

# V THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL

## Hey!!!

What do we do with the  
"left over s"???





## *Now, and Then....*

When my hair is white  
I shall wear tennies  
With faded old blue jeans and my shirt-  
tail hanging out  
And I shall do my shopping at flea  
markets and thrift stores  
And garage sales and stash away all the  
money I don't spend.  
I shall keep my chin up and my  
shoulders back  
I shall sit down on my fist and lean back  
on my thumb  
And watch other people walking  
up and down  
And be grateful I am no longer  
a youth!

I shall pray for rain  
and buy an umbrella  
And go walking in the  
woods and wade in the  
creek  
And talk to birds.

You can't foretell what the  
future has in store  
Or whether there will be a  
tomorrow

Or whether today is the day God shall call  
And you dare not imagine that there is no God at all.

But, now we must keep ourselves from evil  
And pray always that we might be worthy  
And that our life has been a good example.  
I must make a Will to bequeath all my earthly goods  
And buy a coffin that's not too expensive  
So those who know me will neither be shocked nor surprised  
When suddenly I have passed from old to eternal.

Ann Gilbreth

# An Acrostic on the Church

**C** **H** **U** **R** **C** **H**

— **C**hrist is its Founder and Head • Matthew 16:18

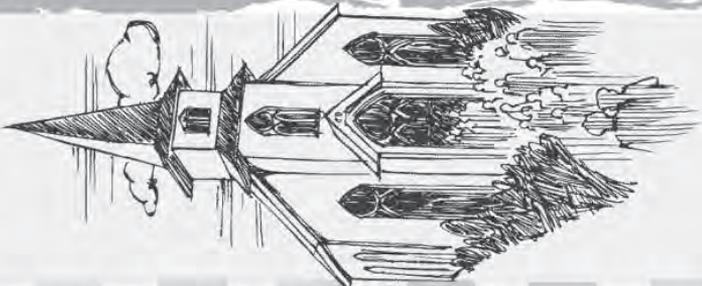
— **H**ope is Present • 1 Peter 1:3

— **U**niversally available • Matthew 28:19-20

— **R**edeemed are its members • Colossians 1:12-14

— **C**hristian is the name worn • Acts 11:26

— **H**eaven is its destiny • 1 Cor. 15:24



# Baptism - Before and After

Mark 16:16

## BEFORE

### LOST IN SIN

- 1 Peter 3:21
- Romans 6:23

### SEPARATED FROM GOD

- Isaiah 59:2
- Ephesians 2:11-12

### WITHOUT HOPE

- Ephesians 2:12
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13

### MUST PREPARE

- Must be Taught - Matthew 28:19
- Must Believe - Mark 16:16
- Must Repent - Acts 2:38
- Must Confess Christ - Acts 8:37

# BAPTISM



### SINS WASHED AWAY

- Acts 22:16
- Titus 3:5

### IN CHRIST

- Galatians 3:27
- Romans 6:3

### IN THE CHURCH

- 1 Corinthians 12:13
- John 3:5
- Colossians 1:13

### HOPE OF HEAVEN

- Colossians 1:5
- 1 Corinthians 15:19
- Hebrews 6:19

HAVE YOU BEEN SCRIPTURALLY BAPTIZED?

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# THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL

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



# Important Message to Our Subscribers and Supporters

(Effective January 1, 2014)

**Byron Nichols**

“I don’t know how you do it, but **keep doing it.**” These encouraging words accompanied the latest contribution check from a Christian brother and friend since my childhood. He has been a faithful supporter of *The Voice of Truth International* since its inception. He is grateful for the magazine and the good that it does, but he wonders how we have managed to sustain this special effort as well as we have. We regularly receive similar expressions of gratitude for the magazine from people all across this country, as well as from others around the world.

The fact is that we cannot “keep doing it” to the extent that we have in the past...**unless we increase the rates for our individual subscriptions and for the bundles of multiple copies of each issue.** We have no alternative but to initiate the increased rates as illustrated in the chart below:

	<u>Old Rate</u>	<u>NEW RATE</u>
1 year subscription	\$12.00	<b>\$15.00</b>
2 year subscription	\$20.00	<b>\$25.00</b>
Each bundle of 35	\$300.00/year	<b>\$350.00/year</b> <b>\$175.00/6 mos.</b> <b>\$90.00/3 mos.</b> <b>\$30.00/mo.</b>

(The new rate for bundles of a number different from 35 will be prorated accordingly.)

It has been getting more and more difficult to “keep doing it.” We definitely intend to “keep doing it,” but the challenge has become greater with each new issue. Our sagging economy is having a rather drastic effect on how much we can do.

We have been blessed to even expand the scope of this work without a single increase in the cost of a subscription or the cost of providing bundles of magazines since the first issue in 1993! (Do you suppose that God may have had a part in our being able to operate as successfully as we have without increasing the rates?!)

Because of unbelievable increases in the rates for shipping the magazines overseas, we have already been forced to reduce by several thousand the number of copies of each quarterly issue that we send to other countries. We send magazines to workers for the Lord who are dependent on brethren like us to assist them by supplying literature that is so helpful to those who are already Christians. Additionally, they are thrilled to have such a wonderful teaching tool as they reach out to the countless souls who are eager to learn what Christianity is all about.

## **The Only Real Solution: “OVER AND ABOVE”**

We are richly blessed in having some congregations, families, and individuals who contribute amounts over and above the rate of their bundles or subscriptions. Brethren, please understand that **this is the only way** that we can do anywhere near what we have been doing in this work.

The thousands of copies of *The Voice of Truth International* that we distribute around the world are provided at no cost at all to those recipients. That means that others must see the great good that is being accomplished for the Lord’s cause through this avenue, and generously provide funds over and above the cost for their own copies of the magazine so that more and more souls can have access to this biblical material that is longed for by so many.

Please understand that we deeply appreciate all who have a part in helping in any way to keep this publication in circulation, and I know that many of our readers have given sacrificially in order to use this meaningful way of sharing the Gospel with others.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 8 about those churches in Macedonia who gave “over and above” their ability to give, all because they viewed themselves as being greatly blessed, and they had a strong desire to share their blessings with others. We rejoice that we have several congregations of a similar type, and we also have families and individual Christians who fall in that same category...**BUT WE NEED MORE!**

Please give prayerful consideration to increasing your involvement in helping *The Voice of Truth International* to succeed in teaching more and more souls the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. †



## *Digging Wells of Harmony*

**Jerry Bates**

The world and even the Lord's church are often torn apart by strife and conflict. In spite of Jesus' injunction to live at peace with one another (Mark 9:50), Christians are frequently quarreling over various issues. It is not uncommon to hear about a team of Christians once working in harmony, but before long breaking up due to some conflict among the team members.

Most church leaders could tell about many cases of conflict with which they are familiar, and the harm those problems caused to the Lord's body. Why cannot Christians simply live at peace with one another?

There are many answers to the previous question, but I believe one major reason is simply that too many want to insist on their rights. We live in a world in which people generally insist on their rights. "I have a right to do this" is the motto of most. If their actions bother you or cause you harm in some way, so be it. You will just have to learn to live with it because they are within their rights to do it.

This attitude often carries over into the church. Christians continue to insist on their rights. "If someone mistreats me, I immediately strike back, because I have a right to protect myself or my reputation." While this attitude sounds reasonable, it is not necessarily biblical. We have many exhortations to avoid grudging or vengeful attitudes. Jesus tells us to turn the other cheek and to go the second mile. We are encouraged to love our enemies and do good to those who would spitefully use us (Matthew 5:38-44). Paul enjoins us to "*repay no one evil for evil*" (Romans 12:17) and to not avenge ourselves but rather leave it to God (Romans 12:19).

The above attitude is not easy to have and is not natural. It takes effort for one to achieve such control. The Old Testament is a treasury of examples, some good and some bad. In Genesis 26 we find an example of one man, Isaac, who chose to avoid conflict and suffer loss, rather than insist on "his rights". He was living with

his herdsmen in close proximity to Abimelech and the Philistines. Due to his prosperity, the Philistines began to envy him (26:14). They asked Isaac to leave them, which he did. He moved to Gerar, where Abraham had originally dug wells. These wells had been filled up with earth by the Philistines, but Isaac dug them anew. His herdsmen also dug new wells of running water. The Philistines immediately claimed that all of that water was theirs. Isaac moved again and dug new wells, and the Philistines quarreled over them also. Once more, Isaac moved, dug new wells, and finally found a place where the Philistines did not quarrel with him.

It was within Isaac's rights to keep the water that he had found. All those wells had been dug by Isaac or his father, Abraham, which meant that the water rightfully belonged to Isaac and his herdsmen. Rather than fight, Isaac chose to forego his rights and suffer wrong. Some might criticize Isaac's behavior as cowardly, and some would call him weak. Yet, the wise man wrote in Ecclesiastes 3:8 that there is *"a time of war, and a time of peace."* This was a time for peace, and Isaac chose the peaceful way. Yes, he suffered temporary loss and hardship, but God blessed him, and he continued to prosper and live peacefully in the land of Canaan.

It seems that he provides a good example for us even today. We do not always have to press our rights. It is sometimes good to even suffer loss for the sake of peace and harmony. This should certainly be true in regards to the Lord's church and our spiritual brethren. Just because something may be within "my rights" does not necessarily mean that it is good for me to do it. Paul expressed that truth in 1 Corinthians 10:23-24: *"All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being."* In the context, Paul was discussing the eating of meats offered to idols. While it was permissible for Christians to partake of such meats, if the eating of those meats would be a stumbling block to another Christian, then one should not eat. The overriding principle was not whether it was right or wrong; rather is it good and edifying to others? Paul stated further in 1 Corinthians 10:33: *"Just as I also please all men in all things; not seeking my own profit; but the profit of many, that they may be saved."*

As Christians our primary goal is not to please ourselves or simply to do what we want as long as it is right for us to do it. We should seek to edify one another and endeavor *"to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:3), even if that means suffering some temporary loss. If all would remember this principle, many of the conflicts that presently occur in the church would not exist and certainly would be much easier to solve.

*"Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification"* (Romans 15:2). *"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Philippians 2:4). †



Apparently every language has them—bad words. God, through the apostle Paul, in Colossians 3:8 regulates the use of foul language—prohibiting the children of God from using such in their conversations. “*But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, **filthy language** out of your mouth*” (NKJV emphasis added). Other translations read “*filthy communication*” (KJV), “*shameful speaking*” (ASV), “*obscene talk*” (ESV), “*abusive speech*” (NASV), “*foul talk*” (RSV) or “*filthy talk*” (YLT). The Greek word **aischrologia** appearing as “*filthy language*” (NKJV) in Colossians 3:8 is a compound word meaning “vile or base conversation or words”; it appears only in that verse of Scripture.

# Foul Language

Louis Rushmore



Ephesians 4:29 provides similar instruction. “*Let no **corrupt word** proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers*” (NKJV)—“*corrupt communication*” (KJV), “*corrupt speech*” (ASV), “*unwholesome talk*” (NIV), “*evil talk*” (RSV) or “*corrupt word*” (YLT). The Greek word **sapros**, translated “*cor-*

rupt” (NKJV) means “rotten or worthless” and comes from another, related word that means “to putrefy.” Seven times *sapros* is translated “*corrupt*” and one time “*bad*” in the King James Version of the Bible.

Ephesians 5:4 continues with this type of admonition regarding bad words. “[N]either *filthiness*, nor *foolish talking*, nor *coarse jesting*, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (NKJV emphasis added). The Greek word *aischrotes* for “*filthiness*” means “shamefulness or obscenity” and only appears here in the New Testament.

Notice from the passages already cited that foul language is only one type of sinful words that may come forth from one’s mouth. Angry, hateful speech, likewise, is condemned (Colossians 3:8), as well as is “*foolish talking*” and “*coarse jesting*” (Ephesians 5:4). Generally, James 3:2-12 identifies the human tongue or speech as often faulty or sinful. Furthermore, it has always been a grievous sin to take God’s name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

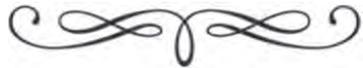
How should we assess the foregoing information? Overall, especially the Christian’s language ought to be free from speech that lacks moral or sexual restraint, devoid of obscenities and cussing or cursing—swear words, not characterized by crude or base jokes, and not regarded as senseless, foolish or silly words.

Another category of bad words is the **euphemism**. This is when more

agreeable words or sounds are substituted in place of vulgar language, but which are intended to convey the same offensive message. For instance, when using the name of God in vain, one might say “Gad” instead of “God” or say “Geez” instead of “Jesus.” When swearing, one rhymes the sound of foul words, using non-words.

There are several circumstances in which one may find himself or herself that promote the use of foul language. These are situations into which the child of God ought not to voluntarily place himself or herself. (Both sexes are employed in this article because the use of foul language is not a sin limited exclusively to one gender.) Two of the biggest temptations to pervert one’s speech are: (1) Evil companionships or bad company can corrupt our mouths (1 Corinthians 15:33). (2) Use of drugs or alcohol often leads to additional sins, including foul language.

Anyone who will not censor himself or herself, Jesus Christ will condemn in the great Judgment. “*But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned*” (Matthew 12:36-37 NKJV). Obviously, then, one’s speech is a serious matter since it will affect where he or she spends eternity. †



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# THE DEITY OF JESUS

Matthew Carver

Perhaps there is no more critical question relative to the validity of the Christian religion than that of the deity of Jesus Christ. If Jesus of Nazareth was not divine — the “Word made flesh” (John 1:14) — then He was an impostor of the vilest rank who perpetuated the cruelest, most deceitful fraud in the annals of human antiquity. If Jesus was not the divine Son of the living God “*whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*” (Micah 5:2), then surely it could not have been He who was “*declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*” (Romans 1:4); and, if not so declared by resurrection, then He is not raised at all. “*And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins*” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Consequently, we are left with the dreaded conclusion that “*if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Many today, particularly New Testament scholars so-called, deny the divine nature of Jesus Christ while admitting His place as an historical figure in Jewish history. Others who profess to be followers of the religion of Christ, most notably those styling themselves “Jehovah’s Witnesses”, deny the deity of Christ on scriptural grounds, believing that the teaching of the Bible contradicts such a claim. Hence, in view of the crucial nature of this theme and with an awareness of the many objectors, we shall proceed to set forth the Bible position relative to the doctrine of the deity of Jesus.

First, we note that, although there were to be no other gods before Jehovah, according to Exodus 20:3 and Deuteronomy 5:6,7, Jesus is said to receive the same glory and honor as God Himself. We find that “*the host of heaven worshippeth thee*” (Nehemiah 9:6) in reference to Jehovah, and yet we find in similar fashion that “*all the angels of God worship him*” (Hebrews 1:6) with reference to Christ. Further, we read that God is worthy to receive the glory and the honor and the power (Revelation 4:11), and yet we likewise read that the “*Lamb that hath been slain*” is worthy to receive the “*power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing*” (Revelation 5:12). Still further, we find that “*blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever*” (Revelation 5:13).

## GOD

In addition to these observations, it is interesting to note that Jehovah God speaks through Isaiah that *“unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear”* (Isaiah 45:23) while the apostle Paul ascribes to Christ the same honor: *“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”* (Philippians 2:10,11).

Finally, we must note that in two separate instances, as found in Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11, God explicitly makes known that *“my glory will I not give to another”*, and yet, in addition to the passages just cited, we recall that Christ our Lord prayed, *“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was”* (John 17:5). Most revealing is the original term translated *“with”*, which means, according to Young, *“along side of, with, among”* (1061). Likewise, the followers of Christ are implored to give equal honor both to the Father and the Son: *“that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him”* (John 5:23). A most important fact to note here is that the word *“even”* in this passage is defined as *“just as, even as, in proportion as, in the degree that”* (Thayer 314), therefore, instructing that Jesus the Son is to be honored *“just as, even as, in proportion as, in the degree that”* the Father is to be honored.

Furthermore, consider that under the Old Covenant, the people of God were commanded: *“for thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”* (Exodus 34:14). Additionally, in warding off the temptations of the Adversary, our Lord quoted from Deuteronomy 6:13: *“Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve”* (Matthew 4:10). However, we find throughout the earthly ministry of Christ that He permitted and received worship from a leper (Matthew 8:2), a ruler (Matthew 9:18), the disciples (Matthew 14:33), a blind man who had been healed (John 9:38), a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:25), the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matthew 20:20), the women who had discovered the empty tomb (Matthew 28:9), and from the remaining eleven apostles (Matthew 28:17).

Moreover, the Bible plainly sets forth the principle that regardless of the greatness of man or creature, none but God is to be worshipped. Peter corrected Cornelius for attempting to worship him (Acts 10:25,26). Likewise, the angel reprimanded John when he attempted to offer worship to him (Revelation

## GOD

22:8,9), admonishing John to “*Worship God.*” However, we see from the previously submitted texts that Christ did receive worship and never offered a correcting word. Further, we find the declaration, “*and let all the angels of God worship Him*” (Hebrews 1:6) directed to Christ. Surely, the angels would not be instructed to worship a “perfect man” or one of their peers, as the Jehovah’s Witnesses teach.

Although much more could yet be examined, we note briefly that the same names and designations are used both of Jehovah and Christ. The most striking and irrefutable of these examples can be found in Isaiah 9:6, in which we find the Lord Jesus described in these terms: “*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*” Here, Jesus is undeniably styled, among other things, “*Mighty God, Everlasting Father,*” very strange designations indeed if He does not possess the same God-nature as the Father. Further, we find in Jeremiah 23:5,6 a similar revelation: “*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*” This passage undoubtedly refers to the Messiah and pictures Jehovah giving reference to another as “*Jehovah our righteousness*”.

We note also that the designation “*the first and the last*” is applied to Jehovah (Isaiah 44:6; 48:12) and likewise to Christ (Revelation 1:17; 2:8). They are both “*Alpha and Omega*”, with Revelation 21:6 referencing God and Revelation 22:13 referencing Jesus. They are both “*Lord of Lords*”, with Deuteronomy 10:17 and Psalm 136:1-3 referring Jehovah and Revelation 17:14 and 19:16 referring Jesus Christ. And perhaps most telling of all, we find the great “*I AM*” statements spoken both of the Father and of the Son: “*I AM hath sent me unto you*” (Exodus 3:14) and “*Before Abraham was, I AM*” (John 8:58).

These observations combine to lead those, who are not already predisposed to an alternate position, to the conclusion that Jesus was/is divine, and that indeed He was and is “*Immanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us*” (Matthew 1:23). †

**Matthew Carver is a Christian, living in Auburn, Kentucky, USA.**

# Fully God

Tom Kelton

Jesus is fully God. This is clearly stated in many passages. John says, *“In the beginning was the Word”* — later, in verse 14, John identifies *“the Word”* as Jesus — *“and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”* (John 1:1). Paul says Christ *“is God over all”* (Romans 9:5) and tells us to look forward to *“the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13). He says that in Christ *“all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form”* (Colossians 2:9).

On many occasions Jesus Himself claimed to be God. In John 5:17 He tells the Jews, who were persecuting Him for healing an invalid on the Sabbath, *“My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”* The Jews *“tried all the harder to kill him”* because *“he was calling God his own Father, making Himself equal with God”* (John 5:18).

In the account of the rigged trial before the Sanhedrin, the high priest asked Jesus, *“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”* (Mark 14:61). Not only does Jesus claim messiahship, but the way He answers makes it clear that the Messiah is God. Jesus says, *“I am...and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds*

*of heaven”* (Mark 14:62). The words *“I am”* solemnly echo Exodus 3:14, in which God tells Moses His name: *“This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”* *“I AM”* was the name by which God was known and worshiped in Israel, and Jesus claimed to be the *“I AM”*. The high priest clearly understood that Jesus was claiming to be God; he tore his clothing and said, *“You have all heard the blasphemy”* (Mark 14:64).

Jesus not only claimed to be God, He acted like God. We are so familiar with the biblical miracles that frequently we fail to realize their significance as authenticating signs of Jesus’ divinity. Jesus demonstrated His power over nature, disease, death, and demons. The number and extent of His miracles are staggering. He walked on water and calmed the seas (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 6:45-52). He turned water into wine (John 2:1-11), and fed five thousand people from five loaves and two fish (Mark 6:30-44). He also forgave sins (Mark 2:5), and who but God can forgive sin (Mark 2:7)?

When Thomas fell at His feet and said, *“My Lord and my God!”* (John 20:28), Jesus blessed him for recognizing He was God and worshiping Him (John 20:29). When He received Thomas’ worship, He claimed divinity.†

**Tom Kelton (deceased) was a writer and preacher at Pharr, Texas, USA.**

GOD

# God Loves Sinners?

Owen D. Olbricht

Does God love all sinners? Does God know a sinner He does not love? The expressions, “God hates sin and loves the sinner” or “God hates sin, but not the sinner” has been repeated so often that it is accepted as Gospel truth, a teaching of the Bible. One preacher confidently declared that God will love even those He sends to hell.

## A Word of Caution

Before quoting Bible teaching, a word of caution should be given. All sinners do not fall into the same category. Some sinners are hardened and have rebelled against God to the extent they will not repent (Hebrews 6:2-6); others can be convicted of their sins and want to turn away from them.

## Bible Teaching

The following Scriptures are given without comment, for they speak for themselves concerning hardened, rebellious sinners.

- *“I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, and cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols; and My soul shall abhor you”* (Leviticus 26:30).
- *“The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity”* (Psalm 5:5).
- *“The Lord tests the righteous, But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates”* (Psalm 11:5).
- *“These six things the Lord hates...A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren”* (Proverbs 6:16,19).

## Love or Wrath Assure Condemnation?

God’s displeasure with those who do *“not receive the love of the truth”* is so great, *“He will send them strong delusion, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”* (2 Thessalonians 2:10-11). If God loves those who do not love the truth, why will He send them a delusion so that they will believe a lie and be condemned?

## Hate and Love No More

Israel had become so wicked (Hosea 5:11-9:15) that God began to hate them. Notice what God stated: *“All their wickedness is in Gilgal, for there I*

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*hated them. Because of the evil of their deeds I will drive them from My house; I will love them no more*" (Hosea 9:15). Yes, God loved sinful Israel and wanted them to repent, but if they continued in their sins, God would continue to hate them and would love them no more.

Instead of thinking that God will love us as rebellious sinners regardless of what we do, we should realize that God will hate us and love us no more if we will not obey Him. If we continue to live wickedly, His wrath will be poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation to the degree that He will torment us forever and forever (Revelation 14:10,11).

### **Love Is Conditional**

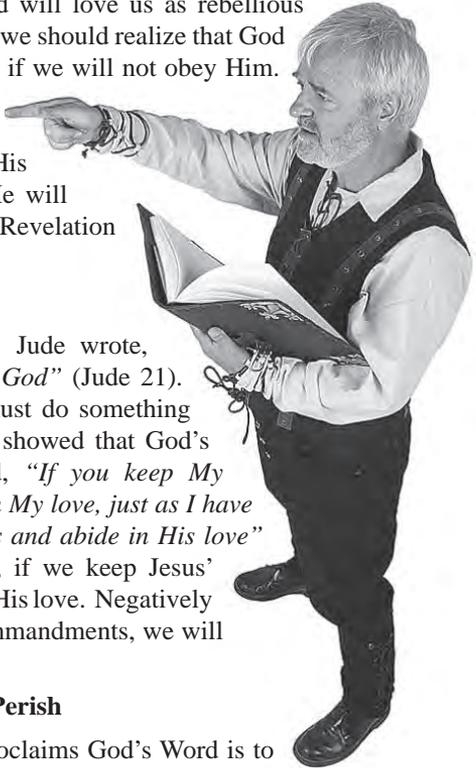
God's love is conditional. Jude wrote, *"Keep yourselves in the love of God"* (Jude 21). *"Keep yourselves"* means we must do something to remain in God's love. Jesus showed that God's love is conditional. He stated, *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"* (John 15:10). Positively stated, if we keep Jesus' commandments, we will abide in His love. Negatively stated, if we do not keep His commandments, we will not remain in His love.

### **Repent or Perish**

The work of anyone who proclaims God's Word is to call people to repent in order to escape God's coming wrath (Matthew 3:7-10; Hebrews 10:25-28; 2 Peter 3:9). A speaker should tell the listeners that God loves them and wants them to repent, but if they continue to rebel against Him, He will hate them and love them no more. They must turn from their rebellious ways, believe and obey Jesus, or the wrath of God will remain on them (John 3:36).

We *can live* in such a way that God will hate us and love us no more. †

**Owen D. Olbricht is a preacher and writer living in Sherwood, Arkansas, USA.**



# The Work of the Holy Spirit

**J.C. Choate (Deceased)**

This theme of the Holy Spirit is important because so many people are confused about Him and His work. While most of the world would reject Him altogether, others go to the opposite extreme and teach that the Holy Spirit works miraculously today. Of the three Persons in the Godhead, He has become the focal point of many religious teachers — Not God the Father or Christ the Saviour, but the Holy Spirit. But what does the Bible say?



The Scriptures show that the Holy Spirit is a personality, the third person in the Godhead. As with God and Christ, He is eternal: He has always been and will always be. He took part in the creation and all of the great events throughout the Old Testament period. In this lesson, we want to learn about His work during the time of Christ and the apostles.

Going back to the birth of Christ, we note that the record says, *“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying,*

*“Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”*

*“So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: ‘Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,’ which is translated, ‘God with us.’*

*“Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son, and he called His name Jesus” (Matthew 1:18-25).*

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Please note the role of the Holy Spirit in all of this. It was the Holy Spirit who inspired Isaiah the prophet to write, *“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel”* (Isaiah 7:14). Next, Mary was found with child, with the explanation that, that which was conceived in her was of the Holy Spirit. Finally, all of this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord through the prophet, that a virgin would bring forth a Son and His name would be Immanuel, or God with us.

According to Luke 1, Zacharias and Elizabeth also had a child born to them in keeping with the power of the Holy Spirit. He was named John and was later known as John the Baptist because he baptized those who would submit to God’s will. Being the forerunner of Christ, the one who was sent to prepare the way for the Lord, he said, *“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

*“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John tried to prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him.*

*“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’”* (Matthew 3:11-17).

As we saw earlier, Mary was found with child of the Holy Spirit, and thus Christ was born into the world. Now, as an adult, we find Jesus being baptized (immersed in water) by John. As evidence of the Father in heaven being pleased with this, the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus, and God said, *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*

In Matthew 4:1 the record says, *“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”* How did He overcome the challenges and temptations of Satan? He answered each time with quotations from the Scriptures, whose writers had been inspired by the Holy Spirit.

We read in John 3:34 that Christ received not the Spirit by measure, meaning that He received the fullness of the power of the Spirit, enabling Him to do the

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work He came into the world to do. This statement, by contrast, is implying that others received the Spirit *by measure*, or that there were **limitations** as to what they could do, even with the power of the Spirit.

Christ chose twelve men to represent Him and to carry on His work after His departure. These men were called apostles. One of the qualifications for an apostle was that he had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry through the time of His resurrection. Knowing that as the resurrected Lord, He would return to the Father in Heaven, Jesus told His apostles, *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you”* (John 16:7). He said again, in identifying the Comforter, *“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”* (John 14:26).

The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would do several things, according to Jesus’ promise: after the apostles were **baptized** in the Holy Spirit ( in Acts 2), He would **comfort them, guide them in all Truth, call to their remembrance all the things that Christ had taught them, enable them to speak in other languages, and to perform miracles to convince the people that they had been sent of God.**

But the **apostles** could not do all the work that needed to be done, so the Lord gave them the power to lay their hands on chosen **disciples** so that they might also receive the power of the Holy Spirit. While the apostles had received the **baptismal measure** of the Holy Spirit — and then through the laying of their hands on others, could impart miraculous power to them — these disciples who received the **laying-on-of-hands measure** of the Holy Spirit **could not pass the miraculous power to others.**

Finally, at the time of baptism in water, for the washing away of sins, **all converts** received the ordinary, or non-miraculous, measure of the Spirit, according to Acts 2:38.

The Holy Spirit worked through the apostles and those on whom they laid their hands, to enable them to perform miracles and to inspire them to write down God’s Word. With the completion of the New Testament, the Spirit works today through the Word, and with us, according to teaching of that Word.

We encourage you to hear the Word of the Spirit, recorded in the New Testament — to **believe** in God, to **repent** of your sins, to **confess** Christ as being the Son of God, and to **be baptized** for the remission of your sins. In response, the Lord will save you, add you to His church, and give you the gift of His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38,47). †

J.C. Choate began publication of *The Voice of Truth International* in 1993.

# GOD

## FROM HIS BIRTH TO HIS RETURN!

David Conley

*"Silent night, Holy night; all is calm, all is bright..."*

How lovely it is to think of the Baby Jesus, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. The nativity scene is so beautiful, so calm, so silent, and so peaceful!

As you look at the scene, you find yourself drawn to the center of attention... the Christ Child! Everyone is focused on Him! Everyone is watching Him! What are they thinking? Perhaps they are wondering what His birth means to the world! Perhaps they are in awe that they are witnessing the greatest event in the history of mankind!

**But wait!** Fast forward thirty-three years! Perhaps some of these same shepherds are standing at the foot of the cross! You find yourself drawn to the center of attention (*between two thieves*), the Savior! He went from a wooden manger to a wooden cross! From swaddling clothes to torn rags! From being surrounded by caring people to a crowd of murderers! The scene is NOT beautiful! It is NOT calm! It is certainly NOT silent or peaceful! Everyone is watching Him! What are they thinking? Perhaps they are wondering what His death means to the world! Perhaps they are in awe that they are witnessing the greatest event in the history of mankind!

**But wait!** Fast forward a few days! Men are standing in awe as they see the resurrected Jesus ascending into heaven! They are drawn to the center of attention (*among the clouds*), the Son of God! The scene is so beautiful, so calm, so silent, and so peaceful! What are they thinking? Perhaps they are wondering what His Ascension means to the world! Perhaps they are in awe that they are witnessing the greatest event in the history of mankind!

**But wait!** Fast forward to the future! Men are standing in awe as they see Jesus RETURN from heaven! They are drawn to the center of attention (*among the mighty angels*), the Judge of the World! The scene is beautiful for the prepared, but it is horrific for the unprepared! What are they thinking? Perhaps they are struck by what His return means to the world! Perhaps they are in awe that they are witnessing the greatest event in the history of mankind!

**Thank God for Jesus' birth, death, resurrection...and RETURN!** †

David Conley works with the Liberty Church of Christ in Dennis, Mississippi, USA.

# There It Stands!

**Rex Banks**

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away from reality, a group of scholars, wise in the eyes of the world but foolish in the eyes of God (1 Corinthians 1:18-25), set out to destroy the integrity of God's Word. Committed to a naturalistic, anti-supernatural approach to the Bible, they accused the writers of the Bible of fraud, dishonesty, and stupidity (in the *niciest* possible way of course, and using euphemisms like "transfigured mirage" for "lie"). However, no sooner had the radical critics spun their fantastic webs than the archaeologist's spade destroyed their flimsy, groundless theories with solid historical facts. Consider a few examples:

In 1893, Hermann Schultz could dismiss the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch by stating of the pre-Mosaic period: "It was a time prior to all knowledge of writing...a time when in civilized countries writing was only beginning to be used for the most important matters of state." Had Mr. Schultz been less prone to call Jesus and the apostles "liars," he would have not been embarrassed by the fact that: "First Egyptology then Assyriology showed that the art of writing in the ancient East...was of vast antiquity... Centuries before Abraham was born, Egypt and Babylonians were alike full of schools and libraries..." (A.H. Sayce).

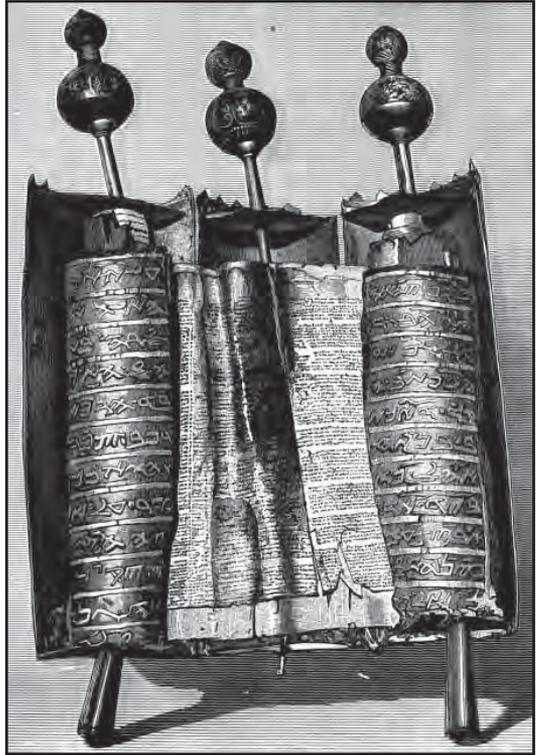
Earlier this century, Robert Pfeiffer stated concerning a certain portion of the Old Testament, that "...notwithstanding its...fictitious Mosaic background (it)...bears the earmarks of its age, the first half of the Persian period (558-331 B.C.)." You see the moral tone and social level of Israel's laws were too lofty and sophisticated to date from the Mosaic period. But you see, when you're working with an impoverished theory, the facts just will not behave themselves! Listen to Meredith G. Kline: "As evidence of the antiquity of codified law, there are Assyrian and Hittite law codes from approximately the time of Moses, the Code of Hammurabi some three centuries before Moses, and the more recently discovered fragments of other Babylonian and Sumerian predecessors of Hammurabi's Code, dating back to Abraham's day."

The creation account was held by many to be "a first-millennium oral Hebrew tradition". Then came the Ebla tablets (discovered in 1964), one of which contained a creation account "...closer to Genesis Chapter 1 than anything yet discovered" (Clifford Wilson). The Ebla records date back to 2,000-1,600 B.C. In his book *The Ebla Tablets*, Wilson also writes: "When this close similarity to

## EVIDENCES

Genesis Chapter 1 was first mentioned to a group of scholars present at that time, there was a stunned silence. Then one of them...made the comment: 'A first-millennium oral Hebrew tradition in a third millennium written document'...No longer can it be claimed that this 'tradition' dates to only a few hundred years before Christ in its written form.'"

Again and again the confident assertion of the skeptics have been disproved by archaeological discovery. It was easy to argue in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Sargon never existed, that the Hittites were a figment of the imagination (or insignificant), and that the Davidic Empire was much smaller than the sacred record suggests, but these and a thousand other allegations have crumbled to dust as archaeology has done its work.



### *Listen to a little poem by A.Z. Conrad:*

Century follows century...There it stands.  
Empires rise and fall and are forgotten...There it stands.  
Atheists rail against it...There it stands.  
Agnostics smile cynically...There it stands.  
Profane prayerless punsters caricature it...There it stands.  
Unbelief abandons it...There it stands.  
Higher critics deny its claim to inspiration...There it stands.  
The flames of persecution are kindled against it...There it stands.  
The tooth of time gnaws but makes no dent in it...There it stands.



**Rex Banks works with the church in Hamilton, New Zealand.**

## EVIDENCES

# EVIDENCES FROM JOB

Charles Cash

Required reading for one of my college courses was the book: *“The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe.”* It contained articles from some forty different scientists presenting evidences for the existence of God and the divine inspiration of the Bible.

Though the Bible is not a scientific book (not written for that purpose), it does contain many scientific evidences of the existence of God, the Creator, and the divine inspiration of the Bible. So we consult another author, Job. He was not a scientist, but he was inspired by God. We shall use the words of a poem by LaFaun L. Morgan entitled, “From Job,” and then sandwich in between its stanzas the Scripture references from Job, along with brief comments. The poem is based on the KJV.

“White winter’s gift the farmers know  
Will help their summer gardens grow.  
But aren’t there treasures in the snow?  
Who told Job so?”

*“Has thou entered into the treasures of the snow?”* (Job 38:22). Each snowflake is hexagonal, having six angles and six sides. Snowflakes have beautiful, intricate designs, like a kaleidoscope from nature. A treasure! The snow provides valuable nutrients for the earth such as nitrogen, as farmers know.

“Fresh water springs are in the seas,  
God measured earth and weighed the breeze.  
How, since such things were mysteries,  
Did Job know these?”

*“Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea?”* (Job 38:16). How did Job know there were “water springs” feeding the seas? Evidently the same way the Psalmist knew there were *“paths of the seas”* (Psalm 8:8), which John Maury made maps of that are called shipping lanes, used by seagoing vessels even today.

“On nothing hang the sea and land;  
We move in space by God’s command.  
He wrote, but could he understand?  
Who moved Job’s hand?”

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*“He...hangeth the earth upon nothing”* (Job 26:7). Centuries upon centuries passed before man realized that the earth was not resting upon anything. Some ancient people believed that the earth was resting upon a giant turtle. Yes! But Job had it right! How? The answer is simple; God told him!

“The earth’s a circle – never fear

A fall from edges of a sphere.

Who whispered hidden things so clear

Into Job’s ear?”

*“He walketh in the circuit (circle) of heaven”*

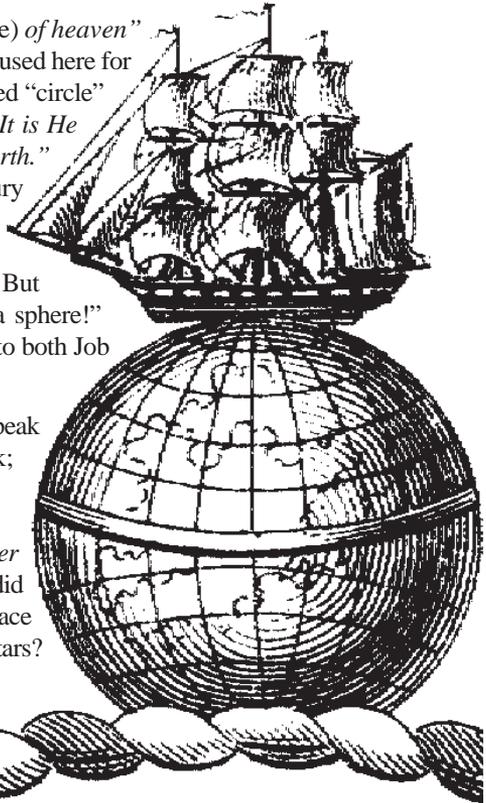
(Job 22:14). The same Hebrew word used here for “circuit,” the word “chug”, is translated “circle” in Isaiah 40:22. That verse reads: *“It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth.”*

As late as the end of the fifteenth century smart men believed the world was flat, that you could go so far and then just fall off the edge into oblivion. But you cannot fall from the “edges of a sphere!” God taught the rotundity of the earth to both Job and Isaiah.

“No eye could see from the mountain peak  
The empty place the north did seek;  
Then who provided truth to speak  
For Job, the meek?”

*“He stretcheth out the north over the empty place”* (Job 26:7). How did Job know that there was an empty place in the northern hemisphere without stars?  
**God!**

It is almost unbelievable how anyone could doubt the existence of God, or the divine inspiration of the Bible, the Word of God. The evidence is truly overwhelming!



†

**Charles Cash works with the Bella Vista Church of Christ in Bella Vista, Arkansas, USA.**

## EVIDENCES

# Apologetics in Songs

Cecil May Jr.

We are admonished to be ready always to give an answer, or a defense (Greek, *apologia*), for our hope (1 Peter 3:15). From that admonition, we derive “apologetics”, meaning “a reasoned defense of our faith.”

Any adequate apologetic, however, must distinguish between the true and the false. It will not, at least when complete, establish equal validity for all belief systems.

When Dr. Thomas J.J. Altizer of Emory University proclaimed in the late 1960’s that God is dead, Dr. Billy Graham made headlines the next day by saying, “My God is alive. I talked to Him this morning.”

An effective, clever line! Dr. Graham may have realized he was following the biblical admonition, “*Answer a fool according to his folly*” (Proverbs 26:5).

The fact that we pray, however, or even that we believe ourselves to be heard, is not in itself an adequate apologetic. Hindus pray to a multiplicity of gods, but neither their prayers nor their sincerity in believing they are heard establishes the reality of their deities.

A popular spiritual song, *He Lives*, contains the line, “You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.” When a song leader selects that song and I am in the assembly, I sing it enthusiastically, allowing for poetic license. I believe God lives in me because the Bible says He does (Romans 8:11), but my faith that He is there, though confident and strong, is not a proof that He lives.

Two other songs have better lines from an apologetic standpoint.

In *Because He Lives*, we sing the line, “An empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.” The “empty grave” stands for the historical evidences for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His resurrection, accompanied by “*many infallible proofs*” (Acts 1:3), is a reason, and a good one, for believing particularly in the truth of Christianity.

There are also abundant evidences for the Bible as the self-revelation of God to man. These include a great number of fulfilled prophecies that can only be accounted for by the supernatural foreknowledge of its Author.

So the song we have sung from childhood is the best-reasoned defense of all: “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” †

**Cecil May Jr. is Dean-Emeritus of the Bible Department at Faulkner University in Montgomery, Alabama, USA.**

# The Book

Dwight Fuqua

Is the Bible relevant to the needs of Twenty-First Century man? Is the “Old Book” still up-to-date? Is it a dead letter?

Francis Bacon wrote, “They that reverence too much old times are a scorn to the new.” We can certainly see how this is true in transportation, agriculture, medicine, and other advancing technologies. Why would the same not be true of the Bible? Consider these thoughts:

**One:** In all of the above cases, the old had not been perfected! The Bible, however, is God’s “*perfect law of liberty*” (James 1:25). The Bible is inspired of God, profitable for man, and adequate for every spiritual need (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

**Two:** The Bible is relevant because sin is prevalent! Who can deny it? To deny that sin exists and is rampant is to deny the morning and evening news. My friend, the Bible deals with sin. It recognizes the reality of sin and reveals what man must do in order to be saved from the slavery and consequences of sin. “*For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 6:23).

**Three:** The Bible is relevant because it gives meaning and purpose to life! Life is more than skin deep. The Master said, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4). The wise man wrote, “*Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). My friend, the Bible can change your life!

Yes, the Bible is relevant! The question is, “How relevant have you made it in your life?” David asked, “*How shall a young man cleanse his ways? By taking heed according to Your word*” (Psalm 119:9). Two verses later he said, “*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you*” (verse 11). Wise men turn to the Word of God. It is “THE BOOK” – the **relevant** Book! †

Dwight Fuqua preaches for the Findlay congregation in Sparta, Tennessee, USA.

**Yes, the Bible is relevant! The question is, “How relevant have you made it in your life?”**

## THE WORD OF GOD

### *We Must Preach Christ*

Shan Jackson

Of all the Bible subjects a preacher can preach, the one that is perhaps the least appreciated is the one that is the most needed. The plan of salvation that God devised for the saving of mankind is without a doubt the most needed, and perhaps the least appreciated, of all topics. But God's plan is a double-edged sword. If the righteous are to be saved according to God's plan of salvation (Romans 4:18), then the unrighteous must go somewhere else, and that somewhere else is described in the Bible as a "*place prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 4:11). The only reason I mention that in this writing is to show you that our preaching must be consistent. Consistent preaching is biblical preaching, and biblical preaching is consistent. If we preach the Bible, we must preach the whole Bible. On one occasion Paul made this perfectly clear when he alluded to "*the whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27 ASV). That, my friends, is what we need to preach, and that is what we intend to preach. We intend, and demand, that our pulpit rings with the whole counsel of God.

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "*For I am determined not to know anything among you, save [except] Jesus Christ, and him crucified*" (1 Corinthians 2:2). Do you realize that without Christ there is nothing for a Gospel preacher to preach? If I cannot preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified, I have nothing worth saying. When Peter preached in Acts 2, he preached Jesus. When Phillip preached in Acts 8, he preached Jesus. Stephen preached Jesus. James preached Jesus. In fact, Stephen and James lost their lives because they preached Jesus. Brethren, in reality, every preacher in the New Testament preached Jesus.

When Peter preached in Acts 2, his audience responded to the preaching. There were baptisms that very hour. The Gospel message is a message that is designed for response. When a person hears the truth and accepts the conditions God places on salvation, there will be baptisms that very hour.

In the context of Paul's 1 Corinthians statement, he also says our faith stands in the power of God, and the power of God is the preaching of Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:5). Paul also wrote, "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation*" (Romans 1:16). The power of our message is not in our eloquence or our style. The power of our message is not in volume or diction. The power of our message is the message. It is said that when Abraham Lincoln died, tens of thousands of people went to Washington for the funeral, or at least to view the body. Aristocrats came to pay homage. Royalty came from all over the

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world. But so did regular people like you and me. The story is told that one black lady came by, and she had her three grandchildren with her. They came to the casket and the lady said, “Children this man died for you.” I suppose to a certain extent that is true. Abraham Lincoln did more for human rights and equality than any president before or since. But in reality, it is Jesus Who died for us. He died for all of us. Whether our skin is red, yellow, black, or white, we are all precious in His sight.

Jesus said, “*If I be lifted up from the earth I will draw ALL men unto me*” (John 12:32). Therein lies the power of our message. Romans 5:8 says that “*Christ died for us.*” He died for ALL of us. There is the power of our message. Remember, “*Christ is the Savior of the body*” (Ephesians 5:23). **Therefore, we must preach Jesus.** †  
**Shan Jackson preaches for the church of Christ in Port Lavaca, Texas, USA.**

### Jesus, My Preacher!

Rodney Nulph

It is certainly not uncommon to hear brethren refer to a particular Gospel preacher as “my preacher”. We all have preachers who stand out in our minds as special for one reason or another. Sometimes it is a particular style, attitude, or pulpit presence that attracts to us to a certain preacher. I, too, have a favorite preacher! There has never been a preacher to mount a pulpit that even remotely compares to “my preacher”. Of course the One to Whom I refer is none other than Jesus. Let me share a few reasons why He is “head and shoulders” above the rest.

Firstly, Jesus preached with **authority**. At the conclusion of His masterful Sermon on the Mount, those who heard Him, “...*were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes*” (Matthew 7:28b,29). Jesus preached with the authority of heaven itself (cf. John 7:16; 8:28; 12:48-50). He did not preach opinions, suggestions, or “think so’s”, but rather the words that He preached meant the difference between life and death (cf. John 6:63).

Secondly, Jesus preached with **urgency**. He spent His days preaching the urgent message from heaven (cf. Luke 4:16-19; Matthew 4:17). He preached to His men (Matthew 16:21); He preached to the multitudes (Matthew 5-7); He preached to the minuscule (Luke 19); He preached to the malefactors (Luke 23:39-43). Jesus understood the urgency of preaching (John 9:4).

Thirdly, Jesus preached **passionately**. The mistaken “picture” many draw of Jesus as a tender man with long flowing hair, holding a baby lamb in His arms is a figment of man’s imagination and not a portrait of the biblical Christ! While Jesus was certainly meek and gentle (Matthew 11:28-30), His preaching was filled with passion. He was **not** a soft-spoken pacifist! Consider the fact that He “*cried in the temple as He taught*” (John 7:28; cf. 12:44). The idea of “*cried*” here literally means to cry aloud, cry out, speak with a loud voice” (Thayer 358). Jesus stood and cried as He extended the invitation (John 7:37). When He witnessed sin in His Father’s house, he passionately and readily dealt with it (John 2:15). He rebuked Peter to the face (Mark 8:33), as well as publicly denounced the false teachers of His day (Matthew 23). Passion and zeal characterized His ministry (John 2:17).

Jesus was the Master Preacher! May I exhort each one to read after Him, to study His Sermons, to follow in His footsteps and one day to enter the Great Throne Room of Heaven to spend eternity with Him. Truly, “...*Never man spake like this man*” (John 7:46b)! †

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# *Tradition or Eyewitness Testimony?*

John Thiesen

Satan is clever. If he can find a way to place doubt in peoples' minds about the truthfulness of the Bible, he will do it. One of the fabrications he has used is the idea that the Bible is just a collection of handed down traditions written by other people during the centuries after the apostles had departed.

The implication is that there must be a lot of mistakes in the New Testament and that we can't rely on it as an entirely factual record of Jesus' life, death for our sins, and resurrection, because it was written too long after the events themselves and must necessarily contain narratives corrupted by lost information, distortion, and fable.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. As with all of Satan's deceitful efforts to corrupt God's truth, his lie is easily exposed by reading the New Testament record itself. A casual examination of the New Testament Scriptures shows that they were written by eyewitnesses of the events and their fellow workers.

The apostle Paul, who wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament (and possibly 14, if the letter to the Hebrews was his work) wrote: "*Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not **seen** Jesus Christ our Lord...?*" (1 Corinthians 9:1).

The apostle John, who wrote 5 of the New Testament letters, includ-

ing the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation, said: "*That which was from the beginning, **which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life...That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ***" (1 John 1:1,3). Does John's information about Christ look like hand-me-down tradition or eyewitness testimony?

Another eyewitness who wrote two of the letters of the New Testament was Peter, one of the original 12 apostles chosen by Christ (as was John above). He said of himself and of his writings to the early Christians: "*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but **were eyewitnesses of his majesty**. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* And this voice which came from heaven **we heard**, when we were with him in the holy mount*" (2 Peter 1:16,17).

In addition to the eyewitness writ-

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ers of the New Testament, there were the men who traveled with them preaching the Gospel by their side. These, having daily contact with the apostles, received from “the horse’s mouth,” so to speak, all their facts. One of these, the beloved physician Luke (Colossians 4:14), claimed to have a complete and perfect knowledge of all the facts about Christ. In writing his letter to Theophilus (the Gospel of Luke), he assured Theophilus: *“It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed”* (Luke 1:3,4).

John Mark was another one of the apostle Paul’s traveling companions who was profitable to him in the ministry (2 Timothy 4:11). To him is attributed the writing of the epistle of Mark, one of the four Gospel accounts. This makes two of the four written by eyewitnesses of Jesus (the apostles Matthew and John) and two written by preachers traveling with the apostles (Mark and Luke). Their letters were circulated among the churches of their time, as well as the letters of the apostles Peter and Paul, along with the remaining two New Testament letters of James and Jude, producing faith in the hearts of first century people, as well as they do to people of our present time.

In fact, this was why their letters

were written, according to the apostle John. *“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name”* (John 20:30,31).

You and I can have complete confidence that the testimony of these writers of the first century continues uncorrupted to this present day because Jesus said, *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”* (Matthew 24:35). †

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



**Jesus' ministry was done openly for all to see. Witnesses abounded!**



## Romans 14:14-23

**Jerry Bates**

1. Are the clean and unclean food laws of the Old Testament still applicable to Christians today? (v. 14)
2. If we in our hearts still believe food is unclean, can we eat of it anyway? (v. 14)
3. If a fellow Christian is offended because of the food I eat, can I still say that I love him? (vs. 15)
4. Is it possible to cause another Christian to be lost simply by the food that I eat? (v. 15)
5. Of what three things does the kingdom of God consist? (v. 17)
6. What does it mean when it is said that the kingdom of God is not eating or drinking? (v. 17)
7. What two things does Scripture say that we are to pursue? (v. 19)
8. Even though it is right to eat certain foods, can it still become wrong for me to eat them? (v. 20)
9. Even though I know it is not wrong to eat some foods, is it always right for me to eat them? (v. 21)
10. Is it possible for food to be the cause of a person's soul being lost? (v. 20)
11. What does it mean when it is said that a person "does not eat from faith? (v. 23)
12. "Whatever is not from faith is \_\_\_\_\_." (v. 23)

(see the back cover for answer)

14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. 16 Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil; 17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men.

19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offense. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. 22 Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

NOTES: The theme of this section is love. In practical terms, what does it mean to love my fellow Christian? Paul is discussing the eating of certain foods, which he had already been discussing in the previous section. Paul concludes this subject with the teaching that all foods are now clean, and therefore, right for a Christian to eat. However, some Christians may not understand it in that way. If they still consider it wrong to eat, then it is wrong for them to eat because it is not of faith. Violating one's personal beliefs about something is always wrong, even if the action itself might otherwise be right.

What effect does their misunderstanding have on me? Many would say none, but Paul says that I should always consider what effect my actions will have on another person. If I openly do what others consider to be wrong, then my actions can have a damaging spiritual effect on them. Love never ignores or disregards the weak consciences of other Christians. We should pursue or work towards things that will edify fellow Christians. If my actions weaken a fellow Christian, then I am doing wrong, even though the action itself may be okay.

In Christ's life on this earth, He always put the needs and well being of others before His own. We must follow the example of Christ and do the same. We should be willing to forego our personal Christian liberty for the good of others. In our modern world, it seems that often Christians are only interested in what is right or wrong. However, the ultimate good after which we must seek is what is helpful and edifying to the body of Christ.

# Our "Eternal Security"

Dean Fugett

We believe as much as anyone in the power of our Savior and our God to save us and to keep us saved (John 10:28-30). We are confident with Paul in Romans 8:38,39, that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. But, while realizing that no one and no thing can separate us from our God, we are aware that we can, of our own choosing, sever ourselves from the grace of God and separate ourselves from the saved. The Bible points out this possibility through commands to guard against falling, through examples of those who did fall, and through exhortations to carefulness of lifestyles. Let's "search the Scriptures" to see the truth about this subject.

1. By attempting to mingle the grace of Christ with the words of the Law for justification, we would fall from grace. "*Christ is become of no effect unto you whosoever of you are justified by the law, **ye are fallen from grace***" (Galatians 5:4).
2. We could of our own desires, cease to be interested in spiritual things and the love of God and become conformed to the world (which Paul warned Christians NOT to be, Romans 12:3), thus be "*not of the Father*" and be lost with the world (1 John 2:15-17).
3. We could cease to do the will of the Father in heaven and not enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21-23).
4. We could fail to add the Christian graces of 2 Peter 1:5-7, thus becoming barren and unfruitful, and thereby fall (2 Peter 1:8-10).
5. We could become entangled again in the world after coming to a knowledge of the truth, be overcome, and be in worse state than before we first believed (2 Peter 2:20-22).
6. After being once enlightened, tasted of the heavenly gift, made partakers of the Holy Spirit, tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, we could fall away, crucifying to ourselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame. We would thereby become as the briars, whose end is to be burned (Hebrews 6:4-8).

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Realizing these truths among many such teachings, we will not become overconfident and careless, but will, “*thinking we stand take heed lest we fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:12); “*examining ourselves, whether we be in the faith*” (2 Corinthians 13:5); “*Work out our salvation with fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2:12); “*Take heed lest there be in us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God*” (Hebrews 3:12); because we know that “*some shall depart from the faith...*” (1 Timothy 4:1).

Then, by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-10), upon our faith (Galatians 5:6) and obedience (Hebrews 5:9), we will have confidence that we shall be saved and be secure. †

Dean Fugett is a preacher and elder working with the church of Christ in Cave City, Arkansas, USA.

### *The Gospel of Christ and Heaven*

**Robert D. Rawson**

Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). The promise of salvation is to those who “*obey Him*” (Hebrews 5:8,9).

Let us immediately allow Jesus into our hearts. He stands at the door and ‘knocks’ (Revelation 3:20). What prohibits His salvation and His being allowed to come into our lives?

**Love of sin** (1 John 2:15-17) is one thing that prohibits Jesus. On our part, the “*lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life*” varies as to the object of our lusts. Sometimes it is a person; sometimes it is our love for personal power; sometimes it is the lazy spirit we adopt. Regardless, these things take us away from Jesus rather than allow Him to come in.

**Failure to love God** is another thing that prohibits Jesus. He said that it’s when we love Him that we obey Him (John 14:15) and become His friend (John 15:14). Failure to love God will result in very sinful conduct (1 John 4:10ff) and heaven will be denied to those (Revelation 20:12ff).

Let us love Him, and let us shun sin so that neither His knocking nor His love for us is in vain. †

**Robert D. Rawson preaches for the Crockett church of Christ outside of Senatobia, Mississippi, USA. He also conducts the Training School for Better Service (<http://www.tsfb3-edu.com/>).**

## SALVATION

# Are You Ready for Your Departure?

**Wayne Barrier**

In 2 Timothy 4:6, the apostle Paul said, “*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.*” Paul was aware of circumstances that indicated that the end of his life was near. He summarized his thoughts as he faced this somber reality. We may not be willing to admit our own approaching departure. Some will say they are young or strong and are not concerned about death. The truth is that regardless of our age or physical condition, we are not far from our departure. Even a long life for man is only a brief period of existence. Are you ready for what you will face beyond this life? Paul was ready. He stated the basis of his confidence. We need to be in the same condition.

Consider what he said in 2 Timothy 4:7, “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*” Paul’s struggle with the devil had been won. He referred to the battle in Ephesians 4:10-18 as he discussed the armor of God needed to win against Satan. Paul was confident of victory.

We too can be confident as we near our departure, if we will fight the good fight, using the weapons and armor provided by the Lord to His Children. Paul finished the race. We must go all the way to the finish line in this race with evil. We can finish, if we keep the faith.

Paul said that he had kept the faith. Our faith is strengthened as we increase and sustain our trust in God and live our lives in obedience to Him. As we pray, study, worship, serve, and devote ourselves to walking with Christ, we will grow stronger. He will sustain us until the end as He did Paul. Are you ready for your departure? If you are not ready, your destination will be eternal punishment. If we are ready, we will reach heaven and an eternal life of joy, peace, happiness, and love.

We must be ready. Allow the grace, mercy, and favor of God to provide for your departure. The same steps to prepare in Paul’s time apply today. We must have faith in God, accept the invitation of Jesus to be added to His church and act on our belief and His instruction. Consider the instruction to the people who were responsible for the crucifixion of Christ when they asked what they must do to be saved. They were told to begin the journey to eternal life by turning to Christ in repentance and being baptized for remission of sin. Read Acts 2:14-47. †

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

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# I Died Last Night

Jack Harriman

A man said to his financial adviser, “I died last night. Tell me, what happened to my estate and the financial well-being of my family.” He was trying to determine his financial readiness in the event of his death. But had his death actually occurred, this would not have been his greatest concern. Let’s suppose that I had died last night. What would be my greatest concern?

My first concern would be in regard to my personal relationship with God. Did I become a Christian? Did I receive the Gospel message into my heart, repent of past sins, and was I baptized for the remission of those sins (Acts 2:38)? This would be my greatest concern.

Did I live a faithful Christian life to the very end (Revelation 2:10)? That would be my second concern. Did I worship God according to His instruction? Did I live a life patterned after His life? Did I reflect His attitude toward others? Was I loving, generous, and kind?



My third great concern would be in regard to my family’s spiritual well-being. Was I the kind of husband that God would have had me to be? Will my children become Christians and be faithful as a result of my teaching and example (Ephesians 6:4)? Oh, how pressing this issue would be if I had died last night!

My fourth great concern would be in regard to my influence on others. Am I, even though dead, yet speaking to my acquaintances in such a way that will encourage them to so live as to get to heaven (Hebrews 11:4)?

One morning someone will ask, “Did you hear that (insert your name) died last night?” And when that appointed day comes, our great concern will not be our estate, but rather the well-being of our soul and the souls of our loved ones. Now is the only time to make preparation for that event. †

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

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# The Reason for Our Hope

Jimmy Jividen

A Christian lives in hope. No matter how dreary the past or how difficult the present, a Christian can look to the future with optimism. He has hope.

The meaning of existence and the purpose of life are not problems to a Christian. God has revealed the answers in Scripture. A Christian has hope because:

❖ He can know whom he has believed and be convinced that He is able to guard what he has entrusted to Him until that day (2 Timothy 1:12).

❖ The consequences of sin cannot overcome the Christian. His guilt has been lifted. His judgment has been cancelled. His bondage has been broken. The redemption price Jesus paid on the cross has freed man from sin and its consequences. He has hope.

❖ The troubles of life cannot bring the Christian to despair. He knows that

God not only controls the universe, but also cares about his every need. The Scriptures affirm, *“He cares for you”* (1 Peter 5:7), and He *“causes all things to work together for good to those who love God”* (Romans 8:28). The Christian has hope.



❖ Death is not feared by a Christian. Jesus conquered death by His resurrection. He destroyed the fear of death by His triumph over the grave. To a Christian, death is not the end, but a glorious change. He has hope. †

Jimmy Jividen is a well-known writer and preacher living in Abilene, Texas, USA.

**To a Christian, death is not  
the end, but a glorious change.**

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# New Things

Mark Phillips

As a child I enjoyed one aspect of a new school year. I enjoyed going shopping and buying new school clothes and my school supplies. As soon as I got home from shopping I wanted to take out my new crayons and begin drawing pictures. Of course, my mom would tell me “No” since those were for school, but I was excited, I like new things.

In Christ, all things become new. Second Corinthians 5:17-19 says, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”*

The message of these verses is powerful. There is not a person alive who has not committed sins and who has not made mistakes that he wishes he could go back in time and do differently. While we cannot go back in time and redo what we have done, we can receive forgiveness of our sins, and in God’s eyes, it is as if we had never committed the sin. We become a “new creation.” Notice some of the words that Paul has chosen to use: *“new creation”, “the new has come”, and “reconciled.”* Along with these words, notice the conditions that we must meet to be new and reconciled: *“if anyone is in Christ”, “through Christ”, and “in Christ.”* God provides this great blessing because of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

What does it take to have this relationship with Jesus Christ? What does the Bible — God’s Word — teach us?

Mark 16:16 quotes Jesus saying, *“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*

Romans 6:3,4 says, *“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”*

Ephesians 4:20-24 reads this way: *“But that is not the way you learned Christ! assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of*

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*your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

In Jesus Christ we can have the forgiveness of sins; we become a new creation; and with that, we have the hope of eternal life; and with that we will have a new home in heaven. It is my desire that we all will obey God's plan of salvation and then live in heaven for eternity. †

**Mark Phillips preaches for the church of Christ at Groesbeck in Cincinnati, Ohio, USA.**

### *One's As Good As Another*

**John Stacy**

Mark Twain said he went to borrow an ax from his neighbor.

His neighbor said, “No! I am using it now, and when I get through with it, I am going to use it to eat soup with.”

“You don't eat soup with an ax,” said Twain

“Well,” said the neighbor, “when you don't want to do something, one excuse is as good as another.”

That may be true with men, but it is not true with God! God will accept no excuse for a failure to do His will. Excuses make God angry (Exodus 4:14; Luke 14:21). Why not cast aside your excuses and obey God now? *“Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts as in the day of provocation”* (Hebrews 3:15). †



**John Stacy preaches for the St. Joseph Avenue church of Christ in Dyersburg, Tennessee, USA.**

# Seeking a Happy Ending

Michael L. King

Any obligation that we are required to accomplish as a Christian always has a much more effective and pleasant ending than when doing it our way. Troubles and weaknesses will manifest themselves ultimately in the lives of some of God's people. There is a time for correction and a way in which it is to be done. The top priority involving relationships must always be, as it was with Jesus, to seek and save those who are lost (Luke 19:10), and to do it with a loving spirit.

Jesus gave instruction, actually a 1-2-3 method, for resolving differences and offences when they occur between brethren. His teaching in Matthew 18:15-17 stands as a hallmark passage for addressing ills among brethren. He taught that in the first place, a proper treatment would be for a private and personal visit to be made to the one "*overtaken*" (Galatians 6:1), or one "*having sinned against you*" (Matthew 18:15). Many years ago, Moses revealed to the Jewish nation God's solution to relationship problems. He advised them to certainly rebuke an offender, but not to hate him or bear sin in their own heart in so doing (Leviticus 19:17). Exercise prudence so he will hear, feel, and be willing to repent or make the necessary changes in his life. Privacy is to be maintained so as not to disturb or discourage others in the process, protecting all the while the other person's privacy, to avoid embarrassment or cause further division or commotion.

The apostle Paul taught that for efforts to be successful and effective, the mind of Jesus must be developed and employed in these matters. He stressed the importance of going to the offending person out of love, with one accord, singleness of mind, free of strife and vain-glory, assuming a lowliness of mind, esteeming the other better than self, forgetting our own things in the matter, having no ulterior agenda or to gain personal reputation, taking the form of a servant, relating with humility, and having willingness to sacrifice self to gain the other (Philippians 2:2-5).

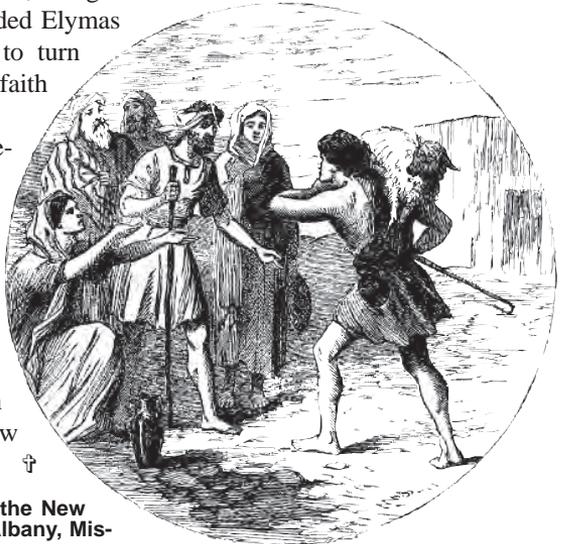
Secondly, should there be no response to the personal expression of love and concern, Jesus taught that the truth of the matter be established in the presence of two or three witnesses. It was Jewish law to establish truth in the presence of witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15). It is not uncommon today when we strive to resolve differences about which we have concern, our objectivity and reasoning capabilities are compromised. We allow tension to build, for in some cases we are experiencing a personal affront or attack. It is hard to be cool and kind when

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on the defensive. Too, the facts bearing upon the matter can be misconstrued, and non-partisan individuals can observe both positions, be objective, and render kindly and lovingly recommendations for resolution. The Lord reminded His Jewish hearers that “*the testimony of two is true*” (John 8:17). Paul exercised this means of determining truth, for he established every word in the presence of two or three witnesses (2 Corinthians. 13:1). The strength of the word of two or three witness under Moses could carry the death penalty (Hebrews 10:28).

The final step, and the least desirable, would be to bring the matter or person, before the church for assistance in making a resolution, whether restoring a wayward brother, or out of a deep love and concern for their soul, exercise church discipline and withdraw fellowship (2 Thessalonians 3:5-7; 1 Timothy 6:5). We must at all times keep in mind our objective — saving the souls of everyone involved. It is intended to be a prayerful, sympathetic, and united effort on behalf of the church. If the first two attempts are not effective and the church fails, there is no backup plan given by God for the wayward brother’s correction. It must be deliberate and prayerful, and done with knowledge of the gravity of the situation. If the church withdraws, God will recognize such; if a person repents, God will forgive. Peter withstood Ananias for letting Satan fill his heart with evil, lying, and withholding from the Lord (Acts 5:3). Paul, being directed by the Holy Spirit, reprimanded Elymas the sorcerer for attempting to turn the proconsul away from the faith (Acts 13:9-11).

This three-step procedure discussion given by Jesus was introduced with the story of the ninety-nine safe sheep and the shepherd going in search for the lost one. It resulted in great rejoicing and a happy ending, and so can it be today when we do likewise (Matthew 18:12-14).



Michael L. King preaches for the New Albany congregation in New Albany, Mississippi, USA.

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# God Has Spoken

Greg Tidwell

In contrast with centuries of religious wars and oppression, tolerance has become a hallmark of our age. What society gained in peace and mutual respect, however, was purchased at the expense of its commitment to truth.

Attempting to be inoffensive and open-minded, the spirit of our age seeks inclusiveness at any price.

Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: *“See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain”* (Hebrews 8:5).

While the world languishes with this noncommittal approach, God calls His people to a profound commitment. Obedience, righteousness, and faithfulness challenge the Lord’s church to rise above the level of mediocrity.

A desire to follow human nature, rooted in pride, encourages individuality and division. A desire to follow the Gospel of Christ, rooted in obedience, encourages conformity and unity within the will of God.

Obedience to God means following the pattern laid out in Scripture for the faithful ordering of His church.

Believing that God has spoken, we have an authoritative directive for the work and conduct of the church. True progress and advancement in the Lord’s work can only be measured by the objective standards given by God Himself. We are only building the Lord’s church if we are building it according to His pattern.†

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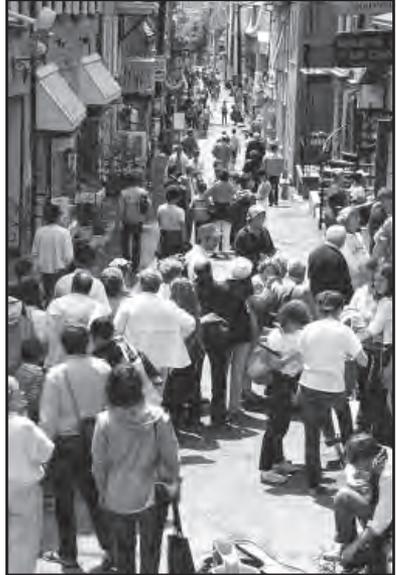
## THE CHURCH

# The Glorious Church

Jimmy Young

The Book of Ephesians sets forth *the church* as the fullness of God (1:22,23) and how all men are reconciled to God in it (2:13-16).

1. The church is purchased with a glorious price. It is bought with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:7). Paul said in Colossians 1:13,14, “*Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*” No greater price could be paid.
2. There are glorious blessings in the church. Man is redeemed and reconciled to God in the church. “*And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby*” (Ephesians 2:16). Only in the church can men be reconciled to God. This comes by obedience (Acts 2:38-47), and then as we go through life we confess and repent of sins (James 5:16).



**Mankind has no greater need than to be redeemed and reconciled to God in the church.**

3. The church has a glorious destiny. “*Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when we shall have put down all rule and all authority and power*” (1 Corinthians 15:24). Ephesians 5:23 says that Christ is the “*saviour of the body*”, which is the church (Colossians 1:18). Heaven is our destiny, if we obey the Gospel of Christ and live therein. The church is from the mind of God. That which is from the mind of men will not save! †

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# Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

## Colossians 3:12-17

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

The admonition is made to those who are holy and beloved of God. Christians need to make honest examinations of their lives and consciences: am I holy? Am I beloved of Him who sees the depth of who and what I really am?

Following that honest examination, we need to take special care in developing the character traits described as our attitudes in dealing with each other and even with those who are not in the body of Christ. If we live and behave in this way, Christ will shine brightly through our lives.

A further admonition: love is to be the basis of all that we do — not the *word* “love”, but the *core attitude* of our lives. This will bring peace and thankfulness.

This world is filled with sin. For Christians, it is an alien and dangerous environment. These directions from our Father are guides that mark the safe path for us as we make our way through this jungle of evil. To return “in kind” is not the way; Jesus’ instructions to repay evil with good serve as our best protection to safely reach that other world.

*To o*  
*often, those who call themselves after the name of Christ live one life on Sunday and another for the remaining six days of the week.*  
*In honesty and sincere humility, everything that I say and do as a Christian is to be done in the name of Christ, as His ambassador in the world.*

# *Preach Only the Gospel?*

**Steven Harper**

Every so often we hear someone make the plea, “Preach only the gospel, and leave everyone else alone.” Have you ever heard that? Have you ever said that?



From my experience, it is usually stated when someone has pointed out some error in the doctrine and/or practice of some religious group, or has pointed out erroneous thinking or false teaching being promoted by someone. I have been asked more than once, “Why don’t you just preach Jesus? Why do you think you have to tell everybody else where they’re wrong?”

It is a sad thing to hear such a plea, if only because it demonstrates ignorance of what the Gospel is all about, and more so of what exactly is being asked. The plea is most often made when one doesn’t *like* what is being taught — *from God’s word* — and the listener is offended by its exclusive message and the fact that he or she may be condemned by those same words; or maybe the listener is just afraid someone else will be offended by those same words and, in our current society, offending someone seems to be the highest offense!

But let’s stop and consider the request. What if we preached “only the Gospel”? First, let us note that the Gospel message is about the fact that Jesus died for our sins, was buried and then raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3,4); that His death purchased the church He established (Acts 20:28). His resurrection certified that He was whom He claimed to be (Romans 1:4) and the confession of faith in Him and His resurrection serves as the very foundation of the church (Matthew 16:18). If that is the Gospel, then can we preach just that and not offend anyone? Let’s think about this for a minute.

## DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

**I can't preach about God, lest I offend the atheist.** The Gospel message is about God so loving the world that He *"gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16) — a favorite passage of many sincerely religious people. But this teaching assumes that God exists; if I am to "preach only the Gospel, and leave everyone else alone," I would still offend some because atheists deny the existence of God, and preaching the Gospel would rightly infer that God exists — something no committed atheist would tolerate. To preach God would be offensive to him!

**I can't preach Jesus as the Christ, lest I offend the Jews.** An obvious part of teaching the Gospel is the fact I must teach Jesus was who He claimed to be: the Messiah. Throughout the New Testament, we find time after time a short statement that says Jesus did something that *"it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord"* (cf. Matthew 1:22). Those things that were spoken by the Lord through the prophets concerned the coming Messiah; if Jesus fulfilled those things, then He would necessarily be the Christ. Jesus also made the claim to be that Messiah (John 4:25,26). But if I "preach only the Gospel," I would still offend some. The Jews who reject Jesus as the Messiah would take offense, so I can't really "just preach the Gospel only" and not offend.

**I can't preach Jesus as the only Savior, lest I offend the Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus — and many Americans.** I also could not preach that Jesus is the only way to heaven because Buddhists and Hindus teach that heaven is attained by reaching supreme enlightenment and eventual nirvana, while the Islamists believe that it is through good works and following the Qur'an that one gets to heaven. According to recent polls, many Americans believe salvation and heaven may be obtained if one is "good enough". Though Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6), and though the apostles taught, *"...there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12), I could not teach that lest I offend those who believe salvation may be obtained by other means.

**I can't preach 'One Church', lest I offend those in denominations.** As was noted earlier, Jesus died for our sins, and His death purchased the church. He came to establish **one church, one kingdom**. When Jesus answered Peter, after Peter declared his belief that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, He said, *"...on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"* (Matthew 16:18). Note that Jesus said He would build "My church" — *singular*; not "churches," but "church." **One**.

But if I preached that lesson, many would be offended because they believe there is not just one church but literally hundreds, if not thousands — and all are

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acceptable to God. Many today believe one should “join the church of your choice” rather than taking the time to find the church for which Jesus died. To preach there is only one church today is, in fact, confusing to many. They look around and see the many denominations and cannot believe that there would be only one church.

Often, when people hear the message of “one church,” they are stunned and ask, “How can so many people be wrong?” Many are highly offended when you tell them Christ died for only one church and had always intended to establish only one church.

**I can’t preach about sin, lest I offend the one who still lives in sin.** As was noted earlier, the Gospel message teaches that Jesus died for our sins. If that is true, I can’t “just preach the Gospel and leave everyone else alone” because preaching the Gospel would be offensive to many who still live in sin and would be condemned by that message. God’s Word tells us that the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) and that things such as sexual immorality [fornication, adultery, homosexuality], covetousness, and pride are condemned by God (Romans 1:18-32), and many would be offended to hear that! Just try to preach publicly that homosexuality is a sin, and you will be quickly reminded by many of how ‘bigoted’ and ‘closed-minded’ you are, and how offensive that message is!

The reality is, I could not preach about sin at all, for “*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23) and surely someone out there would be offended by me telling them they are in sin. I couldn’t even preach about sin to believers, because God’s Word tells us that even disciples still sin (1 John 1:8, 10), and someone might be offended if I pointed out that he/she, even as a disciple, has sinned. I don’t have to speculate on this point, for I have experienced that very situation more than once! Believe it or not, some supposed disciples get offended when they are told that their actions are called ‘sin’ by God!

So, where does that leave us? Some want me to “preach only the Gospel, and leave everyone else alone,” but as we have seen, even that is still going to offend *someone*. If I can’t even preach what is contained in the Gospel message, **what can I preach?** I believe the following line is exactly what I would be able to preach and not offend:

That’s it: **nothing**. If I preach nothing, no one would be offended, right? The problem with that is, I also would *not* be preaching to them *the words by which they could be saved* (Acts 11:14), and I would *not* be preaching *the words by which faith is made possible* (Romans 10:17). If I didn’t preach the Gospel, many would be happy, though — including **the devil** — but God would not be happy. †

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# DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

## WHATEVER IS TRUE

John Gipson

Note that “*whatever is true*” stands at the very top of Paul’s great list of things we should steadily think about. It is ahead of everything else. “*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things*” (Philippians 4:8).

The temptation of today is to repeat the cynical question Pilate asked Jesus, “*What is truth?*” We tend to seek the pleasant, whether true or not. It is so convenient for me to have “my truth,” and you to have “your truth.” “It doesn’t really make any difference what you believe, just as long as you are sincere”, we are told.

For the sake of harmony and political correctness, we are eager to stamp all religions as “true”, regardless of how they conflict with each other. We tend to major on a commonly accepted idea of so-called “spirituality”. This is a vague, abstract state often removed a hundred miles from the truth.

In the Bible, truth is not presented simply as an abstraction, but boldly in the form of Christ. The Christ said, “*I am the truth...*” (John 14:6). As Avon Malone observed, “Other men spoke of truth, but He was truth speaking.” Christ said, “*...and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*” (John 8:32). In our devotion to the pleasant, the lovely, and the gracious, we must never forget Christ and His teachings. He does not mince words when He says, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me*” (John 14:6). Dogmatic? Well, yes. But when is truth not? It always stands against falsehood.

If we rely on God’s truth in Christ, we should never hide from any other truth in the world. “*Whatever is true,...think...*” †

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Satan seeks a ship that sails alone, and he seeks a Christian who is trying to make it through the world alone. It is much more difficult to capture a fleet of ships, and it is more difficult to take into captivity a fleet of Christians. That is why we need to have strong bonds of fellowship among us. I love being with Christians. If you are not developing a close fellowship with other Christians, be on the alert! You are just the person Satan is looking for! ~ Ted Knight

# DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

## Faith and Works

Owen Cosgrove

There is absolutely no doubt that “faith only” will not save a man (James 2:24). Faith only is dead, it is impractical, it is ineffective, it is barren, and it is devilish (James 2:26; 2:15; 2:18; 2:20; 2:19).

The Rich Young Ruler believed, but he did not obey — solid proof that it takes more than “faith only” to save (Matthew 19:16-22). Jesus said, “*Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father who is in Heaven*” (Matthew 7:21). His statement proves that more than mere mental assent is required to please God. Many of the Jewish rulers believed on Christ, but they would not confess Him for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:42,43). See? That is iron clad proof that it takes more than “faith only” to serve God.

Now I have one problem. Through the years I have listened as brethren talked and talked and talked without doing a thing about some church work that needed to be done. Sectarian preachers were insisting on “faith only” while their congregations worked with almost a fanatical zeal, while our brethren were preaching “works, works, works” and doing very little.

What an enigma! What a paradox — for some to preach “faith only” and to perform as though their salvation depended on works, while some of us decried “dead faith” and “faith only,” and then went to sleep at the switch.

It is one thing to make scriptural arguments showing that faith without works is dead. It is quite a different thing to prove our love by our works — to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance — to let our lights shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify God.

The Lord didn’t put all the “works” passages in the New Testament to show that baptism is essential to salvation. There are dozens of other passages to do that. Rather, He filled His Book with Scriptures about “works” to tell us we had better render some real service rather than mere lip service.

Remember the barren fig tree? Work for the night is coming when no man can work. Be ready unto every good work. No wonder we have difficulty teaching some denominational friends that it takes more than “faith only” to save. Some of us have not yet become convinced of our own teaching. †

**Owen Cosgrove (1921-2011) was involved in printed evangelism in many countries and lived in Waxahachie, Texas, USA.**

## DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

# Miracles of Jesus

David R. Kenney

Have you ever heard someone claim an amazing event as a miracle? The use of the term “miracle” has become so generalized that it is important to understand what is a true miracle.

Miracles were supernatural events that overrode natural laws. For example, if someone recovers from a serious illness after months of treatment it is not a miracle. Miracles were instantaneous and required no visits to the doctor.

Jesus’ use of miracles was prophesied in Isaiah 35:5,6, “...*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert*” (NKJV). Jesus performed many miracles, but only a few are recorded. “*And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name*” (John 20:30,31 NKJV).

There were seven miracles recorded in John that demonstrated a facet of Jesus’ power: turning water into wine (2:1-11); healing a man’s son (4:46-54); healing a lame man (5:1-9); multiplying bread and fish (6:1-14); walking on the water (6:15-21); healing a blind man (9:1-7), and the raising of Lazarus (11:38-44). These miracles demonstrate Jesus’ control over quality (wine), space or distance (healing a man’s son), time (healing a lame man), quantity (bread and fish), nature (walking on water), light and darkness (a blind man), and life and death (Lazarus).

It is important to realize that miracles were always used for a definite purpose. Jesus sent His disciples to preach the Gospel, ***using miracles to confirm that the message was from God.*** Mark 16:20 states: “*And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen*”. Now that the Bible has been completely recorded and confirmed (1 Corinthians 13:10; Jude 3), there is no longer a need for these miracles or signs of confirmation, so these have ceased as was prophesied (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). †

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# Giving an Answer for Our Religion

Joe W. Nichols

Most of us have heard people say: “I don’t believe in arguing the Bible;” “The truth doesn’t need defending;” or “Debating is unChristian”. I imagine the devil couldn’t be more pleased with such statements — they contradict God and the Bible! Every Christian is obligated to think logically, to reason soundly, and to use his reasoning and logic in defending the Scriptures.

Paul states, “*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). To “*prove*” is to “*try*” (Philippians 1:10), “*examine*” (Galatians 6:4), and “*put to test*” (1 Corinthians 11:28). One must prove, try, and test what he hears, regardless of who is speaking. The Bereans of Acts 17 were of this disposition, “*examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so.*” For this reason, they “*were more noble than those at Thessalonica.*”

Those who would mix truth and error constantly confront us, and we must ever be on guard. Therefore, we must not only be studious, but questioning and testing what is said to us by supposed servants of God. As Jesus warned, “*Take heed what ye hear*” (Mark 4:24). The Bible is our testing equipment today to prove what is true. It is our measuring rod, our yardstick, and our pattern to determine correctness.

Peter states, “*But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer...*” (1 Peter 3:15). We are told that the Greek word translated “*give answer*” is a legal term used in court wherein the attorney cleared his client of a charge levied against him (*Wuest’s Word Studies, First Peter, page 89*). Since the Bible has no verbal defense except its believers, the person of faith must be its defender. Peter enjoins upon the Christian the obligation to defend the faith in a verbal way — “*give answer.*” The only restriction is that it is to be done in an attitude of “*meekness*” and “*fear,*” humbly trusting God and His Word, rather than self.

God called Israel to *reason* (Isaiah 1:18), and Elijah *debated* the false prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:21). Religion needs to be constantly tested and tried as to its quality. In the cases of God and Israel, as well as Elijah debating the false prophets of Baal, the genuineness of their religions was shown to be vain.

One’s “*Christianity*” stands in its right to exist as the religion from God when one can substantiate the faith and practice in light of Scripture. As children and

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servants of God, we are to: not believe every speaker (1 John 4:1); not succumb to a perverted Gospel (Galatians 1:6-9); beware of those who go onward and abide not in the Gospel of Christ (2 John 9); mark them that cause divisions and stumbling contrary to the doctrine (Romans 16:17); contend (go to battle) for the faith (Jude 3); reason the Scriptures as Paul did at Athens and Ephesus (Acts 17:17; 19:8); expound more accurately to others the way of God as did Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:26); and like Paul, also be “*set for the defense of the Gospel*” (Philippians 1:17).

Valid and sound argument is not wrangling or contentious disputing, but it is drawing conclusions by giving proof and evidence. By reasoning truth, we confirm Jesus to be the Christ, what the New Testament plan of salvation is, what acceptable worship is, etc. We are confident in what we believe and practice because we have Scripture to witness to our intellectual hearts in the matter. Such confidence enables us to teach and preach boldly (Acts 4:29). †

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### A HELP MEET T. Pierce Brown

Almost everyone who refers to Genesis 2:18 using the King James Version or the ASV quotes, “*And Jehovah God said, it is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him.*” Then they pronounce “*help*” and “*meet*” as if it were one word, sometimes saying, “*helpmate.*” I have no particular objection to referring to a man’s wife as his helpmate, if she is such. Nor do I have any desire to deny that God wants a man’s wife to be a mate that is helpful. However, I confess that I am bothered a little when a person who claims to be able to give an adequate exegesis of God’s Word does not know that the word “*meet*” as used here simply means “*suitable.*”

It may not be quite as bad as a person who thinks Jesus said in Mark 7:27, “*It is not **meat** [instead of “*meet*”] to take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs,*” but it is almost as bad. It is our judgment that almost any person can teach the Gospel plan of salvation, which is so simple that it is almost impossible to misunderstand without expert help. Yet, those of us who attempt to do more than write or speak about the simple facts, promises and commands of the Gospel should at least be able to discover the meaning of a word before we attempt to explain it to some other person. †

# CHRISTIANS AS LIGHT IN THE WORLD

**Bonnie Rushmore**

Jesus said, “*I am the Light of the World*” (John 8:12 NKJV). When one obeys the Gospel, that person reflects the Light of Christ to others. “*You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven*” (Matthew 5:14-16). The apostle Paul admonished the Christians at Ephesus, “*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*” (Ephesians 5:8). As Christians, we do not create our own light, but we reflect the Light of Jesus Christ upon a sin-sick world — similar to the moon, which has no light, reflecting only the light of the sun.

In order for Christians to adequately reflect the light of Christ, they must know the Word of God. “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15 KJV). This requires one to dig into the Bible — not just read the Scriptures. This is accomplished by attending the Bible classes and other opportunities to hear God’s Word as set up by the leadership of the local congregation, worshipping God on the first day of the week, and in daily, private Bible Study. The Bereans “*...searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*” (Acts 17:11 NKJV). These Christians did not have a Bible — it was not completed at this time. They went to the priest, requested a scroll, sat there, and studied it. Then, they returned the scroll to the priest. The Bereans did this daily to make sure that they were being taught according to God’s Word. We need to follow their example!

In the physical world, light dispels darkness. In the Spiritual world, Christians disperse the darkness of sin. As we reflect the light of Christ, we change the world from the total darkness of sin to one of hope and compassion through our good works. Our benevolent acts toward others, compassion for others, and the love we

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show toward the lost all reflect Christ and His love and compassion for the lost. Our light shines upon the world through our actions. Without Christians there is no light in the world, and sin prevails.

The purpose of physical light is to enable one to see what is around or to direct one on a safe passage. The spiritual light is intended to light the world and benefit all mankind, not just we who are Christians. Our reflected light cannot be directed into the corners to be dimmed or hidden, but it must be displayed for the entire world to see.

During a lunar eclipse, the earth blocks the sunlight from fully reaching the moon. When this happens, the reflected light of the moon is totally blocked or dimmed, depending on the position of the earth and its relationship to the moon. When Christians allow their selfish desires and wants — I call this the “I syndrome” — to block the Lord’s light, our reflection becomes blocked or dimmed to the world around us. Christ must always be first and foremost in our lives (Matthew 10:37-39). We cannot allow our desires to dim the light of Christ reflecting from us to a lost world.

Sometimes our Light is dimmed by sin in our lives. The light of Christ — the source of our light — is bright and pure. When one participates in sinful activities (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Revelation 21:8), the light of Christ is dimmed or blotted out, similar to the moon with a cloud overshadowing it. *“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain”* (Philippians 2:14-16). We must live our lives in such a way that others will see the light of Jesus shining through us. When the world sees Christians fussing and fighting with each other, the light of Jesus is dimmed or blotted out! When this happens, we become a hindrance to the cause of Christ instead of being the bright beacon guiding others to our heavenly home.

Each Christian is commanded to let his or her light shine. Our individual lights should shine brightly, illuminating the world around us. When our individual lights join the light of other Christians, we become a greater light shining even brighter upon the darkness of sin encompassing our world. †

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## CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

# Christians Become Soul-Winners When...

Charles Box



May God help all who are New Testament Christians to become soul-winners. May we all realize the need for reproducing ourselves many times in the Christian life. “When in the better land before the bar we stand, How deeply grieved our souls will be: If any lost one there should cry in deep despair, ‘You never mentioned him to me.’ You never mentioned him to me, you helped me not the light to see; You met me day by day and knew I was astray, yet never mentioned him to me.” Christians **must** be soul-winners.

**Christians become soul-winners when they are what they should be:** Christians are

Christ-like people who have a great message for the world. It is a message of good tidings and great joy. There is no greater joy than the joy of sharing Christ with the world. “*For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger*” (Luke 2:11,12).

**Christians become soul-winners when they believe the Word of God:**

The message of Ezekiel 33:7-9 should move every Christian to be a soul-winner. “*So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; there-*

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*fore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me. When I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die! and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Nevertheless if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.”*

**Christians become soul-winners when they believe the Great Commission applies to them:** Teaching all nations or preaching the Gospel to every creature applies to all Christians. *“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, all authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 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, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen”* (Matthew 28:18-20). Every Christian has the responsibility of preaching or teaching repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus. *“Then He said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem”* (Luke 24:46,47). Each Christian is sent by Jesus Christ with the message of hope for a lost world (John 20:21). The Great Commission applies to every Christian.

**Christians become soul-winners when they are in love with the Lord Jesus Christ:** The thing that gets people in the temples daily and from house-to-house teaching the Word of God is the love that they have for Jesus Christ. *“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”* (Acts 5:42). Our love for God must motivate us to win souls for Jesus. *“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins”* (1 John 4:10). We love God because He first loved us and gave Jesus for our sins. We show our love when we tell others of the salvation God provides.

Every Christian should be a soul-winner. If you have not yet done so, please obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ through faith (John 8:20), repentance (Acts 7:30), confession (Romans 10:9,10), and baptism (Acts 22:16). After your baptism, arise to be a soul-winner for Jesus. *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”* (2 Timothy 2:2). †

**Charles Box preaches for the Walnut Street Church of Christ in Greenville, Alabama, USA.**

# More Babysitters in the Church

Keith Parker

Larry and Ann were involved in a Bible study with a couple. While Larry was teaching this couple the Gospel, his wife Ann was entertaining their little girl. Jesus was the topic of conversation in one room, and toys and dolls were the topic of conversation in the other room. The couple was baptized. Who converted them? Let me tell you what happened — a brother taught while a sister babysat. Both were involved!

John and Sue invite Jeff over to their house for cake and ice cream after worship one night. Jeff is impressed with John and Sue's warmth and concern. He becomes interested in their religion. He starts going to services with them regularly. Three months later on a Sunday morning he responds to be baptized. Who converted him? John and Sue. Both were involved.

A family moves into the community. The neighbor across the street fixes dinner for them one night. She invites them to worship and they come. Before long the preacher sets up a home Bible study with them. Three weeks later on a Monday night they are born again. Who converted them? Preacher and neighbor. Both were involved.

A grandmother prays for her lost grandson every night. Occasionally she writes him notes saying, "Joey, I love you and am praying for you." Before long Joey becomes friends with a deacon of the Lord's church. At lunch time they talk about Jesus. The deacon encourages Joey to accept the Lord, and he does. Who converted him? Deacon and grandmother. Both were involved.

Brethren, like Jesus, we are to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). We are saved to save (I Timothy 4:16). We have been called to call (1 Corinthians 1:9). In all our activities — glory to God and salvation to souls! Let's do everything that we can to win everybody we can!

**We need more babysitters in the church.**



Keith Parker works with the Lord's church in Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA.

## CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION

# *The Joy of Seeking the Lost*

**Dale Grissom**

Relatively few congregations of the Lord's church are actively involved in local evangelism. Very few indeed make even a pretense of engaging in one-on-one personal evangelism. Many have pulpit preachers, involvement ministers, youth ministers, education ministers, family ministers, and/or bus ministers, and are perhaps involved in overseas missions, yet they never seriously consider their responsibility in the area of local personal evangelism.

Could it be that the need for personal evangelism is not preached because we don't like to be reminded of our shortcomings? Do we ignore the Great Commission in order to avoid a guilt trip? We are a people who pride ourselves on keeping the commandments of the Lord, yet we ignore the Great Commission. We understand that, in order to be obedient, we must comply with commands, necessary inferences, and examples in the Bible. Concerning personal evangelism, we have the command (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16); we have the inference that the Gospel was preached by Philip to the eunuch (Acts 8:35); and we have example after example of the Gospel being presented on a personal basis in the book of Acts. Brethren, that is the way the early church reached people, and that is the way we must reach people today.

We must learn to love the souls of men. We must care enough to seek them and teach them. Let us strive to become true servants of the Lord, unselfishly reaching out to others rather than being so completely wrapped up in our own lives. Brethren, there is more to life than satisfying our own selfish desires — there is immeasurable joy in reaching the lost with the Gospel!

Let us look to Christ as our example, trying to be as much like Him as we can, walking each day in the way He would have us to go. And let us not grow weary in well doing, but keep pressing on to the mark of a higher calling by our Lord (Galatians 6:9; Philippians 3:14). †

**Dale Grissom, now deceased, worked for many years with the church of Christ in Dexter, Missouri, USA.**

*“I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:14*

# Pauline Amnesia

Kevin L. Moore

Having recounted the names of certain individuals he had personally baptized at Corinth, Paul candidly admits, “*I do not know whether I baptized any other*” (1 Corinthians 1:16). Despite his vital contribution as an apostle of Christ and the divine inspiration that guaranteed the inerrancy of his writings, evidently Paul was not omniscient. Yet, his inability to remember reveals something even more notable. It appears that the apostle did not deem it necessary to keep a personal record of all the people he won to the Lord. Why is this significant?

Paul clearly understood the importance of baptism, as seen in his own experience (Acts 9:18; 22:16) and teaching (Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:26,27). However, it seems that whenever possible he refrained from baptizing converts himself to avoid the kinds of problems exhibited at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10-17). He did not want to leave the impression that he was baptizing in his own name or that the ones he baptized could somehow feel superior to those baptized by someone else. Paul’s priority was to proclaim the Gospel, which necessarily included instruction on baptism (1 Corinthians 12:13; 15:1-5; Acts 18:8), and when people responded to the message he preached, the responsibility of baptizing was apparently delegated to others.

Paul’s lack of memory illustrates his conscientious desire to give glory to God. He was never heard saying, “This is what **I** have accomplished in my work,” or “**I** have baptized this many people this year.” The reports of the humble missionary were consistently about what **God** has done (cf. Acts 14:27; 15:4; 21:19). The apostle certainly had a crucial role to play, and he worked very hard in the Lord’s kingdom, but he was always willing to acknowledge his own limitations and his firm conviction that it is “*God who gives the increase*” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5; 3:5-7).

Preachers, missionaries, and all other Christians need to learn to speak in the passive voice. Rather than saying, “I taught and baptized so and so,” or “I have baptized this many people this year,” wouldn’t it be better to simply announce, “So and so was baptized,” or “This many people have obeyed the Gospel,” or “God has added this many people to His church this year!” The customary approach of Paul was to take the emphasis off the teacher and baptizer and to place it on the divine message and those responding to it. In so doing, the Lord is glorified.

How wonderful it would be if every member of the Lord’s church could

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honestly say, “I don’t know how many people I have helped lead to Christ.” This would indicate that we were all fulfilling our evangelistic duty, that countless souls were being won to the Lord, and that credit for the conversions was exclusively given to God. It is admittedly a great honor to serve Christ, to minister to people, and to be used as the Lord’s instrument, but when souls are saved through our humble efforts, let us rejoice in what God has accomplished.

While the church may not be where it ought to be in fulfilling the Great Commission, we as individuals can at least work on our attitudes, perspectives, and involvement. May we all be so devoted to the Lord’s cause that we develop “Pauline amnesia” and give all glory to the One to whom it is due. †

**Kevin L. Moore, former missionary to New Zealand, teaches Bible and Missions at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee, USA.**

*Here Am I, Send Aaron!*

**Steve Higginbotham**

Throughout history, God has called various men to fulfill His purposes. We are probably familiar with the question God raised to the prophet Isaiah when he said, “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?*” to which Isaiah responded, “*Here am I, send me*” (Isaiah 6:8). Likewise, when God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, Moses also said, “*Here am I*” (Exodus 3:4). However, instead of saying, “*send me,*” as did Isaiah, Moses basically said, “Send Aaron” (Exodus 3:13-14). One man made himself available to God, while the other man made excuses.

God does not call us in the same manner today as He once did, but He calls us, nonetheless. God still needs men and women to fulfill His purposes. Will you say “No” to God? When your help is needed in your local church, when you’re called upon to meet a need (e.g., teach a class, publicly serve in the worship, do maintenance at the building, promote and attend special services through the week, visit the sick, transport people to and from worship, prepare meals for the sick and shut-ins, etc.), do you make excuses? Do you say, “No”? Or, do you say, “*Here am I, send me*”?

When examining the life of Moses, it is easy to see the error of having a “Here am I, send Aaron” attitude. However, like many things, it is just harder to see the same error when we embrace it ourselves. Take a good look at your own life. Have you been telling God, “No”? Which response to God’s call describes you best, “*Here am I, send me*”? or “Here am I, send Aaron”? Give it some thought. †

# Major Misconceptions Concerning Worship

Ardron Hinton

Strange views can be found among humans on just about every aspect of Bible teaching, but misconceptions concerning worship are more of a problem than most. This is so, not because worship is more important than other elements of Christ's religion, but because the effects of wrong ideas in this regard are so visible, so public. A person might hold wrong notions about many things relating to Christianity without this even being known to others. However, his views relating to worship are unavoidably reflected in actions that are quite observable. In this brief article we wish to consider four common misconceptions that take those harboring them down the wrong fork of the road.

1. **Wrong Facts** — Focusing on humans, though the focus should be on God (1 Corinthians 3:5-7; Galatians 1:10; Romans 1:18-25). Notice how modern worship often caters to human preferences with little regard for what God may or may not want. The big question for humans is not, "What am I getting out of worship?", but "What am I putting into worship?"
2. **Wrong Accent** — Stressing physical aspects when the accent should be on the spiritual (Acts 17:24,25; Matthew 15:7-9; Colossians 3:15-17). Some modern worship reflects more of the emotionalism of a pep rally than it reflects the reverence to be expected of one in the presence of the Almighty God (Habakkuk 2:20).
3. **Wrong Instructions** — Following human tradition rather than the instructions of God as Christ revealed them through His apostles and prophets (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 14:40, 16:1,2; Mark 14:22-26). Notice the simplicity of these instructions compared with the elaborate rituals and varied customs men have imposed in their place.
4. **Wrong Motivation** — Worshiping God more as a matter of custom than of conviction (Revelations 3:14-19; Philippians 1:15; Matthew 23:14-26). The Bible makes it clear that even right things may be done for wrong reasons. The Christian must be concerned with WHY as well as WHAT in regard to the worship of God (John 6:25-27).

All four aspects deserve a very thorough consideration.



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## WORSHIP

# *What Happened in Worship?*

**Dan R. Owen**

There is so much discussion these days about what we ought to do in worship assemblies, that it is appropriate to turn back to the Scriptures and ask, “What happened in worship in the New Testament?” A brief look at the apostolic writings tells us much about what we should be doing and why we should be doing it.

There is very little in the Book of Acts about church assemblies. Most of the gatherings in Acts were of unbelievers in which one or a handful of believers tried to teach them about Jesus. There was no singing, praying, Lord’s Supper, or giving in these gatherings because they were not Christian assemblies. Right after the conversion of the 3,000 on Pentecost, we are told that they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers. All of these things probably have reference to what was done in their regular assemblies. We know from Acts 20:7 that this church assembled on Sunday in an upper room. They took the Lord’s Supper as commanded by Jesus. This meal was a memorial of the death of Christ, a unifying fellowship meal depicting each participant’s share in the body and blood of Christ, and a proclamation of the church’s faith in the death of Christ as the answer to human sin. During the same gathering, Paul preached the Word to teach and encourage the Christians.

A much fuller idea of what happened in the church is gleaned from the epistles. There was praise in the church gatherings, whether they were under a tree by the riverside, in someone’s home, or in a synagogue setting. The people sang psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. A look at the Book of Psalms gives many insights into the manner of that singing. The singing was sometimes directed to other Christians in the form of admonitions, and was often directed to God in the form of praise. Both the emotions and the minds of the people were much involved in the singing of everything from laments to joyous praise. In the singing was the confession of the Christians’ faith in God and their Lord Jesus Christ.

The Scriptures were read publicly in the ancient assemblies. These were both the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament and the writings of the apostles and prophets of the church. At these times, the Christians listened to the voice

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of God. This was complimented by the preaching and teaching of prophets and evangelists and teachers in the assemblies.

Much attention in the ancient assemblies was given to prayer. As the men “*lifted up holy hands*” they prayed about many different things. Always present at the Sunday assemblies were the “thanksgivings” accompanying the Lord’s Supper. At these times, men praised and thanked God for Christ, His wonderful sacrifice, and the emblems of bread and fruit of the vine which reminded the worshippers of the redemptive events. The people expressed their assent to these prayers by saying “Amen”.

The Sunday assemblies were also times when Christians pooled their monetary resources as a gift to God in support of His work. In this way, the “*fellowship*” of Acts 2:42 was carried on.

What happened in worship in the first century was very special, as it should be today. The entire experience was designed by God to be instructive, edifying, and encouraging to all who were present. It was a time of both open-hearted giving and grateful receiving, and was supposed to be convicting to any unbelievers who were present. What a wonderful experience God has given us in the Sunday assembly! May we in the church today strive to make these times all that God wants them to be. †

Dan R. Owen works with the Broadway congregation in Paducah, Kentucky, USA.

### **Five Activities of Christian Worship**

(in no particular order)

- Lord’s Supper (Communion), Acts 20:7
- Giving, 1 Corinthians 16:1,2
- Singing, 1 Corinthians 14:15
- Preaching, Acts 20:7
- Prayer, 1 Corinthians 14:15

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# GOD'S PATTERN FOR WEEKLY COMMUNION

David Tarbet

Scripture affirms that early Christians met on the “*first day of the week*” to celebrate communion. “*On the first day of the week, we were gathered together to break bread*” (Acts 20:7). The frequency for this feast was tied to Christ’s resurrection — He arose on the “*first day of the week*” (Mark 16:9). Thus, every Sunday was significant to Christians — this was the day the Lord arose. How fitting that the Lord’s Supper be kept on Sunday in honor of the risen One! It was called “*the Lord’s Day*.”

History confirms the practice of weekly communion in the first church. Justin Martyr (140 A.D.) wrote: “And on **the day called Sunday**, all who live in the cities or in the country gather together in one place... (and) bread and wine and water are brought.” *The Didache* (a second century document) encouraged believers: “On **each Lord’s Day** of the Lord, be gathered together and break bread.” It was not until much later that communion was celebrated daily or monthly by some denominational churches. All these changes were without biblical authority. Communion is served **every** “*first day of the week*” in Churches of Christ. All are invited to join us in worshipping the Lord on His Day. †



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## IDENTIFYING CHRIST'S CHURCH

### Dalton Key

The church of Christ of New Testament times was built by Christ (Matthew 16:18), saved and headed by Christ (Ephesians 5:25), and stood alone and unique as His body (Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:4).

Today's church, in order to be Christ's church, must be identical in fundamental and substantive particulars to that church about which we read in the New Testament. The Bible provides no license for doctrinal mutilation or creed-based mutation of this divinely bought body.

The church of Christ was clearly identifiable and distinctive during ancient times. Imagine this: what if there had been a First Church of Apollos, teaching only the baptism of John (Acts 18:24-28)? Would this have been the church Jesus promised to build? Could His church have been distinguished from such a group? What if there had been a Church of the Divine Circumcision, promoting Old Testament adherence and justification through obedience to Moses' law (Galatians 5:1-4)? Would this "church" have been confused with Christ's church? What about a Will-Worshipping Church, teaching "the rudiments of the world" (Colossians 2:20-23)? Could the church of Christ have been distinguished from such?

The first-century church of Christ was easily identifiable and clearly unique as a body which, among other factors, "*continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine...*" (Acts 2:42). They realized that leaving or going beyond this teaching, which was tantamount to the doctrine of Christ, would result in their separation from the very God who had saved them (2 John 9). Thus, they spoke "*as the oracles of God,*" and "*the things which become sound doctrine*" (1 Peter 4:11; Titus 2:1).

Can Christ's church be identified as His one body, and distinguished from other religious organizations, in the same manner today? If not, why not? †

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

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## PROVERBS 17:22

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There was a young man who put himself through veterinary school working nights as a taxidermist.

After he graduated, he decided that he could combine his two vocations to better serve the needs of his patients and their owners, while doubling his practice.

He opened his offices with a shingle on the door saying, “Dr. Jones, Veterinary Medicine and Taxidermy – Either way, you get your dog back!”



Ol’ Bob Ettinger says, “I’m into golf now. I’m getting pretty good, too. I can hit the ball almost as far as I can throw the clubs.”



Young Danny had been used to being the center of attention until his new baby sister arrived. He became more

than a little jealous of her. The parents soon told him that since she was getting older, the house was too small, and they’d have to move.

“It’s no use,” said Danny. “She’s crawling good now, and she’d probably just follow us.”



I don’t get much credit for being very smart, but I figure that may change pretty quickly. I heard somebody say that a way to feel better is to finish things you have started.

Well, let me tell ya, it’s true! I just now finished 2 bags of potato chips and a chocolate cake, and I feel a lot better already!



A wife who had joined a bowling league returned home from her first attempt at the new sport and was asked by her golfing husband, “How did you do?”

She replied rather haughtily, “Well, at least I didn’t lose any balls.”



“I’ve just had the most awful time,” said a boy to his friends. “First I got angina pectoris, then arteriosclerosis. Just as I was recovering, I got psoriasis. They gave me hypodermics,

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and to top it all, tonsillitis was followed by appendectomy.”

“Wow! How did you pull through?” sympathized his friends.

“I don’t know,” the boy replied. “That sure was the toughest spelling test I ever had!”



It is astonishing how many folks don’t know what happens when it rains cats and dogs. It only stands to reason that you have to be careful not to step in a poodle.



It is said that a Saudi prince went to Germany to study. A month later, he sent a letter to his father saying, “Berlin is wonderful, the people are nice, and I really like it here, but I’m a bit ashamed to arrive to school with my gold Mercedes when all my teachers travel by train.”

It wasn’t long until he received a letter from his father. Included was a check for 100 million dollars and a note saying, “Stop embarrassing us. Go and get yourself a train too!”



One day a father was babysitting his little 3-year-old girl. She had a little tea set that she loved to play with. Daddy was watching the evening news

on TV when she brought him a little cup of “tea,” which was just water.

After several more cups of “tea” and lots of praise for such good tea, the mother got back from her errands. Daddy made the mother watch the child bring him another cup of “tea.” He said to his wife, “Isn’t that the cutest thing you ever saw?!” She watched him drink it, then said, “Did it ever occur to you that the only place she can reach to get water is from the toilet?”



Archie and Martha have been married a long time, and he still talks about what a poor cook she is. He told me, “My wife’s a Pillsbury cook. After her meals, you either take pills or they bury you!”



A customer was continually bothering the waiter in a restaurant; first, he’d asked that the air conditioning be turned up because he was too hot, then he asked it be turned down because he was too cold, and so on for about half an hour.

Surprisingly, the waiter was very patient, walking back and forth, and never once getting angry. Finally a second customer asked why they didn’t just throw out the pest.

“Oh, I don’t care,” said the waiter with a smile. “We don’t even have an air conditioner.”

# *Are You Living to Die?*

Paul Holland

In the book **Revolution in World Missions**, Protestant K.P. Yohannan writes of a time he was working in North India. A little eight-year-old boy was watching him so Yohannan struck up a conversation.

“What are you doing?” “I go to school.” “Why do you go to school?” “To study.” “Why do you study?” “To get smart.” “Why do you want to get smart?” “So I can get a good job.”

“Why do you want to get a good job?” “So I can make lots of money.” “Why do you want to make lots of money?” “So I can buy food.” “Why do you want to buy food?” “So I can eat.”

“Why do you want to eat?” “To live.” “Why do you live?”

Yohannan writes that the boy thought for a minute, scratched his head, then looked the missionary in the face and said, “Sir, why do I want to live?” He paused a moment and then answered sadly, “To die!”

The apostle Paul, who brushed death on a number of occasions, wrote: “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*” (Philippians 1:21). To die is gain. To die is a win. To die is an advantage.

At a turning point in the Gospel of John, our Lord told His disciples: “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him. Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name*” (John 12:23-28).

The seed must die in order to bear fruit. We must hate our physical life, relative to the spiritual life, in order to have eternal life. If we would serve Jesus, we must follow Him, even to the cross. Then we can be with Him. If we will serve Jesus, God the Father will honor us. Jesus did not ask God to save Him from the hour of death. It was for that purpose – to experience the hour of death, for which Jesus came. Fulfilling that, Jesus would glorify the name of the Father.

## DAILY CHRISTIAN LIVING



Why do you and I live? To die. To pass from this physical life and enter the spiritual life. To be with God. To glorify His name. Are you preparing for that day to come?

The last book of God's revelation reminds us of this: "*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'*" (Revelation 14:13). †

Paul Holland works with the Paris, Kentucky church of Christ, USA.

***The statement of confidence of all Christians, made by Paul: "For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:19-21)***

# Young People Making Moral Decisions

Mark N. Posey

Decisions you make now will have definite repercussions as you grow older. Your life is nothing but the unfolding of your decisions. While good decisions send you toward happiness and success, foolish decisions will launch you toward despair and misery. Therefore, make wise moral decisions.

What will you decide when it comes to drugs, alcohol, movies, sex, music, clothes, friends, speech, pornography, dancing, obeying laws, obeying parents, etc.? Consider the following suggestions for making moral decisions.

**Make the Bible your moral code.** Everyone is going to live by some moral code. The moral code which you choose will influence your decisions. Therefore, choose the Bible as your moral code. It will guide you in making the RIGHT decisions, decisions that will help you make heaven your eternal home. Solomon, a very wise and inspired man, wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes. He ends this great book by stating a very important principle, “*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commands, for this is the whole duty of man*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). When you base your moral decisions on Solomon’s advice and the entire Bible, you will always make the right decisions.

**Choose your friends wisely.** If you choose your friends foolishly, chances are they will bring you down to their level of standards quicker than you can bring them up to your level of morals. Paul advises, “*Evil companions corrupt good morals*” (1 Corinthians 15:33). Screen your pool of friends, culling the “evil” ones and making the good ones your comrades. Good friends will help you make good moral decisions. I once saw a sign that read, “Show me your friends, and I will show you your future.” Good advice!

**Set your standards ahead of time.** Make moral decisions long before sin presents its ugly face. Decide your actions before you are placed in an awkward position. Joseph had set the standards ahead of time regarding premarital sex and obedience to God. When Mrs. Potiphar asked him to go to bed with her, he was able to say, “*How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*” (Genesis 39:9). His relationship and obedience to God was more important than a few hours of pleasure. He was able to say “NO,” because he had set his moral

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standards ahead of time.

In making moral decisions, you will never go wrong if you always ask the following question: “What would Jesus do?” A small boy, who loved and admired his father very much, asked, “Daddy, how can I be good like you?” To which the father replied, “Try to be just like Jesus, son.” That father knew the value of making good moral decisions. †

**Mark N. Posey is the preacher for the Austinville Church of Christ in Decatur, Alabama, USA.**

### Priorities

Jay Jones

When a person grows old, the one thing that makes him the happiest is to know and see his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, friends, and loved ones walking in harmony with God’s will. Having their priorities in the right perspective is:

- Putting God first in their lives; studying His Word daily, teaching their children, and worshipping and walking obediently to His will.
- Taking care of their physical bodies, eating right, exercising, and not abusing their bodies with drugs, alcohol, tobacco, etc. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- Not being dominated by materialism – realizing at an early age that God gave them the talents they use to accumulate material wealth but also gave them the wisdom to use it wisely. Not being greedy but sharing with the poor and needy and giving God His share. *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:19-21). *“For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works”* (Matthew 16:26-27).

When people reach the last years of their lives and reflect back, I doubt if recounting how much they accumulated in material things would be of any importance. They could ask this question, **“What have I done in my lifetime for the cause of Christ?”** †

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# Excuses, Excuses

Debra Griffin Mitchell

“Jesus called them one-by-one—Peter, Andrew, James and John.” So goes the song by which I learned to name the apostles. But not everyone that Jesus called became His follower, and not everyone who followed stayed faithful.

An obvious example is the rich young ruler in Mark 7:17-23. He desired eternal life; he asked the right question of the right person. Jesus gave him the right answer: “*Go, sell, give, come — follow me.*” But the young man went away sorrowful, “*for he had great possessions.*”

Luke 9:57-62 notes three others who had the opportunity to follow Jesus but chose not to; each had a “good” excuse. The first said to Jesus, “*I will follow You wherever You go*” (verse 57). He was walking along the road with Jesus and many others, a nameless person among dozens in the crowd that always gathered around the Lord.

Maybe Jesus heard those words gladly, always ready to welcome a disciple, but when He turned to the eager man, He warned him instead: “*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*” (verse 58). In other words, “Are you ready to be homeless, as I am?” No answer from the man is recorded, but apparently he chose the comforts of home over following Jesus.

In verse 59, Jesus said to another person, “*Follow Me.*” This one replied, “*Lord, let me first go and bury my father.*” Then Jesus said to him, “*Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.*” Jesus definitely had a mission in mind for this man, but he had an excuse. We might call it the excuse of custom or even responsibility; after all, a good son would want to attend his father’s funeral and settle his estate, wouldn’t he?

Certainly, it isn’t wrong to fulfill family duties, but Jesus knew his heart. If he didn’t come with Jesus now, he probably wouldn’t come later. The mission was urgent — proclaiming the kingdom of God — but not urgent enough for this man.

A third man said, “*I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home*” (verse 61). This is the excuse of convenience. How many of us have said, “When I have more time, I’ll follow Jesus?” This excuse drew even stronger words from Jesus: “*No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God*” (verse 62). Ouch! Imagine the serious tone of voice Jesus must have used when He effectively said, “Don’t start what you can’t finish.”

## DAILY CHRISTIAN LIVING

No doubt many others heard Jesus and were impressed by His miracles and teaching, and they followed Him eagerly in the beginning. Then, some turned away when the teaching became difficult (John 6:60,66). Some didn't like the "sinners" who flocked to see Jesus (Luke 7:39; 18:7). Of the 12 men closest to Him, one betrayed Him outright, and the others vowed loyalty to the death, but ran away when He was arrested (Matthew 26:35,36).

We all make excuses when we don't want to do what we know we ought to do. We are afraid, forgetting that Jesus will be with us. We crave the easy, comfortable life, forgetting it is a deceit of the devil. We love money, though we know riches fly away like eagles. We doubt our abilities, though deep down we know God doesn't ask us to do something we can't do.

Still, Jesus calls us. "Go. Make disciples. Baptize. Teach. Serve. Feed. Comfort. Encourage." His life, His death, His resurrection call us: "*Follow Me, even unto death, and I will give you eternal life*" (John 3:16,36; Revelation 2:10).

Have you heard His calling? Have you answered? Give up your excuses; hold onto faith and follow Jesus. †

Debra Griffin Mitchell is a Christian living in Dyersburg, Tennessee, USA.

### Kingdom of Priests

Mark McWhorter

"*And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation*" (Exodus 19:6). God spoke these words to the nation of Israel through Moses. God had chosen Israel to be a special people to Himself. He would guide and protect them. All He asked was that they obey Him.

Today, Christians are God's chosen people. All He asks is that they love and obey Him. In John 3:3-5, Christ's followers are said to enter the kingdom of God. In 1 Peter 2:5, we read, "*Ye also, as lively stone, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*" Putting these Scriptures together, we conclude that Christians are a **kingdom of priests**.

Today, each disciple of Christ has the authority to approach God. Each has the pleasure of serving God. We do not have to offer animal sacrifices, nor do we have to follow all the priestly requirements under the Old Testament. We live under the New Testament. We have a better covenant than the Old Testament kingdom of priests had (Hebrews 7:22).

Study your Bible. Learn what is necessary for you to be a part of the kingdom of priests. Learn how to properly serve and worship God today. †

# *Adversity's Advice*

Tom Holland

Ages ago, a man who was in the crucible of suffering declared, “*Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble*” (Job 14:1). The echo of this ancient observation comes out in Dr. Peck’s book, *The Road Less Traveled*, whose opening sentence is: “Life is difficult.”

A French author, Jean Vienjean, observed, “Rare are the people and the families who have reached the halfway mark on the hill of life who have not known hardships in one way or another.”

Ironically, some of life’s greatest lessons are taught by pain. You have heard the modern analysis: “No pain, no gain.”

Adversity gives one an immediate insight into character liabilities. Peter compared suffering to the means by which gold is purified (1 Peter 1:7). Job had observed centuries earlier, “*When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold*” (Job 23:10). God’s child can, through penitence and prayer, be made whole again.

Trouble reveals true friends. Job had three “friends”. However, he soon discovered that they were actually judges. They were quick to pass judgment on him, but unfortunately, they didn’t have the information they needed to render a true verdict about Job. Real friends would have empathized with his suffering instead of criticizing him. True friends would have known that “*For with what judgment you judge, ye shall be judged*” (Matthew 7:2). True friends would have been supportive. They would have suffered with Job. His hurt would have become their pain.

Life’s problems reveal the acute need of God in a person’s life. Human counsel is helpful, but it has limitations because it is human. God’s counsel is true and right. One soon learns how much of God’s inspired counsel addresses the problem of pain. Have you read the Psalms lately? What about 2 Corinthians? You might want to look at 1 Peter, and don’t forget the closing book of the Bible.

**Adversity in life brings heaven into sharper focus.** The old song beautifully declares, “Just one glimpse of Him in glory will the toils of life repay.” Surely the turmoil of life will make sweeter the peace of heaven. Surely the sorrows of life will make more precious the joys of our eternal home. Surely human rejection will enhance the blessing of God’s eternal acceptance. †

Tom Holland is a writer and preacher living in Brentwood, Tennessee, USA.

## DAILY CHRISTIAN LIVING

I come from a messed up family — dysfunctional in many ways by today's standards. And, to add insult to injury, I am now openly speaking about the days my parents introduced me, at a very young age to the word "drug".

Can you believe I was "drug" to church every Sunday? I am not just talking Sunday mornings, either. I was also "drug" to Sunday night and Wednesday night Bible study! I was "drug" to my elderly great-grandparents home every Sunday after church, too, where I had to sit and be quiet and show respect to my elders. Shall I go on?

I was "drug" to the kitchen sink every day, seven days a week, to wash the dishes. That was after I was "drug" to the chicken coop to milk the goats, water the horse, and gather the eggs from the hens. And it doesn't stop there!

I was "drug" to the cellar after school where I learned how to clean, weigh and grade eggs. I was "drug" to the front room in the cellar where I had to wait on the egg customers, be polite, and never take a dime for doing my work. "You do this because we're a family," I was told. "We all help out. You need to learn what it means to work to keep us together."

I was "drug" to nursing homes, hospitals and church events to be a supporter and encourager. I was "drug" to the homes of sick neighbors to help clean their houses and hang out their laundry on the clothesline. And if I ever refused to do any of this, I was "drug" to the back bedroom. The back bedroom was where a wooden spoon was waiting and not to ladle out homemade soup.



## DAILY CHRISTIAN LIVING

I often complained about my parents when I was growing up. They were tough. They were no-nonsense. They were old-school. And they put drugs in my veins that still affect the way I act today. I have never had a hint of cocaine, crack, or heroin. I've never visited a methadone lab, nor do I want to. I have drugs running through my veins that are much stronger and more addictive than anything you could ever grow in a field or mix in a lab.

God bless my parents and all those like them who thought it best to drug their kids with a reverence and respect for God and all His creation. I can only pray that I gave my own kids enough drugs to carry them through a lifetime, too! †

Clara Hinton is a member of the Somerset, Pennsylvania church of Christ, USA.

### *The Inheritance*

**Betty Burton Choate**

Do you ever wonder what kind of world we will pass on to our children as an inheritance? It seems to me that our generation has been blessed with the Golden Age. The crown jewels of a king couldn't have made life as comfortable for our ancestors as it has been for us, because so many of the things the average person has and takes for granted today were just not there in the ages gone by. And yet, with all the ease and comfort available today, the world is growing less pleasant to live in because it has become so ungodly, immoral, and hard.

Have we, as a generation, really made such a mess of raising our children and preserving a standard for the world that we have wrecked our own inheritance and made a shambles of what we should be able to give to our children? I pray that there will be a way for the world to be set right and to come out of the tailspin it seems to be in, but I wonder how painful that way may have to be. †



# *It Matters Which Road We Travel*

**Louise Buffington**

Forever is a long, long time —  
A vast eternity!  
And we shall spend it some place —  
We choose where that will be.

We were born free moral agents,  
The choices are our own;  
We will awake to agony  
Or feast 'round that great throne.

There is a road that's narrow,  
The other, excessively wide.  
It matters which one we've traveled  
When we reach the other side.

The narrow way leads to heaven —  
It's the one we want to take.  
If we select the broad road  
There's no way of escape.

We'd better map out our journey —  
These bodies will one day die.  
Forever is a long, long time —  
We'll spend it somewhere by and by.

So we must make it certain  
Which route it's going to be;  
We shall not have a second chance  
In that vast eternity.

# 15 Principles for a Divorce-Free Marriage

Samuel A. Matthews

1. **Cling to each other** as ONE FLESH (one functioning unity; a fusion of two hearts; the union of two lives; the coming together of two tributaries, which, after being joined in marriage, will flow in the same channel — in the same direction — carrying the same burdens of responsibility and obligation).
2. **Work together** as a permanent married team. Be partners that share everything; build a life together that pleases God. Remain committed to keeping your spiritual union — your marriage covenant — inseparable until death.
3. **Pursue each other** with great energy and zeal. Be willing to sacrifice the time spent with others to be with one another. Find things you both like to do together and go after those things. Express genuine appreciation for the things you love about each other.
4. **Never be afraid** to communicate your feelings honestly. The number one killer in most relationships is lack of communication. Intimate conversation will help bring the bonds of your marriage together.
5. **Live honest, respectful, reliable, and dependable lives.** These attributes will build trust in each other. Trust will remove fear and worry.
6. **Remove selfishness** from your marriage. SELFISHNESS — being highly self-centered and self-obsessed; it focuses on oneself; it puts one's own needs above those of one's spouse.
7. **Be willing to compromise.** Each of you must learn to give as well as take. Biblical love always seeks the best interest of the person loved. Strive to unconditionally accept each other.
8. **Do NOT allow intimacy (affection) to slip away from your marriage.** The Bible actually encourages us to enjoy our sexual relationship in marriage (1

## THE CHRISTIAN HOME

Corinthians 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4). Each of us should do whatever we can to make the other happy and avoid anything that makes the other unhappy.

**9. Do NOT neglect** the importance of biblical study and prayer together. As Christians we must live by the Lord's instruction, the Bible. Then, we can pursue righteousness, glorify our Father, and enjoy the life Jesus has promised us (John 10:10).

**10. Keep your relationship** in mind when making decisions, whether big or small. Any decision you make as husband and wife affects both of you. Keep all your promises to God and each other.

**11. Understand that promising to love each other** for the rest of your days is NOT a promise that everything will always be perfect and blissful. There will be problems. Do NOT allow frustration to set in when all your loving efforts never seem to be enough to make your mate happy. True happiness comes by knowing, obeying, and trusting the Lord our God (Psalm 144:15; John 13:17; Proverbs 16:20).

**12. Consider the source** of your expectations in marriage. Are they derived from your own desires, from things you want or would like to have, from what you think you deserve, from what you are accustomed to in the homes of your parents, from what you observe that is offered in advertisements or from what others have? Unrealistic expectations are often responsible for divorce.

**PROJECT:** Make a list of your personal expectations. Compare and discuss them with your spouse (or good friend) as a way of getting to know and to understand each other more deeply. Work together to fulfill the expectations that are possible. Others may need to find fulfillment in your own personal activities.

**13. Avoid physical and emotional marital infidelity.** Emotional marital infidelity — forming an overpowering emotional connection with someone of the opposite sex outside the marriage relationship.

**14. Keep trusting and seeking God together,** and learn to be content (Philippians 4:11-13).

**15. Perform acts of kindness** as the building blocks for a strong and healthy marriage. When the cement of love and commitment are added, your marriage will be formidable. †

**Samuel A. Matthews works with the church of Christ, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands**

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# Giving Our Kids “Peaceful Fruit”

Neal Pollard

Paul’s inspired illustration about the church is so rich and powerful that Ephesians 5:22,23 is a text that has been used to preach many a sermon about marriage. What the writer of Hebrews does with divine discipline is just as compelling. In urging the Christians to remain faithful despite persecution (Hebrews 12:4), he tells them that they had forgotten the biblical exhortation about God’s discipline of His children.

You have seen the fruit of undisciplined children. It is both rotten and smelly, whether it’s a toddler’s tantrum, an adolescent’s attitude, or a teenager’s problems. Seeing undisciplined children is enough to appreciate the wisdom of statements like *“a child left to himself brings shame to his mother”* (Proverbs 29:15). It is unattractive in youth, but destructive in adulthood. In Hebrews 12, the writer uses the word *“discipline”* eight times in seven verses (plus one time inserted by translators in verse ten). That makes it vital to the context of this paragraph. Discipline proves love to children (6), provides legitimacy to children (7,8), produces loyalty from children (9), and perfects pure lives in children (10), though it prompts lamentations in children when it is administered (11).

Yet, in showing how He interacts with His faithful ones, God reminds us how He wants us to parent our children. He wants us to teach them discipline. How do we do that? The writer uses words like *“reprove”* (5) and *“scourges”* (6) *“as seems best to them”* (10) in a way that *“for the moment”* is *“sorrowful”* for the child (11). If you ever had a parent who failed to *“spare the rod”* of correction, you can relate. We do well to remember that *“foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him”* (Proverbs 22:15). *“Experts”* tell us that all corporal punishment will warp and frustrate the recipients. Violent, uncontrolled hitting may well do so, but not loving, measured spankings meant to teach right from wrong. Likewise, having rules and restrictions, consistently enforced, gives a child structure and boundaries.

Children actually want to know their limits, and they (and God) expect parents to spell them out to them. Look down the road at the consequences of that kind of parenting. What will your children reap? The inspired writer calls it *“the peaceful fruit of righteousness”* (11). There are few gifts as precious and meaningful as that! †

Neal Pollard is the preacher for the Bear Valley church in Denver, Colorado, USA.

## THE CHRISTIAN HOME

### *Some Thoughts on Marriage*

Keith Parker

Recently, an old high school buddy called and wanted to have lunch. Over the years we have not kept in touch. In fact, I had not seen him in about three years.

At lunch he dropped a bombshell. He told me that he was getting married and he wanted me to do the ceremony. What a surprise! He is 40 years old and never been married. He is marrying a girl who is also 40 and never been married. And I was reminded of Isaac (cf. Genesis 25:20).

Some thoughts on marriage...

**Marriage was created by God.** Not man. It is God's invention. It was God who said, "*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him*" (Genesis 2:18). It was also God who said, "*He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord*" (Proverbs 18:22). Since marriage was ordained by God, this holy relationship must not be broken. If it is broken, a sin has been committed before the God of heaven.

**Marriage is leaving and cleaving.** When one is married, he leaves those that he loves and he cleaves to the one that he has grown to love. Parents can no longer be number one. When children come along, they are not first in the relationship. With the exception of Jesus, a person's mate occupies the throne of his heart. "*Therefore, shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh*" (Genesis 2:24).

**Marriage is for life.** It is a lifelong commitment. It is permanent. "Till death do us part." Once you start the trip, there is no turning back. It is 'so long as we both shall live' (Romans 7:2,3).

**Marriage has its ups and downs.** There are mountain tops and valleys, highs and lows, blessings and burdens. After a while, the honeymoon loses some of its honey. The grass looks greener on the other side. Disagreements will come. Arguments. Fusses. Fights. It is not all peaches and cream. There are no perfect marriages.

**Marriage must be nourished.** Great marriages don't just happen. You've got to work on them. Listen to good tapes. Read good books. Attend good seminars. It's like an old car. From time to time it needs a tune-up. You've got to change the oil. Put air in the tires. Put new spark plugs in it. So it is with marriage. The fires must constantly be rekindled. †

Keith Parker works with the church in Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA.

## THE CHRISTIAN HOME

# *To My Child: Things I Can and Cannot Do*

**Author Unknown**

- ♥ I can share your life, but I cannot live it for you.
- ♥ I can teach you things, but I cannot make you learn.
- ♥ I can give you directions, but I cannot always lead you.
- ♥ I can allow you freedom, but I cannot account for it.
- ♥ I can take you to worship, but I cannot make you believe.
- ♥ I can teach you right from wrong, but I cannot decide for you.
- ♥ I can give you love, but I cannot force it upon you.
- ♥ I can teach you to be a friend, but I cannot make you one.
- ♥ I can teach you to share, but I cannot make you unselfish.
- ♥ I can teach you respect, but I cannot force you to honor.
- ♥ I can tell you the facts of life, but I cannot build your reputation.
- ♥ I can tell you about lofty goals, but I cannot achieve them for you.
- ♥ I can teach you to obey, but I cannot answer for your actions.
- ♥ I can warn you about sins, but I cannot make your morals.
- ♥ I can love you as my child, but I cannot place you in God's family.
- ♥ I can pray for you, but I cannot make you walk with God.
- ♥ I can teach you about Jesus, but I cannot make Him your Savior.
- ♥ I can teach you about prayer, but I cannot make you pray.
- ♥ I can tell you how to live, but I cannot give you eternal life. †

## THE CHRISTIAN HOME

# Adultery

Ken Tyler

We are told in Proverbs 6:32, “*But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.*” Our society is filled with unfaithfulness. In this article, I want to make some points that I hope will keep us from this great evil.

1. Always work to cultivate the proper relationship with your mate. If things are right at home it will be extremely hard for either mate to be unfaithful. Proper love destroys the thought of adultery.
2. Avoid situations where you will be tempted to become more than just friends. If you feel uneasy around another person, you had better watch out. It is especially easy for people who work together to become too familiar with one another. Before long they are going out to eat, and then adultery. Be smart to avoid this happening to you.
3. Realize the grave consequences of adultery. How important is your soul to you? Solomon said, “...*he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.*” The adulterer goes to hell. It is just that simple. Then, what about your mate? You said, “Till death us do part.” If you commit adultery, it’s going to hurt. Then, what about your children? They will have to grow up with the awful knowledge of what you have done. If you don’t think there are consequences to adultery, then read 2 Samuel 12 and see what happened to David because of his sin with Bathsheba.
4. God said don’t do it. That should settle the matter. Our love for God keeps us from evil. We are told in 1 John 5:3, “*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.*”

I hope all of us realize that God is the key to a wonderful home. When families center their lives around God they really have something special. It is true that “The family that prays together, stays together.” How long has it been since your family prayed together? †

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



# 5-MINUTE BIBLE STUDY

## SANCTIFICATION

**Paula Bates**

1. Abstain from every form of \_\_\_\_\_, Now may the God of \_\_\_\_\_ Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved \_\_\_\_\_ at the coming of our \_\_\_\_\_ . 1 Thessalonians 5:22,23
2. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. \_\_\_\_\_ them by your truth. Your \_\_\_\_\_ is truth. John 17:16,17
3. To the \_\_\_\_\_ of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in \_\_\_\_\_ , called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:2
4. I (Jesus) will deliver you from the \_\_\_\_\_ people, as well as from the \_\_\_\_\_, to whom I now send you. To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to \_\_\_\_\_, and from the power of \_\_\_\_\_ to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an \_\_\_\_\_ among those who are sanctified by faith in Me. Acts 26:17, 18
5. And such were some of you. But you were \_\_\_\_\_, but you were \_\_\_\_\_, but you were \_\_\_\_\_ in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God. 1 Corinthians 6:11
6. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to \_\_\_\_\_ you up and give you an \_\_\_\_\_ among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:32



- |    |                              |    |   |
|----|------------------------------|----|---|
| 1. | Evil, peace, blameless, Lord | 4. | Jewish, Gentiles, light, Satan, inheritance |
| 2. | Sanctify, word               | 5. | Washed, sanctified, justified               |
| 3. | Church, Jesus Christ         | 6. | Build, inheritance                          |

# “Where Two or Three Are Gathered...”

Patrick Morrison

The Scriptures encourage us to, “*Give diligence to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15). One of the greatest challenges of being a faithful student of the Word of God is to allow a passage to say what it says. What I mean by this is that we often use a verse of Scripture to prove a point, or we approach passages with prejudice rather than allowing the verses to speak for themselves. It has been said that a verse taken out of context becomes a pretext to teach any number of things. Most who would take a verse out of context do not do so with malicious or self-serving interest, but intention matters not when we misuse God’s Guidebook to heaven. The space allotted for this article will not allow us to look in greater detail at verses commonly taken out of context, but one such passage that I hope you will consider is this: “*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*” (Matthew 18:20). How many times have we heard this verse used, often by someone in a public prayer, in relation to our gathering together to worship? There are some problems with looking at this verse with the idea that it is speaking of coming together in worship.

First of all, consider the difficulties this verse presents if it is speaking of coming together in worship. What happens if a faithful Christian finds himself/herself in a place where no other Christians are present? Could this one worship God acceptably, or would he/she have to wait until other Christians are found with whom this one could assemble? If this passage is speaking of corporate worship, then we could not worship until at least two or three come together.

Consider also how this speaks to the abiding presence of God within the life of His children. God has promised never to leave or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), and Jesus gave His word that He would be with us always (Matthew 28:19,20). We have the assurance of God’s continued presence with us if we serve Him faithfully. Do two or three have to be assembled together in order for God to be found with them? Is God’s presence nullified in my life when I am not together with other Christians (and please understand that I am not talking about willingly absenting myself from the corporate worship assembly)?

Second, consider that the context of this passage is dealing with how we handle sin among brethren, not the worship assembly (Matthew 18:15-20). When a brother sins against you, then you have an obligation to go to that brother privately

## TEXTUAL STUDIES

to handle the matter. If he is unwilling to hear you in this regard, then you are to take with you one or two others who may serve as witnesses to the proceedings. If he refuses to hear still, then the matter is to be told to the congregation. If he continues to refuse to repent, then he is to be disciplined in order to bring about repentance.

Jesus goes on to say that if two agree in what they ask, then they shall have their request answered by the Father. All of this is spoken within the context of sin between brethren. When we handle offences in the way that the Lord instructs, then we have every assurance that He will be with us! We can only agree with a brother who has sinned against us when we handle the offence the way the Word of God commands, and when the brother who has sinned is willing to repent. Then, it is possible to pray together (likely with the thought of praying for forgiveness of the one who has sinned) with every assurance that those prayers will be heard and answered. So, when two (the offender and the one offended) or three (the offender, the offended, and at least one witness) come together to work out their problems, the Lord will be with them! What a beautiful thought! Doesn't this passage mean so much more when we allow it to speak in context? †

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

## **Worse than an Unbeliever**

**Chad Ezelle**

There are not many things in Scripture that are worse than being labeled as an unbeliever, but not caring for your family is one of those things (1 Timothy 5:8). If God has blessed you with a family, He expects you to care for it. You might be leading as a father/husband. It might be the incredible work of a wife/mother. Whatever your case is, God expects you to care for the ones He has given to you.

No family is perfect. Not even yours! However, as the problems come (today!), how will you show that you're caring for the family He has given you? If you have not lately, you could start by praying, thanking God for the great people He has entrusted to your care. †

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# GREAT LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF ESTHER

**Eddie Parrish**

1. Material wealth is not necessarily proof that one is in good standing with God (1:4).
2. The “do-as-you-please” philosophy has never been good for man (1:8).
3. Drunkenness is sinful and often leads to other sins (1:10).
4. Modesty is a virtue appreciated by few (1:11,12).
5. Hot-tempered people need to cool off (1:12).
6. Good deeds often result in persecution from those who are evil (1:15).
7. We should be careful not to make mountains out of molehills (1:17,18).
8. Families should care for each other (2:7,11).
9. Sometimes it is wise to withhold information from others (2:10,20).
10. We should treat all men with kindness and respect (2:21,22).
11. We should give credit to those who deserve it (2:22).
12. God does not forget our good deeds, and He will reward them in due time (2:22).
13. Wicked men should not be placed in positions of authority (3:1,11).
14. Men are not to be worshiped (3:2).
15. Faithfulness to God sometimes causes others to ask questions about your beliefs (3:3,4).
16. Faithfulness to God sometimes causes others to become angry (3:8).
17. God's laws are different from the laws of others (3:8).
18. God's promises will be kept, regardless of the efforts of men (3:13).
19. We should show concern to those who are hurting (4:4,5).
20. Those who occupy positions of influence in government should use their influence to promote righteousness and justice (4:8).

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21. Intercession is an excellent way to help others (4:8).
22. We must trust God to keep His word (4:14).
23. We must remember that we have a special place in God's will (4:14).
24. We should be willing to live according to God's will, even if it means dying in the process (4:16).
25. We should not let material things blind us to our real purpose in life (5:3,4).
26. Jealousy can make a person extremely bitter (5:9).
27. Righteousness really irritates some people (5:13).
28. Murder doesn't bother some people (5:14).
29. The tables can turn very quickly (6:4,5).
30. Pride goes before destruction (6:6).
31. Wicked men define "honor" in terms of human praise (6:7-9).
32. There are times when evil people need to be exposed (7:4-6).
33. It's not wrong to call evil "evil" (7:6).
34. Your sins will find you out (7:6).
35. Appearances can be deceiving, especially if anger is coloring our perceptions (7:8).
36. We should be concerned about our brethren when they are mistreated (8:6).
37. Good news should be delivered swiftly (8:10,14).
38. Happiness results when righteous men are in positions of authority (8:15).
39. Everyone loves a winner (8:17).
40. Fear is a powerful force (9:2-3).
41. Good work is generally noticed by others (9:4).
42. Public displays of justice deter crime (9:13-14).
43. We should seek the good of our people and speak peace to our countrymen (10:3). †

**Eddie Parrish preaches for the Brown Trail congregation in Bedford, Texas, USA.**

# Don't Do It, Daniel

Maxie B. Boren

A decree had been signed by King Darius forbidding anyone to “ask a petition of any God or man.” To break this decree meant death. The penalty was to be thrown into a den of lions. Ferocious and ravenous beasts would tear limb from limb from any offending party.

This decree put Daniel between the proverbial “rock and a hard place.” He knew that the writing had been signed! He was fully aware that according to the law of the Medes and Persians there was no altering the decree (Daniel 6:9-10).

Surely there must have been “prompting voices” in his mind saying, “Don’t do it, Daniel...it would be folly to ignore this decree by openly praying to Jehovah as you’ve been doing. Until the time has expired, why not just close the window and pray secretly?”

These promptings were undoubtedly met by more noble “voices”, “Daniel, you be true to Almighty God regardless of the decree. Even if you must suffer a terrible death of being devoured by the beasts, don’t sacrifice your loyalty to God.” Daniel made a decision.

I imagine that great man stood a little taller when the matter was resolved in his mind. He himself made a decree in his own heart: “You ‘Don’t do it, Daniel’ voices be forever silenced! I hereby take my stand for, and put my trust in, the Living God.” And so, Daniel did it.

He prayed openly to Jehovah, as in times prior to the decree. Cast into the den of lions, he was not hurt. God delivered him.

Jesus said to Christians, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Do it, my brother, and you’ll never regret it! †

**Maxie B. Boren is a Gospel preacher and an elder in the Brown Trail congregation in Bedford, Texas, USA.**



## BIBLE CHARACTERS

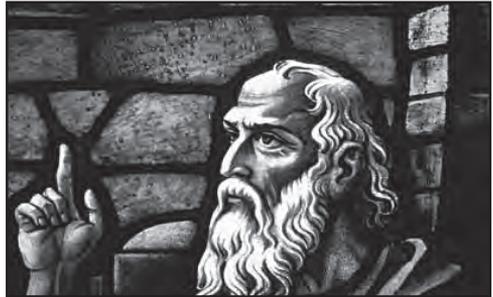
# Paul's Confidence

Gary C. Hampton

Paul, even as a prisoner, was confident God would deliver him (Philippians 1:19). His confidence does not seem to have been in a deliverance from prison. The apostle seems to have been assured that the Almighty would work everything out for good (1:20). It did not matter whether he was delivered from prison to teach freely again or delivered from this life to be with the Lord.

God's spokesman to the Gentiles seems to have based his confidence, in part, on the prayers of the saints for him. He had learned not to trust in himself, but in God, who is able to raise the dead (2 Corinthians 1:9-11). Paul also benefited by the "supply" or help which undergirds and strengthens, by means of the Spirit. He expressed a powerful trust in the Lord as a part of his closing words to his son in the faith (2 Timothy 4:18). Such thinking would surely support one through the most difficult of times.

An "earnest expectation" is "primarily a watching with outstretched head". It "signifies strained expectancy, eager longing, the stretching forth of the head indicating an expectation of something from a certain place" (W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 61). Paul



did not look forward to failure, but to success in showing the Savior more clearly to others, either through his life or death (Philippians 1:20). Death would thus be gain, because it would bring the long-awaited reward of rest (2 Corinthians 5:18; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Revelation 14:13).

One has to know how to live to be able to die with the same assurance Paul expressed (Philippians 1:21). He told the Galatian brethren, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*" (Galatians 2:20). †

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

## BIBLE CHARACTERS

# What About Thomas?

David R. Pharr

On the day of His resurrection, Jesus met with ten of His chosen apostles. Judas had committed suicide in remorse for betraying Christ. We are not told why Thomas missed the meeting. Jesus showed them the wounds in His hands and side, as convincing proof that the very one they had seen so brutally murdered was now standing alive in their presence (John 20:19f). In the joy of this knowledge, they were quick to share the good news with Thomas. But Thomas was not ready to accept their testimony because he wanted to see the proof for himself. He said, *“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe”* (John 20:25).

It happened, then, that on the following Sunday they were together again, Thomas with them, and Jesus came into their midst. It was a dramatic moment when Jesus said to Thomas: *“Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing”* (John 20:27).



## BIBLE CHARACTERS

Thomas is often called “Doubting Thomas” because of his hesitancy to accept what the others told him. But his doubt was honest doubt. He is not to be blamed for insisting on proof. There are doubters who are dishonest. They will not believe even when the facts are shown. Such dishonest doubt is foolish. *“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’”* (Psalm 14:1). *“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked...”* (Acts 17:32).

Such was not the spirit of Thomas. Thomas did the right thing in asking for proof. The Gospel is not a system of blind faith, as some have imagined. Our faith is not “a leap in the dark”. It is expected that we “*prove [test] all things*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Jesus showed Himself alive by “*many infallible proofs*” (Acts 1:3).

Jesus’ invitation for Thomas to examine the wounds removed all doubt. In an examination of joyous faith, the doubter confessed that he was convinced. *“And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’* Jesus said to him, *‘Thomas, because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’”* (John 20:28,29).

This episode about Thomas is not recorded as a mere curiosity. It is not just to tell us something interesting that happened to one of the apostles. Rather, it’s included as one of the many examples of how Thomas and the others were given intimate and convincing evidences that Jesus was alive. Only thereby could they be credible witnesses. The Divine plan was that by their testimony millions “*who have not seen...yet have believed*”. In Acts 10:39-41, Peter explains the apostles’ role: *“And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the country of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom also they slew, hanging Him on a tree. Him God raised up the third day, and gave Him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but unto witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead.”*

Jesus’ words, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” point to all who believe in Christ, “*whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory*” (1 Peter 1:8). How can we believe when we have not seen? It is by the testimony of Thomas and the others. Their witness is in the Scriptures. *“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”* (John 20:30,31). †

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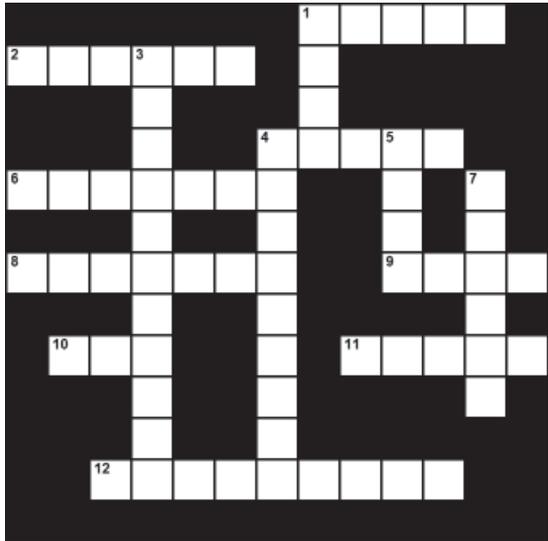
# The Tongue

Bonnie Rushmore

All Scripture references are from the NKJV.

## Across

1. What type of tongue does God hate? Proverbs 6:16-19
2. The tongue is compared to a ship's \_\_\_\_\_. James 3:4
4. What is in the power of the tongue? Proverbs 18:21
6. A righteous man's tongue talks of \_\_\_\_\_. Psalm 37:30
8. When we guard our tongue, from what do we keep our souls? Proverbs 21:23
9. From what should we keep our tongue? Psalm 34:13
10. The tongue is compared to a horse's \_\_\_\_\_. James 3:3
11. The tongue is compared to a sharp \_\_\_\_\_. Psalm 52:1-4
12. The wise tongue uses \_\_\_\_\_ rightly. Proverbs 15:2



## Down

1. What is in the power of the tongue? Proverbs 18:21
3. The tongue devises \_\_\_\_\_. Psalm 52:1-4
4. The tongue is called \_\_\_\_\_. Psalm 52:1-4
5. James says no man can \_\_\_\_\_ the tongue. James 3:8
7. The tongue is full of \_\_\_\_\_. James 3:8

# What Is “The Lord’s Day?”

Russell G. Bell

**Question:** “Would you please give me a Bible test that shows that Sunday is called ‘the Lord’s Day’? Do not use Revelation 1:10, since John did not specify what Day he was alluding to when he said he was ‘*in the Spirit on the Lord’s day*’.”

**Answer:** To my knowledge, the term “Lord’s day” is only found one time in the Bible, and that is in Revelation 1:10. The questioner is correct in his observation that John (the writer of Revelation) did not specify in that passage what day “the Lord’s day” referred to. So, the real question is, “What is the Lord’s day – Saturday (the seventh day), or Sunday (the first day of the week)?” I believe we will all agree we should all worship on the “Lord’s day”; but what day is that?

“Lord” here refers to Jesus and is used in the possessive case; therefore, this was His great day. What great events in Jesus’ life took place on the Sabbath or seventh day of the week? I don’t know, but I do know that on Sunday, the first day of the week, our Lord was raised from the dead (Luke 24:1-9). In this He showed His power to conquer death, not only for Himself, but for us. It was and is truly the Lord’s day, the first day of the week. Also, the Lord’s church was established on Sunday, the first day of the week. We read about this in Acts 2. We know this took place on the first day of the week because Pentecost, the day on which this all took place, always came on the first day of the week.

Further, we see that early Christians worshipped on the first day of the week after Christ’s church was established. “*And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread [observance of the Lord’s Supper that Christ had instituted Himself to be done in remembrance of Him], Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight*” (Acts 20:7). Here we see a typical worship service on the first day of the week, with preaching and observance of the Lord’s Supper.

Also note in 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 that it was the first day of the week that the collection was taken for the needs of the church; “*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I gave order to the church of Galatia, so also do ye. Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.*”

These are my reasons for believing that the Lord’s Day is Sunday, the first day of the week, the day of Christian worship. †

**Russell G. Bell is involved in full-time mission work in India.**

# *What Type of Faith Is Jesus Speaking of in John 3:16?*

Ken Tyler

The passage reads, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* Unfortunately, some interpret faith in this verse as simply believing in Christ as God’s Son and accepting Him as one’s personal Savior.

John 3:16 certainly teaches that one is saved by faith. However, we must understand that not all faith saves. King Agrippa believed, but was not saved (Acts 26:27). The demons believe and tremble (James 2:19). Many of the chief rulers believed on Christ, but would not confess Him (John 12:42,43).

Well, what kind of faith saves? The faith of John 3:16. Jesus is speaking of a faith that will move and motivate the individual to do all Christ says in order to be saved. We see this faith in the life of the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:34). Paul put it this way in Romans 16:26,

*“...made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.”*

The faith of John 3:16 is an obedient faith. †

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

**The unfortunate aspect of many people interpreting “faith” in John 3:16 to mean simply believing in Christ as God’s Son and accepting Him as one’s personal Savior is that it fails to recognize the relationship between faith, obedience and salvation. “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9 NKJV). “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8).**

## Can One Be Raised from the Dead Today?

E. Claude Gardner

1. Where does the Bible teach that people can be raised from the dead today?
2. What truthful and factual proof is there that one was raised from the dead, more than just a claim or hallucination?
3. Who raised the person allegedly from the dead, and who empowered him to do so?
4. According to Hebrews 9:27, after death there is Judgment. Did this person who claimed to have died then face the Judgment?
5. If people are raised, then one need never die.
6. When Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, he had been dead four days, and his body “stinketh.” Can this kind of thing be done today?
7. In war, thousands of soldiers have been killed. Who has raised any of them from the dead? If not, why not?
8. If one can “raise the dead,” then he must do all that Christ charged the apostles (not us today). *“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give”* (Matthew 10:8). Who, in fact, has done these four things?
9. Here is a challenge: I will go to the cemetery with anyone who claims to raise the dead, and if he raises the first one from the dead, I will guarantee to raise the second one from the dead. Will he accept this challenge of his claim?

**Note: All will be raised bodily by Christ at the end of the world (John 5:28,29).** †

E. Claude Gardner is President-Emeritus of Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, Tennessee, USA.

## BIBLE QUESTIONS

# DOES IT MATTER WHAT YOU BELIEVE?

Bill Dillon

A strange statement often overheard is, “Well, it doesn’t make any difference what you believe...” Is this statement an accurate reflection of the will of God, or is it man’s wishful thinking? Is the statement designed to please men, or to please God? The Bible, God’s will for man in this age, teaches that what one believes does make a difference.

1. It matters if we believe in God. Hebrews 11:16 says, “*He that cometh to God must believe that He is...*”
2. It matters if we believe in Christ. Jesus said in John 8:24, “*Except ye believe I am He, ye shall die in your sins.*”
3. It matters if we believe false prophets and teachers. John, the apostle of love, said, “*believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God*” (1 John 4:1). Peter wrote, “*There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies*” (2 Peter 2:1).
4. It matters if we believe the truth. 2 Thessalonians 2:12 says, “*That they all might be damned who believe not the truth...*” The truth is God’s Word (John 17:17).

The negative which says, “What we believe doesn’t matter,” discourages research, stifles investigation, and puts a premium on ignorance. Unless error is the same as truth, up the same as down, and yes the same as no, then it does matter what we believe. The Bible says Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). The Lord commands His Gospel to be preached to every creature under heaven, and “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned*” (Mark 16:15,16). Reader, think carefully, if it doesn’t matter **what** you believe — then it doesn’t matter **if** you believe! †

Bill Dillon is a Gospel preacher living in Cotter, Arkansas, USA.

**Does it matter what one believes about “gravity”?  
It matters more what one believes about “faith”!**

## BIBLE QUESTIONS

# What did Jesus Preach?

Rick Cunningham

Our Lord Jesus was a preacher in agreement with God the Father in everything He taught. So, as He began His ministry, He was baptized saying, *“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness”* (Matthew 3:15). As Jesus came up out of the water, the Father spoke audibly from heaven saying, *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”* (Matthew 3:17). Jesus then taught the need for the people to obey God saying, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21). Jesus, and later His apostles, then taught the doctrines of God. He told His apostles, *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”* (Matthew 28:19,20). Jesus referred to those who obeyed Him as *“my church”* (Matthew 16:18).

So, Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness, taught His followers that only the obedient would enter the kingdom of heaven, and referred to those who followed His teachings as *“His church”*. That’s what He preached.

Isn’t that what preachers are to preach today? Isn’t baptism still necessary for modern man? Isn’t obedience to God still mandatory? Aren’t Jesus’ followers still the *“church of Christ”*? So why are some preachers now rejecting the need for baptism, opposing the practice of obedience to biblical commands, and dropping the name of Christ from church references? This is no small matter. All preachers who are following this new path are false teachers, not representing Jesus truthfully at all.

Isn’t it time to point out the distinct differences between Jesus’ preaching and this pop culture preaching? †

Rick Cunningham preaches for Main Street Church of Christ in Big Spring, Texas, USA.

**A church that doesn’t belong to Jesus Christ is not really a “church” at all! Anything other than “the doctrine of Christ” (Hebrews 6:1; 2 John 9) is not a doctrine that is divine in origin. Are Christ’s church and His doctrine good enough for you (John 12:48)?**

# What Was the First Church Like?

Loy Mitchell

## INTRODUCTION

- \* When Jesus said, “I will build my church”, He was not talking about any denomination, but about the undenominational kingdom of Christ, the spiritual body of Christ.
- \* This kingdom was not established during Jesus’ personal ministry, but much was said about it being “at hand”.
- \* Jesus taught His disciples for three years to prepare them for service in His kingdom.
- \* Then the church or kingdom began “with power” on the Lord’s Day, called Pentecost. This was fifty days after the Sabbath when Jesus was put in the tomb.
- \* In fulfillment of prophecy, we have the beginning of the *first* church, belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- \* Let us notice some characteristics of this Jerusalem church.

## BODY

### 1. THE CHURCH WAS UNITED.

- \* Jesus prayed that all those who would come to believe on Him should be as one, as He and the Father were one (John 17:21).
- \* It should be obvious to every Bible student that God is not pleased to have those who believe in Jesus Christ divided into hundreds of sects and parties, teaching opposing doctrines.
- \* The Jerusalem church was not like that (Acts 4:32).
- \* Believers in Christ can be united today by laying aside human creeds, and humbly following the apostles’ teaching as revealed in the New Testament.

### 2. THEY WERE FAITHFUL (Acts 2:42).

- \* Their unity was not achieved at the sacrifice of principle.
- \* Peter and John were captured.
- \* All of the apostles were arrested, beaten, and released.
- \* Stephen was stoned to death, James beheaded, but this church held to its faith.

## CHARTS AND OUTLINES

- \* It is an example to all believers today to courageously follow the apostles' teaching, to support the cause of Christ with their money and talents, to observe the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, and to pray earnestly in public and private.

### 3. **THEY WERE LIBERAL** (Acts 2:44, 45).

- \* This was an emergency. Thousands who had come to Jerusalem to worship had become Christians and remained to learn the will of the Lord for their lives.
- \* Those who had goods and property sold them to meet these unusual needs.
- \* Today, many believers buy and then say they cannot give.
- \* These early Christians sold so they could give.
- \* Notice that this is voluntary and vastly different from some government systems that deny the right of private property by decree.

### 4. **THEY WERE STRICT.**

- \* Even in the first church there were hypocrites (Acts 5:1-11).
- \* However, they did not nullify the blessing of the pure in heart.
- \* Hypocrites in the church will not justify sinners staying out of Christ.
- \* However, let the action of the Holy Spirit warn all hypocrites.
- \* Ananias and Sapphira lied. They both fell dead.
- \* What would happen where you live if all who practice lying would drop dead?

### 5. **THEY WERE ZEALOUS.**

- \* The church began with three thousand members who were immersed the first day. Soon there were 5,000 men (Acts 4:4).
- \* It continued to multiply (Acts 5:14).
- \* Even when persecution scattered many members, they went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:4).
- \* Today, those who hold to various political and social philosophies put many who profess to believe in Christ to shame by their zeal.
- \* May we urge you to reread the Book of Acts and dedicate your life and talents to spreading New Testament Christianity.
- \* Jesus Christ is the hope of the world.

**CONCLUSION:** Let us imitate that first church and take the world for Christ. †

**Loy Mitchell continues with mission work in Zimbabwe, as well as preaching in many Gospel meetings throughout the US. He lives in Dyersburg, Tennessee, USA.**

# The Old Paths

## Jeremiah 6:16-19

**Andy Jooste**

### **Introduction**

- A. Each year the US President delivers a “State of the Union Address”.
- B. This is the context of Jeremiah’s state of Israel — Jeremiah 6:10-15.
- C. Israel had problems — God had solutions found within “The Old Paths”.

### **I. ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS – GOD’S WAY.**

- A. Paths of righteousness; Psalm 23 — Good shepherds know good paths for the flock.
- B. Find out what pleases the Lord; Ephesians 5:10, 17.
- C. The strait — seldom traveled road; Matthew 7:13,14 — challenging rather than “easy”. Compare with New Age nebulous thinking — no bench marks; boundary pegs — what if properties were sold without demarcation?

### **II. WALK IN THEM.**

- A. Emphasis of studies in James — responses to faith, action, and obedience.
- B. How we are saved by grace; Titus 2:11-14.

### **III. FIND REST FOR THE SOUL.**

- A. Universal quest for peace and tranquility — the current goal in military action.
- B. The invitation of Jesus – take MY yoke and learn of ME — Matthew 11:28-30.
- C. Ignorance of God’s righteousness still the cause of global unrest.

### **Conclusion**

- A. Consequence of Israel’s rebellious disposition; Matthew 23:37.
- B. Are the “old path” markers evident in our personal snapshots? †

**Andy Jooste preaches in Mount Vernon, Ohio, USA.**

# The Lost Tribes of Israel

**Betty Burton Choate**

God pronounced a blessing on the descendants of Abraham, saying that He would make a great nation of them, and that through them the whole world would be blessed. The first part of this promise was fulfilled in the birth of Isaac, and carried through the line until the nation of Israel had developed and had been given the “promised land”.

We are familiar with the history: It seems that Israel as a nation never quite separated God from the idolatry around her. Even in the wilderness, when they were being fed daily with manna from heaven, they were offering sacrifices to the idols they had made: “*“Did you offer Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? You also carried Sikkuth your king, and Chiun, your idols, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves”* (Amos 5:25,26). Perhaps, because Israel was sacrificing to God at the same time she was worshipping the idols, she was never sure who was blessing her and who was cursing her. As a result, Israel repeatedly fell into idolatry.

God sent prophets to bring His people back, and when they refused to hear the prophets, He sent oppressors that brought harsh correction: “*“Therefore I will send you into captivity beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of hosts”* (Amos 5:27). Cycles of repentance, followed by succumbing to idolatry, resulting in invasion and subjugation were repeated over and over again. Finally, in 722 BC the Assyrians ravaged the Baal-worshipping ten tribes of Israel, uprooting them from their “promised land” and scattering them far and wide in what is known as



the Dispersion. Historically, they are often called “the lost tribes of Israel”.

## BIBLICAL HISTORY

What became of the remaining two tribes, Judah and Benjamin? They, too, struggled with idolatry, to the point that God raised up Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to power. His empire grew through conquest, finally resulting in the destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation of many of the Jews to Babylon. *“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion”* (Psalm 137:1). Their unfaithfulness to God brought years of slavery and pain, a time of soul-searching and rededication to the One who had saved them from Egyptian bondage.

“...[T]he Jews in Babylon also creatively remade themselves and their world view. In particular, they blamed the disaster of the Exile on their own impurity. They had betrayed Yahweh and allowed the Mosaic laws and cultic practices to become corrupt; the Babylonian Exile was proof of Yahweh’s displeasure. During this period, Jewish leaders no longer spoke about a theology of judgment, but a theology of salvation. In texts such as Ezekiel and Isaiah, there is talk that the Israelites would be gathered together once more, their society and religion purified, and the unified Davidic kingdom be re-established.” [from *The Jewish Virtual Library*].

After the years of correction in captivity, the descendants of Judah and Benjamin were allowed to return to Jerusalem, and to rebuild the city and the temple. Of course, there was purpose in this. The prophecy had been made in Micah 5:2 and recorded as fulfilled in Matthew 2:6 that *“...you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.”* Jesus Christ, *“... Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting [a declaration of His deity]”* was born in Bethlehem of the lineage of David [fulfillment of the prophecy of His human lineage].

The first promise to Abraham had been fulfilled in the giving of the Promised Land to the Israelites, but the overriding promise was the second part: that all nations would be blessed through Abraham’s descendants. Christ was born, not to bring salvation to the Jews only, but to all the world. How was the foundation laid for the fulfillment of this promise? Surprisingly, through the dispersal of Jews to many nations, during many decades, because of persecution, commerce, and famine! When the people of Judah were allowed to return to their homeland, according to historical records, the majority stayed in Babylon.

Even back there in those dark days when the ten tribes of faithless Israel were scattered and “lost”, people with a knowledge of God were being transplanted in many nations of the world. As is often true of those who are uprooted from their native land, evidently a percentage of these Jews developed renewed dedication to their heritage, to their nation, and to their God. Many continued to obey the com-

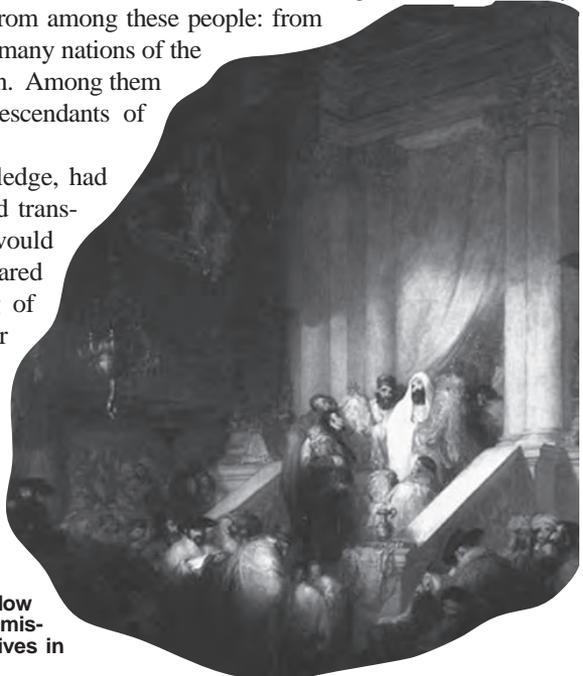
## BIBLICAL HISTORY

mand to return to Jerusalem for the observance of the Passover. How can we know this? By two references in Scripture: on the Pentecost day when the church was begun, among the massive crowds were devout Jews *from every nation under heaven*, speaking many different languages (Acts 2:5-11). Thousands of these obeyed the Gospel and helped to spread the message when they returned to their homes.

The second reference is found in Acts 17:1,2: “*Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where **there was a synagogue of the Jews**. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures.*” So, scattered throughout the world were Jews who had a knowledge of God and of His Scriptures. During the Babylonian captivity, a form of worship was developed which included the building of synagogues. This practice grew among displaced Jews throughout the world.

Wherever a Jewish community developed, synagogues were built, and it was to these places of worship that the apostles went first to teach about the Messiah and His Gospel. While it is true that many of the Jewish faith rejected the message that showed the fulfillment of God’s promise to bless the entire world through Abraham’s family, the earliest converts came from among these people: from the Jews who had settled in many nations of the world because of persecution. Among them would surely have been descendants of those “lost” tribes of Israel.

God, in His foreknowledge, had seen that the separation and transplanting of those Jews would result in a spiritually prepared audience for the spreading of the Gospel. Rather than our thinking of them as “lost” tribes, should we not see them as advance placements for the fulfillment of God’s promise to bless the entire world through the seed of Abraham? †



**Betty Burton Choate is the widow of J.C. Choate, co-worker in missions for many years. She lives in Winona, Mississippi, USA.**

# Who Am I in the Life of Joseph?

Rebecca Rushmore

Can you identify me? Read each clue and think carefully. When you are sure of my identity, look up the passages of Scripture following each clue to verify the facts from God's Word. Give yourself 10 points for each one you identified correctly.

1. Joseph is the older of my two natural sons (Genesis 30:22-24).
2. We bought Joseph from his brothers for 20 shekels of silver (Genesis 37:28).
3. I bought Joseph from the Midianites (Genesis 37:36).
4. I tried to convince Joseph to commit adultery with me and lied about it when Joseph refused (Genesis 37:7-18).
5. Joseph told me my dream meant I would serve Pharaoh again (Genesis 40).
6. Joseph told me my dream meant I would be executed (Genesis 40).
7. I dreamed about thin cows eating fat cows (Genesis 41:1-4).
8. I was the wife of Joseph (Genesis 41:45).
9. When my brothers and I went to buy food in Egypt, Joseph bound me and sent the others home to bring back our youngest brother (Genesis 42:24).
10. I told my father he could kill my two sons if I did not bring Benjamin back from Egypt alive (Genesis 42:37).



See answer on inside back cover

**My Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

# Where Am I in the Life of Joseph?

Rebecca Rushmore

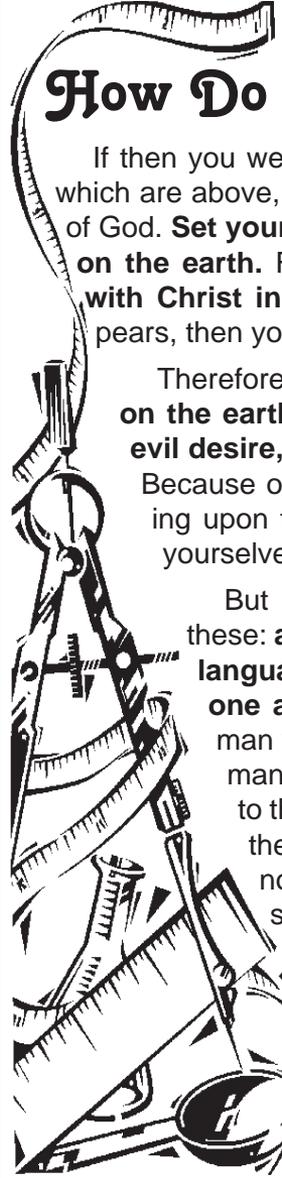
Can you identify me? Read each clue and think carefully. When you are sure of my identity, look up the passages of Scripture following each clue to verify the facts from God's Word. Give yourself 10 points for each one you identified correctly.

1. My father sent me here to check on my brothers and the flocks (Genesis 37:12-14).
2. My brothers had moved here from where my father sent me first (Genesis 37:16-17).
3. Before my brothers sold me, where did they keep me (Genesis 37:21-24)?
4. When my brothers sold me, I ended up in this country (Genesis 37:36; 39:1).
5. When I refused Potiphar's wife and she lied about it, where did Potiphar place me (Genesis 39:7-20)?
6. My family came from this place to Egypt to buy grain from me (Genesis 42:7, 13).
7. I invited my family to move to this part of Egypt (Genesis 45:9-11).
8. My father had a vision from God here on his way to Egypt (Genesis 46:1-4).
9. I buried my father here at his request (Genesis 50:14).
10. My bones were carried from Egypt during the Exodus and buried here after the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 24:32).



See answer on inside back cover

**My Score:** \_\_\_\_\_



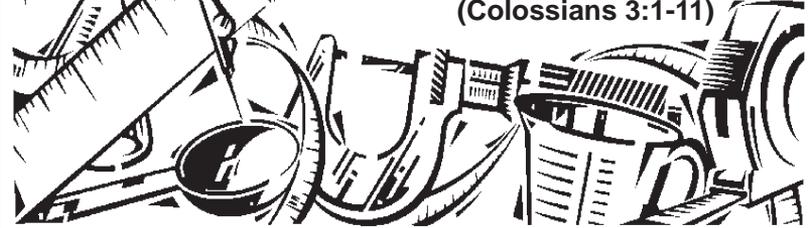
## How Do You Measure Up?

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. **Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.** For you died, and **your life is hidden with Christ in God.** When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Therefore **put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.** Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: **anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another,** since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but **Christ is all and in all.**

(Colossians 3:1-11)



# THERE IS NO TIME FOR APATHY IN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST!

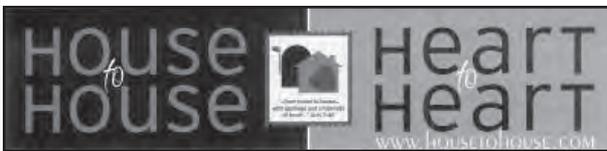
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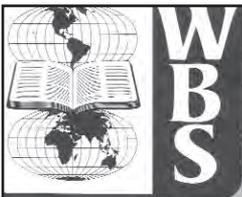
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- \* For just a moment, put yourself in a village in Africa, or even in a large city in India, or in the jungles of South America. You are an immortal soul, living in a perishing body. How will you knowledgeably prepare for the judgment and eternity that awaits us all?
- \* Does the church of Christ exist in your community, so that you can hear the Gospel preached? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- \* Is there a source for buying Bibles in your community? Though the Bible has been translated into most languages, villages seldom have bookstores. For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.
- \* If you have found the Truth and are a Christian, is there a bookstore from which you can order additional study materials? For most people in the world, the answer is “No”.

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## ANSWERS TO PUZZLES

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### *Verse Search* (page 32)

1. No.
2. No. It is wrong to violate our own conscience.
3. No.
4. Yes, if we cause them to violate their conscience.
5. Righteousness, peace, and joy.
6. The most important thing is not our Christian freedom, but the edifying of the body.
7. Things that make for peace and that edify another.
8. Yes, if I violate my conscience.
9. No, not if it causes spiritual harm to another person.
10. Yes, if it causes them to violate their conscience.
11. He is doing something that he personally thinks is wrong.
12. Sin.

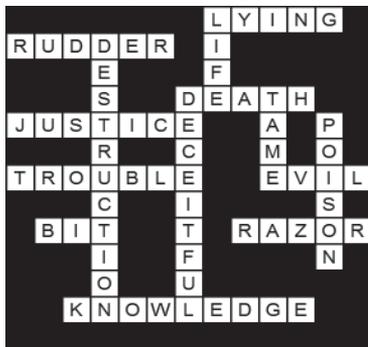
#### **Who Am I?** (page 106)

Rachel, Ishmaelites, Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, Pharaoh's butler, Pharaoh's baker, Pharaoh, Asenath, Simeon, Reuben

#### **Where Am I?** (page 107)

Shechem, Dothan, in a pit, Egypt, in the king's prison, Canaan, Goshen, Beersheba, cave of Machpelah, Shechem

### *Bible Find* (page 94)



**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**



**God's work since creation was to bring Christ into the world to make it possible for sin to be forgiven and for humans to be restored to their relationship with Him.** Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He told His followers to “*go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature*” (Mark 16:15) — **that great work of God entrusted to our hands!**

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