
Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 1

January 4, 2009

Lessons on Salvation (IX)

We are concerned about what the New Testament teaches about the church and salvation. Is there some relationship between the two? What does Jesus teach about this subject? The New Testament, of course, is His will and it reflects His desire. The New Testament is the last will and testament of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and that the prophets and apostles were enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak the mind of Christ. Thus, what is presented in the New Testament is what Christ wants man to know.

Man's Accountability

Someone says "Well you know, really, all we need to do is talk about Christ, just talk about His love and talk about His grace. However, what that does is ignore man's responsibility. There is not any question about the fact that Christ loves mankind. The New Testament teaches that. In II Corinthians 5:14, the Apostle Paul declares that "For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died." So, there is not any question about that. And he goes on to say in verse 15: "He died for all, that those who live

should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." You see, that passage affirms the love of Christ which was exhibited when He died on the cross. But the very next verse, which is a continuation of the sentence, says we should no longer live for ourselves but we should serve Him. There is the human accountability—the human responsibility.

Certainly, the Bible talks about the love of Christ, certainly the Bible talks about the grace of Christ. There is not any doubt about that. In Hebrews 2:9 where the writer is dealing with the humanity of our Lord and the fact that He came in the flesh that He might die for us. He declares: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." Thus, God's grace (favor) is exhibited to mankind. That is why, in Titus 2:11 the record says: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." God's favor has appeared, it has been evidenced, it has been exhibited. But you will note that the

passage says it has appeared to all, that Christ died for everyone. Ladies and gentlemen, if there is no human accountability, if man does not have any responsibility in this, then I think you realize that everyone will be saved. What we need to know is: "What does God expect from man?" There is not any question about the fact that our Lord loves us, not any question about the fact that by the grace or favor of God He tasted of death for all men. There is not any question about the fact that grace has appeared; it has been exhibited. Thus, this passage (Titus 2:11) says that it has appeared to all men and the next verse tells us: "teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age," that we have some accountability and responsibility.

When the record talks about the grace of God it involves not only that grace has been exhibited but that grace has been exhibited to everyone and that grace instructs us—it tells us something. Don't you see the human accountability? Don't believe those who teach that all we have to know is that God

loves us and that by the grace of God Jesus died for us and that is all that man needs to hear. No, what man needs to hear is that in order to appropriate those blessings that were provided by the love of God, exhibited through the grace of God, man has some responsibilities.

Now what does the New Testament teach about the church and this responsibility, about the church and man's salvation?

Reconciliation in the One Body, the Church

Consider Ephesians 2:11–16. In this second chapter, the apostle had been pouring out the sad state of mankind and especially as it existed among the Gentiles. He does that down through verse ten. Then in verse eleven he says: "Wherefore remember, that once ye, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called Circumcision, in the flesh, made by hands; that ye were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in the flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."

The law that is removed, that which stood between Jew and Gentile, is the old covenant, the Law of Moses. This passage says that old covenant was removed. However, it was abolished in His flesh, that is, when Christ died on the cross. It was abolished so that He might create in Himself of the two, one new man. That is, there would be no distinction between Jew and Gentile; there would not be one law to the Jew and another law to the Gentile; not be one plan of salvation for the Jew and a different plan for the Gentile. Thus, He made of the two one new man and thus making peace reconciling them to God in one body through the cross. Thus, both Jew and Gentile are reconciled unto to God and that in one body which is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). There is not one body for the Jew and another for the Gentile, they all become New Testament Christians exactly alike, all worship and serve Him in the same manner because there is one body—the church. Therefore, both Jew and Gentile are reconciled to God in one church. Reconciliation takes place in the church, one church, the universal church; God's people in the aggregate as I have mentioned before.

Why did they man to be reconciled? In Isaiah 59:2, we read: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear." Man is separated from God by sin and the only way he can be reconciled unto God is for that sin to be forgiven.

This passage teaches man must be reconciled to God. God did not leave man, man left God. Therefore, man must be reconciled to God, not God to man. But where does reconciliation take place? It takes place in the body but the body is the church.

Now must one be in the church in order to be saved? Yes, one must be in the church in order to be reconciled unto to God and in order for his sins to be forgiven.

—Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 2

January 11, 2009

Lessons on Salvation (X)

I am not unmindful of the fact that the religious world in general teaches that there is no relationship between salvation and the church. It is interesting to me that there are preachers who hold this view but will do everything in their power to get you to be a member of the church where they preach. Did you ever stop to wonder why? According to their concept it has nothing to do with your eternal well being. It is not going to help you. Apparently they think that getting you to be a member of their church where they preach would help them. So, I believe I would have some questions in my mind if I were you.

What does the New Testament have to say about it? What does God have to say about salvation and the church? That is the final court of appeal isn't it? What man has to say about it is not important. What is important is what the God of heaven has to say about it. Whatever the Bible has to say about a subject, that is the truth. When men maintain something different, then that is not the truth. In Romans 3:4 Paul writes: "Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar." It does not matter what men, or

what group of men, or how many men. The important thing is what does the New Testament teach about salvation and the church, and the relationship between them?

We Must Be "In Christ"

I want to present a formulated argument and I trust that you will follow along with me. In Ephesians 1:3, the Apostle Paul writes: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both*

which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory."

Thus, one must be in Christ in order to enjoy every spiritual blessing. If you are God's chosen you are in Christ. Thus, all spiritual blessings are in Christ. But let's look further, in II Timothy 2:10 Paul wrote: *"Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."* So, salvation is in Christ.

Not only is that the case but in Galatians 3:26 Paul says: *"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."* One must be in Christ Jesus to be a son of God.

Not only is that the case, but in II Corinthians 5:17 the writer says: *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."* So, we become a new creature in Christ. You and I must be in

Christ in order to be this new creature.

In verse 21 he said: *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*

Thus, to be right before God, I must be in Him. That's what the passage says.

John writes in John 3:15, *"whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."* He goes on to say in verse 16: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

But you must be in Christ, that's what verse 15 says.

So, one must be in Christ in order to receive spiritual blessing; he must be in Christ in order to be God's chosen; he must be in Christ in order to be redeemed; he must be in Christ in order to have forgiveness of sins; he must be in Christ in order to become a son of God; he must be in Christ in order to be a new creature; he must be in Christ in order to be right before God; and last, but not least, he must be in Christ in order to have eternal life, that quality of life described in the New Testament that will never end, to go to heaven, if you please.

What Does It Mean to Be "In Christ"?

My friends, if you are in Christ you are in the body of Christ. Ephesians 1:22-23 declares that the church is His body and in Colossians 1:18 that body is called the church. Therefore to be in the body of Christ is to be in the church. That's what the New Testament teaches.

To be in Christ, one is in the body of Christ but if he is in the

body of Christ he is in the Church of Christ, the one He died for. Therefore, if one is in Christ he is in the church that Christ promised to build and in fact did build.

Note further along these lines, in I Corinthians 12:13 the Apostle Paul said of the church of God at Corinth: *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."* Thus, baptism is the act that puts one into the church. Here the "Spirit" is named when the teaching of the Spirit is intended. Thus when one is baptized according to the directions that are laid out in the New Testament, that were revealed and caused to be recorded by the Holy Spirit, he enters the body for by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body or church.

There are only two passages in the New Testament that tell us how to get into Christ. One is Romans 6:3-4 where the writer seems to be amazed that the brethren at Rome didn't know this. He said are you ignorant, don't you know that all we that are baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death.

Does your preacher tell you "I don't believe baptism is necessary"? Well, it is in order to get into Christ. All blessings that are said to be "in Christ" will not be yours unless you are baptized into Christ and you are not baptized into Christ unless it is according to the directions the Holy Spirit has laid out in the last will and testament of our Lord.

The same truth is found in Galatians 3:27. Paul writes, *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."* Therefore, one is baptized in

order to get into the body of Christ, the church. Don't you see that the act that puts one into Christ puts one into the church? But those that are in Christ (in the church) have all the spiritual blessings, even salvation itself. Don't you realize that's the case?

—Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 3

January 18, 2009

Lessons on Salvation (XI)

How is the word “church” used in the New Testament? The word itself is a combination of a preposition and a verb and literally means: “the called out.” In II Thessalonians 2:14 we learn that a man is called out of sin and the world by the Gospel. Whenever man hears the Gospel, believes the Gospel and obeys the Gospel the Lord adds him to the church—the church of the New Testament.

The Local Church

Sometimes the word church is used to refer to a particular congregation meeting in a certain place. In I Corinthians, the Apostle Paul writes to the church of God which is at Corinth. That locates a particular group of these called out people. They are identified as being the church “at Corinth.” It is interesting to note that in Romans 16, the Apostle Paul in saluting a lot of different individuals said: *“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house”* (vv. 3-5).

Here you have the plural term “churches” and the singular term “church.” Plural refers to many different congregations of these people and then to a single congregation that meets in their house. Therefore, the word “church” is sometimes used referring to a particular congregation, a local group of these people. How else could one understand it?

The New Testament teaches that there is just one church or one body (Ephesians 4:4; 1:22-23). Yet this passage (Romans 16), speaks of “churches.” Therefore, the New Testament must use the word in two different senses. In the text before us it is the sense of a specific congregation of people.

Let's focus on how the word “church” is used in this local sense. In the book of Revelation you have seven specific congregations identified relative to location. John writes letters to the church at Ephesus (2:1), the church at Smyrna (2:8), the church at Pergamos (2:12), the church at Thyatira (2:18), the church at Sardis (3:1), the church at Philadelphia (3:7) and the church at Laodicea (3:14). Surely John was not writing to seven different denominations.

The Apostle Paul was instrumental in starting most, if not all, of these churches. Do you think he preached a different doctrine in each? This is not denominationalism; it's not what you see in the world today with its several hundred different doctrines and organizations. Therefore, sometimes in the New Testament the word church is used to refer to a particular group of God's people meeting in a certain locality. That's why I refer to a “local” church.

A Unique Arrangement

You can search the New Testament until you go stone blind and not find any other form of organization or functional arrangement for God's people collectively. The only organization you can read about in the New Testament is for the local church. It is identified, its officers are identified and their qualifications are given, their jurisdiction is also indicated. In Acts 20:28, the Apostle Paul said to the elders of the church at Ephesus: *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the*

church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

The body of men at Ephesus which had the oversight or superintendence are called elders, bishops or shepherds (Acts 20:17, 28). These three terms describe them in their relation to the church.

In Philippians the letter is addressed thus: *"Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:"* Thus, you have three different classes of people. Certainly the bishops were saints and the deacons were saints but there was a distinction made in that the bishops were in the roll of oversight and the deacons were special servants. Every child of God is a servant in a sense but there were special servants. Thus, they are identified; bishops, deacons, saints.

The local church is the only functional arrangement for God's people collectively. Any collective responsibility that's placed upon God's people must be carried out through this local organization that is identified in the New Testament.

The Universal Church

In I Corinthians 1:1-2, the Apostle Paul said: *"Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."*

Notice that he said the church at Corinth and then he said in every place. Thus, these

sanctified people are viewed in the aggregate, a universal sense.

In Matthew 16:18 when Jesus said, *"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church,"* He was not talking about some particular local congregation. He was using the term in that universal sense. In Ephesians 5:23, when the record says, *"Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body,"* the word church is being used in the universal sense.

There is an obvious distinction between a local church and the universal church. In Acts 2:40-47, Peter exhorts the Jews that have believed to save themselves. The record says that those that believed were baptized and that there were about 3,000 souls added to the church. The act that saved them, added them to the church—that final act that brought them salvation was water baptism (Acts 2:38).

Now, in I Corinthians 12:13 Paul writes: *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit."* Can you not see that baptism puts one into that one body, the church in the universal sense?

In Acts 8:32-40, the Ethiopian nobleman was taught the truth by Philip. He heard and believed the truth. Upon which he said, *"Here is water what hinders me to be baptized?"* Philip baptized him. Then the Lord added him to the church didn't He?

Of which local church was he a member? Was it the one at Jerusalem? Was it the one at

Laodicea? Which one? You see the fact that he obeyed the Gospel and was baptized into Christ made him a member of the church universal. He was not a member of any local church. There is an obvious distinction between the two and we need to understand the distinction.

—Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 4

January 25, 2009

Lessons on Salvation (XII)

I think it is important for us to look further into how this word church is used. I have suggested that the New Testament uses the term church in at least two ways. It is used to indicate a particular congregation, for instance, at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1) or the church at Corinth (I Corinthians 1:2). The Letter of I Corinthians was addressed to the church of God at Corinth. In this same place he identifies these people in a general way. He identifies them at Corinth in a particular sense, they were sanctified in Christ, they were called to be saints, and they had called on the name of the Lord. They were the saved. In the next statement he says with all in every place. So you have a particular group and you have all in every place in the universal sense. They were the same people viewed in a different sense. They were people who were sanctified in Christ, called to be saints and they had called on the name of the Lord. They had all done the same thing. Thus, they were members of the church in a general sense and in a universal sense. The New Testament makes the distinction very clear,

between the church local and the church universal.

Universal Church Officers?

I think my brethren know and understand this. Back in the 50's a little booklet was written by Earl West called *Congregational Cooperation*. I think it is one of the best little works I have ever read on this subject and I would highly recommend it to you. On page 13, he, in talking about the church universal, said: "The important point to be remembered is that the only officer known to the church universal is Christ. He is the head of the church, the only sovereign ruler known by the church universal. It is highly significant then that whenever the church universal begins to act, somebody, some organization or some man assumes the sovereign prerogative that belongs to Christ." On the next page he brings this thought up again and applies it to present day problems. He said, "Let no one be deceived for this is the problem the brotherhood faces today." He says, "The answer being given today is that God did intend for the church universal to act through the

elders of a local congregation.

So a local congregation obligates itself to spend a half-million dollars in one year for a national radio broadcast or a benevolent institution. Is anyone so naive to suppose this is the work of a local church? A local congregation has obligated itself to become the agency through which the church universal can act." That, my brethren in Christ, is a problem. The church universal is a relationship between the saved and Christ. There are no officers for the church universal.

We continue to look at the differences between the local and universal. As brother West pointed out (and I give a hardy amen) that Christ is the only sovereign and you can search until you go stone blind and not find an organization for the church universal. If there is an organization for it, then who are the officers of the church universal? What are their qualifications; is there any jurisdiction identified? Who are they and where are they? Thus, I submit to you that the church universal has no organizational structure because it is a relationship of the saved with the Savior.

Local Church Organization

The local church has organization as provided for by God. In the Book of Philippians the first chapter, (1:1-2), Paul writes: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Who are the saints? Well, they are the ones that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, the ones that called on the name of the Lord, those that are the church (I Corinthians 1:2).

So, he said to all the saints at Philippi with the bishops and deacons. Thus, the bishops who are also called elders or pastors who had the obligation of overseers of the church and the deacons who were special servants are officers of the local church. Thus, you have organization identified for the church local. But there is no organization in the universal sense.

Membership in Either?

There is an obvious difference in the way in which one becomes a member of each. One becomes a member of the church universal by virtue of the fact that the Lord adds him to the church. In Acts 2:47 those that gladly received the word and were baptized "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." The process that saved them made them a member of the church. This is precisely what is taught in (I Corinthians 12:13). So, in becoming a member of the church universal the Lord adds such as should be saved. But in becoming a member of the church local, according to Acts

9: 26 we read of something else. The Apostle Paul who had been baptized into Christ came to Jerusalem seeking to join himself to the disciples, but they were all afraid of him not believing that he was a disciple. Thus, he was a member of the church but he was not a member at Jerusalem. However, he became a member of the local fellowship when he was identified as a true disciple by Barnabas. Thus, the New Testament indicates that one becomes a member of the local church in a different way than the way he becomes a member of the church universal. The Lord added you to the church universal when you were baptized into Christ, but you join yourself to the local church in your community.

When it comes to the matter of removing those that are in the church, only God can remove those from the church universal. It has been rightly said that there are some who are in fellowship with God who may not be in fellowship with the local church. Likewise, there may be those that are in fellowship with the local church that are not in fellowship with God. In Matthew 13:49 the record indicates: "So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." So the Lord removes them out of the church universal.

However, man has the responsibility of removing members from the local fellowship. In I Corinthians 5, a case of fornication existed and

they were told to put away that wicked man from among them. Fellowship between the church universal and the child of God is vertical, (I John 1:3-6). Fellowship with brethren is horizontal (Ephesians 5:11; Philippians 4:15). Thus there are obvious differences between the church local and the church universal.

Must one be a member of the church you read about in the New Testament in order to be saved? I affirm that he must.

— Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 5

February 1, 2009

Drawing the Line on Worldliness

In I John 2:15-17 we have a warning about worldliness, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.” It is easy for us to read that it is a sin to be “worldly.” It is easy to tell one another that worldliness is not pleasing to the Lord. However, it is not so easy to explain exactly what worldliness is. Let us try today to establish where we should draw the line on worldliness. Perhaps we will be able to help you answer the question, “How does your life stack up?”

Christians to Be Happy

Let us affirm first of all that we are to enjoy life. There is a scriptural precedent for this. In Deuteronomy 12:7 we read, “And there ye shall eat

before Jehovah your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein Jehovah thy God hath blessed thee.” We show appreciation for life by enjoying the gift. Many times in Ecclesiastes the writer admonishes man to rejoice in that which is his by honest labor. Enjoying happy times is good.

This is especially true for Christians. We of all people should be a happy, joyous people. Writing to the church at Ephesus Paul said, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3); and, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things” (Rom. 8:32), and in Galatians 5:22–23 we have, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against such there is no law.” We

should be filled with joy!

Do We Rob God?

How then do we cross the line into worldliness which is displeasing to God? We do this when we disregard God. The heart of the problem of worldliness is to rob God of what He deserves. See what he has done for us, “And you did he make alive, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins. wherein ye once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience: among whom we also all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest: but God being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:1-4). We must be careful of not going back to that from which we have been delivered. This is

especially true in today's society of loose morals and a lack of spirituality. We must not disregard God by feeling we have to "disobey" God in order to enjoy life. We must not disregard God by forsaking Him for pleasure. Moses learned this lesson when he chose to be with the children of God rather than to enjoy the lascivious pleasures of an Egyptian nobleman (Hebrews 11:24–25).

Sensuality Is a Danger

We cross the line into worldliness when we get out of control. The world is enslaved to *"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life."* Remaining in control is admittedly difficult with the lewdness that is too often portrayed on television and in the big screen presentations. It takes discipline—self-control—to turn the channel or voice displeasure to the proprietors of the theaters that offer such. One of the easiest ways is to simply refuse to watch or attend such screenings. It is essential that we act with temperance and moderation in all things. The world can take control of our lives if we are not careful. Where are your priorities?

Loving Things over God

We cross the line on worldliness when we allow things to tear us down. It is not money that is evil but rather the inordinate love of

money. Paul wrote to Timothy (I Timothy 6:9–10), *"But they that are minded to be rich fall into a temptation and snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows."* Notice they are "minded" to be rich; it is the love of money that is a root of all kinds of evil; and some were reaching after it—the idea being they were striving single-mindedly to have more. This was the problem of the rich young man who made the wrong choice in (Mark 10:17–22). He came to the Lord asking, *"Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"* Jesus told him to keep the commandments and he professed to have kept them all from his youth. Then Jesus told him to *"sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come follow me."* At this the young man left with a fallen countenance because *"he was one that had great possessions."* He had crossed the line and was now held in the shackles of his love for his possessions to the extent that he could not leave them for the Christ who could give him eternal life. What a test! How would you fare?

Will You Draw the Line?

In our love for the world and the things of the world we can destroy ourselves and others. We must be careful what we do! We must take care respecting those things in which we engage. What is your attitude concerning worldliness? Is it pleasing to God?

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 6

February 8, 2009

A Religion of Hope

Christianity is a religion of hope. Which I define as: “desire with expectation.” In Romans 12:12 Paul exhorts the brethren in Rome to rejoice in hope. In the 15:13 he expresses a prayer that the “God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Because Sin Remitted

The hope that Christians have is based on several things among which is their obedience to the Gospel of Christ and the promise of the remission of sins upon their immersion in water for the as commanded by the Lord. In Acts 2, when listeners were convicted of their guilt in the crucifixion of Christ and asked what they needed to do, Peter and the rest of the apostles responded by commanding them to be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). In Romans 6:3–4 the Paul instructed Roman Christians, “Or are ye ignorant that all we

who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.”

This was reinforced to the Colossians when Paul affirmed of them that they had “*been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead*” (2:12).

How anybody could get anything but immersion from these passages is beyond me. Then there are those who would have us to believe that baptism is not necessary to salvation. However, Peter said, “*There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*” Would anyone be so bold as to change the wording from “which now

saves us” to “which does not save us”?

Because God Is Faithful

Another aspect of our hope is the absolute truthfulness of God who inspired Peter to write, “*There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism.*” Peter wrote, “*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise*” (II Peter 3:9). The God whom the Christian serves is “faithful.”

In I Thessalonians 5:23–24 Paul wrote this prayer for them and for us as well, “*And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly: and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it.*” There is absolutely no vacillation or unreliability with God. “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning*” (James in 1:17). God does not lie. In fact, it is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18).

Because We Have an Eternal Intercessor

Further, the Christian's hope is strengthened with the knowledge that we have a sympathetic High Priest. The role of the High Priest was principally so make intercession for the sins of the people (Hebrews chapters 7 through 10). The priests under the Law of Moses were imperfect. They died, sinned and the blood of bulls and goats which they offered for the people's sins was insufficient. (Hebrews 7: 23–28; 10:1–20). The Christian has Jesus Christ—who is not subject to death, who is sinless, and Himself the perfect offering as well as High Priest (Heb. 9:24–28).

Hebrews 4:14–16 tells us Jesus is a sympathetic High Priest in these words, *“Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities: but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need.”*

There Is a Victor's Crown of Life

The Christian's hope rests upon the promise that the faithful shall receive a crown

of life. *“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he hath been approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him”* (James 1:12). The Apostle John heard a voice from Heaven say: *“Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit that they may rest from their labors: for their works follow with them”* (Revelation 14:13). The righteous shall enter into “life eternal” in the beautiful city of God (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 21, 22).

There are many reasons for the Christian to be encouraged. Truly there are many reasons given us in Scripture for the Christian's hope.

—Ed Brouillette

Count Your Blessings

Under all circumstances, we can say with the Psalmist: *“Sing unto the LORD, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness...O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto Thee forever”* (Psalm 30:4, 12). We can count our blessings like David. *“The king shall joy in thy strength, O LORD; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice...For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him*

exceeding glad with thy countenance” (Psalm 21:1, 6). Be thankful!

Too many of us are long overdue in expressing our thanks to God. Take an inventory of your blessings today and watch your worries fade away. Why not, as in the words of that great hymn sit down today and “count your blessings, name them one by one and see what the Lord hath done” for you?

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 7

February 15, 2009

Taking the Bible Seriously

Do you take the Bible seriously? This may seem a foolish question. But I ask it sincerely. Think about it? When was the last time you really spent some time reading from it? How much can you remember of what you have read from the Bible?

That is a challenge if you think about it. It is my conviction that in our time there is too much inattentiveness toward the Word of God. The average person today, even though some may be very religious, knows little to nothing about the Bible. An acquaintance of mine, who is a medical doctor, in a discussion concerning spiritual things, cut me off with the following comment, "I have made a deal with my priest—if he will take care of my soul I will take care of his body." I told him he had made a bad deal.

There are too many things that appeal to us and occupy our main interests for us to

spend any time in Bible reading or study. So many like that doctor seem to have made a deal with their priests or preachers and have decided to leave everything concerning spiritual knowledge up to them, not realizing that many have anything but their souls at interest.

Taken for Granted

Religion is taken for granted by many and few get concerned over whether or not there is a right and wrong, a heaven or hell, truth or error, or even, in some cases, life after death. All of this is the result of not taking the Bible seriously.

Such is truly frightening. I believe, personally, that this is the greatest danger there is to the religious world all around us. This lackadaisical disposition toward the Bible and its great truths has the potential of complete destruction. The prophet Hosea cried out, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have*

rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God I also will forget your children" (Hosea 4:6).

This problem is not new. Jesus said of the Pharisees of his day, "*You made void the word of God by your traditions.*" (Mark 7:13). They valued traditions, and customs more than the Word of God and Jesus reminded them of the prophet Isaiah's charge against them, "*This people honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me, But in vain do they worship me; teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men. You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men.*" We have their counterparts today who cry, "This is the way we have done it for a long time;" or "what was good enough for my father and mother is good enough for me;" or "this is what my preacher says." They do not investigate for themselves asking for Book, Chapter and Verse.

Of Soil & Seed

While Jesus was on earth he often spoke in parables one of which is called the Parable of the Sower. Jesus told of a man sowing seed at planting time. Some of the seed fell by the wayside and produced nothing. Other of the seed fell on stony ground and sprang up for a short while, but because it had no depth, it wilted and died. Some of the seed was choked out by thorns and thistles, but the remainder fell on good soil and produced a good crop. This parable is found in Luke 8 and Matthew 13. Jesus explained it in Matthew 13:18-23. (I encourage you to read it.) The Lord said that the seed is the Word of God; your own Bible is the seed of the kingdom of Christ. The soil is your heart and my heart. Every human in the world that is accountable to God may be found in one of those four categories of soil. The ratio of 3 to 1 may very well be near to actually expressing the number of believers of the Word of God in any generation. Not many take the Bible seriously. Not many really study the Bible for themselves.

After Jesus taught this parable he explained how people who are inattentive to Scripture fulfill prophecy. Jesus said that a prophet, inspired by the Spirit of God, wrote, "By hearing ye will hear and not understand and seeing ye shall see and shall

not perceive" (Matthew 13:14) He also indicated that people stood guilty of becoming gross or dull of hearing (verse 15).

Are Your Ears Dull?

A person does not need to be lacking in intelligence to be classed as "dull of hearing." One who is intellectually sharp in other fields such as science, business or education may be spiritually ignorant. With no offense intended, I suggest that if you have no desire to investigate the word of God, if religious affairs have no appeal to you at all, if worship and service are words you never use, if you are not concerned at whether you are right or wrong religiously, you may be in the category Jesus called "dull of hearing." We all need to think about that.

Have you ever wondered just why people get like this? There is an answer in the Bible. I have already suggested that some are too engrossed in the world around us—others are bound by traditions. Then there are those who think they cannot understand the Bible. They have been taught that the proper understanding of Scripture is reserved for the priest or preacher. Paul wrote, "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of

men, but for what it really is the word of God, which also performs the work in you who believe (I Thessalonians NASB). And he said, "whereby when you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Ephesians 3:4) So, you can understand it—just read it—spend time studying it, but above all put it into practice.

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 8

February 22, 2009

Authority for Congregational Singing (I)

The Silence of the Scriptures

In the first place we must learn that the cliché “silence gives consent” is not so in determining what is acceptable unto God. We must have authority for all that we do whether at work or at play, at home or anywhere else. Paul said, *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”* (Colossians 3:17). While, contextually, this verse applies in particular to singing praise unto God, Paul makes it general in its application when he by the Holy Spirit used the word “whatsoever.” This covers the whole of one’s life. Everything one does must be “from the heart” and “as to the Lord” (Ephesians 6:5–8; Colossians 3:23).

However, let no one think that “All of life is an expression of worship,” as some affirm (*One Body*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 6). However, close worship and service may be related, there is a difference. There are two Greek words in the original text that make clear this distinction, namely, “proskuneo,” which involves an act of homage, and “latreuo,” which involves the

idea of service. While both are sometimes translated “worship” in our versions, there is a difference. A failure to distinguish between the two, leads to “vain worship”—offering as an act of homage unto God that which is unauthorized.

That the silence of the Scriptures does not give permission or make anything a matter of choice is evident from the following: *“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord”* (Leviticus 10:1–2).

Authorities agree that the expression “which he commanded them not” means that they offered fire not commanded in the law. They did not have commandment or authority for it. God’s voice was silent concerning the fire they offered. Thus, we see clearly God’s attitude toward those who presume upon the silence of His word.

Again: *“For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood”* (Hebrews

7:14). The argument here is Jesus could not be a priest on earth because He was of the tribe of Judah, and there was no authority—no voice from the Scriptures—for one of this tribe to be a priest. If this verse teaches anything at all, it means that the silence of the Scripture is prohibitive.

Look again, in the letter from the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15), we find that certain brethren had gone from Jerusalem to Antioch and were “subverting souls” by teaching that circumcision was necessary to salvation. Their teaching was a perversion of truth not because they were commanded not to teach it, but rather because they had no commandment (authority) for it—*“to whom we gave no such commandment”* (v. 24).

The Restoration motto, “We speak where the Scriptures speak and we are silent where the Scriptures are silent” is justified, if justified at all, by the statement in I Peter 4:11 which says, *“If any man speak, let him speak the oracles of God.”* One cannot go beyond the oracles of God and still speak as the oracles of God. One cannot come short of the oracles of God and still speak as the oracles of

God. This divine truth demands respect for both the voice and the silence of the Scriptures. The former authorizes and the latter prohibits.

Generic and Specific

Authority may be either generic or specific. Webster defines "generic" to mean: "pertaining to, or having the rank of, a genus; as, a generic name...General." Webster defines "genus" to mean: "a class of objects divided into several subordinate species." Webster also defines the word "general" to mean: "pertaining to, affecting, or applicable to, each and all of a class, kind, or order; as, a general law."

In the light of these definitions we learn that generic authority includes all of the subordinate species of a genus—it includes "all of a class, kind, or order." Generic authority, therefore, authorizes some things, though they may not be specified. They are within the *genus* that is authorized.

The church building, seats, lights, rest rooms, water fountain, etc., are all authorized generally by the command to assemble in Hebrews 10:25: *"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."* Saints cannot assemble without a place. The kind of place, whether a tent, the shade of a tree, a building (owned, rented, leased, etc.) together with facilities to accommodate the physical needs of people assembled for divinely authorized purposes, is a matter of judgment or choice—all are within the *genus*

"place" which is authorized by necessary inference.

The same thing is true of song books. The command to sing necessarily infers that in obeying the command one will sing from memory or from a song book or its equivalent. There is no other way. Which of the two is used becomes a matter of choice—both are authorized by the *genus* "sing." Hence, both are authorized though neither is specified.

Specific authority on the other hand excludes everything except that which is precisely stated or revealed. Note Webster's definition of the word "specific". "Precisely formulated or restricted; specifying; explicit; as, a specific statement."

There is a fundamental difference in the nature of generic and specific authority. The former is inclusive and the latter is exclusive. That specific authority is exclusive is evident from the fact that its nature cannot be described without the use of some negative term. Try it. Specific authority negates everything except that identified, or, which is the same, it authorizes only that which is named.

All of this harmonizes with Paul's teaching on expedients: *"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not"* (I Corinthians 10:23). A careful exegesis of this verse and its context shows that "all things lawful" (everything within an authorized *genus*) may not be expedient. However, one thing is certain: All expedients are first lawful—they are within an authorized *genus*.

A Fundamental Difference

When it comes to instrumental music in worship, there is a fundamental difference between Christians and others who insist on using the instrument. There is neither generic nor specific authority for instrumental music in worship. However, those who choose congregational singing are able to establish generic authority for their practice. This will be done in a subsequent article on the subject.

—Marshall Patton

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 9

March 1, 2009

Authority for Congregational Singing (2)

In a previous article I clearly established the need of divine authority for all things which Christians do. This authority is either generic or specific. I also pointed out a fundamental difference between the two in nature. Emphasis was placed upon the need to respect both the voice and the silence of the Scriptures; the former authorizes and the latter prohibits.

In that I and many Christians oppose instrumental music in worship on the grounds that the Scriptures are silent regarding the same; some have offered in their own defense the criticism: "There is no command, apostolic example or necessary inference in the New Testament for congregational singing with or without an instrument" (*One Body*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 4). I take issue with this statement. This article is designed to establish authority for our practice.

Historical Information

One other matter needs attention before we come to the real burden of this article. A clear picture of what history reveals concerning the early church and singing is of value. This history shows that different types of singing have been used

by saints through the centuries in their worship unto God.

From the viewpoint of melody, monophonic singing was quite common in Jewish worship and in the early church. This involved a one line melody or a chant. Homophonic singing, which involved all of the voice parts, did not come into use until several centuries later. The following historical excerpts are interesting: "Sacred music must, in the primitive church, have consisted only of a few simple airs which could easily be learned, and which, by frequent repetition, became familiar to all. An ornate and complicated style of music would have been alike incompatible with the circumstances of these Christian worshippers and uncongenial with the simplicity of their primitive forms ... In their songs of Zion, both old and young, men and women bore a part. Their psalmody was the joint act of the whole assembly in unison... The authority of Chrysostom is also to the same effect, 'It was the ancient custom, as it is still with us, for all to come together, and united to join in singing... All worldly distinctions here cease, and the whole congregation form one general chorus'" (McClintock

and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. VI, pp. 757, 758).

It also appears, based upon I Corinthians 14:26, that at times there was a form of individual or solo singing. While this psalm was inspired and sung monophonically by an individual, it may have been with a view to teaching others or leading them in the singing of it. Still, history confirms monophonic singing by individuals in the early church: "Each member was invited, at pleasure and according to his ability, to lead their devotions in a sacred song indicated by himself. Such was the custom in the Corinthian church. Such was still the custom in the age of Tertullian, to which reference has already been made. Augustine also refers to the same usage, and ascribes to divine inspiration the talent which was manifested in this extemporaneous psalmody" (*Ibid.*, p. 758).

I think it well to observe just here that in view of the more ornate and artistic type of singing with which we are accustomed, solo singing must be ruled out in our worship today. It would be next to impossible to keep such from

converting the worship into a theatrical performance. History does repeat itself.

Congregational Singing Authorized

Congregational singing is authorized by generic authority. Who can deny that Christians are authorized to sing in worship unto God (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13)? The type of singing becomes a matter of choice, which choice must be determined and governed by all else revealed. It may be monophonic or homophonic; it may involve a soloist leading a monophonic psalm; it may involve responsive or antiphonal singing, or it may involve the whole congregation singing simultaneously the same melody and words. That singing by saints was done in an assembly is evident from I Corinthians 14:26. Whether this was an inspired or uninspired song, it was still singing, and it was in an assembly. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 obviously demand more than one person in order to do the type of singing here commanded. If more than one, then two, and if two, then any number. Thus, we have generic authority for singing in an assembly. The latter involves corporate singing, and this is congregational singing.

Even antiphonal singing involves all in participation. Some of our songs involve responsive singing—one part of the audience singing a separate voice part at a different time from the others, and then the rest of the audience making response with other voice parts. A good example of this is the

familiar song “What Did He Do?” Though all do not sing the same words simultaneously, all participate in singing the song—the whole congregation is involved and this is congregational singing!

Furthermore, Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 may involve the whole congregation singing simultaneously the same words. Yes, we may “teach and admonish one another” in so doing. There is power in music. No wonder God authorized singing as a means of teaching. When saints join their hearts and voices in praise, in exhortations, in petitions, in resolve, and in thanksgiving, a deeper impression is made upon every soul. Each thereby has an influence one upon the other and the spiritual benefit is intensified. To deny this is to deny the factual and that which is known experimentally. There is more than one way for the congregation to fulfill the command “Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

Generic authority is hereby established for congregational singing. Generic authority makes the *type* of singing a matter of choice so long as the choice is governed by all else revealed. Therefore, it is not necessary to find a specific example of any one type of singing. To insist upon specific authority is to exclude all other types. This would likely put one at variance with his practice.

This is the error of our no Bible class brethren. They fail to recognize generic authority in the command to “teach” and

insist on specific authority for the Bible class arrangement. In so doing they contradict their own practices that are not specified: radio, TV, tracts, home studies, etc.

The issue of authority is of great magnitude. Let us continue to study vital subject, make proper application, and thereby resolve differences, understand each other better, and bring about the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:20, 21).

—Marshall Patton

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 10

March 8, 2009

Measuring Yourself

“For we are not bold to number or compare ourselves with certain of them that commend themselves; be they themselves, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding” (II Corinthians 10:12)

Does measuring ourselves have a strange sound? It should not; we do it all the time. We frequently measure our weight and our waistline—then make plans to diet.

And in many things that are more critical we often measure ourselves and others. The issue is not measuring; however, the standard we use is critical in our taking measure of anything or anyone.

Too many use themselves as the standard or the “measuring stick.” They may think other people to be weird because they are not like them in every aspect. Some may be considered just plain stupid because they disagree with them. Then others may be considered fools because they never do as they do. What standard do these people use who are busy measuring others? It is the standard of *self*. How did they get so smart, so perfect,

that they could become the standard by which to judge everyone? The “I” standard is definitely the wrong measuring device. Those who use it surely “are without understanding.”

I have heard some say, “I am better than some of those hypocrites in the church.” Does it make you feel better when you have convinced yourself you are better than someone you have judged to be inferior? Well better than worst is no real recommendation. “They are without understanding” who use that standard. Being better than all those hypocrites may still leave you miserably wrong; and with the same hypocrites in an eternity of suffering. The “better than hypocrites” standard only gives false comfort.

A Better Standard of Measure

Hebrews 10:39 reads, *“But we are not of them that shrink back unto perdition: but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul.”*

Some translations have “draw back” for “shrink back” in this passage but there certainly is no difference in meaning. Those who “shrink back” or “draw back” are “quitters” headed for

hell—as are all who justify themselves by using “quitters” as their standard or measuring stick. “Those who believe” are entirely different. Heroes of faith offer great role models worth using as examples and imitating. This is far different from “comparing themselves among themselves,” that is, patting one another on the back saying, “I’m OK; you’re OK” The heroes of faith call to a higher plane—to a remarkable measure of faithfulness. Consider Timothy’s measure, for Paul says of him, *“For I have no man like-minded who will care truly for your state.”* (Philippians 2:20) Add Stephanus’ household of whom it is said, *“They have set themselves to minister unto the saints”* (I Corinthians 16:15). We need to include Dorcas who was *“full of good works and almsdeeds which she did”* and *“made coats and garments”* for widows (Acts 9:36, 39). Remember also Barnabas who, *“having a field, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet”* (Acts 4:36, 37). Do you see the standard? The measuring stick? They set it high!

Think with me of a host who *“had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds*

and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, ill treated" (Hebrews 11:36-37). They were God's righteous saints. Stand beside them, measure yourself if you dare! Oh yes, they do raise the standard of excellence to a higher level than most are willing to admit. Being measured by such men inspires determination to stand up—to "measure up." With Paul they exhort, "I beseech you therefore, be imitators of me" (I Corinthians 4:16). Listen also to his qualification, "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Corinthians 11:1). Inspired by such devout men, no one fails or acts unwisely.

Bible Truth Is the Measuring Rod

Truth is God's absolute standard. Truth has no favorites—shows no partiality—never bends to suit situations. Truth is the criteria for final judgment. In any age—in all situations, truth is pure and untarnished. Nothing replaces it. Wise men listen to truth—then compare their conduct and character to God's standard. Jesus said, "Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Wise men want to do right and really try to measure up—even though they may miss the full measure of truth's mark. Truth's measuring stick still beckons upward. Wise are those who seek it diligently and follow it.

Hebrews 12:2 says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,

despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Jesus is "the way, and the truth, and the life." No man comes unto the Father but through Him (John 14:6). Jesus is our standard and His word our guide. He goes before. He shows the way. He shows how a son of God conducts himself.

Christians, sons of God, measure themselves by Him; His image is their goal. They forgive just as He forgave: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). The Christian's pledge to the Father is to "always do what pleases him" (John 8:29)—just as Jesus did in all things. Paul exhorts, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5)

Do you need an ideal standard by which to measure? Don't use yourself—don't use the hypocrite or the backslider. Look to Christ.

—Ed Brouillette

Temptation

We have all heard about the cowboy who went to town every Saturday, tied his horse in front of the saloon and, then, proceeded to go on a bender. One day he came to his senses; he signed the temperance pledge and went on the wagon. However, he continued to come to town on Saturdays and tie his horse in front of the saloon. While he remained true to his pledge for a while, he eventually ended up back in the saloon. You see he never really fled from temptation (I Timothy 6:11; II Timothy 2:22).

But, what about the poor fellow arrested in a Florida Wal-Mart for drinking hairspray? Looks like temptation found him in a very unlikely spot. The Bible says, "Be serious and keep watch; the Evil One, who is against you, goes about like a lion with open mouth in search of food; do not give way to him but be strong in your faith" (I Peter 5:8-9).

The lesson is: temptation cannot be completely avoided; we must learn some self control in order to win over it.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 11

March 15, 2009

Scripturally Baptized

May I Ask a Question?

At this time I would like to ask you a question. It is a very pointed and important question: "Have you been scripturally baptized?" Notice, my question is not, "Have you been baptized?" But, "Have you been *scripturally* baptized?" There is a big difference between the two. Many people have submitted to some act which they call baptism. By this, I mean, many have been led into the water and been immersed, but, it takes more than immersion in water for one to have Bible baptism. Others have gone through an act referred to as baptism by having water poured over them or sprinkled upon them. There are many false ideas believed and practiced relative to the subject of baptism. That is why I ask, "*Have you been scripturally baptized?*"

In order for baptism to meet Heaven's approval, there are certain requirements which must be met.

The First Requirement

The first requirement is that the candidate for baptism must be prepared for it. The candidate must be aware of what is being

done. For this reason (among others) an infant is not a fit subject to be baptized. One who is scripturally baptized must prepare the heart by faith. Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that seek after him." John 6:44-45 tells us that those who have heard and have learned come to God. Faith is produced by hearing the word of God. Romans 10:17, "So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." So, unless one can hear, understand and believe the testimony of God's Word, he cannot be scripturally baptized. Were you baptized while still an infant? If so, you were not scripturally baptized.

The Second Requirement

Also necessary to scriptural baptism is repentance. Repentance is a change of direction, a reversal, an about face. One must be filled with godly sorrow because of sins committed against God. Hear the Apostle Paul again, "For godly sorrow worketh

repentance unto salvation. . ." (II Corinthians 7:10).

Repentance results in a reformation of life and actions. It is a turning away from sin and a turning toward God. Here again infant baptism fails to meet this requirement, because the infant has not transgressed God's laws, thus being not a sinner he is not in need of salvation. Contrary to the opinion of some, an infant does not inherit the guilt of the sin of Adam. Ezekiel 18:20 teaches us, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. Each is responsible for his own sins—not that of his forebears. Can an infant repent of sins? If not, then the infant cannot be scripturally baptized.

The Third Requirement

A scriptural baptism is preceded by an acknowledgment of belief in Christ. This is done by a confession of one's faith. Paul states, [It is] "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Romans 10:10).

Jehovah has always demanded man to express himself in an affirmative manner. Can the infant confess his or her faith in Jesus as the Son of God? If not, then the infant cannot be scripturally baptized. May I also point out there is no scripture that encourages a secret hidden in the heart confession. Unless your baptism has been preceded by faith, repentance and confession, you have not been scripturally baptized. So, I ask again, *"Have you been scripturally baptized?"*

The Fourth Requirement

Another requirement of scriptural baptism is that it be done in the right way. Baptism, according to the scriptures, is a burial. Romans 6:4 affirms, "We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death." In Colossians 2:12 Paul writes, "Having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead."

Scriptural baptism must involve a burial and a resurrection of the candidate; which is analogous to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised from the grave. So likewise, man today must be crucified to the sins of the world (Galatians 2:20), buried in the waters of baptism, and raised as a new creature in Christ.

A Fifth Requirement

For a baptism to be scriptural, it must be done for the right reason. The apostle Peter states "Repent and be baptized...unto (or as some translations have it, for) the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Saul, was told to

"Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16). There is a definite connection between baptism and the removal of one's sins. Baptism is not done "because of" the remission of sins. Neither is it done as "an outward sign of an inward grace." Some religious bodies teach that one is baptized because their sins have already been forgiven. Such is not Bible teaching. Scriptural baptism is done as an act of obedience to God and until one does obey he remains in his sins. Hebrews 5:8-9 tells us, "Though He [Christ] were a son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him." Baptism is that which put one into Christ. According to Galatians 3:26-27: "Ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ." How many have did Paul say had put on Christ? It is as many as were baptized into Christ. Until you are baptized, you have not put on Christ; you are still out of Christ, and if out of Christ, still in your sins and in danger of eternal condemnation.

There are some who say baptism is unimportant but Peter by inspiration tells us, "Which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism" (1 Peter 3:21). Does that sound like baptism is not important?

I ask you again, *"Have you been scripturally baptized?"* What is your honest answer?" You don't need to worry about giving an

answer to me, for I am not your judge. However, you must give an answer to God. Be honest with your Creator? Have you been scripturally baptized? Will you give serious consideration to this important question? Don't gamble with you eternal destiny.

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 12

March 22, 2009

“I Don’t Deserve This!”

Occasionally I hear someone say, “I don’t deserve this!” Perhaps at times you have had the same feeling, whether you expressed it or not. Sometimes it appears that our lot in life has not been fair. Don’t most of us expect life to be easy? Well, it is not. Do we expect life to be comfortable? However, we all experience some pain. We can become disillusioned, even shocked at a situation and reason: “What did I do wrong? This just isn’t fair; it’s not right.”

Someone once asked, “Who said life is fair?” Who promised us a bed of roses and that without thorns? As we look about and consider our lot in life, we may reach the conclusion that life is unfair. Well, it has always been like that.

Bible Examples Confirm

As we look for Bible examples to comfort us we cannot fail to notice Joseph and his life in Egypt. Did he deserve to be thrown into jail? Did he deserve to be forgotten for years after helping the King’s butler? Of course not, but that is what happened to him.

Daniel is another example that must impress us. Did Daniel deserve to be shipped to a foreign country? Did he deserve to be cast into a lion’s den? Did he deserve to be despised by his peers while he served the King? No. But he was.

Did Paul deserve to be cast into jail? To be stoned? To be beaten with rods? Did he deserve his scars? No. But, that was his life’s story. Over and over again he suffered for no other reason than his desire to serve his Lord and Savior.

We could continue with Job, Elijah, Jeremiah and of course, John the Baptist and James who was killed by Herod’s sword. So, when you find yourself a victim of injustice, or some wrong doing, resist whimpering and whining. Just remember, you are in pretty good company.

Look around us. Do we see people deserving what they get? Does the crippled man deserve his limp? Does the blind man deserve to be in darkness? Do all those sick people in the hospitals deserve their illness? Well, here we

might say, some of them do! Many are sick or suffer calamities as the direct result of something which they have one. It may be a bad choice they made, it could be the lifestyle they have chosen to live; it may be the direct result of some sin which they have committed. But, surely, that is not the case for all of them.

Wrong-headed Thinking

Some people consider any calamity as punishment for wrong. The friends of Job assumed that his calamities were deserved and even his wife accepted this conclusion. When Jesus passed by a blind man, his disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2). Jesus left no uncertainty, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned.” No one is to blame! This had not happened to him because of someone’s sins, neither this man nor his parents. He did not deserve to be blind. Many are born with infirmities or deformities, which are not the fault of either them or their parents. Many are born poor and never

seem to have a door of opportunity opened to them to be otherwise. They do not deserve poverty, but there they are.

The Other Side of the Question

Let us look at the other side of the picture. Perhaps we do deserve what we get! Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matthew 7:21-23). They protested their punishment. "We do not deserve this." Jesus said, "I never knew you, depart from me, you who work iniquity, or lawlessness." They were receiving exactly what they deserved. Some professing to be followers of Christ and make a big show of their religion, often are rebels when they think no one is looking. They may even frequently go to church but are still rebels because they have not done what the Lord asks of them. They will eventually get what they deserve.

Many of us just do not grasp the enormity of sin. Some may say I don't deserve this because they have failed to comprehend the enormity of sin. Sin is exceedingly sinful.

(Romans 7:13). Our sins just do not look too bad to us. A bottle of beer, a little lie, a little cheating, a little fornication. What's the big deal? We are just fulfilling the desire which the Lord put in us. We simply miss how bad sin is!

Hell and all of its horrors should show each one just how bad sin really is! There just isn't anything like a little unimportant sin in the guidebook which God has given us. Revelation 21:8 tells us, "But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death."

One thing is for sure. Jesus did not deserve the cross! Even Pilate found no fault in him. Jesus was there only because you and I deserved to be cast into the devil's hell. But God's grace was manifested and made provision for our salvation. Christ died on the cross that we not receive what we truly deserve.

Look at our lives. We are rich and prosperous. We do not miss many meals, live in comfortable houses, do the things that we wish to do. Do we deserve all of this? We are surrounded by friends, and family. Jesus died to free you and me from the guilt and consequences of sin. We have received mercy. Those who have been obedient to his will have received forgiveness, and the love of a Heavenly Father

and enjoy the spiritual blessings which are in Christ (Ephesians 1:7). For those who are willing to obey Him he has provided the finest and greatest family on earth (Galatians 3:26, 27).

Do we deserve this? Do we deserve to be a son of God, a joint heir with Christ? I think not! However, I eagerly accept it all. How thankful we should be that we are not getting what we deserve.

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 13

April 5, 2009

A Tender Heart

Have you ever heard someone referring to another person as having a “tender heart?” Perhaps you have made the statement yourself concerning one of your acquaintances. Usually this phrase is intended as a compliment for “a tender heart” usually refers to one who has concern for other people and other things more than for himself.

King Josiah Had a Tender Heart

In II Kings 22:19 Josiah is referred to as having a “tender heart” for God, for God's law and for the people over which he had been made king. He was one of the few kings of Judah that was praised by the writer of the books of the Kings. In the account of his reign Josiah's mother is mentioned. I am persuaded this shows us the importance of the mother-child relationship. In II Timothy 1:3–5 Paul makes reference of such a relationship when he writes that he was reminded of “the unfeigned faith that is in thee which dwelt first in thy

grandmother Lois and in thy mother Eunice and I am persuaded in thee also.”

Josiah's faithfulness to God and His way is spoken of in the II Kings 22:2. It is commendable in view of the fact that most of Judah was indifferent to God's way. They had departed from the temple worship and were worshipping Baal.

Today's permissive society is very much the same as in the days of the beginning of Josiah's reign. We need to be reminded that we are instructed to “enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby, for narrow is the gate and straitened the way that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). We need to inquire more about God's way and less about man's way.

His Heart Stirred a National Revival

Josiah's faithfulness activated a desire to restore the temple

worship as God had designed it. The church should learn from this and also want to correct the decay and indifference with which service to God is too often found. We need to not only maintain buildings that pleasure us but to truly return to God and His way. In Matthew 5:8, Jesus is recorded as saying, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” and James writes in 4:8, “Draw nigh unto God and He will draw nigh unto you, cleanse your hands ye sinners, and purify your hearts ye double-minded.” Many who are supposed to be leaders among us and who influence others greatly need to be reminded of these teachings.

In verse seven of the context of our text we find that there was no need for the workmen to make an accounting of the money entrusted to them for they dealt faithfully. It may seem a novel idea but we do need more trust among ourselves and we do need to deal faithfully with one another. Christians who love

God will faithfully do God's work. In I Corinthians 4:2 we read, "Here moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." At the final judgment we will all have to account for the trust placed in us. II Corinthians 5:10 reads, "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ: that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

A Tender Heart Searches God's Will

It is interesting to note that as they worked, Hilkihah, the high priest, found the "book of the law in the house of Jehovah" (v. 8). This was the trouble—those who claimed to be God's own people had disregarded His instructions so that it had become lost. Hosea 4:6 tells us, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because thou has rejected knowledge I will also reject thee." How many folks today, who profess a strong attachment to their religion, who never open nor study their Bible?

When Josiah was made aware of the existence of this book he immediately recognized its value. He recognized the destitute spiritual condition of his people and had godly sorrow for their sins. We are told that "he rent (or tore) his clothes" in demonstration of being upset. He desired more light—more truth. We should be seekers for God's truth. Jesus prayed to God, "Sanctify them in thy truth: thy word is

truth" (John 17:17). In Acts 17:11 we are told that the Bereans "were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the scriptures daily, whether these things were so."

Are you inclined to accept certain religious ideas because someone you respect presented them? You should be like those of old who were commended because they "examined the scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."

Mercy Is Given to the Tenderhearted

As a result of his desire to know more of God's law and his determination to restore the temple worship God's mercy was extended to Josiah. In II Kings 22:19 God said to Josiah, "because thy heart was tender, and thou didst humble thyself before Jehovah when thou heardest what I spake against this place and against the inhabitants thereof that they should be a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes and wept before me: I also have heard thee, saith Jehovah." This is the key verse. If we would be found well pleasing in God's sight, we must be like-minded.

Josiah recognized the value of the Law and wanted to share it with others. He read the Law in their hearing—all—both small and great and they all agreed to subscribe to it. Unfortunately the people were outwardly corrected but were not converted in their hearts.

After Josiah's death the people returned to idolatry and left the way Josiah had found for them.

Is Your Heart Tender?

Is your heart tender for hearing the truth? Will you do the Father's will? As James urged: "Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 14

April 12, 2009

“The Bible in a Nutshell”

A favorite passage of most people who believe in the Bible as God's inspired word is John 3:16 which reads, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have eternal life.” This passage has been referred to, by at least one, as “The Bible in a nutshell.” Let us examine it.

The Origin & Object of Redemption

Here we have the origin of redemption: “God so loved.” The fountainhead of man's salvation is the love of God—not holiness, justice, power of truth but love. Had not God possessed love for a lost humanity, there would have been no hope for the redemption of man. Man's redemption did not originate in man's own merit, but because God “so loved.”

The object of redemption is “the world.” God loved the ungodly world in all of its

wreck and ruin and in its most deplorable condition. It was a world nestled in the lap of the Wicked One, a world so blind that it did not know its Maker when He came. John 1:10–11 tells us, “He was in the world and the world was made through Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and they that were His own received him not.” “But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

The Sacrifice unto Redemption

In John 3:16 we find the supreme sacrifice for the redemption of man. “God gave His Son.” The supreme sacrifice was necessary to wrest an alien world from the love of sin and the power of Satan. Oh, what mercy—that God, in planning man's redemption, determined that He Himself should provide the price. This is properly called the grace of God. It is a

sacrifice that could not be induced by the merits or works of man; it is the gift of God, for He gave His Son. “Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). God's appointed lamb and He alone, would suffice to meet the extreme need of the world.

The Boundless Scope of Redemption

In the great provision that God made for the salvation of man, there is ample satisfaction for all—it is “whosoever.” The extent of redemption is seen in “that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). He that will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Revelation 2:17). This is no fake fountain with its imitation jugs and tainted streams; it is no mirage. Jesus says, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but...it shall become in him a well of

water springing up into eternal life." (John 4:14)

"Whosoever believeth on him," may appropriate that redemption. Not he that believeth only. "You see, that by works a man is justified and not only by faith" (James 2:24). "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26).

Someone has said, "Faith is not the water, but it is the cup that hangs at the well by which you drink." There are many who believe after a fashion, that give mental assent of the mind—to the fact of Jesus' existence—who are yet totally devoid of salvation. To believe without obedience is to fail to appropriate to ourselves salvation; it is to take the cup in hand from beside the well, but refuse to dip it into the water and thus quench our thirst. "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). The one who believes has the right to become a child of God (John 1:12).

The Incredible Purpose of Redemption

The purpose of redemption is that those who believe should not perish. Those who do not perish are those who receive salvation. The purpose of redemption is seen in the verse

immediately following our text: "That the world should be saved through him" (v. 17). It might be well to note that, though the prime purpose of redemption is the saving of the soul, Jesus also saves lives. Paul said, "For me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:12). Here is a life of value which will, of course, culminate in the salvation of one's soul.

The fruition of redemption is seen in the words, "Not perish, but have eternal life." Not perish like the old world, but have life like Noah who believed and built the ark to the saving of himself and his household. Not perish like the Sodomites, but have life, like Lot who left the wicked cities with the inhabitants and followed the instructions of God. Not perish like the foolish builder who built on the sands of human wisdom, but have life like the wise man who built his house upon the rock, hearing the words of Jesus and doing them. Not perish like the rich man of who thought only of himself, but live like Lazarus who inherited a place in Abraham's bosom. Not perish like Satan who goes about seeking whom he may devour, but live like Christ having conquered sin and death.

Truly, how marvelous is redemption's story, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every

spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ... in whom we have our redemption through His blood the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:3, 7).

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 15

April 26, 2009

Lessons Peter Learned

In Acts 10 we find Peter being commissioned to preach to some Gentiles. He was so reluctant to do so that a miracle had to occur before he would yield to go. In the verses 34 and 35, after a miraculous vision, he is recorded as saying, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him." These words express some very important truths Peter came to understand as a consequence of this experience.

No Partiality with God

Peter learned that God shows no partiality; there is no respect of persons with Him (Ephesians 6:9). God does not recognize differences in race, color or nationality. In Genesis 1:26–27 and Acts 17:26 we learn God created all of *one* blood. Peter perceived in God's plan of redemption there was no partiality to be shown.

Romans 3:23 tells us that all are in the same boat—all have sinned and need Jesus who came to save "*the world*" (John 3:16).

Salvation Is Conditional

Peter also learned that God will accept only certain ones. Is this a contradiction? Definitely not, God saves *all*, but any saved are saved upon those conditions which He appoints.

Many have erroneously taught "unconditional salvation." They say, "One doesn't have to do anything! Salvation is not of works!" But Peter perceived that there are at least two conditions before God's acceptance.

First, "whosoever fears Him is accepted by Him." Fear means to love, to honor and to respect Him; to consider His alternatives when we disobey. Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 reads "Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For

God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Paul exhorts us in Hebrews 10:28–29, "Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire."

The second condition is, "whosoever works righteousness is accepted by Him." To work righteousness is to do God's will, to obey His commandments, to follow His word. The Psalmist said, "Let my tongue sing of thy word; for all thy commandments are righteousness" (119:172).

Jesus said, "If ye love me ye will keep my commandments" and "if a man love me he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:15, 23). The Lord also said, "If ye

keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

Jesus Is the Lord of All

Peter also perceived who Jesus is with relation to the world. Jesus is not one among many whom claimed spiritual knowledge. Some erroneously teach this about Jesus. They tell us he was not the Son of God but simply a good man, maybe a prophet and, some have even put some man (or men) that they revere and follow as equal with Him or, in some instances, even above Him and would have us believe that His Word is not complete but that something else is needed in addition to it. And many have been deceived by this invention of man's imagination and have come to believe this error.

In Acts 10:36 we learn that Peter came to understand that Jesus is Peace and Lord. "The word which He sent unto the children of Israel, preaching good tidings of peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all)" (Acts 10:36).

The word "peace" means tranquility, quietness, harmony in relationships, reconciliation, order. Of Him Paul wrote, "He is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in His flesh, the enmity even the law of commandments

contained in ordinances; that He might create in Himself of the two one new man, so making peace and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Ephesians 2:14 - 16). Paul further tells us in I Corinthians 14:33, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace." Then, in Colossians 3:15, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to the which ye were also called in one body; and be ye thankful." In Philippians 4:6-7 we read: "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgivings let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall guide your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Peter further perceived that Jesus is "Lord of all." On Pentecost he had preached, "Let all the house of Israel, therefore, know assuredly that God hath made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified" (Acts 2:36). He now knew the reality of what he had preached.

Peter was a very prejudiced man but has now arrived at a new understanding of God's plan. Jesus was continually changing him. He learned that it was not up to him to determine anyone's salvation. Salvation is of God. Our duty is to "fear God" in

our life and "do righteousness" which includes teaching God's conditions of salvation. Jesus is Lord of all and He is our peace in our struggles, our relationships, our prejudices, and in numerous other areas. Believe and submit to Jesus today. He can change you.

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 16

May 3, 2009

Saved Just Like Paul

Recently in a discussion I had someone say to me: "I want to be saved just like Paul was saved." This prompted me to see just what was involved in Paul's salvation. In doing so, consider Paul as he made his defense before Agrippa in Acts 26:13–19. There he tells of a heavenly vision on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians. In that vision he saw some things that we must see for our salvation.

The Heavenly Vision

The first thing that Paul saw was that he was wrong. Verse 11 says he was doing "many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." Let me repeat: Paul saw that he was wrong. All his past so-called goodness was wrong. His past religion, learning and teaching were wrong. Yes—even his parents were wrong. Is it not interesting how many of us use these very things in attempting to justify what we are doing religiously?

Paul saw in Jesus all things that are right. He wrote in Colossians 2:9, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." He followed in the tenth verse by say: "You are complete in Him" and instructed that we were to "do all in His name" (Colossians 3:17).

Paul saw that he was lost and in darkness. The commission Jesus gave him was to go to the Gentiles "to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, so that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me." Paul was included in those who needed to "see and turn from darkness," Paul saw being a devout, loyal Jew who went to the synagogue every Sabbath, who tithed and came from religious folks was not enough. He was still lost and in darkness.

The fact that his father and mother, aunts and uncles,

were likely also faithful, sincere, honest, practicing, religious people was not enough. How many today are what they are religiously not because of conviction on their part but because they have inherited their religion from their relatives? Paul saw this would not work. A change was necessary. Did you realize that the conversions recorded in the Book of Acts were conversions of people who were already religious and were instructed to change? Nowhere in the New Testament do I find any making the plea, "It was good enough for my Dad and so it is good enough for me."

Paul saw that Jesus was the Light. In II Corinthians 4:6 he states, "God commanded light (Jesus) to shine out of darkness." In Colossians 1:13 he points out that those who obeyed the teachings of Christ had by God "been translated out of the power

of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son." Paul says In I Thessalonians 5:5-6 to Christians, "You are sons of light and sons of the day."

Paul saw that fighting against God only hurt himself. It is interesting to note that while he was, in truth, fighting against God he believed, sincerely believed, he was doing what God wanted him to do—alas, he was wrong. He said that he did all in good conscience (Acts 23:1). He did as he had been instructed by his teachers and yet was wrong. How many of us place the responsibility of our failure to search the Scriptures and to give diligence to show ourselves approved unto God upon the shoulders of our teachers or parents—on almost anything but our own failure to study and make application. Failing to have done so, we continue walking in darkness never walking in the light of God's word.

In Acts 26:14, it is recorded that Jesus said to Paul, "It is hard for you to kick against the goad" (the goad was an animal prod, or spur). In other words Paul was kicking, or fighting against God. Gamaliel, one of Paul's teachers, had earlier warned those who would persecute the Christians to be careful "Lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God" (Acts 5:39). The wise writer of Proverbs 21:30 said, "There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the Lord." We need to be thankful that Paul, even though he did what

he did in good conscience and sincerely thought he was doing the best and the most he could for the Lord, learned he was actually fighting against God.

How many are in that same position today? Sometimes when we point out the possibility of their being wrong in their religious practices rather than continued study we are told, "I am sincere in what I am doing." I am not questioning sincerity. However, I am questioning the erroneous teaching of divisive creeds and catechisms. I am encouraging the further study of God's Word to determine the truth.

Paul saw that Jesus was and is our Comfort, Rest, Peace and Deliverance. He wrote in Ephesians 2:14, "He is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition." In Acts 26:17-18, Jesus promises to deliver Paul from his enemies. He will deliver us from teachers of error, from the influences of paganism; Jesus opens our eyes and turns us from darkness to light. Jesus turns us from the power of Satan to God and makes possible the forgiveness of our sins.

Paul Obeyed the Vision

Paul, in Acts 26:19 concludes, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision but declared both to them of Damascus first and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judaea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should

repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of penitence." Let us be obedient to the Way, Truth and Light in every aspect of our lives. Let Him change your life today. Turn from sin and darkness and come to Jesus now. Believe in Him (John 3:16), Repent and turn from past sins (Acts 3:19), confess His name (Rom 10:9, 10) and be baptized into Him for forgiveness (Acts 2:38).

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 17

May 10, 2009

For What Does the Church of Christ Stand?

Some people are critical of us because they are of the opinion that we emphasize the importance of baptism too much. Some are even so bold as to inquire, "Do you preachers of the Church of Christ preach anything but baptism?" Others may ask, "For what besides baptism does the Church of Christ stand?"

I must confess that I do emphasize baptism. The Lord, Jesus Christ, submitted to the baptism of John; He commissioned his disciples saying, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15, 16). Peter on the first Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Christ told believing sinners to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). Saul of Tarsus, who became the Apostle Paul, was told, after three days of prayer, penitence,

and fasting, "arise, and be baptized, washing away thy sins." There are other accounts of conversion in the Acts of the Apostles but these should suffice. If one must be baptized to be saved then perhaps we should emphasize this very important command.

But let me repeat, though we do stand for baptism we do not stand for baptism alone, and let me point out some other things for which members of the Church of Christ stand.

The Scriptures

Members of the Church of Christ stand firmly for the Scriptures. We believe that both the Old and New Testaments are inspired of God. In I Corinthians 2:9-10 Paul affirms, "Things which eyes saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit for the Spirit searcheth out all things, yea the deep

things of God." In II Timothy 3:16-17 we are instructed that, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." The apostle Peter in his second epistle chapter one verses 20 and 21 writes: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation for no prophecy ever came by the will of man, but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." No tampering with the inspired word is allowed for both Deuteronomy 4:32 and Revelation 22:18-19 warn against adding to, taking away from, or substituting for the word of God. The finality of the Scriptures is seen in John 12:48 where we read: "He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I spake the same shall judge

him in the last day.” Galatians 1:8–9 warn: “But though we or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we have said before so say I now again, If any man preacheth unto you any Gospel other than that which ye have received, let him be anathema.”

The Divine Son of God

Members of the Church of Christ stand firmly for the Lord Jesus Christ. We stand for His unique Divine Sonship. In The Epistle to The Hebrews verses one through four of chapter one we read: “God having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, through whom also He made the worlds, who being the effulgence of His glory and the very image of His substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; having become by so much better than the angels, as He hath inherited a more excellent name than they.”

We believe in His pre-existence as Colossians 1:17 says, “And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” We are grateful for

His sacrificial death and His resurrection, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” His ascension into heaven is recorded in Acts the first chapter.

We are convinced that He has supreme and sole authority for so is taught in Mathew 28:18 where it is recorded He said, “All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.” Ephesians 1:21–23 tells us that He is “Far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and every name that is named, not only in this world but also that which is to come; and He put all things in subjection under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.” We read in Colossians 1:18 “And He is the head of the body, the Church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence.” And, from Acts 4:12 we understand that salvation is only in him, “And in none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.” This salvation is the

salvation of the individual from sin to a life of righteousness. It is not social reform but a personal regeneration.

These are just a few of the things for which the Church of Christ stands. Will you stand with us for these things?

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 18

May 17, 2009

Other Things for Which the Church of Christ Stands

One of the criticisms leveled at the Church of Christ is that all we seem to do is to preach baptism. In the last study I gave you a few Scriptures to make you aware of the importance of baptism and for this reason we preached much about baptism. I also pointed out that contrary to what our critics say, we do preach about other important truths contained in God's Word.

We stand firmly for the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures resulting in their authority for all we do as members of the Church of Christ. I also called your attention to the Apostle's teaching to Timothy in the second epistle to him that "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." (3:16-17).

We stand firmly for the Divine Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe in

His virgin birth, His life on earth, His crucifixion, His death, burial and resurrection. We believe He ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords (Acts 1). We believe He was given and now possesses all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:21-23) and that salvation is in His name alone (Acts 4:12). In short, we look to the Lord and His Word as the ultimate authority in all that we do or say.

There Is a Pattern

Members of the Church of Christ stand firmly for the New Testament pattern and plan for the church. We understand the Church is divine although human beings make it up and they are the fallible part of the church. We recognize Jesus as her head (or authority). In Matthew 16:18 He made the promise "I will build my church." It is His Church by virtue of the fact that He died for it. He paid the price for the redemption of those who

are added to the Church by their obedience in baptism to His command. We look to Him as the Founder and Foundation of the church. I Corinthians 3:11 says, "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

We recognize no human allegiance or alliance in things pertaining to religion because Colossians 3:17 teaches us, "And whatever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

We recognize no creed but Christ. Matthew 16:16 records Peter as making this confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Colossians 2:8, 9 warns us, "Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ: for in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." We preach that faith in Him is necessary for

salvation for Christ said, "Except ye believe that I am He, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). Faith in any human creed is not, according to Colossian 2:8-9.

The Scriptures Are the Only Rule of Faith

We preach the New Testament as the only rule of faith and practice which will settle all matters of doctrine, life, practice and polity. II Timothy tells us: "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." There is no room here for any of the creeds and/or confessions formulated by man's imagination.

We recognize the local Church as God's plan of organization and His way of effecting that organization with elders, deacons and evangelists. In Acts 14:23 we are taught that elders were appointed in every church. They are the pastors and shepherds who are responsible for overseeing the local Church and guiding the members of it into all truth regarding the work and worship of the church. We find the qualifications for elders, also referred to as pastors, shepherds, overseers, bishops, in

I Timothy chapter three and in Titus chapter one.

An Appointed Worship

We recognize only the Divine ordinances and memorials contained in the New Testament and practiced by the Church of the first century. We find the first day of the week (Sunday) referred to as the Lord's Day in Revelation 1:10. It was on this day that the disciples met to participate in the partaking of the Lord's Supper in memory of Christ. In Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians in chapter 11 and verse 26 we read, "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come." In Acts the twentieth chapter and in verse 7 we learn that the disciples came together upon the first day of the week to do this very thing. Partaking of the communion does not bring with it any special blessing or sacrament but is done according to the Lord's command in His memory who suffered and died for us. Baptism is an immersion in water and a coming out of the water in obedience to the Lord's command. We are told in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 5 that there is one baptism and Romans 6:3-4 describe that baptism for us in these words: "We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the

dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life."

Colossians 2:12 reads:

"having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

There are many other things for which the Church of Christ stands. In short it stands for Christ and His Gospel.

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 19

May 24, 2009

The Power of Christ's Blood

We often sing the song, *There Is Power in the Blood*. While singing, I have often wondered if all that sang along truly believed this, or were they just singing out of custom and habit because it was a "good old song." Maybe when we sang it before we did not think of the words we were saying. Perhaps we need to be reminded from time to time that the Bible indeed teaches the wonderful power in Christ's saving blood. John declares: "*My little children, these things write I unto you that ye may not sin, and if any sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only but also for the whole world*" (I John 2:1-2).

Acquired Conditionally

The Bible teaches that the spiritual power of the blood can only be acquired conditionally. Only those who believe and obey can acquire the wonderful

blessings of the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ provides to the obedient cleansing and the washing away of sins. The apostle John writes: "*If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus, His Son cleanseth us from all sin*" (I John 1:7). If we understand that verse correctly we understand that the wonderful blessings of Christ's blood cannot be received until one personally comes to Christ Jesus and walks in His light. But we also understand that one must come to Jesus believing that He is the Son of God. Jesus said, "*I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for except ye believe that I am He, ye shall die in your sins*" (John 8:24). Yes, we must believe that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

Not by Faith Alone

However, faith alone is not enough. Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:32-33: "*Everyone*

therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven." The Apostle Paul emphasized this in Romans 10:9-10: "*Because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thy heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved: for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness: and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*"

Repent & Be Baptized

In order to reach the power of the blood of Christ the believer must repent of his sins. The believers on Pentecost were commanded to "*repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins: and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:37-38). Paul instructed the Athenians, "*The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked: but now he*

commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:30–31). Then, the penitent man must be baptized into Christ for the forgiveness and washing away of our sins. The preacher Ananias commanded penitent, praying Saul of Tarsus: “And now why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name” (Acts 22:16).

The Power to Justify

The blood of Christ will bring redemption and reconciliation to the obedient. Paul said, *“In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7). “In whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins” (Colossians 1:14). Redemption means “to be redeemed, purchased, or bought back.” When we sin, we are separated from God. It is as Isaiah said, “Behold, Jehovah’s hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1–2). Yes, when we sin, we are alienated from*

God, estranged in our relationship with Him. We need to be “bought back, redeemed.” This can only be done by appropriating the death of Jesus into our lives. Through the blood of Jesus we acquire acquittal. In Romans 5:8–11 we read, “Much more then, being saved from the wrath of God through him. For if, while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life: and not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”

Sin subjects man to death, *“For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Man sins, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) When he sins he dies spiritually and consequently physically. “Therefore as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin: and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned” (Romans 5:12). But God is not only our Lawgiver but also our Redeemer. As our Judge, He condemns our actions, but when He observes us seek forgiveness and redemption through Jesus, He is ready to acquit us from the guilt of all sin. We are no longer guilty; the penalty forfeited through the blood of Jesus, God proclaims us released from the claims of our former sins— we are*

proclaimed justified, acquitted. Court adjourned.

Won't you seek the power of Jesus blood in your life today?

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 20

May 31, 2009

Phenomenal Prophecies about Christ

I have always been impressed with the number of prophecies found in the Old Testament with a direct, uncomplicated fulfillment in the New. In spite of this evidence some are still bold to declare themselves as skeptics, or agnostics, and deny Jesus to be the only begotten Son of God come to earth for the benefit of mankind. It seems that a study of Isaiah the fifty-third chapter with the fulfillment of the prophecies therein would be enough to convince anyone.

The exact number of prophecies concerning Christ may be indeterminable. However, various estimates have been made. Henry M. Morris estimates there are approximately 300, others have claimed above 400, but if there were only a handful that would be wonderful testimony. God said, through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 46:9-10, "Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else: I am God, and there is none

like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

Christ came to Fulfill

Near the beginning of what has come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is recorded as saying, "Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). These amazing words were realized in His life, death, resurrection and ascension (Luke 24:44; Acts 3:18).

Their amazing character is accentuated when they are considered in light of mathematical probability. What we mean by "probability" is to take into account all the factors pertaining to a particular event and then calculate the odds of all those factors occurring in a single event.

Henry M. Morris, in "The Nature of the Bible" from *The Christian Evidence Series*, gives the following illustration.

The probability of Jesus coming from the tribe of Judah would be one in twelve since there were 12 tribes, and being of the house of David (considering the Jewish structure) would be about one in one hundred. So Jesus coming from both the tribe of Judah and the House of David would have a probability of one in 1,200 (12×100).

Probable Improbability

He further describes an experiment by a Professor Stoner (a mathematician) who gave 48 of his students an assignment in probability. He gave each student one prophecy concerning the Messiah with the assignment of determining the probability of that event coming to pass. At the next meeting of the class they would multiply the forty-eight individual probabilities to find the probability of all forty-eight of them occurring in one individual. When the calculations were finished the probability that all these 48 prophecies would occur in

one person was one in 10^{181} . This means ten with one hundred eighty one zeros after it. That is the chance of Jesus fulfilling all forty-eight prophecies concerning Himself that the students used in their problem of probability.

Peter Stoner in his book, *Science Speaks* (Moody Press, 1963, page 106) calculated the probability of Christ's accidentally fulfilling just eight Old Testament prophecies as being 1 in 10^{17} .

Always on Target

G. Dallas Smith in the *Abilene Christian College Bible Lectures of 1919* (p. 193) used the following illustration: "Five men stand here, each with ten arrows in his quiver. They desire to shoot these arrows at a target, but they do not know where the target is, or how far away it is. The first man stands fifteen hundred yards away, as he afterwards learns, and shoots his ten arrows out into the darkness of the night. The second man stands one thousand yards away and sends his ten arrows out into the midnight darkness. The third man stands eight hundred yards away and shoots his ten arrows into inky blackness. The fourth man stands six hundred yards away, and the fifth man stands four hundred yards away—all of them shooting into the darkness. They call for a light and find

every one of those fifty arrows in the bull's eye—in the center of the target. This would be wonderful indeed; but not more so than the fulfillment of the many prophecies relating to Christ. For instance Moses stands fifteen hundred years away from Christ, and sends forth his prophetic arrows. David stands one thousand years away from Christ and sends out many striking prophetic arrows. Isaiah stands eight hundred years away from Christ and sends forth his arrows. Daniel stands six hundred years away from Christ and sends forth his arrows and Malachi stands four hundred years away from Christ and sends his arrows of prophecy. None of these men knew just how far away they were, or just where the target was; but when the light of the New Testament revelation is turned on, we find all these prophetic arrows centered in the life story of Jesus. How did these men know so many things about Jesus, and so long before He came to this earth? Well, these men spoke from God being moved by the Holy Spirit. And I repeat, the writers of the Bible are in a class to themselves, and this fact places the Bible in a class to itself."

The apostle Peter wrote: "Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that

should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them" (I Peter 1:10).

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 21

June 7, 2009

The Christ in Prophecy

We talked before about the mathematical probability associated with the many prophecies concerning Christ. These calculations preclude the possibility of the chance occurrence that all of these prophecies could be fulfilled in just one person, namely Jesus of Nazareth. The only reasonable explanation is that the writers of the Bible were inspired of God, and Jesus, in fulfilling these prophecies, proved Himself to be the only begotten Son of God.

In this study let's consider some specific prophecies made concerning the Christ.

Prophecies about Christ

The first consider the prophecy in Genesis 3:15. It is generally agreed among Bible scholars that this is a prophecy pointing to the coming Messiah. Adam and Eve were placed in the garden created for them by God and given very specific commands. They chose to disobey, or ignore, God's instructions. In telling them of their punishment for disobedience God said: "I will put enmity between thee (the

serpent) and the woman and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

Paul affirms this seed was Christ, "But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law" (Galatians 4:4).

Abraham was given a promise by God that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed. God said, "And I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). The fulfillment is found in Galatians 3:16: "Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

The time of His coming is prophesied to be in the last days which prophecies we find in Isaiah 2:2 and Joel 2:28. The fulfillment of which is set forth in Acts 2:16-21 in the record of Peter's memorable sermon on the first Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Further, His coming

was to be during the days of the Roman Empire according to Daniel 2:44. We recognize the fulfillment of this prediction in Luke 2:1 and 3:1-2.

The place of His coming is given in Micah 5:2, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." Matthew 2:1 confirms that this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea, in the days of Herod the king, behold wise from the east came to Jerusalem."

As we trace His genealogy we find that He was indeed a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah and of the house of David (Matthew 1 and Luke 3).

His virgin birth is prophesied and Isaiah 7:14 and seen fulfilled in Matthew 1:23; Luke 1:26 - 35.

He was to be rejected by both Jews and Gentiles according to

the Psalms 2:1–2 and again in 118:22. We find this fulfilled as we read that “He came to his own and they that were his own received him not” (John 1:11), and we see Him rejected by even some of His disciples when they failed to understand His teaching in John 6. This rejection continued as He was taken to the judgment hall of Pilate where only John followed, and then we are told it was from afar off, with Peter denying Him at the fire of His enemies.

Prophecies are found telling us he would be silent before His accusers, although mocked and insulted. He was to be given vinegar and gall at his crucifixion. He was to be nailed to the cross and his flesh pierced. These prophecies can be found in a number of places including Psalms, Isaiah, and Zechariah. The pages of the New Testament as well as secular history testify to their fulfillment.

Isaiah 53 was written more than 700 years before the birth of our Savior and contains specific details concerning the Messiah. Just this one chapter of Isaiah gives approximately fourteen prophecies concerning our Lord in twelve verses. In it we find a description, including details, our Lord's crucifixion. It makes for an interesting study. The New Testament furnishes us with exact and complete fulfillment.

Overwhelming Evidence

Surely, in the presence of such evidence, we are made to cry in wonderment, Oh, what a Savior! His coming was not accidental, nor was it planned by man but rather by a God who cared for His creation.

Jesus said of Himself: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16). Reflecting upon the death of Jesus Paul wrote in wonder, “But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)

—Ed Brouillette

What of the Bible?

The Bible must surely be a book of great importance and value. Consider the fact that the Bible changed the character of ancient Western Civilization and has become the basis of all modern Western Culture. As Americans, we cannot help but be impressed by the Bible's influence on our law and government. The Ten Commandments, the moral and ethical teaching of Jesus and the writings of the prophets have all made their mark on our Constitution and founding documents.

Some of the greatest works of art ever produced have a bible theme. Michelangelo's

David and Moses, Handel's *Messiah* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* were all inspired by the Bible. Our calendar is reckoned from the birth of Jesus and many of the towns and cities in which we live have Bible names. Yes, this book influences every aspect of our culture indicating that it must be a great book.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 22

June 14, 2009

The Death of the Cross

*“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, **He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross**” (Philippians 2:5–8).*

In this context Paul is writing about the humility of heart necessary to maintain unity among the believers (2:1–4). As an example of that humility which all are to follow, he sets before us the sublime model of humility Jesus of Nazareth. If every member of the body behaved as did the Christ in looking on the things of others rather than being concerned with self there would be no schism in the church (cf. I Corinthians 12:12–25). The epitome of humility was displayed in the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary (v. 8).

It is apparent from the language of the text that Paul finds great significance in the manner of Jesus’ death. It is not just that He died, but that He was crucified at Calvary. He says, *“Even the death of the cross.”* Let’s

explore further this significance which Paul so readily sees in the death of Jesus.

A Cruel Death

The manner of the Lord’s execution is nowhere detailed in the Scripture. Considering the audience of the original manuscripts, it is obvious why that is so—they were all very well aware of what crucifixion involved. There was no need to explain it. However, we are removed from that event not only by time but also by cultural differences. We are unaware of what crucifixion actually entails.

According to the *ISBE* the victim bore his own cross, or at least the upright beam, to the place of execution. When he was tied to the cross nothing further was done and he was left to die from starvation. If he was nailed to the cross, at least in Judea, a stupefying drink was given him to deaden the agony. The number of nails used seems to have been indeterminate. A tablet, on which the feet rested or on which the body was partly supported, seems to have been a part of the cross to keep the wounds from tearing through the transfixed members. The suffering of death by crucifixion

was intense, especially in hot climates. Severe local inflammation, coupled with an insignificant bleeding of the jagged wounds, produced traumatic fever, which was aggravated by exposure to the heat of the sun, the strain of the body and insufferable thirst. The wounds swelled about the rough nails and the torn lacerated tendons and nerves caused excruciating agony. The arteries of the head and stomach were surcharged with blood and a terrific throbbing headache ensued. The mind was confused and filled with anxiety and dread foreboding. The victim of crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths. Tetanus often supervened and the rigors of the attending convulsions would tear at the wounds and add to the burden of pain, till at last the bodily forces were exhausted and the victim sank to unconsciousness and death. This suffering of our Lord at Calvary excites great sympathy. Herein lays the pathos of the Gospel message. It is intended to touch the heart, and it does. However, there is much more to the death of the cross than the pitiable image of Jesus hanged at Calvary.

A Cursed Death

Both the Jew and the Roman looked upon crucifixion as a detestable thing. Roman citizens were exempted—it being reserved for foreigners, slaves, insurrectionists and traitors. Of it Cicero said, "Let the very name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, his ears." The Jews placed crucifixion in the same class with capital punishment under the law "Cursed is everyone that hangeth upon a tree" (Galatians 3:13; cf. Deuteronomy 21:23). This explains why they had no problem in delivering Jesus to Pilate to be crucified (John 19:7). It also clarifies Paul's statement, "We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness." In the mind of a Jew Jesus was accursed of God, or else He would not have allowed Him to die in that fashion (Galatians 3:13). In the mind of a Greek it was simply absurd to suggest that the Universal Sovereign and Son of God died like a common slave or a petty thief.

An Atoning Death

Paul says that Jesus by dying at Calvary "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Peter expresses it as "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh" (I Peter 3:18). Jesus died for me, and He died for you (cf. Galatians 2:20).

The effect of His death for those who trust in Him is atonement or propitiation (I John 4:10; Romans 3:25). Jesus' death satisfies God's sense of justice

and assuages His wrath against the sinner (Isaiah 52:12). By His death sin is expiated, remitted and forgiven (Matthew 26:28; John 1:29; Colossians 1:14).

This is difficult for some to accept. Paul said that in the mind of many it was just foolishness (I Corinthians 1:18), to others it is an offence (I Peter 2:8). However, it is not difficult to understand—if one will only reason about it a bit.

God is just. He cannot overlook sin, nor can He allow the guilty to go free and unpunished (Exodus 34:7). However, neither does God take any pleasure in the destruction of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). God's justice requires punishment; His mercy demands grace. Therefore, God devised a plan whereby He could maintain the just requirement of His Law while fulfilling the desires of His heart (Romans 3:26). This is the great dilemma which is resolved at Calvary. God accepted the death of His sinless Son as satisfaction for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:1–2). When Jesus cried, "It is finished," God said, "It is enough!"

A Forsaken Death

Jesus was forsaken in His death by the disciples (Matthew 26:56), His family (John 7:5), His nation (John 1:10–11) and by the world (I Corinthians 2:8). Seemingly, He was forsaken of God (Matthew 27:46). This was certainly the opinion of the Jews regarding Him (Matthew 27:43; cf. Psalm 22:6–8).

In what sense was Jesus forsaken? Certainly not in any sense that concludes Jesus was a

sinner (II Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 7:26–27).

Rather, the only sense in which Jesus could be said to have been forsaken was in the sense that God allowed Him to die for our sins. It was not that God could not look on a sinner, but, rather, He was able to save Him but would not (Hebrews 5:7; Luke 23:35; Matthew 26:53). This is the great irony of the cross, God who could save His Son, would not, in order that those who were not could become His sons (John 1:10–12). Will you forsake Him now?

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 23

June 21, 2009

The Blood of His Cross

“For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven...” (Colossians 1:19–23).

This text is part of a doxology—a verse of praise to God—written by Paul thanking the Father for the conversion of the Colossians (1:3–23). His praise centers upon the death of Christ at Calvary as the means whereby believers are conveyed from the domain of the Devil into the Kingdom of the Son of God’s love (vv. 13–14). At verse 20, Paul specifically attributes our reconciliation unto the

Father to “the blood of His cross.”

The Significance of Blood

One function of the Old Testament is to provide a nomenclature or vocabulary through which we are able to understand spiritual realities. It provides us with a rich and vivid imagery through which the concepts of atonement, propitiation, redemption, reconciliation and forgiveness are comprehended. Without this Old Testament background we will never fully appreciate the death of Jesus at Calvary.

The “shedding of blood” figures prominently in the religion of the Old Testament. The significance of blood is evident from the earliest chapters of Genesis. We are introduced to blood sacrifice perhaps as early as Genesis 3:21 and certainly at 4:4 (cf. Hebrews 11:4).

However, it is not until after the Flood, as far as the written record is concerned, that the actual significance is revealed. Jehovah granted man an additional source of food—animals. However, He forbade men from eating the blood. His reason: “But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood

thereof, shall ye not eat” (Genesis 9:4). In that same context we are introduced to the sanctity of life and the need to appease God’s wrath when a life is taken by “shedding blood” (9:5–6). The penalty for murder is “life for life” in order to put away the guilt of innocent blood (Deuteronomy 19:13, 21).

Under the Law the significance is further explained by Moses. The ritual for offering sacrifices is given in Leviticus 17; it requires that every beast be slain at the door of the tabernacle in order that the blood can be sprinkled upon the altar and offered to the Lord. The reason for this legislation is stated in 17:11, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.” It should be apparent now that the institution of sacrifice involved the taking of life to assuage the wrath of God upon sinners. The life of the sacrifice is taken instead of the life of the supplicant.

Cannot Take Away Sin

The startling reality in the Mosaic institutions is the fact

that “the blood of bulls and of goats” cannot take away sin (Hebrews 10:1–4). God designed the sacrificial system specifically to teach this profound truth. The Day of Atonement was that day upon which there was “remembrance again made” of the sins for which sacrifice had already been made. Throughout the year, once every morning and once every evening, on Passover, on Pentecost, at Tabernacles and on every other day of the year, hundreds even thousands of sheep and cattle were slain as sacrifices (e.g. I Kings 3:4; I Chronicles 29:21; II Chronicles 7:7; 35:7–9). Israel as a nation made such offerings to God over a millennium before the first Temple was destroyed. Year after year, these sacrifices reminded them that the Law could not make them perfect and that the blood of animals could not take away sin. Yet, everything must be made clean by blood and sins cannot be forgiven without shedding blood (Hebrews 9:22).

God Will Provide

Abraham when approaching Mount Moriah with Isaac told his son, “God will give us the lamb for the sacrifice” (Genesis 22:1–14). Ever since that day, mankind has been looking for the Lamb of God (cf. John 1:29). Since the blood of animals is insufficient to truly accomplish the atonement of which all are in need, God must provide that sacrifice; this He has done in sending His son to die at Calvary for the sins of the whole world (John 3:11–21; I John 4:9–10; Romans 3:23–26). It is the death of Jesus that atones for our sins in Heaven (Hebrews 9:23–26).

However, why is it that Jesus dying at Calvary atones for sin? Part of the answer is found in Jesus’ teaching on the Sabbath. On at least three occasions Jesus reproved the Pharisees (Luke 13:15; 14:5; Matthew 12:12) with the principle that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath Day based upon the teaching of the Law regarding the humane treatment of livestock (Exodus 23:4–5; Deuteronomy 25:4; Proverbs 12:10). In applying this principle, Jesus concluded that healing a man was permissible because “a man is better than a sheep” (Matthew 12:12).

Why is it that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin? It is because a man is better than a sheep (cf. Genesis 9:6; Psalm 8:3–9; I Corinthians 11:7). Animal blood was not shed in vain since it was necessary in order to insure that men understood the redemptive work of Christ (Hebrews 9:23). However, it is only the blood of man that can atone for man. Jesus is that man who has made the offering for sin (Hebrews 10:12).

The efficacy in Jesus’ death is tied directly to His sinless character. It is not just that one man has died for another. It is that the only sinless man has died for the rest of the sinful race (I Peter 3:18). And, that sinless character is a proven or tested one (Hebrews 2:9–10). He is the man Christ Jesus tempted in all points as his brethren but without sin (2:17–18; 4:15–16; I Timothy 2:5–6). The man who died is the one man who did not deserve to die (cf. Genesis 3:22–24; Acts 2:24).

Yet, there is more to the efficacy of Christ’s shed blood than his

humanity. He that died was the Son of God (Mark 15:39). He was the Son with Whom God was well-pleased (Matthew 3:17; 12:28; 17:5). It was in Jesus that the heart of God delighted; yet, it was upon Him that He laid the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 42:1; 53:4–6). His selfless sacrifice pleased the Lord (53:10) and when Christ cried out “It is finished,” God said: “It is enough” (Isaiah 53:11). And so, God’s just wrath against sinful man was assuaged; atonement for iniquity was made; the righteous demands of Law were satisfied.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 24

July 5, 2009

The Message of the Cross

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

In I Corinthians 1:17–21, Paul contrasts the “wisdom of words” with “the preaching” or “the message” of the cross (NKJV, cf. 1:17). Men, in general, have long held that the message about Jesus’ death is one of folly—too incredible and ridiculous to believe. Thus, men have rejected the simple Gospel of Jesus.

However, Paul affirms that the Gospel is a revelation, a message, of salvation from God which centers in the cross of Calvary. The crucifixion of Jesus is a historical event with spiritual implications and eternal consequences. The “message of the cross,” the Gospel, relates the significance of the event to the men and women unto whom it is preached. The message involves more than the mere facts of the

death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The “message of the cross” answers more than the questions who, what, when, where and how. It answers the all important question—*why?*

Man Is a Guilty Sinner

The problem of sin is universal. All men are guilty (I Kings 8:46).

Furthermore, the fault lies with man; he is to blame. His sin does not result from the transmission of depravity through generation (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). Neither is it because of inability due to an inherent imperfection in man when compared to the perfect standard of God’s righteousness (I Corinthians 15:34). Rather, man is a sinner by the choice of his will (I Corinthians 10:13).

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

God Is Just

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

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

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

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

The Cross Invites All

In the cross we see the means by which all of us may be saved. The death of Jesus is universally offered to mankind (Titus 2:11; I Timothy 2:4–6; John 3:16;

Revelation 22:17). Election is not limited to a few, but to all who believe in Jesus (Ephesians 1:3–10; John 3:16; Acts 17:30–31; II Peter 3:9; I John 2:2). This universal offer of salvation is made through the Gospel (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:47; Romans 1:16–17).

The Love of God

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

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

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

We Cannot Save Self

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

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

Trust and Obey

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

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

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

If you were trapped in a multi-story building during a fire and

the only way out was to jump through a window into a fireman's net on the ground, would your rescue be any less of grace or trust when you jumped? What would others think of the man who boasted about saving himself from the fire after such a rescue? If we truly trust Jesus and his death, we will do what He has commanded in order to benefit from that death.

This is the message of the cross.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 25

July 12, 2009

Reconciled Through the Cross

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” (Ephesians 2:13–19).

What Is Reconciliation?

The word “reconcile” means to change by some means from enmity to friendship. According to W. E. Vine, the Greek word means “to change from one condition to another, so as to remove all enmity and leave no impediment to unity and peace” (p. 63). When it is used in the NT it refers to what God accomplishes through the

exercise of His grace toward sinful man (Romans 5:10, 11; II Corinthians 5:18–20; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20–21).

We commonly use the word *reconcile* in bookkeeping. For example, when you balance your checkbook, you reconcile *to* or *against* the bank statement. If there is a discrepancy between your checkbook and the bank statement, it is the checkbook which is *changed in order to correct the difference*. We reconcile the checkbook to the statement. Thus, the checkbook is changed and agreement and unity is restored between your checkbook and the bank.

The Standard unto Which We Reconcile

The above illustration regarding bank accounts suggests another aspect of reconciliation—the fact that the one in error must make all the changes necessary to agree with that which is right. It is the checkbook which is changed in order to agree with the bank statement. Similarly, the sinner is *reconciled to God* (II Corinthians 5:18–20). God has not sinned; He has not changed or acted in enmity toward man.

Consider the example of the very first sin (Genesis 3:8–10). After having eaten the fruit, Adam hid from God when He came seeking him. It had been their habit to walk together in the cool of the garden; however, after sin it is different. But observe, who is afraid, who is ashamed; it is Adam, the sinner.

God has always loved man, and He always will. This is evident from the very nature of the redemptive plan. It was not man who sought out God, but rather it is God who seeks man. While we were sinners God sent His Son to die for mankind, evincing His unfailing love for us (Romans 5:8–10; John 3:15–17; 1 John 4:9–10).

It is man that must change—be reconciled—but it is God that has made peace possible. He has revealed both the need for and the means of reconciliation in the Gospel, the “word of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:18–20). It is the Gospel that reveals God’s goodness leading us back to Him (II Corinthians 7:8–10; Romans 2:4). It is the Gospel that declares the death of Jesus and instructs us how to obtain the forgiveness of sins through His blood shed at Calvary (Ephesians 1:7).

The Means of Our Reconciliation

Paul clearly identifies Jesus dying at Calvary as the only means available to man for reconciliation to God. Man is reconciled unto God “by the cross” (Ephesians 2:16). Christ made peace “through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:20). Thus, “He Himself is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14) having “put to death the enmity” (2:16), that is, He destroyed sin which was the cause of the enmity.

It is through the death of Christ that we receive the “atonement” or the “reconciliation” (ASV & NASV). He is the “propitiation through faith in His blood” (Romans 3:25), that is, He is the sacrifice for our sins that turns away God’s wrath (cf. Hebrews 9:26; Colossians 1:19–21). The blood of bulls and goats could not cleanse or atone for sin (Hebrews 10:1–4). It required a “better” sacrifice than these (Hebrews 9:24). It required one with which God would be satisfied (Isaiah 53:11; I John 2:2; 4:10). By dying at Calvary, Jesus made reconciliation for the sins of mankind (Hebrews 2:14–17).

The Recipients of the Reconciliation

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians was addressed to the whole church, but he describes them in terms which recognize two distinct groups. There are those whom Paul describes as having been “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (2:11–13). These he calls “Gentiles in the flesh” and “uncircumcised” who

sometimes were “far off”. The other group by contrast is “the circumcision in the flesh made by hands”—Jews or Israelites.

Paul makes no distinctions between them otherwise. Both groups were guilty sinners and in need of reconciliation to God (2:3–5), which is the point of the contrast (cf. Romans 3:23–26). There is no respect of persons with God (Romans 2:11); therefore, Paul can say with confidence that God loved “us” and Christ died for “us” (Ephesians 2:4–7). The atoning benefits of the death of Jesus are universally applicable and accessible (I John 2:1–2; 4:9–10; John 3:16). He concludes that Christ died for all (II Corinthians 5:14–15).

However, the universal provision of the means of salvation does not imply the universal reception of those benefits. It is certainly God’s desire that all men be saved (II Peter 3:9). However, He is reconciled to—makes peace with—only those that believe in Jesus, that is, they have faith in His death that it is occurred for the remission of sins (Romans 3:25–26). It is true that Christ died for all (Hebrews 2:9), but God only saves believers (John 8:21–24).

The Relationship of Reconciliation

Paul says the atoning effects of the death of Christ are realized in the one body through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:16–18; 3:1–6). This “body” is the church (Ephesians 1:22–23; 2:16) of which Christ is the Saviour (5:23–27). Clearly there are none reconciled that are not counted as His church.

They are reconciled in that body by the Spirit and through the Gospel (3:1–6). The Spirit gave the terms of reconciliation on Pentecost when He revealed the Gospel to the Apostles (Acts 2:38). On that day the Lord began reconciling men to God in the one body as they believed and were baptized (Acts 2:40–41, 47). It is in this way that men are even now baptized by one Spirit into the one body (I Corinthians 12:13). The death of Christ is received by believing the Gospel of Christ upon being baptized into the body of Christ.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 26

July 19, 2009

Glorying in the Cross

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

The Judaizers

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

These “Judaizers” eventually infiltrated the Galatian churches and subverted many of the members away from “the grace of Christ” to “another gospel” (Galatians 1:6). They “compelled [the Gentile Christians] to be circumcised” (Galatians 2:3). They “withdrew and separated”

themselves from uncircumcised Gentiles at mealtime, an act of exclusion (Galatians 2:12; 4:17). They taught the observance of “days, and months, and times, and years” (Galatians 4:10).

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

“To Glory” Defined

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

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

In the NT self-glorying takes on a new shade of meaning. Now, it refers to actual believers in God that are seeking acceptance from God, but their approach to Him is flawed (Romans 2:17-25). For Paul “glorying” is reliance upon “works of righteousness which we have done” (Titus 3:5). It is seeking approval by our own deeds (Romans 3:27-4:5). Paul categorically rejected the idea there was anything of merit in sinners that can be the ground of justification (Ephesians 2:8-9).

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

They Glory in the Flesh

To understand Paul's boasting it must be contrasted with that of the Judaizers. Paul says they “glory in your flesh,” that is, they rejoice in your conformity to their demand of circumcision (Galatians 6:13; cf. Philippians 3:1-5). Their religious course was

determined by a worldly self-interest and party advantage (Galatians 6:12). Their motive was to avoid persecution. The Judaizers sought compromise with the Legalists in Judea in order to avoid suffering for truth.

What made their defection so intolerable was the necessary consequence of their doctrine. In requiring circumcision they became "debtors to do the whole law" (Galatians 5:3). However, man cannot atone for his sins by law keeping (Galatians 3:10). He must have a sin offering (3:13). The effect of their doctrine was damnation, "ye are fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). The Pharisees were glorying, boasting and trusting, in their own works for acceptance with God rather than in Christ (cf. Isaiah 64:5-6).

Glory Is in the Cross

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

Throughout the epistle Paul "glories" in the cross—

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

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

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

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

us..."

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

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

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

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

Can You Glory in the Cross?

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

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

The believer is "crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20) and is dead to sin in Christ. In the words of that wonderful old hymn, *A New Creature*, we are "dead to the world, to voices that call...living anew, obedient

but free; dead to the joys that once did enthrall...yet 'tis not I, Christ lives in me." The world and its allurements no longer have dominion over us (Romans 6:7, 14). Being dead with Christ we are raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4, 8); we are "crucified...unto the world" (Galatians 6:14).

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

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 27

July 26, 2009

Thinking Like Jesus

“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things” (Matthew 12:33-35).

Figurative Language

One doesn't have to know very much about agronomy and horticulture to know that Jesus is speaking figuratively. Even the Bible declares the unalterable agricultural principle that trees yield only according to their kind (Genesis 1:11). Everyone knows that you do not gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles (Matthew 7:16). Therefore, the idea that one can cause a tree to change its fruit by making it into something else is outside of the natural realm. Jesus must be speaking figuratively. However, within the moral realm changing one's "fruit" is a real possibility.

For Jesus, the "tree" represents a man, his heart, his soul. The fruit must, therefore, represent his manner of life, his actions, the "produce" of his character. Our Lord understood that it was not what a man ate—washed or unwashed—that made him unclean, but what had entered into his heart (Mark 7:18–23). It was a matter of what had been treasured or "stored up" in the heart (cf. Matthew 16:19 for the relationship between the verb and the noun; obviously, treasure is laid up or stored). What comes out in a man's life is a reflection of what has been treasured up in his heart (Psalm 119:11).

We Are What We Think

Clearly Solomon understood that we are what we think. Not in the pop psychological sense of visualization which is the idea that if we can "see it" (that is, imagine it for ourselves) and believe it, then we can be it. Rather, Solomon believed in the transformative power of God's Word (Hebrews 4:12; cf. Proverbs 2:2). He urged his son to "guard" or "keep" the heart

because from it came the issues of life, literally, the goings forth, or the boundaries and limits of life (Proverbs 4:23). The idea is the determinations of life are determined by the heart as influenced by that which is treasured up within (Proverbs 23:6–7).

Jesus Was What He Thought in His Heart

The Bible presents the Messiah as a man that determined the fruit of His life by the thoughts of His heart. The prophet Isaiah describes Him in this way, "Butter and honey shall he eat, that *he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good*" (Isaiah 7:14–16). Jesus was brought up by godly parents who trained Him in the Scriptures (Luke 2:39–40, 51–52; 4:16), and He learned right from wrong (Hebrews 5:8). Throughout His life, Jesus consistently refused evil and chose only good, thus, His life was known to be full of good (Acts 10:38; Hebrews 7:26–28). The Devil tempted Jesus on several occasions (Luke 4:13). During the first recorded

attempt the Lord answered, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (Matthew 4:4). In the very first temptation Jesus answered the Devil according to the principle we have established, *"Out of the heart are the issues of life."*

During another temptation which Peter mentions, the Lord again demonstrated the character of His heart. Peter says of Jesus, *"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously"* (I Peter 2:22–23). Notice that Peter observes Jesus from the perspective of what issued from His heart. Consider again Jesus' own word in Mark 7:21–22, *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed...deceit...blasphemy..."* Jesus did not lie or revile because He kept His heart filling it with the God's Word (Isaiah 11:4–5; 53:9).

One other text demonstrates how the heart of Jesus directed the conduct of His life. Hear Paul in Philippians 2:3–5, *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."*

Paul says Jesus' obedience was determined by what was treasured up in His mind or heart. Humility, selflessness and full obedience can only

proceed from a heart filled with good. Just as Jesus Himself had taught, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good."

We Can Think Like Jesus

At least three times believers are encouraged to follow the example of Jesus (I Corinthians 11:1; I Peter 2:21; I John 2:6); the implication being that we may do what Jesus did in times of trial and suffering. Therefore, when we observe Jesus doing battle with Satan in the Wilderness of Jordan, we are watching the perfect man exhibiting a life under the direction of a perfect heart. He did not tell others to live by the Word of God (Matthew 4:4) by treasuring it up in their hearts (Luke 6:44) and not exemplify what was possible of those who so lived. Neither did He send His chosen representatives into the world with an exhortation to "imitate me" all the while knowing they could not. We can think like Jesus.

When Peter described Jesus as He was enduring the "hour of darkness," he described Christ as "a man [who] for conscience toward God endure[d] grief, suffering wrongfully." As such a man, He was one that "committed himself to [God] that judgeth righteously" (I Peter 2:19, 23). This was the example He set and which we are to follow. Jesus is an example of faith, trust and endurance to us. He is showing us how to think in order to overcome temptation

to sin. Yes, we can think like Jesus.

Paul in certain terms declares that we can think like Jesus. He says, *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 2:5). This is the mind that sacrificed equality with God and volunteered for the death of Calvary. Only a heart filled with love, joy and compassion could have the good fruit that was evident in life of Jesus. We can think like Jesus.

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 28

August 9, 2009

Thinking Like Jesus (2)

“But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.

“Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.” (John 5:17–19).

The Text in Context

Jesus had just healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda who had been a cripple for 38 years (John 5:1–9). Upon being healed Jesus commanded the man “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.” When the Pharisees saw the man in the streets carrying his bed they challenged him as a violator of the Sabbath. He answered them reasonably and sufficiently, “He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.” He had concluded that anyone capable of healing a lifetime cripple had the authority and the spirituality to discern what was right on the Sabbath (John 15:10-16). So, Jesus was once again at odds with the Pharisees over their

traditions and “fence laws” (Matthew 15:3).

When it was known that Jesus was the one who had healed on the Sabbath, the Jews confronted Him. The rest of John chapter five is the dialogue that was conducted between Jesus and these hypocrites.

While it would certainly be profitable to look at this text for lessons about the deity of Jesus while in the flesh (5:18), or the true meaning of the Sabbath (5:18), or even Jesus’ authority to heal and forgive sins (5:14), we want to consider the text for what it reveals about Jesus the man.

It seems to me that the principle thought in the text is Jesus’ relationship to the Father as a man, a human being, one in the flesh. Granted that relationship is unique (5:17); however, He nevertheless regards Himself as the Son of Man Whom the Father has sent (5:30, 36–37).

We Need A “Life Lens”

I have already shown in a previous study that the Scriptures enjoin upon Jesus’ disciples the need to imitate Him not only in life but in thought (see: I Peter 2:21–23;

Philippians 2:5; Matthew 4:4). We need to see the world as Jesus saw the world—formulate a perspective that becomes the basis for all choices and determines every act. What we need is a “life lens,” metaphorically similar to an eyeglass prescription that will allow us to see *spiritual* reality.

I am both nearsighted and farsighted. I require correction in my lenses which allows me to see both near and far. When I take my lenses off what I see is distorted and imperfect. If I put on the wrong prescription I may see some things, but not as I should see them. I could put on eyeglasses that filter out certain colors and make the world appear all green or all red.

There are many different world views, and these alternative “life lenses” affect the way men behave and interact with others. The atheist sees the same trees, mountains, stars and sun that you and I see. However, his “life lens” is one which has completely filtered out God. The deist, while accepting God’s existence, possesses a “life lens” which does not perceive His personality, especially His love and His concern for mankind. The pagan “life lens” fails to

perceive God's unity and transcendence; thus, he demotes God to the likeness of man (Romans 1:18ff.) or dilutes and diffuses Him throughout the universe robbing Him of both His power and His love. If the believer is not careful in developing his own "life lens," it may be corrupted by the vain and empty philosophies of the world (Colossians 1:28; 2:1-9).

Jesus' "Life Lens"

The fifth chapter of John presents a pretty thorough assessment of Jesus' view of living life as a man before God. Throughout the context Jesus describes Himself as "the Son" (10 times in eight verses). This designation describes Jesus' unique relationship to God whom He calls "My Father" (5:17, 43; cf. Matthew 6:9). Let's begin to explore how Jesus viewed the world, Himself in the world and His relationship to the father as one living in the world.

Jesus believed that as a man He was under authority to the Father and amenable to His will (John 5:19, 30, 37, 43). Jesus believed that He was to speak and act only as he was directed by the Father: "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what he seeth the Father do" (v. 19). Clearly Jesus is talking about what the Father revealed to Him in His role as the Son of Man.

Jesus sought to do the will of Him that sent Him. His judgments were based on the eternal Truth of God. Therefore, Jesus said, "As I hear, I judge" (v. 30). Jesus claimed, "The words that I speak I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the

works...the word which ye hear is not mine but the Father's which sent me" (John 14:10, 24). It is in this sense that Jesus was "an Apostle" (Hebrews 3:1). He was sent under the authority of the Father to speak His words (Deuteronomy 18:18).

However, Jesus was not just a mouthpiece for God; He was an obedient Son—"these also *doeth* the Son" (5:19). The Lord expressed His life mission in these words: "I came down from Heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6:38).

Furthermore, Jesus accepted no authority but that of the Father (5:30, 43). Jesus was not guided in His life choices by His own desires or wants, rather He exalted the Father and did His will. Jesus confessed: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me and to finish His work" (John 4:34). Jesus was concerned with one thing: What is the Father's will. Even in His darkest hour, Jesus acted not in His own interests or according to His own desires but according to the will and word of the Father (Luke 22:42).

Do You Think Like Jesus?

What affect would this same assumption which Jesus made have upon your life? How would your life change if you recognized that everything you say and do must be in the will of God? What would be the affect upon your decisions, your relationships, your level of commitment in spiritual matters?

Most men live as if God were dead, or at the very least, as if He doesn't care (Psalm 10:11;

73:11; 94:7; Job 22:13). Sadly, we are not very conscious of His intense interest in the affairs of men and the reality that He takes note of all that we think, say and do (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; Psalm 33:13-15; Matthew 12:36-37).

Jesus understood that he was ever in the presence of the God of Heaven (John 8:16; 16:32). Do you recognize that you are always in His presence and accountable to Him for your thoughts, words and actions (Hebrews 4:13)?

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 29

August 16, 2009

People Watching

Have you ever done any “people watching”? I suppose most of us have at one time or another. Some friends, my wife and I would sometimes go to the mall. The women did their shopping and the men would sit on a bench, talk and “people watch,” making comments about what they observed.

I believe Jesus was an excellent “people watcher” and observed certain characteristics and spoke about them in parables. He observed that there were certain rules of conduct by which people were guided.

The Good Samaritan

In Luke chapter 10 beginning with verse 33 we have what has come to be called *The Parable of the Good Samaritan*. This was spoken to teach a lesson on how we should behave toward our neighbors (10:37).

In Matthew 7:12 Jesus taught what has come to be known as The Golden Rule: “*All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them...*” In

the parable of the Good Samaritan we see examples of other rules of conduct by which people guide their conduct. Jesus gave the parable in order to contrast human rules with this divine rule; thus, showing the superiority of God’s way.

The “Robber’s” Rule

The first I rule we observe is the “Robber’s Rule.” It is sometimes thought of as the “might makes right” rule. People who conduct their lives in this manner have the idea “I will get what you have if I can.” They may at times employ legal means, but if they can’t they will find some other way. Eli’s sons (II Samuel 15) could be included among those who followed this rule because of the demands they made on those who came to sacrifice. David was guilty of following this rule when he took Uriah’s wife. Nathan the prophet demonstrated this forcefully in yet another parable that of *The Man with a Little Ewe Lamb* (II Samuel 12:4).

A “Selfish Uncaring” Rule

Another rule at work among many which Jesus observed is the “Selfish, Uncaring Rule.” The followers of this rule say: “I will keep what is mine. I’ll look out for myself, you look out for yourself.” This was the rule followed by the priest and the Levite in the parable. They “passed by on the other side,” or crossed the street to avoid the wounded man. Of course they had all the excuses—they didn’t know the man, he might be unclean and thus, they themselves by touching him might also become unclean, and so on. You are probably familiar with those excuses.

Proverbs 11:25 says: “The liberal soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered himself.” The rich farmer of Luke chapter 12 beginning with verse 16 was of this stripe. He had prospered well, his harvest was great and rather than sharing he made plans to build bigger barns, fill them, and then would take his ease. “But God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee: and the things which thou hast

prepared, whose shall they be? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

The young man of Matthew 19 who came to Jesus asking what good thing he might do to inherit eternal life is another example of a man that followed this rule. Jesus instructed him to keep the Ten Commandments. The young man insisted that he had kept all of them and wanted to know what else was required. Jesus told him to go sell what he had, give to the poor and come follow him but the young man went away sorrowful "for he was one that had great possessions."

A "Get Even" Rule

There are some who follow "The Get Even Rule." They reverse the instructions of Jesus in Matthew 7:12. They say, "Do unto others as they do unto you." Remember, Jesus had said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Quite a difference isn't it? As we observe humanity we find the majority following the "Get Even Rule." Jesus said that even the Publicans and sinners did good to the ones doing good to them (Matthew 5:46). There is nothing about this rule that is commendable.

The ones who follow this rule have the general idea that they should treat the other fellow like he treats you. This is not Jesus' teaching nor does the disciple of Christ follow this rule. In I Peter 3:9 we read: "Not rendering evil for evil, or

reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing: for hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing." Christians should not have the get even attitude.

The "I Will Use What I Have for Others" Rule

There are some who are a real blessing to the world and to all with whom they have contact. Their rule of conduct could be stated as: "I will use what I have for others." In I Kings 17:10ff we read of the poor widow of Zarephath who was willing to share whatever she had with Elijah, the prophet of God. This is what the Samaritan of Luke 10:33 practiced. We are told that when he came where the wounded man was and saw him, he was moved with compassion, he came to him, he bound up his wounds, poured oil and wine on them, set the wounded man on his own beast and took him to an inn and took care of him. When he had to leave he guaranteed to make up any additional expenses that might be incurred. Of the early disciples we read: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed were his own: but they had all things common" (Acts 4:32).

We all should follow this rule and not the others because this is the way of Christ. "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also

unto them: for this is the Law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

If we don not follow this rule we lose everything. The rich fool lost it all; the man who took the ewe lamb was worthy of death, the young rich man went away without the salvation he sought; the hypocrites received no mercy in the judgment.

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 30

August 23, 2009

Thinking Like Jesus (3)

“The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel” (John 5:20).

“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:24–26).

Jesus' Life Lens

We have been considering Jesus' words in John chapter five from the perspective of what they reveal concerning His core values and beliefs as a man. These beliefs constitute the “life lens” through which Jesus viewed the world and by which all His words and actions were determined. Jesus did not revisit these convictions every day and re-determine whether they were valid for the present situation. These are the beliefs, values and convictions with which Jesus entered every situation.

God Loved Him

There was never any doubt in the mind of Jesus that The Father loved Him. In responding to the Jews in the controversy over the healing of the cripple, Jesus said, “The Father loveth the Son” (John 5:20). In the Greek language *phileo* is in the present tense which signifies continuous action. Jesus is saying, God has loved me, He now loves me and He will continue to love me.

Jesus is very specific concerning His confidence in the Father's love when He confesses in His prayer at the crossing of the Kidron, “Thou lovest me before the foundation of the world...” (John 17:24). Jesus understands that the love which the Father has for Him is eternal.

Twice from Heaven the Father affirmed His love for Jesus so that others might know. The first time was at His baptism when the voice from Heaven spoke, “This is my Beloved Son, in Whom I am well-pleased” (Matthew 3:17). The second time was upon the Mount of Transfiguration (17:5). Then God again said, “This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am

well-pleased.” He then added the words, “Hear ye Him!”

This latter instance was metaphorically “in the shadow of the cross.” Moses and Elijah had just spoken with Jesus about His decease (Luke 9:31). Immediately, after these events Jesus began to speak openly with His disciples about how He must die in Jerusalem by crucifixion at the hand of the Jews (Matthew 17:22–23; 20:17–18; 21:38; 26:38–46).

One cannot but marvel at the resolve of Christ in His “hour” (John 17:1). How does one even begin to explain His courage and faith without considering His confidence in the eternal love of His Heavenly Father? A love which He knew would never forsake or betray Him (John 17:5, 13a).

Listen to Jesus in John 10:17–18, *“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”* He had the courage and the confidence to lay down His life because He trusted the Father to keep His

word to raise Him up from the dead (cf. Acts 2:24–31). We see the power of God’s love in Jesus when after crossing the Kidron He went into the Garden of Gethsemane and prayed again (Luke 22:39–42). Three times He prayed: *“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”* After the third time, Jesus rose from His knees and said: *“The hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand”* (Mark 14:41–42). Whereupon Jesus walked out to the mob of Jews and surrendered Himself (John 18:8–9; Matthew 26:50–56). The Lord was not taken, He gave Himself. Jesus was not martyred; the Christ was sacrificed (Philippians 2:5–8; Galatians 2:20).

God Loves You

Friend, what would you be able to do for the glory of God, if you were convinced that the Father in Heaven really, truly and eternally loved you? What is there that you could not do?

Just as the Father loved the Son from before the foundation of the world so He has loved each one of us (Ephesians 1:3–6). It was His eternal love that sent Christ into the world (John 3:16), and it was that love which caused Him to allow His only begotten Son to die for the sins of humanity (Romans 5:8–10).

I think most of us recognize God’s love for the world, but we have a difficult time making it personal. Yet, we knew it once. As children did we not sing, “Jesus loves *me* this I know”?

It may be we under estimate the enormity of our own sins. The

apostle Paul understood this better than most. He viewed himself as “the chief of sinners” (I Timothy 1:15). And, he knew too well that Christ had died for him (Galatians 2:20). Like Paul, I need to embrace the reality that Christ “loved me, and gave Himself for me.” It was my sin that necessitated He leave Heaven; it was my sin that required the shame and indignity of His humiliation. It was my sin that brought upon Him the cruel mocking and reviling of sinners. It was my sin that nailed Him to the cross. Yet, He loved me and died for me.

More than Conquerors

In the midst of trials and sufferings we must learn to pray as Jesus did. We must be confident in the love of God and His Christ, confessing His eternal love for us. Only then will we be conquerors, victorious over sin through faith.

Paul addresses this critical issue in Romans chapter eight. He sees the believer in the midst of temptation and suffering (vv. 35–39). He asks the rhetorical question: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” He then lists every conceivable horror that could come upon the believer for His faith. The world would look at these terrible things as proof that the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God either does not care or cannot act. The believer must not be shaken; His God and His Saviour love Him. It is by His love that we will overcome everyone. Just as Jesus faced down death for us, even so we can face death for Him.

A Faithful Creator

Just as our Lord knew that the Father loved Him because he laid down His life, so we know that God loves us as we lay down our lives for the brethren (I John 4:7–21). In these things we become partakers of Christ’s sufferings unto the glory of God. We have nothing to fear in suffering or even death because we know we are loved by a faithful Creator who will not fail to keep all His promises to us. The assurance of His love is the grounds of our trust and the example of Christ our eternal hope (I Peter 2:23; 4:12–19).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 31

August 30, 2009

Thinking Like Jesus (4)

“The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel” (John 5:20).

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.” (Ephesians 3:8–11).

Jesus Saw the Big Picture

When Jesus viewed the world He did not see it as the atheist does, mindless matter and uncontrolled energy governed only by the outcome of random chance. No, Jesus saw the world and His part in it in particular, as being governed by a divine plan. The Father had revealed this plan as it pertained to the Christ to Him. And, Jesus

undertook His role with confidence that God was in control working His plan to its intended outcome, the salvation of mankind (Ephesians 1:3–10; Romans 8:28–30).

He understood that this plan required His death at Calvary in order to succeed (Philippians 2:5–8). With veiled words Jesus acknowledged this to the criticizing Jews when He affirmed “He will show Him greater works than these that ye may marvel” (John 5:20). Jesus is not comparing miracles—whether feeding a multitude is greater than healing a cripple. He is alluding to His sacrificial death—that is the “greater” work (cf. John 14:12).

Jesus Trusted God

The core value that Jesus demonstrates is implicit trust that God will complete His eternal plan and that just as He has promised.

The words of the Psalmist are attributed to Jesus by the Hebrew writer: “I will put my trust in Him” (2:13). In that context Paul speaks eloquently of the incarnation of Christ and His perfection through suffering. He states that this plan required that the Eternal

Word (John 1:1) take upon Himself the nature of the children of Abraham in order to die for each and everyone (Hebrews 2:10–11, 16–17; cf. John 1:14). It was to be through death—dying at Calvary—that Christ would destroy sin and death (Hebrews 2:14–15).

From a purely human standpoint—and a selfish one at that—God’s plan was not a good one for Jesus. It was He that was making all the real overtures and genuine sacrifices. He being rich became poor (II Corinthians 8:9). He effectively emptied Himself of the power, privileges and prerogatives of His exalted position as the Word and took His place among the lowliest (Philippians 2:6–8; Hebrews 2:9). It was Jesus that had to endure the contradiction of sinners, that is, their opposition and hostility (Hebrews 12:3). It was He that was maligned, mocked, beaten, battered and crucified. As if that were not enough, He endured the shameless reproaches hurled at Him by hypocrites and impenitent sinners as he died. Yet, to the very end He maintained His courage and His trust in God’s plan. His last words were: “It is finished.”

He Did Not Waver

Satan sought to shake Jesus' confidence in God's plan. In the Temptation he came to Christ and offered Him a kingdom (Matthew 4:9). We can debate about what kind of kingdom, if any it might have been. But, surely it must have been a legitimate and plausible offer of a worldwide dominion of a sort (it was just as much a kingdom as what he offered Eve was "like God" and not having to "die"). It was deception, misdirection and enticement.

This temptation went to the very heart of the issue. Satan offered: "You've come for a Kingdom; I'll give you a kingdom, and you won't have to die in order to receive it." But, as we have already observed about Jesus, He had core convictions. He was able to see through the deceit that Satan was offering. Thus, the answer, *"Get thee hence Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."* The Lord never wavered.

The Father had shown Jesus what His plan and purpose was: *"For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; and hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man"* (John 5:26). Jesus understood the grand and sublime intent of God's Kingdom was justification, remission of sins, forgiveness. These things required a sacrifice—a death. And so, He was obedient even unto the death of the cross.

Now, Jesus' confidence in God and His plan was vindicated. Christ was raised from the dead

and exalted to the right hand of the Majesty of God on High (Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; Philippians 2:8–11; Ephesians 1:20; I Peter 3:22). Jesus finished the plan of salvation by offering Himself as a sacrifice for sin and the Just God became the Justifier of all that believe in Jesus (Romans 3:23–26).

God Has A Plan For You

The Church of Christ is God's plan for you (Ephesians 3:9–10). It is the Kingdom which Christ came to possess and over which He is reigning (I Thessalonians 2:12; Hebrews 1:8; Matthew 16:18–19; Colossians 1:9–18; I Corinthians 15:22–28). It is the ultimate goal of God's eternal purpose, a special people for his own possession (Ephesians 1:9–14; Titus 2:14; I Peter 2:9). God desires that you enter that Kingdom and be His child (John 3:5; Mark 10:15; Matthew 7:21).

However, the journey toward and citizenship in the Kingdom is often fraught with difficulty, adversity and trials (Matthew 11:12; 23:13; Acts 14:22). While our citizenship is in Heaven (Philippians 3:20), we continue as pilgrims and strangers in this world (Hebrews 11:13; I Peter 2:11). As such, we are often the object of the hatred of the world and made to suffer on account of our faith (I Peter 4:12–16). This suffering and trial serves the purpose of proving and testing us, demonstrating that we are worthy of the Kingdom (I Peter 1:3–9; I Thessalonians 2:12; II Thessalonians 1:5).

In the midst of these trials we should never doubt God's plan and purpose. It is His will by the power of the Gospel to deliver us into His glory (Ephesians

3:12–21). The Kingdom we have received is unshakeable, heaven and earth shall be removed but the Kingdom shall forever stand (Hebrews 12:26–28; II Peter 3:9–15). The Lord will deliver us from every evil work and preserve us blameless unto the consummation of the age (Jude 21–24; I Thessalonians 5:23; I Timothy 4:18).

Just as Jesus trusted in God to accomplish His plan for Him and bring Him through approved and glorified, even we must trust Him to do the same for us in the doing of His will.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 32

September 6, 2009

Can Denominationalism Be Justified?

Denominationalism

Now, my question is this: When Jesus said *"Upon this rock I will build my Church,"* did He have in mind something like we see in the denominational world today? I believe I could give you a technical definition of the word "denomination" but I am not sure that would be of a lot of help. But I can tell you what would help. It seems to me if people would just open their eyes and look at professed Christianity, look at organized religion where you have chaos, confusion and division on every hand, they would have to wonder about it. We have people claiming to be a part of that universal Church that Jesus said He would build—all of them claiming to be serving God, all of them claiming to be Christians, all of them saying "we've been born again." Yet, they teach doctrines that are as contradictory as anything can be. All of them claim to get it from the same New Testament. Now, this is denominationalism. That is *organized* religion. But, is that what Jesus intended? Is what we see in professed Christianity what Jesus planned and what Jesus did? That is what we mean when we ask: "Is the Church of Christ a

denomination? Is that what God intended the Church to be?"

The Two Folds Made One

Someone may ask, "Preacher, have you ever read John 10:16?" Yes and let's read it again. Jesus said *"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd."* I don't believe this passage is very well understood by a lot of people. The concept is that here is one fold, that's one denomination, and here is another one, and Jesus is saying: "I've got some in both of these denominations; in both of these folds. Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. I've got some in this fold but I've got other sheep that are not of this fold." Jesus is not talking about denominationalism.

You'd think someone would read on and see what more He said: *"There will be one flock and one shepherd."* That doesn't sound like the denominational concept at all; does it to you?

May I give you a scriptural commentary on the passage? At the time that statement was made, Jesus was talking to Jews (one fold) about Gentiles (the other fold). Paul in Ephesians 2:14–16 writes, "For He," talking

about Christ, *"is our peace,"* talking about Jews and Gentiles, *"who made both one, and break down the middle wall of partition; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that He might create in Himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."* That is what Jesus is talking about in John 10:16—about Jew and Gentile being reconciled in one body unto God. Those who think Jesus was talking about denominations miss the point. It is not teaching the concept of denominationalism but the bringing of Jews and Gentiles into one body, one Church.

All on the Same Side

Look at Mark 9:38–40, I am about to deal with what is the most subtle argument that I've ever heard advanced in an effort to defend denominationalism. Mark wrote, *"Now John answered Him, saying, 'Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.' But Jesus said, 'Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me, for*

he who is not against us is on our side."

Some tell us: "See there, the disciples had this egotistical attitude, this bigoted attitude, and thought that they were the only ones who had the truth. They thought they were the only ones who were doing right." And they say to us: "Now, this is exactly the situation that you folks are in. You say that because we are not a part of the group that you are a member of we are not right and what we do doesn't please the Lord." They continue to say, "That's the very concept that was expressed here." *Is it?*

Let's look at it closely and determine exactly what the passage teaches. In logic, the foregoing attempt is what is called *begging the question*. That is, it assumes what one is under obligation to prove.

First, there is nothing in the text that suggests that the concept of denominationalism was in either the mind of the man who was casting out demons or the apostles who forbade him. Second, the passage states that he was doing something in the name of the Lord. That is, he had the right to do it. To do something *in the name of the Lord* means to do it because He tells you to do it and do it the way He tells you to do it. In Ephesians 1:15-21, the writer uses this same term, he uses the term "name," he uses the term "power," and he uses the term "dominion," all interchangeably. Those terms all mean the same thing so that whenever Jesus said "*do a mighty work in My name,*" this man, whatever he was doing, and whoever he was doing, was authorized to do it.

But, he wasn't building a denomination, was he? He was casting out demons. All you learn from this passage is that here is someone casting out demons. It was someone who Jesus said had the right to do it.

There is a principle involved here which is this, whenever the Lord directs me and authorizes me to do a certain thing, you don't have the right to try to stop me. He said to them, you leave that fellow alone because he is doing a work in my name. He is doing it because I have authorized him to do it. Thus, whenever Jesus authorizes a thing to be done, all had better think twice before they try to stop you from doing it.

However, the converse is also true. If the Gospel of Christ does not authorize that which you are doing, you had better stop doing it. The third point that I'd suggest to you is that Jesus said that this fellow is not against us, he is for us, and the very minute any man uses this passage to justify religious division, he is not for the Lord, he is against Him. I know that this is the case because Jesus prayed in the shadow of the cross "*not for these only do I pray but for all them that believe on me through the word; that they may all be one, even as we are one.*" (John 17:20-21). So, to use this passage to justify religious division is not to be for the Lord but to be against Him because He prayed for unity and inspired the apostles to write against religious division. Division is wrong and there is not any doubt about it.

Mark 9:38-39 does not prove denominationalism. To assume that it does is to assume what one is under obligation to prove.

That would be like saying: "Well, now, you teach against sprinkling, and this passage says you ought not to teach against sprinkling for baptism." Where in the world did they find sprinkling in the text? The same place denominationalism is found. If Mark 9:38 justifies denominationalism, it justifies everything else. All the passage does is to state the principle that whenever the Lord gives one the right to do something, then I ought not to try to stop him from doing that.

—Elmer Moore

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 34

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Thinking Like Jesus (5)

“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto 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. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5: 21–29).

God Holds Life in His Hands
Jesus affirms that it is the Father that holds life in His hands and

not man (v. 21). It is the Father who raises the dead, and it is the Father who quickens them (cf. I Corinthians 15:45). Here Jesus attributes to the Father both the power to grant immortality and the power to grant eternal life. This statement of Jesus is parallel in thought to His words in Matthew 10:28, *“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”*

The Jews with whom Jesus was speaking had just threatened to kill Him (5:16, 18). They had likewise threatened Him in His hometown earlier (Luke 4:28–29). They would continue to do so many times hereafter (John 7:19, 25; 10:31, 39; 11:53). Not very long after this encounter Jesus confessed in figurative terms that He must die at their hands as a sacrifice—His words were not so figurative that they could not understand what He meant (John 6:28–60). Jesus knew He would die, or better, He knew He must give Himself to die: *“The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many...this is my blood of the New Testament, which is*

given for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 20:28; 26:28).

It is Christ’s willingness to die for man that is at the heart of Paul’s challenge to have “this mind in you” (Philippians 2:5). When we consider ourselves finding the courage and the strength to sacrifice for others, we are amazed at Jesus. The words of Paul in Romans 5:7 strike home, *“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.”*

One might find the courage to die for the innocent, a child or someone in the flower of youth. One might even find the will to do it for a parent or spouse known to be a good person. But where would one ever find the courage, let alone *the desire*, to die for some wicked wretch who cares nothing for God, or anyone else, or righteousness, or even heaven?

Part of the answer lies in Jesus’ assurance that it is God who holds life in His hands and not those evil and wicked men that threatened and ultimately drove the nails into His hands and feet. Jesus knew that while they might kill Him, they could not end His life or destroy His spirit.

Into Thy Hands...

Jesus expressed His confidence in the Father's power over life and death when He said, "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father" (John 10:17-18). Read this confession carefully. It is a declaration of Jesus' faith in and trust of the Father. Note three things in particular. First, that Jesus declares His intent to obey God in yielding Himself to the death on the cross (cf. Philippians 2:8). Observe, that Jesus understands that there can be no "taking again" of life without His first "laying it down." He sees it as His own freewill act of obedience to the Father. Second, Jesus insists that His death will not be martyrdom; it is sacrifice. He says: "No man taketh it from me." Jesus surrendered in the garden; He was not forced to go with that mob (John 18:4-9; Isaiah 53:4-5, 10). While there have been many Christian Martyrs Jesus is not among them. He is, as the Baptist identified Him, "The Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Finally, Jesus attributes His resurrection from the dead to the will of the Father: "This commandment I have received of my Father." The death of Jesus was the centerpiece of God's eternal plan (I Peter 1:18-20). But His resurrection was as necessary to our redemption as His death (Romans 4:25; 5:10). Jesus trusted God to work out His plan and was confident that He would raise Him up. It is for this cause that Peter said on

Pentecost: "[Jesus] being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2:23-24). He had promised and Jesus knew he would not fail or forsake Him (Acts 2:31).

Jesus' trust was expressed in His last words on the cross: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). To "commend" a thing is to "depend" upon the one to whom that thing is commended. These last words of Jesus are actually a quotation from Psalm 31. This great song of David begins with the words, "In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness. Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me. For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me. Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength" (vv. 31:1-4).

Thinking Like Jesus

It seems incredible that you and I should be called to think like the Son of God (Philippians 2:5). Yet, we are and we can walk in His steps (I John 2:6). What we need to put in our hearts is what Jesus had in His, complete trust in God as the only One that has the power of life and death in His hands.

The world does and is threatening believers with their very lives. Like Stephen, James and Antipas we may be called to die for Christ (Revelation 2:10). It is the worst thing that the

unbelieving can do to us.

However, our life is not in their hands. They may dispatch the spirit and lay the body in the dust but it is into God's hands that we commit them (I Peter 4:14-19). And, He has made a promise which He will keep and that is to raise it up in the last day (John 6:39-40, 44, 54).

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 35

September 20, 2009

Thinking Like Jesus (6)

"I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not. "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5: 30–39).

God's Word the Last Word

In the beginning, observe again that Jesus recognized Himself as One under authority. He did not regard Himself as the source

of His words (Deuteronomy 18:15–19); neither did He account that His judgments were right of themselves (Isaiah 11:1–5). The Messiah did not come in His own name, but in the name of the Father, preaching His words and upholding His righteousness.

We will never come to a proper understanding of our Lord or develop a heart and mind like His, until we kindle a passion for doing the Father's bidding like He had (Hebrews 5:8–9; Philippians 2:5–10). The prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane should be in every heart: *"Not as I will, but as Thou wilt"* (Matthew 26:39).

It is also interesting to observe that Jesus does not question the Jews' right to examine His *bona fides*. A year later, Jesus will even make the argument for them, turning it against them when He presents His credentials (cf. John 8:12–18). Jesus was all about respecting the authority which came from Heaven (Matthew 21:23–27), and He differentiated Himself as a teacher by respecting divine authority (Matthew 7:29).

The Authority of Scripture

The text before us is illustrative of Jesus' unflinching dedication to the revealed Word. He teaches us some very important lessons about the Bible, about how to study the Bible, and about the proper use of the Old Testament as an apologetic for Christianity.

Concerning His identity as the Son and authority to speak as the Father's representative, Jesus makes His appeal to the Scriptures and the miraculous signs which he performed (cf. Deuteronomy 13:4–11). He rejects the testimony of John the Baptist, not for lack of integrity, but because One of greater integrity could vouch for Him (John 5:36).

Jesus' approach to the testimony of John is subtle and nuanced; it shames the hypocritical Jews. John had borne witness that Jesus was the Messiah (John 1:29–34). The Jews at one point during his ministry entertained the idea that he might even be the Christ (Luke 3:15; cf. John 1:19–24). John, like Himself, had been popular for a while and the Jews *"were willing for a season to rejoice in His light."* But, as Jesus will demonstrate when He

returns to Jerusalem at the end of His ministry, the Jews did not respect the authority of Heaven whether given to John, or Jesus or ultimately to Christ's Apostles (Matthew 21:24; Acts 4:19). The Lord skillfully puts these Jews in the position of having to deny God to His face, and He classes them with their fathers who had rejected God when He appeared upon Mt. Sinai (John 5:37; cf. Acts 7:51–53; Nehemiah 9:13–18).

Jesus claims the witness that only the True Prophet could claim: *"the works that I do"* (John 5:36). However, Jesus does not make His claim to authority on the basis of the signs alone. He makes His claim on the basis that the signs attest to His approval, while the Scriptures attest that His doctrine is His that sent Him (John 5:39, 45–46; cf. John 7:17; 1:45; 8:28; 9:28–29; Luke 16:29–31; 24:27, 44). There was never any discrepancy between Jesus and the Scriptures as the Jews had received them; neither was there any contradiction between His doctrine and that of Moses and the prophets (John 5:47).

Thinking Like Jesus

The first thing I want to observe is that Jesus recognized all authority is vested in the Father and not in any man. This is the real issue for Jesus when considering John's testimony. At best, it was, from an evidentiary perspective, hearsay" (John 10:41). Indeed, God had spoken to him and given him signs to see (John 1:33). But, there was no independent corroboration of John's testimony. It is fitting that such a man as John should precede the Messiah (Acts 13:25). His humble character

and simple faith are truly characteristic of one that is a servant (John 3:27–36).

We need to recognize that whatever we receive from a teacher must be founded on divine authority expressed in the Word. Jesus did not expect any man to receive Him apart from the teaching of the Scriptures (John 5:38, 45). Questions of faith are never going to be solved by elevating human wisdom or logic to the level of Scripture. We must view the world through the filter of Revelation—not Scripture through the prism of worldly wisdom and conjecture. All truth, whether contained in Scripture or discovered in the laboratory originates with God. Man will never discover anything that God did not already know.

Next, consider that Jesus recognized the unity of Divine Revelation; He did not offer any interpretation of the Scriptures or claims for Himself that were explained away on the basis of contradiction. Jesus did not as a Prophet undermine the Word of God. He boldly asserted that the Scriptures *"testify of me."* Jesus in His teaching about the Messiah established the apologetic use of the Old Testament. He expected any honest Jew to be able to read the Old Testament, look at the life and character of Jesus and reach the conclusion: *"We have found Him of Whom Moses in the Law, and the prophets, did write"* (John 1:45). Truth is consistent. Whatever was revealed in the Old Testament was true, whatever Jesus said about Himself was true and the two were in complete harmony. You do not find Jesus saying, "I

know that's what Moses said, but..."

Finally, Jesus expected men to think, to reason and to come to conclusions which may have been out of the mainstream of popular thought. He let these Jews know that when the evidence was all in and fairly considered there was a choice to be made. That same reality confronts us every day. We must make our decisions based on what we can demonstrate from the Word of God regardless of where that may lead us.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 36

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Jesus Wept...

Jesus wept. That's an interesting, attention grasping thought.

Jesus wept. People speak of Jesus as a Savior, as rejoicing, as strengthening and many other appropriate descriptive phrases but you don't often hear people referring to Jesus as weeping.

We read in John 11:34–36, *“And He said, Where have you laid him? They said to Him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, See how He loved him.”*

An Incorrect View

Jesus is often correctly portrayed as going about His work in a very systematic way. He knew His destiny and He strategically went about to fulfill it. Often people see in this an unemotional Jesus. This is an incorrect view of our Lord. Jesus had emotions just as we do. He experienced every human characteristic common to man, *“Inasmuch*

then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same” (Hebrews 2:14). Even to the point of being tempted in every way we are: *“For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”* (Hebrews 4:15). Hebrews 5:8–9 tells us, *“Though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered: and having been made perfect he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation.”*

Peter affirms of Him, *“Because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that ye should follow his steps: who did not sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him that judged righteously”* (1 Peter 2:21, 22).

Jesus Right to Weep

Jesus had emotions, and did not hesitate to demonstrate them. Jesus wept at the death of His friend Lazarus (John 11:35). *“Jesus wept.”* The Greek word used here for weeping is very strong. According to authorities of the Greek language, it is weeping bitterly, wailing, convulsing with spasmodic contractions of the muscles. He wept for the same reasons we weep intensely at the death of loved ones. We miss them. Also, Jesus wept because others that He loved were weeping. Does Jesus care that people suffer pain and agony? Certainly! As the words of the hymn, says: *“O, yes, He cares, I know He cares, His heart is touched with my grief; when the days are weary the long night dreary, I know my Savior cares.”*

Jesus wept at Jerusalem's sinful condition: *“Now as He drew near, He saw the city and*

wept over it" (Luke 19:41). W. E. Vine, a Biblical language scholar and author of a Greek/English Lexicon tells us the word used here is closely related to the former word mentioned above, and means: "a loud expression of grief, especially in mourning for the dead." Jesus was filled with emotion at the fact that Jerusalem was filled with sin and would within forty years be destroyed by the Roman armies. After Matthew records the seven woes spoken to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus pleaded with Jerusalem, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not" (Matthew 23:37). Yes, Jesus cares when sin takes control of people's lives and when they refuse the Divine warning.

Jesus wept on the night in which he was betrayed: "Who in the days of His flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death..." (Hebrews 5:7). Yes, Jesus cared that friends would forsake Him in His hour of greatest need, that His Father in heaven would forsake Him as He bore the sins of the world on His shoulders. "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying,

Eli, Eli, lama Sabachthani? That is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) Yes, Jesus cares.

In the Gospel according to John chapter six we have a record of Jesus feeding five thousand with five barley loaves and two fishes and having some left over. After they were fed they proclaimed, "This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world" (John 6:14). Later in the same chapter, verses 16 through 21, Jesus walked on water. In spite of these amazing miracles which He wrought, when He taught the lesson on the bread of life many could not accept it. John records, "Upon this many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. Jesus said therefore unto the twelve, Would ye also go away?" (John 6:66-67). Jesus demonstrated more than once his concern about the welfare of those who followed him. Peter's answer to the Lord's question should be noted here, "Simon Peter answered and said, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

Does He Weep for You?

Yes, Jesus cares, that is why He invited saying: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29). Jesus was a man

filled with the emotions of care, compassion and love. His emotions were under the control of the Father's will. That is the great difference between His and our emotions. Ours often lead us away from God. The Lord's always manifest the will and the love of God.

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 37

October 4, 2009

Thinking Like Jesus (VII)

“And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John 5:40–47).

Honor from Men

At first glance Jesus’ words may seem contradictory, hadn’t He just said, in verses 22 and 23, *“For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto 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.”* How can it be that Jesus “receiveth not honour” while at the same time “all men should honour the Son”?

The contradiction is only an apparent one. That honour which the Son ought to receive is not the same in kind to that which the Pharisees sought from one another.

Jesus came to be honoured as men properly honour the Father, that is, Jesus came to be honoured as the Son of God. The entire discussion in this context centers on the claim of equality with God which Jesus made (John 5:17, cf. 15:23; I John 2:23; Luke 10:16). However, when He repudiates the “honour of men” in verse 41, He is repudiating that Pharisaical honour which men, as men, bestow upon men in order to ingratiate themselves to one another (Matthew 23:5–12; cf. Galatians 4:17; II Corinthians 10:12). Jesus neither sought nor accepted the “Hail, Rabbi” of the religious parties.

Him You Will Receive

The Pharisee wanted the praise of men. He sought recognition for his piety. In order to have it, he sounded the trumpet in the streets before him as he gave alms to the poor; by a corrupt application of Deuteronomy 11:18, he conspicuously wore

portions of scripture on his forehead and forearm; he prayed loudly in public places in order to be seen and heard; he fasted more often than the Law required while sitting in ashes and throwing dust in the air. The Pharisee desired and sought the places of honour at table and in the synagogue. He wanted to be addressed as Teacher and Rabbi in the streets. All of this they did in order to be seen of men. Jesus said they had their reward (Matthew 6:1–18; 23:1–12; Luke 18:9–14). Many of the Jews were impressed with this false, pretentious and hypocritical sham which passed for piety (John 5:43).

In stark contrast, Jesus did not come as a teacher quoting the rabbis while contending for a party with the representatives of opposing parties. When Jesus spoke, He spoke as one having authority; He did not speak in His own name but the in the name of the Father (John 5:19, 30, 43; cf. 12:13; Mark 11:9). In his preaching Jesus took issue with what “you have heard it said by them of old time” (Matthew 5:33). He exposed their traditions as perversions and evasions of the Law

(Matthew 15:19; cf. Romans 2:27). He condemned their zeal as the party-spirit and their righteousness as the filthy rags of hypocrisy (Matthew 23:15, 23, 25, 33).

The distinctive difference between Jesus and the Pharisees was the divergence between their convictions regarding divine authority. They were glory seekers and Jesus was a glory giver. Notice His words in John 7:17–19, *“If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but He that seeketh His glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?”*

The Pharisee rejected Jesus because He held them accountable to the Word (John 5:39). They were proud, arrogant and rebellious. They could not accept Him without admitting their error and by their actions condemning their fellows.

You Cannot Believe

Jesus asked rhetorically, *“How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?”* Their glory seeking, their desperate need for the approval of men above the approval of the Father sealed their spiritual destruction (cf. Matthew 10:28).

The truth of Jesus’ charge was proved soon after when during His last week of ministry in Jerusalem it was known that *“among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the*

synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42–43). These Jews were more concerned about where they would sit in the synagogue than where they stood with God.

Thinking Like Jesus

How could you and I transform the church and the world if we thought like Jesus, being concerned only with pleasing the Father? (cf. Galatians 1:10).

The church is troubled mightily in our generation by the fear of men. Elders in many churches are afraid to uphold the hands of preachers that hold the line against immodesty, intoxication and sexual immorality. They are afraid that they will have “their place” taken away and given to another (cf. John 11:48).

Some are content to remain in ignorance never challenging themselves or others to think deeper or longer about what the Scriptures actually teach on some subject. They are content to allow the leading preachers to define their positions for them (John 5:39, 46–47).

Preachers are in fear that should they declare the whole counsel of God, or refuse to parrot a popular “party line” that they will be chastened by “the chief priests and Pharisees” among us (cf. John 7:45–53). They know they will be subjected to the typical misrepresentation and mischaracterization that is always used by those who will not try to think and learn (John 9:24–34). They choose to be silent lest they be accused of “heresy” (John 7:50–52).

Saints are discouraged in the churches by the party spirit and enmity that openly exists. They

fear retribution if they speak up or make inquiries (John 9:22).

Many are willing to compromise with the spirit of the world and be satisfied with a message that is less than distinctive, so they will be accepted by the majority (John 12:42).

Yet, Jesus sought this alone, *“the honour that cometh from God only”* (John 5:44). It was having done this that gave Him strength and confidence in His times of trial. It was this that carried Him to Golgotha and, ultimately, to God’s right hand.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

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Living in Perilous Times

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

(II Timothy 3:1-5)

The Last Days

The "last days" includes the age in which we now live, the Gospel dispensation, and it must be admitted that "perilous," or "grievous" (ASV), times upon us. The conditions mentioned by the Apostle Paul make it difficult to remain faithful to Christ, but if we can recognize these things as being detrimental to our spiritual good, we can fortify ourselves against them. God is being rejected by too many in our time (even one is too many, but it is far more

than that). Our children are growing up in a godless world where some who profess to know God deny Him in their works. It is not uncommon to find in the public schools teachers who would have our children accept the theory of evolution as a fact when it is not even a theory but rather a hypothesis which has been defined by some as a "guess" (and not a very good one at that). When God is rejected there is nothing left but dependence upon self and self is not reliable. The prophet Jeremiah said: "Oh Jehovah, I know the way of man is not in himself." Those described above were lovers of self, haughty, boastful, unthankful, lovers of pleasures but no lovers of God. Much is said about the problems in the schools, about the violence, rebellion, disrespect. I believe the problem started when the teachers were severely restricted in disciplinary procedures by socialists, psychologists and humanists who thought they knew more about raising children than the Creator did. If more

dependence would be placed on the word of God for direction we would have fewer problems. Grievous times are upon us when men think they know more than God does.

The Effect Upon Society

A rejection of God has always resulted in a worsened depravity within society. Paul depicts the process of decay in Romans chapter one. He observed: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever" (vv. 21-25). The end result of

their decline was sexual promiscuity, adultery, the breakdown of the home, corruption, greed and rampant violence.

This cycle of events has occurred over and over. It was witnessed among the ancient gentiles, the Greeks, the Romans, and in our own society today. When men lose faith in God and His Word there is no absolute standard to determine what "ought to be" or what "ought not to be." In the absence of faith in God and His revealed Word no true moral standard can exist.

There is an incredible need for Christians to be prepared to give reasons for believing in and obeying God (I Peter 3:15). Unless we instill in the minds of our young people a real faith based on solid evidence, we will continue to see many turn from God to atheism or skepticism. We must stress to our youth the difficulties and weaknesses of atheism.

We need to assure their understanding of the certainty of God's existence by demonstrating the lack of a satisfactory explanation for the origin of life without Him. We need to impress upon them the foolishness of attributing all of the order seen in nature and man to mere chance. They must understand that atheism reduces man a mere animal without responsibility and with no incentive to service and righteousness.

An Exhortation

God must be the center of our lives—the object of our faith

and love. In Matthew 22:37, Jesus said: *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."* In Matthew 6:33 He exhorted us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. The Preacher after experimenting with all the world offered came to this conclusion: *"This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man"* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). In I John 5:3 we read, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."*

But despite such teaching there is much idolatry even among those who claim to be Christians. In our day, people are so involved with "other things" that they have little time for the Lord. We find many activities now being scheduled for Sunday morning during the hour when Christians come together to partake of the Lord's Supper commanded by the Lord in Matthew 26:28 and the Paul in I Corinthians 11. Isn't it enough that we have taken just about every day and hour in the week for our own selfish uses that we must also steal this hour of the week? Until Christians assert themselves by refusing to participate and support these things that rob God of what is His, matters will only worsen. We are salt and light in a dark and unsavory world (Matthew 5:13–16). The world will always demand more and

more seeking to draw as many away as it can.

The attitude one has toward God is at the root of this problem. If God is first, all else will be in order. If God is pushed into the background other things will fill the gap. The choice must be made day by day. Will you dare to stand like Joshua of old, those who love the Lord will with him say, *"But as for me and my house we will serve the Lord"* (Joshua 24:15).

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 39

October 25, 2009

Knowing Christ

We hear pleas for people to “accept Christ” and to “get to know Christ,” but I am persuaded that many do not understand what it is they ask.

More Than Men Know

Accepting Christ means to be in obedience to Christ. He said, “If you love me you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Likewise, knowing Christ involves much more than simply having a passing acquaintance with the Master. In John 17:3, Jesus said, “And this is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ.” “To know” has a deeper meaning that it receives in our common speech. This knowledge not only implies life; it is life. Knowledge and life are inseparable. You cannot have one without the other.

Requires Obedience

Notice that knowledge requires obedience. We are told in I John 2:4, “He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.” Without obedience to Christ we may have some ideas about Christ, but we do not have true

knowledge of Christ. To know Christ means to obey the teaching of Christ. Obedience to the teachings of Christ will make one a disciple of Christ.

“Jesus said therefore to those Jews that had believed, If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples” (John 8:31). All who would truly know Christ must subject their will to the will of Christ; this means obedience in all things.

Requires Love

I John 4:8 says, “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”

What does this mean? It is possible for a man without love to know about Christ and about God but it is impossible for one to truly know the Father and the Son without love. In I Corinthians 13 we are impressed with the truth that love is the greatest of Christian virtues. While love defies definition, we can suggest its meaning by noting its effect in men’s lives. Paul tells us that love it includes patience, kindness, unselfishness, humility, good behavior, generosity, good temper, guilelessness, sincerity, fortitude and perseverance. If we love all

men, as Christians certainly should, then we will think the best of all men, do our best for them, and help them on to do their best. That is love.

Requires Emulation

True knowledge requires emulation. In being obedient to God’s will we are being like Christ, for he was obedient to His Father’s will (John 6:38). Jesus loved God, His Father, and demonstrated this love by subjecting His will to the will of God.

In loving all men we are being like Christ, for he loved all men, both friends and enemies. He demonstrated that great love in many ways. His Divine love reached its crowning expression in His death on the cross, whereby “put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). Jesus did all that infinite love could do for a lost race. He made possible the way of salvation.

He made effective God’s plan for the redemption of lost humanity. It cost His life. He gave it willingly and lovingly. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for

his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus was and is the friend of all. He shed his blood for all. This is Divine love.

In order to know Christ we must obey Christ, and we must love both God and man; therefore, knowledge of Christ implies a certain relationship toward man. We must have a will that seeks obedience to the commandments of Christ. We must also have a disposition that seeks the good of all men. To know Christ is to be Christ-like.

Begets a Relationship

This glorious knowledge which means a saving relationship to Christ can be enjoyed only in the church of our Lord. We have seen that only the obedient have this knowledge, but those who are outside the kingdom are disobedient; therefore, they do not have the blessed knowledge which is life eternal. If they were obedient, they would not remain outside of the kingdom, but would rather accept the Savior's loving invitation to come into the kingdom, which is His church (Matthew 16:18–19). They would be obedient, gladly receive the word and be baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38–47).

Those without the knowledge of Christ may obtain it through Faith. Jesus said, *"For except ye believe that I am he ye shall die in your sins"* (John 8:24). Saving faith yields in repentance. Those who had been enemies of Christ but came to believe on Him through the preaching of Peter and the apostles were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38).

True believers will confess their faith openly (John 12:42). This is essential to developing the relationship that knowledge can bring. Paul said, *"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness: and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Romans 10:9–10).

Baptism is essential to knowing Christ. Paul, after having seen a vision, having prayed and fasted, was told to *"arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins"* (Acts 22:16–17). We cannot know Christ and not be in Christ: *"And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life"* (I John 5:20). Yet, the only way to be *in Christ* is to be baptized *into Christ* (Romans 6:3–4).

Yet, we cannot stop at baptism; continued faithfulness is essential to being a disciple of Christ and having the knowledge of Christ. The Christian is told to *"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ"* (II Peter 3:18). He is exhorted to be *"steadfast, unlovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord"* (I Corinthians 15:58). The crown of life is promised to them who are *"faithful unto death"* (Revelation 2:10).

By the grace of God, this plan for the salvation of lost souls has been made known to the world. We may know Christ. Whether we will or not is up to each of us. God has given us freedom of choice.

Paul made the choice: *"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the*

knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord... That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Philippians 3:8–11). Paul recognized that to know Christ was life eternal; therefore he was willing to give up all things to obtain that knowledge. We must all come into this knowledge if we are to be saved.

—Ed Brouillette

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 40

November 1, 2009

The Resurrection of Christ

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

O T Resurrections

Elijah raised the widow's son by crying unto the Lord: "and he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried unto the Lord and said, oh Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come unto him again" (I Kings 17: 20-25). Elisha, in 2 Kings 4:33-37, raised the Shunnamite's son.

After Elisha had died, a man's body was hastily placed in the same sepulcher with him. As the dead man's body touched the bones of Elisha he was resurrected (II Kings 13:21). In Jonah 1:17, we find that a fish swallowed Jonah. I have heard people say that this just could not be true because a whale's throat is not large enough to swallow a man. But

one thing undoubtedly is overlooked; God *prepared* this one and that makes a difference. When Jonah was delivered it is described as a resurrection (Jonah 2:6).

N T Resurrections

Jesus was walking past the gate of the city of Nain and waited as a funeral procession was passing. Jesus stepped up to the bier and said, "Young man I say unto thee arise." The dead sat up (Luke 9:14-15).

Jesus entered the house of a man named Jairus. He was the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum where Jesus lived. This man's daughter was sick; as Jesus was coming to heal her she died (Luke 8:49-55). Jesus said to Jairus, "Fear not; believe only, and she shall be made whole." When Jesus arrived he entered her room, put out the mourners and said, "Maid arise." Her spirit came to her again and immediately she arose.

Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead by calling to him from the entrance of the sepulcher. The Jews marveled and

admitted that there was a resurrection (John 11:47; 12:18).

Great Miracles Indeed

If I were asked, I would be one of the first to say that these were great miracles. But note one thing, in all of these miracles God worked through someone, a prophet, but in Christ's resurrection there was no go-between and this is unique.

I am sure that the Jews did not deny the raising of the dead in accord with the above mentioned miracles. They could not even attribute Jesus' resurrection to a case like the man buried with Elisha because Christ was buried him in a new sepulcher wherein no man ever yet lay (John 19:41).

God raised Christ from the dead (Romans 10:9). I know some believe that his body was stolen away, but men were paid to tell that lie (Matthew 28:11-15). The critics say the disciples were just brain-washed, but this is not so for Thomas saw the prints of the nails in His bands and was

told to thrust his hand into His side. He said, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:25-29).

Peter demonstrated his faith in that great miracle on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:22-24) He said, "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves know: Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it."

The resurrection of Christ is the greatest of all miracles because without it there is no salvation. Paul showed the Corinthians that the truth of the Gospel relies upon it: "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures...And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins" (I Corinthians 15:1-4, 17). In verse 32, Paul said, "If after the

manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die."

So, if anyone does not believe that God raised Christ from the dead, there is no need to believe anything because he will be lost.

—Lloyd Nash

What Does the Lord Expect of Me?

When we consider the spiritual blessings that have been lavishly poured out upon humanity, there is but one question that we ought to have. That question is, "What does the Lord expect of me?"

He expects me to be his child.

The first thing that I must do is become a child of God. Someone may ask, "How do I do that?" Jesus answers such an inquisition when He says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

He expects me to know why I believe what I believe.

It is sad to see folks who have no basis for what they believe. Truth has nothing to be ashamed of, it does not contradict itself, and it is clear. "But sanctify the Lord God in your heart and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you of the reason of

the hope that is in you..." (I Peter 3:1 5).

He expects me to grow in my faith and repent of my sin. If we are standing still, we are losing ground. Christ expects me to grow in my faith, and He expects me to turn away from my sins rather than justifying them.

He expects me to remember him. Brethren, let us never forget the Son of God. Let us remember His sacrifice, life, teachings, sufferings, death, and His promise to return.

—Bruce Reeves

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 41

November 8, 2009

What Can We Know About Heaven?

"Now my idea about heaven is..." and then the writer or speaker reveals himself far more than he tells us about heaven. The materialist, sensual, mystical, aesthetic, and surrealist all have a field day with heaven. It is "pie in the sky" to those who ridicule its reality, and an extremely plush "paid vacation" for those who equate "real" with earthly literalism.

An Apocalyptic Description

"Heaven" is a divinely revealed place, state, or condition; and we can know only that which is revealed about it in God's word. We say "place" with some hesitation, using accommodative language; for "location" is space related and may lose its literal significance when applied to eternity. But God's Word is directed to time and space related beings, and information about deity and eternity are necessarily couched in terms that translate into mental images. We cannot truly imagine "eternity" or things eternal in nature, so we must expect the Bible to use anthropomorphisms: whereby things of God, totally incomprehensible to mortal

man, are described in the time and space terms of man.

Jewish typology finds its final usage here. God built a literal people, a literal nation, through whom His Son would put on flesh and dwell among men. He used these people, a distinct advantage to them, as His vehicle for demonstrating God-to-man dealings (Romans 3:1ff; 9:4-5). Then, as His eternal purpose began to reach its fruition in Christ, the literal kingdom of Israel is seen as a type of His spiritual rule. Christ reigns on "David's throne" and is our High Priest "after the order of Melchizedek" (Acts 2:30f; Hebrews 6:20ff). Scattered Israel finds a "highway" and "returns...in righteousness" (Isaiah 10:20; 35:8), and all Christians are "Abraham's seed" or "the Israel of God" (Galatians 3:29; 6:16). It should come as no surprise that heaven is called "New Jerusalem," and praise to God there is described in Jewish terms: "golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints" (Revelation 5:8).

The apocalyptic description of heaven (Revelation 21:1f) speaks of the "Holy City" Jerusalem with its walls of jasper and other precious stones; its street (singular) of gold; twelve gates,

each made of a single pearl, named after the twelve tribes of Israel. The tabernacle of God is there, but this is the true abode of Jehovah—not a "tent" in which the "presence" of God is indicated by a cloud of glory. In fact, we are told, "I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (21:22). God is on His throne—for the authority of God is eternal. There is plenty of water and trees, including the "tree of life" (restoring that which was lost when man was separated from Eden). The high imagery is further indicated by the measuring of the city: "the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal"—a perfect cube (Revelation 21:16).

Literalizing Dangerous

Materialists may literalize heaven to a point of absurdity: as though heaven will be the fulfillment of their most covetous and lustful appetites. We sing, "I want a gold (mansion) that's silver lined"—forgetting that the street is made of gold. It seems we should realize that Bible descriptions of heaven which emphasize its beauty, its value, the peace and lack of pain that prevails, etc., are relating heaven's wonders to

the human realm. We cannot improve on God's way of describing heaven, and would be foolish to try it. But there is ample evidence God is telling us that holiness, righteousness, purity, and praise of God find perfection there. This means little to worldly people, but is given its true significance by the genuine child of God.

Heaven Is Our Country

Paul wrote: *"Our citizenship is in heaven: whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 3:20). Philippi was a Roman colony where citizens were mostly retired soldiers, given full citizenship in the "mother" city Rome. Though far from that city, they dressed Roman, spoke Latin, observed Roman morals, were governed by Roman magistrates, "remained unshakably and unalterably Roman" (cf. Barclay). Paul was saying the Christian, no matter where he is, must never forget he is a citizen of heaven; and his conduct must match his citizenship. To this kind of people, heaven is "going home." Oh, what a wonderful thought to those who have practiced heavenly citizenship, longing for the day when they will dwell in God's presence. "Home to heaven" will be a happy trip for those who, on earth, hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matthew 5:6). But what of those who have no such taste? Can we expect them to long for a life totally different from what they now pursue?

The passage in Philippians continues: *"(Christ) who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his*

glory..." In Romans 7 the body, with its fleshly appetites, is seen as a "law" (force) which wars against the inward man or mind desirous of doing God's will. The conflict results in a "wretched man," captive to sin in his members and delivered only by forgiveness through Christ (7:18). The Christian must strive to "put to death the deeds of the body" (8:13). Paul then promises that though we "groan and travail in pain...now" (8:22), we wait for our adoption, to wit, "the redemption of our body" (8:23). This body, with appetites which war against our desire to serve God, will be changed in heaven—the conflict will be over. How wonderful for those who war against the flesh here. But what of those who "let themselves go," and revel in appetites of the flesh? Do they long for a body change with fleshly appetites removed?

A Prepared Place & People

I am persuaded heaven is not for everyone. It is a prepared place for a prepared people. Heaven's invitation is not limited; its glories are available to all. But many are ill-prepared for heaven, and I cannot believe God would force heaven upon anyone. There is an old story about a slave whose "Massa" had died, and who was asked if he thought the Master had gone to heaven. He said the "Massa" always talked about places he planned to visit, and made great preparation for going there. But "Massa" never talked about heaven, and made no preparation for that destination. "Chances are he ain't makin' dat trip!"

Sorry—I can't tell you any more about heaven than what you

can read in the Scriptures; and I can tell that only in terms used by the Holy Spirit to give us some idea of its wonders.

Whatever heaven will be like, it will be "home" for the Christian and an end to the struggles of this life. Those who are striving to serve God in the here and now are going to love it.

—Robert Turner

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 42

November 15, 2009

When I Pray...

On a few occasions in my travels about the country I have had the opportunity to stay in an exceptional hotel. The service was excellent; each guest was provided with outstanding amenities such as room service, valet parking or bell-man's assistance. It is amazing the lavish service one receives. The purpose of these conveniences is to make the guest as comfortable as possible, to provide an experience absent of a care for anything. You just ring, and they are at the ready.

Sadly, this is how some perceive their relationship to God ought to be. They mistakenly expect to call upon Him anytime they have a desire or are in need, but otherwise God is not to be seen or noticed. Just like the bellhop: ring the bell, appear from nowhere to take away our burdens and then disappear—maybe a thank you and a small gratuity, but certainly nothing more.

However, God expects a relationship with His people that goes beyond just meeting

our wants and delivering us from the unpleasant burdens of life—and He will have it, or no relationship at all (James 4:1–10). He truly wants to commune with us. To have us lay before Him our needs and concerns, to ask Him whatever we will and trust Him to provide just what is best (Philippians 4:6–7). Through that relationship God will strengthen our faith and develop our character so that we will be fit for eternal communion with Him.

Prayer, One Means of Communion with God

Jesus' disciples came asking Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1–13). Among other things this indicates that prayer is not something men instinctively know how to do. We must be taught to pray, and taught correctly.

Jesus instructed the Twelve in the manner of prayer. He taught them to whom to pray—"Our Father Who is in Heaven." He taught them what regard for Him they were to possess in order to

pray—"Hallowed be Your name." He taught them for what to pray—"Thy Kingdom... Thy will ...our daily bread...our sins...lead us not into temptation." He taught them the faith and submission they were to have when they pray—"day by day." He commanded that charity should be in their hearts as they pray—"forgive us...for we also forgive everyone." He conditioned the acceptability of their prayers upon their willingness to obey the Father—"as in heaven, so in earth." He urged confidence in their prayers—"Give us...forgive us...deliver us."

Jesus by this simple but profound prayer made certain the disciples understood that praying is not the presentation of a "holy wish list" to the Almighty. Rather, it is the earnest entreaty of a faithful heart (that is, a heart full of faith). It is an expression of reverence, dependence, repentance, obedience and allegiance. In prayer we articulate our feelings and desires to God.

Importunity

An important component of prayer is *importunity*. This is a difficult word with which to grapple. The verb, *importune*, means to *insist*. It is stronger in meaning than the words *request*, *appeal* or even *plead*. The Greek word which it translates means *impudence* or *shamelessness*; not in the sense of lasciviousness or wantonness, but in the sense of being *brazen* or *acting without the restraint of propriety*. The parable Jesus gives as an illustration of the zeal with which men are to pray is helpful in understanding what it means to be *importunate*. The man in the story came at an inappropriate hour, making a seemingly trivial request from one for whom he should have had the most regard and respect—a *friend*. The friend, at the first, responded with a reasonable reproof and explanation for his refusal: “It’s late and I’m in bed.” However, he eventually relented, not because he was overcome with remorse or embarrassment for not having given the neighbor three loaves of bread, but because he wanted the fellow to be quiet and go home so he could get some sleep. You see, the friend was relentlessly insistent (Luke 11:8). He stood there in the street at midnight without any regard for anything else and continued to plead until his request was granted. That is *importunity*.

Jesus gave another illustration of *importunity* in Luke 18:1–8.

He describes a woman with a legal claim against another. She came to the judge to plead her case. The judge was a wicked and corrupt official who for base reasons would not render a judgment in her favor. However, after awhile he grew weary of her incessant appearances pleading for justice. Notice his reasoning, “Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” The bottom line is: he was tired of being bothered and gave judgment on her behalf. Not because it was just, but because it was personally beneficial.

Now, Jesus, as he often does, makes an argument from the lesser to the greater. His conclusion is: if this wicked and unjust judge will grant a petition certainly God will grant the petitions of His elect. Jesus is not saying we must badger God with our prayers; rather, He is instructing us to be bold and outspoken with our requests. Do not fear or be intimidated to ask the Father for exactly what you need.

Two Passages to Ponder

The Apostle Paul urged us to appear before God through the mediation of Jesus Christ His Son and our Great High Priest. He encouraged us saying, “*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:16). The Greek word translated *boldness*

means “with frankness, or with all out-spokenness.”

The Apostle John said, “*And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him*” (1 John 5:14–15).

When I pray with confidence making a sincere request I can know that God is pleased with that prayer, and He hears me and will answer my request.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 43

November 23, 2009

When I Pray God Listens...

The Father Listens...

He is the One to whom we pray.

Jesus taught the Disciples to enter into their closets and to pray to “*your Father*,” He said pray after this manner, “*Our Father which is in Heaven*” (Luke 11:2; cf. Matthew 6:6, 9). The Apostle Paul acknowledged that he prayed “*unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Ephesians 3:14; Romans 10:1; Philippians 4:6). It is important to understand that our prayers are to be offered to and directed toward the God of all the earth, the Father which is in Heaven.

While I may not perfectly understand the inner workings of the Godhead, it cannot be denied that there is a “*hierarchy*” or order of relationship that exists between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Scripture reveals that the Father retains His supremacy over all creation even though He has placed all things under Jesus as Lord and Christ (I Corinthians 15:27). Similarly, Jesus’ exalted position is reflected in His relationship to the Holy Spirit who operates in “*the name of Christ*” (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13–15). It is clear that

the Father retains His authority over the Son and the Spirit, even while Christ has all authority in the Kingdom. The equality that exists within the Godhead does not alter their roles, nor diminish individual rank. Furthermore, these distinctions do not suggest that anyone of them is less than fully divine (Philippians 2:6–8; Acts 20:28; 5:3–4, 9).

It is an awesome thought to contemplate the reality that our prayers capture the attention of the Almighty. Peter affirmed: “*For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayer.*” (I Peter 3:12).

God is there. We are told to enter a secret place, into our closets opposed to standing on the street corners in order to be seen. And, in this secret place, God sees and hears our prayers (Matthew 6:6). This attribute of God is referred to as ubiquity, the fact that He is everywhere at the same time. The Psalmist pondered this quality of God when he asked, “*Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence?*”

God is aware. God not only sees and hears, but He fully knows

and understands what our needs are (Matthew 6:7–8). We do not have to plead and rant endlessly to get His attention. We do not pray to an idol, but the Almighty God of Heaven (cf. I Kings 18:19ff).

God cares. The Christian may live an anxious-free life because the God he serves is genuinely concerned about the needs of His children (Matthew 6:25–32). We are compelled to marvel at God’s concern for man (Job 7:17). We can rejoice in the boundlessness of His mercy, grace and loving-kindness (Psalm 17:6–9; 86:15–17).

The Son Listens...

He is the One through whom we pray. We pray “*in Jesus’ name*” (Ephesians 5:20); we give thanks to the Father through Him (Colossians 3:17; cf. 1:3). This is not a mystic formula, but a truly important spiritual concept.

There is no approach to God apart from Jesus Christ. He is our “*Intercessor*” (Romans 8:34); He is our “*Daysman*” or Umpire (Job 9:31–33); He is “*our great High Priest*” (Hebrews 4:12–16). It is Jesus Christ, the Son of God,

who alone makes it possible to plead before God.

Jesus makes intercession for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25). He literally, "falls in with us," that is, He has become one with us in order to speak on our behalf. We are confident that we have a representative in heaven that can truly make our case (2:17; 4:15).

He is the one Mediator between God and man (I Timothy 2:5). In arbitration when a mediator is appointed it is necessary that both sides have confidence in him. In the first place, each side must be confident that the mediator can represent their case with accuracy and with zeal. In the second place, each side must be confident that the mediator can do so without favoring the other side.

Jesus is just such a mediator "that might lay His hand upon us both," God and man, and bring us together. We are confident that He is sympathetic to our needs and understands our trials. God is confident that He is His "beloved Son in whom He is well pleased," His Son who learned "obedience by the things which He suffered" (Hebrews 5:8).

He is our Advocate. He is the one whom we call to our side in order to speak to God. He is our court appointed attorney; we speak to the Judge only through Him (I John 2:1-2). However, unlike a "defense" attorney, He does not maintain that we are "not guilty." Just the opposite, Christ represents us admitting our guilt; yet he pleads for mercy, pardon and abundant grace.

The Holy Spirit Listens...

He is the One with whom we pray. Jude instructs: "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." The question is: "How does one pray in or with the Holy Spirit?"

While miraculous praying in unlearned languages was among the gifts utilized in the early church, this is not Jude's concern. At the time he wrote, it was expected that "tongues... shall cease" (I Corinthians 13:8). Rather, the Apostle commands that we pray with the "mind of the Spirit" or a "spiritual mind" (cf. Romans 8:26; cf. 8:6 in ASV). Paul affirms that the Holy Spirit helps the believer to pray. He says that the Holy Spirit dwells in and leads us (Romans 8:11, 14). When this is the case, we are "in the Spirit" (8:9).

However, this is not a miraculous effect; rather, we are "in the Spirit" when we are walking "after the Spirit" and "minding the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8:1-5). To submit to the "law of the Spirit" (v. 2, 5) is to have "the mind of the Spirit" (8:6 in ASV) and such a mind is "in the Spirit" (8:8). This is "the mind" which the heart searcher knows.

It is the giving of such a mind through "the law of the Spirit" that constitutes the intercession of the Spirit (Romans 8:26). It is the heart of the believer that groans (cf. II Corinthians 5:4; Psalm 77:4-10), and it is Jesus that searches the hearts as our intercessor (Revelation 2:23; Acts 1:24; cf. Psalm 139:23; Jeremiah 17:10). But, it is the

Holy Spirit through the Gospel which transforms our hearts and instills in us a yearning for righteousness by shedding the love of God abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5-11). In the midst of suffering and trials we do not know how or for what to pray, but we know whom we love and that for which we hope; Christ can know and try that spiritual mind, the mind of the Spirit and plead for the believer before God who knows how to give better than we know how to ask.

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 44

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When I Pray Heaven's Power Is Harnessed...

When we pray we are asking God to act in our behalf. That for which we petition in hope is beyond our own wisdom and ability to accomplish. (I am stating the obvious as far as the believer is concerned.) While we recognize that we are to cooperate with God in answering our prayers, the answers are nevertheless the end product of His activity (e.g. "Give us this day our daily bread" does not exclude the need to work or seek for a job, cf. Matthew 6:11; Ephesians 4:28). Therefore, we confess faith in Divine activity and acknowledge that when we pray Heaven itself is moved.

While we do not possess a full understanding of God's workings in the universe, for the simple reason He has not revealed the details of His activity, there is sufficient revelation to know that God does work and act on behalf of His people (Psalm 145:10-17). If God is acting, it is of necessity divine action. And, if God is doing, it is of necessity by His divine power and wisdom.

Let's consider the power that works on our behalf. Such a study is profitable because it instills within us confidence in

God's ability to answer our prayers.

The Power that Created the Universe

Consider the immensity of the universe (Psalm 8:3-4). The best estimate at present concerning the size of our galaxy, the Milky Way, is 5.9×10^{17} miles wide (that's 590,000,000,000,000,000). Astronomers believe that there are as many as 300 billion such galaxies in the universe. Of all these, the Hubble telescope has glimpsed at maybe 3,000. In our galaxy alone there are between 200 and 400 billion stars.

God challenged Abraham to count the stars if he could (Genesis 15:5). I have tried and cannot count the stars I can see, let alone counting the hundreds of billions that I cannot see. Yet, our Father who is in Heaven, not only made each star (Genesis 1:16), He knows exactly how many He made and has named everyone (Psalm 147:4-5). Furthermore, think of the many things that God must know about the created universe concerning which mankind has just recently come to know a few; then consider that there must be an infinite number of things that only God *knows and understands*.

This is the God to whom we pray (Psalm 146:5-6). The God that created, made, and understands the entirety of the universe. Such a God is incomprehensible and without doubt a God who transcends the universe. He is the God who is undoubtedly "*able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think*" (Ephesians 3:20).

The Power that Created Earth & All that Is in It

Let's narrow our focus a bit, consider the earth and its inhabitants. We are not too concerned about soaring among the stars, or hopping about the planets, or visiting the magnificent nebulae. We are more troubled by the daily concerns of living and making a living. We are struggling against sin, grappling with living righteously and facing aging, sickness, dying and, ultimately, judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

The reality of a transcendent God is comforting, but is such an incomprehensible God really concerned about what's going on in our remote corner of the universe? Does He care? Does He even see? The Bible says that He does (I Peter 5:6-10).

The inhabitable earth, its creatures and mankind were created for the glory and the pleasure of God (Revelation 4:11). He has a keen interest in it, so much so, that the Bible says He rules in the kingdoms of men (Daniel 4:17; Acts 17:24–26; Jeremiah 10:7; Revelation 19:6). Furthermore, He has decreed a general providence for mankind that governs the workings of the earth (Genesis 8:21–22; Matthew 5:44–45; Acts 14:17). Beyond this, He extends a special providence toward His people (Acts 18:9–10; Matthew 6:24–24).

Certainly the God who has created the heavens and the earth, the God that gives to all life, breath and all things, the God that provides the rains from the heavens and the fruitful seasons, this God is capable of directing all of that which is under His power to the good and benefit of His creation.

Solomon affirmed that *“time and chance happen to them all”* (Ecclesiastes 9:11). However, the world does not operate or run according to pure chance. He also said, *“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD”* (Proverbs 16:33). These statements help us to understand that our view of the world in which we live accepts the reality that our Father in Heaven hears and acts for us (Isaiah 40:28–31).

With God on our side we have no thing or no one to fear (Matthew 10:28; Psalm 118:6; Hebrews 13:5–6). There is nothing in this world that will ever separate us from His love (Romans 8:35). In every trial He is there, and in every situation He is in control (I Peter 4:19).

This is the God to whom we pray, the God that has created the heavens and the earth and under whose control all is kept (Isaiah 51:12–13).

The Power that Created Me

Every one of us is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26–27). We are by intent and design fitted for communion with the Almighty (Genesis 3:8). We have an intrinsic desire to see and speak with God (Ecclesiastes 3:11; Psalm 65:2; 27:8). This is why prayer is not unnatural to us, and why when neglected it creates a void in our hearts.

There is a bond between each of us and God. It is God that formed us in the womb (Isaiah 44:24). He is *“the Father of spirits”* (Hebrews 12:9). From the time of our conception we are known to Him (Jeremiah 1:5).

God is not a disinterested clockmaker. He has not created and then set the universe aside on the shelf to go on to other things that interest Him more. God is involved with all of His creation and knows who each and every one of us is (Hebrews 4:12–13). His eyes are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; likewise, His face is against the evil (I Peter 3:12).

Now this is the God to whom we pray. Each one of us prays to his own Maker (Isaiah 54:5). We pray to the God that truly knows us. He is the God from whom we cannot hide one thing, the God who knows what we need before we ask, the God who is able to search our hearts and understand our innermost yearnings and desires, He is the

very God who formed us and gave us life.

Our Father who is in Heaven wants to help us and is able to do so. Why then do we not pray to Him? Why do we fret and worry about the things we cannot control when we could take those very things to our Father who has the power to understand our needs and address them in a manner and by means which are beyond our comprehension and certainly for our good?

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 45

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When I Pray Providence Is Set into Motion...

It goes without saying that God can provide by miraculous means (Luke 1:37; Jeremiah 32:17). God has left examples of the magnitude of His divine power within the archives of ancient history (Psalm 105). These miraculous acts were intended to not only demonstrate His power, but to confirm His words in the mouths of His prophets (Hebrews 2:1-4; Deuteronomy 18:15-22).

Miraculous gifts in the Church were given for a similar purpose (Mark 16:17-20). However, the Apostle Paul says these gifts would have limited endurance (I Corinthians 13:8-10). God intended for them to last only through the infant stage of the Church's development. Once revelation was complete, there would be no further need for inspiration and confirmation (Jude 3).

However, we are not to think that the absence of the miraculous signifies either the inability of God to provide for His people or a lack of desire to do so on His part. Quite the contrary, Jesus made it clear saying, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20); and "I will

never leave thee nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

God's interest care and provision for His people is generally referred to as *divine providence*. The word *providence* literally means foresight, but is generally used to denote God's preserving and governing all things by means of second causes. The doctrine of *divine providence* has reference to the preservation, care and government which God exercises over all things that He has created in order they may accomplish the ends for which they were created.

Prayer & Providence

One of the great problems believers have in this area of providence is acknowledging that God may act without that act constituting a miracle. We need a correct view of miracles, if we are to understand *providence*. Consider this: all miracles are supernatural, but everything supernatural is not a miracle. God Himself is supernatural; He does appear in the material realm unless He intends to do so (Romans 1:20; cf. Exodus 20:22). The fact that we do not see God does not prove that He does not exist; neither does it prove that He is

not actively engaged in taking care of His people. We must accept that there are many things going on in the universe to which we are not privy and which we cannot see or otherwise detect (cf. II Kings 6:17). These things are not miracles, yet they happen nevertheless (Hebrews 1:13-14).

The efficacy of prayer is predicated upon the reality that God acts within His creation for the sake of His people unto the accomplishment of His purpose. We are taught to ask God to act on our behalf: "Recompense... give us... deliver us...ask... knock...seek..." The Christian either accepts the reality of *divine providence* or he is forced to conclude that God has abandoned His people.

As noted in our definition, *providence* involves second causes. Therefore, we pray "Give us this day our daily bread," but we also "labour, working with [our] hands the thing which is good." We pray for God to give us wisdom, understanding and knowledge of salvation (James 1:5) and He may send a preacher (Acts 8:26-40; 10:1-11:18). We ask "lead us not into temptation" and He makes "the

way of escape" (I Corinthians 10:13; cf. I Samuel 25:32–33).

The Biblical Principle

That *providence* is set in motion by our prayers is taught in James 5:16–18.

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

The historical background for James statement is 1 Kings 18:41–45. It is important to observe when Elijah prayed, he did so upon a revelation from God to do so (I Kings 17:1; 18:1, 36). God told him to pray that it not rain, and He told him to pray for it to rain. Elijah's prayers were offered according to the revelation he had and a rainless drought ensued. While this is extraordinary; there is nothing miraculous about the absence of rain.

However, the whole event is certainly supernatural. It was God that decreed that it should happen; and it was God that decreed when it would end (18:1). From a biblical perspective God's authority over the weather is a well established fact (Deuteronomy 11:14; Jeremiah 3:3; Joel 2:23). However, what is there that should cause us to regard the sending or withholding of rain as miraculous? When it finally rained it was according to the

natural order of things— evaporation, condensation and precipitation.

Now, I am not suggesting that anyone can pray for a drought in order to get the attention of a despotic king; however, I am affirming that you and I can pray for whatever God has revealed that we ought to pray. We do not have any expectation that we will receive anything that is contrary to God's will, that is intended for selfish purposes or does come from a compliant heart (James 4:1-3; I John 5:14–17).

The list of things for which we have a divine right to pray is long and covers the whole gamut of our pilgrimage here upon the earth (Philippians 4:6).

God's Providential Care

The 23rd Psalm indicates a general outline of God's providential care of those who are His people.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

God takes care of our physical needs. We may not have everything we want, but we will

never be in want (Psalm 34:9; 37:25). If we will put God first, he will see to the essentials. Next, God will provide for our emotional needs. No amount of prayer will change the past or reveal the future. However, if we will live at God's pace (Matthew 6:25–26, 34), He will give us His peace (Philippians 4:6-7). We can trust God for mercy and for grace and rely upon prayer for both. Finally, He will meet our spiritual needs. In the midst of suffering, temptation and persecution we are confident that God has prepared something better, and He will provide (James 4:6–10).

—Jeff Asher

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 46

December 13, 2009

Christmas Fact & Fiction

Christmas is always a joyous season, but it is not a “Christian” holiday. I observe it because it is a national holiday and not because it is a religious holy day. Its origin is pagan and secular. This fact gives rise to some vociferous opposition from several religious groups and numerous individuals against the observance of this holiday in any way. It is not taught in the Bible. Since we are not to go beyond the teaching of Christ in matters of religion, it would be wrong for us to observe Christmas as a “religious” day. The Lord Jesus Christ said, “In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). However, to keep the day as a national holiday—in a social, secular way—like we do July 4th, Memorial Day, Mother’s Day, or Thanksgiving Day, and other national holidays, is certainly not wrong.

Not a Holy Day of Obligation

First, let’s study Christmas as a religious holy day. People and churches all over the

world are observing Christmas as a sacred day with elaborate celebrations trying to duplicate the events which surrounded the birth of the Messiah. Some believe that Christmas is the birthday of Christ so strongly that it is nothing short of blasphemy for anyone to speak out against it, and all such opposition is branded as “anti-Christian.” Not so, my friend. The celebration of the birthday of Christ, on any day, was never “Christian” to start with.

For many years there has been a widespread effort to “keep Christ in Christmas.” So far as a large part of activities and greetings around Christmas time are concerned, they certainly do leave Christ out. The conduct of many—more so each year it seems—is certainly anything but in the spirit of Christ. The idea of getting drunk, or even having a drinking party, shooting off firecrackers, and having all sorts of revelry is not in harmony with the spirit of Christ. The very nature of the mission, life, and teaching of Jesus Christ would certainly

indicate that it would be of a different character than that.

The Origin of Christmas

Christ has never been in Christmas. In support of this contention, the following quotations from historical sources on the origin of Christmas are offered.

The Encyclopedia Britannica says, “Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church, and before the 5th century there was no general consensus of opinion as to when it should come in the calendar, whether on January 6, March 25, or December 25th” (Vol. 5, p. 641, 14th edition).

The Catholic Encyclopedia says, “Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church. Irenaeus and Tertullian omit it from their lists of feasts...there is no month in the year to which respectable authorities have not assigned Christ’s birth” (Vol. 3, p. 724, 1908).

Adam Clark, noted commentator on the Bible and a Methodist minister, says that the birthday of Christ “has been placed by

sects and learned men in every month of the year."

The Cyclopedia of Ecclesiastical Literature, by McClintock and Strong, says: "The observance of Christmas is not of divine appointment, nor is it of New Testament origin. The day of Christ's birth cannot be ascertained from the New Testament, or indeed, from any other source. The (church) fathers of the first three centuries do not speak of any special observance of the nativity (birth) of Christ... The institution may be sufficiently explained by the circumstance that it was the taste of the age to multiply festivals... at the same time the heathen winter holidays (Saturnalia, Juvenalia, Brumalia) were undoubtedly transformed, and so to speak, sanctified by the establishment of the Christian cycle of holidays; and the heathen customs... were brought over into Christian use" (Vol. 2, p. 276).

The Encyclopedia of Religion, by Vergilius Ferm, says, "According to authentic records no church festival was held in celebration of Christ's birth until the first half of the 4th century" (p. 164).

A Catholic Dictionary, by Donald Attwater, says, "Christ's Mass, the common English name for the birthday of our Lord, attained its great popularity as a festival in the middle ages. A huge body of custom and belief grew up around the feast, especially of a convivial kind, much of which survived the Reformation."

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge says, "The pagan festival (Brumalia, December 25) with its riot and merrymaking was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit or in manner. Christian preachers of the West and the Nearer East protested against the unseemly frivolity with which Christ's birthday was celebrated, while Christians of Mesopotamia accused their Western brethren of idolatry and sun-worship for adopting as Christian this pagan festival" (Vol. 3, p. 48).

The World Book Encyclopedia, says, "Scholars do not know the exact date of Christ's birth ... In A.D. 354, Bishop Liberius of Rome ordered the people to celebrate on December 25. He probably chose this date because the people of Rome already observed it as the Feast of Saturn, celebrating the birthday of the sun. Christians honored Christ instead of Saturn, as the Light of the World" (Vol. 3, p. 416).

Let's look at one more quotation from *The Encyclopedia Britannica*. Regarding the birthday of Christ, it says, "The exact day and year of Christ's birth have never been satisfactorily settled, but when the fathers of the church in A.D. 340 decided on a date to celebrate the event, they wisely chose the day of the winter solstice which was firmly fixed in the minds of the people and which was their most

important festival" (Vol.5, p. 642).

It is obvious that the date of December 25th was chosen because of the pagan festival of the winter solstice, and not because it was actually the birthday of Christ. The birthday of Christ was chosen as the event for the festival, rather than the festival for the event.

—Grover Stevens

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Words of Life

Volume 9 Issue 47

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More Christmas Fact & Fiction

Not December 25

Against the idea that Christ was born on December 25 is the fact that the Bible says, "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night (Luke 2:8).

Presbyterian Albert Barnes, in his scholarly and popular commentary on the Bible makes this comment regarding this verse, "The Jews sent out their flocks into the mountainous and desert regions during the summer months, and took them up in the latter part of October or the first of November, when the cold weather commenced ...it is probable, from this, that our Saviour was born before the 25th of December, or before what we call Christmas. At that time it is cold, and especially in the high mountainous regions about Bethlehem. But the exact time of his birth is unknown; there is no way to ascertain it."

Regarding the birth of Christ, the Bible simply says, "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the

days of Herod the King" (Matthew 2:1). If God had intended for us to celebrate the birthday of Christ He would not have kept the date from us? And, He would have given some instructions as to its celebration? Why did the Holy Spirit, whom the Lord gave to the Apostles to guide them into all truth, not guide them into keeping the birthday of Christ? The Lord commanded His Apostles to "teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," and the Apostles did not observe the birthday of Christ, nor did they teach anyone else to do so.

There is not a word in the Bible about remembering the Lord's birth, but plenty is said about remembering His death and resurrection. The church, during the time of the Apostles, did not observe "Christmas," but they did observe His death and resurrection by assembling together on the first day of the week, His resurrection day, and observing the Lord's Supper. We have positive instructions from our Lord, Himself, telling us what to

do, when to do it, and how to do it. Our Lord, in instituting this memorial, said, "Do this, in remembrance of me...For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come" (I Corinthians 11:26; Acts 20:7; Romans 4:25; Hebrews 10:25; Acts 17:31; etc.).

Christ's Mass

The name "Christmas" was given to us by the apostate Roman Catholic Church, which had long since departed from the true doctrine of Christ and the New Testament order of things (See: I Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 2:1-2; II Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 John 2:19). The word "Christmas" is "Christ" plus "Mass," or the Mass of Christ. According to the *Catholic Catechism*, Mass is the "unbloody sacrifice" of Jesus Christ. The word "mass" refers to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation—the doctrine that the bread and fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper are miraculously changed into the actual flesh and blood of

Jesus Christ. Just how the "Mass of Christ," which refers to His crucifixion, got connected with His birth, is something that I have not yet learned. Nevertheless, that is the meaning of the term. Christmas is Christ's Mass. In the Mass the priests of the Roman Catholic Church go through a melodramatic ceremony in which Christ is crucified, thus making the "un-bloody sacrifice." The bloody sacrifice was made on the cross; the un-bloody sacrifice is made in the melodramatic ceremony of the priest. This is climaxed by their taking bread and wine and turning it into the actual (so they claim) "flesh and blood" of Jesus. This is the Mass; and "Christmas" means "the mass of Christ," and both the "mass" and "Christmas" had their origin in the apostate Roman Catholic Church. Neither one was observed by the apostles of Christ nor the first century Christians.

"Christ in Christmas"

From all this evidence, it should be obvious to everyone that Christ has never been in Christmas. Christmas originated with men, not God. So, since Christmas is not a part of the doctrine of Christ, if we keep it as a religious observance, we would be transgressing, and not abiding in the doctrine of Christ; therefore, we would not have God or Christ. It is plain that Christ is not in anything that of which He is not the author and, therefore, He is not in

Christmas, and never has been.

Christmas Presents

There are many customs observed at Christmas time to which religious significance has been attached which have neither historical nor biblical precedent to establish their validity. These customs are the fruit of continuing to "Christianize" what is obviously secular. One such custom is gift giving. Gifts are altogether right when the true spirit of giving is the motive behind the gift. There is nothing more Christ-like than giving because one wants to bestow favor upon another (Acts 20:35). It is sad that much of what is done in this regard is more like the giving of the Pharisees. Jesus said, "If ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye, for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again?" (Luke 6:34).

It is said that gifts are given at Christmas because the wise men gave gifts to the baby Jesus. Well, that is just not the case. Rather, the origin of the custom of gift giving in winter began with the story of Santa Claus which in its origin is not a myth or fairy tale. However, the way it is told in our day it comes nearer to being a myth. The story was originally based on facts of a true occurrence in the life of a real person. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says the following about Santa Claus: "Saint Nicholas (born 352 A.D.) was bishop of Myra, in Lycia (Asia Minor), who

was honored by the Greeks and Latins on the 6th of December. A legend on his secret bestowal of dowries upon the three daughters of an impoverished citizen...is said to have originated the old custom of giving presents in secret on the Eve of Saint Nicholas, subsequently transferred to Christmas Day ...the custom being brought to America by the early Dutch colonists" (Vol. 16, p. 416).

According to *World Book Encyclopedia* by the year "1100 A.D. Saint Nicholas had become a popular symbol of gift giving in many European countries... nonreligious figures replaced Saint Nicholas in certain countries soon after the Reformation, and December 25 became the day for giving gifts" (Vol. III, p. 534).

—Grover Stevens

Northside Church of Christ

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Sunday

Bible Class 9:30 AM
Assembly 10:25 AM
Assembly 6:00 PM

Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00PM

Website

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Words of Life

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Still More Christmas Fact & Fiction

The Christmas Tree

There seems to be a great deal of obscurity as to where the Christmas tree came from. *The Encyclopedia Americana* states: "The idea of using evergreens at Christmas time also came to England from pre-Christian northern European beliefs; Celtic and Teutonic tribes honored these plants at their winter solstice festivals as symbolic of eternal life" (Vol. III, p. 667). The Americans copied the idea from the German immigrants in the early 1800's. One German legend credits St. Boniface with its origin, and another, Martin Luther. The decorations came from various legends, some seasonal and some pagan. Whatever "Christian" significance has been attached to the tree has resulted from a corruption of pagan concepts.

The Encyclopedia Americana confirms this when it states "Some scholars hold that the evergreen tree, a symbol of life to the pagans, became a symbol of the Savior and thus

an integral part of the celebration of his birth."

The World Book Encyclopedia states, "The Christmas tree probably developed in medieval Germany from the 'paradise tree,' a type of evergreen. This tree, decorated with apples, was used in a popular Christmas play about Adam and Eve. By 1605, many German families decorated their homes with evergreens for Christmas. They trimmed the trees with fruits, nuts, lighted candles, and paper roses. Later decorations included painted eggshells and various cookies and candies."

A Christmas Wreath

The corruption of pagan concepts continued with the Christmas wreath, holly and mistletoe. The use of these plants as decorations comes from the practices of Celtic, Teutonic and Druid priests who used these items as charms and symbols in the celebration of the winter solstice. Again the *Americana* states, "Celtic and Teutonic tribes honored these plants at their winter solstice festivals ... Druids in particular

ascribed magical properties to the mistletoe in particular" (Vol. III, p. 667). According to *The World Book Encyclopedia*, attributes the origin of the Christmas wreath to a belief that the evergreen and holly symbolized "the strength of life overcoming the forces of winter." In ancient Rome "people used decorative wreaths as a sign of victory and celebration." The custom of hanging a wreath on the front door probably came from this practice (Vol. III, p. 536).

Nowhere in the Bible do we read the fanciful tales that the "holy" (holly) bush was the material out of which the crown of thorns was composed. However, *The Encyclopedia Americana* says, "Legend tells that the berries were once white, but when the crown pressed upon Jesus' brow, the drops of blood turned the berries bright red. The Christmas wreath is thought by some to have originated from this legend" (Vol. III, p. 667)

US Secularization

Americans have continued the secularization of this

holiday which began nearly 500 years ago. Thomas Nast, the 19th century cartoonist, gave us the popular version of Santa Claus based upon the famous poem by Clement Moore, *The Night Before Christmas*. It was Moore who popularized the idea that St. Nick was a mythological "elf" rather than a real person. Nast drew several versions of his Santa between 1863 and 1881 which were based on Moore's original idea and the department store Santa, first introduced in 1841. By 1881 Nast settled on a man-sized Santa combining his original elf-like Santa with the popular German tradition of the Pelznickle. In the early 20th Haddon Sundblom of the Coca-Cola Co. completed the transformation of Santa Claus with their famous red-suited, black booted and ermine trimmed gift bringer. Numerous aspects were added to the myth throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries to make transformation complete. It was Nast that attributed the North Pole to Santa as the base for his secret toy manufacturing.

Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer, was the invention of the Montgomery Ward Department Stores in 1938 as a sales promotion. This resulted in the popular story song first sung by Gene Autry and later popularized by the 1960's animated television special. Jack Frost, Frosty the Snowman, the Christmas Mouse and numerous other fictional characters, not to mention innumerable of songs which

celebrate nothing except snow, love and childhood, have followed and been added to the holiday myth which is the modern American secular Christmas tradition.

Christmas & the Christian

To the Christian, Christmas day is of no religious significance whatsoever. I "observe" it because it is a national holiday, not as a "Christian holy day." The Lord Jesus made a similar distinction in the washing of hands in Matthew 15. The Jews had a religious tradition about washing hands. Jesus condemned such washing of hands as a religious practice, declaring it to be "vain worship" (Matthew 15:1-14), but He did not condemn washing our hands for personal, health, or social reasons. Again, this same principle is taught regarding the eating of meats that had been sacrificed to idols. Christians were taught that it was wrong to eat such meat in a religious conscience for the idol, but that it was not wrong to eat such meat if they did not regard the meat as religiously sacred (Romans 14 and I Corinthians 10:25-33).

There is certainly nothing wrong with visiting relatives and friends, or in giving and receiving gifts, or in remembering the poor. This, however, should not be confined to December. The spirit of kindness, benevolence, forgiveness,

love and joy that usually characterize this season of the year is the spirit of the true Christian every day of the year.

I invite you to receive Jesus Christ, who is the unspeakable gift of God to man. I invite you to the Church of Christ that you might learn more about Him, and His will, and follow the Bible and the Bible only. May God bless you to know the truth and obey it that Jesus may be the author of eternal salvation to you.

—Grover Stevens

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