" (Exodus 36:7).

Our problem as Christians is not generally that we give too much to the work of the Lord. Frequently our problem is that we give too little of our time and our effort, or ourselves. Somehow we just have not seen the need and determined to play our part in filling that need. It's so easy to expect others to take care of teaching the lost, or checking up on members who are sick or negligent. Moreover, it is the fault of we who are preachers or elders in failing to do as Nehemiah did in showing the people the need, and getting their agreement and their pledge of help in doing the work. Paul reminded the brethren of their duties to God by saying, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in

the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Nothing that we do "in the work of the Lord" is ever in vain. We may not always see the results we would like, and we may become discouraged along the way because things do not move fast enough to suit us, but just as surely as in the days of Nehemiah we can endure to the end if we only have "a **mind to work.**"

—*Tim Coffey*

Looking for the Nubbin

Let us suppose I am looking for a field of corn to buy. I travel around seeking a field that contains good corn. Finally, I see one that strikes my fancy. The owner says that he will sell it. I then enter the field to see if the corn suits me. As I pass down the rows, the stalks are tall and strong. Almost every stalk has two massive ears hanging from it. However, I pay them little attention. I am looking for something else.

Eventually, over in a low wet corner I find a scrawny little stalk with one little nubbin on it. I pull up the stalk, nubbin and all, walk over to the owner and say: "This is very poor corn. Just look at that nubbin! Why, I have better corn than that, and I have none at all. If your corn is no better than that, then I want none of it."

All can see that I wasn't fair. I wasn't really looking to see what the field of corn was like. I was just trying to find fault with it. It would seem that I was not really interested in buying the field. I was just looking for the nubbin. In my search, I

overlooked all that made it a fine field of corn.

The church of Christ contains many fine, noble, zealous Christians. When one opens his eyes he can see them. If one is looking for the church that Jesus built he will see it. If he is looking for Christianity in action, it is before his eyes. If he really wants to be a Christian, he has found what he wanted.

However, if he is looking for the nubbin, he will find it too. If he is looking for an excuse to stay out of the church, he can find someone who isn't faithful to the Lord. He can point to that one and say, "I am just as good, or better, than that person." Well, so what! Is it something marvelous to be better than a hypocrite, whose portion is hell? Why not take an open-eyed look at the whole church and then become a member like those who are faithful?

—*Jim Sasser*

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 7

February 18, 2007

The Great Commission

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’” (Mark 16:15).

I have had the privilege of preaching in three African nations, Mexico and Belize in Central America. Each time I have been virtually moved to tears at the deprivation people endure. Anyone with even slight concern for others would wish to be able to do something to alleviate the grinding poverty and endemic disease. But for one who appreciates the value of the human soul a more pressing need is apparent both in third world countries and developed nations—the need for the saving power of the gospel.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-20; Luke 24:44-49). This commission contains in summary form the mission of the New Testament church. What then is the mission of the church of Christ?

Authority Which Dictates

Before Jesus sent the apostles, He claimed, “all authority ... in heaven and on earth” had been “given to” Him (Matthew 28:18). Because Jesus spoke the words His Father sent Him to speak,

His words shall judge us in the last day (John 12:48-49).

Certainly the Great Commission was primarily delivered to the Lord’s apostles (Matthew 28:16-18; Mark 16:14-15). However, Christ commanded His ambassadors to teach those whom they baptized “to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Thus, the commission secondarily applies to all Christians.

The Son of God, our King now and Judge in the last great day, issued the Great Commission as a divine command in summary of His purpose for His people. Who would dare disobey!

Need Which Compels

The purpose of the Great Commission is to lead people to be saved (Mark 16:16). Yet, one cannot be saved unless he is first lost. I could not save a man on the riverbank from drowning; he would be safe. However, if he fell into water over his head and could not swim, he would be lost and need salvation.

Thus, the purpose of the Great Commission implies that the world is lost and needs salvation. Indeed, all responsible people have sinned (Romans 3:23) and are thus spiritually dead (Romans 6:23).

The world now, as in Jesus’ day, tragically needs spiritual guidance (Matthew 9:36-38).

The greatest need of all people throughout the entire world is not bread for the belly but bread for the soul (Matthew 16:26-27; John 6:27; Romans 14:17). The gospel alone has the power to meet this need (Romans 1:16).

Love That Directs

Early in His earthly ministry the Lord gave His apostles the Limited Commission. He sent His chosen ambassadors to the Jews alone to prepare them for the establishment of the kingdom (Matthew 10:5-7). However, the Master taught that our love is to be for all mankind (Matthew 5:43-48). God “desires all men to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Indeed, salvation in Christ is for people “in every nation” (Acts 10:34-35). Thus, the Lord through the Great Commission directs us to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), i.e., to “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). We must seek to win all the lost to Christ, paying no heed to differences in nationality, race, tongue, skin color, social position, economic status, parentage or gender.

Message Proclaimed

The Prince of Peace did not send His ambassadors without a message. The gospel they were to announce is the same we must proclaim.

The gospel contains facts to believe: in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, Christ died for our sins, He was buried, and He arose from the dead the third day (Luke 24:44-46). These facts prove Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 1:3-4), and one must believe them to be saved (Mark 16:16; I Corinthians 15:1-4).

The gospel of the Great Commission also includes commands all must obey. The sinner must repent (Luke 24:47), and, upon confession of his faith in Christ (Romans 10:9-10), be baptized (Matthew 28:19) in order to be saved (Mark 16:16). As a disciple of Christ he must then be taught "to observe all things" the Lord has commanded (Matthew 28:20).

To those who believe the facts and obey the commands, the Lord extends the promise of salvation (Mark 16:16), i.e., "the remission of sins" (Luke 24:47).

Promise That Sustains

The Lord promised His apostles when He sent them out, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). He was with them by confirming their word through the miracles He worked by them (Mark 16:17-18). He kept His promise, and the apostolic preaching was established as true by the divine signs (Mark 16:19-20).

We have that confirmed word, and through it the Lord is yet with us (Philippians 2:13),

accomplishing more than we can imagine (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Conclusion

Our generation is now presented with opportunities and resultant responsibilities perhaps never seen since that generation. With the technology, transportation and freedom now afforded us, we can be the instruments of Christ in the greatest assault on the citadels of Satan since the apostolic age or the most miserable failures in history.

The world is before us lost in sin. We have the power to save them. What shall we do?

—Keith Sharp

May We Judge?

The Bible says in Matthew 7:1, "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

This verse of scripture has been quoted and misused more than any other of which I am aware. If you will read the context you will see immediately that the Lord is speaking of hypocritical judgment. The idea is, not that you can have no judgment concerning another, but before you judge another, look at yourself. Get rid of your sins before you condemn sin in another.

Read I Corinthians chapter five, there they were to judge the fornicator among them and withdraw themselves from him. Jesus said, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). If a person steals, he is a thief. If he murders, he is a murderer. If he commits fornication or adultery, he is a fornicator. Their own works condemn or judge them. Of course, final judgment

belongs to the Lord. Notice Acts 17:31: "Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained."

Nevertheless, some immediate judgment has been given to man. Look at 1 Corinthians 6:2, "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world, and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?"

Certainly we need to be careful with our judgments. Judgment must not be based on prejudice, bias or even consensus. Be sure you are judging by facts, not surmising and, above all things; be sure your life is above reproach before you judge another.

"Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?" (Romans 2:21)

—Robert Craig

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 8

February 25, 2007

To Those Who Have Fallen Away

The Bible speaks of individuals who at one time named the name of Christ, but had given up the faith. An example of such a man was Demas who loved this world more than the Son of God (II Timothy 4:10). It is no surprise, therefore, to find Christians making shipwreck their faith today.

If you have put on Christ through baptism, but now no longer serve Him, consider what the Bible says.

Spiritual Men Are Concerned About You

The apostle Paul agonized over the condition of his brethren in Galatia. They had received the gospel only to pervert it. *"I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain"* (Galatians 4:11). Later he writes, *"You ran well, who hindered you from obeying the truth?"* (Galatians 5:7). His alarm was justified because some of them had already *"fallen from grace"* (Galatians 5:4). Those who were yet spiritual he admonished to *"restore such an one in the spirit of meekness"* (Galatians 6:1). It is obvious that the backslidden condition is serious and perilous.

Why This Concern?

Peter wrote of those that had turned back into the world, *"For if, after they have escaped the*

pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them, and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning" (2 Peter 2:20). He says they are worse off than when they never knew the truth. That's hard to imagine, but it's the case.

Paul sheds some light on their pitiful situation. He indicates that they are helpless and almost hopeless; there is nothing anyone can do for them. He says, *"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,"* (Hebrews 10:26). The backslider has turned away from the only one that can help him—Jesus Christ. Until one re-instates Jesus as King over his life and comes back to Him as the Redeemer, he continues a headlong rush toward perdition (Hebrews 10:27-31). The longer this condition persists the more real is the possibility of apostasy and eternal destruction (Hebrews 6:4-8). While men remain resistant to divine appeals to repent the heart continues to harden, some will reach a point of no return (I Timothy 4:1-2; Hebrews 3:12-13).

Why Does This Happen?

There are three reasons why men leave the faith.

There are the pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11:25). Christians do get caught up again in those things that once gave them pleasure when they were in the world (II Peter 2:20). Sometimes this happens when we are least expecting it, or we have been careless in guarding against temptation (Ephesians 5:11-15). We can be foolish like the cowboy who took the temperance pledge. Before "going on the wagon" he came to town every Saturday, tied his horse in front of the saloon, went in, and got drunk. After taking the pledge, he came to town every Saturday, tied his horse up in front of the saloon and went about his business. However, after a while, passing by that saloon coming and going got to be more than he could stand. Soon he was back inside getting drunk. We need to learn that wisdom leads us to find a new place "to tie up our horse."

There is the problem of being different (Romans 12:1-2). The Lord describes this problem in the parable of the soils: *"But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy*

receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended" (Matthew 13:20-21).

Christians need to expect Satan to put the pressure on them from all sides (II Corinthians 11:13-15). While we were in the world Satan did not persecute us because we were on his side. However, when we became Christians, Satan lost some from his fold. When this happens, Satan gets mad and, like the Lord, goes looking for his lost minions. However, his tactics are ruthless and severe.

Finally, there is the problem of getting caught up in this world. Returning to the parable of the soils, Jesus describes this problem also: *"And the ones that fell among the thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity"* (Luke 8:14).

Perhaps you intend some day to get serious about religion, but not while there is so much to do. Ballgames, work and social activities are not wrong in themselves, but they should never come before God. If you are too busy to assemble, worship, study and meditate upon the Bible, then you are too busy to go to heaven.

I hope you will think about your condition, repent and return back to your rightful place in the household of God. Know that the Father, the Lord, the angels in heaven and the church will rejoice in your decision. They are all earnestly seeking you and awaiting your return home.

—Jeff Asher

Safe Preaching

It's not always safe to be a preacher. That is, a preacher who preaches what people really need. Herod the tetrarch was living in a state of adultery. Some say he was guilty of incest. Maybe it was a little of both. But he was living with his brother's wife, Herodias, and John said to him, "It is not lawful for thee to have her" (Matthew 14:4).

Some of our present day preachers say, "John shouldn't have judged him." In fact, just down the street from me, a church advertises on their reader board, "Come! We neither judge nor condemn." Well, Herod had judged himself. He's the one who was the adulterer. Jesus said, "By their fruits ye shall know them." John taught, "Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance." The fruits he saw here was rebellion to God's law of marriage.

There are so many today that are living in rebellion to God's law of marriage that it is not wise for preachers to say anything about it, so they remain silent and accept anything into their fellowship that comes along.

John had a mission. That was to call people back to God. Preachers today have the same mission; call people back to God. Herod laid hold of John and put him in prison. He would have put him to death but he feared the people. Salome, the daughter of Herodias, danced before Herod and pleased him immensely. So much so, that he promised her anything. At the instruction of Herodias, Salome requested the

head of John. Her request was granted and John lost his head all because he had enough courage to preach what he knew would please God. He could say with the apostle Paul, "Woe unto me if I preach not the gospel." I believe he could also say with Paul, "I have fought a good fight ... henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

It's not always safe to preach the truth and, sad to say, most present-day preachers have learned that lesson.

—Bob Craig

Gospel Meeting Next Week

You should be making your final preparations for our Gospel Meeting with *Dan Melhus*. We will have a great week with uplifting Bible studies and fellowship.

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 9

March 4, 2007

A Misunderstood Memorial

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

(I Corinthians 11:23-32)

This text is Paul’s account of the words of institution uttered by Jesus at the Last Supper (Luke 22:13-20) and his explanation of their significance to the memorial which we call the Lord’s Supper (I Corinthians 11:20).

This memorial has been kept by the church since its beginning

(Acts 2:42). It is central to her worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) and an essential element in her continuing proclamation of the Gospel (I Corinthians 11:26).

However, as with every aspect of the church’s worship, the memorial has not escaped the effects of apostasy and digression. The Supper is often misunderstood and abused because men are ignorant and unlearned with respect to the divine design and intent of this great memorial.

A Misunderstood Cost

One of the leading causes producing abuse is a lack of appreciation for the true cost of the Lord’s Supper. When the cost is considered, the actual dollars and cents spent is not what ought to be viewed. The physical elements used in the Supper, unleavened bread and grape juice, are common, universally obtainable and relatively inexpensive—a practically negligible expense.

Rather, the cost should be measured in terms of the suffering which Christ endured and the grief which heaven experienced.

Jesus voluntarily left the throne room of heaven and laid aside the privileges and prerogatives that were His by right in order to step down to this low world of sin and

sorrow (Philippians 2:6–8). Yet, this was only the beginning of His sufferings (Hebrews 2:9–10; 5:8–9). He was raised in poverty (Luke 2:24), learned a trade (Mark 6:3) and continued in a simple and austere life (Luke 9:58). Ultimately, He yielded to the will of the Father and laid down His very life which was violently taken by wicked and hateful enemies (Acts 2:23).

Yet, in order to truly appreciate the staggering cost which heaven paid one must also contemplate the suffering which the Father endured as well. The grief which the sin of mankind has brought to the heart of God is incalculable (cf. Genesis 6:5, 6; Habakkuk 1:13). We have obviously angered God and wounded His heart (cf. Hosea 3:1–5). Yet, the great love with which He loved us was undiminished and moved Him to send His Only Begotten Son as our Redeemer. Any human father can grasp a small portion of God’s agony by imagining your own feelings at the suffering and death of a son.

Thus, it was the humiliation, suffering and death of the Son of God that paid the price for this wonderful memorial.

A Misunderstood Value

That the practical spiritual value of the Supper is often misunderstood is indicated in numerous ways, most notably by the careless manner in which

observed. While passing the trays, one is likely to see all manner of disinterested and irreverent behavior manifested by those claiming to “discern the Lord’s body.” Whispering, note passing, sleeping, sketching, nail-clipping and other distracting conduct may be noticed. The Supper is a time for reflection and contemplation, not idle daydreaming.

Willingness to forgo observing the Supper is a good indicator that one does not appreciate its value. The denominations have long pretended that they do not want to trivialize the Supper by taking it week after week. Thus, they take it once a quarter, on special “holy days” or not at all. How does calling the Church of Christ each week to reflect on the high cost of redemption and to contemplate the significance of their place in the body of Christ trivialize the Supper (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 10:16–17)?

However, many who would defend the observance of the Supper every first day of the week as an obligation enjoined by the Scriptures upon every believer, will without guilt of conscience miss the opportunity to do so for entertainment, family or other social or recreational pursuits. One willing to put a worldly pleasure above remembering the Lord’s death sees little need in it. This latter does the greater harm in that his neglect serves to bolster the claims of those in error.

Other’s display their lack of appreciation by their alteration of the Supper in substituting different elements and transforming it into a common meal. Several years ago in a community where I lived one of the local denominations announced that they were going to observe the “Lord’s Supper” by

feeding the entire church hamburgers, french-fries and a beverage of choice. What foolishness. The Lord’s Supper is just that, the **LORD’S** Supper (I Corinthians 11:20–21). It is not our own Supper.

In the first place, the significance of the Supper is found only in the authorized elements— unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine (Matthew 26:26–28). In the second place, Paul condemned making a common meal out of the communion (I Corinthians 11:22, 34). That the Lord’s Supper was never intended to be a common meal is apparent from the fact that it was ordained after men had satisfied their hunger (Luke 22:20). We come together to eat, but not to feast.

The value of the Lord’s Supper is realized in its special spiritual functions. First, for the believer there is a reminding function. The Supper reminds us of the suffering of Christ (11:24–25). We are called upon to see in the bread the “body given for you” and in the cup “the blood shed for many for the remission of sins.” It serves a demonstration function (11:26). The public eating of the Supper in an assembly of believers is a proclamation of our common fellowship in Christ’s death and testimony to all that we await His return. Likewise, it possesses an examination function (11:27–28). Each one who eats must do so examining His own self—not to determine personal worth, but to determine whether or not one is living a life equal to the proclamation he makes. Hypocrisy and enmity are inconsistent with communion in the body and blood of Christ (cf. John 6:50–51). Thus, in the Supper there is a discernment function as well (11:29). In eating we are compelled to properly evaluate

the death of Christ and determine whether or not we are truly relying upon His death for our redemption (cf. Hebrews 10:26–29). Herein is the last function realized, a chastening function (11:30–32). Self-examination performed by the light of the cross is powerfully transforming. It is the blood of Christ that purged our conscience (Hebrews 9:14) and only that blood can keep it clean (I John 1:7–19). A child of God will not continue in sin (I John 3:9). Therefore, those who really love Christ will be turned in repentance from sin, while those who love their sin will drink condemnation unto themselves (cf. I Timothy 4:2). Have you misunderstood this wonderful memorial? Will you begin to comprehend its cost in suffering to Christ and the Father in Heaven? Will you realize its value and allow it to truly function as it was intended?

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 10

March 11, 2007

A Misunderstood Memorial (2)

And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

(Luke 22:15-20)

These are the words of institution uttered by Jesus at the Last Supper when from the elements of that ancient memorial He established a new and greater memorial—the Lord’s Supper. The Church of Christ has kept this feast for nearly two thousand years as a perpetual demonstration of their faith that the risen Redeemer is coming again to receive all His saints unto Himself for eternity.

However, this sacred feast has been corrupted over the centuries through neglect, indifference, ignorance and pride. Because of these corrupting influences many do not understand the place of the Supper in the worship of the Church or its significance to the believer.

Let’s continue our study of this misunderstood memorial.

Its Mistaken Participants

Many denominational groups misunderstand who is actually authorized to eat the Lord’s Supper. There is often great debate among them over whether the Supper is “open” or “closed” to the members of a specific denomination. The truth is that the Supper is neither “open” nor “closed.”

Those who advocate an “open communion” do so because they believe that the Supper should be offered to all who are “believers” regardless of denominational affiliation. Their view rests in the conviction that “the church” is not necessary to salvation only “faith in Christ” is necessary (cf. Acts 20:28; James 2:24); thus, anyone who has “faith” should be allowed to participate.

Those who advocate a “closed communion” do so on the grounds that only “baptized believers” should be admitted to the supper. (Now, here is where it gets sticky.) Baptists, in general, would deny admission to the Supper to any that have not received “Baptist baptism,” or immersion, because, while they will grant with other sectarians that baptism is not necessary to salvation (cf. Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16), it is necessary to church membership. The Lord’s Supper, according to them, is “a church

ordinance” and, therefore, the unimmersed, even though “saved,” may not participate since they are not members of a Baptist Church which requires a vote of the local church and immersion at the hands of a Baptist preacher. Roman Catholics, while they accept sprinkling, affusion and immersion, nevertheless reject Protestants at the Mass because they have not been “baptized” at the hands of a Catholic and are not subject to the Roman Pontiff.

The truth is that the Lord’s Supper is to be observed by those who are “disciples” (Acts 20:7), which “the Lord added to the church” (Acts 2:41–42; 47). These disciples have indeed been immersed in water for the remission of sins, baptized (Acts 2:38); however, they are nothing more than, or other than Christians (Acts 11:26). They have not joined any denomination, but have joined themselves to a local church organized after the New Testament pattern (I Corinthians 11:22). The New Testament does not authorize the local church to “police” the Supper, but it does command that all who assemble to participate engage in careful self-examination (11:27–29).

The Lord’s Supper is not a litmus test to determine creedal correctness; neither is it an ecumenical device to promote cross denominational fellowship. The Lord’s Supper is where the

saved remember the death of their Savior.

Its Misunderstood Terms

The Lord's Supper is referred to by several different terms in the New Testament which are often misunderstood.

It is called the Lord's Supper in order to designate its memorial character and sanctify it from any common association with an ordinary meal (I Corinthians 11:20–21). It is by metonymy known as "breaking bread" (Acts 20:7; 2:42) indicating that it is nevertheless to be eaten as a communal meal (I Corinthians 11:33). Paul calls it "the communion" (I Corinthians 10:16) which reflects the universal fellowship the Church has in the death of Christ (10:17) and the demand which such fellowship makes for a holy life (10:18-21). Paul also refers to it as the "Lord's Table" suggesting the elements by what contains them and, again, implying the idea of a communal meal eaten by all the saints (cf. II Samuel 9:7–13; Luke 22:29–30).

Finally, the Lord's Supper is called a "Feast of Charity" or "Love Feast" (Jude 12). Some have thought that the "love feast" was a second meal the Church was authorized to keep—perhaps a social meal or a benevolent meal. However, there is absolutely no evidence that the "love feast" was ever any such thing (I Corinthians 11:20–21, 34). In Jude and II Peter (2:13) where the saints are reproved over the matter, both contexts indicate that the error involved their eating with those who were sinful men (Jude 10-16; II Peter 2:10-14). The effect of their eating with these men was "spots and blemishes" in "your feasts." Thus, by eating with these men they brought themselves into fellowship with those whom Christ had no fellowship. The

circumstances in this text parallel those of I Corinthians 5:9-11 and I Corinthians 10:21. Just as the situation at Corinth necessitated that the Supper be restored to its pure observance, so the circumstance in Asia required the same thing; therefore, Peter urged them to "be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless" (II Peter 3:15).

While mentioning misunderstood terms, it is important to note that the Lord's Supper is never called "the Eucharist" or "sacrament," it is never offered in connection with "the Mass" or an "altar." Furthermore, the bread is not called "the Host." Neither is the Lord's Supper referred to as a "church ordinance." And, it is certainly not the "Christian Passover" (cf. I Corinthians 5:7). These are all terms that have their origin in denominational doctrine and practice.

Its Misunderstood Frequency

The religious world in general does not understand when the Lord's Supper is to be eaten, and, unfortunately, many of my brethren have forgotten. It is becoming more and more common to hear of Churches of Christ eating the Lord's Supper on Thursdays and Saturdays.

There is one verse in the Bible that specifies a day in connection with the Lord's Supper. It simply says, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

The first day of the week was "when the disciples came together to break bread;" that's simple enough to understand. If you asked me, "When is pay day?"

And, I replied, "Friday is when the employees are paid." Would you not expect to be paid every Friday? When dealing with frequency of time, in order to express an annual or semi-annual event one would name the day and the month. In order to express a monthly event one would name the day within the month (e.g. the third Sunday), in order to express a weekly event one would specify the day of the week. This the New Testament does in Acts 20:7.

What did Moses mean in Exodus 20:8 when he said, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy?" The Jew understood that every week had a seventh day and that day was holy to God. Every week has a first day and that day is when disciples assemble to break bread.

Let's endeavor to develop a proper understanding of this great memorial's designations, participants and frequency.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 12

March 25, 2007

The Beatitudes (1)

And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:2-10

These eight blessings have been designated as “the Beatitudes.” The name comes from the word *beatify* which means to make blessedly happy (*The American Heritage Dictionary*). Jesus in these sayings describes the man who has genuine joy.

The subject of the Sermon on the Mount is the character of the Kingdom of Heaven; therefore, necessarily, it is about the character of the individuals that are its citizens. These beatitudes are more than an affirmation of blessing; they are an intricate description of the man who will be granted entrance into the Eternal City (cf. Luke 10:20; Philippians 3:20).

As I look at the Beatitudes, there is a climax at verse six. The first three “blessings” describe the character of the one who will become a Kingdom citizen, a saint, a Christian. The fourth describes the intense desire of the seeker to escape the bondage of sin and promises him success—he will be satisfied. The next three blessings describe attributes which will be possessed by every Christian. He must be these things to have the joy of the Kingdom of Heaven. Finally, there are adverse consequences of Kingdom citizenship, but even in these, the saint has joy.

Let’s take a closer look at the character of the Kingdom citizen.

Blessed Are the Poor

Jesus said, “Blessed be *ye poor*: for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20). Who and in what condition are these of whom the Lord speaks?

The Bible does not attribute virtue or righteousness to a state of poverty per se (Proverbs 30:8). A rich man may enter the kingdom as well as a poor one (Matthew 19:23-27). A poor man may be just as miserly and wicked as a rich man (Exodus 23:2-3; I Timothy 6:10; Proverbs 28:16; Jeremiah 6:13; Luke 12:15; Hebrews 13:5). While there is an

indication that the poor have some advantage over the rich, poverty alone does not make one righteous (James 2:5-6).

Matthew’s account of Jesus’ words is more detailed and in these there is an elimination of any confusion. He says, “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*.” The poverty that leads to righteousness is a poverty of heart—recognition that one is a sinner bereft of any merit before God. The man upon whom Jesus pronounces great joy is the man who knows he is guilty before God and lost in sin. As David said, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart” (Psalm 34:18; 51:17). This man will receive the boundless riches of heaven. As Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). The man who is truly sorry for his sins and understands his pitiful condition has begun to provide for himself “bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that cannot fail, where no thief approaches, neither moth corrupts” (Luke 12:21).

Blessed Are Those that Mourn

Jesus condemned those that “laughed” in Luke 6:25 saying: “Woe unto you that laugh now

for ye shall mourn and weep!" Are we to understand that a good sense of humor and clean fun are sinful? Are Christians supposed to be a miserable and unhappy bunch? How can we reconcile this with the fact that those who mourn are filled with unspeakable joy?

The second beatitude is often misunderstood being read at funerals or written on sympathy cards. Jesus is not talking about mourning on account of loss or bereavement. Even Jesus wept and was sorrowful at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). Can any read His words to the disciples and conclude Jesus was joyful in the death of His friend?

Rather, Jesus is talking about mourning over sin. That which He condemned in the Pharisees was their hypocritical confidence in their own righteousness. This disposition of heart was displayed in their contempt for those whom they regarded as sinners (Luke 18:11; Mark 2:16). They often argued with Jesus affirming their righteousness and spiritual superiority. Once they even affirmed: "We be Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to any man" (John 8:20-34).

That which Jesus says results in unspeakable joy is described by James in his epistle (4:8-12). The Apostle affirms that mourning, weeping and heaviness of heart on account of sin will end in exaltation by Jesus Christ. The blessed man is that man who by godly sorrow is led to genuine repentance (II Corinthians 7:8-10). He yields his heart in submission to Christ who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings. Without this no man shall see the Kingdom of

Heaven (I Corinthians 6:9-10; Mark 10:1; Galatians 5:21).

Blessed Are the Meek

Another misunderstood beatitude is this third one. Misapprehended in its terms, joy is ascribed to the weak and timid. Misapprehended in its promises, the blessing is thought to be found in a temporal existence and earthbound reign of Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Meekness is simply defined as gentleness; however, the significance of the word as it is used in Scripture is far greater than its use in the common Greek. The word has nothing to do with timidity or a yielding weakness. Moses is described as the meekest man in all the earth (Numbers 12:3), and this after he had smote the Egyptians, struck the rock to give water, broken the tables of stone at Sinai and forced the people to drink the dregs of the golden calf. As Vine notes, "It is that temper of spirit in which we accept [God's] dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting...[it is] first of all a meekness before God... the opposite of self-assertiveness and self-interest...because it is not occupied with self at all" (EDNTW, pp. 727-728). Meekness is that strength of character that that yields itself willingly in obedience to the bidding of God.

The phrase "inherit the earth" would be better rendered "inherit the land." It is common throughout the Old Testament and signifies God's blessings upon His obedient people. It first appears in the fifth commandment which is restated in Ephesians 6:2-3, "that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" or "the land" (cf. Exodus 20:12). Paul says this was the first commandment with promise. God promised

Israel that they would remain in the land of Canaan so long as they were faithful to Jehovah (Leviticus 18:28: 20:22).

David uses the phrase repeatedly in Psalm 37 (vv. 9, 11, 22, 29, 34). Jesus' third beatitude is a quotation of David in Psalm 37:11. Each time "inherit the earth" is juxtaposed with being "cut off." It is a contrast between the fate of the righteous and the fate of the wicked. To "inherit the land" is a proverbial way of expressing the victorious salvation of the righteous (Psalm 37:21-29).

Thus, the man who accepts God's will without complaint and trusts God in every situation giving Him the obedience of faith, this man will be saved; he will inherit the land (II Peter 1:5-11; I Peter 1:3-9). Meekness is the next natural step in this progressive description of the saint's character. He must first reject self and through Godward sorrow submit himself freely and gladly to will of Heaven.

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 13

April 1, 2007

The Beatitudes (2)

And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:2-10

Blessed Are You that Hunger & Thirst

Jesus said, "Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled...Woe unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger" (Luke 6:21, 25). As in the other beatitudes, Jesus is not speaking literally. There is no intrinsic righteousness produced by hunger which is proven by Jesus' dismissal of the idea when He condemned the fasting of the Pharisees (Matthew 6:16-18; Luke 18:12).

Furthermore, on at least two occasions, Jesus fed those

following Him who were hungry (Mark 6:36; 8:1-3). Yet, He also refused to feed some that came to Him seeking bread (John 6:24-42). It is impossible to harmonize Jesus' actions with a literal interpretation of the word "hunger".

However, when we consider what Christ said to the bread seekers in John 6 this beatitude begins to come into focus. The Lord urges them to "labor not for the meat [or bread] that perisheth, but for that meat [or bread] which endureth to eternal life" (v. 27). Later in the same context He declares, "I am the bread of life" (v. 35). Thus, it becomes apparent that Jesus is describing Himself as that which can satisfy the longings of the human heart for a restored communion with God (cf. John 4:13-14). We, as sinners, yearn as did David when he said: "As the hart [the deer] panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Psalm 42:1). David wanted the "joy of salvation" which comes only when God "blots out" all our iniquities (Psalm 51:7-9).

It is this desire that Jesus describes as hungering and

thirsting after "righteousness" (Matthew 5:6); it is a yearning for justification or the remission of sins. Such a yearning, that it will not go away until it is satisfied. This is the man who is seeking the Kingdom of Heaven—and he will find it.

This is certainly the natural progression of the beatitudes toward their climax. First, there must be poverty of spirit, that is, a consciousness of one's spiritually bankrupt condition before God (Isaiah 64:6). Then, the man who would enter the Kingdom must be turned in upon himself in remorse for sin which will result in a true repentance from sin (Psalm 51:17; II Corinthians 7:9-11). This results in a willing, humble submission to Christ (Hebrews 5:8-9). These are the characteristics of the man who will enter the Kingdom.

The great longing of the heart will be satisfied when the sinner receives Jesus Christ—the bread of Heaven (John 6:33-40). Sin is forgiven in Christ (Romans 8:1-3), and we are new men alive in righteousness (Romans 6:3-13). We no longer know the futility and frustration of living in sin

without God and without hope; rather, now, we are victorious through Jesus Christ (Romans 7:24–25; 8:37–39).

Blessed Are the Merciful

The paradoxical nature of these beatitudes continues in this fifth heavenly statement: “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). Mercy is generally thought to belong to those who are in power over others. The dictionary regards it as “clemency”. Thus, those in a position to grant or show mercy are generally perceived as not in need of the same. However, Jesus in describing the Kingdom citizen affirms that all are in need of mercy.

Again, consider what has already been described as necessary for entrance into the Kingdom (Matthew 5:3–6). Could not all of this be summed up as mercy? No man enters into the Kingdom apart from the mercy and grace of God (Ephesians 2:5–10; Titus 3:3–7).

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 14

April 8, 2007

The Beatitudes (3)

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

This beatitude is emblazoned above the door of the United Nations Building in New York. It is there because the goal of that institution is to prevent war and the suffering that comes from it. The nations that subscribe to the UN believe that it is a noble and worthwhile goal to work for “world peace.” However, since the founding of that body, in words of Jesus which are more apropos, there have been “wars and rumors of wars.”

Jesus did not have the achievement of global serenity and the absence of armed conflict before His mind when He spoke the words to His disciples. That is not to say that Jesus and Heaven do not desire it, but, rather, that this is not the promise or the mission of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the first place, the Kingdom of Heaven is not a carnal or temporal institution (John 18:36). The Kingdom, reign or rule of Heaven is in the heart (Matthew 13:19) and over the life (Matthew 20:20-28; Col 3:14-17). It is not directly concerned with the actions of civil government (Matthew 22:21). The Kingdom of Heaven does not compete with temporal rule;

it actually requires that disciples be obedient to law, pay taxes and reverence rulers (Acts 5:28-29; Romans 13:1-7; I Timothy 2:2; I Peter 3:17; 4:15).

In the next place, the Kingdom of Heaven, while not desirous of conflict with earthly kingdoms, nevertheless, is often at odds with these. Jesus said, “I come not to send peace but a sword” (Matthew 10:34; Luke 12:51; 22:36). He is arguably the most controversial man to have ever lived, and He continues so to this day. The nations were aligned against Him at His birth and in His death (Matthew 2:1-18; Acts 4:23-30; cf. Psalm 2:1). His teachings have been opposed by kings and nations until this very hour. Just the mention of His name or the teaching of His word in some quarters of the earth will result in immediate execution.

However, the Kingdom is preeminently concerned about *peace* (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3)—peace with God by the death of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:14-17). Every man, who will, may be reconciled to God through the Gospel (II Corinthians 5:18-20; Romans 5:10). Those who reject the reconciliation effected by Jesus Christ are destined for defeat and destruction (Romans 6:23; cf. Joel 3:9-21; Revelation 19:15).

Thus, being a “peacemaker” involves, first, individually making peace with God (Romans 5:1). This is evident from the pattern already seen in the beatitudes. The seeking, penitent sinner who submits to God in obedience to the Gospel of the Kingdom will be saved (cf. Mark 16:15-16; John 3:1-8; Acts 2:36-40). However, Kingdom citizenship results in a transformation of life. The saint enters into a life which is characterized by mercy, purity and, now, peacemaking. He takes on the character of his Savior (1 John 2:4-6; 3:1-3, 14-16; 5:18-21; I Peter 2:20-25). In order to display the character of the King, the Kingdom must be involved in the great work of peacemaking by preaching the Gospel of the Great Peacemaker, Christ (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15).

Blessed Are the Persecuted

The most astounding of the beatitudes is the eighth and last one: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.” How could any persecution under any circumstances be grounds for rejoicing?

Every disciple needs to understand that persecution is

his lot. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12). It will not always be violent, and it will rarely end in martyrdom; nevertheless, we will be persecuted.

Jesus described some of the forms which this persecution may take. Men will "revile you," that is, they will mock, taunt or chide you because of your faith. This they did to the Lord while blindfolded and bound (Luke 22:63–65; cf. II Peter 2:23). Men will say all manner of evil, vicious and malicious things about you falsely. Again, Jesus often endured this. They called Him a servant of the Devil (Matthew 10:25); they said He was crazy (John 10:20) and demon possessed (Mark 3:30); they implied He was illegitimately born (John 8:41); they accused Him of being a heretic (John 8:48), a deceiver (Matthew 27:64) and a blasphemer (Mark 14:64).

Jesus said that His disciples would be "cursed," that is, imprecated and condemned (cf. Matthew 25:41). The Jews often expressed this low estimation of Jesus (Luke 7:34, 39, 15:2; John 9:24) and His disciples (John 8:45–49). He warned that men will "despitefully use," that is, abusively threaten with violence. Certainly the Lord suffered this (Luke 4:29; John 10:31–33; 11:8), as did His disciples (Acts 4:17, 21; 5:40–41; 14:5). Jesus said this persecution would in some instances be from "city to city" (Matthew 23:34). Jesus had to avoid going into Judea because Herod (Luke 13:31) and the Jews wanted to kill Him (John 7:31). His Apostles were literally chased

from "city to city" by unbelievers (Matthew 10:23; Acts 17:13; I Thessalonians 2:2).

There will be times when the persecution may take on a very violent, even deadly, character. Jesus said, "some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues" (Matthew 23:34). Disciples have been beaten, murdered and executed in every age—even the present. It has often been the religious crowd that has been the guiltiest of this sort of violence. The Jews persecuted and executed Christ and all but one of the Apostles (John 21:18–23). The Roman Catholic Church persecuted the Reformers and the Reformers persecuted one another. Jews and Muslims have persecuted Christians for centuries. Some of the most heinous of acts have been perpetrated in the name of "religion."

While we may have not yet been put to the sword, what Jesus said is nevertheless true: "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). We have, and will again, face some form of persecution.

Wherein is the joy and blessing to be found? It comes from the knowledge that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). Those who hate Christ and His disciples may well take away all that we have, including life itself, but they cannot take away our reward in heaven (Matthew 5:10, 12). We have received the Kingdom of Heaven which cannot be shaken or moved

(Hebrews 12:27–28). They may kill the body, but they cannot destroy the soul (Matthew 10:28). The suffering disciple commits his soul to the faithful Creator (1 Pt 4:14–19) with the expectation that He will raise it up in the last day (John 6:39–40).

Now, because we have received such a Kingdom as this, we "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Hebrews 12:28). For this "cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (II Corinthians 4:16). We know "in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). Like Jesus, we despise the shame of our suffering and persecution in expectation of the joy that is set before us in our eternal reward which cannot be taken away (Hebrews 12:2).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 15

April 15, 2007

Salt & Light

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:13-16)

In February 1992, while I was in Nigeria, the late Brother Joseph Onyemaechi took me far out into the bush near Aba to preach on Sunday evening to a new congregation he had started. We were honored with the presence of several village dignitaries. When I was through preaching, the chief spoke for the villagers. He welcomed the new, little church and me. He acknowledged I had spoken the truth. Then he observed, "We will watch the people you convert. If they live good lives, you will convert many from our village. If not, you will not." The chief was both wise and a fine judge of human nature.

In Matthew 5:13-16, the Master teaches us our responsibility to the world. We are salt and light. By successfully so acting, we

lead the world to glorify God. How can we effectively be salt and light for Christ?

Salt

The function of salt is to preserve meat and to make otherwise unpalatable food tasty (cf. Job 6:6). God rules the world in righteousness (Psalm 9:8; 97:2; Revelation 19:15). Where there are no righteous people, a nation will perish (cf. Genesis 18:16-33). The righteous lives and influences on others of Christians preserve the nation and make society palatable to God.

However, to cure or flavor food, salt must be in contact with the food. Christians are to be in the world but not of the world (John 17:14-18). If we are to influence people in the community for good, we must be among them. We need to become friends with them, have them into our homes and go to innocent functions of mutual interest. Jesus mingled socially with sinners in order to save them (Matthew 9:9-13), and we must do the same.

In ancient Palestine, salt was dug from the ground or recovered from salt marshes. If moisture dissolved the sodium chloride (salt) from the compound, a residue would be left. This residue was useless to

preserve or flavor but had enough saltiness left to sterilize land on which it was thrown. It was worse than useless; it was a nuisance. It was carefully swept up and thrown on footpaths, where at least it would do no harm (cf. Luke 14:34-35).

Christians who cease to live righteous lives are worse than useless; they hinder the cause of Christ (cf. Romans 2:21-24). They are a discouragement to their brethren and a stumbling block to the lost.

Light

The Master called us "the light of the world."

The physical light of the sun is the basis of and absolutely essential to earthly life. It provides energy, warmth and visibility. It guides, heals, protects from evil and exposes things hidden in darkness.

Jesus boldly announced, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). He is the source of spiritual life (John 1:4). The Son is the sun that lightens the world. He shows us God (John 14:7), guides us to Him (John 14:6), protects us from evil (John 10:27-30) and exposes the evil lurking in the darkness of ignorance and sin (John 3:20).

Christians are to reflect to the world in our lives the life Jesus lived upon earth (2 Corinthians

3:18; 1 Peter 2:21-22). We are the moon that reflects the light of the sun (2 Corinthians 3:2-3). Our lights thus shine as we live "in all goodness, righteousness, and truth" (Ephesians 5:8-11). As Jesus "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38), so should we (Acts 20:35). Our friends, neighbors and acquaintances will see Jesus in us as we befriend the poor and lowly; live honest, morally upright lives; love each other; do good in return for evil; show mercy to our friends in their troubles and heartaches; try to gently lead them from their sins; speak of things that are pure; and put God first in our lives.

Poor, Jewish homes had the light of a single oil lamp. It would be foolish to light such a lamp and then cover it with a basket. When sin, selfishness, lack of concern for others, and apathy for the Lord characterizes our lives, our light is smothered.

A city built on a hill cannot be concealed from the enemy. Because of the peculiar claims of God's people, we are conspicuous to the world (Hebrews 12:22-23). We must be especially careful to have our "conduct honorable" before a hypercritical world (1 Peter 2:9-12).

Result

The result of such lives is that people of the world "may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." People glorify God by believing and obeying His will (Ephesians 1:12).

How shall we lead our lost friends, neighbors, loved ones and acquaintances to Christ? We must be the light of the

world. If our lives reflect Christ, our words will be effective. If not, no amount of preaching and teaching will hide our misdeeds from the people we are seeking to reach. "Let your light so shine...."

—Keith Sharp

A Date or a Mate?

Jerry is a bright young man with a great future. He is a Christian, genuinely dedicated to pleasing the Lord and preparing for Heaven. Two girls recognize these great qualities and want to date Jerry, but their approach is considerably different.

The first girl tries to attract Jerry by worldly means. She relies on her physical beauty and "up-to-date" wardrobe. She turns on her charm anytime he is around and is quite forward in his presence. She owns her own car and seeks to use that cherished commodity to the greatest possible advantage. She is a member of the church and attends regularly, but material values obviously outweigh spiritual values in her life. She has some good qualities, but she is placing so much emphasis on outward appearance it is difficult to penetrate the veneer and see her real character.

The second girl makes no obvious effort to attract Jerry at all, for her "meek and quiet spirit" could never allow her to be forward or flirtatious. In her effort to please God, she seeks to develop spiritual qualities in her life, and she would like to think that these would make her attractive to a godly young man. Because she is Christ-like, she is warm, friendly, sympathetic, concerned, the kind of person one can feel close to, and she

manifests these qualities in Jerry's presence as she does toward all her acquaintances. This girl is neat and wholesome in her appearance and radiates an inner beauty which "is in the sight of God of great price."

Which girl is Jerry most likely to date? I am not sure. I have seen good boys who, flattered by the attention of flirtatious girls, make poor choices. Jerry could make that mistake. Hopefully, Jerry will distinguish between the girl that will make a great date and the one who will make a great wife and choose the latter.

Two vital questions remain. Girls, which one of the two girls correctly depicts you? Boys, which would you choose for a date? Young people who love the Lord will date and ultimately marry that one who will help them go to Heaven.

— Bill Hall

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 16

April 22, 2007

Guidelines for Determining Wholesome Christian Recreation

The summer months are soon upon us. The warmer weather will provide additional opportunities for recreation and entertainment. The fact that many of us will be faced with these choices raises the question: "How does the Christian determine in which activities to engage?"

Recreation is necessary for a well-balanced life. Mental health authorities say that balanced living includes work, recreation, companionship, and religion. Time and energy should be apportioned to each of these. The Lord even recognized this truth when he instructed the Twelve to take time for leisure activities (Mark 6:31).

The problem is not just finding something to do, but finding suitable recreation in which Christians may participate. Many varied activities are suitable. What guidelines should we follow when making a decision? Does it matter?

Many things present themselves invitingly. You must make a decision about them according to your convictions, and Christians should base their convictions upon biblical teaching and principle.

Twelve Bible Principles

The following Bible principles can successfully guide you in everyday living as a Christian. Ask and answer the following questions for yourself when determining your choice of recreation and entertainment.

Will this activity violate my conscience? (Romans 14:22-23)

If you offend your conscience because you do something without faith, to you it is sin. Study your Bible to assure yourself that what you do is in accord with God's will. When in doubt don't. However, ignorance is not bliss. An untrained conscience cannot hurt, but neither can it warn. The fact that you did not make a wise and reasoned choice will not prevent whatever harm may result (Proverbs 14:29b; 19:2).

Will doing it cause others to fail or stumble in their faith? (I Corinthians 10:23-33)

Though one having strong faith may participate in an activity without offending his own conscience, he must consider the conscience of another who does not have the same knowledge and faith. Do not risk leading a weaker or younger Christian away from Christ by your example.

Can I glorify God in my body while doing it? (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

Man's purpose on earth is to glorify God. Christians know that their bodies belong to Christ. We should never make use of our bodies in such a way as to defile it as a temple for God or encourage others to sin.

Will it bring me under an evil influence? (I Thessalonians 5:22)

You must be constantly on guard so that you are not led into wrong practices by your friends. If you think you have strong enough faith to resist temptation, take heed, you can fall (I Corinthians 10:12). The Bible warns that evil companions corrupt good morals (I Corinthians 15:33).

Will it conflict with my duty to God? (Matthew 6:33)

There are many things that are right of themselves that become wrong because they compete with our obligation to God and His kingdom. Jesus called these things "the cares of this life" (Luke 8:14). We become entangled in these otherwise wholesome activities and begin to crowd God and the church out of our lives. Put God and his kingdom first.

If I do it, will it bring reproach on Christ or His Church? (I Peter 4:14-16)

Reproach may fall on us because we are Christians, but we must never bring reproach upon Christ because we behave hypocritically. We must be certain that the activity is consistent with our profession of Christ. Some activities are held at inappropriate locations, or in conjunction with immoral activities. Other activities are endorsed and upheld by obviously unwholesome and immoral sponsors.

Will my efforts at self-control be strengthened or weakened? (I Corinthians 9:27)

Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit of God which dwells within Christians (Galatians 5:22-24). Self-control can be learned, and it needs to be practiced. Yet, there are some activities which work against self-control. Some activities bring us in contact with people and behavior that weaken our resolve to maintain our self-control (cf. Proverbs 7:10; Isaiah 56:12; I Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9).

Is it a work of the flesh? (Galatians 5:19-21)

Some things are inherently wrong even though many folks find them enjoyable and acceptable (Hebrews 11:25). Drunkenness, fornication, gambling, dancing (revelry), and such like are works of the flesh. Other things become sinful because they are corrupted by being brought into association with works of the flesh. Take care that you are not blindsided by sin.

Will it arouse the indecent? (Philippians 4:8)

Reading books and magazines or viewing television and movies, which create indecent desires is contrary to Christianity. Paul said, "Whatsoever things are pure ...think on these things".

Will this weaken my influence as a Christian? (I Corinthians 10:33)

We want to get along with everyone and recognize that we cannot force our will on others. However, we cannot violate our own conscience and sin against Christ in order to please men. We may have to refuse and accept the consequences. In the long run, our associates will recognize we are serious about our faith.

Is it legal and does it respect community standards? (Romans 12 and 13)

There are some things which may not be inherently evil, but they are nevertheless illegal or inappropriate. These laws and customs are there for the general safety and peace of the community. To disregard them is disrespectful and may endanger peoples lives and property. The Christian recognizes this and is compliant with law and custom.

Does it violate my parent's wishes? (Ephesians 6:1-4)

There are young people who would still have their health, and others who are dead who would be alive today, had they listened to their parents whom they considered "square." Wisdom and experience should be respected when making any decision. A Christian will defer to such (Proverbs 1:5; 9:9).

May God bless you in making these principles part of your life.

— Jeff Asher

FYI: for your information

- **Gospel Meeting**—Jeff Asher was in IL April 15-20 preaching.
- **Debate**—Bruce Reeves will meet Steve Raines & Ron Mitchell in debate on the campus of Central Baptist College in Conway, AR April 23-24, 26-27. Subjects to be discussed include: apostasy, faith alone and water baptism.
- **Prayer List:** Danny & Joyce Anderson, Gary Box, Dallas Crabtree, Mary Hill, Maxwell James, Troy Lake, Errol Lawson, John Lasater, Roy Fenner, Wallace Little, Paul Ragland, Wanda Stewart.
- **Out of Town:** Jeff & Cyndi Asher are in Conway, AR.

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 17

April 29, 2007

Why I Need Jesus

"But one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:42)

We are all familiar with this passage. It is the narrative of Jesus' visit to the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Mary had chosen to leave of the care of domestic chores in order to stop and hear the Savior, while Martha continued to busy herself with serving her guests. Mary recognized her need of Jesus and what he had to offer. Martha was concerned about other things, unnecessary things. Herein is the lesson.

I plainly confess to you that I need Jesus. However, I am not in financial trouble. I am not about to go through a divorce. My children are fine. As a matter of fact, everything seems to be going very well for me. Yet, the common concept seems to be that one must be in some terrible personal trouble before he needs Jesus.

Now, I am convinced that every man needs Jesus and precisely for the same reasons that I need Him. Therefore, I would like to explain to you why I need Jesus.

I Need Him as My Savior

I was a sinner. This is so because the Bible teaches us that

all accountable people sin (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). We sin by transgression (1 John 3:4; 5:17), and we sin by omission (James 4:17). We sin sometimes through ignorance and carelessness (Acts 8:18-24), and other times as a matter of the will (Hebrews 10:26).

The Bible reveals the plight of sinners. The punishment for sin is eternal death (Romans 6:23; II Thessalonians 1:7-9; Jude 14, 15) in a place the Lord has prepared for sinners known as Hell (Matthew 25:41, 46; Mark 9:43, 44; Revelation 21:8). As a sinner, I faced Hell as the consequence of having violated God's word. There was nothing I could do to save myself from the just consequences of my sins: not my regret, no amount of righteous living, no special deeds of kindness to humanity, or works in support of religion.

Jesus Christ came to save me from the consequences of my sins. His death effects, the remission of the sins of all mankind (Matthew 26:28; 20:28; Hebrews 10:4-10). By His blood we are cleansed and redeemed (1 Peter 1:16, 19; 1 John 1:7; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). He is not a savior, but *the* Savior (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 10:43).

I Need Jesus as My Intercessor

Ashamedly, I admit there are still times when I sin (Galatians 6:1-2; II Timothy 2:24-26; James 5:19-20). On those occasions I still need Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:1-2; Hebrews 4:14-16).

However, some folk erroneously believe they do not need Jesus once they are born again. They have been deceived into believing that the sins of the Christian do not damn his soul (but the Bible says differently in Acts 8:21, 23.) They have been taught that the perfect life of Christ has been imputed to them (but the Bible says differently in Romans 4:7-8). They mistakenly believe that the Holy Spirit keeps them from sinning (again, the Scriptures are against them in Galatians 2:11.) Even some of my brethren have bought into this error saying that sins are not imputed to the believer (yet, the Bible is against them as well in 1 John 1:8, 10).

Jesus is our great high priest in heaven standing at the right hand of the Father pleading our case when we err. He is ever attentive to our prayers and on this account we can come before Him boldly and find grace to

help in time of need.

I Need Jesus for an Example

We all are looking for an example to follow. Young children often imitate parents. Young adults seek to emulate those who are remembered for greatness. The Scriptures recognize the power of example (I Corinthians 10:6; 11:1; Ephesians 5:1; I Thessalonians 1:6; I Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7; Hebrews 13:7).

Christ is a perfect, sinless example from whom we learn how to live. I can follow his example in every way: resisting temptation (Matthew 4:1-11), learning submission in suffering (Hebrews 5:7; Matthew 26:39), enduring mistreatment and willingness to forgive (I Peter 2:21-22; Luke 23:34).

When I make moral choices I always ask, "What would Jesus do?" However, why ask such a question if Jesus is no example? If I cannot, as John instructed, "walk even as He walked", why bother to follow Jesus. Yet, if I can look at His life as a sinless example of how I "ought" to live, then there is in Jesus a guide that I will find in none other.

I Need Jesus to Give Meaning to Life

Most people are dissatisfied with life and living. We hate the routine and come to recognize the vanity of things. So many in the world today have the most of life and nothing for which to live!

Jesus brings meaning to life and makes it worth living. I am here because I was created by God

(Genesis 1:1). He has a purpose for me (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Being endowed with free will I can choose to bring my life into subjection to Christ or continue in rebellion (II Corinthians 5:10, 11; Ecclesiastes 12; 13, 14). Since I chose Christ, I have never regretted it. He satisfies my every yearning and life is fulfilling (Matthew 5:6; John 4:13, 14; 6:35).

I Need Him for Strength

Some things in this life are impossible to face alone. People are facing their problems with pills, alcohol, or psychoanalysts because they have tried it alone, and the world is as waste and wasted as never before. There must be a better way! There is.

No problem is too big for Jesus (Philippians 4:13; II Timothy 4:16-17). Our God is a refuge to us in times of trouble (Psalm 56:3, 4; 3:6; 46:1-2). He provides the strength, the comfort and the assurance that we need to make it through life.

We sometimes sing: "O He all my grief has taken, and all my sorrows borne, in temptation He's my strong and mighty tower ... Though all the world forsake me, and Satan tempt me sore, through Jesus I shall safely reach the goal..." Brother or sister, are you relying upon Jesus for this daily strength?

I Need Jesus to Win the Victory Over Death

I think we all fear death to some extent (Hebrews 2:15). The experience of death is the most difficult any man is called upon to face. Without Christ it is a senseless, bitter end to the human experience. However,

Christ has brought "life and immortality to light through the gospel" (II Timothy 1:10).

There is ample evidence of the resurrection (John 11:25). There is no event in history better documented than the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. That fact is the token that you and I will put off this tabernacle of clay and be clothed upon with incorruption. The believer has a hope that none other has (John 14:1-2; I Peter 1:4, 5). It is this promise that calms our fears and eases our pain as we close our eyes to sleep in Jesus.

Friend, you need Jesus too! It is not a sign of weakness or insanity. Rather, it is "the good part" which will never be taken away.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 18

May 6, 2007

Forgiving Just Like Jesus

Jesus certainly set the example of forgiveness even though the sin was horrible. As He hung on the cross, having been crucified by those who did not even know what they were really doing, He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). If we will just think about it a little we will realize that He had this attitude when He came to this old world. We learn that all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Since all have sinned, all need forgiveness. Jesus came here on a mission of just such forgiveness. If He came here to forgive, and He did, why should we think it strange when He did what He came here to do? In doing this He set the example for all His followers to seek a way of forgiveness by demanding repentance on the part of those who sin against them. The fact is, if Jesus had not come to this earth there would be no forgiveness; and therefore, there would be no salvation. We must seek ways to forgive others their sins against us, for in so doing, their sins may be forgiven against God Himself. Have you ever thought about the fact that six of the Ten Commandments had to do with men sinning against other men?

We need to actively seek to forgive those who trespass against us so God can forgive them too. This is the example Jesus set for us as He hung upon the cross.

Forgiveness Is Conditional

We need to seek opportunities to forgive, but we also need to be sure that we do not try to go too far with our forgiveness. Some have the idea that we must forgive without conditions attached. Not so, says the Lord. Look at Luke 17:3-4, "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."

I want us to notice the word "if" in this passage. If we do not put the "if" in the passage, we may be trying to be even more forgiving than Jesus, our example. We may be in the position of trying to teach Jesus the basis upon which true forgiveness may take place. We must be careful that we do not take Jesus out of the place of example, and put ourselves in His place.

The Example of Jesus

We may learn the true basis of Jesus' forgiveness from the first

passage to which we called attention (i.e. Lk. 23:34). Jesus prayed for His Father to forgive those who were in the very act of killing Him. He said nothing about repentance in this prayer, but that does not mean that He was calling upon His Father to forgive His killers unconditionally. The Holy Spirit who Jesus sent took care to reveal the necessity of repentance when Peter preached the very first sermon in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38). Notice also in Lk. 24:47, Jesus said "repentance and remission of sins among all nations would be preached beginning at Jerusalem." When Peter preached that first sermon at Jerusalem, he formally accused the people of murdering Jesus. He said in Acts 2:36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." When these people asked what they should do (v. 37), Peter replied with the word "Repent!" Forgiving like Jesus, as well as forgiveness by Jesus, demands repentance as a condition. Those who try to forgive without condition are trying to be better than God in the matter. One of the vital points of Calvinism is the doctrine of "unconditional election." God

doesn't do it, and the Bible doesn't teach it!

Two Factors in Forgiveness

By this time we ought to be able to realize the fact that forgiveness hinges upon at least two factors. The first is the willingness on the part of the offender to repent, and the second is the attitude on the part of the offended about forgiveness of all. Either one of these people can block their own forgiveness on the part of God by their actions. Further, either one of these may be forgiven by God on an individual basis. The offender may be forgiven by God by repenting of the sinful activity even if the offended will not forgive (cf. Matthew 21:28-32). The offended may maintain a right relationship with God by simply manifesting a willingness to forgive if the offender will repent, and a desire for him to do so.

Jesus Teaches on Forgiveness

Early on in His personal ministry, Jesus taught about forgiveness. In Matthew 6:12 we read as He taught His disciples how to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Are we to pray that God will forgive us without repenting? No one believes that, do they? All understand (except the Calvinists) that God will not do so. But we are to forgive as God forgives us! That is at the point of repentance too isn't it? If a person will not repent then I am not to forgive him! It would be wrong for me to do. It may even lead to sin in my own life in relation to the sinner.

Forgiving & Remembering

What if you did forgive a person for some sin without his repentance? First of all you would be more forgiving than God. Furthermore, if the person was forgiven by you as God forgives, the sin could not be remembered any more, that is, it will not be an issue between them (Jeremiah 31:34). God does not remember their sins and iniquities any more! Please check Hebrews 8:12 along this line. Now, we are commanded to teach the lost the plan of salvation which includes repentance (II Timothy 4:1-4; Acts 17:30-31; etc.). We are also commanded to restore a brother who is overtaken in a fault (Galatians 6:1-2). If, however, we have already forgiven them as God forgives, then we cannot remind them of their sins. We may sin against God by going too far with this mushy, gushy concept of forgiveness. Our forgiveness must have a demand for repentance in it, or we may be a partaker of other men's sins. We have possibly tied our hands behind our back by our overreaction to a call to forgive. We have "gone too far" (2 John. 9-11).

Reasons for Forgiving

There are several reasons given in the New Testament as to why we are to forgive those who sin against us. First of all, God demands it of those who seek forgiveness themselves, and we all need this (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). Those who refuse to forgive then, by that very act, block the road they must travel down themselves. Second, we cannot pray to God if we refuse to forgive those who desire it of us (Mark 11:25).

Third, Jesus is our example in this as well as all other facets of our lives (I Peter 2:21). His example was that He prayed for even those who were at that very moment crucifying Him. Those who are still not convinced ought to take a few minutes to read and study Matthew 18:23-35. Here God warns that if we do not forgive our brother he will hold us accountable as He did the man in the parable. Be willing to forgive!

—Harry Lewis

FYI: for your information

•Congratulations to our High School and College Graduates:

Matt Dickenson, Rebekah Asher from Panola JC and Cyndi Asher from SFASU Graduate School.

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 19

May 13, 2007

“At the Mouth of Two Witnesses”

“One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”

(Deuteronomy 19:15)

The wisdom of God reveals itself in fascinating ways. Take, for instance, the passage before us, wherein God legislates concerning the number of witnesses required to convict someone of violating the law. God clearly states that the testimony of one witness cannot, by itself, lead to a conviction, and particularly in murder trials. In Numbers 35:30, Moses writes, “One witness is not sufficient testimony against a person for the death penalty.” And again, in Deuteronomy 17:6, Moses says, “He shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.” To better understand why God enacted these rules and guidelines, consider the following. The word “witness” literally means, “return, repeat, do again” (TWOT), and refers to the witnesses repeating the evidence seen or heard by them firsthand. In the case where only one witness exists, at best you have one person's word against the other; and this was not adequate for a God of justice. God knows that man does not possess infinite knowledge and

that man can only know about others what is revealed to him (I Corinthians 2:11). He also knows that man can make mistakes and draw false conclusions, sometimes even with the best of intentions (John 4). Additionally, He understands that man too often allows emotions to drive his actions instead of reason and truth (Matthew 27:22-25). To help prevent a man from being falsely condemned, even when motives were good, God enforced the rule requiring that at least one more individual testify to what he saw and/or heard. This assisted finite judges in determining the truth of the matter and gave justice an opportunity to prevail.

Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness

In connection with this, we find the law forbidding man to bear false witness against his neighbor (Exodus 20:16). “False” means, “lying, deceiving, lead astray, betray, or forsake” (TWOT). Thus, God expressly forbids a man to alter or manufacture testimony intended to direct or steer the judge or jury towards an erroneous decision. This violation, in and of itself, carried its own punishment, up to, and

including, the death penalty (Deuteronomy 19:15-21).

We also see Solomon speaking on the subject in Proverbs 29:24, where he declares the obligation of the witness to testify with the truth. For one to know of the matter and not come forth to declare what he knows is to commit sin. *“If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter—if he does not tell it, he bears guilt”* (Leviticus 5:1). So, in a very broad sweep, Moses obligates a man, who knows that one bears false witness, to come forward and refute and repudiate the false testimony.

Responsibility of the Witnesses & the People

Now, to emphasize the seriousness of the situation, God required the witnesses to take the lead, by being first, in executing the convicted criminal. *“The hands of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people...”* (Deuteronomy 17:7) In so doing, the witnesses, if their testimony was false, not only sinned by lying, but now become guilty of innocent blood and are themselves worthy of death: *“Then you shall do to him as he thought to have done*

to his brother..." (Deuteronomy 19:19). An obligation also falls on the people to make certain that the search for truth was in earnest as they, too, take part in the execution. The lynch mob may "get away" with the "legal" murder on this side of life, but they must answer to the One who hears the voice of the blood of innocents and Who avenges them (Genesis 4:10; Psalm 9:12; Nahum 1:2; Luke 18:7-8; I Thessalonians 4:6; Revelation 6:9-10).

Spiritual Application

Bear in mind that God also keeps the terms of His covenants (Romans 3:21-26), and the Omniscient God (Proverbs 15:3) holds Himself to the multiple witness condition of law.

Consider the fact that, to the best of my knowledge, more than one witness always appears in context when condemnation occurs. Even in the case of a "secret sin," multiple witnesses testify. ("Secret sins" are sins we try to hide from public view.) Some might ask, "How?" First, and foremost, God, Himself, bears witness against us when we sin because of His Omniscience (1 Chronicles 28:9; Hebrews 4:12-13, et al). And the second witness stares back at us in the mirror. Jesus told the Jewish leaders, "You are witnesses against yourselves..." (Matthew 23:31). Isaiah says, "They are their own witnesses" (Isaiah 44:9). And again: "Our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, And as for our iniquities, we know them" (Isaiah 59:12).

Therefore, in keeping with God's law, at least two witnesses testify against us when we sin. Thus, properly convicted, the witnesses, in a macabre sense,

enforce the punishment and administer the penalty of death (Genesis 2:16-17; Romans 6:23). God spiritually puts to death any and all who violate His will by separating Himself from them (1 John 1:5; Isaiah 59:1-2), and we, in the act of committing sin, separate ourselves from Him, and by such put ourselves to death (Acts 13:46; Isaiah 59:12-13).

How often do we think of condemning and testifying against ourselves when we sin? And yet this is precisely what occurs. Truly the Psalmist said, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (Psalm 19:7-11) Even His judgments to condemn the sinner to death.

Beloved, please understand that when you choose to get drunk, commit fornication, forsake the assembling, speak evil of your neighbor, harbor ill-will against a brother, or any such thing that violates the law of God, you instantly testify against yourself, and God corroborates that testimony with His perfect knowledge. In connection with this, we are justifiably executed "at the mouth of two or three witnesses." (Deuteronomy 19:15; II Corinthians 13:1; Hebrews 10:28-31) Without repentance (Acts 17:30-31) of these sins, based upon our faith in the word of God concerning the risen Savior, Jesus Christ, (John 3:16; 8:24; Romans 5:1; et. al.), our confession of faith in Him (Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37), and baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:1-18; et. al.), we stand condemned (Luke 13:3; Mark 16:16) before the Judge (Hebrews 12:23).

Choose Life

"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him, for He is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them." (Deuteronomy 30:19)

—Mack Duncan

FYI: for your information

• VBS: June 4-7 (M-Th) at 7:00 PM w/ Randy Harshbarger, Dale Hendricks, D.J. Dickerson and Mickey Chandler.

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 20

May 20, 2007

Except Ye Repent...

"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

(Luke 13:1-5)

Repentance Required

Several years ago a man called a radio broadcast of which I was host and asked me to define repentance. He said it had been a very long time since he had heard any preaching on it and wondered if preachers still believed in it. Needless to say, I was taken aback by the comment.

However, one need not listen long to the preaching that gets done on radio and television to realize that the caller was correct. There is a great deal said about the need to believe in order to be saved, but precious little about the essentiality of repentance.

However, the Lord said, "Except

ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." The force of this statement is that only those that repent—no more and no less—will be saved. Repentance is essential.

Luke's account of the great commission does not mention faith, but it does mention repentance. Jesus said: "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." The Gospel message is a message of repentance.

When Peter preached the first Gospel sermon on Pentecost, he said to those in his audience that confessed faith in Christ, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). The forgiveness of sins was offered to the believer that repented and was baptized. No believer was saved apart from it and none were baptized without it. Repentance is essential.

The essentiality of repentance is easily demonstrated from the numerous statements about it in the Scriptures. Both John, Jesus and their disciples came preaching "Repent, for the

Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matthew. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 6:12). As already noted, Jesus said, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." In Peter's first three recorded sermons, he exhorts his audience to "Repent" (Acts 2:38; 3:19, 5:31) in order to have the "forgiveness of sins." In commenting on the conversion of Cornelius' household, the Jews observed, "Then hath God also granted unto the Gentiles repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Paul declared that God would no longer forbear with the ignorance of the Gentiles "but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent because He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:30-31). As a matter of fact, the Apostle characterized all of his preaching as being that which required of Jews and Gentiles "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21; cf. 26:20). Repentance is essential.

What Is Repentance?

Webster seems to define repentance in degrees. He states: "to feel remorse, contrition, or self reproach." He then adds: "To feel such regret for one's past conduct as to change one's mind regarding

it." Then, finally, he states, "to make a change for the better as a result of remorse or contrition for one's sins." As far as the dictionary is concerned, repentance ranges from regret to reform.

The best definition I have found based upon the Scriptures comes from J.H. Thayer in his *Greek/English Lexicon of the New Testament*. He defines repentance as "to change one's mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins...a change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and a hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds" (pp. 405-406). Thayer recognizes what most others do not in defining repentance; it is much more than sorrow, regret or reformation. It is a change of volition rooted in remorse for having wronged the One True God resulting in a new found abhorrence of one's past and a resolve to change for the better.

Paul expresses this reality in II Corinthians 7:8-10 when he defines repentance as beginning in a "godly" or "God-ward" sorrow which "worketh" or effects repentance. He then describes the change of mind that took place in the Corinthians (v. 11). He uses a combination of words that expresses both their abhorrence of their sin (sorrow, indignation, fear, revenge) and their resolve to do better (carefulness, clearing, vehement desire, zeal). The end result was that they proved themselves "clear in this

matter." Their repentance was "unto salvation;" God forgave them and they were now justified or blameless before Him.

The Lord Defines Repentance

Jesus spoke a parable about a man that had two sons and a vineyard (Matthew 21:28-32). He asked each of them to work on a particular day. The first said, "I will not;" but afterward repented and went. The second said, "I go sir;" and went not. Jesus asked the chief priests and elders that heard Him, "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They all answered, "The first." Jesus agreed with them and then challenged their continued disobedience respecting the ministry of John the Baptist (cf. Luke 7:29-30).

In this simple story Jesus pinpoints repentance. It is the difference between "I will" and "I will not." However, it is not the difference in the *words*; it is the difference in the resolve of the heart which the words reflect. You see the second son said "I go, sir," but he went not. He said the right words, but his heart was not in them. However, the first son who said, "I will not;" repented and went. His repentance cannot be separated from his actual going to the vineyard because it is his going that reflects the resolve of his heart. There was a change of mind that resulted in a change of behavior.

This is why John preached, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matthew 3:8). Repentance always results in works that are answerable or suitable to its profession.

If He Say, "I Repent"

Jesus is misrepresented in His teaching on repentance when men put the emphasis on the words and not the fruits. For example in Luke 17, Jesus said: "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." It is not that he comes and says "I repent;" but that he "turn again to thee saying I repent." The word "turn" is the same word sometimes translated "convert." As with the man's son, so it is with our brother, there is a conversion, a change of the mind which must necessarily be reflected by a change of behavior.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 21

May 27, 2007

Leading Men to Repentance

“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds.”

(Romans 2:1–6)

Getting Men to Repent

A young evangelist once commented to an older preacher that he was not having much success in getting folks to be baptized. The elder replied: “What you need to do is lead them to repentance; they’ll find the water on their own.” There is real wisdom and genuine understanding in those words.

We often preach what men need to believe in order to be saved, as well we should. We teach them the facts of the

Gospel concerning Jesus and how to enter Christ. We exhort men to save themselves from this wicked generation by putting on Christ in baptism. However, getting them from “A” to “C” so to speak is where we are failing in our preaching. Paul addressed that problem in Romans 2:4 when he charged the Jews with “not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.” They had not made the connection between the Gospel message and their condemned state. They, in their pride and self-righteous conceit, did not recognize the death of Messiah as being necessary to the forgiveness of their sins—in their mind others were sinners. Not understanding God’s goodness in Christ, they could not, and did not, repent.

Similarly, if men today do not recognize their woeful condition before God and come to esteem Christ as the remedy for their sin; they cannot, and will not, repent.

Recognition

It is impossible to repent of what one does not acknowledge or recognize as sin. Ignorance of our sin cursed condition is no longer an excuse. He commands “all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). The Gospel has

gone into the entire world and the invitation is extended to all men. God no longer works through one nation exclusively, neither has He left unrevealed any of His purpose or plan. The mystery of ages past is made known and all who will may understand (Ephesians 3:1-4; John 7:17).

Repentance begins with this acknowledgement that we are sinners. It was not until David was confronted and compelled to consider his wickedness by the prophet Nathan that he repented. In his great Psalm of repentance, he wrote: “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Psalm 51:3–4).

In the parable of the Prodigal, Jesus uses an expression that truly reflects the dilemma of the sinner. You remember that the young man, as sat in the hog wallow, reflected on the blessings of his father’s house. In those moments of contemplation Jesus said of that boy, “he came to himself” (Luke 15:17). What Jesus describes there is that moment when this young man saw himself for what he really was—a rebellious son (15:18–19). Once he acknowledged his guilt, he was able to get up and go home—

not before.

Remorse

According to Paul, it is Godward sorrow that brings a man to repentance (II Corinthians 7:8-10). This remorse for sin is the natural consequence of an honest heart properly responding to the truth of the Gospel (v. 8). Returning to David as an example, the penitent king wrote of his own sorrow for sin, saying, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:8, 17). While David understood that he had sinned against, Uriah, Bathsheba, the nation and many others; he also knew that all sin is, first and foremost, against Jehovah (Psalm 51:4). It is this grief for sin that moved David to repent (Matthew 5:4).

Resolve

Once sin is properly acknowledged and guilt accepted the heart is prepared to repent. This transition to repentance is demonstrated, again, from the Prodigal. As he sat there in the hog wallow, he said, "I will arise and go...and will say..." (Luke 15:18). The next thing we see in the text is that fact that "he arose and came to his father...and the son said..."

Jesus is careful to get us to see the change of will that took place in this young man and the process by which he came to it. His resolve to go was formed after the painful experience of recognition and godly sorrow coupled with the renewed assurance that his father was a

merciful and benevolent man.

It is the assured goodness of God that leads sinners to repent. While we are overcome with the guilt of sin, we are not "swallowed up with overmuch sorrow" (II Corinthians 2:7) because we are confident that our Father wants to forgive us and will forgive us. He has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). Rather, God's desire is that all come to repentance (II Peter 3:9).

Reformation

If one has truly repented, issuing in resolve to do better, then the fruit must follow. John the Baptist recognized this truth when he reproached the Pharisees that came to be baptized of him, saying: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:7-8). These venomous hypocrites were unwilling to confess their sins or change their ways. Unlike the harlots and the publicans who repented at the preaching of John (Matthew 21:32) and reformed their lives (Luke 3:10-14; 7:29-30; 19:8-10).

Reformation alone is not repentance. Many have reformed for fear of loss, or temporal consequences. However, when the fruit does not appear the tree is ready to be cut down (Luke 13:6-9).

Restitution

Restitution is a biblical principle. Under the Law the sinner restored what was taken and added the fifth part (Leviticus 6:5; Numbers 5:7). Zacchaeus when convicted of his extorting

ways confessed and promised to restore all fourfold (Luke 19:8; cf. Luke 3:12-13). The Philippian Jailer when convicted of his wrongs against Paul and Silas took them and washed their stripes (Acts 16:23-24, 33). Paul who went to Damascus to enter the synagogue and arrest Christians, upon his conversion entered there instead and preached Christ (Acts 9:2, 19-21; cf. Galatians 1:23-24). The truly penitent person seeks to make right and restore what he has wronged. Paul calls this *revenge* (II Corinthians 7:11; 10:6), literally, the idea of vindication, acting in such a way as to clear one's self of all blame, suspicion or doubt. How better for a thief to prove himself than to return what he has stolen, or a liar than to go to those whom he has lied to and tell the truth? Anything less is not repentance.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 22

June 3, 2007

How to Ruin Your Influence

The Power of Influence

Solomon said, “A good name is better than precious ointment” and “rather to be chosen than great riches” (Proverbs 22:1; Ecclesiastes 7:1).

In ancient times, ointments were one of the principle forms of medicinal preparations (Isaiah 1:6; Jeremiah 8:22; Revelation 3:18). They were also used in burial rituals (Matthew 26:12; John 19:39), as well as, for cosmetic purposes (Esther 2:12; Amos 6:6) and ceremonial rituals (Exodus 37:29). Thus, Solomon affirms that a man with a good reputation is more welcome in times of distress or suffering than the healing balm or the soothing fragrant ointment of the apothecary.

Solomon often mentions the power of wealth (Proverbs 10:15; 18:11). Possession of it may be a reflection of wisdom (14:24; 15:6; 27:23). Certainly in the hands of the wise it is a defense against adversity (Ecclesiastes 7:11-12; 10:19). However, Solomon is also certain that possessing a good character is of greater importance (Proverbs 10:2; 11:4, 28; 16:8). In the end character is all that matters (Ecclesiastes 5:15). In light of this evident truth, Solomon affirms that a righteous character, or “good

name,” should be chosen over wealth.

In describing a would-be disciple, Jesus likens that man who starts but does not finish (Matthew 7:26) to salt that has lost its “saltiness” (Matthew 5:13). The phenomenon of salt losing its virtue refers to the use of impure rock salt or mixed saline and earthy deposits. Once the salt is leached out a tasteless and worthless residue is left behind (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, p. 868). The believer who returns to the world is such a one (II Peter 2:20-22)—“good for nothing.” However, the believer who maintains his faith and perfects his righteous character has the power to give light to all and lead them to glorify the Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:14-16; Philippians 2:14-16). He has influence.

Influence Can Be Lost

The loss of influence has devastating spiritual consequences to the disciple, the church and the world. A hypocrite gives aid and comfort to the enemy (I Peter 3:15-16). He causes God to be reproached by them (II Samuel 12:14; Romans 2:24), turning men away from Christ (II Timothy 3:5-6; II Peter 2:2). Worst of all he becomes useless and imperils his own soul (II Peter 2:17).

The Bible is filled with example upon example of men who managed to destroy the good name they had by the folly of sin. From these examples we learn that it is much easier to destroy a good name than it is to repair a bad one. Let’s consider some of the things one might do to ruin whatever influence for good might be possessed.

Be Inconsistent

The world is always looking to catch the Christian in inconsistency. This is why it is such a “newsworthy” thing when a preacher, elder, deacon or Bible teacher is caught in sin. The world uses this to justify themselves because they can say: “See, I am as good as so-in-so and he claims to be a Christian!” However, this is the mistake the hypocrite always makes, measuring himself by other sinners (II Corinthians 10:12). We need to be measuring self alongside Christ, who did no sin (John 8:46; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; I Peter 2:22).

Jesus identified inconsistency as the basis of all hypocrisy when He upbraided the Pharisees in Matthew 23. They taught one thing but did something else—“They say and do not” (v. 3, cf. Romans 2:1-3). Therefore, Jesus said, “Do not after their works.”

Neither God nor the world tolerates inconsistency in the believer. Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the indebted servants (Matthew 18:21–35). The servant that owed his master 10,000 talents was accused by those who looked on (v. 31). The text says they were “very sorry;” literally, they were vehemently distressed. These are the words used to describe Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37). They understood the nature of the injustice and complained about it. Rest assured, Satan and his minions exercise their tongues against the hypocrite.

Be Unreliable

If you want to destroy your influence in the world and the church, as well as lose your soul, be a one talent man (Matthew 25:14–30). Never finish a task, never seek instruction, never volunteer, never go beyond the minimum requirement, never do what you promise or what you are capable of doing. The one talent man was not cast into outer darkness because he lost the master’s money; he did not. Rather, he was punished because he did not utilize his abilities and maximize his efforts.

Men do not trust the unreliable man for fear of reaping the consequences (Proverbs 25:19). As the King of Assyria observed for Israel regarding their relation to Egypt, “You cannot lean on a broken reed without getting hurt” (II Kings 18:21). If you cannot be faithful in the small things you will not be given the opportunity for greatness (Luke 19:17).

Nowhere is this truer than in the church. But, I see folly on

the part of many. How many times has it been suggested that a poor attending, uncommitted member of the body be given more responsibility, such as a class to teach or the deaconate, in order to encourage his interest and participation. “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures!” Paul said, “And let these also first be proved” (I Timothy 3:10). Why give the church a “tooth ache” and a “broken ankle”?

Be Unfriendly

Those who are genuinely friendly cultivate influence (Proverbs 27:9, 17, 19). The quickest way to lose it is to manifest an unfriendly spirit (18:24).

One may manifest such a heart in many ways. Do not offer to help those struggling under a burden (Proverbs 17:17; 27:10; cf. Exodus 23:4–5). Manifest unconcern for others in trials (Job 6:14–15; Psalm 35:13–14). Betray confidences (Psalm 41:9; 55:12–14). Expose them to ridicule if they sin rather than restore them to faithfulness (Proverbs 11:13; 17:9; Matthew 18:15). Make a nuisance of yourself (Proverbs 25:17; 27:14). Ignore your friend’s faults to his destruction (26:6, 9). Bail out when the going gets tough and it requires something from you (Ecclesiastes 4:9–12; Proverbs 25:19; II Timothy 4:16).

Be a “Hot Head”

The Bible warns against being quick tempered (Ecclesiastes 7:9) and making friends of those who are (Proverbs 22:24). Why? Good judgment is impaired by anger (Proverbs 14:17, 29). Solomon said, He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and

without walls” (Proverbs 25:28; cf. 16:32). The angry man has everyone he knows in turmoil and everything he tries in ruins (Proverbs 15:18; 29:8, 22).

Have a “Big Mouth”

The mouth can surely get one in trouble and ruin influence (Proverbs 18:6–7; Ecclesiastes 5:3). The braggart (Proverbs 27:2), the gossip (26:20–22) and the complainer (Philippians 2:14) all have a “big mouth”. In order to have influence, let your words be few (Proverbs 10:19–20), be well chosen (15:28; 29:20) and well spoken (17:27; 21:23).

Good influence is essential to being a successful Christian. It takes time to build and care to maintain. Very little effort is needed to damage it—perhaps permanently. Let’s all take care “to shine as lights in the world.”

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 23

June 10, 2007

Rebuilding Confidence in God

“And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?”
(Psalm 77:10–13)

The Plight of Asaph

The psalm does not give enough details to know exactly what events are before the author’s mind. It is obviously a time of trouble which personally affected Asaph, but the significance of the events appear far reaching, even national in scope (vv. 7–9). It seems to me that he writes near the reign of Jehoiakim when the Kingdom was in dissolution and God was promising Babylonian Captivity to a rebellious and impenitent nation (cf. Habakkuk 1:1ff; II Kings 24).

Whatever the circumstances, Asaph is overcome with grief and perplexed to the point that he expresses doubt respecting the faithfulness of God (v. 3). He cannot reconcile what he sees happening with what he knows God has promised to accomplish through his people Israel (Genesis 12:3).

Asaph struggles to reconcile the hardship and trial that he and

other righteous saints are enduring with the constancy of God’s grace and mercy.

Through the centuries many have found themselves in the same situation as Asaph. There may have been a time when you were perplexed by the overwhelming magnitude of your trials and made to wonder as Asaph, “Will the Lord be favorable no more? Has God forgotten to be gracious?”

It is during these difficult times that we need to rebuild and restore our confidence in God. It is in these questioning moments we must recognize an opportunity for strengthening. However, how shall we go about finding our way out of the difficulties of the time?

This Is My Infirmity!

Verse 10 marks a transition in the thinking of the psalmist. While he had previously considered God’s works in the ancient past (v. 5) and God’s grace and mercy which he had personally received (v. 6), it is in the second look that he gets the right perspective. Whereas before Asaph had considered God’s works as evidence that God has been blessing, he now considers God’s works as a revelation of His nature. It is in learning about God that he is able to restore again his

confidence in Jehovah and rely upon Him.

First, Asaph learned to appreciate the strength of God: “I will remember thy wonders of old.” He finally comprehended that there is nothing too hard for God (Luke 1:37). The God who made the worlds, stopped the sun in its circuit through heaven, and raised the dead can do anything. It is He that is the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe. This strength of the Almighty should be a warning to the wicked; there are none who are able to resist Him. Likewise, His strength is pledged to succor and save His people (Psalm 89:11-16). Our God is able.

Next, Asaph learned “*Your way O God is holy*” (v. 13 in ESV). All of His doings are holy, right and good. He does not tempt men with evil; He has rather promised not to lead men into temptation but to deliver them from the Evil One (Matthew 6:13; I Corinthians 10:13). When evil befalls it is not the work of God.

Israel often doubted God in the wilderness. They questioned not only His judgment, but his character (Numbers 21:5). In trials men foolishly assign evil intent and design to God. How many have asked accusingly, “Why is God doing this to me?”

We should rather be confident that God has only righteous purposes in His dealings with us. Whatever trials beset us God's purposes and plans are that we overcome and become holy as He is (I Peter 1:7, 13-17).

Third, Asaph was awed by the majesty of God: "Who is so great a God as our God?" The psalmist learned from his contemplations that "there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart" (I Kings 8:23). In power, in fidelity, in holiness, in whatever attribute might be named Jehovah excels. His excellence is so great that it necessitates the conclusion "there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me" (Isaiah 45:21).

Finally, Asaph came to be assured of God's beneficence: "*Thou hast with Thine arm redeemed Thy people.*" It is not enough to know God's power, holiness and majesty. These alone will not inspire confidence in God. Rather, these may drive us to further despair. However, when we see the omnipotent God gently and patiently leading His people—ever merciful and ever forgiving—we know He is as great in mercy as He is in majesty, infinite in pity as He is in power.

Renewed in Confidence

Once our confidence is restored then we are able to see the trials that beset us in the proper light. Asaph gives us an example of the proper view which we are to contrast with a doubting heart. The example he sets before us is Israel at the Red Sea fleeing

before Pharaoh (vv. 16-20).

According to the historical narrative in Exodus 14 "the children of Israel were sore afraid" (v. 10). Their doubts were so overwhelming that they accused Moses of having led them into the wilderness to die (v. 11). However, Moses challenged them to "Fear not," and promised that "The Lord will fight for you" (vv. 13-14). We all know how God parted the Red Sea and brought Israel through while destroying the Egyptians (14:19-30). The miracle had the desired effect upon Israel for they "saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD" (v. 31).

However, Asaph in the psalm before us describes the miracle from the perspective of a people who at that point began to trust God. He attributes fear, not to Israel, but to the obstacles that fled before them and the enemies that perished around them (Psalm 77:16-20). Israel experienced the love of their God as a shepherd going before them leading them to safe pasture. When we have this kind of trust in God, we like David will confess, "*I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*" (Psalm 23:4).

Fear Not Little Flock

Jesus urged His disciples to "Fear not" (Luke 12:32). He is calling us to seek the Kingdom of Heaven first without concern for things and fear of men. He pleads with us not to have a "doubtful mind" (v. 29). God knows what our needs are. He is well able to provide them. And, just as He clothes the fields and

feeds the birds He will provide us with all things necessary to do His will (II Corinthians 9:10).

Now, in those times when we "wander in the wilderness" and struggle against our adversaries do we doubt? We must remember that these are the opportunities when we can "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exodus 14:13). We must trust God to "furnish a table in the wilderness" and remember that He is "Our Rock" and "Our Redeemer" (Psalm 78:12-35).

Beloved, we serve an omnipotent, holy, awesome God; He is infinite in mercy and compassion. We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (Psalm 100:3). Let us give Him thanks for ever and show forth His praise to all generations (Psalm 79:13).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

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“Ye Cannot Serve God & Mammon”

The full verse context of this decisive declaration and precise pronouncement is Matthew 6:24 where our Lord said, *“No man can save two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot save God and mammon.”*

Our Lord was both positive and negative in this text. He positively assures us that we cannot serve two masters simultaneously. One master will have captured our affectionate allegiance; the other master will have aroused our hateful disdain and adamant rejection. He told us negatively we could not serve God and Mammon. Jesus was never all positive; he was never all negative. Being all one and none of the other causes extreme imbalance. Proper balance means actively opposing what hinders and hurts and ardently approving and persistently practicing what helps and holds us faithful to our mighty Messiah.

Divided Allegiance, An Impossibility

An estranged wife, married for a dozen years and with husband and children depending on her, seeks to recapture her teenage dating years and yet assures her husband of her love for him but an emotional need for other men in her life as illicit lovers. This is divided love in attempt, but it can never be love in reality. Marital

love cannot be divided between a true mate and a string of illicit lovers. All such attempts reflect immaturity gone to seed.

Spiritual allegiance to Deity and an affinity with worldly wealth and secular interest are just as impossible. Yet multitudes seek to practice a divided love in such matters. They utterly fail to realize that one cannot be a friend of God as Abraham was (James 2:23) and a friend of the world at the same time (James 4:4). The concepts are poles apart.

Wavering Israel in Elijah's era sought a marriage between popular Baal and strict, demanding, uncompromising Jehovah. The fiery Elijah in his courageous contest with Baal's devotees upon rugged Carmel taught Israel that they could no longer go limping between partial service to the idol Baal and partial service to the living God Jehovah. Minds needed to be made up once and for all as to whether they were going to serve what human hands had molded—Baal's lifeless image—or Him who made human hands and human hearts—God Almighty (I Kings 18:21).

The Rich Young Ruler

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the coming of the unnamed rich young ruler to the Christ (Matthew 19:16-22; Mark 10:17-22; Luke 18:18-25). As he approached Jesus his back was to

his riches at home; his face was toward the Master. So eager was he in his enthusiastic quest for eternal life that he even ran to the Lord. He fell at the Master's feet and inquired what was necessary for him to do to have eternal life.

Jesus surveyed his heart; he knew that his divided heart was wedded to his wealth and only in a surface sort of a way for heavenly wealth. Bluntly, the Lord told him he would have to get rid of that which blinded his eyes and swayed his heart toward worldly matters. Sell all. Dispense to the poor. Come and follow me. Treasure of a heavenly nature will then be yours, the Master tells him forthrightly and quite sadly.

This was stunning and shocking to the upset ruler. It hit him like a thunderbolt. He had not counted on having to make such a choice. It had not occurred to him that God would have to be preferred above his gold; he had not counted on putting the Savior over all his silver back home; little did he realize that if heaven ever became a reality, then earthly riches would have to give way to redemption. To gain his quest that day the Messiah would have to be preferred to all his money and wealth. For heaven to glow with rich reality that day truth would have to take precedence over things.

His eye turned away from God and back to his gold. His hand reached away from the Master so

near at hand and back for his silver hoarded away in His treasure house. His heart no longer yearned for heaven and its eternal treasures; now he yearned for his earthly riches, for his worldly wealth.

A Disappointing Choice

Money and the Messiah were the two great magnets that toggled upon his heartstrings that day. The Messiah came in second; money as is so frequently the case, won first place in his affections. Let us never forget that when Jesus comes in second, He is not first and a soul is lost. Each of the three writers of this interesting narrative seeks to capture his departure, Matthew uses "sorrowful". Mark employs "sad". Luke goes with "very sorrowful". He did not leave "mad"; he did not leave "glad"; he left in sadness of soul, in sorrow of heart. But, nevertheless, he went away.

As we behold this fading figure, his back is now to the Savior and his face is toward his riches. This is where his allegiance had been all along. He just did not realize it until he was tested by truth and the definite demands of dedicated discipleship. Please note that Jesus did not call him back. He did not run after him with extended apologies for making discipleship too hard.

Jesus did not soften in the least the demands of discipleship. Jesus was definite in his demands; he was a decisive Lord; he was not a crowd pleasing preacher more concerned for numbers than souls. He was not a Master who would allow each person to set out his own set of stipulations for service in the coming Kingdom.

Jesus stated the principle in the sermon on the Mount. We see it clothed in a clear-cut example near the end of his ministry when the rich young ruler met Jesus. It

is doubtful right before he came that anyone could have convinced him that gold and silver meant more to him than did God and eternal life. But after meeting Jesus he knew which came first. Mammon, the god of riches and wealth, claimed ardent allegiance and undying affection in his worldly heart. He found out once and for all time that he could not serve God and mammon. Neither can any other man.

—Robert Taylor, Jr.

What Your Attendance Shows

Attendance has always been a sign of interest. Even in the secular world, attendance shows the degree of enthusiasm one has for the project or the kind of importance one attaches to the endeavor. Let me cite the following things shown by regular attendance.

- (1) It shows the world that you value your relationship to the church.
- (2) It shows the weak Christian that Christianity is important to you.
- (3) It shows the young people how they ought to be concerned for the cause of Christ.
- (4) It shows the new convert that to order to grow into a mature child of God attendance in the assemblies is an absolute must.
- (5) It shows even those closest to you that your priorities are aligned so that God occupies first place in your life.
- (6) It shows your neighbors that there is consistency between your profession and your manner of life.

(7) It shows your brethren that you care about them and want to do whatever is possible to encourage them in their effort to go to heaven.

(8) It shows the brethren that you want to do your part and take on your share of the work, while it encourages them to do their part as well.

(9) It shows the Lord that you are willing to do His will and want to encourage others in the same.

(10) It shows the devil that you intend to be stronger tomorrow than you are today. because he knows that the Christian is strengthened by attending church.

In consideration of all these and other things which could be cited, don't you think it would be good if you made a special effort to attend regularly?

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 25

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Overcoming Our Sins

In the debate I had on the subject of homosexuality, Dr. Charles Arehart repeatedly claimed that he had tried everything to overcome "being gay". He recounted how he had prayed in his closet as a young man that God take away his desire for other men. He told how that he went to a "Christian" psychologist that finally told him that God did not care about what he did in bed. He related how he and his college roommates at the Methodist Seminary tried to "pray through for victory". He even told of going to a Catholic priest for exorcism. Dr. Arehart's conclusion was: "I cannot overcome my sin."

Dr. Arehart's failure to overcome sin, like the failures of all other sinners, was not for the lack of striving but for the lack of striving lawfully (2 Timothy 2:5). If we are to overcome sin we must do it with God's help in God's way. Listen to Paul, the apostle: "And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Christ might shew forth all longsuffering,

for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Timothy 1:12-16).

Though he was the "chief" of sinners Paul was enabled by the grace of God through faith to be saved from sin. Paul's salvation is a pattern to all of us that would believe (Ephesians 2:8-10). Therefore, let us consider how to overcome sin.

(1) Believe that Jesus Christ is your Savior who can free you from your sin. The Bible teaches us that Jesus is the Savior of the world (John 3:16). His death on the cross is accepted of God as propitiation for the sins of the whole world (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:1-2). When washed in His blood we are cleansed of every sinful stain (Revelation 1:5; 7:14).

If we would be saved we must believe on Christ (Acts 16:30-31). Our trust must be such that we are confident that there is no sin so black that God cannot forgive it in Jesus' blood (1 John 1:7). Furthermore, our trust must be such that we are confident that we can do and be all things God would desire in Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:13). Thus, there is no sin so powerful that it must have dominion over the child of God (1 Corinthians 10:13).

(2) Fully repent of your sins.

Repentance is changing our minds about our sin in order to start doing the right thing (Matthew 21:28-31). While a change in life is not repentance, there is no repentance apart from a change in life (Matthew 3:8).

God has commanded all men to repent (II Peter 3:9). But, how does one repent? You must consider God's goodness (Romans 2:4), His love (1 John 3:16; 4:19), the severity of the judgment (Acts 17:30), receive the instruction (II Timothy 2:25) and reproof of His word (Proverbs 1:28; Jeremiah 6:8), remember your wicked deeds (Ezekiel 20:43) and your former state (Revelation 2:5). When one does this he will follow the Psalmists example: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments" (Psalm 119:59-60).

(3) Confess Christ and be baptized to receive the forgiveness of your sins by Jesus' blood. Baptism of the penitent confessing believer puts one into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3). The result is God cutting off the sins of the flesh through the crucifixion of the

old man of sin (Colossians 2:11–12; Romans 6:4). In water baptism we put on Christ and are in Christ (Galatians 3:26–27).

However, baptism does not do what some expect it to do. Baptism washes away past sins (Acts 22:16), but it will not keep us from sinning, nor does it take away temptation. Even Jesus was tempted after he was baptized (Matthew 3:16–4:1).

Yet, baptism is a help in keeping us from sin. Christians are to remember their baptism (Romans 6:1–4; Colossians 3:1–3) in order that they not forget their commitment to live a new life (Romans 6:8–13).

(4) *Totally devote your life to God's service.* In order to overcome sin we must make our chief aim the kingdom of heaven and God's righteousness (Matthew 6:33). This means that both the body and the mind are brought into subjection to Christ (I Corinthians 9:27; II Peter 1:5–11). It will require a whole new way of thinking (Romans 12:1–2). You must change your values and your sense of pleasure in order to overcome (Philippians 3:7–9).

(5) *Study the Bible diligently.* In the Scriptures are found the knowledge, wisdom and strength to overcome sin (Psalm 119:9–16). It is through them that we are able to develop an intimate walk with Christ, the supreme example of a Victor over sin (I Peter 2:21–23; 1 John 2:6). He said, *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32).

(6) *Pray to God regularly.* Jesus urged His disciples to *"watch and pray"* that they not enter into

temptation (Matthew 26:36–46). He taught them to pray that God not lead them into temptation (Matthew 6:13). The Bible teaches us that prayer is helpful in deliver-ing us from sin (James 1:5; 5:16; I Corinthians 10:13).

(7) *Assemble with the church faithfully.* One purpose the church is designed to fulfill is providing an environment in which we receive encouragement from others to live right (Hebrews 10:24–25). This may come in the form of teaching (I Corinthians 14:31), discipline (1 Timothy 5:20), sharing (Hebrews 10:32–36), the worship (1 Corinthians 11:26), hearing the experiences of others (Acts 14:27), etc. If you are struggling with sin, then the place you need to be is with the church when they assemble.

(8) *Learn to control your thoughts.* All around us Satan has devices the only purpose of which is to turn our thoughts toward sin. We must recognize that what we allow to come into our mind will affect our manner of life (Philippians 4:8). Solomon said, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life"* (Proverbs 4:23).

(9) *Avoid people and places that tempt you. It is true that "evil companions corrupt good morals"* (I Corinthians 15:33). When we have turned our back on sin, Satan will use our past associates to get us to return to our former haunts and dens. It is foolish to think that we can wander in and out among these sinners and not be tempted (Proverbs 13:20).

(10) *If you sin again, repent and pray to God to forgive you.* As

already noted, Christians are struggling against sin, however, not always victoriously.

Sometimes we are not circumspect and Satan trips us up. We do not need to give up in our struggle if we sin again. Rather, we need to renew our repentance and ask God humbly to forgive us (Acts 8:22; I John 1:8–10; Proverbs 28:13).

Dr. Arehart gave up in his fight to overcome sin because he let an infidel psychologist and a compromising Nazarene theologian convince him that he could not and need not change. Dear brother, do not be deceived by such. Jesus has died for you and promised that by His grace through faith you can overcome sin. Will you begin today to fight Satan and win the war with sin?

–Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 26

July 1, 2007

The Bible & Our Nation

With the anniversary of our national founding upon us it is appropriate to call our attention to the undeniable influence of the Bible in the building of the United States of America. The influence of the Bible on our political theory and republican institutions is so profound and extensive that one cannot escape beholding it no matter which way he turns. When an American directs his thoughts to the genesis of our beloved country, the Bible rises to view like the sun at daybreak.

The influence of the Bible permeates our culture because it produced the value-judgments by which all of us live. It is conspicuous in the lives of the vast majority of those great men who led our historical progression. It is written into the constitutions of the several states, inscribed upon the monuments that honor our heroes, and solemnly proclaimed in the ceremonies of our government, in the motto on our coinage, and in the basic assumptions that underlie the total life of the United States of America.

At Plymouth Rock

Our forbearers brought with them to the new world a sacred regard for the Bible and allowed

its influence in the new society they produced. That influence appeared aboard the Mayflower when our forbearers signed an agreement, a basis of government, the renowned Mayflower Compact, based upon the Bible, and beginning with the solemn words, "In the name of God, Amen!"

When the sorrows of the American Revolution descended upon them, they made a Liberty Bell and inscribed upon its bronze throat these words from the Bible, "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof" (Leviticus 25:10). During the long war that followed, it was the figure of General George Washington, kneeling in the snows of Jackey Hollow, that, more than anything else, nerved and inspired the colonists to achieve final victory. That sacred dependence of our national life upon the Bible and its significance, is, even today, memorialized with Ward's famous bronze plaque on Wall Street in New York City, where, Washington still kneels.

It was the same story during the crisis that marked the bonding of the thirteen colonies into a United States by means of the constitution. It was to the God of the Bible that they turned for

wisdom and guidance. When it appeared that all was lost, Benjamin Franklin rose from his seat and addressed General Washington, "Mr. Chairman, if a sparrow cannot fall to ground without Our Heavenly Father's care, how can an Empire rise without His aid? I call the convention to prayer." They rose from their knees to sign the Constitution.

Even the tragedy of the Civil War was touched here and there with a shaft of light from the Bible; when Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, a great unruly mob gathered on Wall Street in New York. On that dark night it was a man who would later be President of the United States, a gospel preacher by the name of James A. Garfield, who quelled the mob by reading a passage from the Bible with his own appropriate comment. He turned to Psalm 97, verse 2, and read: "Fellow Citizens, 'Clouds and darkness are round about Him. His pavilion is dark waters and thick clouds of the skies. Justice and judgment are the establishment of his throne. Mercy and truth shall go before His face.' Fellow Citizens, God reigns, and the government in Washington still lives."

Democracy Is Biblical

If there was ever a single sentence that catches the essence of democracy, it must be found in the words of Lincoln at Gettysburg who stated that the Civil War was being fought to determine that, "Government of the people, and by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth." And yet, it is a great tragedy that most people do not know where Abraham Lincoln got those words. They came out of the preface to the Wycliffe Bible, written centuries before Abraham Lincoln was born. The quotation from the preface of Wycliffe's Bible reads, "The Bible is the government of the people, and by the people, and for the people!"

On the same occasion when Lincoln uttered his immortal words at Gettysburg, there was another speaker, the renowned Edward Everett, who delivered what was called the principal address. It is rarely if ever remembered or quoted; but, in spite of his general failure, he did make one statement worthy to be compared with Lincoln's. He said, "All the distinctive features and superiority of our republican institutions are derived from the teachings of the Scriptures."

Charles David Eldridge also identified the Bible as the source of all social justice. He said, "The Old Testament prophets and the New Testament writers denounce the exclusive privileges of the rich, and the usurpation of the rights of the poor, and strenuously enforce their demands for righteous dealings among men. The Bible, like an unfailing arsenal, has

supplied the ammunition for the age long struggle for liberty."

The Law of Our Nation

It is not merely in the eloquent speeches of national leaders, neither in crisis charged dramatic episodes alone that the influence of the Bible is detected in the birth and growth of our nation. It is consciously and conspicuously contained in the basic legal devices of the country. Dean Clarence Manion, Chairman of the Department of Law, Notre Dame University, has examined the constitutions of all the states and affirms that the Bible is the basic law in forty-seven states, the Ten Commandments being specifically named in forty-seven of the state constitutions.

Walter C. Speers said that, "Democracy is nothing but an attempt to apply the principles of the Bible to a human society." Ulysses S. Grant admonished the nation to, "Hold fast to the Bible as the sheet anchor of your liberties; write its precepts in your hearts, and practice them in your lives. To the influence of this book, we are indebted for all the progress made in true civilization, and to this we must look as our guide to the future. 'Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.'" Robert E. Lee declared that the Bible, "is a Book, in comparison with which, all others are of minor importance."

In God We Trust

Particular attention is directed to the motto inscribed on the money and the coinage of the United States, "In God We Trust!" What are the profound

implications of that motto? "In God We Trust," means that God is. It means that God is a person. It means that God is worthy of our confidence. It means that God is solemnly and officially recognized as the Author of all national wealth and benefit. It means that we should obey God. And, it means that God has not left himself without witness, even in the present society which seems to be on the verge of rejecting God altogether. Just think of it; every time some sinner puts down the money to gratify his lust, satiate his greed, or indulge his ambition, there, printed on his very thumb, are the words, "In God We Trust!" It is like Paul who spoke of a certain godless age and said, "Nevertheless (God) left not himself without witness" (Acts 14:17).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 27

July 8, 2007

The Spurned Invitation

We have kittens. This is not a give-away announcement, though I will take names, but it is the reason I found myself, a few days ago, sprawled under my house—have you noticed that they build them closer to the ground, now? I was scraping along beneath and through ducts and pipes and wires and cobwebs and... things... because one of those kittens crawled through a hole and got under the house and thought it could not get out—so it was mewling and mewling and mewling, as if in great misery.

Well, we tried first to reach it from the outside, but naturally that did not work. The only alternative was somebody *must* go into the pantry and squeeze down through the little hole in the floor and get under the house. You would need somebody small for that. The best I can recall, this was when Frances quietly left. This is how I wound up, slithering like a snake—don't even think that word—along under the floor.

I was about half-way there when the mamma cat came by me and went to the kitten and began providing dinner; and

that doomed my mission. I called the kitten, I called the mamma, and both just looked at me once—and then wouldn't even do that, much less come to me. I meowed, I hissed, I did a passable cat fight (I could imagine the neighbors, hearing my voice, looking at each other and nodding, knowingly)—and that kitten, out of my reach behind an air conditioning duct, stayed there. And, for that moment anyway, if coming to me was the only way it was going to escape from under the house, it simply was not going to escape.

Now, to the Point

The plight of every responsible human being is depicted by these words: “your iniquities have separated between you and your God...all have sinned...the wages of sin is death” (Isaiah 59:1–2; Romans 3:23, 6:23).

Then, the caring response of God is set forth, in these words: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son...the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost...Christ died for our sins...for the grace of

God hath appeared bringing salvation to all men” (John 3:16, Luke 19:10, I Corinthians 15:3, Titus 2:11).

Now, how does that grace of God amend the human predicament which is due to sin? The answer is, “access by faith into this grace” (Romans 5:2). The Hebrew writer called Jesus the author of eternal salvation “unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). The obedient faith which gives access into the grace of God is called for in the invitation of Jesus, “Come unto me...and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

The stunning reality is that, like that kitten, so many are indifferent to the proffered escape: “few are they that find ...” the way unto life (Matthew 7:14). The kitten was indifferent to my efforts because it was presently comforted by the mamma cat. Dying sinners are mostly indifferent to the loving provisions of a caring Savior; but that which comforts them is both deceitful and temporary, and it will inevitably and eternally be replaced with suffering.

—Pat Farish

Harness to Fit the Team

Foy E. Wallace, Jr. once made the observation that it takes more than a single harness to work a team of horses. One need not be an old-time farmer to see the sense in that. There must be some means of common direction and guidance if a plurality of horses, people or churches are to work as one, hence "harness to fit the team."

In the days of the "harness shed" one might determine how a man worked his horses by looking at the gear. If a man with four horses had four single harnesses, we would conclude that he worked his horses independently. But if we found double harnesses, or gear for larger teams, we would draw conclusions accordingly.

A Look into God's Harness Shed

There is ample evidence in the NT that God intended for saints to work together in local churches (1 Corinthians 1:2) and God has a harness for this type of team. The elders (or bishops) are overseers in the Lord's church (Acts 20:28) and the means by which saints are treated as a unit (Acts 11:30). We can study the realm of elders, the scope of their oversight, and learn the extent to which God intended to team the saints.

Acts 14:23 reads, "And when they had ordained them elders in every church ..." We have long recognized this passage as

teaching that each congregation is independent and self-ruled; i.e., has its own direction and guidance system. This is a single harness (one group of elders) to rule *only* one church.

Every other passage on the subject confirms this conclusion. Titus was to "ordain elders in every city..." (Titus 1:5) Peter wrote, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof..." (1 Peter 5:1-3). When Paul wrote to the church at Philippi he addressed "all the saints...with the bishops and deacons" (Philippians 1:1). God's harness shed contains no gear whereby two or more churches may be teamed to work as one on any project.

Making Harness Where God Made None

But men have never been satisfied with God's plan. It seems to them the churches should be hitched together—they speak of "sister" churches, in a "brotherhood of churches". Since God gave no harness for such. They must make their own. Some use a permanent hook-up with churches organically related through a synod, national headquarters, etc.; while others use various agencies whereby churches may "team up" for benevolent or "mission" projects. A "board" or "sponsoring church" agrees to oversee and coordinate the work, and hence becomes the

harness whereby many churches work as one. However the matters are handled, a harness has been devised which God did not authorize.

This error is not corrected by accusing those who object of being "anti-" benevolent or mission work; nor by saying the Bible says "go" but it doesn't say "how". God does say how to organize, and the independent local church is the whole of it. God's harness fits the only team God authorized. It is enough for the faithful.

—Robert Turner

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Words of Life

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How to Get Along with Brethren

There are many problems with which the Christian is faced. One of those problems is how to get along with other Christians in the local church. Let us consider this subject.

We can get along with the brethren if we will show our love for them. We are commanded to love one another (John 13:34; 1 John 3:23). This love consists of a particular kind of behavior patterned after the example of Christ (John 13:12-15) and founded upon the character of God (1 Corinthians 13:1-8). We must be sincere in this love one for another (1 John 3:18), as well as, unfailing (Hebrews 13:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:12). We must learn to love or we will never manage our relationships with each other (Romans 13:8-10).

We can get along with the brethren if we will minister to them, that is, "serve" them (Galatians 5:13-14). There are always opportunities for service. We can "visit", that is, care for, the sick (James 1:27). We can lend to the needy (Luke 6:31-36). We can sympathize with those in sorrow (Romans 12:15). Sometimes what is needed is real, genuine encouragement (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

We can get along with the brethren if we will make an effort to help bear their burdens. There are some burdens which we

must all bear alone (Galatians 6:5). Yet, there are burdens which we can share (6:2). If we would share what we can, the others would not be so great (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13). Too often we are harsh toward our brethren because we do not know what loads they are trying to move (1 Corinthians 2:11). We need to be sensitive toward our brother's need and with compassion help him lift it (Colossians 3:10-12).

We can get along with the brethren if we will not gossip about them. Christians need to recognize the evils of gossip (Proverbs 16:28; 17:9; 18:8). It is a terrible sin whose end is alienation and pain. The Bible warns us not to speak evil of one another (1 Peter 2:1). The sure cure for gossip is not to be one or befriend one (Proverbs 20:19; 6:14, 19; 26:20, 21).

We can get along with the brethren if we will deal cautiously with their faults. All Christians have their faults at one time or another (Matthew 18:1-20). Ideally we are ever aware and ready to confess them and make them right (James 5:16; Luke 17:1-5). However, sometimes, more often than not, we are slow to repent and need help. This is when our brethren can come to our aid (Matthew 18:15-20). Yet,

when we do so the golden rule still applies (Matthew 7:12).

We can get along with the brethren if we will forgive them when they repent. Christians are to follow the example of Jesus in forgiveness, always willing, whether or not the sinner desires it (Luke 23:34). It takes great faith to forgive a brother repeatedly, but the Lord says we can and must do it (Luke 17:3-5). We will be able to do it when we remember that we ourselves have been in need of mercy and forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32).

We can get along with the brethren if we will repent of our own sins. Often times, it is our sins that are the cause of contention among brethren (Colossians 3:1-11). The offender and the offended both have an obligation to effect reconciliation. However, the seriousness of the offender's position is evident in the fact that until he is right with his brother, he cannot be right with God (Matthew 5:23, 24). The pride of life sometimes gets in the way of our making reconciliation (1 John 2:16). We ought to be ashamed of our sin, but never ashamed to admit it. A brother once told me, "It is never wrong to be the bigger man." Oh! How true. Right or wrong personally, it is always right to correct a sin.

The Bible says, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Those of us who enjoy this blessing recognize the truth of that statement. We can go a long way toward restoring this pleasantness among us if we would learn better how to get along. The next time there is opportunity let us each one make a conscious effort to do something that will help us be at peace and bind us closer together. This is what the Lord wants. by doing so we can have a little bit of Heaven now and the hope of it together in eternity.

—Jeff Asher

Congregational Independence

For years “congregational independence” has been so widely accepted as a sound principle, that many members of the church of Christ use this “orthodox” terminology without really grasping its significance. Our purpose here is simply to define and to apply terms to which we all agree.

“Independent” means, “Not dependent, as (a) not subject to control by others; not subordinate; (b) not contingent or conditional; (c) not relying on others. Not dependent for support or supplies; having a competency.” (See: *Webster’s*)

An independent church is one which operates solely under its own oversight (and of course I refer to those matters subject to human judgment) and in keeping with its own resources. This means it operates according to its own ability—does not function as any part of

a combination of churches, to plan or execute a program of work collectively.

A church unable to meet its own needs for self-maintenance is “dependent,” and should receive alms from other churches until it can again become self-sufficient (II Corinthians 8:14). Such unavoidable dependency does not, however, authorize a system of operation whereby a church is continually dependent by choice. (The fact that God allowed churches to exist without elders—Acts 14:23 — does not rule against the divine plan for oversight when qualified men are available.)

Independent operations and “inter-congregational” arrangements are not compatible. The terms are contradictory, and history has repeatedly demonstrated the reality of this conflict. (See Firm Foundation editorial Dec. 10, '63.) “Willing” participation compounds, rather than excuses, the wrong.

When hundreds of churches supply the funds for some project, and allow the elders of one church to direct and oversee this collective effort—(such as a “brotherhood” T. V. or benevolent program) these churches are dependent upon one-another, for support and/or oversight, with reference to that project. Having willfully created a dependent position, they have altered God’s plan of organizational structure (the independent local church) and therefore sin.

The “good” that may be done by the unauthorized organization does not justify its existence. “Shall we do evil that good may

come?” (Romans 3:8). Why are the defenders of “brotherhood” evangelistic and benevolent projects so unwilling to deal with this basic issue? Must prejudice-producing name-calling (as “anti-orphan-care”) take the place of honest Bible study?

Collective action is “opposed to individual, and to distributive” action. (*Oxford English Dictionary*) Collective action is impossible if all units remain independent. These are facts that cannot be successfully denied. Advocates of the “sponsoring church” and “institutional boards” means of inter-congregational action should either change their practice or cease to claim congregational independence. Nor can the truth be changed by ignoring this warning.

—Robert Turner

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Words of Life

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The Purpose of Preaching

“Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2).

Many great sermons are recorded in the Bible, such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5, 6 & 7), Stephen’s history of the Jewish nation (Acts 7), Paul’s address on Mars’ Hill (Acts 17), and Peter’s first sermon under the new covenant (Acts 2). Men today have very little respect for preaching—maybe it’s because they don’t know the purpose of preaching. Why do we preach?

Explain the Scriptures

This sounds so simple, yet it is often forgotten by men today. In Acts 7, one-third of Stephen’s sermon was from the Old Testament. His audience knew what the verses said, but he had to explain what they meant and how it applied to them.

When Philip preached in Acts 8, he explained Isaiah 53. The eunuch wanted to know “of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?”

After Artaxerxes released the Israelites, Ezra, a scribe and

priest of God, read the “Book of the Law of Moses” to the people. With aid from the Levites, Ezra “helped the people to understand the law” (Nehemiah 8:7). They read distinctly from the book—in the Law of God—and they gave the sense and helped them to understand the reading (Nehemiah 9:8).

Give Light

In Apostolic sermons no appeal was ever made to modern theological thought. Men of God simply proclaimed God’s word. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

The apostles never claimed an emotional experience as the basis for salvation. They presented God as having revealed His will to man (I Corinthians 2:6-13). This revealed will was placed into written form, “by which, when you read, you may understand” (Ephesians 3:4).

Disturb People in Error

Peter did not soft peddle the truth in Acts 2. He accused his audience of killing the Son of God. As a result, these people were “cut to the heart” (Acts

2:37). Cutting a man to the heart is not a task to be relished—it is the end result of freedom, joy and salvation for which we seek.

The way some men preach today, a lost man might never know his condition. Sinners will never cry out “What must I do to be saved?” while listening to the “positive preaching” of the day.

Present Christ

The first thing Paul did in every city he visited was to lift up Christ and set Him before men as their only hope. Paul told the Corinthians he “determined not to know anything among you, except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (I Corinthians 2:2). Salvation does not come by the preaching of politics or moral platitudes. Our hope is in heaven, not Washington, D.C.

Tell About the Church

Some today tell us to “preach the man not the plan.” But we cannot preach the King without His kingdom, or the Groom without His bride. When the Gospel was preached in Acts 2, men were added to the church (Acts 2:47). This is the church Jesus

promised to build (Matt. 16:18), and the only one which He will save (Ephesians 5:23).

Let us not put our trust in denominations built by men, for they will be uprooted (Matthew 15:13). "The kingdoms of earth pass away one by one, but the kingdom of heaven remains."

—David A. Padfield

The People Had a Mind to Work

The passage that serves as a title to this article says this: "So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto half the height thereof: for the people had a mind to work." The challenge of that statement is clear. Do we have an attitude of wanting to be involved in the Lord's work? Is our attitude such that we move from just talking to actually working? Nehemiah was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. Receiving word about the disrepair of the walls around the city of Jerusalem, he obtains permission to return to his homeland for a period of time, that he might help rebuild the city. Nehemiah returned and the task was accomplished in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). Why were they successful? How did they go about their work? Was it different for them, but for us the work we must do is too hard?

Nehemiah 2:18 says that the work Nehemiah engaged in

was a good work. That is, the walls needed fixing, and so the work was begun. They didn't need a committee to talk about fixing the walls for several months. They simply went to work. "They had a mind to work." Their attitude was such that the task was not too hard or difficult. It is interesting that Nehemiah and his helpers faced opposition in their work. How did they respond? They prayed to God and shored up their defenses (Nehemiah 4:9). After the work was completed the people enjoyed a period of worship and devotion to God as the words of God were read before all (Nehemiah 8). They rejoiced in the presence of God.

Preaching the gospel is a good work, isn't it? Shouldn't we be concerned about preaching the only message that can save the souls of the lost? It is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). Our souls are purified when we obey God (I Peter 1:22). Do we need to sit around and talk about the need to preach, or should we just get up and try to go teach someone the truth? Do we need some personal work classes before we can go and tell someone what we knew when we obeyed the gospel?

Jesus said the fields were white unto harvest (John 4:35). Now is the time for labor. Now is the time to sow the precious seed of the kingdom. There seem to be plenty of laborers (Christians), but are we laboring? Do we truly rejoice in the preaching of

God's word? It is the only guide that will see us safely into heaven. It alone is the lamp that lights the way into paths of righteousness. God's words bring comfort to the aching soul. It is truly the message men need. Do we have a mind to work?

The last verse of Nehemiah says: "Remember me, O my God, for good." Will God remember us for the good we have done? Will He remember us for the effort we made to be His people? Or, will He remember that we wanted to work and talked about working and even got together once to begin working, but never actually did any work? "There is much to do; there is work on every hand."

—Randy Harshbarger

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 30

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Working for the Lord

How much time do we spend working for the Lord? If all we consider is the time spent in assemblies and classes, about five hours per week. Surely the work we do for the Lord is not limited to that!

I do not mean to minimize the importance of "church attendance" (Hebrews 10:25) or the work done by the elders, the deacons, the Bible class teachers or the preacher. However, we need to recognize the importance of other aspects of our work for the Lord.

When one becomes a Christian, he undergoes a complete transformation. The Bible says we are "born again" (John 3:5) and that "old things are passed away...all things are become new" (II Corinthians 5:17). We are no longer "conformed to this world" but "transformed" so that we may "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2). Therefore, the effects of conversion are not limited to the time spent in assemblies of the saints or doing organized "church work." We are working for the Lord, or should be, every day in all that we do (Colossians 3:17).

Let's think about some ways in which we all are working for the Lord.

On the Job

God has ordained that men work (Ephesians 4:28). God recognized it as good for man from the very beginning (Genesis 2:19). The man that will not work is a sinner (1 Timothy 5:8) and does not deserve to eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). But, God says that the laborer is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7).

Work is good. There are several obvious reasons why this is true: (1) it makes it possible to be a blessing to someone in need (Ephesians 4:28); (2) it is a blessing to the laborer because it keeps him on the giving end (Acts 20:35); (3) it is a means of developing an honest report in the community (1 Thessalonians 4:11; 1 Timothy 5:13); (4) it gives a sweetness to life that idleness cannot (Proverbs 12:11); (5) it builds character and usefulness in service (Proverbs 22:29); (6) it makes it possible to sleep at night (Ecclesiastes 5:12).

Now, if working for a living is something that God has ordained, then it is something we do in His name and unto His glory (I Corinthians 10:31).

Therefore, how we behave on the job reflects on Christ. How we use what we earn reflects on Christ. Whether we work in order to serve Christ fully reflects on Him.

In the Home

God has ordained the woman's place. She is to "guide the house" (1 Timothy 5:14). This is definitely work (Proverbs 31:13ff). The woman who is serious about this work has the power to better her family financially, socially, educationally and spiritually (Proverbs 14:1, 11; 15:6; 24:3).

When a woman is a homemaker she is doing the work of the Lord. It is sad that our society disdains this godly work and wants to turn nurturing children over to the state. Great men are made by the influence of godly parents, and in particular the influence of a Christian mother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).

When a house is guided by such a woman many things may happen to the glory of God: (1) children are instructed in righteousness (1 Timothy 3:15); (2) unbelieving husbands are often converted to Christ (I Corinthians 7:16); (3) the saints (1 Timothy 5:10) and the

stranger are cared for (Hebrews 13:2).

In Daily Living

God requires that every Christian live a holy life (I Peter 1:13-16). This means that we are resisting the Devil and his temptations (James 4:7), keeping ourselves pure (1 Timothy 5:22) and not following the crowd in going the way of the world (1 Peter 4:3-4).

Too many "saints" are not living the holy life. More and more social drinking, gambling, lasciviousness and immodesty are being found among church members. These things are sinful (Galatians 5:19-21) and are destroying the influence of the people of God in the world (Matthew 5:14-16).

The Christian is sometimes the only "Bible" the world will read (II Corinthians 3:2). It is God's plan to influence men by the lives of His people (John 13:34-35). We are to be "examples" (I Timothy 4:12) and a "pattern" of good works (Titus 2:7). And as such, we are to walk as Jesus walked (I John 2:6; I Peter 1:21-22).

Every time the Christian says "No" and refuses to defile himself he has done the work of the Lord (Daniel 1:8). This is the hardest part of living, getting up every day and going out among people in the world who curse, smoke, drink, gamble, extort, cheat and who knows what else; all the while remaining "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). They encourage you to "run with them" and ridicule you if you don't. The Lord sees, and He is pleased.

In Bible Study

God expects us to read, study and meditate on His word (II Timothy 2:15; I Timothy 4:13-15). However, our hurry up and go, go, go lifestyles make it nearly impossible to stop long enough to read the Scriptures let alone think about them (see: Psalms 1; 63:6; 77:12; 119:148; 143:5).

I do not exaggerate when I suggest to you that quiet reflection on the word of God is working for the Lord (Philippians 4:8). To do so is critical. We are what we think (Proverbs 4:23; 23:7). We cannot teach what we do not know (Hebrews 5:12-14). We cannot pray if we are ignorant of God's will (I John 5:14). We will not avoid sin, if we are ignorant of righteousness (Romans 3:20; 7:7).

In Good Deeds

God has created us in Christ Jesus to do good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). When we read the New Testament we cannot help but be impressed by the countless examples of Christians busy doing good works in support of Christ and the Church.

Yet, being ready for "every good work" seems nearly impossible (Titus 3:1). Scripture and common sense teach us that opportunity and ability determine what each is responsible for in good works. There are some things which I am unable to do. There are other things that I never had opportunity to do.

What Paul enjoins is the spirit of Isaiah 6:8, "Here am I, send me!" It is the attitude and commitment to do whatever must be done that one can do that makes one ready for every good work. The brother or sister caring for an aging parent or a sick child is just as much involved in doing the work of the Lord as the Bible class teacher or preacher.

Working for the Lord is something which we all must do. We need to learn what working for the Lord is and get serious about the duty. If we think it is just what we do in a meetinghouse on Sundays and Wednesdays, we aren't doing much work for the Lord. Let's all go to work for Him today.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 31

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Ten Witnesses to Jesus' Deity

Jesus' deity is a controversial subject. It was controversial in the first century (John 5:18; 10:33). Jews rejected the idea that God would appear among them as a man. This was the principal issue between Jesus and his enemies (John 8:21-24).

It was controversial prior to the writing of the Nicene Creed. The Gnostics taught that Jesus was an angel or demi-god. The Arians taught that Jesus was not of the same substance as God being only the highest of the created order. The Socinians taught a Unitarian view of the Godhead denying the divinity of the Lord.

It is controversial today. The Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, Mormons, Muslims, Jews, and Modernists all deny the deity of Jesus to some degree.

The controversy surrounding the subject is rooted in its importance. It is important because it is a Bible subject. That reason alone makes it worthy of our consideration. However, our interest must transcend academics.

It is important because it is a salvation subject. The New Testament requires that we confess the deity of Jesus in order to be saved (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9-10; I Timothy 6:12-13).

The deity of Jesus is a difficult subject. It is a matter of the finite considering the infinite. It is a matter of the creation considering the Creator. It is a matter of the disciple following his Teacher.

The Claims of Jesus

Jesus referred to Himself as a Divine Person (John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5-8). Men understood Him to be making a claim for divinity (John 5:18; 8:53, 58; 10:33). The Lord did not correct their view of Him as mistaken (John 19:7-9). Therefore, He must have believed it of Himself.

Jesus exercised prerogatives which belong to Deity alone. For example, Jesus received worship (Matthew 2:11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 28:9,17; Mark 5:6; Luke 5:1-11; 24:52; John 9:38; 20:28). He also forgave sins (Matthew 9:1-6; Mark 2:5-10; Luke 5:20-24; 7:36-50; 22:39-43).

Jesus manifested a character consistent with deity (1 Peter 2:21-22). Jesus lived a life above reproach and challenged men to prove otherwise (John 8:46). This is the least we would expect of God in the flesh (Romans 8:3-4). Had Jesus been a sinner He could not have been divine (cf. John 9:31-38).

The Scriptures Make Jesus Divine

Jesus is called God (John 1:1-3; Matthew 1:23; Hebrews 1:8; Romans 9:5; Acts 20:28; I Timothy 3:16), is ascribed the title of Creator (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; Ephesians 3:8-11; Hebrews 1:10-12), is called Jehovah, the personal name of the Godhead (cf. Exodus 3:14; Matthew 3:3 [Isaiah 40:3]; Acts 2:21 [Joel 2:32]).

He is called the "first and the last," a title of Deity (Revelation 1:17; 22:13; cf. Isaiah 44:6; 48:12-16). Jesus is said to be equal with God (Philippians 2:6; Zechariah 13:7). Jesus is described as being above all, having pre-eminence (John 3:31; Philippians 2:9-11; [Psa. 97:9]). He is the Only Begotten Son of the Father in Heaven (John 1:18; 3:16; Mark 1:1; Luke 1:35).

The Prophets Said Christ Would Be Divine

Isaiah called the Christ Jehovah, Everlasting Father and the Mighty God (Isaiah 6:1 [John 12:41]; 8:13 [1 Peter 2:8]; 7:14 [Matthew 1:23]; 9:6 [Luke 1:32,33]; 40:3 [Luke 3:4]).

Jeremiah refers to David's descendant as THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). This is one of the divine names for the God of Heaven.

Joel called the Christ the LORD (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:17). Micah ascribed unto Him eternity (Micah 5:2; John 1:1) Zechariah said He was God's equal (Zechariah 13:7; Matthew 26:31). Malachi says He is the Lord whom ye seek (Malachi 31-4; 4:5,6) and David said that He was his Lord (Matthew 22:41-46; Psalms 110:1ff.).

The Angels Testify

Gabriel announced His birth and affirmed His divinity (Luke 1:30-35). The angels worshipped Him at His birth (Luke 2:8-15; Hebrews 1:6). Even now the angels in Heaven worship Jesus (Revelation 5:8-14).

John Believed in Jesus' Divinity

John taught the pre-existence of Jesus (John 1:15, 18, 27, 30). He called Him Jehovah as did the prophet Isaiah (John 1:23).

John saw the sign from Heaven of the descending Spirit in the form of a dove and confessed its significance identifying Jesus as the Son of God (John 1:32-34).

Deity Revealed at the Transfiguration

There are two accounts of the transfiguration in the New Testament (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-10). Each states how Jesus' appearance was altered and what the voice from Heaven said concerning Jesus. Years later, two of the disciples present gave their own eye witness testimony concerning what they saw. Peter told how he saw the glory of God in Jesus and heard the voice of the Father (II Peter 1:16-18).

John also gave testimony of what he saw, heard and handled concerning the Word (I

John 1:1-2) whom He knew to be God in the flesh (John 1:1-2, 14).

The Father Affirmed Jesus' Divine Nature

Jesus said the Father bore witness of Him (John 8:17-18). This He did at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:17). Again he testified at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). The Father also gave His witness in all the miracles which Jesus did (John 5:31-37; 10:24-42; Mark 16:17-20; Hebrews 2:1-4).

The Father's most significant statement of approval came in the resurrection (Romans 1:4; John 10:14-18; Matthew 12:39-40). Jesus had predicated all of His claims on the resurrection from the dead. The Father in Heaven validated them every one when he brought Jesus out of the grave.

The Witness of the Spirit and the Apostles

Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit after His return to the Father (John 16:7). On Pentecost he came and worked miracles in confirmation of the testimony that the Twelve gave (Acts 2:32-33; Romans 1:4; Acts 1:22).

Jesus' Enemies Testify

The demons confess it (Matthew 8:29; Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41; 8:28). The Sanhedrin voted on it (Mark 14:64; John 19:7). The Centurion who crucified Him confessed it (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39). The thief that died with Him agreed to it (Luke 23:39-43; Matthew 27:44). Judas Iscariot committed suicide because of it (Matthew 27:3-4). Pontius Pilate commanded that it be written and posted for all to see (John 19:19-22).

This Evidence Must Be Impeached or Accepted

The testimony of two men establishes every matter (John 8:17). Here is that much and more! Can you deny this tenfold witness of Jesus' deity?

Now, what must you do? You must believe with all your heart that He is the Saviour, the Son of God who died for your sins and was raised for your justification (Romans 10:9-10). You must repent of your sins, not some of them, but all of them (Acts 11:18), and confess your faith before men that Jesus is the Christ (Romans 10:9-10). Then upon that good confession be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

-Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

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Resurrection Consequences

1 Corinthians 15 is Paul's great resurrection chapter. Verse twelve is Paul's first argument for the resurrection of the dead. He has preached the Gospel at Corinth which affirms the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. However, some were denying that believers would be raised (2 Timothy 2:17-18). Paul shows that such a doctrine is inconsistent with the Gospel which was preached unto them (1 Corinthians 15:12-13).

Throughout the remainder of the context Paul considers what must be true "if there be no resurrection of the dead" (15:13). He concludes, "Then Christ be not risen... our preaching is vain... we are found false witnesses... your faith is vain... ye are yet in your sins... they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished... we are of all men most miserable"

Finally, Paul considers a positive consequence of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth "But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (15:20). Contextually, this is the only consequence of the

resurrection that Paul should consider. However, it certainly is not the only consequence of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the keystone of Christianity. If it did not occur then none of what is predicated upon it is true. Christians, like their Lord, need to make their stand on this truth (Matthew 12:39-40; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19; John 2:19). Believing the evidence for the resurrection to be so strong let us consider what must be true since Christ is risen from the dead.

There Is a God

Peter wrote that our faith in God is established by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: "Who by him do believe in God that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God" (1 Peter 1:21).

How else do we account for the fact that the tomb was empty? Men have tried to explain it away. But the explanation requires more "faith" than accepting the obvious "that God raised Him from the dead" (Romans 10:9). There is only one Being

capable of the resurrection—God Almighty.

Jesus Is the Son of God

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God (John 8:21-24). The miracles which He worked proved it (John 10:30-38; Hebrews 2:1-4). However, Jesus was willing to stake all his claims upon the validity of the resurrection (Matthew 12:39,40; John 2:19). Paul wrote that Jesus was declared to be "the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection of the dead" (Romans 1:4).

Sins Are Forgiven

The resurrection of Jesus proves that the Father accepted the death of Jesus as satisfaction for the sins of the world and the purchase price of the church (Hebrews 9:14, 26; Acts 20:28; Isaiah 53:10-12).

Jesus entered Heaven as our High Priest (Romans 4:25-26; 5:10; 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). Jesus did not take this honor upon Himself, but it was given to Him by the Father (Hebrews 5:1, 4). Jesus' holiness perfected Him as our sacrifice (Hebrews 5:8-9) and qualified Him to be our High Priest chosen of God (Psalms 110:1-3).

Baptism Is Efficacious

Baptism is meaningless without the resurrection (Romans 6:3-11). If Jesus was not raised from the dead there is nothing which corresponds in significance to our being "raised to walk in newness of life." If Jesus did not die to sin once and was raised to live unto God, then we cannot reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ.

Baptism is powerless without the resurrection (Hebrews 9:14; 10:22). As already shown, it was the resurrection that established the efficacy of Jesus' death. If Jesus was not raised then we surely were not baptized into death because His death would be meaningless (Romans 6:3-4).

Baptism is vain without the resurrection (Colossians 2:11-12). The confidence that we have that our sins are forgiven is in the "operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." If Jesus is not raised we could not possibly be "saved" or have had our "hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience."

The Kingdom Is Established

The prophets promised that the seed of David would rule over the kingdom (Psalms 89:35-36; 2 Samuel 7:13). Isaiah said that this Messiah would be raised from the dead in order to rule (Isaiah 53). On Pentecost Peter preached "that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh,

He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne" (Acts 2:30). Thus, the prophets spoke of the resurrection of Jesus as being antecedent to the establishment of the kingdom of Heaven.

The glorified seed of David is in Heaven reigning over His Kingdom (1 John 3:1; Philippians 3:20). He is truly David's seed "according to the flesh" (Romans 1:3; John 1:1, 14).

There Will Be Judgment

Paul when preaching on Mars' Hill in Athens urged his audience to repent because Jesus was raised from the dead (Acts 17:30-31). The resurrection of Christ not only assures us of God's acceptance of His death as the penalty for sin, but also assures us that He has given Him all authority including that of the Judge of the quick and the dead (John 5:22-29; 1 Peter 4:5; Hebrews 9:22-28).

Many think that there will be another opportunity to be saved when Christ returns. However, when Jesus comes it will be apart from sin, not to make another atonement (John 5:22-29; Hebrews 9:24-28; cf. Hebrews 10:26-30). Men will confess Christ at His coming, but not unto their salvation (Romans 10:9-10)—rather only unto their just condemnation (Romans 14:10-12). When Jesus returns it will be for those who have been faithful in this life (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Facing the Consequences

You and I must face the consequences of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. "Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead ..." what will you say and do with Christ? You cannot ignore His resurrection. It has implications that affect you now and hereafter. Have you believed on Jesus? Do you trust in God that raised Him from the dead? Have you been baptized in His name? Do you look unto Him to appear again apart from sin? Are you ready to stand before Him in judgment of everything you have done?

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

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Who Is Jesus to You?

This question is one to which all of us must give a satisfactory answer that is in accord with the word of God. If our lives are to be centered around Jesus Christ, if our faith, hope, expectations, and conduct revolve around Him, then we must have a complete answer to such an inquiry.

The Divine Son of God

We must accept Jesus as the divine Son of God, His divine Sonship is part of who He is (John 5:19-20, 22-27, 37). I must accept Jesus as Christ in order to be saved.

Some deny the divine Sonship of Christ and yet maintain they are Christians. Yet, the scriptures are very clear about the divinity of Christ. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1: 1, 14).

John's purpose in his gospel is to prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. In doing so he shows Him as, "giving life to whom He will, as the bread of life, as the light of the world, as not of this world, as the I Am." Truly, this man was the Son of God

(Hebrews 1:1-6). He was deity before, during, and after His time on earth. How much clearer could it be?

The Son of Man

Jesus described Himself ten times as "the Son of Man," and the New Testament described Him as such thirty-nine times.

It is strange that we use this title of Him so little, when He used it so often. As the Son of Man, He had all the miseries and sufferings that can be affirmed of any man. He is the ideal for all men of all times.

Jesus' humanity is seen in the fact that He hungered, He could get tired, and be in need of rest, and on the cross He was thirsty, He wept and was exceedingly sorrowful at times, indicating that He too could feel mental and emotional pain, distress, and even depression. We are told that He grew mentally and physically (Luke 2:52; Hebrews 5:8-9).

By having become as much a human as any human, He could know the trials and burdens that all men have and do something about them. Jesus was a veritable and actual man.

What does this mean for you and me? He can be sympathetic to our physical and spiritual problems, temptations, and difficulties—"Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people, for in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:17-18).

Our High Priest

As our High Priest, Jesus can also plead our case in the courts of heaven, filling our need of an Advocate (Hebrews 7:25; I John 2:1).

Jesus encourages us not to sin (Romans 8:1-4; Hebrews 4:14-16). He was tempted to sin "in all points like as we are," yet He did no sin (I Peter 2:21-25). His temptations were just as real as ours. His example was not a fluke, joke, or act. His sinless perfection "condemned sin in the flesh."

The Savior of Men

We must accept the truth that Jesus is the only means of salvation and we need His

grace and forgiveness. "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6), He alone is the "good shepherd."

God does not want anyone to perish, but He will not do anything to interfere with man's choice in the matter. In order for us to be saved, we must be willing to be saved.

The King of Kings

We must also be willing to accept the authority of Christ. The power and authority of Christ does not render us any benefit until we submit to his commands.

Jesus said, "All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). The question for us is, "Does Jesus reign in my heart and soul as King?"

The Judge off All

Jesus will judge the world. He will measure all of humanity by His word. As we decide "what to do with Jesus," it is paramount we keep this truth and fact in mind. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Corinthians 5: 10).

Jesus said this, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

Who is Jesus?

To the lost Jesus is the Great Savior, to the spiritually sick, He is the Great Physician, to the confused, He is the Mighty Counselor, to the powerless, He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. To the discouraged, He is a sympathetic High Priest, to the ignorant, He is the Master Teacher, to the destitute, He is the Wonderful Provider. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end, the first and the last, the Mighty God, the Son of God and the Son of Man, our all in all!

—Bruce Reeves

What Crucified Christ?

The Bible teaches that the purpose for Christ's death was to take away the sins of the world. But, have you ever wondered what motivated those responsible to do what they did?

The One who did no sin, living a life of absolute purity and perfection was brutally murdered and killed. The amazing thing is that those responsible for it were the religious leaders of the day.

It is important to recognize that attitudes produce action. The murder of the Lord was prompted by the sinful attitudes of those involved. Sadly, we see the same attitudes in the religious folk today.

What are the attitudes that crucified Christ?

Ignorance crucified Jesus and it causes some to crucify Him afresh today as well (Hebrews 6:4-6). We need men who desire to know the truth. Some are satisfied and don't want to know the truth.

Hatred crucified Christ. The Jews hated Him because their deeds were evil and He was not (John 3:19).

Betrayal crucified Jesus. Judas is alive today and still betrays the Lord for selfish ambition. These prostitute religion for what they can get out of it.

Religious envy crucified Jesus (Matthew 27:18). Many have more loyalty to creed and party than they do to Christ.

False accusation crucified Him and it is a disgrace when Christians falsely accuse and misrepresent others.

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Words of Life

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Three Letter Words

Peter urged: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (I Peter 4:11). Every believer ought to speak as the Bible speaks. We ought to call Bible things by Bible names and use Bible words to express and explain Bible concepts. However, from time to time I encounter a preacher who will not use the words of the Bible. As a matter of fact there are several three letter words that you can hardly get them to speak or properly recognize as being in the Scripture. I want to consider some three letter words that denominational preachers will not use even though God uses them in the Bible.

The Word A-N-D

The word "and"—A-N-D—occurs hundreds, even thousands of times in the Bible. In English grammar it is a copulative conjunction which simply means it joins two words or phrases that are of equal rank or importance. It is a word to which we pay little attention, perhaps because it is so common. Yet, it is a word of great importance when it comes to understanding the will of God. This word "and" is a word which some denominational preachers do not like to use.

For example, consider Mark 16:16. Jesus said, "He that

believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." According to Jesus, who is it that will be saved? It is he that believes—A-N-D—is baptized.

Many denominational preachers say that baptism is not necessary to salvation. Matthew Slick (www.carm.org) wrote, "One of the most nagging questions in Christianity is whether or not baptism is necessary for salvation. The answer is a simple, 'No.' But you might ask, 'If the answer is no, then why are there verses that say things like "baptism that now saves you" (I Peter 3:21, NIV) and "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38, NIV)?' This is an honest question and it needs a competent answer. But, before I tackle this I need to lay a foundation of proper theology."

Mr. Slick went on to say of Mark 16:16, "It says he who believes and is baptized will be saved. Therefore, they conclude that baptism is a necessary part of becoming saved. But, does this verse prove that baptism is necessary for salvation? Not at all, Mark 16:16 does not say that baptism is a requirement for salvation. Let me show you why. I could easily say that he who believes and goes to church will

be saved. That is true. But it is belief that saves, not belief and going to church. Likewise, if you believe and read your Bible, you'll be saved. But it isn't reading your Bible that saves you. Rather, belief in Christ, in His sacrifice, is what saves."

I am always amazed at how easy it is for these preachers to read the Bible and then set in at denying the very thing it says. In the first place, the parallel sentences used to illustrate the text are erroneous and illogical. If going to church is not necessary to salvation then it cannot be logically or grammatically joined to "belief" by the conjunction A-N-D. "And" has the same force as a plus sign in a mathematical equation. For example, in the equation $2+3=5$, which in a math sentence would read "two AND three ARE five," both the addends two and three are necessary to produce the sum of five.

Mr. Slick's own illustration trips him up when he offers as a parallel "He who believes and reads his Bible will be saved." Now, according to him reading the Bible is not necessary to salvation. Yet, the Bible says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Jesus Himself said, "Sanctify them through thy

truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). This would be humorous if it were not so serious.

A man once tried to illustrate away Mark 16:16 by saying: "He that dies and is buried shall decay; since everyone knows that burial is not essential to decay, it is evident that baptism is not essential to salvation." Again, this is sophistry. To be correct, he would have to say: "He that dies, whether he is buried or not, shall decay." We know this is true concerning death and decay from observation. However, we only know what Jesus said in order to draw any conclusions about salvation. As much as one may wish it to be so, Jesus did not say, He that believes, whether he is baptized or not, shall be saved."

More Examples of A-N-D

For instance, in Romans 10:9-10 Paul says: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, **and** shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; **and** with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Now, can a man be saved and not confess Christ? Jesus didn't seem to think so. He said: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33). Now, if faith is the only thing necessary to salvation as Mr. Slick says, Jesus must be mistaken. However, if one concedes that faith and confession are both necessary

then, by the same logic, baptism is also necessary.

Mr. Slick mentioned Acts 2:38, that text says, "Repent, **and** be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Can one be saved without repentance? Again, Jesus didn't seem to think so when He said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). Thus, there is more than just belief required in order to be saved.

Who Is Condemned?

The last part of Mark 16:16 says, "He that believeth not shall be damned." Some point out that Jesus did not say, "He that believeth not **and** is not baptized shall be damned;" thinking that if belief **and** baptism are necessary for salvation, then unbelief **and** not being baptized are necessary for condemnation. Thus, since Jesus only mentioned unbelief as necessary for condemnation, belief alone is essential for salvation. Is this the correct conclusion? I think not for several reasons.

In the first place, when a gift is conditional, whether on one or more conditions, one need only forgo one condition to be disqualified. I doubt anyone would have trouble with Mark 16:16 if what was involved were a new car. If I to promise, "He that touches his nose with his tongue and is baptized shall receive a new car;" how many un-baptized people would receive the new car?

Furthermore, we need to learn that we may have to do more than anyone verse requires, but we will never have to do less. Mark 16:16 does not mention repentance or confession. But, we have shown that Jesus

required both. Faith, repentance, confession and baptism are ALL essential to salvation—failure in any results in condemnation.

Finally, these conditions must be met in logical order. Faith proceeds from hearing the Gospel, confession proceeds from faith, repentance naturally results from acknowledging Christ as Lord, baptism will only come when the heart and will are given to Jesus' authority in repentance. No unbeliever can be saved; he will never confess, repent or be baptized unto remission of sins. It is a logical and spiritual impossibility.

Yes, that three letter word A-N-D is very powerful and important. As small as it is, one cannot get around it, run over it, ignore it or deny its place in communicating the truth of the Gospel.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

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More Three Letter Words

The Word N-O-T

Another little Bible word that denominational preachers do not like to use is the word “not”—N-O-T. Like the word “and” it occurs many times in the Scripture. As a part of speech, it is an adverb which is used to express negation, denial, refusal or prohibition. That this little word gives denominational preachers a lot of trouble is evident from the way in which they ignore it and endeavor to maneuver around its prohibitive limits.

For example, consider I Peter 3:20–21 which says, *“Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water, the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* In this text, Peter is creating an analogy between water baptism and the events of the world-wide flood which occurred during the days of Noah. He speaks

of Pre-flood humanity which had become, according to Genesis chapter six, a wicked and impenitent race. Of all mankind, only Noah and his family were found to be righteous (Hebrews 11:7).

In describing water baptism Peter calls it a “figure” or an antitype indicating that there is some correspondence between elements of the flood which effected Noah’s deliverance and baptism which Peter says does “save us.” He does not say that baptism is an empty, ceremonial ritual which has nothing to do with salvation as many want to construe his words. As a matter of fact, a careful and correct reading of the text will establish the importance and necessity of water baptism. When one looks at the verse, reading only the simple sentence which it contains, Peter says, “Baptism doth also now save us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” This brings the analogy into clear focus. Baptism corresponds to the ark in which eight souls were saved, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ corresponds to

the water of that ancient flood. Peter affirms that as the power of the water saved Noah in the ark, the power of the endless life of Jesus saves us in baptism (Hebrews 7:16, 25; 10:21; Romans 4:24–25).

As Paul said in Hebrews chapter seven, “[Jesus Christ] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

According to Acts 2:38 the Apostle Peter on Pentecost affirmed that baptism is for the remission of sins. In so doing he connected baptism to the sacrificial life of Christ. Our Lord said He came to give His life as a ransom for many and that His blood was shed for many for the remission of sins (Matthew 20:28; 26:28). He offered this atonement to God after His resurrection upon His ascension to glory thereby putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:24–28). In the text before us, I Peter 3:21, the Apostle affirms the same of water baptism, that it saves us by or through the resurrection of

Christ, which is to say, as Paul in Romans 6:3–4, that baptism is when and where God appropriates to the believer the saving benefits of the death of Jesus Christ. It is in baptism that we are buried with Christ—baptized into His death—and raised to walk in newness of life.

Tied Up in “Nots”

It is the parenthetical expression that gives denominational preachers so much trouble because that is where they encounter that little word “not”—N–O–T. Peter describes baptism saying, it is “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God.” Most denominational preachers protest long and hard against water baptism complaining that such a ritual bath, as they like to call it, can have nothing to do with the remission of sins. They often emphasize Peter’s words, “NOT the putting away of the filth of the flesh.” Yet, in doing so they misread the text. They would have you think that the very thing Peter affirmed saved us he called with his next breath “the putting away of the filth of the flesh.” Does that make sense to you? Peter is describing baptism; he says it is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh. Baptism is not a Jewish laver ritual that cleanses like the water of purification (Hebrews 9:13). It is NOT that, a ceremonial

washing, BUT it is the answer of a good conscience. In baptism the believer is obeying God expecting that he will receive from Him the pardon promised, as Paul describes in Hebrews 10:21, “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

In water baptism God operates on the believer, performing “the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (Colossians 2:11–12.). Paul says we are buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God.” No ritual bath can accomplish what Paul attributes to baptism. And only an obedient believer trusting in Christ as His risen Lord could ever possibly have what is promised.

In an effort to minimize the efficacy and essentiality of water baptism some have tried to re-punctuate the sentence. I heard a preacher one time read the passage: “Baptism doth also now save us NOT (the putting away of the filth of the flesh...)” However, moving the parenthesis only causes one to stumble over another three letter word B–U–T—“but”. It is also a conjunction which is used to mean: “on the contrary.” The awkward moving of the parenthesis in

order to negate Peter’s salvation affirmation reduces the parenthesis to nonsense. It would have Peter saying, Baptism does not save us being the putting away of the filth of the flesh, on the contrary it is the desire for a good conscience toward God. What sense does that make? Why would Peter say baptism doesn’t save but being baptized expresses the desire to be saved, especially if as some contend one is saved the moment he believes before and without water baptism?

The language of Scripture is not difficult. It becomes difficult when men begin to alter, twist and pervert even the simplest of words.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 36

September 9, 2007

Still More Three Letter Words

NOT by Faith Only

Another example of denominational preachers having trouble with N-O-T is found upon reading James 2:24, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." How many times have you heard denominational preachers tell you "Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone"?

The Methodist Discipline in Article IX states: "We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith, only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort."

James 2:24 is the only verse in the Bible that has the phrase "faith only" in it, and it is preceded by the adverb of negation, prohibition, refusal and denial—N-O-T.

I honestly do not understand why denominational preachers have so much trouble understanding that the faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Let's just take a moment and read it straight

from the Bible. In Hebrews 5:8-9, Paul affirms of Jesus, "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him." Now, to whom does Paul say Jesus is the author of eternal salvation? It is to "all them that obey Him."

In Galatians 5:5-6, Paul affirms: "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love." He then asks: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?" What did Paul affirm avails? Faith only, faith alone, faith plus nothing. No, the faith that avails—that accomplishes something—is the belief that obeys because it loves God. Belief or faith comes by hearing the word of God—the word of truth—according to Romans 10:17. Paul says the faith that saves

is the faith that obeys the truth.

One last example, hear Paul in II Thessalonians 1:6-10: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

Paul contrasts two groups—the righteous, whom God will save, and the wicked, whom He will punish. That which distinguishes each from the other before God is their relationship to the Gospel. The wicked that perish are those that "obey not the Gospel"—there's that

three letter word N–O–T. The righteous are those who have believed.

Unraveling “NOTS”

What did Jesus say in Mark 16:16? “He that believeth not shall be damned.” What did He say in John 3:18? “He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” Yet here, in II Thessalonians, Paul says the one condemned is the one that “obeys not.” Which is it? No obedience or no faith? Friend, it is both. Disobedience manifests unbelief—to “obey not” is to “believe not.” The man without faith cannot and will not obey God.

By the same token, obedience manifests faith. Returning to James chapter two, verses 17 and 18, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.” Verse 20; “Faith without works is dead.” Verse 26, “As the body without the spirit is dead, even so faith without works is dead also.”

There is nothing more clearly taught in the Bible than the essentiality of obedience to manifesting saving faith. Paul wrote in Romans 1:1–5, “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of

God... for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name.” In Romans 16:26 he wrote, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”

In the very middle of that same book, Romans 6:16–18, Paul says: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” *Obedience is unto the righteousness which is by faith* (cf. Romans 4:12–13). We became the servants of righteousness when we believed, that is when we obeyed the Gospel. Our hearts were purified by faith (Acts 15:9) when we obeyed from the heart the truth which came by God’s Holy

Spirit in the Gospel (I Peter 1:22).

We, like the Romans of old will be made free from sin when we obey from the heart the Gospel of Jesus Christ. You today, may be a child of God—a sinner saved from a Devil’s hell, the eternal punishment away from the presence of God—if you will in faith obey Jesus. “He that believe and is baptized shall be saved.” Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” “With the heart man believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 37

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Even More Three Letter Words

The Word F–O–R

The word “for,” like the words “and,” “not” and “but” are very common words in the English Bible—together probably occurring tens of thousands of times. In English, the word “for” as a part of speech is a preposition which is a word, or a group of words, that is used to show the relation between a noun or pronoun, called its object, and some other word in the sentence. A prepositional phrase consists of a preposition, its object, and modifiers of the phrase or any of its parts. A prepositional phrase may be used as an adjective in modifying other nouns, pronouns and other adjectives. It may act as an adverb modifying verbs, other adverbs or adjectives. It may even act as a noun in the sentence.

The word “for” is a very versatile word. As a translation it may represent any of a number of prepositions in the Greek language, which is the original language in which the New Testament was written. Greek prepositions tend to be more precise than some English ones. Thus, in translation, context determines the significance which “for” may have in the sentence, whereas, the Greek may be more exact. In some cases consulting a Greek

dictionary may prove helpful. However, in most cases we can simply compare the language of Scripture with itself and reason through whatever apparent difficulties their may be.

Now this preposition “for” as we have noted appears in many passages and usually it does not present a problem. But once in a while, it really causes denominational preachers to stumble all over themselves and the Book because it just doesn’t go along with their notions of what they have determined to be doctrine.

Most notably “for” appears in Acts 2:38. Here Peter on Pentecost preached, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” The Greek preposition in this verse is the word εἰς [pronounced “ice”]. According to the *Bauer, Arndt, Danker and Gingrich Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, it is used in this verse as a preposition denoting purpose having the sense of “in order to.” Specifically, of this text, the authors go on to say the prepositional phrase “for the remission of sins” signifies the idea: “so that your sins may be forgiven.” Much evidence from the lexicographers and

translators could be supplied in order to prove this contention.

However, one need not be a Greek scholar to understand these things. One does not even have to be able to find the words in a Greek to English dictionary to be able to know what the truth is. Simply using a concordance we can study the phrase “for the remission of sins” and learn what the truth is.

What’s It “FOR”?

The phrase “for the remission of sins” occurs five times in the New Testament. It appears in Mark 1:4 and Luke 3:3 in describing the baptism of John. Jesus used the phrase in Matthew 26:28 to describe His own death. It is here in this text, Acts 2:38. And, it is found in Romans 3:25.

In both Mark and Luke the baptism of John is described as “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” What does this expression mean? In the first place, it was “the baptism of repentance” because it was necessary that a man repent in order that he might be baptized. When many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John’s baptism, he rejected them saying that they must first “bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, we have

Abraham to our father." (Luke 7:29-30). These Jews did not acknowledge that they had any sins of which to repent. They were trusting in themselves that they were righteous (Luke 18:9). Thus, because they would not repent John rejected them (Matthew 21:32). However, the harlots and the publicans came confessing their sins and were baptized of John (Matthew 3:6). In the next place, it was "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" because upon being baptized these penitent Jews were forgiven. In Luke chapter seven verses 29 and 30, Luke says the harlots and publicans "justified God" when they were immersed of John, meaning that by their obedience they demonstrated that God was just in His estimation of them as being sinners in need of forgiveness, just as the Baptist had preached. However, the Pharisees, on the other hand, who had been rejected of John and would not repent and be baptized, the Bible says "rejected the counsel of God against themselves." Their stubborn resistance to John's preaching and their refusal to obey God in the baptism of repentance resulted in condemnation. They remained in their sins. They were as John judged them, chaff to be burned with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:12). Clearly then the prepositional phrase "for the remission of sins" means "so that your sins may be forgiven" or "in order that your sins may be forgiven."

In Matthew 26:28, Jesus said when taking the cup of the fruit of the vine while instituting the Lord's Supper, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the

New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Jesus declares that His blood was shed, that is, His life was given "for the remission of sins." That the death of Jesus was intended to procure the forgiveness of sins is evident from many passages. For example, John says of Jesus, "Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood" (Revelation 1:5). Later describes the saved in chapter seven as "they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Jesus died "so that your sins may be forgiven."

Now, in Acts 2:38, we have exactly the same language seen in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is not only the same in the English, but the Greek as well—in each one the preposition *εις* occurs. In the previous occurrences context demanded we understand "for remission of sins" to mean "so that your sins may be forgiven." The same is true in Acts chapter two.

—Jeff Asher

Let the Lowly Brother Take Heart

It is a common tendency to base our self-concept on present circumstances (income, assets, economic level, etc.). If you are struggling to put food on the table and clothes on your back, you may be tempted to think you are not worth much. (We place far too much emphasis on such things; see James 2:1-4).

James says to poor Christians: Though you live in humble circumstances, you "ought to take pride in" your "high position."

Let's be certain we get this. There is nothing better than to be in fellowship with God, through Jesus Christ, and to be actively involved as a daily disciple. For a while on earth, you may struggle; undergo trials and difficulties, and it may be, rich, powerful people mistreat you. But in Christ, you have a high position that should cause you to "glory" or "take pride."

In contrast, the rich man has "his humiliation," in the fact that he will pass away with nothing. Whatever your economic situation, it is temporary, so don't depend on it (Matthew 6:19-24; James 5:1-6; I Timothy 6:17-19; Luke 12:19-20). James said: "For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits" (James 1:9-11).

—Warren Berkley

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 38

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The Divine Plan for Giving (1)

Preaching on the subject of monetary giving is always difficult for any preacher, especially me. Every time the subject is discussed some will wonder whether or not the preacher is fishing for a raise, or perhaps he is getting ready to move, or he has found out what some are giving. Monetary giving is our religious duty. And, none of us should resent being told what our duties are. Rather, we should want to know and be glad to hear what our duties are in order that we may properly and adequately execute them.

I have learned that those things which cost us little are generally appreciated little. Men are often this way in regard to the church, particularly, those who have always known the truth. This is true because for the most part few have struggled and suffered for the growth and prosperity of the cause of Christ. Most members in congregations (and many preachers) are enjoying the fruits of other men's labors. There has been little or no cost to them personally. They

have nothing invested in the local church; no money, no time, no sweat, no tears, and no souls.

The financial strength of any congregation is the size of its weekly contribution. In most cases, potential will exceed current resources. Therefore, I doubt that we can ever give more than we can use in the Lord's work—though that would be a good problem to have (Exodus 36:6).

Enjoined Upon Us by Commandment

Paul wrote, *"As I have given order...even so do..."* (I Corinthians 16:1). The ordinance of God for giving is just as much a command as baptism or observing the Lord's Supper (I Corinthians 14:37). We all recognize that a man cannot please God and regard the command to be baptized as an optional thing predicated on desire or convenience. Therefore, how can we suggest that God accepts us when we say in our hearts: "I will contribute if I have some left over when I am through doing as I wish"?

Some have sought relief for their pocket books in II Corinthians 8:7-10. Paul wrote these words of "advice" to encourage the Christians in Corinth to "abound" in their giving, that is, to run over or be excessive in their giving. Paul had used the example of the Corinthians to exhort the Macedonians in their giving (II Corinthians 9:2). The Macedonian response was overwhelming (8:2-5). Paul, not wanting the Corinthians to fail to measure up to his "boasting" of them, exhorts them to fulfill that which they had purposed a year before. There is nothing in this verse that could even possibly suggest that giving is an option which we may elect to ignore when it is convenient. Paul would not and did not ask the Corinthians to give beyond their ability. However, he was not ashamed to ask brethren to do all that they were capable of doing.

On those few times that I have preached on giving, I have observed that those who are already giving well

somehow manage to re-evaluate their purpose and give more. While those who are going to resist whatever admonitions they receive sit idly by and take credit for the increase.

Giving Is Periodic

Paul commanded them to give *"on the first day of the week"* (I Corinthians 16:2). If you worked for me, and I told you that I was going to pay you on Friday, how often would you come around to see me? If you say once a month or whenever you sent for me, I want to hire you for some very dirty work. Now, we all know very well that just as every week has a Friday, every week has a "first day". How often does the Lord expect you to contribute to the treasury?

The question arises whether or not the Lord expects me to "make up" my contribution when I am absent from an assembly. He certainly does! However someone objects saying, "Well, does that mean the Lord expects us to make up the singing, praying, preaching, and Lord's Suppers missed?" No, these things are not determined by weekly prosperity. The fact that I was absent from the assembly does not mean that the Lord's money becomes a "bonus" for me. We purpose what we are going to give before the first day of the week. We "lay it by," put it into the treasury, on the first

day. If \$50 per week is my duty, then one such contribution per month will not do.

Now, I recognize that emergencies may arise: sickness, unemployment, catastrophe, etc. These things are unforeseen and may interrupt periodic giving. But, a new boat, a new travel trailer, or an expensive vacation is not an emergency.

Giving Is Personal

Paul wrote to Corinth, *"Let each one of you lay something aside"* (I Corinthians 16:2). Religious piety is always a personal responsibility (Luke 12:48). I am not relieved from my responsibility to give because there are those in the church who give a great deal.

Now, it matters not who drops it in the plate. It is the sacrifice that counts. Therefore, husbands can put into the plate in one sum what they and their wives purpose to give. However, young people with an allowance or wives with an extra income that is theirs alone from working are not excused from giving because "Dad gives for the whole family" unless the whole family purposes out of what they prosper.

It is important to notice that no one is excused from observing this command. The unemployed are not excused, if they are prospered. The retired are not excused if they

are prospered. The poor are not excused if they are prospered (II Corinthians 8:2; Mark 12:44). The wives of unbelievers are not excused (I Corinthians 7:13).

We need to see this aspect of giving more than any other. The Lord has asked each one of us to give. It is for our eternal good that He has enjoined it upon us. He set the example by giving personally (II Corinthians 8:8-9; Philippians 2:6), and He asks that we follow His loving demonstration. He said that the giver would be blessed (Acts 20:35) and empowered to increase the fruits of righteousness (II Corinthians 9:8-11). Let us trust Him and give abundantly.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 39

October 7, 2007

The Divine Plan for Giving (2)

God's Plan Calls for Proportionate Giving

Our text states that the believer is to give, "storing up as he may prosper" (I Corinthians 16:2). We must give of what we have, not of what we wish we had, but do not (II Corinthians 8:11-12). We are all tempted to daydream about what we would do if we had a million dollars. Yet, you will accomplish more with the few hundred dollars you do have every week, than with the million you may never have. We should give as God enables us to give (I Peter 4:11; Acts 11:29). If I am able to give \$10 a week I should give it. If I am able to give \$250 per week I should give that.

Paul taught that giving according to our power prevents overburdening others (II Corinthians 8:13). The Corinthian saints were better prospered than the Macedonians. Paul wanted the Corinthians to excel in giving, but they were not to look upon it as being burdened and others eased. The Macedonians gave as they were able and were willing to do more (II Corinthians 8:3). The Corinthians could do more and

needed to be willing (II Corinthians 8:11). I believe that this ought to be true among the saints in a local church. It is not right that some should sacrifice and give and others be relieved of responsibility. This is true whether it be in monetary giving or some other service. Those that are able should perform and not enjoy the fruits of other men's labors.

How much should I give into the treasury of the local church? We might begin by seeing how Israel gave under the Mosaic Covenant: one tenth of all their produce (Leviticus 27:30-33; Numbers 18:21, 24; 2 Chronicles 31:5); every man over the age of 20 paid the half-shekel of redemption whenever a census was taken (Exodus 30:11-16); in addition to this the Israelites brought freewill gifts, offerings, and payments of voluntary vows (Deuteronomy 12:6). However, in the face of these "mandatory" requirements the Israelites often "abounded" in giving (Exodus 36:2-7; I Kings 8:64; II Chronicles 5:5-6).

Can we afford to give less than a tenth (Hebrews 8:6)? One hundred members giving 1/10

of \$100 per week would be one thousand dollars per week.

More realistically for the congregation here, 30 wage earning members making \$500 per week giving 1/10 of their income would result in a \$1,500 per week contribution. There are some who may not earn \$500 per week; yet, there are many more who earn that much and more.

The chart on the next page breaks gross annual income down according to weekly contribution. The purpose of the chart is for you to see where your giving falls as a percentage of your income.

The chart is not designed to bind ten percent as a fixed figure for giving. However, it sure helps evaluate our weekly giving compared to what we spend on recreation and entertainment. It costs over forty dollars to take the family out to eat and over twenty dollars to go to a movie. Some brethren do this several times in the month. Now, how about your giving?

We are to give as we have been prospered by God and our own economy. We are not to obligate ourselves out of giving. Some are guilty of the

Annual Income	Weekly Gross	20%	15%	10%	5%	3%
50,000	961.54	192.30	144.23	96.15	48.08	28.84
45,000	865.38	173.08	129.81	86.54	43.27	25.96
40,000	769.23	153.85	115.38	76.92	38.46	23.08
35,000	673.08	134.62	100.96	67.31	33.65	20.19
30,000	576.92	115.38	86.54	57.69	28.55	17.30
25,000	480.77	105.77	72.12	48.08	24.04	14.42
20,000	384.61	76.92	57.69	38.46	19.23	11.54
15,000	288.46	57.69	43.27	28.85	14.42	8.65
10,000	192.31	38.46	28.85	19.23	9.62	5.77
5,000	96.15	19.23	14.42	9.62	4.81	2.88
2,000	38.46	7.69	5.77	3.85	1.92	1.15

sin of covetousness. Their coveting has caused them to be indebted to every department store and charge card company in town (Proverbs 22:7). It does not take long to \$10, \$15, and \$20 yourself to death. I truly believe this is why many Christians are such poor givers. Brethren, we honor the Lord out of our substance (Proverbs 3:9), not out of the leavings.

God's Plan for Giving Is Preventive

Paul was careful to instruct the Corinthians to be consistent in their giving so "that there be no collections when I come" (I Corinthians 16:2). There is nothing more demoralizing to a church than financial woes. Plans are made, work is begun, and then the money runs out. There is no excuse for that.

I have known of churches to operate on the "special contribution" system, that is,

there is a poor contribution but if enough people want something we'll get it. Such sounds as if someone is hoarding at home. Building improvements, mission work, benevolence, evangelism, and yes, even preachers' pay raises have been known to be left undone because brethren were unwilling to give of their means as they should.

"Storing up" means just that. The Lord wants us to lay up in the treasury so that the work is not hindered by continual pleas for money. It is not right for the elders to have to stand before the church and beg brethren to give.

Conclusion

Realize that giving as we have been prospered is commanded of the Lord. When we fail to give as we have been prospered we disobey God and hinder the progress of the local

church. The limits of the financial strength of this church is dependent upon what you individually purpose to do.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 40

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The Motives for Giving

A motive is an emotion, desire, physiological need, or similar impulse which incites anyone to act. We recognize that all actions arise from some motive (e.g., Matthew 27:18). We often look at actions inquiring, "What was the motivation for that?"

By considering the motives for giving, I hope to motivate those who are not giving as they should to do better and to motivate those that are giving well to continue in that ministry with the ability that God supplies.

A Desire to Please God

There are numerous examples in the Scriptures which dissuade us from being the object of God's displeasure (e.g. Genesis 38:10). God rejects those with whom he is displeased (Psalm 60:1). Therefore, we should strive to please God (I Thessalonians 4:1). We please God when we keep his commandments (John 8:29). Among the things that please God are our gifts and offerings which we bring (Hebrews 13:16). We recognize the difficulty that this presents to us at times (Galatians 1:10) and so does God (Hebrews 13:15-16). The Scriptures assure us that when God is pleased He blesses (Hebrews 11:4-5). It is wonderful to know that we can be

well-pleasing to God by giving of our means.

In Order to Be Christ-like

I say, without fear of contradiction, that no man can be a Christian who does not give something. I know of nothing as unlike Christ as a covetous man, a lover of money, a non-giver (I Timothy 6:10, 17-19). Giving is the very essence of Christianity (John 3:16; Matthew 20:28; Ephesians 5:25). Therefore, we should emulate the example of Our Father and His Son (I Peter 2:21-23).

Someone might ask: "Is the mere collection of money worthy of the example of Christ; how could you associate anything as base as money with the gift of Christ?" My answer, "Because Paul did" (II Corinthians 8:8-12).

Heavenly Treasure

Above all else we should want to increase our holdings in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20). As we have already observed, the covetous man is unlike Christ (Matthew 19:16-29). He has been deceived to think that his wealth will sustain him. However, though his wealth may endure, there is no guarantee that he will live to enjoy it (James 1:9-11; I Timothy 6:4-7).

Earthly wealth cannot enter the heavenly house (James 5:1-3;

Luke 6:24; 12:15-21). Yet, we can be assured of riches in heaven by good stewardship of our earthly prosperity (Luke 12:32-34).

A Blessing in Giving

Jesus said in Acts 20:35, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." What is the blessing of giving?

It is a blessing to be on the "giving end", rather than on the receiving end (Ephesians 4:28). There is the promise of God to deliver the liberal giver from trouble and want (Psalm 41:1; II Corinthians 9:8). Concerning this truth Albert Barnes wrote, "Do not suppose that by giving liberally you will be impoverished and reduced to want. You should rather confide in God, who is able to furnish you abundantly with what is needful for the supply of your necessities." Few persons are ever impoverished by liberality. The divine blessing rests upon the liberal giver, and while every person should make proper provision for his family, everyone should give liberally being confident that God will supply our future needs.

Furthermore, the liberal giver is promised the blessed eternal reward (Matthew 25:31-40). He is the one who has real riches in which he may trust (I Timothy 6:17-19). This is the great

blessing of giving, the gift of eternal life (I John 2:25).

To Glorify God

When the gospel is preached and Christianity practiced God is glorified (I Peter 4:11). Notice how the Corinthian contribution served to glorify God (II Corinthians 9:11-13).

Liberal giving on the part of the members of a church makes the various ministries possible (Romans 12:5-8). Preaching, teaching, media evangelism, relief to needy saints, etc. are made possible only by the liberal giving of the saints.

The Example of Others

We are in the Scripture admonished to be and to imitate the good example (I Timothy 4:12; Philippians 3:17; 4:9). Therefore, there is nothing wrong in being motivated in our giving by the good example of others (II Corinthians 8:1-2; 9:2). We have those here that are worthy examples in giving. Their contributions reflect purpose and proportion. They are consistent in frequency and amount. We all need to emulate their example of purposed liberality.

To Prove Our Love

Love has always been measured by the liberality of the giver. The measure of God's love for us is found in His gift, Christ (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8). Paul challenged the Corinthians to abound in giving as a proof of their love for God (II Corinthians 8:7-8, 24). Liberality is a good measure of one's love for God.

The Scripture says that our hearts and our treasures are together (Matthew 6:21). Perhaps, this is the origin of the

expression, "If the Lord's got your pocketbook He's got you heart." So many people have all their treasure in there. The true expression should be. "If He's got your heart he will also have your pocketbook."

I am disappointed when some brethren are so base in their thoughts that they will use a brother's liberality as a means to discredit him. I have heard people accuse godly members of trying to "buy" the church simply because they were good givers. Such statements as that only indict the impure motives of the slanderer. I personally am indebted to brethren who make certain that God gets a liberal share of everything they have.

To Do the Work Effectively

It is a shame but some do not desire to do the work of the Lord effectively. Therefore, they are often unwilling to give, or have what they give spent. The New Testament teaches that we are to do what we do for the Lord to the best of our ability (Romans 12:7-9; I Peter 4:11).

There are many wonderful tools and methods that are available to the Lord's people today that were not available in the past, things that can and do help the work be done efficiently and effectively. However, brethren are often unwilling to consider those things because they cost. Television, radio, advanced printing techniques and audio-visual aids are available to the church to improve both preacher and Bible class teacher. We should take advantage of these aids and put them to work. Simply because Peter or Paul preached without such things does not mean that they cannot

be utilized for effective use today. Furthermore, we do not at times have a large enough picture of our potential. Neither do we set before ourselves the right kind of goals. There is much that we can do as a people if we would plan and set goals for the growth and spread of the Gospel.

Conclusion

No higher motives than these have ever induced men to action. Such motives as these should not be stifled, but rather encouraged. A full appreciation of them and a quick response to them would see the improved and increased advancement of the gospel.

— Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 41

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Biblical Characteristics of Giving

In the previous articles we considered both God's divine plan for giving and the motives which ought to prompt us to give.

Concerning God's divine plan we learned: (a) it is commanded; (b) it provides for periodic contributions; (c) it requires personal participation; (d) it demands proportionality, and (e) it is designed for prevention.

Proper motives for giving include: (a) a desire to please God; (b) a purpose to be a Christian, (c) a desire for treasures in heaven, (d) the expectation of a blessing, (e) the wish to glorify the name of God, (f) a desire to follow the good example of others, (g) the proving of our love, and (h) the desire to do the work of the Lord efficiently and effectively.

In this final article we shall consider the characteristics of acceptable giving. The importance of this aspect of our worship of God through giving ought to be obvious. As in all our worship, it must be characterized by those things which will qualify the

worship as in spirit and truth. The Scriptures indicate that it is possible to give and not receive the blessings that accrue to the giver when the gift is brought properly (I Corinthians 13:3).

Therefore, certain qualities must characterize our giving in order for it to be acceptable to God. A consideration of these qualities shall constitute the basis of this lesson study.

Self-surrender

Self-surrender was the secret of Macedonia's liberality (II Corinthians 8:3-5). Note that Paul refers to their contribution as not being what was expected—"not as we had hoped." Rather, out of their "deep poverty" they abounded to the "riches of their liberality," a contribution larger than one would expect possible among a people so oppressed.

What was the cause? Their surrender to the Lord and His will as expressed in the authority of the apostles. The Macedonians were wholly consecrated to God. This occasion serves to prove that a people can do much even

when they are poor, if all are disposed to do it.

We often sing songs which are intended to remind us of our "consecration" to God. Do we reflect the spirit of those songs in our giving? For example when we sing, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold ..." Or when we sing, "Were I possessed of boundless store, my heart would long to yield thee more ... O Savior mine can I withhold the trifling deed, the paltry gold ..."

Without Display

We do not do anything as worship for the purpose of pleasing men (Galatians 1:10; Ephesians 6:6-7). Our religious duties, giving in particular, are not to be done for the purpose of "eye service". Jesus condemned the Pharisees for blowing trumpets, standing on the street corners, and disfiguring their faces in order that others might take note of their "performance." Such "demonstrations" nullified whatever spiritual rewards might have been theirs and ended in the epitaph, "They

have their reward" (Matthew 6:1-4).

Let us be warned that we can be guilty of the same when we are concerned only with appearances and approval. This mindset has blighted the church often (Acts 5:1, 2, 8).

However, that does not mean that we must keep what we give a secret from everyone else (Acts 4:34-37; 9:36; Luke 7:1-5; Acts 10:4). We oppose the practice of "the pledge" or the sectarian "tithing", but not on the basis that it violates some principles of privacy. Our objection is that it violates the principles of freewill, cheerfulness, and not being a matter of necessity, as well as, it empowers a body with prerogatives to which it is not entitled.

Willingness

It is understood that a gift is not a gift when it is given through any motive other than freewill (Romans 4:4; 5:16). Only when we give in this fashion is there any reward to the givers (Revelation 22:17; I Corinthians 9:16, 17; Philemon 13, 14).

Our giving should be ready and willing (I Timothy 4:17-19; Galatians 6:6; Philippians 4:15; II Corinthians 8:3, 11-12), not grudgingly, or of necessity, and without grumbling (II Corinthians 9:7; I Peter 4:9).

The above terms indicate literally, giving "out of sorrow, i.e., regret," giving out of "necessity imposed by either external or internal pressures," giving with "complaints and displeasure." The believer who gives under these circumstances would be better off having kept his "gift".

Heartily, Sincerely and Joyfully

Everything the believer does as service unto God, he is to perform heartily, that is, "out of the soul" (Colossians 3:23). The idea is that his service proceeds from a heart that loves God. This describes the emotional aspect of our giving (Matthew 22:37).

Our liberality is one proof of the sincerity, genuineness and trueness of that love (II Corinthians 8:8). Those who really love the Lord give liberally (Romans 12:8; II Corinthians 9:6; 8:9). Does your contribution reveal a love that is true (I Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4)?

Paul observed that the Macedonians gave as they did because of their joyfulness—delight in doing the will of God (II Corinthians 8:2; 1 John 5:3). They were happy serving God; they actually took pleasure in it. Therefore, they were liberal as givers (I John 3:16-23). Many do not give because

they have yet to experience the joy of serving God.

Is Your Giving Acceptable?

Acceptable giving is that which is done without regard to pleasing self, rather, it is the outpouring of a heart that truly loves God and finds pleasure in serving God. Such giving as that comes without remorse, complaint, or guilt. It is a free gift that is the occasion of rejoicing. Gifts that bear these characteristics come to God unaffected and unrestrained from the hearts and not the pockets of the saints.

— Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 42

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The Resurrection of Christ

The resurrection of Christ is the greatest of all miracles.

However, we know that there were others raised from the dead before Christ's resurrection, and attention will be called to some of them. In so doing, we will note the difference, and how the resurrection of Christ excels.

Elijah raised the widow's son by crying unto the Lord: "and he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried unto the Lord and said, oh Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come unto him again" (I Kings 17: 20-25). Elisha, in II Kings 4:33-37, raised the Shunamite's son.

In Jonah 1:17, we find that a fish swallowed Jonah. I have heard people say that this just could not be true because a whale's throat is not large enough to swallow a man. But one thing undoubtedly was overlooked; God prepared this one and that makes a difference.

Christ also raised Lazarus from the dead and the Jews admitted that there was a resurrection (John 11:47; 12:18).

If I were asked, I would be one of the first to say that these were great miracles. But note one thing. In all of these miracles God worked through someone, but in Christ's resurrection there

was no go-between and this is unique.

I am sure that the Jews did not deny the raising of the dead in accord with the above mentioned miracles. I have been told that they even believed if a man were buried on another's bones, he might rise again as when they let the man down into the sepulcher of Elisha. When the man touched Elisha's bones, he revived (II Kings 13:21). But with Christ this was not so, for they buried him in a new sepulcher wherein no man ever yet lay (John 19:41).

Christ was raised without a go-between. God raised him from the dead. I know some believe that his body was stolen away, but men were paid to tell that lie (Matthew 28:11-15). The critics say the disciples were just brainwashed, but this is not so for Thomas saw the prints of the nails in His bands and was told to thrust his hand into His side. He said, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:25-29).

Peter demonstrated his faith in that great miracle on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22-24). He 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

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."

The resurrection of Christ is the greatest of all miracles because without it there is no salvation. Paul showed the Corinthians that the fact of the gospel relies upon it: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:1-4). "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (Verse 17). In verse 32, Paul said, 'If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die."

So, if anyone does not believe that God raised Christ from the dead, there is no need to believe anything because he will be lost. One must believe (Hebrews 11:6), come to repentance (Luke 13:3), confess Christ (Matthew 10:32), and be buried with Christ in baptism (Romans 6:4; Acts 2:38).

—Lloyd Nash

A Mind to Work

The passage that serves as a title to this article says this: "So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto half the height thereof: for the people had a mind to work." The challenge of that statement is clear. Do we have an attitude of wanting to be involved in the Lord's work? Is our attitude such that we move from just talking to actually working? Nehemiah was cupbearer to the Persian ruler, King Artaxerxes. Receiving word about the disrepair of the walls around the city of Jerusalem, Nehemiah obtains permission to return to his homeland for a period of time, that he might help rebuild his city. Nehemiah returned and the task was accomplished in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). Why were they successful? How did they go about their work? Was it different for them, but for us the work we must do is too hard? Nehemiah 2:18 says that the work Nehemiah engaged in was a good work. That is, the walls needed fixing, and so the work was begun. They didn't need a

committee to talk about fixing the walls for several months. They simply went to work. "They had a mind to work." Their attitude was such that the task was not too hard or difficult. It is interesting that Nehemiah and his helpers faced opposition in their work. How did they respond? They prayed to God and shored up their defenses (Neh. 4:9). After the work was completed the people enjoyed a worship period of service and devotion to God as the words of God were read before all (Neh. 8). They rejoiced to be in the presence of God.

The preaching of the gospel is a good work, isn't it? Shouldn't we be concerned about preaching the only message that can save the souls of lost men and women? The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). Our souls are purified when we obey God (1 Peter 1:22). Do we need to sit around and talk about the need to preach, or should we just get up and try to go teach someone the truth? Do we need some personal work classes before we can go and tell someone what we knew when we obeyed the gospel?

Jesus said the fields were white unto harvest (John 4:35). Now is the time for labor. Now is the time to sow the precious seed of the kingdom. There seem to be plenty of laborers (Christians), but are we laboring? Do we truly rejoice in the preaching of God's word? God's word is the only guide that will see us safely into heaven. God's word is the lamp that lights the way into paths of righteousness. God's Word brings comfort to the

aching soul. It is truly the message men need. Do we have a mind to work?

The last verse of Nehemiah says: "And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the first-fruits. Remember me, O my God, for good." Will God remember us for the good we have done? Will He remember us for the effort we made to be His people? Or, will He remember that we wanted to work and talked about working and even got together once to begin working, but never actually did any work? There is much to do; there is work on every hand.

—Randy Harshbarger

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Words of Life

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When God Says Nothing

Through the years I have had folks ask me to answer various questions they have about the Church of Christ. These questions often involve the work and worship of the church. Some have a hard time understanding why we reject instrumental music, sprinkling as baptism and women preachers while accepting song books, meeting houses and electric lights. When I explain these things to them they more often than not reply, "But it doesn't say not to!"

The difficulty lies in not understanding how the Bible authorizes, and in particular, recognizing that silence does not authorize anything. We all learned this lesson when young from our mothers. Being sent to the store for a loaf of bread did not authorize a candy bar. I always knew better unless Mom said I could. "You didn't say not to" was never an effective defense.

Sometimes the query is framed in terms of an exclusive proposition. For example, I have been asked: "Where does the Bible sing

only?" I cannot produce the text that says "sing only" but I can show that the New Testament only says sing. Neither can I produce the text that says "immerse only," but I can show that the New Testament only says immerse. This is how one demonstrates the truthfulness of an exclusive proposition.

We are introduced to the exclusive proposition and its proof in Hebrews 7:14, "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood." The Hebrew writer establishes that one from the tribe of Judah is excluded from the Priesthood on the grounds that Moses spoke concerning the priesthood for the family of Aaron from the tribe of Levi *only*. Thus, based upon the truth that Scripture revealed only one family and tribe for priesthood, he concludes that all other tribes are of necessity excluded.

While it is true, that Moses did not say, "None of the tribe of Judah, none of the tribe of Issachar, none of the tribe of Asher, etc." The fact

remains that "Moses spake nothing" and this is sufficient. Therefore, in order to establish an exclusive proposition all that is necessary is to show what the Scriptures say.

The exclusive proposition may be illustrated from the case of Noah. In Genesis 6:14, God said, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood." God did not have to give Noah a list of all the trees of the forest and preface each with "Thou shalt not use." All God needed to say, which is all He did say, was, "gopher wood." By this instruction every other kind of wood was excluded.

Another illustration taken from the Old Testament is that of the Passover Lamb in Exodus 12:5. "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats." Had God said to Israel, "Your animal shall be without blemish," Israel would have been at liberty to bring a lamb, a pig, a horse, or a cow. However, Israel understood perfectly well that God said, "Don't offer the

pig; don't offer the horse; don't offer the cow." Why did they understand that? Because "Moses spake nothing" concerning pigs, horses and cows as Passover offerings.

Now, how have we applied the Biblical principles involved in proving an exclusive proposition? An example which is easily seen is that of establishing the first day of the week as the only day upon which the Lord's Supper may be taken. In Acts 20:7, Luke records, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow." Now, if we could find that brethren observed the Lord's Supper on a day other than the first day of the week, as well as upon the first day of the week, there would be a case for observing the supper on a day other than the first day of the week. However, we do not find any Scripture testimony (statement, example or necessary implication) that leads to that conclusion. Therefore, we know that all other days are excluded as days upon which the Lord's Supper may be properly observed. Those who advocate another day for observance have the burden of presenting the additional evidence that compels the conclusion that the Supper

Class	Specified	Excluded
Tribes	Levi	All others
Wood	Gopher	All others
Animals	Lamb	Any other
Day	First Day	Any other
Music	Singing	All other

may be observed on a day other than the first day of the week.

Now, let's return to the question of music in worship. In Ephesians 5:19 Paul wrote, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." In addition to this passage, New Testament writers mention music in worship eight other times (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; I Corinthians 14:15, 26; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13). In each case, the reference is only to singing. Now, what's wrong with mechanical instrumental music in worship? It is not authorized. Granted the Bible does not say sing only, but the Bible only says sing.

If we understand that when God said to Noah, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood," He in effect said, "Don't use pine." And, if we understand that when God said to Israel, "Your lamb shall be without blemish," He said, "Don't

offer a pig." And, if we understand that when the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread they did not come together on another day. We ought to understand that when God said "sing" He also said: "Don't play an instrument."

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

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When Christians Sin

It is sad, but a fact that Christians sometimes sin (1 John 1:5-2:2). From this passage, we learn that only a liar would deny that he ever sins and that confessing our sins to Christ is required for Christians to obtain forgiveness.

The book of Acts records the occasion when a Christian, Simon the sorcerer, sinned before God and man (Acts 8:9-24). Simon sinned by attempting to purchase the power the Holy Spirit had given to the apostles and was destined to perish because of his sin, for his heart was not right with God (Acts 8:21). He was told to "repent" in order to be forgiven by God (Acts 8:22).

In order that we may appreciate the awfulness of sin and blessings of forgiveness, let us study what happens when Christians sin.

Righteous People Can Become Unrighteous

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel said, "when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is

guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die" (Ezekiel 18:24).

Christians can depart from God and be hardened by sin. The Hebrew writer said, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:12).

Christians can also fall from grace (Galatians 5:4) and leave their first love (Revelation 2:4-5). Paul also warned, "let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

How Can A Christian Obtain Forgiveness?

Christians are God's children, and as such we can go to Him and ask His forgiveness — we can address Him as "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:8).

Christians are required to repent of their sins before God will grant forgiveness (Acts 8:22). Repentance is not just saying, "I'm sorry." The word "repent" "signifies 'to change one's mind or purpose,' always, in the NT, involving a change for the better, an amendment, and always, except in Luke 17:3, 4, of 'repentance' from sin." (*Vine's*

Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). Repentance is "a change of heart that brings about a change in action." John the Baptist told the people to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3:8). Repentance involves restitution (Leviticus 6:1-7; Luke 19:8-9; Matthew 7:12).

Confession of our sins is also required before Christians can be forgiven. John said, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). This is not a confession of faith in Christ, but confession of our sins. The word "confess" means "to confess by way of admitting oneself guilty of what one is accused of, the result of inward conviction" (*Vine*).

Prayer is a natural extension of repentance and confession (Acts 8:22). As Christians, we have "an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1; Hebrews 4:14-16).

King David of Israel provides a wonderful example of an individual who sought God's forgiveness by acknowledging his sins, turning away from them and asking God's forgiveness (Psalm 51:1-13).

When God Forgives His Children

Some of the most beautiful and poetic passages in the Bible deal with the manner in which God forgives His repentant children.

The great prophet Micah said God "will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). When God forgives us our sins will be removed "as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). God will blot out our sins and remember them against us no more (Psalm 51:9; cf. Acts 3:19). Our sins are wiped out of His memory and never brought up again.

When Should Christians Forgive Others?

Some Christians are under the mistaken idea that we can or should forgive other people, regardless of whether God has forgiven them of their sins or not.

Yes, we are commanded to forgive others, for Jesus said, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37). Jesus also taught that "if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15; Mark 11:26). The parable of the unmerciful servant plainly shows that God will not forgive us if we do not forgive others (Matthew 18:21-35).

However, we are to forgive other people only when they repent! The sinning brother must ask for forgiveness. "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke

him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." (Luke 17:3-4).

Let me say it again -- the sinning brother must repent before you can forgive him (Luke 17:4). Remember that "repentance" includes restitution and amendment of life.

Picture what happens when you forgive someone that God has not yet forgiven. Suppose a person lies about you and you "forgive" them, although they have not repented nor asked for your forgiveness. If you "forgive" this person it means that you are never going to bring this matter up to them again -- neither will you bring the matter up to others or yourself. However, after you have "forgiven" this person, they are still destined to perish, for "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (Revelation 21:8).

The truth is that the best thing you could do for this person is to bring them back to God -- "if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20).

It comes as a shock to many Christians, but there are some people we should not even pray for. When a brother or sister in Christ continues in their sin until their death, God has commanded us that we not even pray for that person. "If anyone sees his brother sinning

a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that." (1 John 5:16).

Conclusion

Let us all see the enormity of sin and willingness of our Father to forgive. God has set conditions for forgiveness of His erring children. When a Christian sins, he must repent and pray (Acts 8:22).

Non-Christians (those who can not call upon God as their "Father") must "repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Have you been forgiven by God on the basis of His will?

—David Padfield

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Words of Life

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What Hinders Me?

After preaching to the multitudes in Samaria, Philip the evangelist is told to journey to a deserted region south of Jerusalem on the road to Gaza (Acts 8:26-40). Along this road Philip preached to an Ethiopian nobleman. The story of the conversion of the Ethiopian is one of the many “pattern conversions” in the book of Acts, i.e., the conversions in the book of Acts all follow a similar pattern, which makes them especially helpful today when we would tell someone what to do to be saved.

Let us notice the events which led up to this conversion.

While in Jerusalem to worship, he had probably availed himself of the privilege of purchasing a copy of the scroll of Isaiah—and it was this scroll that he was reading on his way back to Ethiopia. He was reading from the 53rd chapter of the book, a passage which speaks at great length of the suffering of the Son of God and His death on the cross.

Philip ran to the chariot, heard the Ethiopian reading, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?” This must have made an impression on the Ethiopian. In humility he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” Philip began at

Isaiah 53 and “preached Jesus to him.” “Preaching Jesus” must include instruction on what to do to become a Christian. The question expressing a desire to be immersed would not have occurred to the Ethiopian unless he had been previously instructed concerning the act of baptism. No true preacher of the gospel has ever preached Jesus without preaching the baptism Jesus commanded (Mark 16:16).

Near one of the streams which crossed the Jerusalem-Gaza road, the Ethiopian said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Philip told him the only thing that stood between him and salvation was faith in Christ as the Son of God.

“Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him,” which reminds us that baptism is a burial (Romans 6:4). When the Ethiopian came out of the water, he went on his way rejoicing in the fact that all his sins were forgiven.

I would like for us to consider the question the Ethiopian posed before his conversion: “What hinders me from being baptized?” He realized it was possible something could stand in the way of his baptism. What could hinder him? The color of

his skin? His nationality? The fact he served a foreign government? The fact that he was a eunuch?

There are people today who are the proper subjects of baptism, i.e., they believe in Christ as the Son of God, and yet something hinders them from obeying the gospel. Let us notice a few things which “hinder” people from being baptized.

Family

Jesus warned that His gospel would cause division (Matthew 10:34-39).

Sometimes we hear people say, “My mother was one of the kindest, sweetest, most pious women you could ever meet. She slaved for her kids and was a wonderful neighbor, but she died without being baptized. Is she going to heaven or to hell?” Let me say it kindly, but its none of your business (Deuteronomy 29:29). She is in the hands of a God who knoweth and doeth all things well.

People often ask, “But what about the man who dies on the way to the baptistery—is he going to heaven or hell?” If the man is alive, I will tell him to be baptized (Mark 16:16). If he is dead, he is in the hands of God. We must argue on the basis of the law under which we live—

clemency is in the hands of the Judge.

The truth is that at the moment of death our destiny is sealed (Hebrews 9:27). If I could do anything for the dead, I would. There is no sense in dwelling on the fate of those who have died without the gospel. We need to spend our time teaching those who are alive.

If your mother really was as pious as you said, do you think she would want you to do what is right or to follow her in error? My first responsibility is to obey Christ myself (Hebrews 5:8-9). Then, I have an obligation to teach those who are lost (Matthew 28:18-19). My responsibility is only to the living—the dead are in God's hands.

Hypocrites

It is a sad thing, but true: not everyone who claims to be a Christian lives up to their obligations in Christ. There is no question that there are people who claim to be Christians who will lie, cheat, steal and even commit adultery.

Hypocrites are a great hindrance to others obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ. Sometimes it is the hypocrite at school or work who drinks and everyone there knows it. Sometimes it is the hypocrite in the pew -- people can see they don't even come to Bible class and then pay no attention to the sermon and yet sing, *More About Jesus*, or, *Tell Me The Story of Jesus*. They sing *Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross* and then talk and pass notes during the Lord's Supper. There are people who will sing *Purer in Heart Help Me to Be*, and then be the biggest gossip in the country.

It is bad enough that hypocrites will be lost, but they are going to take others with them.

Hypocrites in religion have always been a problem (Matthew 23:13-15). Hypocrites will get their "reward"—either here or in eternity. "Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later" (I Timothy 5:24).

But is this really the reason for not obeying, or just an excuse? Hypocrites are pretty small individuals, and if you can hide behind them you must be smaller yet. I have gone to a lot of professional sporting events and have never seen anyone get up and leave because of all the hypocrites. There is a lot of counterfeit currency in circulation, but I've never seen anyone refuse money because they might get a counterfeit bill.

Uncertainty

Some people want to obey the gospel, but say, "I am not sure I can remain faithful." This at least shows a proper respect for the fact that God requires faithfulness on the part of His people. Every Christian knows that every Christian sins (I John 1:6-2:2). When we sin we can ask God to forgive us (I John 2:1).

Simon, an erring Christian, was told: "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you" (Acts 8:22).

We can take comfort in knowing there is no sin that we have to commit. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you

to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Conclusion

King Agrippa was "almost persuaded" to become a Christian (Acts 26:24-29). Felix was waiting for a "convenient time" to obey (Acts 24:24-25). There is never going to be a "convenient time" to leave sin. Will you not leave it now? Angels in heaven would rejoice over one sinner who comes to repentance.

—David Padfield

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 46

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Hindrances to Conversion

“For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at anytime they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Matthew 13:15).

The word conversion means “a spiritual and moral change attending a change of belief with conviction” (Webster). It is the process by which one becomes a Christian. In the quoted passage Jesus teaches that there are hindrances to conversion. Since conversion is essential to eternal life, we should identify and remove every one. What are some hindrances to conversion?

Willful Ignorance

Those of whom Christ spoke had deliberately closed their own eyes to the truth, lest they should see, hear, understand and be converted. Because they did not desire conversion they closed their eyes.

Peter wrote of some lustful scoffers who were willingly ignorant of the destruction of the world by flood. They “conveniently” overlooked that fact while questioning the Lord's return (II Peter 3:3-5).

Many today are willingly ignorant of the Gospel, God's power to save (Romans 1:16), because they desire to continue walking their own ways.

Ancestor Religion

Many reject conversion because it would mean a departure from the religion of their ancestors. They sing the song, “It was good enough for father and it's good enough for me,” not realizing it may not have been good enough for father, not being the “old time religion” of the Bible. We should be more interested in conversion and heaven than our forefathers' religions. Saul of Tarsus left the religion of his fathers to obey and preach the gospel of Christ (Galatians 1:11-16).

Prejudice

This is, perhaps, the greatest hindrance to conversion. It is a padlock on the mind which brings condemnation before investigation, and effectively prohibits sincere investigation. It was prejudice that caused the religious Jews to murder Stephen, rather than accept the truth he preached (Acts 7:1-60). Many who are blinded by prejudice ridicule God's church, scoff at the command

to be baptized for the remission of sins, and scorn the one church. Those who desire heaven must sweep prejudice from their minds as a hindrance to conversion.

Worldly Pleasures

Such pleasures choke out the word of God in human hearts (Luke 8:14), and hence are hindrances to conversion. Many are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (II Timothy 3:4). Demas forsook Paul because he loved this present world more than God (II Timothy 4:10). We should realize, as did Moses, that it is far better to suffer affliction with God's people than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:24-26). Sinful pleasure is only temporary and “the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (I John 2:17). An eternity in hell is too great a price to pay for a few fleeting years of sinful pleasure.

Religious Leaders

False teachers have always been hindrances to conversion. They deceive the people into believing they are saved without obeying the gospel of

Christ. They fill the peoples' minds with false doctrines which hinder the entrance of the truth which is able to make them free (John 8:32). In Acts 13:6-11 we read of a false teacher who tried to hinder the conversion of Sergius Paulus. Religious leaders provoked their followers to crucify Christ and persecute Paul. They conspired against Stephen because they could not answer the truth (Acts 6:9-14). Satan has ministers disguised as God's ministers (II Corinthians 11:13-15), Jesus said they are wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). Beware of them!

Desire for Prominence & Popularity

We find some hindered in this fashion in John 12:42-43.

"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on | him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." If we are to be converted we must love the praise of God more than the praise of men.

Trust In Riches

"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Timothy. 6:9-10). It is far better to lay up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust

doth not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal, than to lay up treasure on earth soon to be left behind (Matthew 6:19-20). It is certain that we can carry nothing out of this world (I Timothy 6:7).

Many feel no dependence on God because they depend on material possessions, consequently their conversion is hindered. They traded spiritual security for worldly security. They trust in riches to prepare for this life which shall soon fade away, while neglecting to trust in God to prepare for a life beyond the grave which shall never fade away.

God calls one a fool who does this (Luke 12:15-21). Jesus said, "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:24-25). Hence Paul wrote, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (I Timothy 6:17).

Whatever it is that hinders your conversion, cast it aside immediately. Absolutely nothing is worth the eternal loss of your soul. Worldly pleasures do not begin to compare with the joy of salvation and hope for the future. Worldly riches cannot buy salvation and a home in heaven. These uncertain riches can fade away, but the riches of

a Christian can never be corrupted, defiled or stolen, because our inheritance is reserved in heaven (I Peter 1:4). Soon we shall all lay aside the robe of flesh and be carried into eternity to await the resurrection and judgment before Christ Jesus, at which time we must give an account for the deeds done while on earth. Let us prepare while we can by obeying the gospel (Hebrews 5:9; II Thessalonians 1:7-9). Believe in God (Hebrews 11:6), in Christ (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3), confess faith in Christ (Acts 8:37), and be buried in baptism (Romans 6:4; Acts 2:38).

What doth hinder you?

—Earl Fly

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Words of Life

Volume 7 Issue 47

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What Can I Do To Help?

What can I do to help the cause of Christ? Paul gives us a list of things in Galatians 6:1–10, *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”*

Restore the Erring (v. 1)

I can restore my brother or sister who has been overtaken in a trespass. This must be done in a spirit of meekness, realizing that I too am subject to temptation. A “holier than thou” attitude

would be justifiably resented by the erring one, and would defeat my whole purpose. When approached in the right spirit any honest person will appreciate having his faults pointed out. I may in this way cover a multitude of sins and save a soul from death (James 5:20).

Bear a Burden (v. 2)

None of us live to ourselves (Romans 14:7). We all need one another and can help one another. There are times of discouragement that come. In those times, I can help my brother with his burden. Something as small as a smile, a compliment or an expression of appreciation can lift a great burden from the heart and mind of a friend. A wife can help her husband with his load of care and responsibility, and the husband can help the wife. In bearing one another's burdens we fulfill the law of Christ.

Face the Facts (v. 3)

“If a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.” The high school Senior has often been pictured as thinking he knows all that is worth knowing. If so, he is not alone. The college graduate often emerges with the “know it all” attitude to a

disgusting degree. Preachers, young and old, often become enamored with the sound of their own voices being convinced of their brilliance. Christians in need of teaching sometimes push themselves forward as teachers. I can help the cause of Christ greatly by making a realistic appraisal of my own abilities and acting accordingly (Romans 12:3).

Do My Work (vv. 4–5)

I can serve faithfully in my own capacity. I can study and work to become a better teacher, song leader, exhorter, deacon, preacher or elder (I Peter 2:2). There is a burden that we may share, but there is another burden that each must bear himself. No one else can do my praying, singing, giving, assembling, eating, teaching or exhorting for me. I must discharge these individual responsibilities myself. I alone am responsible for them in the judgment (Romans 14:12).

Support a Teacher (v. 6)

In some contexts the word communicate refers to financial support given to evangelists (Philippians 4:14–15; I Timothy 6:18; Hebrews 13:16). I may not be able to go to a foreign field to preach, start a church in a community where it does not

exist, or even teach in a public manner, but I can give financial aid to those who are willing and able to do these things (Romans 16:23; 3 John 6–8). These men are worthy of our support (Luke 10:7; I Corinthians 9:14).

However, in other texts the word has the significance of partaking with or sharing (Romans 15:27; I Timothy 5:22; II John 11). If this is the significance in this text, and it appears to be, then Paul is urging the saint to make a sincere effort to understand and implement the things which he is being taught. This is Paul's exhortation to the Philippians when he says: "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do" (4:8–9). There is no better way to support a teacher than to accept and practice his teaching (3 John 4).

Realize Reaping Time Is Coming (v. 7-8)

I may deceive my wife; I may fool my neighbors; I may evade the law; but God has solemnly warned me that I can't fool him. He will not compromise His laws or His own righteousness. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." If I fully realize the simple, powerful truth of this verse, it will have a profound influence on my every action. The wild oats of youth, the middle-aged fling, and the old man's folly will all be avoided if I am conscious that the reaping time is surely coming.

Jesus showed the value of being conscious of the approaching judgment in the parable of the faithful and wise servant (Matthew 24:44ff). That servant

who is looking for his master's return is busy about his master's business. However, that servant who is unconcerned about his master's return wastes his master's goods and abuses his servants. If you want to be helpful to the Kingdom keep yourself motivated in Christ's work by taking the judgment seriously.

Persevere (v. 9)

The working Christian can and does get tired (Mark 6:31). The most faithful of saints can be discouraged by the struggle against indifference, rebellion and apostasy (II Thessalonians 3:12–13; II Corinthians 4:15–17). That which helps keep the saint going is the knowledge that God sees and knows our struggles and that He will help us in the hour of trial (Luke 18:1–8).

But, beyond this is the divine promise given to every believer that we will receive the reward of our labor (I Corinthians 15:58). God says the rule of the harvest will apply to us. Not only will we reap what we sow (Proverbs 11:18; Galatians 6:7–8), but we will reap more than we sow and that abundantly (II Corinthians 9:6; Amos 9:13). It is the prospect of an abundant harvest that sends the sower into the field despite all the difficulties he must overcome in order to make a crop. The prospect of such an abundant reward causes us to view our difficulties as light and the burdens of the day as nothing compared to eternal glory (II Corinthians 4:17).

Do Good to All (v. 10)

Now, whatever is inherently good and consistent with the principle of sowing to Spirit is what I as a Christian must be

doing. This is good that I can and must do toward all men as the opportunity arises.

Maybe you have read the poem, *The Gospel According to You*. The last stanza goes like this: "You are writing each day a letter to all; take care that the writing is true. It's the only Gospel some people may read, the Gospel according to you." There is a lot of truth in that (cf. II Corinthians 3:2–3). Most men would rather see a sermon than hear one. We all have tremendous influence upon those around us. We need to take care that we use it to save men's souls.

What can I do to further the cause of Christ? There are many other things, but this one passage, Galatians 6:1-10, points the way for me. Am I practicing it? Are you practicing it?

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

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What Is Sin?

One of the most common of all Biblical words is "sin." There is nothing beautiful and lovely in this word. When we hear it spoken, when we read it upon the printed page, when we utter it, there is no feeling of warmth and tenderness. The sound of it is harsh, cold, and lonely. Especially is this true when we must use the term in application to our own lives. "I have sinned!" Does the sentence not reek with the stench of despair? It is interesting to note that the Bible speaks of sin in a very matter-of-fact manner. God's Word does not go to great length to prove the existence of sin. In the early chapters of Genesis the term is used. A good example is seen in Genesis 4:7. As God speaks with Cain he declares: '.... if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door' "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph just prior to the birth of Jesus and said: "....thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) Paul wrote: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) Only a fool would deny that sin exists.

But what is sin? What is its nature? What are the consequences of it? Is there a remedy which will affect its

cure? These questions need to be answered.

Sin Defined

Sin is, literally, "*missing the mark*" of perfection in the sight of God (1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5); a failure to choose the right path when confronted with the choice of obedience or disobedience to the Divine Will (Hebrews 11:24–26).

"*Sin is the transgression of the law*" (1 John 3:4). Or as the ASV renders the passage, "*sin is lawlessness.*" The law of God in any dispensation determines that which is right and wrong, good and evil. It reveals to man what he can and cannot lawfully do, say, and think. If one refuses to abide by God's law, he becomes a "lawless" man—to the extent that he transgresses or disobeys. Such lawlessness is sin. Adam and Eve were "lawless" when they partook of the forbidden fruit. David was "lawless" when he took the wife of Uriah. Thus, they became sinners.

"*All unrighteousness is sin*" (1 John 5:17). One is unrighteous when he fails to do what God's commandments require just as surely as he is unrighteous when he does what they prohibit. Sin consists of doing that which is prohibited and in

refusing to do that which is commanded. "*Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" (James 4:17) The commands of God enjoin righteousness (Psalm 119:172). The unrighteous man is a sinner. He has fallen short (Romans 3:23).

The Nature of Sin

First, observe that sin is *deceptive* (Romans 7:11). Paul said that sin "deceived" him. Personified, it deceived him into accepting the religion of the Pharisees and rejecting the religion of God's beloved Son. Today sin continues its deception leading men to believe a lie rather than the truth of the Gospel (II Thessalonians 2:8-12). Many in religious error are honest and sincere (but deceived) in their religious convictions. Sometimes men are deceived into believing that they can escape the consequences of sin. These must one day learn that such is not the case. Let us not be deceived by sin.

Sin is *enslaving*. Mark well the drunkard, the dope addict, the prostitute. It is difficult to rid one's life of sin after it has taken a firm hold. Yet, as difficult as it is, one can cast off this yoke of bondage. "*But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but*

ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness." (Romans 6:17–18).

Sin separates (Isaiah 59:2). The prophet admonished Israel saying: *"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."*

God does not first turn his back on man; man separates himself from God by embracing sin. God has not separated himself from man; sin—sinful man, if you please—caused the separation.

Sin's Consequences

Let us now note some of the consequences of sin. Sin breeds cowardice. Adam and Eve hid themselves, and Adam said, *"I was afraid"* (Genesis 3:10). This was after they had violated God's law.

Sin results, generally, in remorse of conscience. Consider the example of Judas. He returned the "blood money" to the chief priests and elders with this explanation: *"I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood."* (Matthew 27:4) Later he hanged himself, the result of a conscience tormented by sin.

Quite often sin causes us to suffer defeat. Israel's defeat at Ai (Joshua 7), Moses' death just prior to entrance into the promised land of Canaan (Numbers 20-12; Deuteronomy 34:4), and David's rejection when he desired to build the temple of God. (II Samuel 12:9–10; I Chronicles 22:7–8) were all the consequence of sin.

Sin causes man to be without God. This is due to the fact that sin separates (Isaiah 59:2). The

Gentiles in Ephesus were at one time *"without God in the world"* because of their sins. (Ephesians 2:12). Suppose Noah had been without God when the flood came upon the earth. What if Daniel had been without God when placed in the lions' den? Contemplate the fate of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego had they been without God when thrown into the fiery furnace. Consider the fate of those without God in the Day of Judgment. Then, remember that sin separates.

Sin ends in eternal, spiritual Death. *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Romans 6:23) *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"* (Galatians 6:7).

The Remedy for Sin

With man under condemnation due to his embrace of sin, all praise and thanksgiving should be rendered to the Almighty for mercifully providing a remedy—a plan of salvation.

This scheme of redemption has been given in order to effect the remission or forgiveness of man's sins. Jesus said, *"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. 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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved."* (John 3:14-17) When those who were bitten by the fiery serpents went to the brazen serpent and looked thereon in obedience to

God's command, they were healed physically. (Numbers 21) When men who have "been bitten" by sin go to Jesus Christ in obedience to God's commands, they are healed spiritually. (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:8, 9) Those in the wilderness who were bitten and refused to go to the brazen serpent died. Today, those who have sinned and refuse to trust in Christ and obey the Gospel of God will be lost eternally (II Thessalonians 1:7-9). John wrote: *"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."* (Revelation 22:14). Will you come in faith to Jesus and be cleansed of your sin?

—Roger Hendricks

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Words of Life

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Are There Few That Be Saved?

"Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?" (Luke 13:23.) This question, asked of the Lord by an unidentified man, is one that is frequently raised in our own day when the Gospel is effectively preached; when sin is denounced in no uncertain terms and when the conditions of forgiveness as set out in the Word of God are plainly stated. We have no means at our disposal to determine the attitude of the heart of him who asked the question; if we did it would help us evaluate his motives and give us a better understanding of why the question was raised. Be that as it may, the Lord gave an answer that is at once detailed and very much to the point.

It is worth noting that the Lord did not answer the man's question with a simple "yes" or "no." Many times men frame questions with the expectation of creating a prejudice against the truth by simple "yes" and "no" answers. Such answers to a question may be sufficiently correct but many times they are not sufficiently complete. While Jesus answered the man's question, He also states some reasons why the answer is true.

A Parallel Situation

A frequent objection to the truth is that the person who preaches

it "thinks he is right and everyone else is wrong," and that members of the body of Christ "think that they and their little bunch are the only ones going to heaven." These and kindred remarks are appeals to prejudice and have no element of merit in them either one way or the other even if they were true representations of the people to whom referred. They serve only to cloud the mind and turn the interest from truth to personalities.

Someone is heard to object to the teaching of the Bible that men must be baptized in order to be saved; he points out how many pious people there are who have never been immersed—who therefore must be lost—and concludes that such teaching cannot be right because it leaves out so many and includes so few. In effect he, like the man in the text, is asking "are there few that be saved?"

One thing must be clear to all thinking men; if no man on earth is saved, that does not change the truth of God. God's truth is not affected by the number of people favorably receptive to it. Man often seems to reason that for God to be just and righteous and for truth to be true it must just about save everyone. But the case is stated

very differently in the Bible. Indeed, the picture painted by the Bible of mankind in this respect is not very bright.

God Wants All Saved

However, before we examine some matters along that line it might be well to make a few observations on God's provisions for man's welfare and his willingness to save all men. *"God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* (II Peter 3:9). *"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). These examples from Scripture suffice to indicate God's willingness to save all. If any man is lost, it will be in spite of God's love and preparation for him.

Then, there is the attitude of Christ toward the lost. *"For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost"* (Luke 19:10). *"And this we judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead"* (II Corinthians 5:14). *"Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28). This certainly indicates the willingness of Christ to save and the completeness of His sacrifice for the lost.

Consider too, that the Gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16) and that the Gospel is to be preached to the whole creation (Mark 16:15-16). This reveals the divine provision of salvation for all.

The Question Before Us

But returning now to our question: "Are there few that be saved?" Consider: *"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 which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). In the verses above this text (vv. 13-14) Jesus had pointed out the two ways in which men may enter and live; the one to life and the other to death and destruction. Of the way that enters to life He said: *"Few there be that find it."* I would not attempt to say how many are lost and how many are saved; but concerning the Lord's comparison we must accept that *many* are lost, and shall be forever so, and only *few* are saved. In Matthew 22:14 Jesus said: *"Many are called, few are chosen."* This needs no additional comment to be applied to the question under review. These examples are sufficient to show that Jesus has given a clear and satisfactory answer to our question: *"Are there few that be saved?"*

Now, all of this will naturally raise a question in our minds: If God desires the salvation of all; if Jesus died to save all and the Gospel, God's power to save, is for all, then why are not all saved? The fact that any man is lost will incidentally explain why many men will be lost; for any condition that will cause the loss of one, when multiplied in

terms of mankind, will cause the loss of many.

"Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Many men will not believe. Therefore, many will be lost because of unbelief.

"He is the author of eternal salvation to all that obey Him" (Acts 8:22-23; Hebrews 5:8-9). Many will not obey the Lord. Therefore, many will be lost. Jesus weeping over Jerusalem declares his love and provision for her people but laments: *"Ye would not?"*

"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Men must have the truth to be freed from sin. Some men do not love the truth and instead believe a lie and are be damned" (II Thessalonians 1:10-12). We see on every hand evidence that men are satisfied with less than the truth of God in religion.

"He that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him" (Acts 10:35). Men must seek the righteousness of God and not their own righteousness (Romans 10:1-3). They must work the righteousness which is revealed in the Gospel (Romans 1:17) and not attempt to manufacture it according to their own ways and means. Doing so they fail to be righteous at all, for the only righteous man is the one whom God makes righteous. It seems that most of the people with whom we deal are indeed religious minded people. Only, they are too often minded to be religious according to their own ideas rather than those of God.

In answering the man's question, the Lord did not at that particular moment

comment on the number that would be saved or lost (which seems to be what the man was most interested in) but rather upon the need for personal diligence on his part to be among those who are saved. The Lord pleads with him to *"strive to enter in."* What difference, good friend, if all the rest of earth should go into the joys of our Lord and we ourselves be shut out? The real problem of our soul is not how many or how few are to enter heaven, but whether or not we will enter. If we will assure our hearts before God then the many or few will be no problem. Let us do all to enter in while the gate is open. Leave the *"many"* or the *"few"* to our Lord.

—W. L. Wharton, Jr.

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Words of Life

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The Faith of Atheism

Unbelievers constantly bring against Christians the charge that the Bible is unworthy of a place in a scientific age since it calls for faith. By the term faith they seek to convey the idea that the Bible asks men to believe without evidence, and often contrary to the evidence. This is a misunderstanding of what the Bible means by faith, as any student of the Bible knows.

The unbeliever is not without beliefs, for the term does not mean one without any belief at all but that one does not accept a certain faith. The unbeliever must always have beliefs for the simple reason that a denial of one thing or proposition often amounts to the affirmation of another. A system of denials finally works its way into a system of affirmations.

The Atheist Creed

The atheist believes but he cannot prove that God does not exist. To know that God does not exist one would have to know everything and be everywhere, for the thing which he did not know

might prove God's existence, and the place where he was not might contain evidence of God's existence. And the person who possessed such characteristics would be God himself. The atheist cannot reverse this argument and say that one must know all in order to have sufficient reason to believe in God.

Several lines of evidence prove that it is rational to accept God and irrational to reject God. We need to know at least some of these things, but we do not need to do all in order to know these things.

Let me illustrate. To prove that a certain statement is not in the writings of Charles Darwin one would have to know all of Darwin's writings, for the page he did not know might contain the statement. But to know that the statement is Darwin's, one would not need to know only the page which contained it.

The atheist sometimes finds his own creed difficult to believe. A friend, who was an atheist, once told me that

most of his atheistic friends were not really atheistic as they believed that "some sort of something," superior to matter, was necessary in order to account for the world.

The atheist scoffs at the idea of an Eternal God but he must believe in the eternal existence of matter. Something has always existed for something now exists. If in the beginning there was nothing, there would be nothing now for out of nothing comes nothing. So everyone must accept the fact that something has always existed, and the only issue is whether it is reasonable to believe that "In the beginning God" created matter, life, and mind; or whether "In the beginning Matter" created mind, consciousness, and intelligence.

The atheist must believe in the spontaneous generation of life from non-life. This is contrary to all scientific experiments, and is a far greater miracle than the resurrection of Christ. It is, in reality, the miracle of the creation of

something from nothing since life, consciousness, will, and intelligence are found in man but not in matter. The atheist must believe something utterly unlike matter was produced by matter.

The atheist must believe that the order evidenced in nature and in man is the result of chance or of something labeled fate or law. Even atheists concede that there is at least "apparent design" in nature.

The atheist must believe that consciousness arose out of a peculiar combination of non-conscious matter. In this same amazing matter we must search also for the origin of mind, the power of speech, and the love of the beautiful.

The atheist must believe that man is a machine without any responsibility for his conduct. The atheist contends that man is merely matter devoid of the power of choice. And yet, the atheist continues to hand out praise and blame as if he thought that man had some responsibility for his conduct.

If man has no responsibility then there are no moral values. Morality implies an "ought" and "ought" implies some power of choice. To say that a person "ought", or "ought not" to do a certain thing is to say that he can help what he does and that he has an obligation to act in one way instead of in another.

The atheist must believe, if he is consistent, that all thought is irrational. According to the atheist brain waves are simply the inevitable by-product of irrational causes. The atheist ultimately holds that all mental processes are wholly determined by the physical movement of atoms in the brain.

Woolsey Teller put it like this: "Thought is a form of vibration and sensation in the nerve fibers of the brain and the nervous system—thought is matter in motion" (*The Atheism of Astronomy*, pp. 10-11). This movement of matter is mechanically determined; there is nothing rational about it. One thinks the way he does because forces make matter move in that certain way in his brain. The self-styled "freethinker" is not even a free-vibrator for all is determined, and nothing is free.

There is, therefore, nothing rational about the arguments of the atheist against the believer in God. It is just the way his brain happened to rattle. How strange and instructive it is that those who claim the name of "rationalist" and maintain that Christians are irrational should end up with a position which implies that all thought is irrational.

Let Them Defend It

These, then, are some of the articles of faith to which the atheist is automatically

committed. It is amazing that men who hold such articles of faith should think that Christians are credulous. The Christian's faith is based on evidence, but the unbeliever's creed is believed often without ' and often contrary to, the evidence.

In discussions with atheists this should be made clear. The atheist should be called upon to defend his articles of faith. Instead of spending all of our time supporting with evidence and argument what we believe, we should spend part of our time pressing the atheist with the demand that he prove his own articles of faith.

—James D. Bales

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