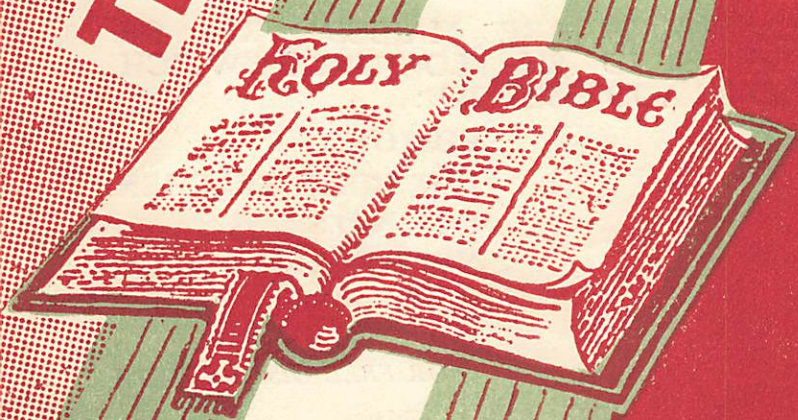


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A Look At Dowry

In the long ago the Apostle Paul had asked the question : "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (1 Corinthians 5 : 6). That principle is still true. Even after becoming a follower of Christ, the Christian lives with other people of the world who are there to influence him. However, as a Christian one need to remember the exhortation : "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12 : 2). Expecting and demanding dowry is one of the evil practices being practiced in most parts of our country and in some other parts of the world. This social evil has given birth to a variety of wickedness, such as, bride-burning, wife-beating, harassment and extortion, etc. Most marriages are reduced only to a business contract, where money plays a decisive role. The marriage takes place only if certain amount of money or things are assured to be given. But in most cases it doesn't stop there, the young bride is expected to bring cash amount or expensive things from her parents whenever she visits them after the wedding. In some instances the young girl is compelled to visit her parents frequently for bringing a certain amount of money to her husband on one pretext or another. In cases where the parents of the

girl can't afford to give any more, then the husband and the in-laws begin to torture the young woman in various ways. She is denied food, proper sleep, harassed, beaten, bruised and driven to commit suicide, so that the husband could remarry again. How tragic and shameful all of this sounds. Yet such cases are growing in our civilised society day by day.

The evil practice of dowry is prevalent among rich and poor alike. The root cause of this widespread evil is covetousness, a desire to get rich, and that leads to all kinds of problems. The Bible teaches: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothings, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1 Timothy 6 : 7-10). Then Christ warned by saying: "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." (Luke 12 : 15). According to 1 Corinthians 6 : 10 a covetous person will not enter the kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul said, therefore, that covetousness should not even be named among Christians. (Ephesians 5 : 3). A Christian should not be a covetous person. He should learn to do to others what he would desire others to do to him, as Christ taught in Matthew 7 : 12.

The purpose of marriage should not be to get rich, but to establish a home and a family. In marriage two persons of opposite sex come together to love each other and to care for one another and to share the life together. When God created Adam in the beginning. He saw that it was not good for Adam to live alone. The Bible says, "And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. The rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man, And Adam said : this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and

mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." (Genesis 2 : 21-24). This is how God instituted the first marriage by bringing together two persons of opposite sex, in the garden of Eden, for the purpose of living and sharing the life together. There was no dowry involved, the basis of marriage was love, and that's the way it ought to be even today in every marriage.

In most marriages the curse of dowry plays its ugly roll where parents are involved in arranging the marriage. This is not to say that arranging marriages is bad. But in most such cases parents of the boy go about in arranging the marriage in a crafty business like manner. They bargain, openly demand costly things and cash, and force the opposite side to agree to give so much. They show no concern whether the parents of the girl, who is going to be the dear wife of their own son, would be able to afford to give what they ask. Imagine, here are two families, they are going to come near in a new relationship, but there is no love and concern, for the other. How sad.

Again, for almost all dowry related suicides and killings parents of the husbands are responsible. In most cases they are the ones who encourage and instigate the husband of the newly married woman to punish her for bringing insufficient dowry. I have people to tell me where the husband has demanded a new house, or money to start a new business, even from poor inlaws, all at the behest of his parents. Instead of helping the new couple to love each other, to adjust and settle together in the new life, they, the parents, sow the seeds of discord and create strife and thus become the main cause in the murder of the daughter in law, or in the separation of the couple, in many cases. God made both man and woman. He instituted the order of marriage. When two persons of opposite sex come together in marriage, they are no longer separated from one another but become one flesh, and whoever causes them to be separated sins against God.

Christ very plainly taught on this subject when He said, "Have you not read that He Who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this

reason a man shall leave his mother and father and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19 : 4-6).

There is nothing wrong where the parents of the girl willingly want to give things or even money to their dear daughter who has lived with them for so many years and now would be establishing a new home of her own. This should be natural. Such things should therefore be accepted as gifts given out of love. But there should be no coercion, asking, bargaining and compelling involved. No demands should be made from either sides out of covetousness. The Bible says, "Marriage is honorable among all. (Hebrews 13 : 4). Let us respect God's word. The beautiful thing is that that there will be no fightings and no killings and no divorces in marriages if God's principles, as mentioned in His Bible, are followed by all people.

Questions often Asked about Baptism

J.C. Choate

People always have questions about baptism. Sometimes they do not ask for information, but to make some point. Regardless, we'll answer some of the most often asked questions about baptism, based on what the Bible teaches.

Why was Christ baptized? He was the Son of God and he had no sin. John felt this way about baptizing him, but Christ said, "Suffer it to be so now : for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matthew 3 : 15). With this explanation, John baptized him. What if Christ had not been baptized? Then people would have reasoned that since Christ was not baptized, then why should they be baptized? So with his baptism, he destroyed that potential argument.

How was Christ baptized? Was it by sprinkling, pouring

water over his head, or by immersion? As we all know, most motion pictures that are made portraying the baptism of Christ shows John pouring some water over his head. It is odd that they would do this, because in doing so they are going against the facts as set forth in the scriptures. Of course, they are giving in to the pressures of the traditions of men. The Apostle John said that John, the Baptist, was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim because there was much water. (John 3 : 22, 23). At the time Christ was baptized John was baptizing in the Jordan. Then both Matthew and Mark recorded that after Christ was baptized that he straightway came up out of the water. But why was he in the water, and especially in a river, if John was going to do nothing more than sprinkle some water on his head or pour some water over his head. That could have been done most anywhere. But they were in the Jordan River where there was enough water for John to immerse or bury Christ in the water. That is the meaning of baptism anyway, that is, immersion or burial. Furthermore, it was done in literal water. When the man from Ethiopia was baptized, as stated in Acts 8 : 26-39, we are told that Philip and the Eunuch both went down into the water and then he baptized him. After that it specifically says that they both came up out of the water. So there is no doubt in either case as to what happened. Anyone that would argue with that would argue with his shadow.

If it is necessary for one to be baptized, i.e., to be saved, then why did Christ not say in Mark 16 : 16 that he that believeth not and is baptized not shall be damned? For the simple reason that if one does not believe then naturally he is not going to be baptized. He was saying in Mark 16 : 16 that if one wants to be saved then he must believe and be baptized, but if one wants to be lost then it is not even necessary to believe. Regardless of what he said about being damned, he said that one must believe and be baptized to be saved. Now, are you prepared to risk your soul's salvation by not doing that? If you are doing that kind of reasoning, then probably you are a hopeless case anyway.

How can there be any salvation in water? No one said that water has any saving power. It is not the water that saves. Christ is the one that saves, but he saves only those that obey his

commands, and one of the commands he has given is that one must be baptized, or buried in water. We often use the example of Noah and his obedience. Water did not save him but he was saved by water. What is the difference? The difference is that water was not the saviour, but God was the saviour, and God saved Noah when he obeyed his commands, built an ark, and went in along with the specified animals. While God used the water to destroy the wicked, he used water to bear up the ark so that Noah and all that were in the ark might be saved. What if Noah had argued with God that water couldn't save him and his family, and had refused to build the ark? Then they could not have been saved. And what about the person who argues today that water cannot save, and refuses to obey the command to be baptized? Then he cannot be saved.

Does baptism only save? While Peter said that baptism saves, according to I Peter 3 : 21, he does not say that baptism only saves. God has required that man do a number of things in order to be saved, and baptism is only one of them. Not any one thing saves, but a combination of things. For instance, faith only does not save, repentance only does not save, confessing Christ only does not save, and baptism only does not save. But when one obeys all of those commands, as the Lord has specified, then his obedience to them saves him. The problem is that man gets to talking about this command or that command, gets confused, and confuses others about it. But if you will go through the book of Acts, and read of the different cases of conversion, and see what they did in each case, then I think you will see how all of these commands were obeyed, and the result was that they were saved, were added to the church, and entered Christ to be children of God.

Can one be saved without baptism? If so, one can be saved without obeying this command. If so, then one can be saved outside of Christ and his church. (Mark 16 : 16; Romans 6 : 3, 4; Galatians 3 : 26, 27; II Corinthians 5 : 17; I Corinthians 12 : 13). Now do you think that is possible?

Can't one be born again without being baptized? Actually, being born again results from being baptized. In John 3 : 3-5 Christ says that one must be born of water and of the Spirit. How

can one be born of water without being baptized? When one is baptized then he is buried in water, and on coming up out of the water, then there is the coming forth, or a birth taking place, or that of being born again, and becoming a new creature. (Romans 6 : 3, 4; Colossians 2 : 12). Paul says one enters Christ at the time when he is baptized, and that if one is in Christ that he is a new creature. (2 Corinthians 5 : 17).

Can one be baptized twice or be re-baptized? One may be immersed any number of times, but there is one scriptural baptism. (Ephesians 4 : 4-6). The one baptism is an immersion in water, for the remission of sins, to put one into Christ and into his church, in obedience to the Lord's command, and by his authority. (Romans 6 : 3-4; Acts 8 : 26-39; Acts 2 : 38; Galatians 3 : 26-27; 1 Corinthians 12 : 13; Matthew 28 : 19-20). Therefore, there is no such thing as being baptized twice or being re-baptized. Man uses that kind of language but the scriptures do not. Now if one is not sure that he has been scripturally baptized, and he is immersed again, then if the first immersion was scriptural, then this one was not baptism, but immersion only. But if the first immersion was not scriptural, then it was not baptism, but just an immersion in the water, but since this one is according to God's will, then it is the one baptism,

When must one be baptized? He must be old enough to believe in God, old enough to repent of HIS sins, old enough to confess WITH HIS MOUTH that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and old enough to be immersed in water for the remission of HIS sins. (Hebrews 11 : 6; Acts 17 : 30; Matthew 10 : 32; Romans 10 : 10; Acts 2 : 38). Again, the individual desiring to be saved must do that. No one can do that for him.

What if one dies without being baptized? We are dealing with the living, and the Lord says that each accountable being must believe and be baptized to be saved. (Mark 16 : 16). The Lord will deal with the dead at the judgment, and we have every reason to believe that he will be a righteous judge. As for us, we cannot take anyone to heaven and neither can we send anyone to hell. Neither should we think that the Lord will save us in spite of the fact that we are not baptized on the basis that a friend or relative died without being baptized. The Lord will deal with

him, but now you must deal with the Lord and he has commanded you to believe and be baptized to be saved.

Our prayer is that by answering some of these questions about baptism that you have been helped. If we will leave baptism in the Bible and merely do as the Lord has commanded, then there will be no problem. The problem comes when man begins to change the Lord's teaching on this subject, and other matters, and then begins to tell you what you can do or what you don't have to do. Please do not be deceived, but hear the Lord and do what he says. Only then can you be right, and only then can you be saved.

A Convict Wrestles with God's Amazing Grace

Joe Moran

Hi! I'm Joe Moran, and I hope and pray that my message will help you and all who hear it.

I abducted a physician from his home in 1983. Later I was arrested, convicted, and received a twenty-year prison sentence.

But my life of crime began many years prior to that incident. I was born and reared in a poor family. I got involved in crime at an early age. First, I started stealing food for the family because no one would help us. Many mornings we ate cornmeal gravy and cornbread for breakfast.

My childhood was very rough. My father was an alcoholic. My mother was a good woman who believed in God, but it seemed that the harder she tried to do right the worse things became. I was constantly in and out of juvenile court and reform schools. That is why I never had time for God. I was too busy "doing things." From 1957 to 1983, I was arrested 65 times on charges ranging from petty larceny, burglary, robbery, assault, to murder and possession of drugs, fraud, bad checks, and aggravated kidnapping.

But I am a changed man today ! I am not the same person I was when I was placed in jail in 1983. While locked behind bars, I took a very serious inventory of my life. I didn't like what I discovered because I didn't like what I had been. There are no windows in the jail. I had the feeling of being locked in a submarine under water. Sometimes those conditions will prompt an individual to look at the world inside himself.

So here I was (and still am at this writing) in jail, in Gallatin, Tennessee, charged with aggravated kidnapping, robbery and auto larceny. Being a dope addict, I was also behind bars with a \$ 500.00-a-day "monkey" on my back, knowing I had no way of getting any drugs. The first ten days were like a hell on earth for me. With tormenting sensations. I was hot one minute and cold the next. My bones ached so bad that I wished I could die.

On Sunday I looked out my cell door and at the far end of the corridor in my cell block I saw two men from the free world conducting a worship service with my fellow inmates. Mr. James Henry was leading singing and Mr. Burnice Westbrooks, a minister, was preaching. I was hurting so bad that I could hardly stand it. One of the songs they were singing was :

"Amazing grace ! how sweet the sound !

That saved a wretch like me !

I once was lost, but now I'm found;

Was blind, but now I see."

I reasoned within myself, "Could those thoughts be applicable to me ? " Then I heard the minister preach that God loves us—regardless of how big, or small, our sins may seem to us. He said that even if you are locked up physically you can be free spiritually, because Jesus had said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8 : 32). He lovingly pointed out that Jesus died on the cross, rose from the dead, ascended back to heaven and established his church that we read about in the Bible. With kindness he emphasized from the scriptures that if we want to go to heaven, we need to believe, repent of our sins, confess Christ as God's Son, be baptized for the forgiveness of our sins, and live a faithful

Christian life. With those thoughts in my mind, this convict began to wrestle with God's amazing grace.

For several weeks I listened and observed those worship services from a distance at the other end of the corridor in my cell block. I would say to myself, "That's not for me. Here I am a large: 300 pound! man; I can't let them know that I want to be up there in those worship services." I was afraid of what others might say to me. So I stayed in my cell for about four months before attending any of the worship services with the group.

Finally, when I did attend the worship service being conducted in my cell block, the group was singing, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." They also sang about "Jesus and The Old Rugged Cross," and how "The Way Of The Cross Leads Home". I sat there and I knew I was lost! I also knew that those songs and the gospel message fit me. I was lost—on the wrong side of the cross—in darkness—realizing that it could be possible for me to be on the other side of the cross, in the light, and enjoy the salvation paid for by God's dear Son.

The more I listened to the gospel the more I wanted to hear and study. I was searching; but secretly I didn't want anyone to know it. Eventually, however, I started attending the worship services in my cell block every Sunday. I sang with the other inmates, meditated on the prayers, and searched the scriptures. Since the winter of 1983 until the writing of this true story, I have completed two one-year Bible correspondence courses and received certificates of completion for this work. One course was from the Hartsville Pike Church of Christ; the other, from the Madison Church of Christ.

I am glad I chose to do those studies. Through those lessons, and the Sunday worship services in my cell block, the gospel touched my heart and opened the way for Jesus and his truth to come through. Through my love for the Lord and my obedient response to his gospel, he has forgiven me. I have found myself, and the Friend of life. As a new person in Christ (1 Corinthians 5: 17), I have found salvation and peace of mind.

I hasten to add, however, that my spiritual new birth into

Christ and his church did not happen without a lot of inner struggles. You gathered, no doubt, from this brief sketch of my life that I was not a religious-minded person. But I'm thankful that through a diligent study of the gospel, my heart was softened toward Jesus. The proverbial "beam" or "log" was moved from my eyes so that I can see the way I was living was wrong. I recognized I was lost ! I needed a Savior !

I want to thank those who have taken an interest in my well-being for being patient with me. It has taken a long time for me to step forward and start aiming my life in the right direction. For so many years I was a very hard-hearted person. Regarding my conversion, I just wanted to be sure that when I made a decision to live for Christ that it would be the right one for God's sake and mine.

I am very remorseful for the wrongs I have done. I hope the physician I wronged will find it in his heart to forgive me for my actions against him. I thank God he wasn't seriously hurt. I never intended for him to be hurt.

So many have encouraged me to live right. I appreciate everything everyone has done for me ! I ask Christians everywhere to pray for me that I may remain strong in Christ.

I want to live God's way now. My attitude is expressed in the title of the song, "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow." Thankful that I am no longer a junkie, I have put my old ways behind me, and a new creature through Christ has emerged. I am glad that I was arrested :—for, like the prodigal son, I have found myself. I know who I am and what I want to do with my life. I want to help other people. One of my goals is to conduct seminars in churches and schools for parents and young people on the dangers of drugs, and the pitfalls of crime.

The most joyous day of my life was February 13, 1986 when I walked the last mile of the way and was baptized into Christ. Please don't procrastinate as I did. Don't put Christ off—put him on. Wear him everywhere you go. Let him be your shield against all evil, your King of kings, your Lord of lords and your hope of salvation. With Jesus Christ you won't ever have to walk alone !

A Zeal For God

Dan Winkler

INTRODUCTION

"Zeal" is defined as "eager interest and enthusiasm" **Webster's New World Dictionary**, p. 1698). The New Testament word translated "zeal" means "to burn with zeal . . . to be heated or to boil" (Joseph Henry Thayer, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**, p. 271). The Bible defines zeal as a state of being consumed by something (John 2 : 17; Cf. Ps. 119 : 139, KJV).

Christianity is to be a life of zeal for God (Titus 2 : 14). Christians are to be zealous of that which is good (I Peter 3 : 13 ASV). The commands to be good, be pure, or be right, are easily understood. Yet, the same Bible teaches man to be zealous. Man is to be zealous "of that which is good." To obey God one must do what he says, as he says, for the reason(s) he says. Therefore, man's zeal must be for that which is good !

As with any work that places demands on lifestyle and time, the Lord's work [the most important work of all] is performed by two types of individuals. (1) There are those who are interested and motivated to support the Lord's work. (2). There are also those who are indifferent and melancholy when it comes to the Lord's work. Each Christian should scrutinize his own heart and life with the question, "Which of these two attitudes do I possess ? "

From Paul's words in Romans 10 : 1-3 consider three lessons relative to zeal that will serve to encourage an excited and energetic support of the Lord's good work.

I. ZEAL IS READILY SEEN

Like the sun, zeal is self-evident. Man does not have to question the sun's presence when he awakens in the morning. The light of day gives evidence of its existence. Even so, when one is fanatically consumed by a purpose, when he is eaten alive with zeal, such will be very apparent,

(1) Consider some examples of zeal's self-evident nature. Paul said of his kinsmen in the flesh. "I bear witness that they have a zeal" (Romans 10 : 2). Paul's kinsmen provided him with evidence of their fervor (Cf. Acts 21 : 20; Galatians 4 : 17). There is also the example of Jesus (John 2 : 13-17). When did his disciples remember the Messianic prophecy, "Zeal for my Father's house hath eaten me up"? After he had cleansed the temple. He provided them with evidence of his fervor. They saw hands of determination weave a scourge of cords. They saw arms of justice sling that scourge of wrath and drive out livestock that otherwise littered the house of God They saw shoulders of indignation overturn the tables of selfish mercenaries taking advantage of the poor. They heard the voice of divine vengeance cry. "Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise."

(2) Zeal should be an apparent factor of the Christian's life. Christians are to present their bodies as "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God," proving "what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12 : 1-2). In doing so, they will be diligent, rather than slothful, "fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Romans 12 : 11). Others should be able to recognize the Christian's zeal for God by the lively jaunt of his march, the radiant smile of his countenance, and the fervor in heart that drives him to obey and serve God regardless of the cost or consequences. Like Jehu said to Jehonadab the Christian should be able to say with others, "Come with me, and see my zeal for Jehovah" (II Kings 10 : 16).

II. ZEAL IS CHANNELED

Like electricity, zeal follows a channel. Electricity follows conductors such as wire or cable from a point of origin to a given destiny. Even so, zeal flows from the origin of one's heart down given channels of interest. Zeal is never presented in scripture as inactive and neutral. It is always doing something for, to, or against something or someone !

(1) Consider some examples of zeal being channeled. Again, Paul said of his kinsmen, "They have a zeal 'for God' " (Romans 10 : 2). One could also consider the examples of Jehovah

(Isaiah 9 : 7; 37 : 32; 59 : 17; Ezekiel 5 : 13), Jesus (John 2 : 17), Phinehas (Numbers 25 : 11, 13 KJV). Saul (II Samuel 21 : 2), and Paul (Acts 22 : 3; Galatians 1 : 14; Philippians 3 : 6) to see that zeal is channeled. It has been said that a "fanatic is one that cannot change his mind and will not change the subject." Such a statement indicates the fact that zeal is channeled.

(2) Zeal must be channeled down proper avenues in the Christian's life. There are improper channels of zeal which may consume the Christian's life—such as, athletics, vocations, recreational pursuits, and the traditions of men. Though nothing is inherently wrong with properly exercising one's self in these given areas, they must not be the main channel down which the Christian's zeal flows. They must not be the cornerstone of the Christian's priorities, God's people are to be zealous of "good works" (Titus 2 : 14; I Peter 3 : 13 ASV). Some of the good works that should act as the conductors of zeal in the life of a Christian would be the edification of his brethren (I Corinthians 14 : 12), the support of sound gospel preaching (II Corinthians 7 : 7), sacrificial giving (II Corinthians 9 : 2; Cf. 8 : 1-5), serving the Lord (Romans 12 : 11), prayer (James 5 : 16), and brotherly love (I Peter 1 : 22). All have experienced the flame of adrenalin rushing through their veins; it has simply been channeled in different directions. Christians must learn to channel their fervor down paths of righteousness and efforts of good works.

III. ZEAL MUST BE GOVERNED PROPERLY

Knowledge without zeal is a living corpse! On the other hand, zeal without proper knowledge is a volcanic glacier erupting in one sporadic belch after another, covering the church under the lava bed of confusion, instability, and a righteousness of man rather than God. Zeal for God must be governed by God.

(1) Consider some examples of this principle. The zeal of Paul's kinsmen was "not according to knowledge" because "being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10 : 2-3). Note : their zeal was not according to knowledge because it was governed by "their own" standard rather than God's. Though Paul was once a part of the same

disposition (Galatians 1 : 13-14, 22-24), after his conversion he wished only to be found in Christ. He wrote, "I count all things to be loss . . . that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of mine own even that which is in the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God through faith" (Philippians 3 : 8-9). His desire was to live by the righteousness of God. Before doing so, like his brethren, his zeal was not according to knowledge (Cf. Acts 26 : 9).

(2) **Zeal in the Christian's life must also be governed by the will of God.** Tragically, there are those who have stirred up contention and confusion among God's people out of a zeal not according to knowledge. For example, there are some who measure the faithfulness of others by the standard of their own special interest [a pet project, a favorite command, etc.], to the neglect of other matters equally important. Then too, there are those who measure the faithfulness of others by their own "opinionated" study. In addition, there are those who burn like a candle at both ends only to phase out into the oblivion of indifference. There are also those who deem themselves zealous because they attend worship services regularly and know enough Bible to quote a verse or two but, though such is commendable, they never lift a finger in cooperation with and support of all other "good works." Indeed, zeal for God must be governed by God !

CONCLUSION

In his little workshop of Cremona, Italy, Antonio Stradivari applied the art of making violins. Prior to his death on December 18, 1737, he laboured under a principle that has remained valid for more than two hundred years : "Other men will make other violins, but no man shall make a better one." Such fervor !

Isaiah's prayer to God voices an excellent question to ponder. "Where are thy zeal and thy mighty acts?" (Isaiah 63 : 15). The epitaph on a tombstone reads : "Here rests a man who never rested here." In keeping with a "zeal for God" according to knowledge, may such come to be said for each member in the church of the Lord.

Jesus' Prayer for Unity (John 17 : 11, 20-23)

Thomas W. Weaver

As one looks at the division in the religious world of today and the lack of concern about it, he might be made to believe that such division is pleasing to the Lord. If it is, how does one account for Jesus' earnest prayer for unity as recorded in John 17 : 11, 20-23 ?

Let us give serious consideration to this prayer as we are guided by six pertinent questions : (1) Does Jesus want unity ? (2) To what degree does he want believers to be one ? (3) Is this unity possible ? (4) What is the basis for such unity ? (5) What are the results of this unity ? (6) What can I do to promote this unity ?

Consider question No. 1 : Does Jesus want unity ? If one has taken a careful look at Jesus' prayer, the answer is very obvious. If Jesus does not want unity, why did he pray so earnestly for it? Remember he prayed "that they all may be one."

Jesus surely knew that the prophets spoke about a united kingdom of heaven, not a divided kingdom. In Isaiah 2 : 2 we find these words : "And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established." Here we read of God's "house" not "houses." A corresponding scripture (1 Timothy 3 : 15) says, "that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Both the "house of God" and the "church of God" are singular, as also in the "pillar and ground." Daniel by inspiration wrote, "The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed" (Daniel 2 : 44) This too is singular. A similar New Testament passage (Mark 9 : 1) has Jesus saying, "Verily I say unto you, there are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power." Singular again ! Jesus promised, "upon this rock I will

build my church," not "churches." Through the inspired writers Jesus begs believers to be one (I Corinthians 1 : 10) : "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment." Consider such a powerful plea for unity : "Speak the same thing," "no divisions," "perfected together" in the "same mind" and in the "same judgment !" No wonder that in verse 13 the searching question is asked, "Is Christ divided ?" No person who honestly examines such stress on unity can possibly believe that Jesus is pleased with anything less than perfect unity.

Next, let us look at the second question : To what degree does Jesus want believers to be one ? Does today's rampant division approach his desire ? Jesus prayed "that they may be one, even as we are. . . that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us." It is evident that so-called Christendom is as far from this degree of unity as is the east from the west. Does anyone believe for a moment that the slightest division exists between the members of the Godhead ? Can the following conversation between God the Father, and Christ the Son, be imagined ?

God : It makes no difference as to church membership.

Christ : I purchased the church with my blood.

God : One church is as good as another.

Christ : Only those who are members of the church for which I died shall be saved.

God : Mechanical instruments of music are all right in Christian worship.

Christ : Mechanical instruments of music in worship are an abomination to me.

God : To think that water has anything to do with remission of sins is foolishness.

Christ : Baptism in water for the believing penitent is absolutely essential to an alien sinner's salvation.

How utterly impossible it is to imagine such chaos in heaven ! We find it on earth; but we must know that division grieves the heart of Jesus and that no division exists in heaven. If the Godhead were as divided as we are, no decision could have been made as to which member of the Godhead would come to earth; and if he did come, what he would do after he came. Furthermore, one could hardly expect the Godhead to agree on what should be the answer to a prayer. Are we not happy that God and Christ are one ? And we need to be one "as" they are one !

Our third question is : Is this unity possible ? Is it possible that we may be one to the degree God and Christ are one ? Many seem to think such unity is utterly impossible. If one thinks that such unity is impossible, then he is obligated to explain why Jesus prayed for it and pleaded for it through the inspired writers. We know Jesus would not have prayed for the impossible; nor would he have taught us to be one. If unity is not possible, why do we find it so evident in the early church ? Its unity is expressed in these words : "And all that believed were together and had all things common . . . continuing steadfastly with one accord, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2 : 44-46). Again "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul" (Acts 4 : 32). Their being so united is positive proof that Jesus was praying for the possible, not the impossible.

The next question is : What is the basis for this unity ? Since faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10 : 17), it is evident that the word of God is the only basis for unity. Does God's word contradict itself ? We know it cannot, and does not. A good example for unity upon what God has revealed is found in Matthew 16 : 13-17 : "Jesus asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of man is ? and they said, Some say John the baptizer; some Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, 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 Bar-Jonah : for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." On the basis of what man thought, we find division; on the basis of

what God revealed, we see perfect unity. All who accept God's word as the absolute and only authority will find unity, not division. No one can possibly say that God's word causes division.

Our fifth question is : What are the results of the unity for which Jesus prayed ? More than once in Jesus' prayer he said, "that the world may believe that thou didst send me." The early church was united. Did their unity encourage belief ? or unbelief? Surely it promoted belief, just as Jesus knew it would. The church began in Jerusalem with about three thousand (Acts 2). Soon it increased to about five thousand (Acts 4 : 4). "The number of the disciples was multiplying" (Acts 6 : 1). In Acts 6 : 7 : "And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." One important factor in this growth of the church must have been the unity of believers. In verse seven (just quoted) we have the basis of unity again : . . . were obedient to the faith." not "faiths." So mighty were their united efforts that in less than a century the gospel had been "preached in all creation under heaven" (Colossians 1 : 23). Yes, Jesus was right in knowing that unity would promote belief ! By the same token, division promotes unbelief.

Our sixth and final question is : What can I do to promote unity ? After a careful study of Jesus' prayer for unity, no one could profess to love him and not desire unity. What can I do ? Jesus prayed for unity, and so can I. Jesus worked for unity and so can I.

This combination of prayer and work is illustrated in Nehemiah four, where we read of the great success in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem despite great obstacles. The people had a mind to work, and they made their prayer to God.

Finally, in addition to working and praying I can be a diligent student of the word of God, the only basis for unity. I can reject every human teaching, for that destroys the unity for which Jesus prayed.

The Power of the Powerful Word

W. Edwin Kearley

Mankind is lost in sin. A truth we must not forget is stated by Paul : "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3 : 23). The history of man reveals a history of sin. Even those who have given their lives to Christ are guilty of sin. The apostle John said : "If WE" (including himself) say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us" (I John 1 : 10).

Therefore men need a Savior. God has left us an instruction manual from the Savior. Paul said, "For the grace that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teacheth us . . ." (Titus 2 : 11-12).

Is this manual powerful enough to do the job? The Psalmist said, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19 : 7) Of the word Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ : for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth" (Romans 1 : 16). The writer of Hebrews stated, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4 : 12). There is no area of man's activity which God's word does not direct. Peter tells us God's word lives : "The word . . . liveth and abideth forever" (I Peter 1 : 23).

An emotional response should be evoked in us because the word of God does so much for us ! We should exclaim with the Psalmist, "O how love I thy law ! It is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hath made me wiser than mine enemies; for they are even with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers : for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. I have not departed from judgments: for thou hast taught me. How sweet are thy words unto my taste ! Yea,

sweeter than honey to my mouth. Through thy precepts I get understanding : Therefore I hate every false way” (Ps. 119:97-104).

Only the pure word of God is powerful enough for God's use. The doctrine (or teaching) of Christ must not be changed. John informed us : “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (II John 9). The teacher or preacher who teaches or preaches doctrines not authorized by Christ cannot expect to be pleasing to God. Those who support doctrines not authorized, are like wise condemned (Galatians 1 : 8-9).

WHAT DOES THE WORD OF GOD DO FOR US ?

(1) It gives life. Jesus affirmed, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; . . . the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6 : 63). Paul wrote : “And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness” (Romans 8 : 10).

(2) The word converts the soul. Jesus said of the Jews, “Lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Matthew 13 : 15).

(3) The word saves. Cornelius was told by an angel to “send to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter, who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11 : 13-14). James taught : “. . . Receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your soul” (James 1 : 21).

(4) The word produces faith. Paul stated, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10 : 17).

(5) It procreates the new life in Christ. James records, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth” (James 1 : 18). Paul said to the Corinthians, “. . . I have begotten you through the gospel” (I Corinthians 4 : 15; see also I Peter 1 : 23).

(6) The word cleanses us. Jesus said, “Now ye are clean, through the word which I have spoken” (John 15 : 3).

(7) We are sanctified by the word. Jesus prayed : "Sanctify them through thy truth : thy word is truth" (John 17 : 17).

(8) The word of God enables the Christian to make spiritual growth. Peter encouraged. "As newborn babies, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Peter 2 : 2).

EACH INDIVIDUAL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HOW HE HEARS. James said, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1 : 22). Some are babes (I Peter 2 : 2) or "dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5 : 11), and others are able to digest "strong meat" (Hebrews 5 : 12).

Every person needs to become a Christian. Every Christian is expected to grow spiritually (I Peter 3 : 18). Some early Christians were rebuked for their lack of growth. In Hebrews 5 : 12 the writer states, "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God . . ."

May the truth be taught without addition or subtraction (Revelation 22 : 18-19). Preachers must not shun "to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20 : 27).

Hearers must hear in view of eternity. We must have ears and hearts receptive to the word of God.

A Picture Of The Blessed Man

Howell Bigham

In Psalm one we find a picture of a blessed man. This threshold to the book which contains 150 psalms, delivers divine contrast between the blessed and the ungodly. Furthermore, it presents a portrait of two channels, or choices, for man : to obey God, or to disobey God (Matthew 7 : 13-14; Joshua 24 : 15). In studying this great chapter of inspiration, we find five important points.

A Profile of the Blessed Man

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (verse 1). Note the character of the blessed man. First, he is one who “walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.” A person who is blessed and righteous in the sight of the Creator will not follow the counsel or advice of the wicked, but rather will follow the advice that is given in the inspired word of Almighty God (Ecclesiastes 12 : 13; II Timothy 3 : 16-17) ! The apostle Paul said, “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5 : 11) !

Secondly, the character of the godly man is one who will not stand in the way of sinners. The blessed man will not congregate or assemble with those who follow the course of Satan ! He understands the terrible influence that evil can have upon good ! Paul spoke concerning such when he said : “Be not deceived : evil communications corrupt good manners” (I Corinthians 15:33).

Furthermore, the blessed man also is one who will not sit “in the seat of the scornful.” He will not take his seat with those who mock God and his word ! ! Rather, the blessed man’s walk, stand, and seat will be with God and his truth (Jeremiah 6 : 16).

The Pleasure of the Blessed Man

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (verse 2). Indeed the righteous man’s profile consists of more than just “do not’s;” it also contains his pleasure. His pleasure and delight is in the word of God (Psalms 119 : 103; 19 : 10) ! He delights in the study of the Bible (Psalms 119 : 35; Acts 17 : 11-12), realizing that it is the source of eternal life (John 6 : 63). God’s word is our guide to lead us through this world of sin, to our eternal home in heaven (Psalms 119 : 105) ! Not only does he delight in God’s word, he also meditates (studies seriously) upon the word of Jehovah (I Timothy 4 : 15-16; Psalms 119 : 97). The importance of meditating on God’s truth is seen in the command of Paul to “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2 : 15).

The Prosperity of The Blessed Man

“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither: and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” (verse 3). The Bible affirms that the righteous man will prosper (Matthew 6 : 33; James 1 : 25; I Timothy 4 : 8). The blessed are described as a mighty tree. A mighty tree is one that is grounded and settled in mother earth. Likewise, the faithful Christian is rooted and grounded in Christ Jesus, the Savior of man (Colossians 1 : 23; 2 : 7). Furthermore, the righteous man is likened unto a tree that has been “planted by the rivers of water.” This tree is one that receives an abundant source of nourishment. Likewise, the faithful child of God receives an abundant source of nourishment from the inspired word of God (II Timothy 3 : 16-17; Psalms 119 : 104) !

Continuing, the blessed man is described as a tree that “bringeth forth his fruit in his season,” This mighty tree is fruitful. It is alive—not dead ! Therefore, the righteous are to be fruitful in the kingdom of God (John 15 : 8; Mark 16 : 15).

Lastly, the prosperous tree is portrayed as one whose “leaf also shall not wither.” The prosperous tree is an evergreen tree. It is a thriving, healthy, prosperous tree ! Likewise, the faithful Christian is one who will live forever—in the glory of heaven (Revelation 2 : 10). Yea, the blessed man will prosper, for he is one who lays his treasures up in heaven (Matthew 6 : 19-21; Revelation 3 : 17-18) !

The Perishing Way of the Ungodly

We read of the perishing course of the ungodly : verses 4 and 5 teach “The ungodly are not so : but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous ” Notice that the “ungodly are not so.” They are unlike the blessed man who : (1) walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly; (2) nor standeth in the way of sinners; and (3) nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. The ungodly are those who : (1) do follow the advice of the wicked; (2) assemble with sinners; and (3) sit in the seat of those who mock God. Therefore, because of their following the destructive course which leads to eternal hell

(Matthew 7 : 13), they are described as worthless "chaff which the wind driveth away. "The reason for their unfit and perishing condition is because they follow after the creeds and doctrines of men (Matthew 15 : 9; 7 : 21-23), rather, than the good word of God ! Therefore, at the judgment bar of Christ, they will not stand (Matthew 25 : 41-46; John 5 : 28-29) !

The Purpose is Given

Finally, verse six presents the reason why the ungodly shall perish : "For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous : but the way of the ungodly shall perish." The judgment will be a day of revealing (Galatians 6 : 7-8; Ecclesiastes 12 : 13-14: II Corinthians 5 : 10) ! On that great day the Lord will approve of the one who follows his will (Matthew 7 : 21). However, to the ungodly, they will hear the despairing words : "I never knew you : depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7 : 23) !

In conclusion, Psalm one contains these five important points. There are two ways with two different destinations offered to every accountable person. Which will you choose? We pray that all will choose the way of the "blessed man" (Psalm 1 : 1-3).

Some Just Don't Like Preaching

Ronnie A Missildine

"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel : not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

Where is the wise ? where is the scribe where is the disputer of this world ? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ?

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom.

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 1 : 17-24).

This scripture tells us that there were those in Paul's day who viewed preaching as foolishness or unnecessary. But Paul, in using a little irony said that "it pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Some people just don't like to hear preaching. Consequently, you, hear them say, "The sermon was too long," because it went 35 minutes. Or they say, "We shouldn't have gospel meetings any more : they are out dated." What they are really saying is I don't like preaching."

Don't think that I am saying that people ought to come just to hear the preacher entertain. I am not ! There is something much more fundamental than that. People OUGHT to want to come to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ preached.

In an analysis, we might find two problems. First, may be some preachers are trying to entertain instead of preaching the gospel. Consequently people are not really helped by an entertaining (?) little sermonette. It may be that more jokes and illustrations are given than Bible quotations, and people are not edified enough.

But second, it could be that some listeners are "dull of hearing . . . lest they should hear with their ears and understand with their heart and should be converted . . ." (Matthew 13 : 15). That, friends, is an attitude problem on the part of the listener ! We ought to want to listen EVERY TIME the truth of God's word is preached, whether we are 'entertained' or not. We need

it so we can be edified and grow and learn—and (if nothing else) to hear the old, old story that we love so well !

The gospel is not outdated. It remains God's power to save (Romans 1 : 16). And the preaching of it is still "the power of God, and the wisdom of God !"

How Much of the Lord's Time Have You Stolen ?

Edsel Burleson

Recently a church bulletin told about a young man who was working in a large department store. His employer told him he would be required to work on Sunday. It so happened that the hours assigned to him would have prevented his attending any of the worship services which he had regularly attended since childhood. The young man informed his employer that he would not be able to continue his work under those conditions, and his employer told him he would have to go.

A few days later, the young man answered an ad in the paper from a bank which had advertised a vacancy for a teller. In checking the young man's previous employers, the bank president contacted the department store head and inquired as to the boy's record, and whether he could recommend him. The store manager replied, "Why, yes, I'll be glad to recommend him. He will make you a good man . . . I just fired him a few days ago."

"Fired him ?" the bank president exclaimed. "Why would you recommend a man whom you just recently dismissed from your service ?" The store manager explained the circumstances under which the boy was released, and remarked, "I know he will make a good man for your bank, because if he won't steal the Lord's time, he won't steal your money !"

How much of the Lord's time have you stolen ? It is such a temptation to take the Lord's Day and use it as our own !

Time is such a valuable possession. Each of us has exactly the same amount. But how differently it is used, or misused! Waste of time is the most extravagant and costly of all expenses. Schiller said, "He who neglects the present moment throws away all he has." The Apostle Paul urged: "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (Colossians 4 : 5).

Longfellow said "It takes less time to do a thing right than it does to explain why you did it wrong." Once we lose time it is gone forever! One today is worth a dozen tomorrows.

The man who makes the best use of his time has most to spare.

Some Thoughts On Gratitude

Charles E. McDonald

"Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thessalonians 5 : 16-18)." ...Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5 : 20). These scriptures point us to the need of learning and practicing the virtue of gratitude. Men ought to be diligent about it.

I read of a preacher who had the habit in his opening prayer each Sunday of thanking God for the weather. On a particular dreary, cold, icy, windy Sunday morning, the few people who had ventured out wondered how they could possibly refer to the nasty weather outside with any note of gratitude. The preacher was, however, equal to the occasion. "Dear God," he prayed, "we thank Thee that Thou doest send us so few days such as today."

How about us? Do we "give thanks always for all things" to the Father through Jesus? As we learn to see the "silver lining" in all things, to be "goodfinders,," we will grow in the virtue of Gratitude, and will make it a point to "give thanks, in everything."

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