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EDITORIAL

The Gospel is Simple

The Gospel of the Bible is so simple that its simplicity often causes many to stumble. Yet the fact remains that one must obey the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved eternally in heaven. (2 Thessalonians 1:7,8). The Gospel contains the facts that Christ died for the sins of the world, and was buried in a grave, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). In his epistle to Romans the Apostle Paul had said: "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered." (Romans 6:17). Notice, they had obeyed from the heart "that form" of the doctrine of the Gospel, that is, they had died in the likeness of Christ's death through repentance, and through baptism they were buried in the grave of water in the likeness of Christ's burial, and then had come up out of the watery grave of baptism in the likeness of Christ's resurrection. Thus, by obeying that form of the doctrine or the Gospel they were saved from sin. This was exactly what Christ had commanded before His ascension into heaven. We read, He said to his disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15,16). The Gospel of God's love is for every creature, for the whole world, and

all must believe and obey His Gospel to be saved from sin and to go to heaven,

Nevertheless, as Isaiah, the Prophet, had exclaimed, "Who has believed our report?" (Isaiah 53:1). The simplicity of the Gospel causes many to stumble and reject the simple plan of salvation. People want to believe that every person on earth must suffer for his or her own sins and must pay the price of one's own wrong by inflicting sufferings to self or by performing various acts of human wisdom. They believe salvation is something that can be earned by man's own efforts. Many people find it too hard to believe that God is so great, almighty, loving and kind that He can take the sins of man, the whole world, upon Himself and receive the punishment in His own body for the sins of every man and every woman, and set them free. The message of the Son of God dying on the cross for the sins of the whole world seems foolishness to so many people and they do not want to accept the Good News of God for man's salvation. What the Apostle Paul had said almost two thousand years ago is still true, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.....Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness." (1 Corinthians 1:18-23). The Apostle further declared, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jews first and also for the Greek." (Romans 1:16).

God has revealed only one plan of salvation for the whole world. There is only one God and there is only one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, and who is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 2:2). All who want to have their sins forgiven, and hope to go to heaven, must have their sins washed away in the blood of Christ Jesus by obeying His Gospel (Revelation 1:5). He is the way, and the truth, and the life. (John 14:6). There is no other way.

Confronting People With The Gospel

J.C. Choate

One of the reasons the church today is not growing as it should is because we as members are not confronting people with the gospel. We are living with them, working with them, traveling together, and have all kinds of contacts with them, but the fact is, we are not talking to them about their need for the Lord. For some reason, we think that as long as we tell the truth, are honest, go to worship, and we are good people, that that is all that the Lord expects of us. We should be that kind of people, for sure, but that is not enough to convert our friends to Christ. To ever reach them, we are going to have to go to them and confront them, talk to them about their need for the Lord, and tell them what they need to do to be saved.

Perhaps we don't talk to people about the gospel because we don't know what the gospel is. In that case, let's think about that for a minute. Paul said that the gospel is good news or glad tidings. (Romans 10:15). It is based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4) But how could someone's death be good news? Because Christ died that we might be saved, and with his resurrection we are also assured of a resurrection.

The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is re-enacted each time one obeys the Lord. Paul says that Christ died, and one pictures that by repenting or dying to his sins. He says that Christ was buried, and that as one obeys the Lord in baptism that he is buried in water. And finally, he says that Christ was resurrected, and that is seen as one comes forth from a watery grave to walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:1-13). In Romans 6:17,18 he states that we were the servants of sin, but after obeying a form of the doctrine, that we became the servants of righteousness. The doctrine is the death, burial, and resurrection, and a form of it is that of dying to sin, being buried in water, and then being resurrected from the waters of baptism. That's what the man from Ethiopia did in Acts 8:26-39.

One must believe the gospel, that is, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, but to be saved he must obey the commands of the gospel. The commands are faith, repentance, confession of Christ as being the Son of God, and baptism, which shows forth the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection, as we noticed in Romans. 6. Each time one obeys those commands, then he is saying that he believes in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and each time we witness one obeying those commands then we are reminded again of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection.

Because of the gospel, and the Lord's requirement that one obey the commands of the gospel to be saved, then Paul said that Christ would come back one day to take vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the gospel. (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Peter also asked, "What shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel?" (1 Peter 4: 17).

Christ has commanded us to go into all the world and preach the gospel. (Mark 16:15,16). Paul said that it in the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and that he dared not to hinder it. (1 Corinthians 9:12). On another occasion, he said, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost." (2 Corinthians 4:7). Did you know that you can hide the gospel, that you can hinder it, that you can render it worthless? But how can one do that? By simply not preaching it and sharing this good news with those with whom you come in contact. Paul said, "Woe be unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

We are told that this treasure (gospel) has been placed in earthen vessels (us). How blessed we are to have been saved by the gospel, that is, saved by Christ as we obeyed that gospel, and how blessed we are to have a knowledge of it and to be able to convey it to others. What a shame when we keep it to ourselves, don't share it, and deny many of the knowledge of God's will, and perhaps salvation itself.

No doubt each of us have had many opportunities to talk to someone about the gospel but we failed to do so. If you are a parent, perhaps you can recall the time when your child was being called on to recite a poem, quote a verse of scripture, or to tell a

story. Being proud of your child, and wanting him to do a good job, you waited patiently for him to begin. But may be in his hesitation, because of being nervous, or having forgotten his part, you couldn't keep from whispering in the background, "Go ahead, don't be afraid, you can do it." Perhaps as the Lord looks on, observing his children talking to friends about the weather, their work, their family, and many other things, he is also anxious for us to speak up and say something about him, the gospel, and their need of salvation. Although Jesus is not going to interfere and do something that he has asked us to do, but don't you know that it hurts him so much when he sees us with so many opportunities to confront our friends with the gospel but for us to end up talking to them about everything in the world but that. Again, you can almost picture the Lord seated at the right hand of God, and even standing up, out of concern that we speak up, and saying to himself, "Speak up, son," "Speak up, daughter," "Tell them that I love them, that I died for them, that I want them to be saved." "Teach them the gospel and tell them what they must do to be saved."

Of course the old excuse that most of us offer is that people are not interested. But man is lost and the gospel still saves, so it is up to us to get them interested. The fact is, we have the best product in the world. We have the truth, the gospel plan of salvation, and the hope of eternal life to offer. If our friends are not interested, then it must be because we are not good salesmen. What about our religious friends? They are selling their products and they have the poorest products in the world. Their gospels, the churches they represent, the names that they wear, are imitation, counterfeit, and man-made. In spite of that, they are able to convince lots of people that they need to accept those teachings, and then to go out and sell it to their friends. How said for them to be able to do that, when we have the pure and unadulterated truth of God, and yet we claim that we can't convince anyone of their need of it. Shame on us. Perhaps we are the ones that need to be converted.

My brethren and friends, what are we doing with the gospel? If we have been holding it, hiding it, refusing to share it, let us repent and ask the Lord to forgive us, and then let's get up and go to work for the Lord. We'll have no problem in reaching people

with the gospel if we will teach it as though we believe it and plead with people to obey it, knowing that they will be lost if they don't. Let's do it with the urgency that it deserves. In other words, let's confront people with the gospel. Now that is not only the hope of the lost, but it is also our hope.

Jesus Christ, The King of The Jews

Steve Williams

Over the head of Jesus on his cross on a sign was the charge against him for which he was crucified: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews" (Mt. 27:37). Mark's gospel reads: "The King of the Jews" (Mk. 15:26). Luke reports it as "This is the King of the Jews" (Lk. 23:38). John's gospel gives the most complete information of all, He reports that the inscription was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek (Jn. 19:20). It read: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (Jn. 19:19). The chief priests of the Jews complained to Pilate, saying, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews', but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate, in his typical, defiant manner, replied, "What I have written I have written" (Jn. 19:22).

In art work, engravings, sculpture, and mosaics, the sign on the cross is usually depicted as reading "INRI". This puzzled me for a long time, because that abbreviation did not conform to the English or the Greek of any of the above statements from the cross. The inscription in John came the closest in Greek, but it would be abbreviated. "INBI". Much of this art work, though, came from the western portions of Europe where Latin reigned supreme as the language of Christianity for centuries. The Latin text of John 19:19 reads, "Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudeorum,", that is, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." This would be abbreviated "INRI".

The accusation on the cross was written by Pilate out of spite and disdain for the Jewish people. The Roman soldiers hurled the

idea of kingship in the face of Jesus in a mocking tone (Mt. 27:29). Herod ridiculed the thought of Jesus as king (Lk. 23:11). But Jesus was and is King and has been anointed by God as "King of kings" (Rev. 17:14; 19:14). If we must honor earthly kings (1 Pet. 2:13-17), how much more so should we honor the King of kings.

The Conversion Of Saul

W.A. Holley

Saul (later called Paul) is one of the greatest characters of all time. One should read Acts 2, Acts 22, and Acts 26 in order to see the complete picture of this man's conversion to Jesus Christ.

Here is a man who changed religions—he gave up the Jews religion for the religion of Christ (Galatians 1:13-14; James 1:27). Actually, Saul became a friend and member of the church which he had once sought to destroy (Galatians 1:23). Verily, his conversion was dramatic and electrifying, indeed!!

What of Saul's Character?

Before his conversion to Christ, he was a good moral and religious man (Philippians 3:6). Saul was not an immoral man; rather, he endeavored to always have a good conscience before God and man (Acts 23:1; 24:16; 26:9-11).

One of Saul's problems was that he did not know the religion he was promoting had already gone out of date (Colossians 2:14-17). Today, no person can be saved through obedience to the demands of the Jews' religion (John 14:1-6). While persecuting Christians, he was ignorant of the gospel of Christ (I Timothy 1:13). While persecuting Christians, though zealous of the law of Moses, he was "chief of sinners" (I Timothy 1:13-15; Cf. Philippians 3:6).

Saul, before his conversion to Christ, made a determined effort to completely destroy that church which Jesus Christ

established (Matthew 16:18-19; Acts 2:1-4; 36-38, 41-42, 47; Galatians 1:23; Acts 9:1-2; 26:9-11). One can have a good conscience while promoting a false religion (Proverbs 14:12; John 16:2). In his madness, Saul made "havock" of the church of Christ. What does the word havock mean? It means, according to Vine, "to destroy, ravage, lay waste . . ." All of this action was done by Saul, against the Lord's church, while he (Saul) was yet a sinner (1 Timothy 1:13-15).

Why the Lord Appeared to Saul?

The Lord Jesus did not appear to Saul to save him apart from the preached word of God. One does not have to see the Lord to be saved (Cf. I Peter 1:8; I Corinthians 15:8) It was necessary for Saul to see the Christ that he might qualify to be an apostle, thus becoming a "witness" of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:21-22; 26:16-18). The apostle Paul wrote: "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time" (I Corinthians 15:8). What do these words mean? Well, Saul was "born out of due time" for seeing the Lord in the ordinary way before his ascension. Since we cannot become apostles, it is not necessary for us to see the Lord.

Must Sinners See a Light?

The light that Saul saw was at "noon" or at "midday." He saw no light in the darkness of night. Saul was still a sinner even though he had seen a light. After seeing the light, he asked, "Who art thou?" (Acts 9:5-6). He did not believe until after he had heard Jesus' reply. Jesus answered, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest..." (Acts 9:5). Faith results from hearing God's word (Romans 10:17).

Seeing a light as did Saul is no part of God's converting process. Saul was not saved until he obeyed the complete will of God (Hebrews 5:8-9; Romans 6:17-18; 6:3-4), Special experiences of grace, feelings, or other acts (imagined, or real) do not belong to God's law of pardon. Any so-called experiences, separate and apart from the word of God, are unscriptural (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12).

What Saul did to be Saved ?

We shall permit the Holy Bible to answer: "Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest..." "And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:5-6). Notice the word "must."

Saul was brought into the city of Damascus, where he "was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink" (Acts 9:9). Acts 9:11 tells us that Saul prayed; but he was not saved directly in answer to prayer. How do we know? Because Ananias was sent to tell Saul what to do to be saved. When Ananias came to Saul, what did he tell him to do?

Again, we shall permit the scriptures to answer: "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 9:10-19; 22:16).

Is a sinner saved by baptism only ? Indeed, he is not ! No gospel preacher ever preached such a doctrine! A sinner cannot be saved by "baptism only", any more than a sinner can be saved by "faith only", (John 3:16, 36, ASV,), or by "repentance only" (Acts 17:30-31), or by "confession of Jesus' name only" (Matthew 10:32-33). Rather, when the truth of God's word is summed up, a sinner is saved by faith, plus repentance, plus confession of Jesus' name, plus baptism.

Paul argues that he was baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27). Did Paul tell the truth regarding his own salvation? Salvation is in Christ (II Timothy 2:10); but he was baptized into Christ so that he might partake of that salvation. Yes, Paul was saved by faith (Romans 5:1-2); but he was, by faith, baptized into Christ, that he might be saved by faith. One cannot be "justified by faith" out of Christ. We urge our readers to follow Paul's example in becoming Christians today.

Jesus, The Son Of God

G.F. Raines

All penitent believers who have been baptized into Christ are sons of God (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27, A.S.V.);

but Jesus, having been miraculously begotten by the Holy Spirit and born of 'the virgin Mary (Matthew 1:18-25), was (and is), uniquely, the Son of God.

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: Some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it: And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:13-19).

If Jesus were not the Son of God, he was an imposter, because he said in many instances that he is the Son of God. If Jesus were an imposter, he was not a good man. It is universally admitted by those who deny the truth of the Bible that Jesus is a good man. It is grossly inconsistent to admit that Jesus is a good man and at the same time deny that he is the Son of God.

Jesus made the evidence that he is the Son of God absolutely impregnable forever by his glorious resurrection from the dead by the working of "the mighty power" of God. Paul says that God "declared (him) to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4).

Other proofs which declared Jesus to be the Son of God are (1) his matchless teaching (Matthew 7:28-29); (2) his miracles (John 3:2; 20:30-31); and (3) his sinless life (Hebrews 7:22-26).

The Ethiopian eunuch, desiring to be baptized into Christ, said to Philip, "See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou

mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:36-39).

Jesus says: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33).

Paul says: "...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10).

Girls Please Read This... (Boys Too!)

(Anonymous)

Once I was an innocent, beautiful, virtuous, religious, and ambitious girl. I went to school and had lofty ideas of doing big things in life. I had hoped some day to have a good husband and a happy home. I loved the church, I believed the Bible. I went to Sunday School. I was much loved and admired by my friends.

Then some, whom I believed to be my friends, made me believe that my happiness depended on my being smart; that only popularity and pleasure were ideal. Too, I was told that "everybody is doing it." After seeing the ads of cigarette companies, and watching my so-called friends indulging, I was influenced to smoke and I got a great kick from sitting in public places puffing smoke in others' faces."

Having lost my desire to go to church or to be with church

folks, I went with the crowds to dance halls, road houses, and cocktail rooms. I became brazen enough to call for a drink at the bar. I learned to gamble, play the horses, and had my late hour dates.

Now I have had my fling—I've been the modern girl, and I have had my personal liberty, but what has it gotten me? My life has been wasted. My virtue is gone. What do I have left? Here I sit, an old, ugly, bleary-eyed blotched-faced, cigarette smoking, half-crazed, drunken sot.

God's Wisdom In A Mystery

Nicky Faught

Paul wrote a great deal in I Corinthians concerning human wisdom and the foolishness of trusting in human wisdom. He stated his determination to not preach in words of human wisdom lest the faith of his listeners should rest on the wisdom of men (I Corinthians 2:4-5). He then gives a treatise on the wisdom of God that the "mature" of all ages will appreciate. The "mature" are those who humbly receive and trust in the wisdom of God, no matter how "foolish" it may seem to men.

Paul specifically speaks of God's "wisdom in a mystery." In Ephesians 3:6 he elaborates on the definition of this "mystery." There he says that it is that the Jews and Gentiles are fellow members of the body (the church) and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel (i.e., the death, burial, and resurrection—the crucifixion and gospel of I Corinthians 1 and I Corinthians 15:1-4).

Paul says several things about the wisdom of God.

(1) God's wisdom was not of the Jewish age (verse 6). The Jewish age was led by materialistic men of pride. The age itself was governed by a law of works that could not save, and was misused by these leaders.

(2) God's wisdom was hidden in this mystery (verse 7). We

defined "mystery" above. The word mystery does not denote the "weird," as it perhaps does today. Vine says that it refers to that which is "outside of the range of unassisted natural understanding, and can only be known by Divine revelation to those illumined by the Holy Spirit." Thus this mystery did not deal with secret or magical arts, etc. God's "mystery" of salvation was so unique that no one could know it, or discover it without God revealing it. Thus it was hidden to men in the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages. Read Ephesians 3:3-6, 10.

(3) God's wisdom was predestined (verse 7). God planned this mystery before the beginning. He planned to hide it, and then reveal it at the proper time (Galatians 5:4. See Ephesians 3:11; I Peter 1:19-20).

(4) God's wisdom was misunderstood by the Jewish Age rulers (verse 8). Obviously, if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord. They acted in ignorance (Acts 3:17); but they were not innocent.

(5) God's wisdom was prophesied (verse 9). Paul quotes from Isaiah. This quotation is often interpreted as a prediction of heaven. It seems to refer, however, to the same hidden truths concerning this mystery that Paul has referred to already. Thus, Isaiah was predicting these truths that would be revealed in the church.

(6) God's wisdom was revealed through the Holy Spirit (verse 10-11). (Read Ephesians 3:3) Since this mystery could not be understood by men on their own, it had to be revealed by God. It had to be an apocalypsis (Greek for uncovering).

(7) God's wisdom was revealed specifically to the apostles (verse 12). We must respect the role of the apostles in revealing this mystery to men. The apostles only had the inspiration of the Holy Spirit needed to reveal this mystery (John 16:13). The revelation would be made once, for all time (Jude 3).

(8) God's wisdom was revealed by apostles through verbal inspiration (verse 13). Many feel that the Bible has inspired parts. Some feel that the apostles' thoughts were inspired but that their words were not. Paul plainly states that the apostles were inspired

word for word. Every word is inspired. In Galatians 3:16 paul even made an argument based on the singular form of the word "seed." We should either take the entire Bible as inspired or that it is not inspired at all. Others feel that the original words have been altered so much by translations and copies that we cannot depend on the Bible. That is a myth! The Bible has been copied and translated many times; but we have hundreds of manuscripts, copies and segments of the writings of early Christians from which to develop our best translations today. They are not the exact originals, but they are surely very close!

(9) God's wisdom was understandable by those who would humbly accept this inspired message (verse 14-16). Calvinists used this passage to say that a man could not understand the spoken or written word unless the Spirit enters and prepares hearts first to be able to understand it. Thus a man needs (?) the direct intervention of the Spirit today just to be able to understand what he reads or hears from the word. Further study shows this to be false. The book of Acts gives several conversion examples. In each case people heard the word and then chose whether to believe or not. The word spoken was by direct inspiration; but there was no direct operation of the Holy Spirit apart from the word on the heart of the listener.

Thus we conclude Paul's treatise on the revealed wisdom of God. The mature today will accept this revelation and all the inspired teaching of the apostles as the divine standard in matters of religion. The immature will continue to trust in their own wisdom, even as those in Paul's day.

Unfeigned Love Of The Brethren

R.W. Gray

Peter leaves no doubt that the new birth is into a new relationship and "into" a new way of viewing one's peers. There will be in the purified life a manifestation that a radical change has occurred in the soul (John 3:3-6). "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth UNTO the unfeigned love of

the brethren, love one another with a pure heart fervently, having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth" (I Peter 1:21-23, ASV).

John makes it abundantly clear that absence of manifested love for one's brother bespeaks a soul yet benighted by carnality. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren, He that loveth not his brother abideth in death" (I John 3:14-15 KJV; cf. I Corinthians 3:1-3). The darkness yet in the soul reveals itself in hatred for one who is a member of the household of God (I John 1:6-7).

It is a sobering thought that one may submit to the primary requirements of the faith, seeking through this the purification promised, yet lose his soul at last because he could not dispel the envy and/or hatred for another of God's children. Our soul would be in no greater jeopardy if we murder our neighbour than it is when we seek to harm and/or destroy a brother through envy (I John 3:16-17). This sin is one therefore that must be avoided at all cost.

Love (agapao), whether for God or man, can be known only from the actions it prompts. Our love should have as its primary objects the God who first loved us (I John 4:10-11). Love for God must express itself first and foremost in implicit obedience to his commandments (John 14:15, 23). Love for brethren likewise expresses itself in action toward them (I John 3:17, 23). Love that is in word only is a feigned love that will not assure our hearts before God (I John 4:19-20). Because of the importance of this matter, the Holy Spirit has spoken often to the point of it. The so-called "love chapter" seeks to identify love's qualities with such clarity that the reader cannot be left in doubt as to whether it is manifested in his life. Paul says love suffers long, and is kind. Love does not envy, brag or boast. It does not manifest itself in a rude or arrogant manner, nor does it seek to have its own way. Love is not easily provoked, is not resentful of others, nor does it think "evil" of its object. It never rejoices in the wrong but always in the right. It bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. It is a never-failing quality (I Corinthians 13:4-8). And, O how it is needed among the

people' of God in these trying times. Do we possess it, brethren, by divine definition?

The inimitable Guy N. Woods, in his commentary regarding the fervency of the love we must manifest, observes, "Fervently", from ektenos, intensely, describes an emotion that is vivid and forceful, earnest and pointed...Children of God are not to love one another indifferently, or loosely, as an unstrung instrument, but with the full tension of heart-strings drawn out fully." (Wood's Commentary on First Peter, p. 50). A derivative of the same word is translated "earnestly" in Luke 22:44, in reference to Jesus' heart-rending plea for his very life in the garden of Gethsmene. How truly "fervent," then, is this unfeigned love to be!

God's love for us, our response to his love, and an unfeigned love for brethren rid the heart of all fear (I John 4:18). If you love me I do not fear that you will harm me. God loves me, and will do what is best for me at all times (Hebrews 13:5; Romans 8:28). Fear of God's wrath upon the disobedient is quelled in the knowledge that he has brought us from death unto life; and our love for one another guarantees his protection (Hebrews 12:28-29; I John 4:18; 3:14; Colossians 1:12-13 and 3:6).

A mistaken view of love is that it manifests a mushy sentimentality to the degree it ignores all sin and error in the life of others. Jesus, our example in love, warned, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten:..." (Revelation 3:19). Love is sometime manifested in the discipline of its object (Proverbs 13:24).

Love for the fallen will move one to "restore such an one in the spirit of meekness" (Galatians 6:1). Love for souls and for truth will move one to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Timothy 4:1-6). If you love your brother or sister who is in sin and unfaithfulness, you will "snatch them out of the fire; hating even the garments spotted by the flesh" (Jude 22-23).

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God...And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment" (I John 3:18-23).

The Secret Of Contentment

Levi Sides

"And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (I Timothy 6:8).

I am told that in a cemetery in England stands a grave marker with this inscription: "She died for want of things." Alongside that stone is another which reads: "He died trying to give them to her."

In a laughable yet tragic manner these epitaphs suggest the folly of living and working only for this world's goods. Whenever one is so enamored by earthly possessions that acquiring them becomes his primary goal, he encounters frustration and disappointment. This is true because man is a spiritual being and can never be content with material fortunes. The old Cracker Jack slogan, "The more you eat the more you want" reminds us of an important truth: People can easily develop an insatiable appetite for things, while neglecting to fulfill the real cravings of their hearts with the "bread of heaven." I have yet to meet an unbeliever who has amassed great wealth and doesn't want more. Riches simply do not satisfy, and the more a man gets the more he wants! "He that loveth Silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase" (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

The person who knows the Lord and whose affection is centered upon "things above" (Colossians 3:1) can find perfect contentment even with the bare necessities of life. That is why the great apostle Paul could write to Timothy, "...having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (I Timothy 6:8). That is a

rough recommendation. How do we translate this advice into action? Try these guidelines:

1. Don't over-estimate material possessions! Many conclude that material abundance is the abundant life. That is a false conclusion. Jesus said: "...A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). Our affluent age is prime proof of this truth. Perhaps no similar amount of space in the world can claim more combined wealth than Beverly Hills, California. Has prosperity provided contentment for its residents?

2. Don't fret over what you Don't have! One day Ahab pouted into his palace. Flinging himself across his bed, he turned his face to the wall and refused to eat. What was wrong? He wanted to buy a certain vineyard and the owner would not sell. Ahab was a wealthy man! But, all he could think about was this vineyard he did not have. Many are content with their property until they focus envious eyes on a choice possession of another.

3. Don't overlook what you DO have! Contrast what you are with what you might have been but for the grace of God. Stop looking at the things you don't have long enough to focus on the things you do have! Do you have a regular job, reasonable health, loving family, plenty to eat, sufficient clothing? The majority of earth's citizens can't claim such an impressive inventory.

What are your priorities in life? Have you discovered the secret of true contentment?

"We Are All Going To The Same Place Only We Are Traveling Different Roads"

Bill Dedmon

Many people have made the remark when engaged in a discussion about the church and the importance of being in the church.

"Everybody is going to the same place but we are not going on the same road." Generally speaking they will explain how you could go to Memphis or Panama City or Atlanta by a number of different roads.

I used to reject the idea but now I must confess that the afore mentioned statement is valid. We are all going to the same place but we are all travelling a different road. "As it is written, as I live saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (Romans 14:11) Paul said, "...we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ..." (II Corinthians 5:10).

It is true that we are all going to the same place! Judgment! We will all go to the same place but we will not all stay in the same place; "before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another..." (Matthew 25:32). A person can travel any road he chooses, in fact the broad road is so broad that it will accommodate all philosophies of life and one following the broad road will end up at the judgment. The narrow road is limited to only those things taught in God's word. We must obey the will of God and in so doing we will hear: "Well done, good and faithful servant..."

The Hardening Of Pharaoh's Heart

John L. Wheeler

To the Romans, Paul said: "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" (Romans 9 : 15-19).

The context deals with Paul's answer to the Jews who thought that God would be unfair to cut them off and give salvation to the Gentiles. He has shown that the selection of Israel in the first place was entirely up to the will of God. Not all the seed of Abraham was chosen. If God had the right to choose them in the first place, did not he have the right to cut them off, especially since they were chosen without condition, and they were cut off because of their unbelief?

He goes further in his argument concerning the reasons for their rejection, citing Pharoah as an example. God told Pharoah, "And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth. As yet exaltest thou thyself against my people, that thou wilt not let them go?" (Exodus 9: 16-17). God will harden whom he will (Romans 9: 18). It is clear that God hardened the heart of Pharoah. At the same time, we see that Pharoah exalted himself against God and his people.

You remember that Moses had been sent back into Egypt to lead God's people out of Egyptian bondage. When God first called Moses at the burning bush, he said, "And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand" (Exodus 3:19). Later, he said, "And I will harden Pharoah's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 7:3). Then after Aaron's rod had been turned to a serpent and had swallowed the serpents of the magicians, he hardened Pharoah's heart (Exodus 7:13). Several times the record says that God hardened the heart of Pharoah.

But we also read several times that Pharoah hardened his own heart. "But when Pharoah saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had" (Exodus 8:15). Then, "And Pharoah hardened his heart at this time also, neither would he let the people go" (Exodus 8:32). The Bible says that God hardened the heart of Pharoah; it says also that Pharoah hardened his own heart. Now, which is true? The fact is: both are true. God hardened the heart of Pharoah; Pharoah hardened his

own heart. You see, God never took away Pharoah's ability to choose. He did not take away the will of Pharoah.

As we look at the facts in the case, we see the explanation of the hardening of Pharoah's heart. Here was the ruler of the greatest nation on earth at the time. He had some two-and-one-half million—or may be double that many—slaves who were Israelites. They were very profitable in the building scheme of Pharoah. Further, it would be a political liability to let them go, for they might join his enemies. Three things were foremost in the mind of Pharoah regarding Israel; power, profit, and pride. There is no way that he would part with these slaves by his own choice. He had no mercy, nor love for mankind. He was hard and brutal, and was concerned only with his own position in the world. How would it look to other nations if he just agreed to let this multitude of slaves go free? The very demand of God that he let them go was contrary to his own best interest as he saw it. It was by and with this demand that GOD hardened his heart.

When Pharoah heard God's demand to let the people of Israel go free, he made his choice. So HE hardened his own heart. He still has his own will, and he used it. It was not until he saw resistance as hopeless that he agreed to let them go. Even agreed to let them go. Even then, he changed his mind, and tried to bring them back.

God still hardens men's hearts today in the same way. Some so love the world and its pleasures that any demand to give them up results in the hardening of the heart. God does it by making the demand. Men harden their own hearts by rejecting God's will—just as the Pharaoh did, and now as the Jews have done.

We Can Not Live By Success Alone

Edsel Burleson

J.H. Jowett said: "We live by disappointment as well as by attainment. The cloudless skies make a Sahara. It is the strangely-

mingled weather with its dullness and cold, searching, mists and rain which makes our hillsides and valleys green with pleasant land. So in life, we cannot live by success alone. Success alone would make us hard and dry."

The following information appeared in the "20th Century Christian" several years ago.

When Abraham Lincoln was a young man, he ran for the Legislature in Illinois and was badly swamped.

He next entered business, failed, and spent seventeen years of his life paying up debts of a worthless partner.

He was in love with a beautiful young woman, to whom he became engaged—then she died.

He then tried to get an appointment to the U.S. Land Office, but failed.

Entering politics again, he ran for Congress and was badly defeated.

In 1856, he was defeated by Douglas.

One failure after another—bad failures—great setbacks. In face of all this, he eventually became one of the country's greatest men!

Yet, how easily many of us become discouraged. If things take a turn we did not anticipate, we are prone to give up quickly. Paul assured the Corinthians, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Corinthians 10:13).

We must accept the fact that "into each life some rain must fall," but realize also that "every cloud has a silver lining." The Roman Christians were told, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

False Optimism

Ancil Jenkins

"Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant" (Isaiah 56:12).

Doesn't this sound like some people today? Don't you know people who seem to get their greatest pleasure from having a "good time?" Our culture has caused our vocabulary to be stretched to include such words as "happy hour." "Party" once was something one HAD: now it is something one DOES!

The context of Isaiah 56:12 indicates the prophet was speaking to people who were just like so many today. They were wilfully ignorant (II Peter 3:5, K.J.V.) of what lay ahead of them. Just as the people of Noah's day (Matthew 24:37-39), they were eating, drinking, and partying up to the time of their destruction. God's warnings against them were clear; yet it never entered their mind that the world would ever be any different than it was. They felt it could only be better.

Is this not the reason men today do not take spiritual matters seriously? Is this why life (to some) is an endless series of "good" (?) times? Even God's children often forget that life is more than just food and drink? (Matthew 6:25).

Peter reminds us of those who perished in the flood. They failed to heed the warning of Noah because they felt that life would never be any different. "... for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Yet, this was not true; for the day came that God broke up the fountains of the deep and caused rain to fall from heaven. All living creatures that breathed were drowned in the flood (II Peter 3:3-7).

"The day of the Lord will come" (II Peter 3:10)! God has reserved our world for destruction. We know not the day or hour (Mark 13:32), but we should not delude ourselves by thinking that tomorrow will be just like today.

The fact that God has not yet intervened into our world and

destroyed it, is no source of comfort. Just because he has been longsuffering does not mean that we can bring on the beer and wine to "celebrate!"

God's patience is not a cause of celebration. It should encourage us to soberness and reflection (I Thessalonians 5:6). Time will not always be the same—let us be ready. Let us watch and be ready!

"What Is A Christian . . . In The World's Eyes?"

Douglas W. Milligan

The Lord's church has often been accused of being "nit-picky" and "narrow-minded." Many in the world think we have been too limited in our definition of who is, or not, a Christian. Recently some brethren have questioned our previous stand in this highly-sensitive area. To simplify the issue for the purposes of this article, please allow the following definition:

A Christian is one who has "been saved by grace through faith," has been "born again of water and of the Spirit," and who, because of that obedient response to his faith, belongs to Christ (Ephesians 2:8; John 3:3, 5; Romans 6:3-6, 16-18).

On this definition, surely, we can agree. This is recognized as a test of Christianity. But what does the world look for in a person who professes Christianity? What is a Christian . . . in the world's eyes?

In John 13:34-35 Jesus said the world would expect Christians to love one another. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Christians are supposed to love one another in such a way that people in the world can "see" their love. I recently overheard

a denominational member telling about her congregation—how it had grown from seven members to several thousand in just a few short years. She told of the love and care that went into nurturing new members—how they were visited and made to feel at home. She explained that they were “assigned” to various couples of the same age and interests for the space of an entire year until they were grounded; and then they themselves were put to work nurturing other new members. Everyone was involved and felt loved and appreciated. This lady exuded enthusiasm! She made one wish to be a part of such a loving group!

Beloved brethren, this is what the world is looking for in Christianity. No, this denominational group is not “true to the old paths.” No, they have not rejected the doctrines and commandments of men in favor of pure New Testament Christianity. But, brethren, they do love one another! Let us examine ourselves “whether we be in the faith.” Can we say that we, as a whole, love one another this way? If so, then “what meaneth the bleating of the sheep?” Why do churches “label” one another, and refuse to support each other’s efforts? Why not sit down and reason together? Why are so many articles increasingly critical and harsh? Beloved, let us “love one another with a pure heart, fervently!” “Let all your things be done with charity!” Let us “with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavour to keep the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace” (I Peter 1:22; I Corinthians 16:13; Ephesians 4:2-3).

Brethren, it is vitally important to teach “doctrinal truths” to all men. We must “contend earnestly for the faith.” It is imperative that we preach the PURE gospel to all men! But beloved, they will never listen to a word we say if they cannot see love demonstrated in our lives. Brethren, let us strive to develop the kind of love that will cause men to be drawn to the doctrine of Christ as we preach it. May we let the light of God’s love shine through each of us.



Can We Be Sure That "Sunday" Is The "First Day" Of The Week?

Bob Prichard

The church began on the day of Pentecost, which always fell on "first day of the week" (Leviticus 23:15-16). The universal practice of the New Testament church was to meet on the first day of the week. Paul told the Corinthians, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him" (I Corinthians 16:2). Paul waited seven days at Troas, so that he might join with the Christians there to worship. "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples were come together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow" (Acts 20:7).

But is it possible that the real first day of the week has been lost as the calendar has been changed over the years? Even though there have been some changes of the calendar, there have been no changes of the days of the week since the first century. The calendar in use in the first century Roman empire was the Julian calendar, established about 46 B.C. by the Roman Emperor Julius Caesar. This calendar, used for the next fifteen centuries, was an improvement over previous calendars, but was not accurate, because it assumed that the solar year is exactly 365½ days, whereas it is actually about eleven minutes shorter. Although this seems small, it made a difference as it accumulates over a long time.

Calendar reform came in 1582 under the authority of Pope Gregory XIII, who issued the calendar we now use. The Gregorian calendar was a refinement of the Julian calendar. It did nothing to change the days of the week. The inaccuracy of the Julian calendar had caused an error of ten days to accumulate. The vernal equinox, the first day of spring had been on March 21 in the year 325 when the council of Nicaea met; but by 1582 the vernal equinox was falling on March 11. To remedy this situation, Pope Gregory decreed that in the year 1582 the fifth day of October would not be called the fifth, but would instead be the fifteenth. So the day after

Thursday, October 4, was not Friday, October 5, but instead was Friday, October 15. Ten days were removed from the calendar, but there was absolutely no change in the seven-day regularity of the week.

This change was resisted in many countries because of opposition to the papacy. England and its colonies did not make the change until 1752, when parliament decreed that the day following Wednesday September 2 would be called not the third, but Thursday September 14. Although certain days of the calendar were skipped, there was no change at all in the seven-day cycle of the week. Thus we can be confident that our day Sunday truly is the "first day of the week," the day God has authorized for worship under the New Testament (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

What The Church Of Christ Is

The church of Christ is a group of men and women who have been converted to Christ. The conversion began with a complete change of heart from the love and practice of sin to submission to the law of God. This change of heart and purpose was brought about by the Holy Spirit operating through the one means the Bible tells about, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17).

Those in the churches of Christ were led to believe in Christ by the preaching of the gospel of Christ, for "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Without this faith, men and women cannot approach God for salvation, for "without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

This faith leads to a sorrow for sin, a regret that is sincere and unfeigned, and this godly sorrow works repentance (II Cor. 7:10). Without genuine repentance, we cannot be saved, for Jesus

said, "I tell you, Nay, Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

The church of Christ gladly confesses that it believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of the living God, and before one is scripturally baptized he makes that confession (Acts 8:36-38). This confession is in order to salvation (Romans 10:10).

The church of Christ is composed of men and women who have been baptized into Jesus Christ (Romans 6:3). Baptism is for the remission of sins, we are plainly told in Acts 2:38, and it is in this act that one becomes a member of that one body over which Jesus is head "and of which he is the Savior (I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 5:23).

The church of Christ today assembles on the first day of the week to break bread just as it did in New Testament days. "Upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them" (Acts 20:7). This is done in tender remembrance of His death for us (I Cor. 11:24, 25, and thus we show forth the Lord's death until, He comes.

Upon the first day of the week we contribute, "lay by in store" of our money according to our prosperity for carrying the "word of truth" to the world, and for caring for the poor and needy.

The public worship of the church of Christ consists of congregational singing of gospel hymns, preaching the gospel, praying, the Lord's Supper and contributing in sacrifice to the Lord.

The church of Christ bears her own burdens, and does not ask people who are not members of the church to pay her obligation, or to support the church. That obligation rests upon the members only.

When you visit in the church of Christ services, you have no obligation whatever except to respectfully hear the word of God.

You will find worship after the New Testament pattern, simple and sincere. Churches of Christ recognize no creed but Christ, have no discipline or rules but the inspired word of God. Members wear no name but the divinely given name, "Christian." And you will find that you have the very greatest welcome to all the services, too.