

THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL

Is There
Substitute for God?

Page 15

Reasons
for Believing

Page 24

Cheap Grace

Page 34

The Secret
to Waking Up
the Pew Potatoes

Page 47

Profanity

Page 68

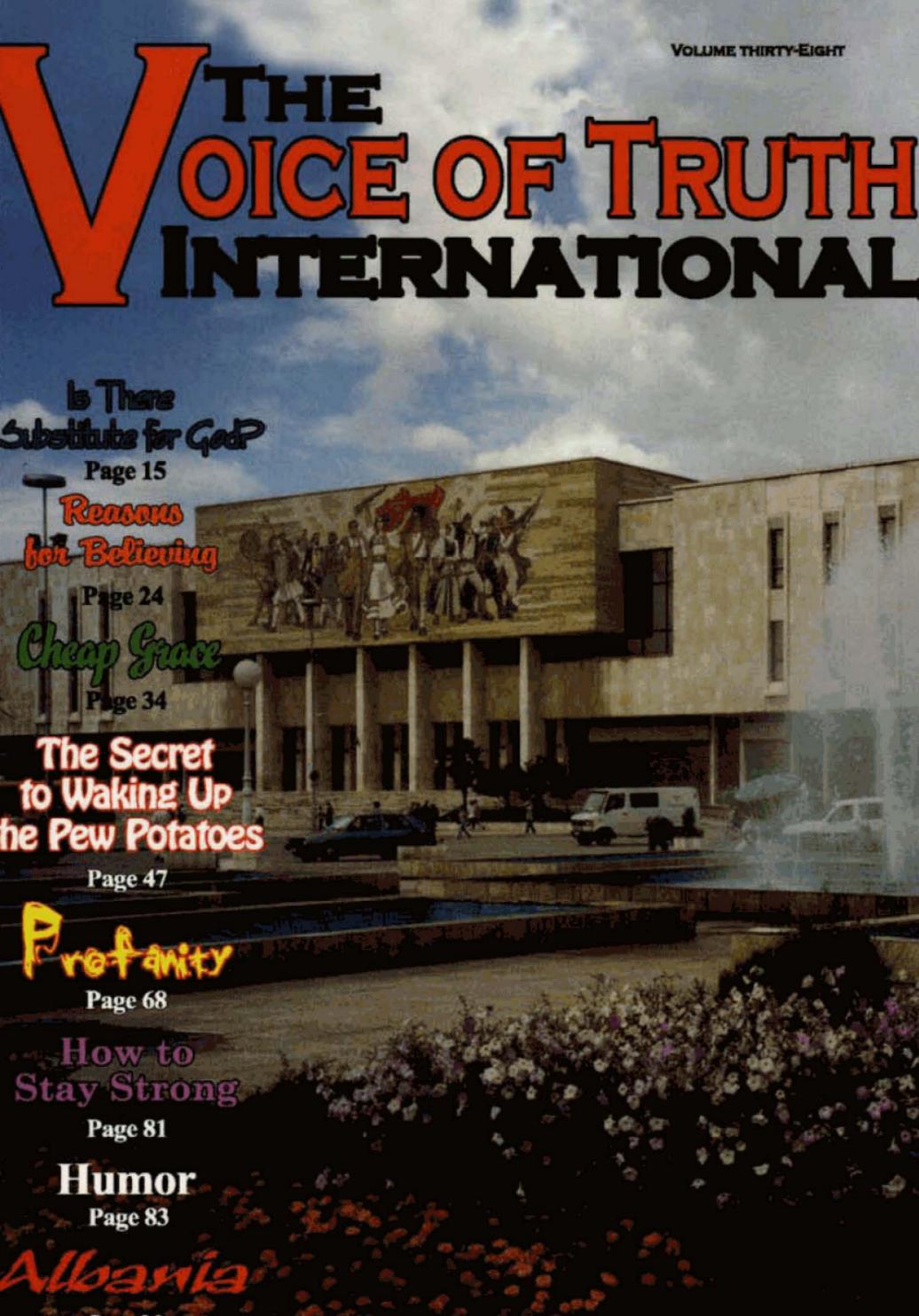
How to
Stay Strong

Page 81

Humor

Page 83

Albania



A basketball in my hands is worth about \$19.

A basketball in Michael Jordan's hands is worth about \$33 million.

It depends whose hands it's in.

A baseball in my hands is worth about \$6.

A baseball in Mark McGuire's hands is worth \$19 million.

It depends whose hands it's in.

A tennis racket is useless in my hands.

A tennis racket in Venus Williams' hands is a championship winning.

It depends whose hands it's in.

A rod in my hands will keep away a wild animal.

A rod in Moses' hands will part the mighty sea.

It depends whose hands it's in.

A sling shot in my hands is a kid's toy

A sling shot in David's hands is a mighty weapon.

It depends whose hands it's in.

Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in my hands is a couple of fish sandwiches.

Two fish and 5 loaves of bread in God's hands will feed thousands.

It depends whose hands it's in.

Nails in my hands might produce a birdhouse

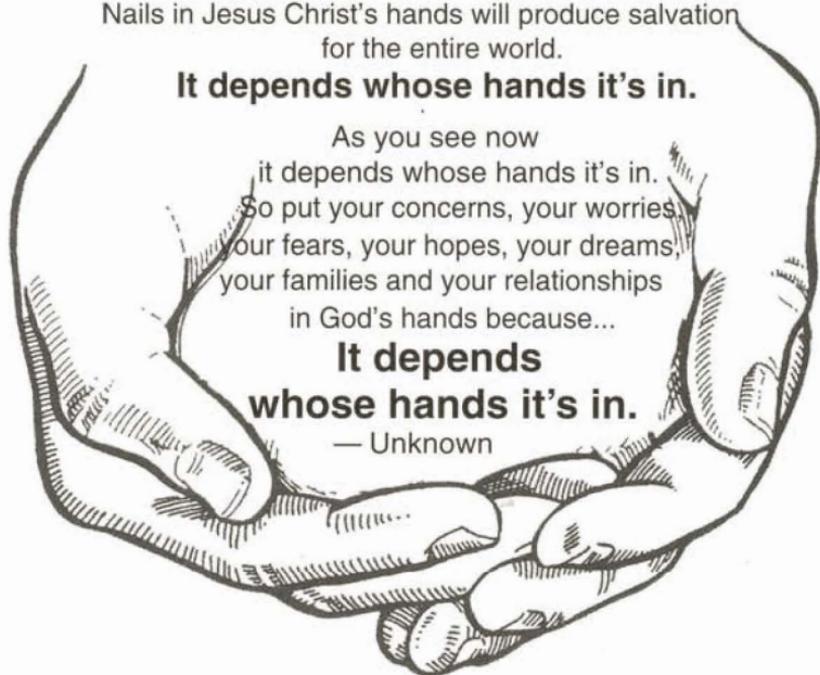
Nails in Jesus Christ's hands will produce salvation
for the entire world.

It depends whose hands it's in.

As you see now
it depends whose hands it's in.
So put your concerns, your worries,
your fears, your hopes, your dreams,
your families and your relationships
in God's hands because...

**It depends
whose hands it's in.**

— Unknown



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"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

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

Sinners are spiritually DEAD.



“... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”
(Romans 3:23).

How do we **ESCAPE** condemnation?

How can we **BE SAVED** from sin?

How can we be **MADE ALIVE** spiritually?

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are **in Christ Jesus**, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

“And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you” (Romans 8:10,11).

So we are made alive **IN CHRIST** ...

But **HOW** do we

“**PUT ON**” CHRIST?



“...Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? ...Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3,4).



A new creature in Christ!

The church

- The family of God —
- The house of God —
- The bride of Christ —
- The body of Christ —
- The saved —



Christ is the door into God's household (John 10:9; Hebrews 3:6; 1 Timothy 3:15). By burial in the waters of baptism, we are washed in the cleansing blood of Christ, entering the church through the door of Himself (1 Corinthians 12:13).

LEADERS NEEDED

J. C. Choate
Editor-in-Chief



Our greatest need today in the church is for leaders. We need men who are truly converted, know what the Bible teaches, and who will take a stand for the truth. We need men who have world vision, with an evangelistic spirit at home and abroad. We need men who will speak up, will

act, and who have the respect of their brethren. We need men who have a strong faith, who love the souls of men, and who have time for the Lord and His work. With enough men like this, the church will grow and will evangelize the world. Without them, we will stagnate.

Women have a different role, but they must also take a lead in their own areas of work. They can publically teach the children, the young women, and other ladies. They can be good wives and mothers, and give support to the men in the church. They can reach out to relatives, neighbors, and friends with hospitality and teaching efforts. Without the involvement of its women, the church is not going to do much or go very far.

The challenge in today's world is to realize that both men and women have their own work to do, as God ordained. When one tries to do the work of the other, problems result. This is why God gave separate and distinct leadership roles. When each one respects the other and does the work God gave them to do, then there is harmony and progress. Otherwise there is competition and failure.

The church is in great need of leaders today. It will go no further than its leaders — elders, deacons, preachers, and teachers. We have

too many who do not *have the time* or *take the time* to lead. We have too many who do not know the Lord's word and do not know the mission of the church. For sure, the job of true leaders is more than providing a meeting house and keeping the doors open. If those in charge of sports, business, and politics handled their affairs as the leaders in the church often do, they would be complete failures. Where there are no plans, no goals, and no meaningful work, what can be accomplished?

We have reached the point where we offer excuse after excuse for our failures. We tell ourselves that people are no longer interested, that the religious world will not listen, that radio preaching is a waste of time and money, that people will not read, and so we are ready to sit down and die. Is that leadership? That is not leadership. That is not the way the Lord's people should conduct themselves.

A real leader will not give up and quit. If one method of work does not produce good fruit, he will try something else. He will continue to seek, pray and work till he finds something that will get the job done. He remembers the words of Jesus, "*With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible*" (Mark 10:27).

Listen! the world is in sin and we have the cure — the gospel of Christ, the grace and mercy of God. If presented in the right way, reaching enough people, and convincing the sinner of his great need, there will be a response. No, we don't have to compromise the truth, teach error, preach grace only, or do a thousand other things to sugar-coat the gospel. We do not have to deny the Lord's name, join the denominations, or establish community churches. All we have to do is preach the truth with personal conviction, and love the ones we are teaching.

Jesus said that we are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15,16). Did He say that or not? If He said it, are we doing what He said we **MUST** do? If we are not, are we *obeying* Him? And if we are not obeying Him, how can we say that we are spiritual leaders?

What will leaders do? They will lead, keeping their eyes on the *ultimate goal of evangelism*, so that the church can carry out the

Lord's instructions. And when there are enough leaders that are doing that, the world will be evangelized. The Lord has not asked us to do something He will not enable us to do, if we are committed.

To be leaders, it is not necessary that we have lots of money, that we have large congregations, or that we have high degrees in education. All we need is the Lord, truth, faith, love, zeal, vision, wisdom, and total commitment to the goal.

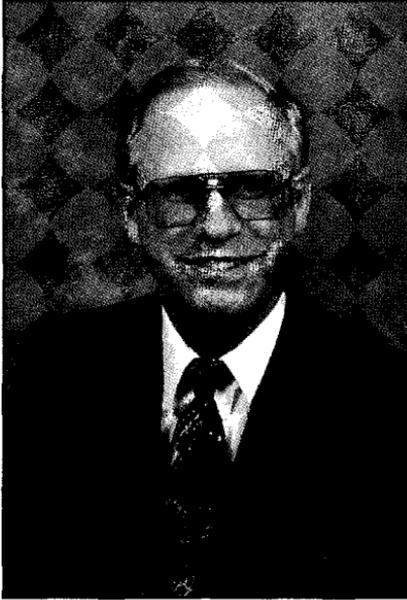
The Lord has provided us with every means to do the work He has asked us to do. We have the local congregations, the availability of radio, TV, and literature. There is the internet, tapes, videos, DVDs, and unlimited numbers of other means to help us to get out the message. We can conduct gospel meetings at home (longer, and more effective, than a day or even 3 days), conduct city-wide campaigns, put literature in hospitals, medical clinics, places of business, motels, use Bible correspondence courses to reach the masses, canvas the cities and communities where we are to encourage people to study with us privately and to attend our assemblies.

We have the numbers to do the job, a language spoken around the world, and a currency that all want. As we go, naturally we will face opposition and even persecution, because Satan will fight, but even this opposition will help the gospel to spread as never before. That's what happened in the first century, and that is what will happen today if we will only go forward with the work God has given us to do.

When we sit down, refusing to take the truth to our local people and to the world, then we are depriving humanity of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. As a result, they will be lost, and our own souls will be in jeopardy because we miserably failed the Lord.

Brethren, when will we decide that enough is enough, that we are no longer willing to sit and let the church dwindle into idleness while the world dies? When are we going to get up and be the leading voice in the religious world, rather than a timid mouse-squeak because of our spiritual inhibitions? Our Lord was characterized as *the Lion of Judah! If we are His, we must have courageous hearts!*

Are you a leader? Get down on your knees and ask God to help you and your fellow leaders to see the one open door He has placed before you. Then **GO THROUGH IT!** And keep on going! †



THE CALL OF JESUS

Byron Nichols
Managing Editor

Jesus always made clear the demanding terms and the costliness of being His disciple. Nothing has changed — He still calls people the same way. Please notice the honest, forthright call of Jesus: *“If any man will come after Me,*

let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23).

“If any man will”

Jesus immediately makes it clear that man has a definite part to play in this call. Man must have a *desire* to follow Jesus. Following Jesus is a matter of choice — it most certainly is God’s will, but the decision is left to us to make. Peter admonished the multitude on the day of Pentecost, *“Save yourselves from this perverse generation”* (Acts 2:40). Later Paul told the Philippians to *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Philippians 2:12).

It is noteworthy that Jesus speaks of **any** man following Him. Every individual who desires to follow Jesus can do so, but all must comply with the same requirements — there are no exceptions, no favorites.

“Come after Me”

Surely, if we desire to “*come after*” Jesus, we will understand that we will be required to comply with His orders. This means that we cannot ignore His words in favor of the words of anyone else. Those who are truly pointing men to Jesus will of necessity also be pointing them to His words. The Lord spoke of some who were among the spiritual leaders in His day — “*And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matthew 15:9). In essence, Jesus was saying that folks are only fooling themselves when they choose to ignore what **He** says in favor of what **they** might prefer.

“Let him deny himself”

This phrase has also been translated “*he must say ‘no’ to self*”; “*he must leave self behind*”; “*he must give up all right to himself.*”

I believe that it is significant that the first thing that Jesus said is necessary in following Him is self-denial. He knew the difficulty of denying self, and He knew that without denying self we can never put Him first in our life. Paul came to a thorough understanding of this principle. In Philippians 3 he writes of his past accomplishments in the Jewish religion, but then he states, “*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ*” (verses 7 and 8). Please also consider Paul’s words in Philippians 1:21 and Galatians 2:20.

“And take up his cross”

Even after the Roman soldiers compelled Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus’ cross the rest of the way to Calvary, Jesus continued to carry the unseen cross that was His greatest burden. Isaiah foretold, “*The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us*

all” (Isaiah 53:6). Peter said that Jesus “*Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree*” (1 Peter 2:24). John declared that Jesus “*is the propitiation (the atonement, that which appeases) for our sins; and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2). William F. McDowell had it right then when he said, “The cross was not heavy because of the wood, but because of the world.”

But Jesus never asks us to bear **His** cross, rather He says that we must bear **our own** cross. The cross was an instrument of death, and Jesus says to those who would be His followers, “You must take up your cross; you must die to self.” He sums it up with these words, “*And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it*” (Matthew 10:38-39).

“Daily”

Only Luke records the fact that Jesus stipulated that His followers are to bear their cross **daily**. True discipleship is consistent, regular, faithful. **There is never any hint that Jesus will accept anything other than full-time, full-fledged commitment.** Following Jesus involves putting Him first and serving Him from the heart every day.

The time will come when there will be no more crosses to bear, but crowns to wear. Hopefully we can bear our cross with the constant realization that our burdens of service and submission are light in comparison with what Jesus has borne for us. May we continually press on to the finish line of this race, being confident of the victor’s crown that awaits all who run with patience the entire race. †

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GOD

Understanding the One... ..	Samuel A. Matthews.....	12
Is There a Substitute for God?.....	Bobby Dockery	15

EVIDENCES

How Can This Mind ...?.....	Betty Burton Choate	17
What About the Laws of Nature?.....	Dayton Keesee	19

THE WORD OF GOD

The Bible — of Man or God? ..	Donny Weimar	22
Reasons for Believing the Record.....	Ardron Hinton.....	24
They Despised the Law of the Lord.....	Loy Mitchell	26

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

2 Types of Sin	Sunny David	28
Does Christ Have a Law?	Owen Cosgrove	30

SALVATION

You and God's Plan	Albert Gardner	33
Cheap Grace	Stan Mitchell	34
You'll Need a Lawyer	David A. Sargent.....	35

THE CHURCH

Maintaining the Purity of the Church.....	W. Douglass Harris	37
What the Church Needs	Leroy Brownlow	39

WORSHIP

The Privilege of Worship	Maxie B. Boren	40
The Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day.....	Cecil May, Jr.	41

CHURCH GROWTH

The Secret to Waking Up... ..	John-Mark Wilson	47
God Expects Us to Be One.....	Jerry Dyer	49

CHURCH AND BIBLE HISTORY

Persecution and Endurance	Dr. Hans Grimm	51
---------------------------------	----------------------	----

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

The Heart of God	David Deffenbaugh.....	55
Lead Me to Some Soul Today.....	Dale Grissom.....	56
Prove It!	Robert L. Moss	57

DAILY CHRISTIAN LIVING

Neglect of One's Neighbor	Carl B. Robinson.....	60
A Lesson from the Geese	Milton Olson	63
I Will	Vance Hutton	65
Give Thanks to God	Willard Collins	67
Profanity.....	Frank Chesser	68
Is Homosexuality Wrong?	Charles E. Burch.....	69

THE CHRISTIAN HOME

Marriage	Ken Tyler	71
We Must Start at Home	Randy White	72
Examples Dad and Mom Can Set	Gary C. Hampton	75

COMFORT AND REASSURANCE

The Eternal Crown.....	Jphn R. Vaughn	78
Strengthened in the Lord	Jeril (Polly) Cline.....	79
How to Stay Strong	Randal Matheny.....	81

PROVERBS 17:22

Humor		83
-------------	--	----

TEXTUAL STUDIES

When Bible Study Is Beneficial.....	William Woodson	85
What Is the Motive?.....	T. Pierce Brown	87

BIBLE CHARACTERS

A Funeral at Joppa	Colin McKee	90
John Mark —	Jack Harriman	92

BIBLE QUESTIONS

Did God Harden Pharaoh's... ..	Kevin L. Moore	94
What About the Sign of the Fish?.....	Wayne Jackson	95

FEATURES, POEMS AND FILLERS

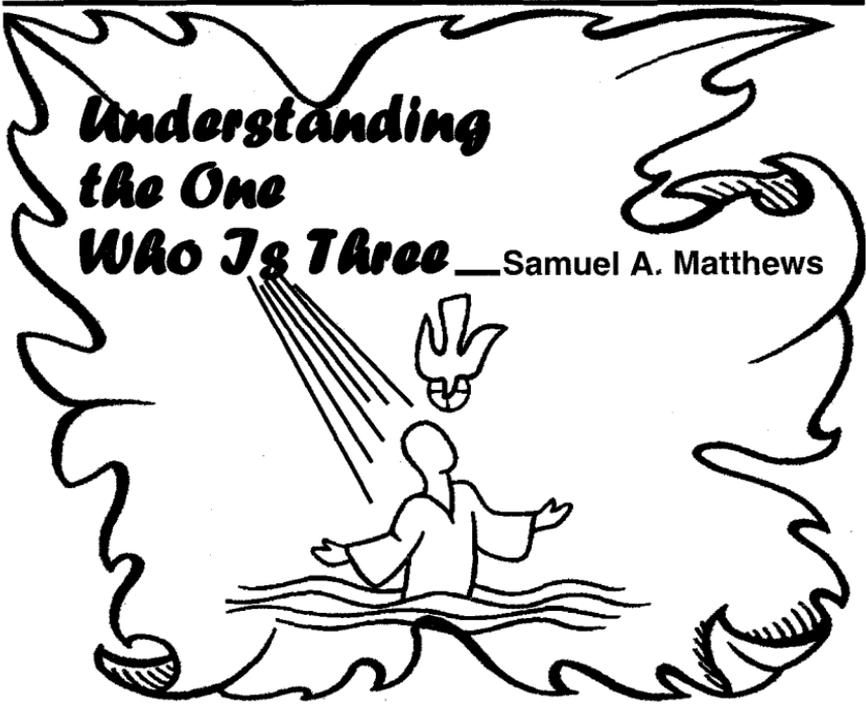
It Depends Whose Hands It's In.....	Unknown	Inside Front
Salvation.....		
The Church.....		
Editorial: Leaders Needed	J.C. Choate.....	4
Editorial: The Call of Jesus,?....	Byron Nichols	7
Verse Search		21
Who Should Read the Bible?.....	Anonymous	23
Can We All See the Bible Alike?.....	Johnny Polk	31
Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses		32
What Follows Baptism?		54
Think About It... ..	George Bailey	58
How Do You Measure Up?		59
Did Man Just Happen	Anonymous.....	64
The Third Candidate	Barbara Cagle Ray	77
The Three "Bears" of Galatians	Jim Cox	88
Who Am I?		89
Am I Serious about Christianity?	Mark Sherfield	91
Simon of Cyrene Bore.....	Anonymous.....	93

FROM THE HEART OF ...

Albania	Richard N. Ady.....	96
God Is at Work in Albania; God Opens a Door; Early Challenges; God Gives the Increase; God Provides Albanian Leaders; Missionaries and Campaigners Work Together; Mountain Peak Experience; Preaching from Satan's Pulpit; Satan Fights Back...		

Understanding the One Who Is Three

—Samuel A. Matthews



As we continue to talk about the Godhead, please keep in mind the fact that man is unable to discover the nature of God by himself. He cannot, in the least, understand God apart from Divine revelation. Reason alone will not fathom the nature of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:21).

The Christian is not under obligation to explain all the mysteries connected with this doctrine. One is required to set forth only the teachings of Scripture and be willing to follow them. Did not the Psalmist say, *“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I*

cannot attain unto it” (Psalm 139:6; cf. Isaiah 55:9)?

From a study of Scripture, **THREE** distinctions (Persons) can be observed in the Godhead (a term meaning the Divine Rule of God). It is important that we consider several scriptural arguments to prove this point. Please open your Bibles and read each passage.

In Matthew 3:16,17, we have recorded the baptismal scene of Jesus. On this occasion the three persons of the Godhead are easily noted. Simultaneously there is the Son on earth coming up out of the

waters of baptism, the Holy Spirit descending from Heaven in a bodily form as a dove, and the Father in Heaven who speaks, saying, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*"

The point established on this occasion, and on the occasion of Jesus' transfiguration with Moses and Elijah, was that the Son is NOT the Father; for the Father is the one who spoke from Heaven after Jesus had been baptized and as He was praying (cf. Matthew 17:5; 2 Peter 1:17,18; Luke 3:21,22). But neither is the Holy Spirit the Father or the Son, for the Holy Spirit was descending while the Father was in Heaven speaking, and while the Son was on earth praying! In later years the apostle Peter made reference to this event in his sermon to Cornelius' household, when he mentioned the THREE members of the God-head. He said, "*How GOD anointed JESUS of Nazareth with the HOLY SPIRIT and with power*" (Acts 10:38).

While conversing with His apostles in regard to the sending and their receiving the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, "*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever*" (John 14:16). The promise of "*another Comforter*" (Gk. Paraklete) clearly implies that they already had one Comforter, **Christ** Himself (1 John 2:1). Thus,

we see TWO distinct persons characterized by the term "Comforter" or "Advocate".

All THREE persons of the Godhead are also seen in John 14:16. All three are shown to have different functions. Christ the Son acts the part of an **intercessor** when He says, "*I will pray the Father.*" The Father acts the part of the **donator** because Jesus said of Him, "*He shall give you another Comforter.*" The Holy Spirit would serve as a **consoler** and **helper** by abiding with them forever. This passage shows conclusively that there are THREE distinct persons within the Godhead.

As our Lord contemplated leaving this world and returning to His Father in Heaven, He again mentioned all three persons of the Godhead. He said, "*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me*" (John 15:26).

The apostle Paul named seven items, of which he said in each case there is ONE (Eph. 4:4-6). Among these he mentioned **one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father**, which, when added together makes THREE. None of the seven items mentioned are the same. They are all different because there is ONE of each. The one body is not the same

GOD

as the one hope; the one faith is not the same as the one baptism; neither is the one Spirit the same as the one Lord, nor is the one Lord the same as the one Father. The Father, the Lord (Son), and the Spirit all possess the One Divine nature, yet they are different or distinguishable as THREE personalities.

As we have already covered, the word "God" is a name of the Divine substance or quality of being. Therefore, when the Bible says there is but one God, the meaning is that there is but ONE Divine nature. All three persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son (the Word), and the Holy Spirit, are called God.

Jesus and the apostle Peter referred to **the Father as God** (John 6:27; 2 Peter 1:17). The Father refers to **His Son as God** (Hebrews 1:8). And why is the Son also called God? Because He, too, possesses the attributes of deity that identify one as God.

Again, the Holy Spirit is called God. In Acts 5:3,4, Peter made it clear that Ananias had lied to **God** by lying to **the Holy Spirit**. All three persons are referred to as God (deity, divinity). There is only ONE God — one Divine nature — but there are THREE persons possessing this unified set of infinite qualities.

Jesus was called a mediator by Paul. The Bible says, "*For there is one God, and one mediator between*

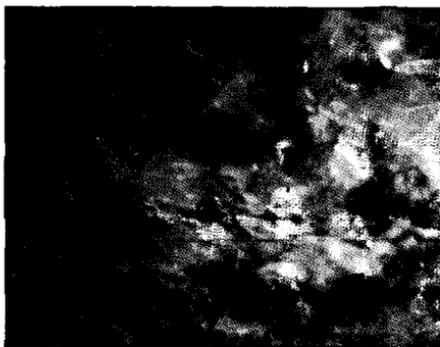
God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus is the "mediator" between God and man. He is literally a "go-between." It should be obvious to all that Christ could not be a mediator BETWEEN God and man if only one person or being makes up the totality of the Godhead.

While Jesus was on the earth, **He** did not know the time of His second coming (Mark 13:32). **The Father** knew but **the Son** did not; thus, clearly showing that the Father and the Son are TWO distinct persons. Similarly, "*And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven Him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come*" (Matthew 12:32). From this passage it is clear that **Christ** and **the Holy Spirit** are not identical persons.

But neither are **the Holy Spirit** and **the Father** the same. In John 14:26 we learn that **the Father** would SEND **the Holy Spirit** upon the apostles.

Thus, from many passages such as these it is clear that there are THREE persons in the Godhead and they are NOT the same. Yet, all three are called God in the Bible because they all possess the same Divine nature. †

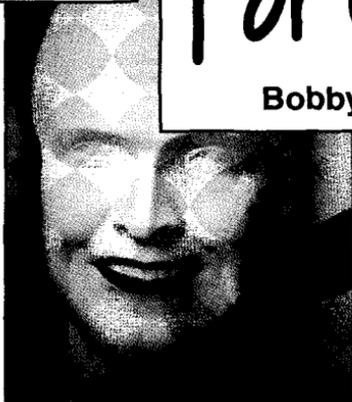
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15
 There a
 Substitute

For God?
 Bobby Dockery

Some years ago an article by David Raphael Klein appeared in *Reader's Digest* under the provocative title "Is There a Substitute for God?" Klein wrote: "Somewhere along the way, Western man began to lose his belief in God as a personal force, as the decider of his fate, as the ultimate judge of his actions. The idea that God created man became old-fashioned; we evolved. The notion of hell was picturesque, but no longer compelling. Life began to be seen as more or less accidental; sin became a



relative sociological matter, and to many a pure fiction."

It is certainly true that many people seem to be saying in word and action, "God, we don't need you any more!" And they resort to all sorts of ineffectual and destructive substitutes for God: astrology, philosophy, paganism, alcohol, drugs, science, money, pleasure, etc., etc. But whenever people turn away from God, life turns to chaos. Families disinte-

GOD

grate, the social order collapses, and darkness descends! Our need for God cannot be filled by anything else!

Without God There Is No Basis for Decency and Morality.

If God is not there, all things are permitted! If Hitler decides to murder 6 million Jews, or suicide bombers blow up women and children, how can we say they are wrong, if God has not spoken? If God did not create us, then we are forced to say there is nothing sacred about human life. If life is not sacred, then there is no logical argument against murder, rape, assault, or any other crime!

Without God There Is No Meaning in Life or Reason for Existence.

Man becomes, as one eminent evolutionary biologist expressed it, merely a biological accident created by nature, without purpose, to be obliterated without regret.

Without God We Are Left Without an Explanation for the Universe.

How can anyone contemplate the eye of a horsefly...the mechanics of human finger movement...the camouflage of a moth...the intricacy of the nucleus of a cell...or the complexity of the universe, and say it all happened by sheer, blind chance? Such a person believes in miracles that would be far more astounding than any in the Bible!

Without God We Are Without Hope and Are of All Men Most Miserable.

David Klein notes, "In freeing himself of the terror of hell, (modern man) gave up the hope of heaven: you live, you die, that's the end of it..." God is the God of *all* hope (Romans 15:13). Without Him there is *no* hope in the world (Ephesians 5:12). Belief in God is the only thing that can keep us from ultimate despair. God's grace keeps us from despairing of ourselves, and God's providence keeps us from despairing about the future.

Nothing else can take the place of God. Nobody else can fill His shoes. For life to have meaning, God must be at the center (Matthew 6:33).

Is there a substitute for God? The answer is an emphatic NO! †

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

How Can This Mind Comprehend God?

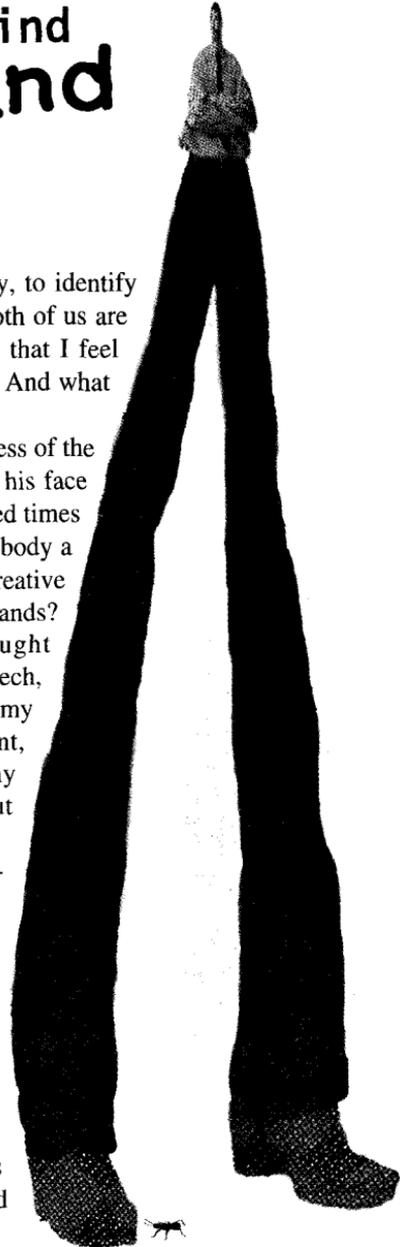
Betty Burton Choate

I look down at my feet, squinting closely, to identify the black moving speck as an ant. Though both of us are living beings, we are of such different kinds that I feel absolutely no identity with the little creature. And what awareness can he possibly have of me?

Are the ant's eyes able to "see" the hugeness of the human body, beginning at the foot in front of his face and reaching upward fourteen or fifteen hundred times larger than himself — like me, trying to see a body a mile and a half tall? Can the ant imagine the creative power or the destructive power in these two hands? Can the ant, unable to enter into my thought processes or to understand a word of my speech, have even a remote expectation of "knowing" my thoughts and mind? Can the heart of the ant, made from such different substance from my own, fathom how to even begin to reach out emotionally to me, to love me?

What ridiculous questions! The differences in "kind" create an insurmountable wall between the ant and my being, my mind, my spirit. There can be absolutely no crossing over, from me to him, or from him to me.

Between the infinite Spirit that is God and the ant-sized mortal that is me lies another seemingly insurmountable wall. How can I, in my human smallness, even begin to "see" God, whose presence is everywhere? How can I, with my limited



strength, comprehend the power that spoke into existence from nothing the vastness of the universe, with every particle of matter that exists? How can my mind fathom the MIND that conceived the monstrous gaseous stars that burn with an explosiveness and intensity that could engulf my world in one searing breath, and that also conceived the worlds within our cells that are too small to be seen without the aid of electron microscopes. Truly, that which is seen is made up of that which is unseen!

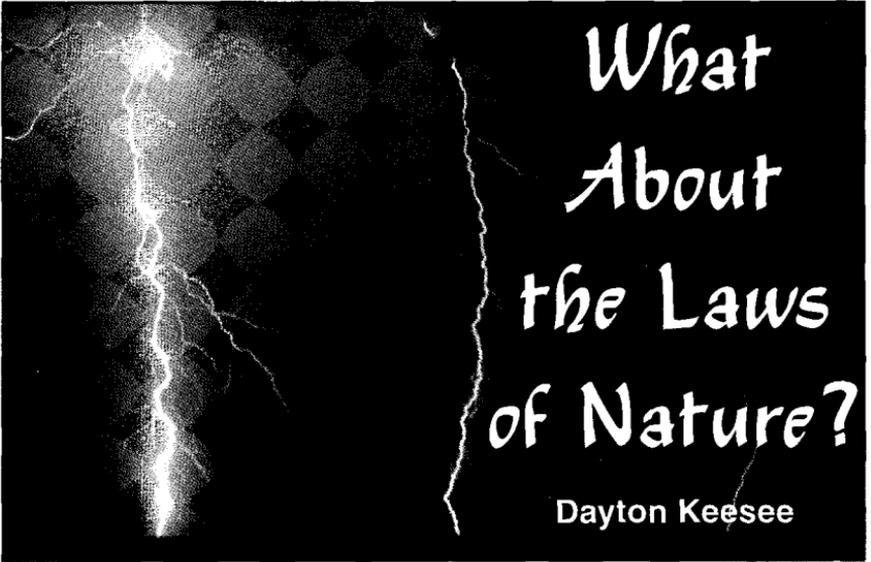
How can my pathetically small mind, which cannot understand God's language or enter into His thought process, any more than an ant can think my thoughts — how can *I* fathom **GOD**?

But we cry out for Him. There is a voice that will not be hushed, crying for His help, for His mercy, for His love. As small as we are, as impossible as it seems for the human spirit even to be *aware* of the great Spirit that is God, much less to *identify* in some mysterious way with His Spirit, *we do!* **Why?** Because we were made differently from everything else in creation. In His letter to us, He told us that we were made **IN HIS IMAGE**, that we were **MADE A LIVING SOUL**.

Yes, we are actually less than ant-sized in comparison to God; our power and abilities are less than ant-sized — but God built into our minds and spirits a likeness to Himself, a bridge to Himself, that enables a breeching of the impossible wall. Incorporated in the “awareness of self” that is uniquely human is an undying awareness also of God. *He does not go away*, and the human spirit spends its little lifetime either in search of God or in denial of God — but always the God-question is being dealt with. Not one human has ever passed through this life without wrestling with the question of God in his own life, concluding with an acceptance of Him or a rejection. **The fact that there is not another single question which confronts every human, and which every human must answer for himself, is one of the greatest evidences for the undeniable existence of God.**

But even those who reach out to God in longing will never be able to comprehend His mind or to love Him on His level of love — any more than an ant can comprehend human thought or feel human love. Our capacity simply is not sufficient. Yet God has given us, to the extent of our miniscule ability to accept, a little window into His mind through borrowing the human words He gave us and writing them in His book. He has given us a drop of His love — all our hearts can stand — and even with so small a portion sometimes we hurt with the sweetness and the greatness of it.

These are a foretaste of what He has promised, when “...*we shall be like Him* [our Lord, Jesus Christ]...” (1 John 3:2) and when “...*I shall know just as I also am known*” (1 Corinthians 13:12). †



The flood of humanistic jargon has been too prevalent in favoring naturalism over supernaturalism. In simple terms, that means that among men humanism prevails over Divinity. Science defines terms more than truth. God's revelation is relegated to a secondary, or lower level of usage, as men go their own way with their limited discoveries and endless speculations.

In both secular and religious circles we are bombarded with comments about "the natural world", "the laws of nature", "Mother Nature's ways", and "human nature", justifying an endless stream of wretchedness, because it is just "nature's way".

Too many have a misconcep-

tion of the expression "the laws of nature". There are no reliable laws supplied by nature. Nature is not a legislator. Laws that dictate our seasons, day and night, the air we breathe, the earth on which we move about, are all the products of a mighty God, not Mother Nature! How do I know that? I know that, not by scientific experimentation, but by Divine revelation.

God's laws account for the seasons, day and night (Genesis 1:4,5,14-18). God gives to all "*life, breath and all things*" (Acts 17:25). His principles and proclamations govern all planets and places. As Nehemiah wrote: "*Thou alone art the Lord. Thou hast made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all*

EVIDENCES

their host; the earth and all that is on it; the seas and all that is in them. Thou dost give life to all of them, and the heavenly host bows down before Thee" (Nehemiah 9:6).

Therefore, every day and night, every breath of air, and every changing season is a blessing from a benevolent Father — almighty God — in whom "*we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28; Genesis 49:25; Revelation 1:8). These significant events, too often taken for granted, are supernatural because we cannot supply the air we breathe or the days and nights we enjoy. To relegate them to natural laws, crowding God out of our conception of His cosmos, is consummate folly and a dangerous departure from reality. We dare not fall victim to the mistake of King Agrippa, who failed to give God the glory (Acts 12:23; note Psalm 145:9-18).

The very word translated "*nature*" (Greek *phusis*) means "the force, laws...order of nature...as opposed to what is monstrous, abnormal, perverse" (J. H. Thayer, **Greek English Lexicon**, p. 660). Hence, by *nature* (law) some were declared as *no gods*, and some were Jews by *nature* (law — Galatians 4:8, 2:15). As such, *the laws of nature* are laws that are of **the law** that God has established. Therefore, our existence and this

universe are all products of the supernatural God. We dare not forget these revealed facts.

Days and nights, the air we breathe, genetic directives, and reproduction processes are absolute laws, so unspeakably spectacular and yet so "common" and abundant in occurrence that continual evidence echoes all around us that we are products of supernatural design and development. Neither man nor nature has ever achieved these super-human displays which constantly surround us from Divinity. Therefore, let us forever end such talk about "Mother Nature" and the God-denying philosophy of naturalism.

Recognize that man and this universe are the products of Divine creativity and wisdom. Since He holds us accountable to Him (Romans 14:11,12), then "*let all the earth fear the Lord: Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him, for He spoke, and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast*" (Psalms 33:6-9).

Read slowly and carefully Psalm 139:117. Then concern for the Creator will be a *natural* law in your heart. "*Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker*" (Psalms 95:6) †

Dayton Keese is a gospel preacher living in Midwest City, Oklahoma, USA.

Verse Search

Supply the missing information from the book of Acts, chapter sixteen, NKJV.

1. Paul and Silas traveled to Derbe and Lystra, and there they found a young Christian by the name of _____ (V. 1).
2. What unusual thing did Paul do, and why? (Vs. 1,3).
3. Besides preaching and strengthening the young churches, what did Paul and his company do? (V. 4).
4. What happened while they were in Troas? (V. 9).
5. What happened on a riverside at Philippi, the foremost city of that part of Macedonia? (Vs. 12-15).
6. What happened to Paul and Silas after healing a slave girl who brought her owners riches through her fortune-telling? (Vs. 16-24).
7. The slave girl had cried out, "*These men are the _____ of the _____, who proclaim to us the _____ of _____*" (V. 17).
8. Since this was the truth, why did Paul cast out the spirit? (V. 18).
9. How were Paul and Silas treated when they were arrested? (Vs. 22-24).
10. "*But _____, Paul and Silas were _____ and _____ to God, and the _____ were listening to them*" (V. 25).
11. Describe the miracle that occurred. (V. 26).
12. What question did the jailer ask of Paul? (V. 30).
13. What answer and promise did Paul give? (V. 31).
14. Just as Peter instructed in Acts 2:38, when the Jews asked the same question, what else was involved in the Jailer's salvation, besides the fact that he had to learn of Jesus and believe in Him? (Vs. 32,33).
15. How do we know that the Jailer counted baptism as of vital importance? (V. 33).
16. Was Paul content to slip away from Philippi quietly? (Vs. 35-40).

[See inside of back cover for answers.]

Who wrote the Bible? Some theologians believe the Gospel must be shaped around culture, for it is in this environment that man lives. The Bible is as subjective as man's various psychological philosophies, they claim. Make the message relevant to society and people will promptly respond, they justify.

But, this supposition poses another important question. **Who inspired the Bible?**

If man has the liberty to bend and reshape Christ's doctrines, conforming the Bible to his own concept of religion, then the message is *not* of Divine origin. It cannot be, because man has become the editor, as well as the originator of its edited teachings.

But the Bible claims itself to be God's revelation to man (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21). It instructs us

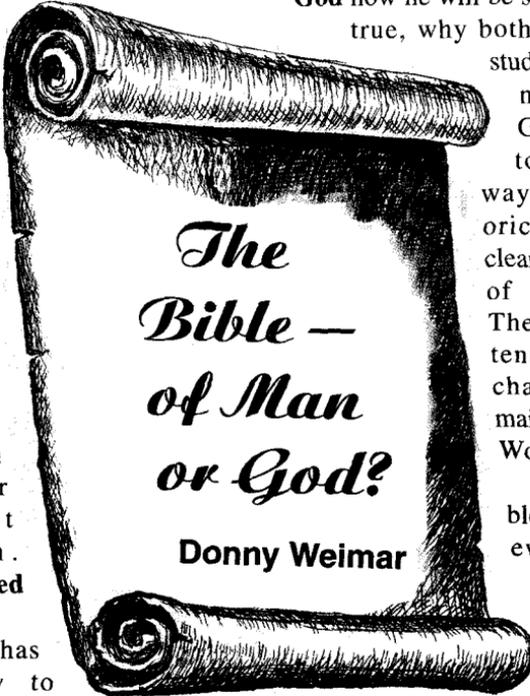
how we may be saved from the consequence of sinning (cf. Romans 1:16; 6:23). However, if the scheme of redemption is not an *absolute model*, then man has license to tell **God** how he will be saved. If that is true, why bother with Bible

study at all? Why not just tell God, "I'm going to Heaven *my way*." The rhetoric itself makes clear the simplicity of God's truth. The Bible's contents *cannot* be changed and remain *wholly* God's Word.

The Bible is relevant to every age, even to our's today. Consisting of all of things pertaining to life and godli-

ness, the pure and plain Gospel is as meaningful to people today as in the first century (2 Peter 1:3). The invitation to come to Christ is extended to **all**, in **every** place for **all remaining time** (Acts 2:39).

Too, truth is inherently objective and absolute. Jesus told Bible students, "*You shall know the truth*



THE WORD OF GOD

and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). The immortal message for mortal man is a permanently present call of hope. Paul warned that those who pervert the Gospel to create another are not actually teaching the good news (Galatians 1:6-9). Thus, any people who attempt to alter the Gospel to fit their own particular faith system jeopardize the very salvation to which God calls us (cf. Revelation

22:18). The Bible is written for man. Its originator is God. God has no editor.

Culture must conform to the law and will of Christ. The Gospel calls people; in whatever society they dwell, to change their beliefs and behaviors to be saved from eternal condemnation (Acts 17:30). Jesus said God's Word will be the

standard to determine each soul's eternal state on the Judgment Day (John 12:48). Man has no authority to rewrite the Lord's Book. God is above man; it is never the reverse. Therefore, let all obey 2 Timothy 2:15: "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" †

Donny Weimar preaches for the church in Collinsville, Texas, USA.

Who Should Read the Bible?

- The Young.....**to learn how to live.
- The Old.....**to know how to die.
- The Ignorant.....**for wisdom.
- The Learned.....**for humility.
- The Rich.....**for compassion.
- The Poor.....**for comfort.
- The Weak.....**for strength.
- The Strong.....**for direction.
- The Haughty.....**for warning.
- The Humble.....**for exaltation.
- The Troubled.....**for peace.
- The Weary.....**for rest.
- The Doubting.....**for assurance.
- The Sinner.....**for salvation.
- The Christian.....**for guidance.

— Anonymous

Reasons for Believing the Record

Ardron Hinton

Some consider anyone gullible and unenlightened who actually believes the New Testament record of events relating to Christ. The recorded circumstances concerning His birth, the reports of His miracles, His death and what it accomplished, and the report of His resurrection are all denied by many who consider themselves too enlightened to believe claims that are so contrary to the conclusions of modern materialistic intellectuals. They conclude that such things CANNOT happen; therefore reports such as those in the New Testament *cannot* be correct and should be dismissed without further consideration.

Is this sweeping negative reaction to the New Testament record justified? Is supporting evidence really non-existent, or is it being ignored? Let's look at some facts relating to the case.

1. As the New Testament describes the church in its beginning, it was a spiritual institution ruled over by Christ from heaven. It had no earthly headquarters, no

political alliances, and no military arm. In spite of its physical limitations, it spread steadily and widely for nearly four centuries. Where Islam, for example, spread later through the use of military might and political control, Christianity had achieved its position through the strength and influence of its message. This message is unique and powerful, able to transform entire ethnic groups into nobler and more caring people. Its basic beliefs inspire high standards and personal liberties in nations. It contains teachings that would revolutionize society even more if they were more widely practiced. If Bible information is not to be believed, how do you explain the marvelous "fruit" it has produced?

2. Jesus made bold statements concerning Himself. He claimed to be divine and to be exercising all the authority of the Godhead. There can be no middle ground here. Either He is divine, or He is not. If He is not, the doubters are left with only two choices: (1) He really

THE WORD OF GOD

believed this claim, so He must have been crazy. (2) He knew it was not so, thus He was a liar and a fraud. Weighing evidence, who can believe either? Can an afflicted brain produce such a marvelous code for right living? Is a dishonest person likely to do so? On the other hand, if Jesus is who He claimed to be, then His work as the Great Teacher is not at all surprising.

3. Paul made the resurrection of Christ the main proof of His genuineness (1 Corinthians 15). Several hundred people who knew Him well verified that the same teacher who had been killed at the insistence of Jewish leaders was indeed alive among them after being entombed. Paul wrote this while most of these witnesses were still living. Two leading Jews had buried Jesus. They had wrapped and anointed His dead body. Roman guards were posted. Yet He was seen alive again by reputable witnesses who risked their lives to affirm this. It is an undisputed fact that first the Jews and then the Romans tried to suppress this new religion with violence, yet there is no evidence that they were able to disprove the resurrection.

4. The reports of miracles by Jesus and His associates as evidence of the supernatural origin of their message have been rejected by materialistic worldly minds of our

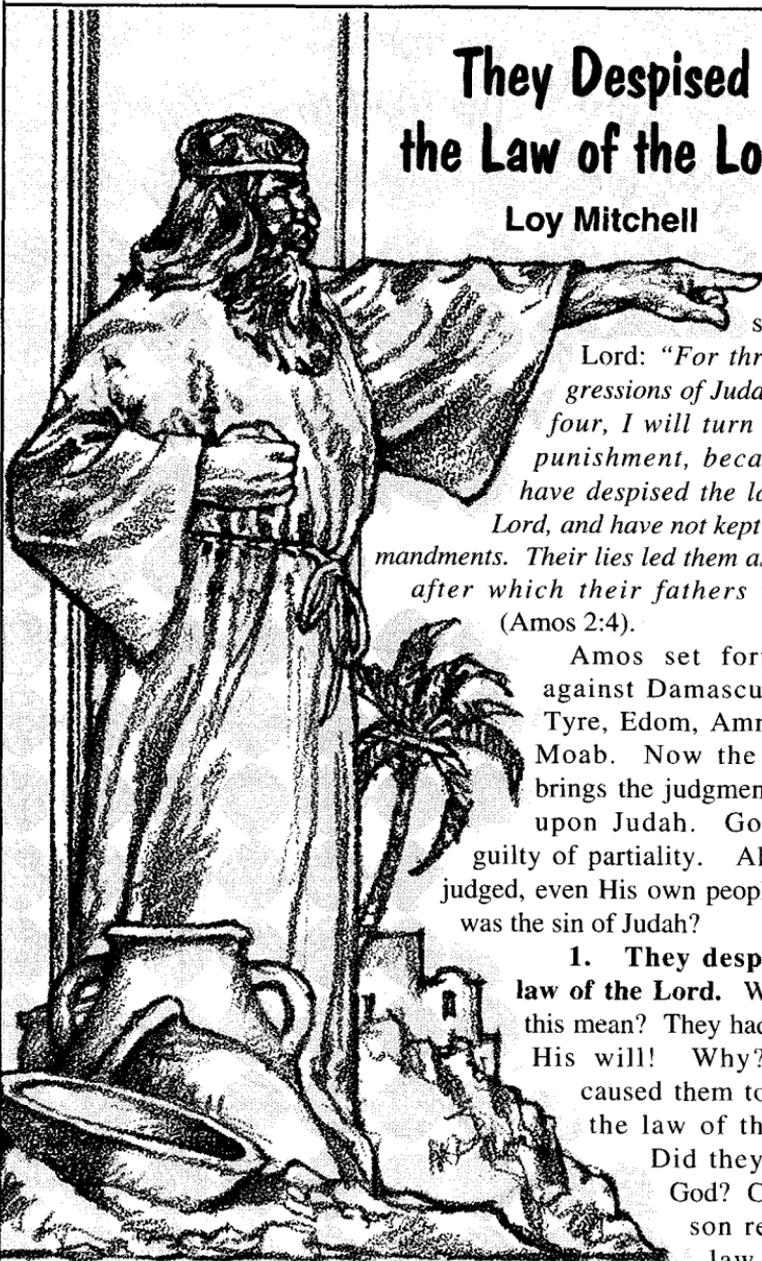
day. As Paul said to Festus (Acts 26:26), "*These things were not done in a corner.*" His enemies did not deny the miracles — they simply closed their minds to their significance. These were not tricks or staged performances. They were openly done under varied circumstances that allowed no sleight-of-hand and that left no doubt concerning the miraculous nature of the events. Thousands of people who heard the message when it was first delivered and who saw it confirmed by these signs (Hebrews 2:1-4) lived even into the second century, so that their lives and the inspired record of the miracles overlapped, for verification. These miracles did not do away with natural law, but momentarily suspended it.

5. The written material available on the early history of the Christian religion is tremendous. No other religious movement from so far back in history can produce such evidence concerning its beginnings and the reliability of its message. Extensive writings by men eighteen and nineteen centuries closer to the events attest to the validity and reliability of the Bible record. Unbelievers can reject this fact, but they cannot deny its truthfulness. †

Ardron Hinton is the preacher for the church of Christ in Roosevelt, Oklahoma, USA.

They Despised the Law of the Lord

Loy Mitchell



Thus says the Lord: *“For three transgressions of Judah and for four, I will turn away its punishment, because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept His commandments. Their lies led them astray, lies after which their fathers walked”* (Amos 2:4).

Amos set forth woes against Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. Now the prophet brings the judgment of God upon Judah. God is not guilty of partiality. All will be judged, even His own people. What was the sin of Judah?

1. They despised the law of the Lord. What does this mean? They had rejected His will! Why? What caused them to despise the law of the Lord? Did they respect God? Can a person reject the law of God

THE WORD OF GOD

and still respect the One who gave it? These people had a heart problem. They did not love God with all their heart, soul, and mind. What a tragic picture! What a terrible situation! When a man rejects or despises the law of God he has already rejected God.

2. They did not keep His commandments. Their hearts were not right. The despising of the law led them to disobedience. Action is the expression of the sentiments of the heart. What was in their hearts? Lies! Their lies had led them astray. By the word "lies" we are to under-

Do we despise the law of God today? Do we reject His law and replace it with doctrines created by humans, or with beliefs we personally prefer? Do we this day *keep His commandments*? When we reject or despise His law, we show we reject and despise the God who gave that law.

I often wonder why we can not find time EVERY day to read, study, and meditate upon His Word. If we neglect His Word, are we not neglecting God?

When I cannot find time to be present for Bible study with fellow

Why can we not find time EVERY day to read, study, and meditate upon God's Word? If we neglect His Word, are we not neglecting God?

stand this refers to the doctrines of false religions, idols. They denied God and His authority and placed something else in their hearts. Every idol is a lie in embodied form. When that takes place, man does not keep God's commands.

3. They would be punished by God. "*But I will send fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.*" The promise of judgment was made by God through Amos, and God did keep His promise. Judah and Jerusalem were destroyed.

Dear reader of this article, does this have a message for us today?

saints and find it too inconvenient to return on Sunday and Wednesday nights, I have a heart problem. Someone or something other than God has first place in my heart. Will God judge us? Is He a partial God? "*It is time for judgment to begin from God's house; and if first from us, what will be the end of those who do not obey God's gospel? If the righteous is saved with difficulty, what will become of the godless and the sinner?*" (1 Peter 4:17,18). †

Loy Mitchell preaches for the Northside congregation in Topeka, Kansas, USA.

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

When a baby is born into the world he is just as pure as God is in heaven, *because he has not sinned*. Jesus, therefore, said, "*For of such is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 19:14). But when that baby grows and attains maturity, at whatever age that may be, he/she is able to distinguish right from wrong. God then holds that individual responsible for his/her actions.

Speaking of all of the accountable men and women and boys and girls, the Bible declares, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans

3:23). But then it says, "*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 6:23).

The truth of the matter is that **all accountable humans have sinned**. But all may be saved from sin because God has provided salvation in Christ for all. God's promise of salvation from sin is to all those who will believe in Christ and will repent of their sins and will be baptized for the remission of their sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). When one

thus obeys the commandments of God, he becomes a Christian, a follower of Christ, and Christ adds that individual to His church, which is the body of all the saved souls. (Acts 2:47).

But, can one not sin after becoming a Christian? And what should a Christian do to be forgiven of sin? The answer is found in the first epistle that John, the apostle, wrote to

Christians, where he said, "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our*

sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8,9).

In Acts chapter eight we have an example of a man named Simon. After believing in Christ he was baptized, and thus he became a Christian and a member of the church of Christ. But a little later when he had sinned, the apostle Peter told him to repent of his sin and pray to God for forgiveness. Simon, realizing that he had sinned, asked Peter to pray to the Lord for him (Acts 8:22-24).

2 Types of Sin

Sunny David

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

The fact of the matter is that as Christians we *can* sin and do wrong. This is not to say, however, that one should *purposefully* and *intentionally* sin. But, in becoming *Christians*, we do not cease to be *humans*; and as humans, one is always susceptible to sin in one way or another. The most wonderful fact, however, is that, because we are *in Christ* and under the cleansing power of His blood, as Christians we have the confidence and the assurance that if we repent of our sins and confess them and pray

ness, God will certainly forgive him, regardless of what his sin might have been. But **the sin leading to death** is the sin one is **not willing to repent of and confess**.

If one continues to persist in sin, even after being told or shown about the wrong he is doing, or if one knows that he/she is living in sin but is not willing to change his life, then others should not pray for forgiveness of such sins — God *cannot* forgive *unless a person is willing to repent*. To pray for forgiveness for someone

**The sin leading to death
is the sin one is not willing to repent of and confess.**

to God for forgiveness, He is faithful to forgive us our sins.

The apostle John in his epistle mentioned two types of sins a Christian can commit. He said, "*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. All unrighteousness is sin and there is sin not leading to death*" (1 John 5:16,17).

The sin, **not** leading to death or separation from God, is **the sin which one is willing to repent of and confess**. As one does these things and prays to God for forgive-

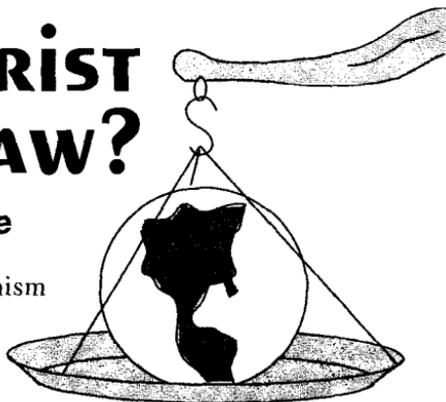
who is determined to continue in his sin is to ask God to do what is opposed to His very nature. Such a sin, unrepented of, will lead one to death which is the eternal separation from God in hell. But as long as there is life, it is not too late to realize and correct one's sinful condition, asking God for forgiveness.

These are the two types or categories of sin. May we never, as Christians, so harden our hearts and be filled with such pride that we will not repent whenever we do wrong. †

Sunny David is a preacher of the gospel, Hindi radio speaker, and editor of a monthly publication, *The Bible Teacher*, in New Delhi, India.

DOES CHRIST HAVE A LAW?

Owen Cosgrove



From the wave of neo-Calvinism [the teachings of John Calvin (d. 1564) or his followers, emphasizing predestination, the sovereignty of God in overruling the free will of man, and salvation by grace alone], presenting itself in various congregations of the Lord's church comes the startling interpretation that **we are saved by grace without any act of obedience on our part**, and therefore, *to try to be justified by any law of any kind will cause us to fall from grace!*

Is that what Paul meant in Galatians 5:4, "*Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law, ye are fallen away from grace*"? It is obvious from the context of Galatians that Paul had reference to **the law of Moses**. Galatians 2:19 says, "*through the law I am dead to the law.*" Does this mean that a Christian is dead to the law of Christ? Galatians 3:12 says, "*the law is not of faith.*" Does this mean that Christ's law is not of faith? Galatians 3:13 says, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law.*" Does this mean that Christ's law is a curse and He delivered us from it?

Galatians 3:18,19,21,23,24; 4:4,5,21; and 5:3 are all obvious references to **the Mosaic law**. The argument that these passages refer to law in general (because the definite article is not present in the Greek) ignores Romans 8:2, "*For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*" The definite article is there — not only in the English, but also in the Greek. Christ indeed has a law — a law of spirit and life — and Paul said it made him free from the law of sin and death.

Many other passages speak of Christ's law. "*Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ*" (Galatians 6:2). "*...the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God...*" (Romans 8:7). In the New Covenant, God puts His "*laws into our mind*" as we hear and believe the Gospel (Hebrews 8:10, Romans 10:17). Christ's way is "*the perfect law of liberty*" (James 1:25, 2:12). It is "*the royal law*" (James 2:8).

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Obedience to Christ is linked inseparably to salvation (Matthew 7:21-29; 28:18-20; Luke 6: 46; Acts 3:22-26; Romans 6:17,18; Philip-pians 2:21; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Hebrews 5:8,9; 1 Peter 4:17; Mark 16:15,16; Revelation 20:12,13; etc., etc, ad infinitum). To say that seek-ing justification by obedience to Christ's law will cause one to fall from grace *implies that God's grace has no conditions*. The natural con-sequence of this error leads either to **universalism** (belief that all people will be saved) or to John Calvin's doctrine of **Limited Atonement** (the belief that only those God has selected and operated on directly will be saved).

This error is serious. It is not benign. It is grievous, malignant, flagrant, and egregious. Grace is both appropriative and consequen-tial. It is both free and conditional. It is received by obedience and it requires obedience. It brings salva-tion and it teaches us responsibilities (Titus 2:11,12). It is offered to all, but it is appropriated only as man hears and obeys the law of Christ. That's what the Great Commission is all about. When we deny these truths, we are actually denying God's *power of salvation*. †

Owen Cosgrove is involved in printed evangelism in many countries, and he preaches for the Northside congrega-tion in Waxahachie, Texas, USA.

Can We All See the Bible Alike?

Moses said that we can (Deuteronomy 29:29). David said we can (Psalm 119:104). John said we can (John 20:30,31). Jesus prayed that we will (John 17:20). All these spokesmen for God have declared that *through study of the Scriptures* we are enabled to see them alike.

However, there are some things that **HINDER** a clear understanding of the Bible:

1. Relatives (Matthew 19:29; 10:34-37).
2. Pride (Proverbs 14:12; 16:18; Revelation 3:17,18).
3. Majority (Exodus 23:2; Matthew 7:13,14,21).
4. False doctrine (Matthew 13:14,15; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).
5. Satan (2 Corinthians 4:3,4).

If we will accept only the word of God (1 Peter 4:11), we should not only see the Bible alike, but **understand** and **practice** it alike. We should be **ONE** religiously.

— Johnny Polk

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

Acts 8:12

Acts

6:5 says that Philip was one of the seven men chosen to minister to the needs of the church in Jerusalem. The Apostles laid hands on them and gave them the power to do certain miracles, to aid in their work and to prove that they were teaching by God's authority. Philip preached and performed miracles in Samaria.

But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.

The people in Samaria listened to Philip's message and were convinced by what they heard and the miracles they saw. The record does not say that they were saved when they believed.

In most denominations, infants and small children are "christened" or "baptized", based on the teaching that children inherit the sin of Adam. **There is no provision in the New Testament for the saving of children!** This silence is one proof of that God does not count children as sinners. In Samaria, both **men** and **women** responded to the gospel.

What did Philip preach?

1. the kingdom of God
2. the name of Christ. Obviously, we must understand both of these topics in order to be saved.

There are those today who say, "Just preach Jesus and don't talk about the church — churches are not important." But according to Matthew 16:16-18, the kingdom and the church are the same thing. Part of Philip's message was "the kingdom".

Hundreds of varying names are worn religiously, yet Acts 4:12 says that there is only one name by which we can be saved: the name of Jesus Christ. It was that name that Philip taught to the Samaritans.

The people of Samaria believed what Philip taught, but more was required in order for them to be saved.

What did the believers do in order to complete their obedience to God and to be saved? **The record says that they were baptized.** According to Acts 2:41,47, these were added by God to the church.

You and God's Plan

Albert Gardner

Recently I picked up a tract with the above title. This is a great title, but the content was disappointing because it was unscriptural.

The author made this statement and it was printed in italics for emphasis: "We are baptized because we have been saved, not in order to be saved." How would anyone come to that conclusion if he read what the Bible teaches about baptism?

Consider Acts 2:38. "*Then said Peter unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*"

Peter told sinners to do two things: (1) repent and (2) be baptized. These two things are joined together by the word "and," which means both of them are to be done for the same reason, and the purpose is stated — "*for the remission of sins.*" Why were they to repent? Did they repent "**because** they were saved," or "**in order to be saved**"? Surely, no one will claim sinners are to repent because they are already saved! Jesus taught "*repent or perish*" (Luke 13:3). Sinners are to repent **in order to be saved**.

The connecting word "and"

demands that both things are done for the same purpose. Whatever reason we repent is the same reason we are to be baptized. Sinners are to repent in order to be saved, and they are to be baptized in order to be saved.

The stated reason for repentance and baptism is "*for the remission of sins.*" We can learn the meaning of that statement by comparing Acts 2:38 with Matthew 26:28, where the exact words in both English and Greek are used in connection with the Lord's Supper. "*For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*"

Did Jesus shed His blood "because we are saved," or "in order for us to be saved"? Of course, He poured out His blood so we **could** be saved. We were lost and could not be saved without the cleansing power of His blood.

Peter used the same words in talking about salvation. Sinners must "*repent and be baptized*" — "*for the remission of sins.*" Dear friends, that means "**in order to be saved.**" †

Albert Gardner is a gospel preacher living in Strawberry, Arkansas, USA.

Cheap Grace

Stan Mitchell

“**Cheap grace** is the deadly enemy of our church. We are fighting today for **costly grace**.” So said Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German preacher in the late 1930’s.

“Cheap grace means grace sold in the market. The consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the church’s inexhaustable treasury, from which she showers blessings...Grace without price, grace without cost. Because everything has been paid, everything can be had for nothing” (The Cost of Discipleship, page 45).

“Cheap grace.” This is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, although sometimes we treat it as if the phrase were redundant. We are so presumptuous about the blood of Christ, His suffering on the cross. We glibly accept it, then make statements like, “It doesn’t matter what God’s **word** says, God’s **grace** will forgive us!”

Understand this: grace forgives the human frailties of Christians; it does not forgive open rebellion on the part of alien sinners or erring children of God.

A concept of cheap grace does

three harmful things to the Christian:

- ❖ It encourages a loose attitude toward God’s holy commands.
- ❖ It diminishes the enormity of Christ’s death on the cross.
- ❖ It weakens our desire to become Christ’s disciples, committed and determined to never turn back from serving God.

The gift of grace was free, but the payment for our sin was historically high, by “*the precious blood of Christ*” (1 Peter 1:19). The value of a gift lies not in the cost to the receiver, but to the redeemer!

“Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means!” (Romans 6:1).

By the way, Bonhoeffer knew what he was talking about when he spoke of sacrifice and discipleship. He was put in a NAZI concentration camp for refusing to toe the party line, and was executed in 1945.

How many of us have counted the cost of God’s grace and of faithful discipleship, and would be willing to pay with our lives? †

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“You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say may be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney and to have that attorney present during questioning. If you desire an attorney but cannot afford one, an attorney will be provided for you by the state without charge.”

YOU'LL NEED A LAWYER

David A. Sargent

“Wait a minute!” you cry in desperation. **“What have I done?”**

The truth of the matter is that it may be something that you **have** done or something that you **should have** done.

The crime is SIN, and each and every one of us is guilty! Sin is breaking the law of God (*commission*) (1 John 3:4). It is also knowing to do good and not doing it (*omission*) (James 4:17). Each one of us has been **convicted** of sin (Romans 3:23) and stands under its **condemnation** (Romans 6:23).

SALVATION

You'll need a GOOD lawyer to find a way out of this dilemma. When choosing a lawyer, a wise person will select one who is not only very knowledgeable of the law, but is also very understanding concerning the defendant's situation.

Here is the GOOD news: there is ONLY ONE "lawyer" who is perfectly qualified to be your representative, AND He is willing to take YOUR case!

God is the One who has been offended by our SIN. And, there is ONLY ONE Mediator between God and men: the Man, **Christ Jesus** (1 Timothy 2:5).

Similar to the job of a lawyer, a "mediator" is one who intervenes between two parties to bring reconciliation to both. Jesus is the ONLY ONE who can "mediate" between you and God. **You NEED Him to be YOUR "Lawyer."** He desires the opportunity!

When it comes to our problem with SIN, Jesus is the perfect mediator. Jesus became man so that He could identify with our situation, our problems (Hebrews 2:17,18). He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He was tempted in every way, just as we are — yet without SIN (Hebrews 4:15).

Even though **Jesus** is one's lawyer, we must NOT expect to be found innocent. The verdict is **STILL** guilty! **There is NO way around it; we have sinned, we are guilty, and NO amount of good works can erase our guilt or compensate for the damage done.**

But, if we will place our confidence and trust in our "Lawyer" and obey His instructions, we will find forgiveness. How can that be? **Jesus** "*gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time*" (1 Timothy 2:6). Even though we have been found guilty, **Jesus** took the punishment of SIN upon Himself when He died on the cross. Those who trust Him, and are truly penitent for their sins, confess Him before men, and are baptized for the forgiveness of sins will be released from their debt of SIN. All because of the Mediator!

The verdict is in: YOU have been found guilty! You'll need a GOOD lawyer. But NOT just anyone will do. In fact, **Jesus** is the ONLY ONE who can handle your case.

Will you allow Him to represent YOU on Judgment Day? God bless you! †

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Maintaining the Purity of the Church

W. Douglass Harris

In English dictionaries the first definition of “pure” is “free from extraneous material, or mixture of anything of a different, inferior, or contaminating kind.” Paul said of Christ that He “*gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession*” (Titus 2:14).

Because of the ecumenical syndrome of our times, compromise of the truth by some threatens to corrupt the purity of the church. Allowing an admixture of man-made doctrines and practices is contrary to everything taught in the New Testament. How do we keep the church free from extraneous and unscriptural matters?

1. We must keep the doctrine pure.

The church at Jerusalem continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine — the doctrine taught by the Spirit-guided apostles (Acts 2:42). There is a body of teaching that is identified as the “*doctrine of Christ*”, and we are forbidden to go beyond that (2 John 9-11). This doctrine, unmixed with the doctrines of men, provides us with all the reproof, correction, and instruction that completely guides us unto every good work (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

2. We must preach only the Word of God.

This was the charge Paul gave to Timothy, to preserve the purity of the church in its doctrine (2 Timothy 4:1-4). Four times in his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul instructed them to speak the things that become

THE CHURCH

(befit) “*sound doctrine*” (1 Timothy 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9, 2:1). “Sound” is from a word that means “healthy or wholesome.” It is paraphrased in the New Century Version: “*You must tell everyone to follow the true teaching.*”

3. We must continue to teach that one becomes a Christian by obeying a certain “*form of doctrine*”

— a likeness to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

This obedience is completed in scriptural baptism (Romans 6:16-18). So there is a pattern of doctrine that must be followed, in spite of the opinions of some to the contrary.

4. We must take heed to the frequent warnings in the New Testament against departures from the apostles’ doctrine.

Preaching the Word as Paul commanded Timothy *excludes everything else* (2 Timothy 4:1-4). We are forbidden to add to God’s message or to take away from it, and we have no authority to change what He has written (Revelation 22:18,19; 2 John 9,10).

5. The Church must be kept pure in practice as well as in doctrine.

Twenty-one books of the New Testament are devoted to exhorting members of the church to live pure and holy lives. Here are some of the injunctions from the inspired apostles: “*Come ye out...and be separate and touch no unclean thing*” (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1); “*Be not conformed to the world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds*” (Romans 12:1,2); “*Keep yourselves unspotted from the world*” (James 1:27); “*Let sin no longer have dominion over you*” (Romans 6:14); “*Depart from unrighteousness and be vessels of honor*” (2 Timothy 2:19,20); “*Love not the world, nor the things in the world*” (1 John 2:15-17; James 4:4).

Lack of space forbids citing more of these injunctions, but a careful study of the letters to Christians and churches in the New Testament will provide complete guidance in matters of daily purity for individuals and congregations.

Conclusion:

Eternal vigilance is the price of the purity of the church. Maintaining the purity of the church requires a pure faith (doctrine) and a pure practice. We owe it to our Lord to be vigilant in purity. †

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What the Church Needs

Leroy Brownlow

1) More Knocking on Doors and Less Knocking on Each Other.

The Great Commission demands that we busy ourselves in taking the gospel to others (Mark 16:15). The Bible says, "*Speak not evil one of another...*" (James 4:11). It is so much better to be busy doing good rather than evil.

2) More Sound Heads and Fewer Soreheads.

Perhaps there has never been a time in the history of the church in which we have had a greater need for men sound in the faith and wise in judgment. Sometimes the voice of the wise goes unheeded and the voice of the foolish takes over (1 Kings 12:6-8).

3) More Open Hearts and Fewer Open Mouths.

All conduct proceeds from the heart. Prejudice closes the heart to a true consideration of the facts. If the heart was made right before the mouth was opened, most church problems locally and universally would cease to exist (James 3:5-6; Proverbs 26:20).

4) More Seed Slinging and Less Mud Slinging.

The task of sowing the seed of the kingdom is so great that it should leave no time for the slinging of mud at a brother. The fact that we have the whole world as our foe should draw us closer together (Proverbs 18:24). There should be no division in the Lord's camp (1 Corinthians 1:10). One can never white-wash himself by slinging mud at another. He who tries gets his own hands dirty.

5) More Sacrifice of Self and Less Sacrifice of Others.

There are plenty of members of the church who are willing to sacrifice the other fellow — his talent, his time, his money, and even perhaps his reputation. Sacrifice should begin at home (Luke 9:23).

6) More Concern over Direction Than Speed.

This is the jet and missile age. Speed is being enthroned and multitudes bow before it. But in the Lord's work, the greater question is not: "How fast are we traveling?" But rather, "Which way are we going?" (John 14:6; Matthew 7:13-14). All speed is not progress. On the other hand, neither is standing still.

†

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THE PRIVILEGE of Worship

Maxie B. Boren

into the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122:1). That’s the attitude the sincere Christian has! First, because the true Christian loves God with all his heart (Matthew 22:37; 1 John 4:9-11,19), and, secondly, he wants to “*serve the Lord with gladness*” and “*enter into His courts with praise*” (Psalm 100:2,4). Thirdly, the true Christian is so grateful to God for the manifold blessings that come from His hand, realizing that He is the “*Fount of every blessing*” (James 1:17), and he wants to “*enter into His gates with thanksgiving.*” The Bible teaches us, “*in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The Christian, therefore, is *glad* for the opportunity to assemble with other Christians to express to God praise and thanksgiving!

Will YOU be present for Bible classes next Lord’s day because you want to learn more of God’s will for your life? Will you happily and thankfully be present for the worship assembly? We certainly encourage you to do so! Don’t forget: **God will be there.** †

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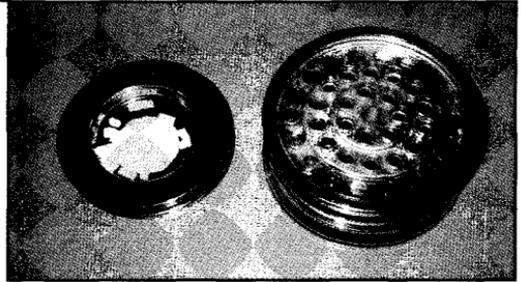


Citizens of our nation often express thanks for their freedoms, and especially for the freedom to worship “without being afraid”. Comparisons are made between those of us so abundantly blessed as contrasted with other nations of the world where religious expression is often times brutally curtailed.

And yet, so few people, relatively speaking, take advantage of the privilege of a free society. While going to the assembly each Lord’s day morning we encounter scarcely any traffic because most people are staying at home with no intention of worshipping God. Even some members of the Lord’s church make a weekly decision as to whether to attend the worship assembly or not. And some of these, even if they do decide to “go”, seem to do so begrudgingly. How regrettable!

The psalmist said, “*I was glad when they said unto me, ‘Let us go*

THE LORD'S SUPPER *and*



THE LORD'S DAY

Cecil May, Jr.



Seventh Day Adventists and others often ask, "Where does the Bible change the day of worship from the Sabbath (Saturday, seventh day) to Sunday (first day of the week)?"

Most protestant churches today take the Lord's Supper as often or as seldom as they may choose. The largest group in Christendom celebrates Mass every day. A number of churches of Christ in recent years have announced celebrations of the Lord's Supper as part of wedding ceremonies, or in connection with a reenactment of the Seder on Thursday night of Passover week (commemorating Christ's institution of the

Lord's Supper in the Passover week before he was crucified), and on other occasions on various weekdays.

When we are to partake of the Lord's Supper, and why we worship on Sunday instead of Saturday are more closely related issues than some might suppose.

Scriptural evidence, corroborated by second and third century writings and practice, points to the fact that Sunday is the Lord's day, and is the day the early church assembled to partake of the Lord's Supper.

Virtually all of the churches that offer communion less frequently than every Sunday nevertheless

WORSHIP

meet every Sunday. All biblical evidence for Sunday as the day of meeting, however, is tied to the church assembling to partake of the Lord's Supper on that day.

The Lord's Supper and the New Testament

For people committed to biblical authority the first consideration must be Scripture, "the teaching of the apostles".

When the church was first established, Scripture says, "*They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers*" (Acts 2:42). McCord's translation, following correctly the original Greek, has "*the breaking of the bread*", which according to a frequent usage of the Greek article, would signify a particular breaking of a particular bread.

It is generally recognized, however, even without considering the article, that a continued, regular participation in the Lord's Supper is spoken of here.

To the Corinthian Church Paul repeated teaching he had already delivered to them (presumably in person) concerning the Lord's Supper. It was teaching, he said, he received from the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:23). It agrees in remarkable detail with what the gospel accounts tell us Jesus said and did in instituting the Supper

"*on the night He was betrayed*" (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:17-20).

Paul adds the detail that Jesus said, "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death til He comes*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Once again "the apostle's teaching" implies a continued regular participation in this feast of the Lord.

The Lord's Supper and the First Day of the Week

In Acts 20, we find Paul in a hurry to get back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:16), but when he came to Troas he waited seven days before meeting with the disciples (Acts 20:6). "*Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight*" (Acts 20:7).

The stated purpose of their meeting was not to hear preaching but to break bread, that is, to partake of the Lord's Supper. The time of their meeting for that purpose was "*the first day of the week*".

To this agrees what we learn from Paul's epistles to Corinth about the practice of that church, and indirectly, even, about the practice of the churches of Galatia. Concerning the Corinthian church, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:20, "*Therefore when you come together*

in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper," but the context shows he was rebuking them because their assembling was *supposed* to be to take the Supper, yet their conduct made it so that it was *not* the Lord's Supper they were actually taking! Verse 33 adds, "*When you come together to eat....*"

In 1 Corinthians 16 Paul spoke of a contribution he was urging all the Gentile churches to make to the Jewish congregations in Judea. He told them, "*As I have given order to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let every one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come*" (1 Corinthians 16:1,2).

Some say this simply means "lay aside at home", but in any case it points to a special significance for the first day of the week.

Dr. Everett Ferguson observes, "This verse says nothing specifically about an assembly, and it has its difficulty in interpretation, but I would call attention to its position, after chapter 15's discussion of the Resurrection which occurred on the first day of the week. And however the putting something aside was handled, 'store it up' is literally 'to put in a treasury'. But what concerns me here is that *the first day of the week* had some special significance to the Christian communities

(in Galatia as well as in Corinth). The natural thought is that this was the occasion when the Christians were accustomed to being together. Otherwise, the specification of the day is unintelligible." (Gospel Advocate, 1991, p. 54.) And when they came together, it was to commune in the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day

Some things the early church did are significant and exemplary; some are insignificant and incidental. Virtually all of Christendom follows the example of the early Christians having Sunday as the day of assembly. Churches of Christ have followed the same example more fully by breaking the bread on that day.

However, while the Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus in an upper room and also celebrated in Troas in an upper room (Mark 14:15; Acts 20:8), hardly anyone deems it important to seek an upper room for the Lord's Supper today. What makes the difference?

The difference is that there is no theological or doctrinal significance to an *upper* room. It was merely coincidental that such a place was used twice. No point is made of it. There is no significance to attach to it.

In contrast, there is great theological or doctrinal significance

WORSHIP

attached to the first day of the week.

Jesus was raised from the dead on the first day of the week. Every resurrection account, one in each of the four gospel records, begins with a time designation stating that fact (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:1; John 20:1; Matthew 28:1).

Most of the recorded post-resurrection appearances of Jesus took place on the first day of the week, the one on which He was raised (John 20:13) and then one week later (John 20:26). On both of these occasions Jesus ate a post-resurrection meal with His disciples.

Pentecost is set on the day after the seventh Sabbath from Passover (Leviticus 23:16), and the day after any Sabbath, of course, is always the first day of the week. **So the birthday of the church, the establishment of the kingdom, the promised coming of the Spirit, Peter's first use of the keys of the Kingdom given him by the Lord: all occurred on the first day of the week.**

John wrote from Patmos that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day (Revelation 1:10) when the visions he recorded in The Revelation began. With good reason and by near universal agreement, "the Lord's day" is acknowledged to be the first day of the week — Sunday, as we in America call it today.

Although it is more illustrative than evidential, it is striking that the only two occurrences of the New Testament word *kuriakos*, an adjective meaning "*pertaining to the Lord*" and translated "*the Lord's*", occur in reference to "*the Lord's Supper*" (I Corinthians 11:20) and to "*the Lord's day*" (Revelation 1:10).

The Lord's Supper and the Lord's day, as we have seen, are scripturally, apostolically, connected. Let us leave them that way. "No Lord's day without the Lord's Supper; no Lord's Supper without the Lord's day." (I first heard that statement in an excellent presentation by Dr. Everett Ferguson of Abilene Christian University. I have since seen it in his writings. He refers to a similar statement, "No Lord's Supper without Sunday and no Sunday without the Lord's Supper," as the conclusion of Willy Rordorf, in **The History of the Day of Rest and Worship.**)

The Lord's Supper Not on The Sabbath

The best claim for a time rivaling Sunday for assembly and the Lord's Supper would lie with the Sabbath, the seventh day, Saturday.

Speaking negatively, there is no reference in the Bible connecting the Lord's Supper or the assembly of Christians with the Sabbath. Evangelists went to synagogues on the Sabbath to preach and make con-

verts, just as they went to the gathering places of pagan philosophers for the same purpose (Acts 17:17), but there is no indication in Scripture that Christians used the Sabbath as a day of meeting or worship.

Keeping of the Sabbath was one of the laws of the Old Testament, nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14-16), abolished at the death of Christ (Ephesians 2:15).

Consider the doctrinal significance of Sabbath keeping.

There are two listings in the Old Testament of what we call the Ten Commandments. The record in Exodus says concerning the Sabbath commandment, "*For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath Day and hallowed it*" (Exodus 20:11).

The record in Deuteronomy, when Moses repeated the law for the new generation about to enter the land of promise, restates the Ten Commandments and, at the command to keep the Sabbath, adds, "*And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day*" (Deuteronomy 5:11).

Putting the two passages to-

gether, the Lord chose the seventh day as the day to honor and rest because he himself rested that day (Exodus), but the reason he commanded the children of Israel to keep the day was as a memorial of their deliverance by God from Egyptian bondage and their formation by Him into a new nation (Deuteronomy).

The stated theological significance of the Sabbath fits the Jews and the first covenant. The theological significance of the first day fits Christians and the new covenant. As Jesus said as He gave His disciples the cup at the institution of the Supper, "*For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins*" (Matthew 26:28).

The Lord's Supper taken on any day other than Sunday is without scriptural sanction, and it weakens its doctrinal significance.

The Lord's Supper, the Lord's Day and Early Church History

The biblical evidence to me is compelling. Under the direction of the apostles of the Lord, the early church understood it had an obligation to assemble on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper. And they regularly did that.

I realize, however, that it is not as clear-cut as some would like. Is there a way to check our conclusions? Have we put the evidence together correctly?

WORSHIP

Christians in the years immediately following the death of the apostles reached the same conclusions concerning the apostles' teaching on this subject as have we.

The writings of these devout but uninspired men do not, of course, have scriptural authority, and no such claim is here made for them. They are significant enough to be heard, however, and on the subject of the day of Christian assembly and the Lord's Supper, there is a large number of such writings that testify, and they are unanimous and unequivocal.

Several of the early writings state that Christians assembled for the Lord's Supper; several state that they met on Sunday because it was the day of the Lord's resurrection; many state both.

An early writing called the *Didache* (14:1) says, "Come together each Lord's day, break bread and give thanks."

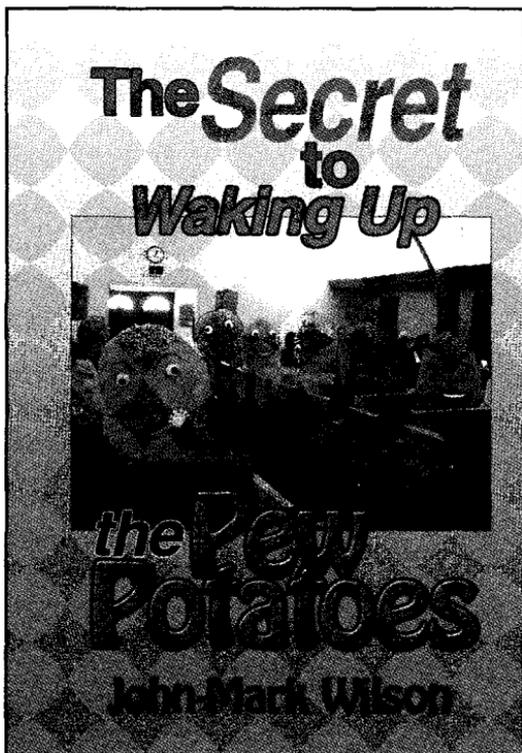
Justin Martyr (*Apology* 1, 67) says, "On the day called Sunday there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in a city or rural district.... When we cease from our prayer, bread is presented and wine mixed with water.... We all make our assembly on the day of the Sun, since it is the first day on which God changed the darkness and made the world, and Jesus Christ our Savior arose from the dead on the same day."

These and many more pertinent ancient texts can be found in Everett Ferguson's book, **Early Christians Speak**. These records show that error began to creep into the teachings of the church as early as the second century. Some doctrines and beliefs that are not in accord with biblical teaching are mentioned with approval in these writings of church fathers. Understandably, because of their conflict with the Scriptures, they are not presented here as authoritative. The great number of the writings during that time, however, and their unanimity on the question concerning the Lord's Supper and the day of worship, make a very strong case that our understanding of the biblical record is correct.

Early Christians, throughout continued Roman persecution, persisted in Sunday meetings, even though the penalty for discovery was beating, imprisonment and often death. Why did they not throw the authorities off-track by meeting instead on a Wednesday or Thursday night, if that would have been acceptable to God?

As Dr. Furman Kearley said, "They died rather than give up Sunday assembly, because the Lord was not raised from the grave on Thursday night." †

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The older congregation you attend can double or even triple in attendance, if you apply the principles in this and the following lessons. Our Christian bookstores are filled with wonderful ideas for evangelizing our communities. Yet, hundreds of splendid ideas are ineffective, if we don't understand how to implement them.

These lessons are designed to function as an action-plan for small, older congregations of the Lord's church. Many are struggling to simply keep alive! Many would do anything to keep from closing their doors. Yet, they feel powerless as their numbers continue to decline.

The original mission and vision of the Lord's church needs to be brought back to the forefront. Many congregations continue to shrink because they have shifted from Christ's *mission* to simply "assembling with the Saints". Assembling is important. In fact, it's commanded (Hebrews 10:24-26). But, this is not the primary mission of our Lord and His church.

"Church" is from the Greek word "*ekklesia*" meaning "the called out"; in this case, "the called out" of the world (Romans 1:5,6; 1 Corinthians 1:2). We are called out of the world by the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). Upon our obedience, we are saved and added to the church (Acts 2:36-47). As a Christian, we are now part of the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23; 1 Corinthians 12:13-27); therefore, we should emulate Christ in our daily lives. **His** mission is **Our** mission! Jesus' mission was "*to seek and to save the lost*" (Luke 19:10), and our mission should be no different.

CHURCH GROWTH

The biblical system will empower the preacher, or any concerned member of this “type” of congregation, to ignite what is present in the form of talent, knowledge and ability. Not only does the reader learn how to recapture the vision of the early church, but he also learns how to motivate others to do the same. The Word of God provides a powerful pattern for church growth! The New Testament is saturated with examples of common, everyday people doing extraordinary things with God’s help. Christians who worship with smaller congregations, who are interested only in assembling, have seen glory days fade into their magnificent past.

Many sit back on their padded pews and wonder, “What happened to all the people who used to attend services?” I have affectionately named these comfortably concerned Christians *Pew Potatoes*. No disrespect is meant by this title. I wish only to emphasize that, from the perspective of the “pew potato”, something needs to be done, but no one is sure what. Most are not even sure they can assist their brothers and sisters in Christ to overcome the problem.

The Lord’s church will never begin experiencing new growth until its members realize the problem. Individual Christians must lift

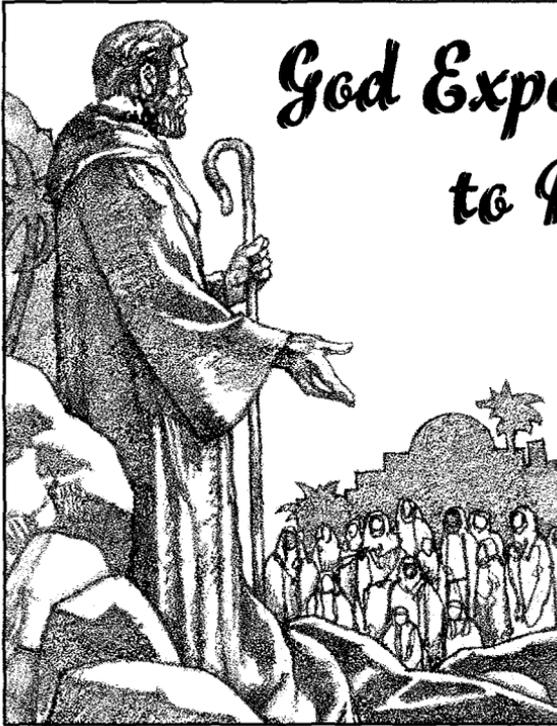
up the mirror of God’s Word and take a good look at who they are, spiritually! Our vision must be in line with Christ’s vision.

Through empowering small congregations with “Recapturing the Vision” of Christ, the attendance will begin to explode! Each member, whether young or old, will be engaged in spreading the love of God to a lost and dying community. Members will become excited with their new direction and vision. Visitors will be amazed, and lives will be changed as those present begin obeying the Gospel of Christ!

There is no reason why this Bible-based system can’t work in the congregation you attend. If you have a handful of faithful members who are literate, can talk, pray and dial numbers on the telephone, then you have all you’ll need for success. If you have been discouraged, just remember the powerful words penned by a man who had opportunity after opportunity to be discouraged, but instead decided to write, “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*” (Philippians 4:13). †

(Excerpt from Chapter one of John-Mark Wilson’s study book and work-guide, **The Secret to Waking Up the Pew Potatoes.**)

John-Mark Wilson (director@howtopreach.com) works with the church in Haiti, Missouri, USA.



God Expects Us to Be One

Jerry Dyer

Jesus prayed on the night before He died that all who believed on Him, through the Word, would be one, just as He and His Father are one, so that the world would believe that His Father had sent Him. As Jesus' prayer continued, He emphasized the result of this "oneness." *"I in them and*

You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as you have loved Me" (John 17:20-23).

In John 13:34,35, Jesus told His disciples *"All will believe, if you have love one for another."* He wept over Jerusalem, saying that if only they had known the things that make for peace, but He went on to say *"but now they are hidden from your eyes."* How sad, how frightening, that God's chosen people — His personally protected and blessed people — missed the truth, and now it was hidden from their eyes!

We know that history can, and does, repeat itself. Is it possible today that the very family of God could actually miss the way to peace and oneness in Christ? Paul warned the Galatians that if they *"bite and devour one another beware,"* because they might be consumed by one another. How can we show that we belong to God's Son, if we *"consume one another"?*

CHURCH GROWTH

Does God expect us to go with the majority, for the sake of peace? Does He want us to choose sides and battle for “our position”? Should we follow “Brother Someone,” because he has “always stood for truth in the past”? Should we, as congregations, just pretend to have unity with other congregations, in spite of having very critical opinions of them? Should we just divide into “tiers” of adherence to the

go back to the pattern of unity and oneness that our Lord prayed for and demands of His followers? Absolutely! Where God guides, He provides. The formula for the unity God expects is in His Word, and we have His promise that following His pattern will work. Let us put aside the old paradigms that have consumed us. It is not only possible it is working, wherever Christians are following His pattern.

God's Word is very clear: we must follow the pattern in order to receive the promises! We can be united only if we follow the pattern of God.

Word of God and opinion? Can we just remain apathetic and let the “big men of the brotherhood” fight it out and then tell us what to do?

God gives us the pattern, just like He had given it to Jerusalem. Could it be that we, like Jerusalem, have let our customs, our preferences and our selfishness “hide it from our eyes”?

God's Word is very clear, we must follow the pattern in order to receive the promises! We can be united if we follow the pattern of God. We ask the unbeliever, to “go back to the pattern.” Shouldn't we

An important part of our work at the Clayton Pepper Center for Church Growth Studies is helping churches manage their diversity and deal with conflicts according to the pattern of God. Often brethren will say, “I have been a Christian many years and never heard this before.” We must shift our paradigms back to the Word of God! It is essential to our own relationship with God and in order for the world to believe. †

Jerry Dyer directs the Clayton Pepper Center for Church Growth in Nashville, Tennessee, USA.

Editor's Note:

We would like to continue with the account brother Grimm wrote concerning the existence of Christians in many places throughout the centuries following the establishment of the church in Jerusalem in AD 33. Because true Christians have always been in the minority, their history has often been ignored, even while many were dying martyrs' deaths as "heretics" at the hands of religious people. The story continues...



Persecution and Endurance

Dr. Hans Grimm

Only the especially cautious ones [Christians] stayed behind in some hiding places in the mountains of northern Armenia and in the district of Thondrak, where even to this day they have maintained themselves as a small group of 28 families. Their feeling had not betrayed them: seventy years after their return from the Islamic sphere of power, the Byzantine emperor had all the heretical churches of his Asiatic part of the empire deported to Thrace and settled there near Philippolis close by the military border just across from the Bulgarians, who were still heathen. They were to serve in a certain way as a buffer between the warlike barbarian peoples of the Balkans and the imperial city on the Bosphorus. However, they were sternly forbidden to solicit for their "heretical faith". In spite of this, the life and simple worship of these settlers made the deepest impression upon the inhabitants of their new home. Even before the turn of the millennium (first thousand years after Christ) the priest Jeremias of the eastern church had himself baptized. Under the code name of Theophilus (Friend of God) he displayed a zealous activity among his countrymen and even among the mystic circles of the monks in the hermitages of the Athos Mountains. Under the name of "Bogomiles" he entered into the church history of the great sects.

CHURCH HISTORY

Old Slavic belief in the gods and Finnish-Ugrian Schamanism of the Bulgarian lordly rank merge in many parts of the eastern Balkans with Gnostic-Manichean conceptions which non-Christian groups of heretics had brought with them, groups that had been deported at the same time as the Christians. In numerous discussions the brethren and sisters tried to protect themselves against the reproach that they had had anything at all to do with these dualistic groups of ascetics; it was all without avail. The hundreds of earnest disciples of Christ who because of their proclamation of the doctrine of the Lord (just as it had been preached by him on the mountains of Galilee) had had to mount the funeral pyres both in Constantinople, the residence of the emperor, and also in Tirnowo, the residence of the Bulgarian Grand Khan, were burned to death as "adherents of the faith in two gods."

persecutions of the decades between 1150 and 1180 in Bulgaria and Servia drove the untiring messengers of the Savior farther to the north and west. In 1115 they emerged in Albania, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, and Dalmatia; a few years later the first churches of Christ were established in northeast Italy. They were to record the seemingly greatest success in Bosnia, where at the turn of the 13th century, according to the estimates of the Catholic Inquisitors, 70 per cent of the population professed "Bogomilism". The Catholic Bishop Daniel of Poili had himself baptized in the Bosna in 1198, and the strong churches of the eastern and western state churches stood empty.

Here at the boundary of the Byzantine and Roman circles of culture also a new designation of the old evangelical church now appeared, at first used only by the people, then although very unwillingly by the officialdom of the Inquisition :

The severe persecutions of the decades between 1150 and 1180 in Bulgaria and Servia drove the untiring messengers of the Savior farther to the north and west.

In spite of this, the message of freedom in Christ kept extending farther and farther. In the year 1071 there arose in Ukraine a first church of the gospel of Christ. The severe

Katharoi, i.e., "the Pure". This term crossed over through the Italian *gazzari* to become in German the loanword *Ketzer* (i.e., Heretic), But the Roman Catholic counter-propagan-

CHURCH HISTORY

da liked much better to designate the churches of God with the name of *Pataria*, i.e., "Riffraff".

All imaginable false doctrines and abominable deeds were ascribed to the Christians. The Mendicant Orders contended emphatically that they were guilty of "unspeakable crimes" in their secret assembles, yet they were but committing the "crimes" of not acknowledging the clergy and the sacraments given out by them under magical formulas, showing their preference for the New Testament over the Old Testament, rejecting all confessions of faith formulated

feel constrained to confess:

"The accusations against the Catharists of the 11th century are precisely the same as those that were raised against the Christians throughout the Roman empire in the second century: immorality, ritual murder (worship of a grotesque idol)."

Several crusades were waged against unfortunate Bosnia by the booty-greedy Croatian, Hungarian, and Venetian magnates, but these miscarried because of the brave resistance of knights and great landowners of the nation who did not belong to the churches of Christ.

...yet they were but committing the "crimes" of not acknowledging the clergy and the sacraments given out by them under magical formulas, showing their preference for the New Testament over the Old Testament, rejecting all confessions of faith formulated by the religious councils, and making their plea for the Word of God alone.

by the religious councils, and making their plea for the Word of God alone. In the Roman Catholic church history and also in the Protestant reference works, in many cases without inspection, these brethren were haunted by the false and stealthy accusations of the Catholic mission preachers. Not until the year 1927 did the Dictionary of Catholic Theology

This region, by the papal legate the Twertko Ban of 1373, was named "the cave of bandits into which all the heretics of the eastern land of the western land take refuge." Not until the cooperation of the Turkish and Catholic armies was effected in the year 1446 did Bosnia succumb. But 40,000 left their homeland that had fallen into the hands of the unbelievers and of

the superstitious, and emigrated into the inaccessible mountains of Herzegovina, where the last surviving small congregations of Christ were not annihilated until the year 1942 by bands of Nazi Vstacha.

The last report of the old congregations around Thessalonika got to Central Europe in the year 1550 when messengers of the Christians residing there came to Moravia to be convinced of the rumors that believers in the truth of the New Testament were permitted to live there in peace. Shortly after that the church in Thessalonika fell victim to a slaughter which the Moham-medan volunteers, returning from the wars in Turkey, waged against the "unbelievers" of Old Thessalonika. Only in the plateau of Witosch near Sofia were there still living in 1939 some families of the "Bogomil" faith, beloved by the poor and the unfortunate because of their unselfish willingness to help, but spied upon and persecuted by the government and the church because of their uncompromising profession of the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. †

Excerpt from Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ in Central Europe by Dr. Hans Grimm, translated by Dr. H.L. Schug, and printed by Firm Foundation, P.O. Box 210876, Bedford, Texas, 76095-7876, USA.

Note: The Bibliography will be given at the conclusion of the series of articles. Editor.

What Follows Baptism?

If "...old things have passed away..." and "...all things have become new..." (2 Corinthians 5:17) through baptism, what effect does this have on the new Christian?

The new life means new relationships, new priorities, new standards of behavior. It means that we will continue to **study God's word** so that we can grow in our likeness to our Father. It means that we will **assemble with the church**, our spiritual brothers and sisters, to worship God. We will deal with our associates, and with all people, in a **caring way**, doing unto others as we would have them to do unto us (Matthew 7:12). We will be eager to talk to others about the new life we have found in Christ.

Sometimes people want to relegate "religion" to no more than an "outward form" and the "rituals" of "worship". But true Christianity permeates every day and every aspect of life.

Next: What is the "Family of God"?

THE HEART OF GOD

David Deffenbaugh

The parable of the prodigal son is one of the best known and best loved of Jesus' parables. As in all the Master's teachings, many wondrous and abiding lessons are to be learned. Yet, this parable does not stand by itself. It is but one third of a message. The fifteenth chapter of Luke, in which the parable is found, presents a trio of parables, all of which teach a single truth.

The first of the three parables is that of the lost sheep (verses 4-7), the second, the parable of the lost coin (verses 8-10), and finally, the parable of the prodigal, or lost son (verses 11-32). The unvarying refrain from the first to the third of these parables is the joy in heaven over the lost being found (verses 7,11,32).

What is the single message to be gleaned from the three? In these parables Jesus allows mankind to look into the heart of God. God's passion is for the lost. The lost are those who have gone away from Him, and when they do, He feels a sense of loss. He is the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to find the one. He is the homemaker who lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches diligently for the solitary lost coin. He is the father whose

eyes longingly scan the distant horizon to catch sight of a rebellious boy returning home. Jehovah's desire is for lost humanity.

One should realize that these parables, as Alexander Maclaren explains, "were not meant to set forth with anything like completeness either what wanderers had to do to go back to God, or what God had done to bring wanderers back to Himself." While the Bible clearly tells of God's redemptive work on behalf of mankind and His redemptive plan for man's return, that is not the intent here.

The need for such a message is learned from these parables' setting (verses 1-3). Sadly, there are many people presuming to serve God who do not share the Father's love for the lost. The elder brother demonstrates that it is even possible for one in the Father's house not to know the Father's heart. This becomes evident when the diligent effort to win the lost is absent, and hesitance to receive the repentant is present.

The child of God, to truly be such, must share the heart of God. †

David Deffenbaugh preaches for the church in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, USA.



This should be the prayer of every Christian. We should be praying for courage to set up Bible studies and the wisdom to effectively teach the Word. Those who are diligently involved in soul winning are those who actively and regularly commune with God in prayer. When we care enough for lost souls to pray about them, we will usually work much harder in teaching the Gospel of Christ.

Each of us has friends who have not obeyed the Gospel, and many thoughts go through our minds when trying to decide how to reach them. Many of us are afraid we will lose their friendship if we talk to them about Christ. Be assured that most will welcome and appreciate those friends who care enough to talk to them about where

they will spend eternity.

We must also prepare ourselves to *teach* by diligently *studying* our Bibles. We need not think that we have to be able to answer every question — we will never be able to do so — but we do need to be able to go to the Scriptures and teach the Gospel plan of salvation.

The problem with many of us is that we simply do not care enough about lost souls to make the effort. It has often been said that *people don't care how much we know until they know how much we care*, and that sentiment is so true. Love has to be such a strong force in our lives that it will motivate us to get up and go teach others about Jesus. When we confront the lost in a loving and kind manner, we will have much success in reaching them.

The Lord commanded His disciples to go teach, and that great commission is still in effect today. If we will devote as much time to study and teaching as we do to making excuses, the borders of the kingdom will surely be increased. Heaven is certainly a wonderful place; prepare to spend eternity there! And our going there just may depend upon our taking someone with us. †

Dale Grissom is an active and successful soul winner in the Lord's church in Dexter, Missouri, USA.

CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

There are many times in the lives of children (even older people) when they are called on to back up their words with actions. It may be that a boy states that he can hit a baseball farther than anyone else. One may claim that he is stronger than the others. Another may say he can run faster than anyone else in the neighborhood. On and on the list of claims could go. Yet

to each of these claims there is the common response of challenge: "Prove it!" Even at a very early age in life, children want to see something proven rather than just talked about. Even parents have to be careful what they claim, for the children will surely call their hand.

I read an article that contained the following question concerning members of the church. "How many members have to tell us what they believe instead of showing it?" It is true that a Christian must tell others about God, Christ, the church, Christianity, etc. However,

it is also true that just stating beliefs is no acceptable substitute for showing them in our lives. We can go to

great lengths and into much detail telling people about how great the church is, how wonderful Christianity is, what God expects of us, and so on, but their reply will be, "Prove it!" They want to see such things in our lives.

◆ Onlookers will not be persuaded how wonderful Christianity is by one who constantly complains and walks around with a frown.

◆ They will not believe how wonderful God's way is, and the importance of following that way, by watching a member whose priorities in life are elsewhere.

◆ They will not be convinced of the importance of obeying the Gospel and remaining faithful by members who are not faithful in attendance, in supporting works of the church, and other such activities.

◆ They will not understand the



importance of living a godly life by members who dress immorally and who have speech habits which are corrupt.

Jesus calls for His people to let His light shine through them (Matthew 5:16). They are to show themselves a pattern of good works (Titus 2:7). Their faith is to be seen in their actions (James 2:17,18). Other people are to be led to glorify God by their good works (1 Peter 2:12). Jesus stated that only those who exhibited His ways in their lives would receive life eternal (Matthew 25:31-46).

While it is true that we must *tell* the world of our lives as Christians, rest assured their reply is for us to **"Prove it!"** by our lives.

Do you have to tell someone of your Christianity, or can they already see it in your life? †

Robert L. Moss preaches for the Hillcrest Church of Christ in Neosho, Missouri, USA.

Think About It...

We'll never bring all the world into Christ until we bring Christ into the world.

We'll have no faith in the mission before us unless we have faith in the Master behind us.

We'll never get others to obey the commands until we obey the commission.

We can't make Christ mean anything to others until we make Him mean everything to us.

Let's not say jeeringly, "Look what the world is coming to!" but joyfully say, "Look what has come to the world!"

We'll never get excited over sowing the seed until we get excited over seeing the need.

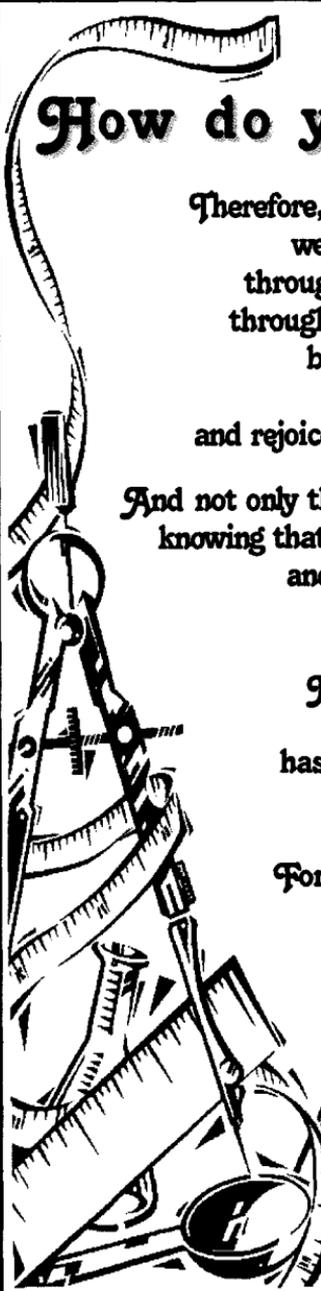
We'll have more conversions when we have more convictions.

We'll never get others to see the joy of claiming Christ until we get ourselves to see the joy of proclaiming Christ.

We'll never really consider the lost until we stop considering the cost.

We won't have to pay the penalty in the reaping if we are willing to pay the price in the sowing.

— George Bailey



How do you measure up?

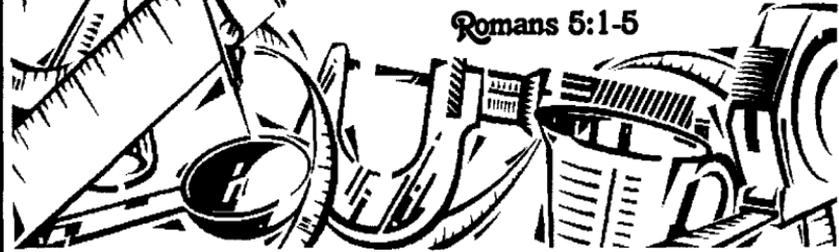
Therefore, having been justified by faith,
we have peace with God
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
through whom also we have access
by faith into this grace
in which we stand,
and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations,
knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;
and perseverance, character;
and character, hope.

Now hope does not disappoint,
because the love of God
has been poured out in our hearts
by the Holy Spirit
who was given to us.

For when we were still without strength,
in due time
Christ died
for the ungodly.

Romans 5:1-5





Neglect of One's Neighbor

Carl B. Robinson

Neglect of one's neighbor can send his soul and ours to hell (Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:1-9). It can be as damning as the unbelief that keeps some from becoming Christians in the first place (Mark 16:16).

The great commission is for every disciple: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The Lord commanded that the new disciples be taught "...to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you...." (Matthew 28:19,20). He had just commanded them to teach so as to baptize, so He was going a step further in His instructions by commanding that

every baptized person be taught the necessity of teaching and baptizing others. This is given in the form of a command, not a choice or an option. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any-time we should let them slip.... How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation...?" (Hebrews 2:1-3). The neglect of our neighbor's salvation is neglecting our own salvation. Yes, we are to be our "...brother's (neighbor's) keeper" (Genesis 4:9).

The Christian's Salvation Is at Stake

The Lord will take vengeance on

those that neglect obeying the gospel with an everlasting destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9), and on those that go back to the world (2 Peter 2:20-22). Oh how pitiable! But, it is not enough not to murder, cheat, steal and mistreat your wife or husband. If a neighbor is in physical danger, unrecognized by him, it would be criminal neglect to fail to warn him. He is more mistreated when his eternal destiny is at stake, if he is not warned of "...*the error of his way...*" (James 5:19,20). If you see the good that you might do, yet

a general responsibility to others. Still, they have explained it away with the false reasoning of excuses, giving up the battle for a neighbor's soul, possibly without even a struggle. "He will not listen," or "It will not do any good," has been the cry. Can you know before the effort has been made? Many souls have been converted after repeated refusals. Have you said that you did not know how to teach others, or that you did not know enough Scripture? Yet, probably you have made little or no effort to study so that you

The one-talent man was not condemned because of inability. He was not a murderer, an adulterer, or a thief. He faithfully kept what he had for the Lord, but *he was not fruitful*. He brought himself back, but this wicked and slothful servant brought no new possession for his Lord.

do not try to do it, have you not been guilty of sin? (James 4:17). The neighbor is neglecting his salvation. You are also neglecting your neighbor's salvation, and therefore your own salvation is caught up in the neglect (Ezekiel 3:17; 33:1-9).

The Folly of Excuses

Christians, especially, do not want or intend to be eternally lost. Some have understood that there is

might learn how to win souls. Experienced personal workers will be glad to have you as their assistant. You can learn by observation, while helping handle equipment and giving moral support. Far too many claim to be one-talent people, though they actually have the potential ability to grow if they would use the talent they do have. Give yourself this opportunity by studying personally and working with others

of more knowledge and insight.

The one-talent man was not condemned because of inability. Neither was he condemned because of what could be called "crimes". He was not a murderer, an adulterer, or a thief. He even faithfully kept what he had for the Lord, but *he was not fruitful*. He brought himself back, but this wicked and slothful servant *brought no new possession for his Lord*. What greater possession could he bring than another soul? This is the ultimate of the "interest" God wants on His investment. Because the slothful servant gained no other "talent", **the unused talent** was taken away, and his condemnation was "...Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30).

The Condemnation of the Negligent

Have you intended to speak to a neighbor about his salvation, but neglected it until he passed into eternity, because of the press of other things? When such negligence is neglecting your own salvation, what could be more important?

In Ezekiel 3:17-21 we read:

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me:

"When I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand.

"Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

"Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not give him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand.

"Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul."

No doubt many children of God are unprofitable because of sins they commit, including the sin of neglect of a neighbor's salvation. Is it any wonder that the road to destruction is broad and that it is so easy for the masses to enter therein? †



As each bird flaps its wing, it creates an “uplift” for the bird following. By flying in a “V” formation, the whole flock adds 71% longer flying range than if each bird flew alone.

People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier when they travel on the thrust of one another.

Whenver a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to fly alone, and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front.

If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation with those who are headed where we want to go.

When the lead goose tires, it rotates back into the formation and another goose takes over at the point position.

It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership because people, like geese, are interdependent upon each other.

The geese in formation honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

We need to make sure our honking from behind is encouraging, not something less helpful.

When a goose gets sick or wounded or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow her down to help and protect her. They stay with her until she is either able to fly again or she dies. Then they launch out on their own, either with another formation or to catch up with the original flock.

If we have as much sense as the geese, we'll stand by each other like they do, until we've completed our long migratory flight and have reached the security of God's new heaven and earth. †

Adapted from "A Lesson from the Geese" by Milton Olson.

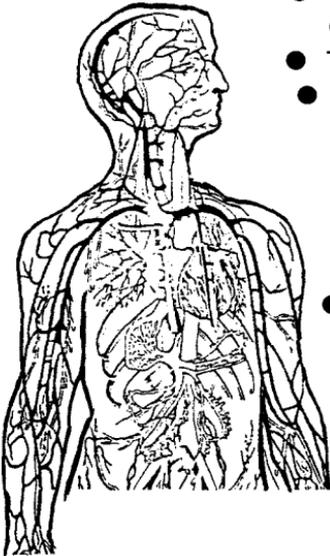
Did Man Just Happen?

Or must we conclude that Supreme Intelligence designed man?

Psalm 139:14

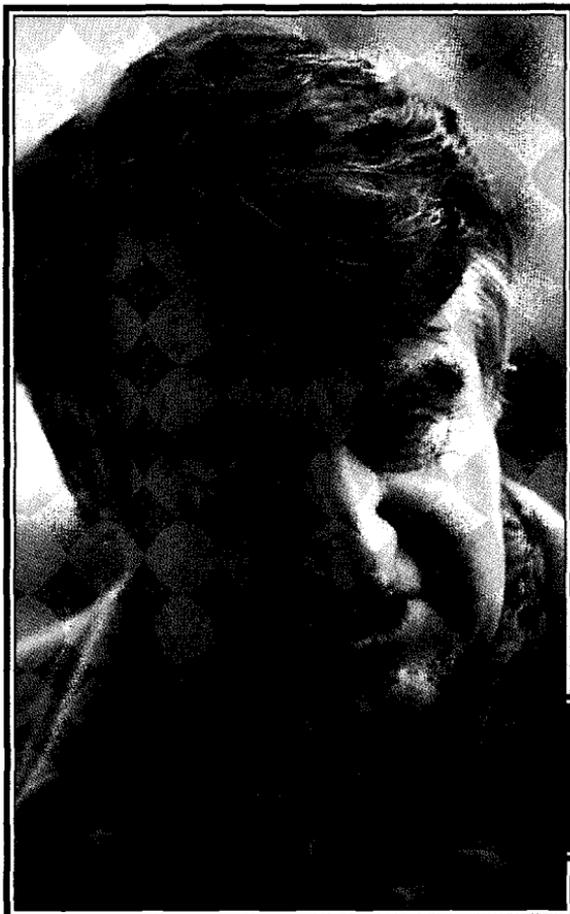
I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

God's Created Marvels:



- Self-restoring, self-repairing healing system.
- Sensitive, stereophonic auditory system.
- Tireless muscular-connecting tissue system.
- Rugged yet sophisticated digestive system.
- Analytical, sensitive taste-smell system.
- Well engineered skeletal framework.
- Extensive blood circulatory system.
- Computerized memory-bank system.
- Ultra-sensitive nerve network.
- Programmed glandular-hormone system.
- Filtered, warmed respiratory system.
- Ventilation-insulation skin envelope.
- Waste recycle and disposal systems.
- Unfathomable reproductive system.
- Voice and language mechanisms.
- Elaborate danger-warning system.
- Living-color optical system

**Could such marvelous machinery
come from blundering chance?**



There are so many "I will" statements from the great book of Psalms. Old Testament writings were preserved for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11). Hopefully many people have made promises like these we notice in this article. What kind of promises have you made for the future? Promises and intentions are profitable *only* if they are good ones and *only* if they are kept. Let us

I WILL

Vance Hutton

notice the following good promises. They

then will be profitable to us if we keep them faithfully.

1. **I will take heed to my ways:** Psalm 39:1 contains this precious promise and resolution. Will we in the future do a better job of taking heed to our ways? Hebrews 2:1 speaks of **giving the more earnest heed to the things we have heard**. Hebrews 3:12 presents the challenge and warning about **taking heed lest we depart from the living God**. Timothy was admonished to **take heed to himself** (1 Timothy 4:16), and Paul challenged the elders of Ephesus to **take heed unto themselves** (Acts 20:28). All are called upon to **take heed lest we fall** (1 Corinthians 10:12). May we all

DAILY CHRISTIAN LIVING

take heed to our thoughts, words, deeds, attitudes, priorities, and affections. Self-examination is so vital (2 Corinthians 13:5). How Christ-like are we (1 John 2:6)? Whether or not heaven is our eternal home will be largely determined by how we take heed to our ways (1 Corinthians 6:9).

2. **I will put my trust in God:** *“I will trust in thee”* (Psalm 56:3). *“In God have I put my trust”* (Psalm 56:11). *“I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord”* (Psalm 121:1,2). *“...I believe God”* (Acts 27:25). **Faith requires trust** (Hebrews 11:6). Without it we cannot please God. *“...be strong in the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:10). *“Rejoice in the Lord”* (Philippians 4:4). Without Christ, we could do nothing (John 15:5). Christ provides strength for every occasion (Philippians 4:13).

3. **I will praise God:** Psalm 119:7 holds the resolution of the psalmist to **worship God**. *“...worship God”* (Revelation 22:9). God seeks our worship (John 4:23). A trait that hopefully will always describe us is that we are a people that worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3). Let us never turn our backs on the assembly (Hebrews 10:25). God is truly worthy to be praised.

4. **I will be obedient to God:** *“I will keep thy statutes”* (Psalm 119:8). *“I will delight myself in thy commands”* (Psalm 119:47). I will meditate in thy precepts (Psalm 119:93). Nothing can replace the desire to know and obey the will of God. Such folks will have right to heaven (Matthew 7:21). Christ is *“the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him”* (Hebrews 5:8,9).

5. **I will be thankful:** *“At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee...”* (Psalm 119:62). *“In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God...”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18). *“...be ye thankful”* (Colossians 3:15). God is so good to us. We have been blessed immensely. It is vital that we remember what He has done for us, with a heart filled with thanksgiving.

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Philippians 4:6).

What are your “I wills”? Make good ones. Keep them!



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Give Thanks to God

Nine men cleansed from leprosy stand out in the Gospel as examples of ingratitude. Ten lepers met Christ and cried, "Master, have mercy on us." All were cleansed, but only one turned back to give thanks. Jesus asked, "Were not the ten cleansed? But where are the nine" (Luke 17:17)?

Webster defines ingratitude as "insensibility to kindness." Men through retaliation render evil for evil, but an ungrateful person renders evil for good. The Christ-like personality seeks to overcome evil with good.

Examples of Gratitude

David, Daniel, and Jonah are described as grateful people. When David was old, after he had served as Israel's able king, he said to God before all the assembly, "Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name...for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee" (1 Chronicles 29:13,14). David gave thanks to God because he realized that God had made his possessions possible. Whatever man enjoys comes through the kindness of God.

Daniel interpreted the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar by the help of God. Daniel was grateful to God and prayed, "I thank thee, and praise



thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and has now made known unto me what we desired of thee: for thou hast made known unto

Willard Collins

us the king's matter"
(Daniel 2:23). God made Daniel great, and Daniel was appreciative.

From within the stomach of the great fish a penitent Jonah gave thanks to God. In the course of the prayer he said, "But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed" (Jonah 2:9). Jonah rebelled against the Almighty, and he was given another chance. He was grateful for this added opportunity.

Jesus exemplified gratefulness to God in everyday life, and Paul commanded it. When Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, "He took a cup and gave thanks" (Matthew 26:27). Paul summed up our duty by writing, "In everything give thanks: for this is the law of God in Christ Jesus to youward" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The ungrateful individual cannot walk in the steps of Christ and Paul. †

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Profanity

Frank Chesser

The power of speech is a marvelous thing. The compassionate heart beats sympathetically for those who are unable to communicate with the spoken word. Their loved ones have felt the warmth of their embrace, but have never heard their expressions of love and affection.

Profanity is a vile and odious abuse of speech. It is man's stupidity on exhibition. It is evidence of a heart whose arteries run black with sin, "*for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*" (Matthew 12:34).

There is nothing "big" about cursing. Filthy speech cannot add one inch to a man's stature. A tongue bred in a gutter provides no basis for boasting. Cursing is an act of cowardice. It takes courage to buck the tide, but those who curse "*follow a multitude to do evil*" (Exodus 23:2).

Some bless God's name in prayers on Sunday and take His name in vain on Monday. "*Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing*" (James 3:10). Such people have a "church house" religion. They put on their Sunday

speech to match their Sunday dress while hastening to change both by Monday.

Profanity is as common as the cold. In the home, school, and factory, at work and play, the repulsive sound of vile speech permeates the air. In the use thereof, many have graduated from amateur to professional status. They are proficient in sin.

Profane speech is a manifestation of wickedness. It is the wicked that are "*full of cursing*" (Proverbs 10:7). Those characterized by such speech shall be ushered into a Christless eternity, for one with a tongue that is "*set on fire of hell*" (James 3:6) cannot be an heir of heaven.

"*But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth*" (Colossians 3:8). Clothe your tongue with speech that will promote righteousness, encourage man, and be fit for the ear of God. †

Frank Chesser is a gospel preacher working with the Panama Street Church of Christ in Montgomery, Alabama, USA.

IS HOMOSEXUALITY WRONG?

Charles E. Burch



The answer one would receive to this question depends on who gives the answer. Many want to offer their own opinion, but opinions will not judge us in the end. Homosexuals argue that it is only an alternate life style and is not sinful. In fact they distort the word of God to justify their unnatural behavior. Therefore, let us go to God's word, for it will judge everyone at the end of time (John 12:48).

DAILY CHRISTIAN LIVING

Gods word says, *“If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them”* (Leviticus 20:13). In Genesis 19, God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of homosexuality. They would not repent. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul also condemned the practice. *“For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their own lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly...”* (Romans 1:26,27). There are many other scriptures which reveal homosexuality to be a sin.

But homosexuals can and have changed! The apostle Paul states that there were some in Corinth who had ceased the unnatural practice of homosexuality. *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexual, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of our God”* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NKJV).

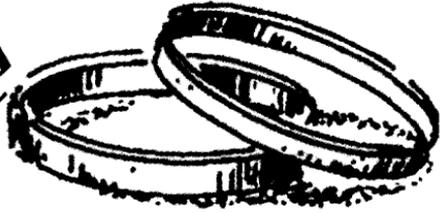
The apostle said, *“And such WERE some of you”*, not such **are** some of you. This plainly states that some of the Corinthians had been guilty of homosexuality, but they had ceased to practice the sin and had turned to God for cleansing. The passage teaches that one can stop practicing any and all of the sins listed. When one ceases from sin and turns to God, he can be washed, sanctified, and justified. **Homosexuals can and have changed!** God does not see homosexuality as *an alternate life style*, but as *a sin* that will cause one to be lost in a devil's hell in eternity, if he does not repent and receive God's forgiveness through obedience. God loves all people, but He cannot save anyone who is living in sin. God will give anyone the needed strength to leave sin, if he truly seeks to do so.

God, through His word, teaches us to **love everyone**. And love everyone we must! Yet at the same time God teaches us to **hate sin**. The homosexual community says this is impossible, for *“if you hate what I do you hate me.”* This is why so often, when a homosexual is murdered it is immediately called a hate crime. Homosexuality is an unnatural act between two people of the same sex. GOD says it is sin! †

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Marriage

Ken Tyler



Marriage is a divine institution (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-24). When carried out according to God's plan, it is truly a beautiful relationship. As a matter of fact, in Ephesians 5:22-33 the husband and wife relationship is likened unto that of Christ to His bride, the church.

Marriage is beautiful, that is, unless it has been perverted. Sadly we must say this to be the condition of so many marriages today. I'm sure you could give example after example of homes that are broken. We should be alarmed over the condition of the home and try to do something to help the situation.

M. F. McKnight has defined marriage as "an agreement by which a man and woman consent to live together as husband and wife for the purpose of establishing a home, mutually accepting all of the responsibilities that the relationship involves and rightfully expecting all the privileges incident thereto."

All of us must realize that in God's plan marriage is "till death us do part." Listen carefully to Romans 7:2,3, "*For the woman*

which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man." We are told by Jesus in Matthew 19:6, "*...What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."*

When two marry it is to be until death parts them, and every couple must realize this before they become husband and wife. Many enter into marriage as a trial and error proposition and then, instead of trying to work out the problems that arise, they just simply say, "We are incompatible," and break off the relationship. Marriage is not to be taken lightly. We must wake up before divorce completely destroys the home. †

Ken Tyler is the preacher for the church of Christ in Arab, Alabama, USA.



We Must Start at Home!

Randy White

As the Christian looks upon this great nation in which we live, it is certainly with a tremendous amount of concern! Each day that passes only brings more tragic news. Homosexuality, immorality, divorce, and every form of ungodliness known is rapidly gaining ground. This being true, we should all be concerned, for God has never tolerated rampant ungodliness for long. On this point Solomon said, *“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people”* (Proverbs 14:34). As one reviews history it is easy to see where

“unrighteousness” was the downfall of every powerful nation up to this time.

Concerning Israel, God warned, *“Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin”* (Ezekiel 18:30). This could, and should, be said of the world today! We need to repent of our sinful ways so that God will continue to bless our nation!

But, as we ponder this thought, where do we begin? As it has been from the dawn of time, God’s plan begins with the family — with

THE CHRISTIAN HOME

godly fathers, mothers, and children filling their roles as God commands. Satan has the world so busy trying to fight the so-called “big” things that we have lost sight of what is most important!

To the fathers, God has always given the responsibility of spiritual leadership and family guidance. Abraham, Noah, and many other fathers in biblical history have taken this role seriously, even to the saving of their house!

Concerning this thought, the Apostle Paul said, “...*fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*” (Ephesians 6:4). Solomon had already stated many years before this, “*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*” (Proverbs 22:6). Far too many of our fathers today are shunning their God-given responsibility to train, both by example and by teaching!

To the mothers God gave an equally important role concerning the home and heaven. The Apostle Paul, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, instructed the older women to teach the younger to be, “...*sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed*” (Titus 2:4,5). Chauvinism, the

“equal rights” movement, and many other worldly forces have caused women to feel that motherhood and keeping the home are degrading, compromising, or a “second best” way to spend their talents and lives. They are wrong.

The greatest thing this writer remembers being in our home was my mother! She taught me the very core values that I possess today. Unfortunately, mankind has tried to improve upon God’s plan and it has turned out to be a disastrous thing for the home and the family. Daycare centers, schools, and many other institutions are teaching our children values that may not be our own. God’s plan never intended for someone else to replace the mother in the home.

To the child, God also gave a plan. The Apostle Paul said, “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise*” (Ephesians 6:1,2). In order for children to learn how to honor their parents they must first be taught! This responsibility was given to both the mother and the father.

Far too many children today do not understand this principle of respect, which applies not only to parents but ultimately to every authority figure — even to God! In fact, in order for a child to learn to

THE CHRISTIAN HOME

honor his parents properly, he must first learn to honor God. This is where the father is failing today. Solomon said, "*Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying*" (Proverbs 19:18). Our children must learn that when they dishonor their parents, they have dishonored God!

Sometimes children will question or defy parents, and an angry parent may respond, "You do this because 'I' say so!" But children need to learn that the parent is functioning under a rule of authority, too — God **requires** parents to train their children to be obedient.

A good way to enforce parental authority is to begin at an early age teaching children that just as they must be obedient to their parents, the parents, themselves, must be obedient to God. Part of parental obedience to God is teaching obedience and respect for authority to their children.

As stated earlier, Satan has us running in circles! We are so concerning ourselves with things of this

world that we have forgotten God's real plan. If our children are taught to pray at home the government cannot stop them elsewhere! If they are taught to dress modestly at home, then we will not have to worry when they leave home! This same rule applies to language, respect for authority, work, and many other areas of life.

Solomon said, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation*" and how true this is! If we wish to change all the ungodliness going on around us, let us first begin with our household! Joshua said, "*...choose you this day whom ye will serve: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD*" (Joshua 24:15).

This is not to say that we should not do all we can to fight against the sinful things being promoted in our society. But we should never get so busy with the world's needs that we forget our real responsibilities at home. †

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A house is made of wooden beams.
A home is made of love and dreams.

Somebody said being a mother is what you do in your spare time.... Somebody doesn't know that when you're a mother, you're a mother ALL the time...

Parents can teach their children about good communication by using good habits in dealing with their offspring. When children begin to speak, it is important to put down the paper, turn off the television, or set aside our work, whenever possible. This demonstrates a genuine interest in the child and his thoughts, therefore making him feel he has special worth to someone.

Examples Dad and Mom Can Set For Their Children

Gary C. Hampton

Importance should be placed upon getting a clear understanding of the child's point before responding. Remember, James said, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath"* (James 1:19). A good way to do this is to repeat in your own words what you heard him say. In this way, he will be able to correct any misunderstandings you may have, and you will be better able to answer his concerns.

Parents also need to demonstrate self-control in discussions with their children.



THE CHRISTIAN HOME

Flying off the handle at little problems tends to say to them that such behavior is acceptable for them when little things go contrary to their wishes.

Do not forget to let your children see you communicate with God. Especially remember to let them hear you expressing thanks for all the blessings God has given. Further, be sure to acknowledge your need for the guidance of the Almighty. Then, call each child by name in your prayer and ask for God's help in teaching them to become great servants in the kingdom. In one case I know, a man also prayed for the ones rearing the future spouse of each of his children. It should be added that both boys married wonderful Christian women.

It is good for children to see their parents admit mistakes and repent of sins. Those who have grown up around adults who would never admit that they had erred have unrealistic expectations of themselves, and a training in false pride that refuses to acknowledge one's own wrongs. When they fall short, there will be a tendency to be severely disappointed with self, internally, while refusing to admit any wrong to others. Such conflicted hearts have a rough emotional road ahead.

Ironically, those who will

humbly admit their sins will find a loving heavenly Father ready to lift them up and help them rear children better prepared to overcome failure. Peter's experience should help us to realize the Lord's readiness to forgive and restore the penitent one. On the night of His betrayal, "*The Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren'*" (Luke 22:31,32).

Despite his strong objections to the contrary, Peter did go on to deny the Lord three times. When he realized what he had done, the impetuous apostle went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:31,32, 54-62). After the resurrection, Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved Him, and he responded in the affirmative each time. Jesus then instructed him to feed His sheep.

Peter did precisely that, emphasizing, for all who, like him, had too much pride, the importance of humbling oneself before God if one would be lifted up (1 Peter 5:6). In much the same way, parents who can admit their mistakes, and learn from them, are better prepared to help their offspring overcome failure. †

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The Third Candidate

Barbara Cagle Ray

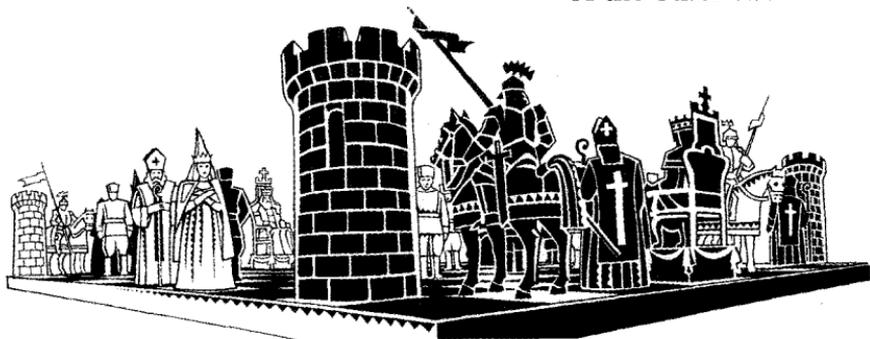
The king summoned candidates to honor each year;
Their accomplishments had to be of great magnitude.
After his advisors carefully screened the nominees,
Each was presented to the king to be interviewed.

The first was a physician, who was well known,
For he treated patients with no means to pay.
The second was a businessman of great wealth
Who used his fortune to help others each day.

The third candidate came before the throne;
She was a woman whose hair was silver-gray.
“What have you accomplished?” asked the king.
“I am a mother,” was all the lady had to say.

“So you are a mother,” mocked the king.
“Why should I bestow this honor upon you?”
One of his aides stepped forward and said,

“Your Honor, she’s the mother
of the other two.”



The Eternal Crown

John R. Vaughn

An old Roman soldier retired after 40 years of service: 10 as a private and 30 years as an officer. He had fought 123 battles, and been wounded 45 times. He had been awarded 14 civic crowns for saving the life of a Roman citizen; 3 mural crowns for being the first to climb the breach and 8 golden crowns for retrieving the standard of a Roman legion from the hands of the enemy. He also had 83 golden chains, 60 bracelets, 18 golden spears and 23 horse trappings, the spoils of war.

Faithfulness is always rewarded. As a Christian who has been faithful to the Lord, your rewards will far exceed those of the Roman soldier. His were temporal, yours are eternal. Notice what the Bible says about your reward:

1. **It is a crown of righteousness:** *"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: but not to me only, but also to all them that have loved His appearing"* (2 Timothy 4:8).

2. **It is a crown of life:** *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life,*

which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him" (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).

3. **It is a crown of joy:** *"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at His coming?"* (1 Thessalonians 2:10).

4. **It is an incorruptible crown:** *"And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible"* (1 Corinthians 9:25).

5. **It is an enduring substance:** *"For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and enduring substance"* (Hebrews 10:34).

God's reward is the best. It is an eternal motivation for building a positive life (1 Corinthians 15:58). Grow in the Lord. Continue steadfast in Bible reading and prayer. Grow in faith and faithfulness, and in bearing fruit to Him, for the rewards are out of this world. †

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COMFORT AND REASSURANCE

It was a time of national disaster. Not only had they lost the war, but their king had committed suicide. Their fighting men had fled before the enemy and had fallen slain upon Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31). When the people saw that the men of Israel had run from the battle and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their own cities and fled also. Chaos reigned.

But amidst the ruin, one thing remained...his faith. Faith's focus is God and His ability to keep what He has promised (Romans 4:20,21). The passage of time does not diminish its confidence. The Scriptures simply say, "*But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God*" (1 Samuel 30:6).

In our day and age we would have expected David to blame the

Strengthened in the Lord

Jeril (Polly) Cline

This was a time of personal turmoil as well. While the nation he loved was enduring great duress, David's adopted hometown, Ziklag, was raided and burned. The Amalekites had taken captive all the women and children. Facing the burned-out rubble along with the loss of their families, David and his men lifted up their voices and wept till there was no strength left in them to weep (1 Samuel 30). Could things get any worse?

With no one knowing where their sons and daughters were, the men openly talked of stoning David. They were embittered and wanted revenge. Defeat and death, devastation and disloyalty surrounded him, and "*David was greatly distressed*" (1 Samuel 30:6).

loss of his faith on the difficulties he endured while trying to live a good life. How could God have let such things happen to him? Blame God. Blame the circumstances. Blame the government. Blame... blame... blame. But do not continue walking by faith. The world would regard that as foolish.

Faith is a deliberate choice to believe God and entrust oneself to Him. Personal faith requires personal accountability. When all else is crumbling and darkness is descending, then the true health of our spiritual well-being is revealed.

David took his relationship with God seriously. He felt responsible for strengthening himself in the Lord who had become his very own God. He refused to blame oth-

COMFORT AND REASSURANCE

ers for not encouraging or comforting him. In the midst of his hurt, he relied upon a relationship he had been building during easier, better times. His sustenance was not measured in money or possessions, good health, or power. God was His refuge, a very present help in time of need. No person could offer what God could. Human beings fail, even the closest and best-intentioned of them.

When, in the likeness of man, the Lord Jesus lived on this earth, He knew what it was to be responsible for strengthening Himself in His God: *“I have food to eat that you do not know about...My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work”* (John 4:32,34).

Later, when faced with the desertion of His closest friends, He reminded Himself: *“Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:32,33).

Jesus reminds us that the common experience in this world is tribulation. It comes in many forms and faces. But we have something

greater in common, our Source of peace...God Himself. The Lord knew there was no peace in this world apart from God. But by fixing our eyes upon Him (Hebrews 12:2), we become courageous, with a courage that is given by God, not for individual power or prestige, but to be used in this world so that we become victorious over all Satan’s schemes. Our common enemy knows: *“this is the victory that has overcome the world — even our faith”* (1 John 5:4). A faith like this brings glory to our Father (1 Thessalonians 1:11,12). This is why Satan’s objective is to destroy our faith in our God.

At the end of His earthly life, while upon the cross, our Lord quoted from David’s Psalms 22:1 and 31:5. Hear His very last words: *“Into Thy hands I commit my spirit”* (Luke 23:46). Only Jesus could entrust His spirit to the Father. Only I can give mine into His faithful keeping. There is no safer place for our spirit, no greater haven of peace, than in the hands of our loving God.

Cease striving, and strengthen yourself in the Lord your God. Commit your heart and soul and spirit to the One Who is faithful while you are alive and have such an opportunity. †

Jeril (Polly) Cline is a writer living in Blue Ridge, Georgia, USA.

He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.

2 Samuel 22:20



How to Stay Strong When Trouble Comes

Randal Matheny

Not the size of the struggle, but the strength of the mind determines whether we will be faithful to God. When trials and difficulties arise, the mind often grows weak.

As one proverb says, *"If you give up when trouble comes, it shows that you have very little strength"* (Proverbs 24:10, NCV).

So the question is this: How can the Christian remain strong when troubles come?

The apostle John wrote the book of Revelation to the seven churches in the region of Asia (Revelation 1:4). Christians in that area were suffering persecution because of their faith. By means of a vision given to him by God, John showed these disciples that a greater battle was going on in the invisible, spiritual world.

The Christians were few in number, with limited resources. The Roman government appeared to have the upper hand. But this battle was weighted greatly in favor of the church. Their spiritual advantage was far

COMFORT AND REASSURANCE

greater than what their physical disadvantage appeared to be.

In the beginning of his letter, John reminded these Christians of three important spiritual facts that would help them to remain faithful to Jesus. Even in an age so far removed from theirs, remembering those facts will also keep our minds firm when we face trials.

1. ***“He is the One who loves us”*** (Revelation 1:5). Suffering for the sake of the gospel should never cause us to doubt God’s love for us. God’s own Son suffered the horrible death of crucifixion in order to save many people. We may be sure, therefore, that when God allows His people to suffer it is in order that many may be saved.

2. ***“And he is the One who has made us free from our sins with the blood of his death”*** (Revelation 1:5). God has also forgiven our sins. Our sufferings should never cause us to doubt that we have been pardoned and welcomed back into God’s fellowship. At times, you might think that something you have done in the past still causes God to let you suffer. It is true, of course, that forgiveness often cannot remove the *consequences of sin*, but it does remove the *guilt*. The message revealed through John in Revelation is a reaffirmation to all Christians that forgiveness is real, even though we may undergo great trials.

3. ***“He made us to be a kingdom of priests who serve God his Father”*** (Revelation 1:6). When Jesus saved us at our baptism and added us to His church, we became a part of His kingdom. This means we obey Him in everything. He is king, and we are His faithful subjects. It also means that we work to build up His kingdom. John says that we serve God. His work is to save more and more people from sin. When we suffer persecution, we must remember that our work still must be done. We cannot let our difficulties keep us from teaching others that only Jesus saves. In fact, we should expect to be persecuted. Showing the power of God when we are under trials is a part of our work.

From the very beginning of his letter of Revelation, John shows us how to remain faithful when we are persecuted. He moves our attention away from ourselves. He directs our thoughts to the person of Christ. This apostle reminds us of Jesus’ love, of His forgiveness of our sins, and of His call for us to serve God in His kingdom.

If we remember these things, we will be firm and strong to the very end. No problem, no matter how large, will be able to move us away from Christ. †

Randal Matheny is a Christian publisher in Brazil. He edits www.Forthright.net.

PROVERBS 17:22



Question — Where do you find a dog with no legs?

Answer — Right where you left him.



Poor old cousin Ned is so behind the times that he sent me a fax with a postage stamp on it. That shouldn't be too surprising, though, because he also thinks Taco Bell is a Mexican telephone company. His wife Nell isn't much better. It takes her two hours to watch "60 Minutes." They were going out to the airport the other day and turned around and came back home after they saw the sign that said, "Airport Left."



A wise man never plants more garden than his wife can hoe.

My neighbor told me that he resents the fact that some folks say that he is hen-pecked. He said, "I'll have you know I run things at our house! I run the vacuum sweeper, I run the washing machine, I run the dishwasher..."



"Sorry, we don't have potted geraniums," the clerk said. She then added helpfully, "Could you use African violets?"

"No," replied the man sadly. "It was geraniums my wife told me to water."



Irate taxi driver to passenger:
"There'll be no charge, lady. You did most of the driving."



Why is it that when you transport something by car it's called a shipment, but when you transport something by ship it's called cargo?



If a man is bald in front, he's a thinker. If he's bald in the back, he is a lover. If he's bald in front and back, he thinks he's a lover.

PROVERBS 17:22

One of the fellows at the office is convinced that his wife is a direct descendant from Noah. His reasoning — when they travel she takes two of everything.



A Sunday School teacher was teaching how God created everything, including human beings. Little Johnny seemed especially intent when they told him how Eve was created out of one of Adam's ribs. Later in the week his mother noticed him lying down as though he were ill. She said, "Johnny, what is the matter?" Little Johnny answered, "I have a pain in my side. I think I must be having a wife."



Woman driver to friend:

"The part I don't like about parking is that noisy crash."



Dogs have owners. Cats have staff. Dogs believe they are human. Thousands of years ago, in Egypt, cats were worshipped as gods. They have never forgotten.

Cat's motto: No matter what you've done wrong, always try to make it look like the dog did it.

We just celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary. We went to Hawaii on our honeymoon. The airline has assured us that we should be getting our luggage any day now.



Points to Ponder

Anyone can be busy. Few are focused enough to be truly effective.

Character not only defines how we handle a situation, but in which ones we find ourselves.

A few good decisions far outweigh dozens of poorly made ones.

A willingness to sacrifice today is what brings fall's harvest and winter's provisions.

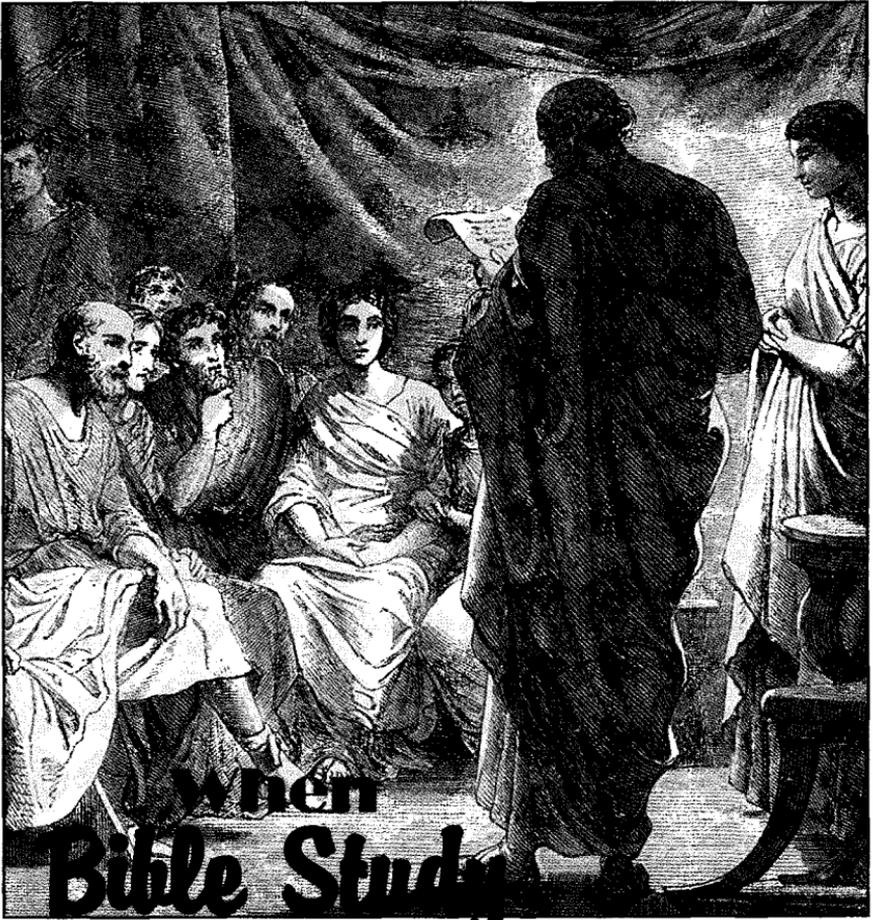
I've learned that the best classroom in the world is at the feet of an elderly person.

I've learned that just one person saying to me, "You've made my day" makes my day.

I've learned that simple walks with my father around the block on summer nights when I was a child did wonders for me as an adult.



The road to success is always under construction.



When
Bible Study
Is Beneficial

William Woodson

The study of the Bible is often regarded as the special province of scholars, academicians, and specialists in ancient history and lore.

Such a view chills the study of the Bible for the non-specialist and results in the view that the Bible is not for "ordinary folks", making it

TEXTUAL STUDIES

thus a kind of closed book for most of mankind. Such a view would hardly have included the identity of the early disciples, most of whom were of humble origin and work, and would not have been applicable at all in the early church, composed primarily of the poor, the slaves, and the ones who were not mighty in this world.

Neither is this view — that only specialists need attempt Bible study — appropriate in regard to the Bible in the church today. While one should respect what the specialist is able to provide concerning complicated word meanings, background studies, and archaeological finds, it is possible for all who will study to obtain a knowledge of Scripture which will be beneficial and strengthening to the soul.

A splendid example of profitable Bible study by ordinary people was that of those known as the “Bereans.” Of them we read:

“These were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed...” (Acts 17:11,12).

Four aspects of the Bereans’ study may be noted to attain beneficial results.

1. They had proper attitude,

“readiness of mind.” Here were people who wanted to know God’s will and were ready to receive the truth as they studied and understood it. Their hearts were open and receptive to God’s message.

2. **They had right activity,** *“searched the Scriptures daily.”* These individuals applied themselves — and that daily — to the reading, the searching of the Scriptures for the truth.

3. **They had right desire for accuracy,** *“whether those things were so.”* It mattered to these people that what was being taught would be found (or not found, as the case might have been), to be in keeping with the words of Scripture. Too much was at stake for carelessness. They wanted the truth and sought to gain it through daily, diligent study.

4. **Consequently, they enjoyed achievement,** *“Therefore many of them believed.”* The goal was attained in the growth of their faith, which led them to do the will of God.

These same qualities of heart and diligence will enable any honest person to study with profit the words of Scripture today. May each of us be diligent in this beneficial work. †

William Woodson is retired from the Bible Dept. at David Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee, USA.

What Is the Motive?

T. Pierce Brown

“Faithful is the saying, If a man seeketh the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work” (1 Timothy 3:1).

The first three times I was asked to serve as an elder, I refused because I did not feel that my present state of health would allow me to give the job the attention and service required to do justice to it. I thought of 1 Timothy 3:1, “Faithful is the saying, If a man seeketh the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.” Certainly I was not seeking the “office” (although many of us are aware that the word “office” is not in the original text). It has been said that if a person is not seeking to be an elder, he is disqualified. The text does not say that.

It could be said with equal emphasis that if a person is seeking the “office” for its power or prestige, rather than because he is faced with the responsibility to use whatever talent he has for the glory of God and the good of His church, he is disqualified. The motive with which one does what he does is often the primary factor in determining the value or propriety of the action.

My mind turned to the expression Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 1:2,3, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your **work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father.” It is more evident in the original text than it is in most of the versions that the work for which Paul was thankful was not merely work, but it was work which was based in, or produced by, faith. The importance of this cannot be overestimated. One may do any amount of good work that can be imagined, yet it has no eternal value if it is not **of faith**. Paul says in Romans 14:23, “*Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*”

Although this may not be a full commentary on the verse, it is certainly true that the motive and attitude with which a thing is done is vital. Even in the church of the Lord, we have no doubt that many works that are done are not works that are produced by faith in Christ

TEXTUAL STUDIES

or His Word, but are produced by pride, selfishness, ambition, or some other improper or unworthy motive.

The second expression Paul used is equally significant. He said, "**Labor of love.**" The primary difference in "work" (ergon) and "labor" (kopiao) seems to be in the intensity of the activity. Labor would involve greater hardship, difficulty, or sacrifice. Our point in this article is that it was a labor produced by love. This makes us think of Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 13:3, "*And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing.*" No work or worship or service that we do has any eternal value if it is not done in love. Whether we are thinking of the work of an elder or of any other work of any Christian, the same truth applies.

Paul's third statement is also significant. He remembered their "**Patience of hope.**" Patience as used in the Bible is not simply the attitude that a fisherman might have when he sits idly by a body of water, waiting for the fish to bite. The word involves bearing up under trials, persecutions, difficulties, and hardships. Even if we have that willingness or attitude, if it is not produced by the hope we have in Christ, it is not the thing for which Paul gave thanks. Our final judgment will be partly in terms of the motive and attitude with which we did what we did. This will apply to everything from our baptism, right on through the Christian life.

Why you are serving as a preacher or an elder is very important. What is your motive? †

T. Pierce Brown lives and serves the Lord in Cookeville, Tennessee, USA.

The Three "Bears" of Galatians 6

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.
For each one shall bear his own load.

From now on let no one trouble me, for **I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.**

— Jim Cox

Who Am I?

Can you identify me? Read each clue and think carefully. If you guess my name after the first clue, give yourself a score of 100 points. If you know who I am only after the fifth clue, your score is 60, etc.

When you are sure of my identity, look up the passages of scripture following each clue to verify the facts from God's word.

1. **100** I was the son of a king of Judah, and became a king myself (2 Kings 11:2,4).
2. **90** My father's mother — daughter of Ahab and Jezebel — tried to have me killed, but my nurse hid me in the temple for six years (11:1-3).
3. **80** When I was only seven years old, Jehoiada, the priest, brought me out and I was crowned king of Judah, of David's royal lineage (11:4-12).
4. **70** When they put the crown on my head, they clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!" (11:12).
5. **60** Under Jehoiada's good influence, I was a good king, repairing the temple and renewing the worship of God (12:2,5).
6. **50** I commanded the priests and Levites, "Go out to the cities of Judah, and gather from all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that you do it quickly" (2 Chronicles 24:5).
7. **40** Sadly, I was not strong in my own convictions, for when Jehoiada died, I allowed others to lead me away from God (2 Chronicles 24:17).
8. **30** Through Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, God warned me that He would forsake me because I had forsaken Him (24:20).
9. **20** My response to the son of the man who had done so much for me was to have him stoned to death (24:21).
10. **10** What happened to me? Because we had left God to serve Baal, God sent the army of the Syrians and they destroyed the leaders of Judah, leaving me wounded. My own servants killed me (24:24,25).



My Score _____

See answer on inside back cover.



There are many unanswered questions concerning Dorcas. We might wonder what she died of, how old she was, what she looked like, or how many there were in her family. However we have sufficient information to show us the real character of this woman, and to tell us something of the exemplary life she lived. Why was she adored and admired by those in the community where

A Funeral at Joppa

Acts 9:36-43

Colin McKee

she lived? Why is the story of her funeral (and restoration to life) included in holy writ? What do we learn of her life's example?

I. Dorcas used her talent as a tool for God. Working with a needle and perhaps some other instruments for sewing clothes, she provided for those around her who were in need. She followed the counsel of Paul: "*Whatever you do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord and not unto men*" (Colossians 3:23). She did not possess some unusual, extraordinary talent; just the ordinary ability to sew. She didn't have to be a surgeon, technician, lady president, or business lady to bring glory to God and serve others. She didn't excuse herself by saying, "I can't do much, so I won't try". She didn't say, "My little bit won't make any difference." She had the true spirit of a servant that Jesus called upon His followers to demonstrate.

II. Dorcas was a worker. She was "*full of good works and charitable deeds*" (v. 36). The only way to be full of good WORKS is to WORK! The only way to be FULL of good works is to be BUSY in the kingdom of God.

BIBLE CHARACTERS

Her service was not sporadic, occasional, or haphazard. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “...always abounding in the work of the Lord.” She may not have filled every need of those in her community, but she did what she could. She spent more time in working for God than she did in pleasure, recreation, or personal pursuits. No one would have been overly concerned or moved about her death if she had simply looked out for her own interests and ignored those around her. If she had not demonstrated love to her neighbors, they would not have been grieved at her parting.

III. Dorcas didn’t put off doing those things that were important. Service is not something we do in the future. It must not stop at the planning stage, or the “want to” stage. She put her faith into practice. Putting things off makes us susceptible to three dangers: **(a)** we may lose the opportunity, **(b)** we may fall to temptation, **(c)** we may die. Galatians 6:10 admonishes, “*As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*”

The life of Dorcas was so productive and useful that God allowed her to be raised to serve further in His Kingdom. When you die, will those who attend your funeral say that a true Christian servant has died? Is your life so full of good

works that it would be worthwhile to bring you back for more service? What beauty and good we can bring to the lives of others by serving as Dorcas served! †

Colin McKee works with the Lord’s church in Cleveland, Alabama, USA.

Am I Serious about Christianity?

- * Does my life glorify God and cause others to glorify Him (Matthew 5:13-16) or do I shame Him?
- * Am I happy to be a servant of God (Philippians 3:1; 4:4) or do I resent the work I do?
- * Do I love people, even to the point of loving my enemies (Matthew 5:44)?
- * Am I a daily Bible reader, serious about learning God’s will (Acts 17:11)?
- * Does my prayer life reflect my faith and trust in God (Matthew 6:5-15)?
- * Have I ever won even one soul for Jesus (2 Timothy 2:2)?
- * Am I teaching anyone the gospel and praying for their salvation (Titus 2:11-15)?
- * Am I willing to repent of sins and to correct attitudes and actions which are unChrist-like (Acts 17:30,31)?

— Mark Sherfield

John Mark —

A Case Study in Christian Maturity

Jack Harriman

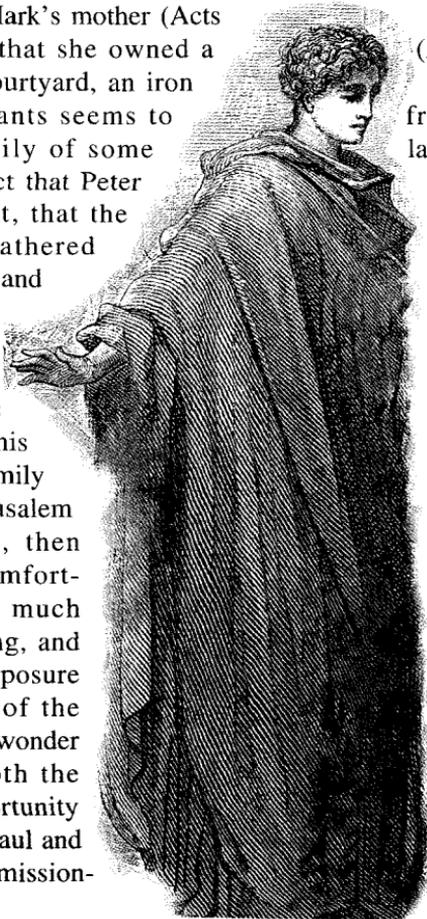
After Peter's miraculous release from prison, he went directly to the home of John Mark's mother (Acts 12). The fact that she owned a house with a courtyard, an iron gate, and servants seems to indicate a family of some means. The fact that Peter went there first, that the church was gathered there for prayer, and that Barnabas was a close relative (Colossians 4:10) leads one to believe this was a leading family in the early Jerusalem church. If so, then Mark had a comfortable lifestyle, much religious training, and considerable exposure to the leaders of the church. It is no wonder that he had both the desire and opportunity to be a part of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey.

But John Mark failed.
He quit.

He went back home (Acts 13:13).

And it is obvious from what happened later that Paul thought his leaving was unjustified (Acts 15:36-40). He must have arrived in Jerusalem with a load of guilt. How he must have dreaded facing his mother and the church!

Thankfully, someone in Jerusalem did not give up on John Mark. They helped him rebuild his self-image and his dream of being a missionary. Over the years he won back Paul's confidence and trust. Eleven years later, he was with Paul in Rome (Colossians



BIBLE CHARACTERS

4:10; Philemon 24), and Paul said of him: "...with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)". Paul's last letter pleaded for Mark's companionship: "...Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry" (2 Timothy 4:11). And above all else, the Holy Spirit chose him as the man through whom the gospel story would be revealed — the Gospel of Mark.

Two applications are readily seen in Mark's story.

First, many of today's young Christians grew up in a similar environment as John Mark — a comfortable lifestyle, a Christian home, religious training from birth, and exposure to great leaders in the church. They have enjoyed an ideal beginning, and are prepared for great service in the cause of Christ. They need to be reminded of this and encouraged to that end.

Second, John Mark's failure is typical of many of us who have those dark periods in our past — periods of instability or rebellion. John Mark had to live with the scars, and so do we. But he made a comeback, and so did we. Thank God for those who did not give up on us.

Let us not give up on others. †

Jack Harriman is a gospel preacher living in Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA.

Simon of Cyrene Bore...

Simon of Cyrene bore
The cross of Jesus
— Nothing more —
His name is never heard
again,
Nor honored by historic
pen;
Nor on the pedestal of
fame
His image courts the loud
acclaim.

Simon of Cyrene bore
The cross of Jesus
— Nothing more —
And yet when all our work
on earth is done,
And golden beams the
western sun
Upon a life of wealth and
fame,
A thousand echoes ring our
name
Perhaps our hearts will
humbly pray,
"Good Master,
Let my record say
Upon the page divine,
'He bore the cross of Jesus'
— Nothing more."

— Anonymous

Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart, or Did Pharaoh Harden His Own Heart?



Kevin L. Moore

The Bible mentions Pharaoh's heart being hardened as a result of the demands God made and the signs He performed in Egypt (Exodus 7:13,14,22,23; 8:19; 9:7,35; 14:5). So who was responsible for Pharaoh's stubbornness?

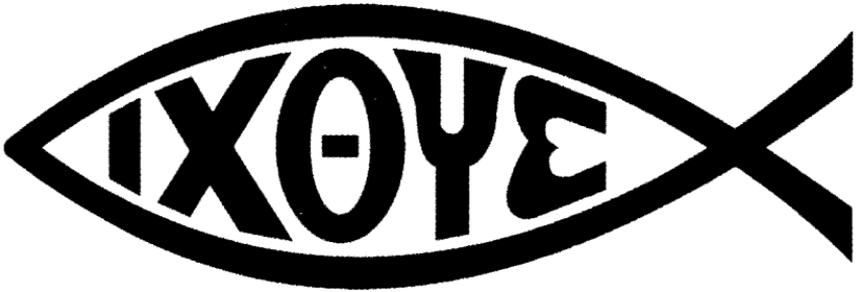
The Bible says that **God** hardened Pharaoh's heart (Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; 11:10; 14:4, 8,17), but it also affirms that **Pharaoh** hardened *his own heart* (Exodus 8:15,32; 9:34). The answer lies in understanding how Pharaoh's heart was hardened. God hardened Pharaoh's heart *simply by making demands that Pharaoh didn't like*. Pharaoh hardened his own heart *because of his own stubborn pride*

and rebellion. God did not take away his free will.

Just as the sun has different effects on wax and clay (it softens one and hardens the other), so the Word of God has different effects on those who hear it. When a Christian goes door-to-door to share the Gospel, he will inadvertently make some people angry, while others will be appreciative.

God's actions and demands in Egypt softened the hearts of some (Exodus 9:20; 10:7), but hardened the heart of Pharaoh. It was not simply a matter of what God did that made the difference, but rather the condition of Pharaoh's heart. †

Kevin L. Moore works with the church of Christ in Wanganui, New Zealand.



What about the Sign of the Fish?

Wayne Jackson

Question: "I have seen the small emblem of a fish on many cars. Sometimes the name 'Jesus' is enclosed; sometimes there are foreign letters. Now I am seeing the same fish-sign with the name 'Darwin' within. What is the significance of this?"

The fish became a symbol for Christianity in the early days of the post-apostolic church. It is frequently found carved on the walls of the catacombs beneath the ancient city of Rome. The Greek word for "fish" is *ichthus*, and each letter represented a word, namely: **i** (Iesous - Jesus), **ch** (Christos - Christ), **th** (theou - of God), **u** (huios - son), **s** (soter - savior). The fish thus became sort of a code word, during times of persecution, by which believers expressed the conviction: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and my

Savior."

In the "Darwin" symbol, you will notice that tiny feet have been added to the fish image. This is designed to suggest that fish evolved into walking creatures. It is not difficult to detect the philosophy of those who display this emblem. This new symbol is quite revealing. **First, it suggests** that the displayer dishonors the Creator and the Bible, and that he has contempt for Jesus Christ. **Second, it reveals** that the owner is ignorant of the genuine facts of science. **Third, it demonstrates** that the growing influence of creationists has greatly irritated evolutionists. Creation science has made tremendous headway in recent years. Let us continue to press the battle. †

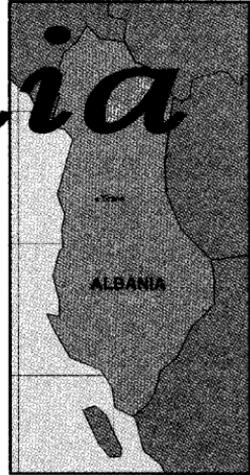
Wayne Jackson is the editor of *Christian Courier* and is a preacher in Stockton, California, USA.

Albania

God Is At Work in Albania

Richard N. Ady

In 1990, while the dark cloud of communism hung over Albania, Bill McDonough and Baxter Low entered the country with a forty-foot container of “Mother-Baby Boxes.” Each box contained vitamins, minerals, baby formula, and medicines needed to save the lives of Albanian mothers and babies who were dying of malnutrition.



God Opens a Door

In Albania, McDonough stayed in the home of Dr. Maxim Bozo, the Under-Secretary of Health, whose seventeen-year-old daughter, Evis, was keenly interested in English. Evis became the first World English Institute (WEI) student in Albania. She ran an ad in a government newspaper, and this resulted in forty-five additional students. That was the beginning of God’s effort to spread the Good News about Christ to the Albanian people through WEI.

In 1991, Bill McDonough went back to Albania and ran a series of newspaper ads that resulted in 4,500 more WEI students. These new students were assigned to volunteer teachers throughout America, and the Word of God went forth through the mails.

In July of 1992, Bill McDonough, Ben Jones, and I led the first summer campaign in Tirana. By this time, communism had fallen and people were looking for something better — something that would give life meaning and restore hope and peace to the land. The Prince of Peace and His Gospel of hope appealed to many.

Early Challenges

Conditions in Albania in 1992 were stark. From a human point of view, they were not conducive to learning, but God often works most effectively in poor circumstances.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

1. Albania's economy was in shambles. The Democratic Party had been voted into power, but shelves in stores were virtually empty. An estimated seventy percent of the people were unemployed, and wages were pitifully low.

The average wage in 1992 was \$8.00 per month. One of my students, Genci Uzuni, earned \$9.00 a month. He was a university — educated economist who worked for the government. Medical doctors were paid between \$12 and \$14 a month. Eighty percent of the average person's wages went for food. Yet, the Albanian people were generous to a fault.

Bill McDonough's student, Teri Poiani, was a music teacher at the Pedagogical Teacher's College — the site of our campaign. She taught her students to play various musical instruments and gave private concerts.

One day, she brought her mandolin to class and entertained us with several familiar songs, including "O Suzanna". Afterwards, she carefully wrapped her instrument and presented it to Bill as a gift. It was a high-quality mandolin imported from Czechoslovakia and the only instrument she owned. Bill said, "I can't take your mandolin." But she insisted, and Bill accepted it with misty eyes.

2. Sanitation Was Poor. The Pedagogical Teacher's College was in a state of disrepair. All twenty-six teachers taught in the dining hall. The teachers sat on crude wooden benches facing their students across equally crude wooden tables. The windows at the top of the walls had no glass panes — only bars.

The unisex restroom at the school contained squat toilets, a barrel of water, and a dipper. The odor was almost overwhelming. All three toilets were surrounded by wooden stalls, but the springs on the doors had been installed backwards. Instead of keeping the doors closed, the springs kept them open. The door between the hall and the restroom was missing.

Some of our elderly teachers had neither the strength nor the agility to utilize the facilities, so they pooled their resources and hired a carpenter to construct two toilet stools. As we ate dinner at the Tirana Hotel one night, Sherrill Bennett said, "The first thing I'm going to do when I get home is hug my commode!"

There was no safe drinking water at the school, so the teachers took turns filtering water. According to the manufacturer, the porcelain filter that we used was the best in the world — so good that we could pump water out of a sewer and drink it safely. So we pumped water from the barrel in the restroom.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

During the campaign, every teacher got sick. Some were deathly ill, but no one went to the hospital. Dr. Erie Adams, one of our teachers, fell out of bed one night and broke a tooth off at the gumline. She went to the dentist the next day, took one look at the equipment, and decided to fly home.

One of our students, Dr. Vigi Demiraj, took us on a tour of Tirana's Number One Hospital. In ward after ward, medicine cabinets were empty. That day, Albania's biggest and best hospital had no water, and the toilets were filthy. As we walked down a dark hall toward the surgery room, a rat ran under my feet and scampered into a patient's room nearby. No one seemed to notice.

The head surgeon had just completed an operation when we met him. Tears streamed down his cheeks as he removed his cap and gloves. He had just lost another patient while performing surgery on an old wooden, vinyl-covered operating table. This brilliant but beaten man told us about other patients he had lost due to inadequate medication and equipment. We were traumatized. In those days, (we were told) Albanians went to the hospital to die, not to get well.

3. Crime and violence were rampant. The streets were war zones every night. On August 25, Sean Nistrath and David Rivoire (two of our teachers), went shopping after school and didn't get home until 9:30 that night. They lived in apartments across the street from each other, so they parted company in the street and went their separate ways.

As Sean walked into the stairway entrance of his apartment building, three men accosted him. One grabbed him by the throat and punched him in the nose while another waved a butcher knife in front of his face. Another grabbed Sean's bag of gifts and tried to pull the wallet from his hip pocket. While Sean was struggling to protect himself and his gifts, a resident walked into the entrance, and the three robbers ran away. Fortunately, someone noted the license plate number of the getaway car, and the robbers were put in jail the next morning. Except for a few scratches and bruises, Sean was unhurt.

4. Atheism was widespread. Albania's Enver Hoxha, one of the meanest communist dictators who ever lived, had shouted, "There is no God." He had outlawed all religion and had declared Albania to be the only officially atheistic country in the world.

On the first day of our campaign in 1992, Aurela Azizaj said, "I want you to know that I don't believe in God."

I replied, "Aurela, I understand why you think there is no God. That's what you've been taught. But let me tell you why I believe in God. Listen

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

carefully, and when I am through, you can tell me where I am wrong in my thinking.”

I listed four or five of the most compelling Christian evidences. Then I said, “Tell me where I am wrong in my thinking.” She said, “I think I believe in God. I have always been told why I shouldn’t believe in God, but I have never heard the reasons why I should believe in Him.” Seven weeks later, she was baptized into Christ.

God Gives the Increase

Aurela’s change of heart was typical. On August 2, 1992, God blessed us with the first fruits of our labors. Two young men, (Artur Kuçi and Eno Damo) and a young woman (Klodiana Papakristo) were baptized in the lake just south of Tirana.

A week later, on August 10, nine more people were baptized into Christ, including Kostanca Thimio, Klodiana’s aunt.

At the age of eight, Kostanca had fallen from a balcony and had injured her back. Seven years later, a poorly-trained surgeon tried to straighten her back but severed a nerve instead. Rather than helping her, he sentenced her to a lifetime of discomfort and deformity.

Kostanca’s tragedy only increased her resolve. She completed a teaching credential and learned to ride a bicycle. She defied the government’s ban on religion by saying, “I will proclaim my belief in God! What more



Walking to the lake for the first three baptisms.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

can Hoxha do to me? At the risk of going to prison, she studied the Bible and taught it to members of her family.

Following her new birth, Kostanca became an active personal evangelist in the Tirana church. Within a year, she brought fifteen of her friends and relatives to the Lord, including her mother, Eftalia. Eftalia had a serious heart condition and was suffering from kidney failure, but she was baptized in November 1993, knowing that the cold water could kill her.

Through Kostanca's slurred speech and trembling hand, the mighty hand of God was at work in Albania.

On August 16, seven more people were baptized into Christ, including Artan Samara and his wife, Beki. Bill Mozley baptized Artan, and Artan baptized Beki. It was a vivid demonstration of the priesthood of all believers. Artan is now a pillar in the church.

On August 24, I baptized four people in the Adriatic Sea, including my host, Daut Bezati, and his wife, Mimoza. On the seashore, Daut said, "When you first came to Albania, we thought English was more important than the Bible. But, little by little, the Bible caught up. Now, we know that the Bible is more important than English." Without knowing it, Daut had expressed the rationale behind World English Institute.

In August 1992, forty-three people, most of them from Muslim backgrounds, were baptized in lakes, fountains, swimming pools, and in the Adriatic Sea. When the campaign ended, more than 100 people were attending the Sunday morning worship services.

Those were the glory days in Albania, and the glory belonged to God. I have never seen a riper mission field. When John and Dee Redmayne arrived in September to serve as missionaries in Tirana, they were greeted by a church of fifty-eight members.

God Provides Albanian Leaders

Looking back on the events of 1990 and 1991, it is obvious that God was preparing the way for mission work in Albania. When communism fell, people fled from the country in droves. Many went to Romania hoping to find jobs.

Among the young Albanians who fled to Romania were Artan Xhaferi and Engjell Allushani. In Bucharest, Artan and Engjell lived in a refugee camp, met some American missionaries, studied with them, and obeyed the Gospel. Since they could not find employment, Artan and Engjell spent their time studying the Bible. For eighteen months, they feasted on the Word of God.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

In mid-July 1992, the church in Bucharest took up a special collection and flew Artan and Engjell back to Albania to help establish the church in their homeland. They arrived in Tirana on July 30 and immediately joined hands with the American teachers. When the first three students were baptized three days later, Artan and Engjell took them under their wings. Week after week, they led new Christians to their apartment for teaching and Tender Loving Care. Today, Engjell is in Italy. Artan is the WEI National Follow-up Coordinator and a strong leader in the Tirana congregation.

Missionaries and Campaigners Work Together

Through the years, God has continued to use WEI as an evangelistic tool in Albania. Campaigns and seminars have been conducted every year, and students have been baptized in numerous cities, villages, and towns. Missionaries have come and gone, and churches have been established in Berat, Durrës, Elbasan, Fier, Korçë, Kuçova, Lushnjë, Orikum, Reps, Tirana, and Vlorë in Albania and in Prizren, Kosova.

In 1993, Ron and Janette Cotton moved to Tirana. Two summer campaigns were conducted, and fifty-four people were baptized into Christ. Van and Jean Tate and Russ and Rosemary Burcham led a group of eighteen teachers to Vlorë, and twenty-eight Albanians were added to the kingdom in that coastal city.

In 1994, Kay Banta and Ellen Walker took leaves-of-absence from the Arkansas public school system to serve the Lord in Tirana. Doris Lohry, Emily Pownall, and Aubrey and Carolyn Stephens, also, moved to Tirana to serve as missionaries. Two mini-campaigns were conducted in Tirana in 1994, and twelve people were baptized into Christ.

John and Dee Redmayne left Tirana to start a new congregation in Durrës, Albania's second largest city. James and Barbara Jones moved to Korçë in southeastern Albania and started a new work there. Ron and Jet Cotton moved to Vlorë and took Engjell Allushani to work with them.

Perhaps the most significant development in 1994 was the retirement of Bill Morgan from Safeway. That set him free to join us in a summer campaign, and he has been deeply involved with WEI and Albania ever since.

Mountain Peak Experience

The summer of 1995 was perhaps the most eventful in the history of the church in Albania. Bill and Nancy Saltsman moved to Korçë and Virgil and Jackie Jackson to Vlorë. Ken Sandifur led several people to Christ in Shkodra.

Bill Morgan led a campaign in Tirana while Artan Xhaferi and I trav-

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

eled all over the country contacting WEI correspondence students who had asked to be baptized. People were added to the kingdom in Berat, Durrës, Çorovoda, Kuçova, Kukës, Erseka, Fushë-Aresi, Fushë-Krujë, Rrëshen, Selenica, Shkodra, Tirana, and Vlorë.

The Culture Palace in downtown Tirana was reserved for a five-day seminar, and invitation letters were mailed to 2,200 students in and around Tirana. Ben Jones got permission to stretch banners advertising the seminar across two main streets in Tirana. He also posted a sign on the Culture Palace and scheduled an interview on a popular television show.

Preaching from Satan's Pulpit

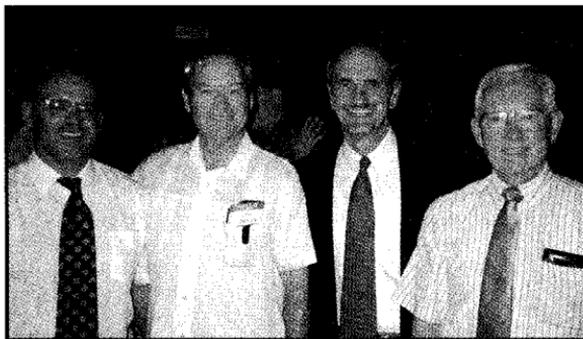
During the week of July 24-28, Prentice Meador, Jr. and Dino Roussos proclaimed the Good News about Christ to more than 500 people from a platform that Enver Hoxha once used for preaching atheism. Alfred Zikë served as Master of Ceremonies, welcoming the Albanian people in their own language and introducing the speakers. I taught an English lesson each evening, and singers from Livermore, California inspired the audience with Christian hymns.

Satan Fights Back

On Monday night, the first night of the seminar, a group of hard-rock musicians known as "Sons of Satan" heckled Prentice from the back seats. During the Question and Answer period, they stood up and asked questions about alleged discrepancies in the Bible.

When Prentice answered them from the Bible, the audience applauded. When the Satanists asked a question, the audience groaned with displeasure. On Tues-day evening, the audience gave Prentice a standing ovation!

When Dino spoke Wednesday evening, the Satanists tried the same tactics on him. But Dino answered their questions from the scriptures. The Satanists became so desperate one night



L to R: Dino Roussos, Ben Jones, Prentice Meador, and Dick Ady at the Culture Palace.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

that one of them walked down the aisle, hopped up onto the stage, and tried to snatch a Bible out of Artan Xhaferi's hand.

After the seminar each evening, the Satanists stood around in the foyer trying to recruit followers. They said to the young people, "God is the bad guy. He takes all the fun out of life. Satan is the good guy. He gives you pleasure and everything you want."

Four young men, none of whom had been baptized, confronted the Satanists and argued with them from the scriptures. By Friday night, the Satanists had been so soundly beaten that they said nothing during the Question and Answer session, and they left the building without making an effort to recruit followers in the foyer. The following Sunday, all four of the young men who had defended the gospel returned and were baptized into Christ!

Down in the Valley

Having experienced the mountain-top 1995, the church in Tirana went down into a valley in 1996. Conflict arose in the church, and the minds of the Albanian people turned toward money. Pyramid investment companies popped up everywhere. Many people sold their homes, farms, equipment, everything, to invest in companies that promised to pay 20%, 40% — up to 100% interest per month. By the end of the year, however, the pyramid schemes began to collapse, and nearly every family in the country suffered severe financial loss.

In the midst of this gloomy picture, there were some bright spots. Our team of nineteen workers was smaller than usual, but God blessed us with nineteen precious souls. Among the campaigners were Wayne, Brenda, and Krystal Speer and Pete Hodge. These four campaigners were so impressed by the receptivity of the Albanian people that they went home, settled their affairs, and returned as missionaries.

Moreover, in 1996, three Nations University classes were taught in Tirana by Sean Niestrath, Tom Seals, and Van Tate. Between twelve and twenty students attended these classes four hours a day, Monday through Friday, for two weeks. Tom said, "I have done mission work in Europe and North America, and I have taught students in Christian universities, but I have never found a group of students so eager to learn as these students in Albania."

In Vlorë, Virgil and Jackie Jackson lead five people to Christ in 1996 and nurtured the young church there.

Taste of Heaven and Hell in 1997

These were the best of times and the worst of times. In early 1997, the

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

last of the pyramid schemes collapsed, and the people blamed the government. In a fit of rage, people raided police stations and national armories seizing guns, ammunition, tanks, airplanes, and other weapons. Beginning at Vlorë, the rebels fought government forces throughout the country, marching through city after city. Finally, the rebels stormed Tirana, firing automatic weapons into the air and spraying apartment windows with bullets. Government forces collapsed, and anarchy reigned.

In Vlorë, Virgil and Jackie Jackson barely escaped in the heat of terrifying violence. At great risk to himself, a neighbor drove the Jacksons to Greece where they boarded a boat and crossed the Adriatic Sea to safety.

In Durrës, John and Dee Redmayne and their children escaped on a ferry bound for Italy — just before the rebels closed the docks.

In Korçë, Bill and Nancy Saltsman prepared to leave the country, but they missed their ride and were stranded. One of their students took them into her home and provided food and shelter for a week while desperados roamed the streets firing automatic weapons, burning government buildings, and robbing people of their possessions.

In Tirana, Ellen Walker, Holly Murphy, and the Stephens quickly packed one suitcase each and made their way to the American Embassy compound. There, they were airlifted by U.S. Marine helicopters to a ship in the Adriatic Sea.

Artan Samara wrote the following during the crisis: *“We are passing a really terrible situation. The danger of losing the life is following us everywhere. We are only three million people, and there are nearly the same number of weapons in the hands of the people. Everybody has one or more weapon, including me. There is no army, no police forces, only the jungle law. The prisons are open, and the prisoners have armed themselves.*

“You hear about people killed, about broken houses, about kidnaping, raping, and different terrible things. All the stores and depots, including the state’s food reserves, are looted and destroyed. This has made it very difficult to find food, and if you find it, it costs three to five times more than normal. Even the hospitals and old people’s houses have been objects of destruction.

“Apart from this, the church has been staying together. Although it is dangerous to walk the streets, the members of the church have been present in the Sunday services and Wednesday’s Bible classes.”

Light Pierces the Darkness

On June 29, 1997, elections were held in Albania under international

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

supervision, and the Socialist Party was voted into power. This, however, did not restore order to the land. The new officials were not scheduled to take office until early August. President Sali Berisha (of the Democratic Party) announced that he would resign from office but would not set a date for his resignation. Thugs took advantage of his weakness as a lame-duck president and continued robbing people at gunpoint and killing those who resisted them.

In May, during the chaos, Wayne Speer, his wife Brenda, and their teenage children, Krystal and Ephraim, moved to Tirana, along with Pete and Dulcie Hodge. Ellen Walker, Aubrey and Carolyn Stephens, Emily Pownall, and Doris Lohry also returned to Tirana. The Redmaynes returned to Durrës, and the Jacksons returned to Vlorë. The first time Jackie built a fire to burn trash, a hand grenade in the trash barrel exploded in her face seriously wounding her. In spite of this, the Jacksons decided to stay and work with the church in Vlorë. The Saltsmans continued to serve God in Korçë.

In the midst of violence, danger, and economic ruin, the faces of the Albanian people turned toward God. Only twelve teachers went to Albania for the campaign that summer, but the Lord added fifty people to His church, including Keti Thanasi, a school teacher from Fier who was visiting in Tirana. Keti has been the backbone of the church in Fier ever since. During the summer of 1997, the Lord was adding people to the church almost daily.

Doug Smith said, "I have always wanted to be involved in a church like the one we read about in the second chapter of Acts, where people were being baptized almost every day. Now, at last, I have had the privilege of being involved with such a church."

The Afterglow

In 1998, the church of Christ continued to flourish in Albania. Randy and Pam Richards and their teenage daughter, Amber, moved to Tirana to work as missionaries. Aubrey and Carolyn Stephens moved to Berat to work with the church there.

Forty-four people were baptized into Christ in Tirana in 1998, including Bledar Valca who has since taught and baptized a dozen of his friends and relatives in the village of Reps.

Nitela and Erinda Shehu, two of Bill and Mozelle Morgan's correspondence students in Elbasan, obeyed the gospel. Doug Smith led a campaign in Elbasan, and this resulted in twelve additional Christians. These new Christians needed mature leadership, so Pete and Dulcie Hodge moved to Elbasan to work with them.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

In Vlorë, Virgil and Jackie Jackson taught and baptized approximately twenty people.

A mini-campaign in Fier, led by Art Hitt, resulted in eight new Christians. Virgil and Jackie Jackson began driving up to Fier to conduct worship services on Sunday afternoon after having worshiped with the church in Vlorë earlier in the day.

At least eighty-four people were baptized in Albania that year.

Another Balkan War

In 1999, the church in Albania faced another crisis. War broke out in Kosova between the Serbs and ethnic Albanians. Reports of atrocities against the ethnic Albanians began to circulate.



Bledi takes his student's confession.

On March 25, NATO bombers started flying over Albania en route to targets in Kosova and Serbia. Serbian forces immediately attacked dozens of Kosovar villages, systematically killing ethnic Albanian intellectuals, shooting able-bodied men and burying them in mass graves, robbing people of their possessions, burning their houses, and often raping their women and teenage girls.

Approximately a million refugees streamed out of Kosova into neighboring countries. More than 600,000 of them sought refuge in Albania.

Immediately, the church in Tirana emptied its treasury to provide food, clothing, blankets, and personal items for the homeless refugees. In cooperation with Healing Hands International, Manna International, Partners in Progress, Whites Ferry Road Relief Ministries, and World English Institute, churches of Christ throughout Albania ministered to the Kosovar refugees.

In Tirana, the church rented an apartment and set up a feeding center. Supplies were given to the refugees every day. Twice a week, Çimi Kafexhiu conducted Bible classes for them. Some of the refugees started

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

attending church services on Sunday.

In April, Doug Smith decided to visit the Tirana camp known as "Tent City." After entering the camp with a group of newspaper photographers, Doug wondered why he was there.

"Help me, Lord!" he prayed. "Show me what you want me to do." As Doug prayed, he looked up and saw a handsome young man who stood out in the crowd. Approaching him, he said, "Can you speak English?"

"Not much," the young man replied.

Doug soon discovered that the young man's name was Festimë Gashi and that he was quite fluent in English. Festimë introduced Doug to his family, and Doug bonded with the family immediately.

Later, Doug and his wife Marcia returned to the camp and enrolled the two oldest Gashi boys in WEI. Festimë invited Doug to come to Kosova for a visit.

"Not right now," Doug said with a laugh. "Maybe later."

After two and a half months of relentless NATO bombing, peace was restored to Kosova, and the refugees left Albania as suddenly as they had appeared.

Following two survey trips, Doug Smith found himself in Prizren, Kosova trying to establish the church in a Muslim society. In Prizren, he asked a rental agent to help him locate a flat that could serve as living quarters, office, and classroom. The agent not only helped Doug find a place to live and work, but he also took him to the nearby village of Leshan and located the Gashi family.

The warm relationship that had been established in Tirana was perpetuated in Kosova. Festimë has since been baptized into Christ and is one of the strongest leaders in the Prizren church, a congregation of fifteen members.

In Albania, God added 145 new Christians to the kingdom in 1999, the largest number of conversions in any given year since the church was established there in 1992.

God Continues to Work in 2000 and 2001

The years 2000 and 2001 were red-letter years in Albania and Kosova. In 2000, ninety-one people were baptized into Christ in Albania, and two Muslims became Christians in Prizren. Lloyd and Suzanne Campbell, their teenage son Alex, and their daughter Hanna moved to Tirana to work with the young people in the church. Rosalie Waymire also returned to Tirana as a missionary.

A record 285 people attended Friends Day in Tirana in March 2000, and that record was broken in 2001.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

The first Elders/Missionary Conference was conducted in Tirana in March 2000. Elders from supporting churches in America came to visit their missionaries and to engage in prayer, planning, and encouragement.

The church in Idaho Falls, Idaho sent two elders, Dennis Winebarger and Les Pope, and their Deacon of Missions, Patrick Smith. Dennis and Patrick and their families are now missionaries in Durrës, along with Les Pope's son, Ty, and Lynn Hunt.

In the mountains south of Vlorë, Virgil and Jackie Jackson conducted the first nationwide youth camp in 2000. Four young men from Prizren, Kosova attended the camp and visited the church in Tirana. They were so deeply impressed that, for the first time, they seriously considered converting from Islam to Christianity. In 2001, all four of them were baptized into Christ. Today, they are active leaders in the Prizren congregation where Jim and Kath Cassie are serving as missionaries.

In 2001, eighty-eight Albanians were baptized into Christ including nine in Kosova.

Highlights of 2002

The tragic events of 9/11/01 have had a noticeable impact upon the work of God in Albania. Many of our prospective campaigners canceled due to economic difficulties or fear of terrorism and war. As President George W. Bush applied pressure on Saddam Hussein to disclose and destroy his weapons of mass destruction, many Muslims in the area became less friendly toward America and Christianity. The climate in 2002 was not as conducive to evangelism as it had been prior to 9/11. Nevertheless, in 2002 the Lord added approximately fifty-five people to His kingdom in Albania.



Two hundred and eighty-five people worship at the Historical Museum.

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

Durrës

The Durrës team (made up of Lynn Hunt, Çimi Kafexhiu, Kevin & Allison Morrill, Patrick and Jamie Smith, and Dennis and Fredia Winebarger) was especially effective in 2002.

When the Redmaynes returned to New Zealand in 1999, the church in Durrës stopped meeting. In early 2001, Çimi Kafexhiu, Erik Qirjaqi, Artan Xhaferi, and others reactivated some of the former members, and started conducting Sunday worship services. When the Durrës team arrived in mid-2001, a small congregation was ready to receive them. In 2001, five people were baptized into Christ.

In 2002, more than 100 one-on-one WEI classes were taught in Durrës weekly. Çimi Kafexhiu began working with the Durrës church as a full-time evangelist. The Durrës church sponsored Albania's first Bible Bowl and won first prize. It also conducted Albania's first Vacation Bible School. Several groups of campaigners came during the summer. In 2002, seventeen people were baptized into Christ.



Bill Morgan and Lorena before her baptism.

in February and shouted, "Better than ten sermons!" In conjunction with the drama, the Tirana church hosted the first National Youth Day in February drawing 216 young people from Albania and Kosova.

In March, Bill Morgan led the third annual Elders/Missionary Conference. During the year, Bill also taught three leadership-training classes in Tirana and a summer campaign in Lushnjë.

On July 27-29, the church in Tirana celebrated its tenth anniversary. On the final evening, Ellen Walker directed a second drama production which

Tirana

In 2002, Randy, Pam, and Amber returned to the states, and Erik Qirjaqi became the Director of WEI in Tirana. Lloyd Campbell continued working with the young people and preaching some of the time. Suzanne continued teaching her children's classes.

Ellen Walker directed the young people in two drama productions that impacted the lives of hundreds of people. A professional movie producer attended the "The Carpenter's Family"

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

packed the University Fine Arts building with more than 300 people.

Twenty-five people were baptized in Tirana between January and October 2002. The church in Tirana sponsored its own WEI campaign, and also sponsored the establishment of a church in Lushnjë where Tom Bonner now works as a missionary.

Vlorë

In addition to conducting four sessions of the Christian Youth Camp in the mountains south of Vlorë, Virgil and Jackie Jackson continued working with the churches in Vlorë and Fier. Among the fifteen or so people that Virgil baptized in Vlorë in 2002 was a former naval officer, Skënder Mejdiaj, and his wife, Vera. This dynamic couple live in Orikum, south of Vlorë, and will be the core of a new congregation in Orikum.

In October, the church in Vlorë hosted the first National Albanian Men's Day. More than seventy men attended.

Fier



Artan interprets for Tom in Lushnjë.

Doug Smith moved to Fier in August 2002 to work with the church while Brent Parr was preparing to come as a long-term missionary. In September, Doug baptized Albert Shahini and started conducting Sunday services at Zharrez, a village nearby. Since then, three other men have been baptized, and Doug has returned to the U.S. Fier

now has a number of potential male leaders. Brent Parr continues to study with these four Christian men and with eleven other men over the age of thirty. The future of the church in Fier looks bright.

More Missionaries Needed

In spite of the rapid growth of the church in Albania during the past ten years, there is a continuous need for more missionaries to help plant churches in other Albanian cities and towns and to help train church leaders.

If you are a retired preacher or class room teacher and are still healthy, flexible, and alert, you are needed in Albania, the beautiful little country north of Greece on the Adriatic Sea. †

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ANSWERS TO PUZZLES

Verse Search — 38 (from page 21)

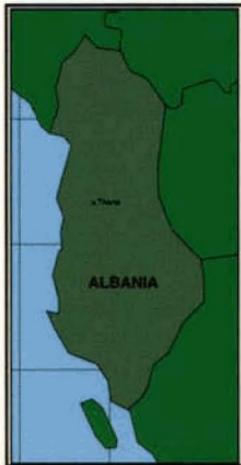
1. Timothy.
2. He had Timothy circumcised, so that the Jews of the region, who knew that his father was a Greek, would not be prejudiced against Paul's message before they even heard.
3. Delivered a copy of the letter from the elders and apostles at Jerusalem, stopping the teaching of Judaizers.
4. Paul saw a vision of a man asking them to come over into Macedonia and help them.
5. They met, taught, and converted Lydia and her household.
6. They were beaten and thrown into prison.
7. Servants; Most High God; way; salvation.
8. She was possessed by an evil spirit and was a mouthpiece for him. Even during Jesus' ministry, the evil spirits and demons always knew who He was, and He always forbade them to speak. Satan's mouthpiece is not the one God wants proclaiming His message.
9. Their clothes were torn off, they were beaten with rods, and thrown into the inner prison, with their feet fastened in stocks, and a personal guard.
10. At midnight; praying; singing hymns; prisoners.
11. There was an earthquake, all the doors were opened, and all the prisoners' chains were loosed.
12. "What must I do to be saved?"
13. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."
14. "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins."
15. He and his family were baptized *immediately, sometime after midnight*.
16. No, the magistrates themselves had to come to the prison and release them; they then went to Lydia's house, comforted the brethren, and departed.



Joash

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Republic of Albania



Government: Republic

Head of State:

President Alford Moisiu

Head of Government:

Prime Minister Fatos Nano

Information and Photo supplied by Richard N. Ady

Secular Facts:

Location: SE Europe, on the SE coast of the Adriatic Sea, bordered by Greece, Yugoslavia and Macedonia.

Land Mass: 10,600 square miles; coastal plain extends the length of the country, hills and mountains covered with scrub forests.

Population: 3,544,841; under 15 years, 29.5%; over 65 years, 7%.

Major Cities: Tirana, Durres, Vlore.

Language: Albanian, Greek.

Literacy: 100%.

Religion: Muslim, 70%; Albanian Orthodox, 20%, Roman Catholic, 10%.

Ethnic Groups: Albanians, Greeks.

Economy: *Agriculture:* corn, wheat, potatoes, vegetables; *Livestock:* cattle, chickens, pigs; *Labor force,* 50 % agriculture, 50% services; *Natural resources:* chromium, coal, oil, gas; *Communications:* Radios: 157 per 1000; TV sets: 89 per 1000; *Telephones:* 547,500; Daily paper: 54 per 1000; *Health:* Life expectancy, male, 69.3; female, 75.1; infant mortality: 38.6 per 1000.

Monetary Unit: Lek.

The Church:

Congregations: 13 established, 1000 baptisms, 80% of Muslim background.

History: In 1990, while Albania was still a nation isolated from the world by Communism, Bill McDonough of the church's program, "Partners in Progress" took in tons of "Mother-Baby Boxes" to help avert deaths from malnutrition. This resulted in contacts being made for "World English Institute" studies of English through using the Bible. The first converts were made in August of 1992.

Richard Ady has led the efforts of WEI, matching American teachers with students for the correspondence courses, and coordinating follow-up work throughout the country. Artan Xhaferi, a local Christian in the capital city of Tirana, is now the National Follow-up Coordinator.

Prentice Meador and Dino Roussos preached in a 5-day seminar, attended by more than 500 people. Recently, the first nation-wide men's retreat was held. VBS is also an effective tool.

In addition to missionary families living full-time in Albania, many Christians have participated in campaigns, resulting in new congregations being established. Because of hardship, many converts have emigrated to other countries, and some have fallen away, but the church continues to grow numerically and spiritually.