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but for sinners, for his enemies. (Romans 5:8). But again, why did he do all of that? That man might be saved. Unbelievable! What grace and mercy was shown to man! He didn't just voice his love for man, he showed it, he proved it.

What was the Lord's instructions to his disciples? Always, to go to others, taking his message. Christ commanded the Apostles in the limited commission to take the news of the coming kingdom to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matthew 10). Just before the Lord returned to the Father in heaven, he commanded them to go into all the world and to preach the gospel to every creature. (Mark 16:15). He asked them to go and teach all nations. (Matthew 28:19). He instructed them to remain in Jerusalem until they received the power of the Holy Spirit, and then they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8).

An imaginary story is told how that when Jesus got back to heaven he told the angels there of his plan to take his message of salvation to every creature under heaven. They wanted to know what that plan was. He explained how he had given his Apostles and their converts the responsibility of doing this. Then they wanted to know what alternative plan he had if man failed. He responded by saying that he had no other plan. In other words, the Lord has left it up to his people to take the gospel to every creature under heaven. If we fail, we have failed the Lord and we have failed mankind. What an awesome responsibility, but what a privilege we have to carry forth the word of salvation, the hope of the world.

When we trace the work of the Apostles and their converts through the book of Acts then we must conclude that it was nothing but pure evangelism. What do we mean by the word evangelize or evangelism? We are talking about moving, going, spreading, travelling, communicating, preaching, and teaching the gospel of Christ. The Apostles preached the gospel for the first time in fact on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. The result was that some three thousand obeyed the Lord and he added them to his church. The gospel was then preached again and again there in Jerusalem. This got the attention of the high priest and the leaders of the people and they called them in and warned

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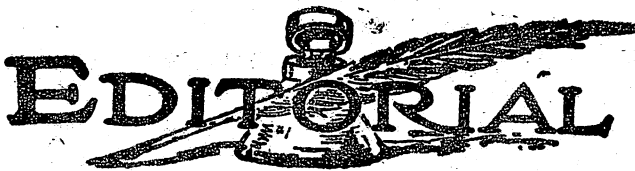
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EDITORIAL

Evangelize

Of all the words that might be used to describe the work of the church and its purpose in this world, perhaps the one word that says it best would be, EVANGELIZE. Christians are saved to save others. All of their efforts as individuals, and as congregations, and as the church worldwide, must have as its ultimate goal to reach souls for Christ. If this is not its prime target, then regardless of what is done, how many meetings are conducted, how much good work is engaged in, how much is given, and all of the other things that might be included, then all of it is vain in the end.

Let me ask you this question : Why did Jesus come into this world ? For sure, it was not just to be coming, to live among men, to perform miracles, and even to heal the sick. Christ himself tells us why he came. He said, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10). He paid a great price to be able to do that, if you know all that he gave up, and he did that man might be saved. He left heaven, was born in the likeness of man, was betrayed by one of his own apostles, suffered, bled, and died on the cross, and returned to heaven to sit at the right hand of his Father. He did not die for friends, we are told,

that they should not be spreading news about Christ. Later they were put in prison and beaten and warned not to speak in the name of Jesus, but the record says, "And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." (Acts 5:41,42).

In Acts 8 we read of a great persecution coming against the church and we are told in verse 4 that the disciples were scattered abroad but that they went everywhere preaching the word. Later on in Acts 8 we are told how that Philip went down to Samaria and preached the gospel and that many believed and were baptized. Finally, in Acts 8:26-39 we have Philip preaching to a man from Ethiopia. He is converted and goes on his way rejoicing. In Acts 9 there is the record of the conversion of Saul and we know that he went on to become a great gospel preacher and one who spent all of his time in spreading the cause of Christ, making one missionary journey after the other. In Acts 10 there is the story of the conversion of Cornelius and his household, representing the Gentiles. Many other conversions are likewise recorded in Acts.

With the gospel being preached in Jerusalem, it rapidly spread through Judea, to Samaria, and to many other places in Asia and Europe. Great cities like Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Rome were soon hearing the gospel for themselves. As a matter of fact, in less than thirty years from the time the Lord gave the Apostles the Great Commission to take the gospel into all the world, Paul was able to say in Colossians 1:23 that the gospel had now been preached to every creature under heaven.

How did all of this happen? For sure, it could not have been done had the gospel remained indefinitely in Jerusalem. And yet, they could have reasoned that the church is young here and there is still much work to be done. Therefore, we will continue the work here for the time being. With that kind of reasoning they might have remained there for a hundred years more. But it was not the Lord's will that the gospel be preached only in Jerusalem. He had commanded that his will be taken to the whole world. That meant then that someone was going to have to go. Perhaps

in the providence of God the persecution that took place in those early days was the means of moving the Christians out. As a result of going on to other places, then the work grew and spread.

But what about today? We still have a lost world and the Lord has given the same Great Commission to his people of our present generation. While the gospel has been taken around the world, still in many countries much remains to be done to take the truth of God to every creature. Where does it begin? It begins with you and me and the local congregation. What are we doing to evangelize? What is the local church doing to evangelize? At the present rate, how long will it take to get the gospel message out to our area, our city, our country, and our part of the world.

It is so easy for us to just sit and do nothing more than to go to worship on the Lord's Day. While the Lord wants us to do this, but is this enough? It is also easy for the local congregation just to drift by from year to year without putting forth much effort to evangelize and to grow in numbers and to grow in spirituality. Are we in that case doing the work that the Lord wants us to do? Are we letting the light of the gospel shine forth to the point that all will be able to see it. Are we not concerned about the lost? While we wait, souls are dying and going out into eternity without even knowing the gospel. That is to our shame, my brethren.

Since we are a part of the local congregation, then let's think for a minute about the local church. The question is, what kind of programme do we have as the church to evangelize? Do we have any plans, any goals? Do we have any special meetings planned? Are we using the classes to train the members to teach and preach? Do we have participation from the men of the congregation? Are we giving as we should? Are we engaging in good works. Do we have classes in various homes in an effort to teach God's word. Do we visit the sick and the weak? Do we have any meetings in other parts of the city with the hope of expanding the Lord's cause in our city? Are we planning meeting efforts in nearby cities? Are we giving any support to that of helping to spread the gospel at home or away from home. Where do we expect the church to be a year from now, five years from now ten years from now? Are we trying to restore the erring? Do we have a discipline programme? Are we following up on our contacts? Are we trying

to involve every member of the church in the Lord's work? Do we have business meetings to discuss the state of the church, its needs, and to make plans for its growth? What are we doing toward putting forth an effort for a meeting house?

Now my brethren, when we answer some of those questions then we will begin to find out where we really stand, whether we are doing any thing, and how we measure up to the Lord's expectations of us. It is not enough just to say we are the Lord's church, his people. He has work for us to do. He wants us to evangelize. When we do that then we will grow and spread. Oh yes, we can make excuses and feel sorry for ourselves, but that is not the solution. It may be that we are too lazy. It may be easier just to drift along. It may be that we are satisfied. It may even be that we are not converted or that we are not concerned about the lost. It may be a lot of things, but the Lord will not accept anything short of us doing what he has asked us to do, and that is to take the gospel to others. This is the life of the church. Your salvation and my salvation and the salvation of all other people depends on it.

I would therefore like to appeal to you as the Lord's people to think seriously about what you are doing or not doing. Can't you do something? Can't you do more? Let's make a programme for ourselves, for the local area, and for the world. The Lord will help us, and if we'll give the proper leadership and example, our brethren will help us. With faith, zeal, and determination, there is no end as to what we can do for the Lord. Let us arise my brethren and **EVANGELIZE**. That is the solution, the only solution. **EVANGELIZE**, and again I say to you, let us **EVANGELIZE**.



**associate
editorial**

How Do You Hear?

Hearing is one of the most important things. The wise king Solomon wrote in Proverbs 1:5, "A wise man will hear, and will

increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." Again, James, in the New Testament, wrote, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." (James 1:19). Then he also added, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." (James 1:22-24). At Romans 10:17 the apostle Paul said, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

We believe what we hear. Hearing truth results in true faith, but false teaching produces a false and a wrong faith. Why so many on earth today worship Idols, and different things of nature in the name of God? Because they have never heard of the true and the living God. No doubt, they realize that there is a God, one who has created the heaven and the earth and all things therein. But they have changed the truth of God into a lie. (Romans 1:25). They have never tried to really know and understand Him. Their faith, rather blind-faith, is so much overshadowed with the teaching and traditions of men that they cannot see beyond it, inasmuch that even when they hear truth they perceive it to be a lie. Again, why so many believe in denominational Christianity, that is, one church is as good as another; why they believe in infant baptism, and so many other things which are never even mentioned in the book of God? Simply because they have never heard the truth or they have never tried to hear the truth. Many have the attitude of those about whom Christ said, "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; 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).

While some hear any thing and accept any thing preached unto them in the name of the Bible, there are others who are dull of hearing. They would hear and hear but never any thing goes into their mind. Such were the people about whom we read in Hebrews 5:11, 12; where the writer, speaking about Christ and

Melchisedec, said, "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For 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; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. Those who are dull of hearing remain where they were in the beginning of their Christian life. They never make any progress. Can't distinguish between truth and error; can't teach someone even the first principles of the Gospel of Christ; can't come forward to assist in the Lord's work. According to the apostle Paul, they are, "Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2 Timothy 3:7).

Then there is another group of people who would not hear because of prejudice. These are the ones who have already made up their mind on religious matters. I know some folks who do not want to attend a gospel meeting conducted by the church of Christ, or read any literature published or brought out by the church of Christ because they are prejudiced against the church. They say, "church of Christ doesn't believe in the Holy Spirit; church of Christ teach water salvation; church of Christ does not believe in the Old Testament of the Bible; etc." Of course all such things are false. Those who make such statements are misinformed people. They have never heard the truth about the church of Christ. They have closed their mind. They have never investigated for themselves. They have believed what they have heard, and, of course, they have heard a lie. Their faith is not based on what the Bible teaches but on what men say.

Many are willing to hear only what they want to hear. They already believe in a certain teaching or doctrine, and if it is shown to them from the scriptures that what they believe is wrong, they are not prepared to hear that. Such people usually belong to a sect or a denominational church. Even though the Bible does not teach what they believe and practice, yet they would want to justify their denominational doctrine, simply because they have believed it through the years. When it comes to the scriptural name of the church, they say, "name is not important." When shown the command of Christ, as recorded by Mark in Mark

16:16, that to be saved one must both believe and be baptized. They would say, "what if someone believed and didn't have the opportunity to be baptised?" Another argument they would present to escape baptism for salvation is that "the thief who died on the cross with Jesus was not baptized." All they want to prove by such foolish reasonings that baptism is not essential for salvation. They want to follow Christ and want to go with him in his Father's heaven but they are not prepared to do what he has said. Such people need to remember what the Lord has said in Matthew 7:21-27. Let me quote, Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day (*the judgment day*), Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them," said Jesus, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

What kind of listener are you? Are you the one who hear what the Lord says and does accordingly, or the one who hear but never obeys the command of the Lord? Much depends on what you hear and how you hear. There is only one way to be saved: hear, believe, and obey only the truth, God's word. (John 17:17; 8:32).

Humanity Over Nationality

Norman Hogan

"And they gave him [Paul] audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow; for it is

not fit that he should live." (Acts 22:22). What word? The word, **GENTILES**. (Verse 21). The condemnation against Peter at the household of Cornelius was that he "went in to men uncircumcised and did eat with them." (Acts 11:3). The Samaritan woman declared that "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." (John 4:9).

The Hebrews were often blamed for their exclusiveness and bigotry. Yet, in a beautiful Old Testament story, which is often cited as a great love story, we find an example of how humanity triumphed over nationality. The story is that of Ruth and the incident is the gentle Moabitess being welcomed into a Hebrew home.

Is there a lesson of lasting value in this incident? Do we ever allow nationality to take precedence over humanity? Do we sometimes equate God's love as being a love which extends only to those of our community, our nation, or our socio-economic background rather than a love which transcends all artificial human barriers?

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). Please notice that this does not say that God so loved the United States of America, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of South Africa or India but that "God so loved the world." Neither does it say that God so loved the black man, the white man, or the brown man, but that "God so loved the world." The statement is not that God so loved the rich man, the poor man, or the man in between but that "God so loved the world."

As a Christian I may be actively involved in the affairs of my community, state, and nation. However, I must not become nearsighted and fail to see and appreciate the universal need of humanity for the gospel of Christ. The exaltation of nationality over humanity is just one among other reasons that some Christians and some congregations develop what may be called the "two hundred and fifty mile syndrome" in mission work. A selection of place to work, send, support is sometimes based on convenience to the local church doing the sending and supporting rather than to the concept of need.

This is no criticism of any church being involved in domestic missions. We obviously need much more such involvement. It is, however, a suggestion that we look at our motives and be sure we do not allow a subconscious nationalism to become triumphant over the needs of humanity. As we pray, talk, and plan we must keep our minds open to the billions in the world as well as to the millions at home.

The Seven Questions Of Romans Eight

Sam E. Hester

One of the best sections in the Bible on Christian hope is Romans eight. One of the best ways for a Christian to learn a great lesson in hope is to answer the seven questions of the chapter.

Question. One : "For we are saved by hope : but what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for ?" (V. 24). The true object of hope is not physical "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Question Two : "What shall we then say to these things ?" (V. 31). The verses before this question tell of such wonderful things that the only proper response should be "hallelujah" or "Thanks be to God." Who would not be thankful for our coming redemption in heaven (v. 23), the intercession of the Spirit (vs. 26-27), providence (v. 28), and God's calling us, justifying us, and glorifying us (v. 30) ?

Question Three : "If God be for us, who can be against us ?" (V. 31). The answer to this question has always thrilled Christians. No one who really counts can be against us as long as God is for us.

Question Four : "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ?" (V. 32). If God gave his choicest gift to us, we can be assured that he is a gracious and kind God who will give other blessings.

Question Five: "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (V. 33). The devil has always spoken against God's chosen ones. All enemies of God, including some wolves in sheep's clothing, will speak against the brethren. The debt of God's people has been paid. God has justified them in Christ.

Question Six: "Who is he that condemneth?" (V. 34). Since there is only one judge, anyone else who condemns us is an imposter. Only someone who puts himself in God's place would attempt to judge God's people. Christ is at God's right hand representing us. Only a fool would plead against those for whom Christ is pleading.

Question Seven: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (V. 35). The truth is, none of these things can separate us from the love of Christ. Neither life nor death, the present nor the future, height nor depth, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ.

These questions help stir up Christian hope within us. They teach the nature of hope, how to respond to things that should make us hope, what God has done and can do for us, how that no one will be able to charge or condemn us, and how that nothing can separate us from God's love. Let us learn the answers and teach them to others.

The Bible And The Home

Winford Claiborne

Psychologist, psychiatrists, sociologists, theologians, and others who specialize in working with troubled marriages seldom agree on any concept relating to the home, but they are almost universally agreed that the so-called "traditional home" is in sad shape. They may disagree on the reasons for the difficulties, on how to resolve the problems which the home faces, and on whether or not the home is really worth saving, but they can see with their own eyes that divorce, infidelity, child and spouse abuse, and general happiness in marriages are rampant.

Almost anyone can see that marriage as an institution is alive, but that it is not well.

When adultery, divorce, tensions and conflicts prevail in a marriage relationship, those who reside in that home have to pay a penalty which in some cases is worse than losing a loved one in death. The children in such a home often suffer severe trauma. They are generally torn between their loyalties to their separate parents; they do not want to lose either parent. The children are exposed to an example by the parents which will adversely affect their attitudes toward marriage and the family. It is a well-known fact that children of divorced parents are more likely to divorce than the children who come from stable and happy homes. Besides all of this, the church is influenced by the homes from which the members come.

But there is a way out of the troubles which afflict the homes. The inspired word of God provides for a solution to all the heartaches and headaches which confront the home. "The whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) includes instructions on how to live in the home so as to have the peace and harmony which God meant the home to experience. Peter affirmed that God's power "hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." (2 Peter 1:3). Since being good wives, Husbands, children, parents, in-laws, etc. falls within the category—"all things pertaining to life and godliness"—then surely everyone who accepts the Bible as the word of God can see that the Bible gives divinely inspired counsel in all areas relating to marriage and the family.

The scriptures deal with family relationships (and all other human relationships) in two ways: Generic or universal principles which apply to all human relationships and specific instructions which apply to a particular relationship. Probably the best known generic principle is the Golden Rule. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12). Just imagine what the application of that principle would do for the homes! But its meaning and message are not exhausted when applied to this one relationship. Think what it

would do for labour-management conflicts, elder-member relationships, etc.

The Bible gives specific instructions to all persons within the home. Let us take the husband as an example. Peter tells husbands to "dwell with them [their wives] according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." (1 Peter 3:7). Peter directs husbands to know as much about their wives as they possibly can. Husbands must know their wives' wishes, needs, desires, and plans. They should make it a major responsibility to love and to understand their wives. Husbands must give honor to their wives as being fellow-heirs of the grace of life. If husbands fail in their duties to their wives, their prayers will be hindered (literally, cut into). Their prayers will not be answered.

Let us now apply both kinds of principles—generic and specific—to one phase of the marriage relationship: the sexual. Marriage counselors understand the need for adequate knowledge, skills, and attitudes in this vital area of marriage. Many counselors would not apply biblical principles to this relationship, but Christian counselors would not hesitate to do so. Paul describes Christian love as being longsuffering, kind, and unselfish. (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). Husbands and wives must learn to be patient, gentle, and generous in every area of their married lives. "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth [welfare]." (1 Corinthians 10:24). "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." (Colossians 3:13). Hundreds of such passages could be given, but these should suffice to show now the Bible can be used in dealing with this phase of marriage.

Specifically, the Bible has much to offer in the area of human sexuality. The Song of Solomon, Proverbs 5-7, and many other passages give specific advice and examples to husbands and wives. Paul lays down the following rules which would help couples to achieve good sexual adjustment. First, God demands that sexual activity be confined to the marriage relationship. "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own

wife, and let every woman have her own husband." (1 Corinthians 7:2). Second, both husbands and wives have sexual privileges and obligations. The husband must give his wife her conjugal rights; the wife has reciprocal responsibilities. (1 Corinthians 7:3). Third, God recognizes women's sexual needs to be as important as men's needs. "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." (1 Corinthians 7:4). Fourth, withholding the sexual privilege from one's spouse amounts to stealing, robbing ("defrauding," KJV). Refraining from sexual expressions of love must be by mutual consent. The sexual privilege may not be used for punishing or rewarding one's spouse. (1 Corinthians 7:5). Fifth, after a couple has ceased sexual activities for a time, they are instructed to "Come back together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency."

The other areas of conflict in marriage—lack of money or wrong attitudes toward money, in-law problems, disputes over children, etc.—may be resolved by proper appeals to God's great book on counselling. Let us study and preach God's word to find the solution to all human problems, whether those problems are in marriage or in any other area of life.

Perils Of A Preacher's Market

Wendell Bloomingburg

The statement of Jesus in Matthew 9:36-38 is as true and needed now as ever. Since "harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few," we need to pray the Lord of harvest that he will send forth labourers into his harvest."

Our greatest need is for "every member evangelism"—every Christian feeling a responsibility to share the "good news" of redemption with every one he can. (Acts 8:4). Only then will we be doing what God wants us to do as individuals or as the church. But there is still a great need for full-time workers, for those who can give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." (Acts 6:4). These are needed both at home and

abroad. Many small congregations in mission areas do not need a "pastor", but sorely need a full-time worker who is qualified and grounded in the truth to help them grow and reach out. Though they cannot afford a "full-time preacher," larger congregations could send one to these places.

What does the term, "preacher's market," imply? Perhaps it can best be explained with an illustration. For a long while after World War II, many items were hard to get. New cars were certainly among the hardest, so it was a time of a "dealer's market." Since they had a limited supply, they could sell at full-list price and perhaps even above that to some who would pay it. I was on the list of dealers in West Tennessee, West Kentucky, and Virginia for nearly two years. Early in 1947 I got a car in Virginia. Today it is a "buyer's market." A person can play one offer against another, and get the best deal he can find.

So today, among large congregations who offer large salaries to men to work for them full-time, there has developed almost a "competition" for certain preachers and even "competitive bidding." What disturbs me even more is that I see signs of preacher's taking advantage of this and actually arraying one congregation against another and going with the highest bidder! Though I hope and pray this is a false impression, I see it reinforced by what to me are other ominous signs.

For years I have contended that if a man once moves for money, he is "hooked"—that whether consciously or unconsciously he will no longer be governed by ideals of "need", where I can do the most "good", etc.

Preaching brother, does any of this describe you? Why did you make your last move? Why are you thinking now of moving?

Do we all (preachers, elders, every Christian) need to re-think our concept of the "gospel preacher"? So-called "professionalism" is both good and bad. In the sense of thorough preparation and qualifications we need a "professional" approach. But we certainly do not need it in the sense of viewing it as a "profession" like other professions. When Paul waived his right to be married and to be supported for the "gospel's sake" (1 Corinthians 9), and when he said that besides all the physical hardships that came to him there

was "the care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28), does he sound like a "professional" or "time-server"?

Am I best described by "woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel" or by such expressions as "fleecing the flock"—or Matthew 23:7 to be greeted "brother, brother"? ("rabbi, rabbi").

The Unshakeable Kingdom

Clyde Woods

In Hebrews 12:22-28 the writer stresses as "unsearchable riches of Christ" the great advantages Christians enjoy that make the way of Christ far superior to Judaism. The passage concludes :

Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace, whereby we may offer service well-pleasing to God with reverence and awe : for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28-29).

Modern disciples, like those addressed in Hebrews, should appreciate the greatness of the kingdom of God, the church. A brief review of this theme in Scripture may help us to do so.

Kingdom Envisioned

The unshakeable kingdom is the kingdom the prophets envisioned. Two of the most significant prophetic visions of the Messianic kingdom are the parallel ones contained in Daniel 2 and 7. The first of these was originally granted not to a prophet, but to a pagan king, the great Babylonian monarch, Nebuchadnezzar. Interpreted by Daniel, this dream involved a colossal image having four parts which represented four successive world powers beginning with the Neo-Babylonian empire represented by Nebuchadnezzar himself, "the head of gold." (Daniel 2:38). Conservative interpreters agree that the other three parts of the image represented the Medo-Persian, the Greek, and the Roman empires. Concerning the fourth empire the text states : "And in the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed, nor shall the sovereignty there of be left to another people; but it shall break in pieces and consume all these

kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." (Daniel 2:44). Thus the dream points to the Roman era as the time of the establishment of the promised kingdom. With this scenario agrees Daniel's vision of the four beasts in chapter 7, although this latter vision stresses also that conflict would accompany the emergence and growth of the Messiah's kingdom.

Admitting that these chapters point to the Romans, Premillennialists seek to find what amounts to a fifth world power in a yet future revived Roman Empire represented in Daniel by "toes" (chapter 2) or "horns" (chapter 7). Such groundless speculation distorts both visions by making their otherwise compact imagery quite grotesque, either by imagining extended time gaps of thousands of years or by assuming the "toes" or "horns" to represent a far longer period than that involved in all the rest of the body of the respective vision. This will not do. The prophets envisioned a Messianic kingdom to be realized in the ancient Roman era, the age that witnessed the origin of the New Testament.

Kingdom Announced

The unshakeable kingdom is the kingdom Jesus and John announced. Both John (Matthew 3:1) and Jesus (Matthew 4:17) called up on people to "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Jesus later proclaimed the coming of the kingdom within the lifetime of his hearers (Mark 9:1) and promised his apostle "the keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19). Such announcements harmonize perfectly with the visions in the book of Daniel as interpreted above. On the other hand, if Daniel's visions applied to a to our own, as premillennialists insist, why did Jesus and John announce the coming kingdom? Millennial speculation faces an impossible quandary at this point.

Kingdom Described

The unshakeable kingdom is the kingdom Jesus described. In various ways during his ministry Jesus identified his kingdom as spiritual in nature. A new birth, not Jewish descent, is the requirement for entrance into this kingdom. (John 3:1-8.) Jesus' many parables of the kingdom find their fulfillment in a spiritual kingdom, the church. Compare Matthew 13:1-52; 18:21-35. Most

notably Jesus before Pilate clearly defined his kingdom as spiritual in John 18:36 :

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world : if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews : but now is my kingdom not from hence.

Thus the books of the Gospel consistently depict the Lord's kingdom as spiritual. Equally impressive in the Gospel accounts is the total absence of any evidence of an earthly kingdom offer. Jesus never once offered Israel an earthly kingdom, nor did he ever change his message in this regard. Never once did he instruct disciples as to an earthly kingdom. Never once did Jesus quote an Old Testament passage and apply it to an earthly kingdom. Never once did Jesus teach that Israel, after rejecting him, still has a glorious national future after his second coming. Such millennial speculation is not Biblical; the kingdom Christ described is his spiritual kingdom, the church.

Kingdom Established

The unshakeable kingdom is the kingdom established in Acts. Acts 2 records the birthday of the church and presents this embodiment of the Lord's people as the inauguration of Christ's reign on David's throne. Speaking of David's witness to the coming Christ Peter said :

Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne: he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left unto Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all are witnesses. Being therefore on the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear. For David ascended not into the heavens : but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet. Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. (Acts 2:30-36).

The kingdom of God is the rule of God in the hearts of men. Jesus is Lord and reigns today on David's throne at God's right hand.

Kingdom Victorious

The unshakeable kingdom is the victorious kingdom. For all its unusual imagery the Book of Revelation has one simple theme—the victory of God and his people. “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15). Because this is so the Lord can assure, “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10). Though it may often appear otherwise to men on earth, the kingdom of Christ is destined to win. As Christians we are citizens in this spiritual kingdom, the church, and ought to be grateful for receiving this wonderful spiritual kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Spiritual Maturity

Roy Sharp

History gives us an indication that man, generally, has been growing physically for the past one hundred seventy years. The size of adults has increased at the rate of one inch every thirty to fifty years. Perhaps, this is due to improved nutrition, better medical care, reduced energy expenditure, or other similar factors.

In spite of our medical advances, improved nutrition, or other advances we have made, there are still many individuals who do not grow properly. One of the most heart-breaking sights in our world is a child that cannot grow properly. Visiting a hospital where physically immature children are being cared for is an unforgettable experience.

We lament greatly physical retardation. However, a more miserable sight is a soul that is dwarfed and not growing. The Hebrew writer speaks of some individuals who had failed to grow in the first century. “For when by reason of the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that someone teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become

such as have need of milk, and not of solid food." (Hebrews 5:12). This same circumstance occurs again and again in our day. We cannot lightly excuse a lack of spiritual growth.

If we are to grow properly in a spiritual way, we must understand some basic precepts presented in the New Testament. First, we should recognize that we cannot grow spiritually before being born spiritually. All Christian living is in Christ. We owe even our physical lives to God. Paul stated, "Neither is he served by men's hands as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." (Acts 17:25). All spiritual life is in Christ. Paul spoke of the Ephesian brethren, "And you did he make alive when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins, but now in Christ Jesus ye that once were afar off are made nigh in the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:1, 13). Since all spiritual life is in Christ, we must enter Christ through obedience. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently." (1 Peter 1:22). "For as many of you as were baptized unto Christ did put on Christ." (Galatians 3:27). We must be born spiritually before we can grow spiritually.

Second we see God leading us to spiritual needs for growth that are similar to our physical needs. If we are to grow physically, we need food, proper care, and exercise. Those same qualities are needed spiritually. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4). Growth depends upon food. "As new born babes, long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation." (1 Peter 2:2). The word of God supplies spiritual nourishment for every need.

Spiritual body need special care if it is to grow properly. God gives us great care. (Matthew 6:33; Romans 8:37-39). We as members of the body must exercise care and concern over each other. "If any suffers, let all suffer. If any is honored, let all be honored." (1 Corinthians 11:25, 26). Elders are to take special care of the flock as a shepherd would tend to the needs of his sheep. (1 Peter 5:1, 2). Without proper care from God, for each other, and from the elders, one cannot grow properly.

Third, exercise is necessary for proper growth. A physical body that is fed well and is cared for well in every way except giving it exercise will not be able to grow and function. Unless our bodies are used, we will grow flabby and unresponsive. Spiritual exercise is likewise necessary for spiritual growth. Paul wrote, "For bodily exercise is profitable for a little; but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is and of that which is to come." (1 Timothy 4:8), We must work and exercise ourselves unto godliness daily if we are to stay spiritually fit. "Wherefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58).

The following things will accrue if we have the proper spiritual diet, care, and exercise. We will be able to go beyond "the doctrine of the first principles of Christ" unto maturity because we will be able not only to drink the milk of God's word, but will be able also to eat the meat of God's word. Our ability to discern between good and evil will be greatly enhanced. (Hebrews 5:12; 6: 1). One of the most powerful instruments of our body for good or evil, our tongue, will also be brought under control. (James 3:2). All who grow to spiritual maturity will be better able to realize imperfections and therefore, the great need for God. (Matthew 5:3).

The church of our Lord needs men and women who are brought to spiritual maturity. This can be realized if all take the attitude of the Apostle Paul when he wrote and lived the statement, "I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded." (Philippians 3:15).

I Believe In God

R. C. Oliver

I have never been to the moon or travelled into outer space, but I believe that some of our astronauts have done so. And though some may wish to deny these reports, these denials do not shake my faith in what our astronauts have been able to accomplish.

I have never been to London, or Paris, or Jerusalem, but I believe these places exist. I cannot conceive of myself not believing that they exist, and I would be inclined to pity anyone who might doubt their existence just because he has never been to either place.

In much the same way, I firmly believe that God exist, and I believe he will reward those who diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6). However, I have never seen God. I have never exchanged conversation with him, but my faith in God's existence is as strong as is my faith in the reports I have heard about our astronauts and in the fact that the above places exist upon the earth.

Just as there is a continual awareness within me of these accomplishments and places, during every waking moment, so also is there a continual awareness within me of God's existence, during every conscious moment. I cannot conceive of myself not believing in God. I could doubt my own existence as easily as I could doubt his. Truly, "In him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts 17:28). And while I know that this faith was originally planted within my heart by two wonderful parents, along with others whom I dearly love, this is not my reason for continuing to believe in God.

Through the years I have never ceased to nurture my faith through research, study, and meditation. I have read, explored, and probed persistently into available evidence, and my faith is as strong today as it has ever been. I have read books both for and against the existence of God, and through it all my faith has grown stronger.

Believing in God is a natural response for a being such as I am—such as man is. God has provided for the wholesome satisfaction of both my physical and spiritual needs. Faith in God is not altogether an emotional experience; it involves the *intellectual*, the *emotional* and the *volitional* as well as the *moral* nature within me.

Faith in God not only requires the exercise of my intellect in searching for and weighing the evidence, it shows me what I am to

love and hate. Faith in God shows me what to do as well as how to distinguish between good and evil. If there were no God, murder would be as virtuous as mercy, and drunkenness as upright as sobriety. If there were no God, it would be absurd to talk about either good or evil. If there were no God, man would be no more than a rock or a clod! And while there are many reasons for believing in God, all of these may be reduced to these two: Reason and Revelation.

The material world makes it reasonable for me to believe in God. When condemning the Gentiles for their faithlessness and ungodliness, Paul wrote: "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." (Romans 1:20). Paul here affirms that those *invisible* things of God, his "eternal power and Godhead," have been made known by those things that are *visible*, the material world about us. The same general truth is expressed in Hebrews 11:2: "Things that are seen were not made of things which do appear." It is possible to see the material world, but it is not possible to see God's eternal power and Godhead. Nevertheless, God's existence is so clearly revealed through the material world that Paul affirmed that those who do not believe in God are without excuse!

How great must be the one who brought into existence this indefinitely great universe. However, his greatness is not limited to magnitude for as Whitman says: "A leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars." Again: "A mouse is a miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels." Truly, if you want to see evidence of God's existence then look above yourself, around yourself, and within yourself. His power and attributes are everywhere apparent. Nature declares there is a God!

Though nature offers evidence of God's existence, it does not reveal God's will. To know God's will, man needs a revelation. God has given this revelation through his word, the Bible. This is my second great reason for believing that God exists. The Bible clearly says: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Genesis 1:1). A more accurate statement of how things came to be cannot be found! But someone asks: "How do you know the Bible is true?"

I believe the Bible is true because of the proverbial "one thousand and one" remarkable statements contained within it: It contains statements beyond the capability of man either to know or to produce apart from God. Its scientific foreknowledge cannot be explained apart from God. Its marvelous prophecy cannot be explained apart from God. Its unerring history cannot be explained apart from God. Its great revelation of and remedy for sin cannot be understood apart from God. Truly the very *nature* of the Bible, along with the message it contains, join together to declare that God is. Each therefore should "read it to be wise, believe it to be safe, and obey it to be holy."

In summary, there are many things that man believes which he has not seen, and one who is responsible would be without excuse should he fail to believe them; therefore, to argue that God does not exist simply because he has not been seen is not a very convincing argument. Furthermore, in that both Nature and Revelation join together in affirming that God is, it is little wonder that David declared. "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." (Psalm 14:1). "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5:17).

Choose This Day

Scripture : From I Kings

Brad Brumley

Jezebel is sick to death of Elijah. Since Israel just could not hold both of them, she commands her Gestapo to do Elijah in. She would silence that fanatic once and for all. Thus Elijah, accused of treason, becomes a fugitive and retreats to a mountain cave. There he broods over his fate, feels sorry for himself, and resents God's abandoning him to the murderous whim of Jezebel.

While Elijah is in that cave feeling the world is too much for him, he finds himself confronted in a "slight thin breeze" by a voice asking him : "Elijah, what are you doing up here ? You're no good to me in this cave : Jezebel's corrupt regime still runs rampant; the people are deluded by her image mongering, her

religious practice reeks of sham, and while she plays my people for suckers, you are whining here in this cave. Get down there where the people live; lay some moral choices before them; tell them the truth about their government's deceit, their vacuous religious practice; their slovenly priorities. Do not be deluded into believing you happen to be the only one in the country who remains faithful. I know 7,000 others who feel about things as you do, but they crave articulate, courageous leadership. So, get off this mountain; return to the action."

This mood, I think, pervades the Biblical faith. Life's hurly-burly provides the context for making religion count. We see in the prophetic strain, for instance, no privatized religion wrought in isolation. When things get tough for the prophets, they do not head for mountain retreats, but end up in jail. The street corners provide their forums, the illusions of power their antagonists, human issues their grist.

And Jesus? He works the crowds, enters commercial life, seeks out street people, confronts temple prelates ends up, as George MacCould writes "on the town garbage heap on Cross between two thieves where they had to write his name in three languages, Hebrew, Latin, and Greek." Our Lord touches and wrestles with all in the bounds of the human condition.

The Biblical faith cannot be exercised in isolation from the stress and ambiguities, the chaos and possibilities of human life. "Elijah, what are you doing up here? Get off this mountain. We need to tackle some human affairs."

While his retreat to the cave gets Elijah in trouble with God, commitment to God gets him in trouble with Jezebel. Jezebel and Ahab possess strong ideas about power. They know who is in charge and they stop at nothing, not even murder, to get what they want. They run into one big problem, however - Elijah. He will not keep quiet. He will not be bought off. He cannot be compromised. He simply refuses to accommodate. Jezebel's elaborated imported religious practices, surely worthy of a royal court, cannot deflect Elijah from the self-indulgence and injustice those practices mask. And in one of the most stirring confrontations in history, Elijah takes on Jezebel's apologists, her propaganda hucksters, and

in a clearing on Mount Carmel demands : "How long will you go in limping with two different opinions ? If the Lord be God, then live like it; choose this day whom you will serve."

One commentator suggests that the people remain silent in face of Elijah's hard choice. Why? Not because they resist the truth behind his question, but because they perceive it to be irrelevant. "Limping between two opinions Us?" You know how it goes : "We're theists. We say our prayers diligently. We attend religious services. We contribute to the support of our religious institutions. And us preachers ? You know how we work for institutional survival, how we want our programmes to be successful, attract the right people, make everyone feel good. If the Lord is God ? Whoever said he wasn't ?"

Jezebel, that's who ! She's no less alive in our time than in Elijah's. Subtle, aggressive, smooth, cutthroat Jezebel. She and her consort Ahab push persuasive choices at us, and Elijah is right, we limp along between not simply two, but many opinions.

For instance, Jezebel never stops saying to us in the churches, "You take care of religion. I'll take care of the world." She wants us to stay in our sacred caves, running through our orders of worship, fumbling around with building maintenance, massaging one another with religious language. Who are we anyway to deal with the complexities of politics and public administration ? Who are we to offer any perspective on the security interests of the state ? After all, we are not privy to the information accorded those in the top slots. Jezebel knows what religion is, and if only our churches stuck to it, we would be overflowing with real religious people. Very persuasive !

And if she cannot persuade us to remain in our sacred caves, then she will invite us to serve in her retinue. She will co-opt us; incorporate us into the system; give us a tax break or two. She will convince us of our patriotic loyalties and by association with us assume Divine sanctions for her policies and goals. If Jezebel cannot drive us to our sacred cave, she will muffle us with flattery and her personal piety. Elijah knows it; neither a sacred cave nor co-optation for him. In broad daylight he poses again and again the question of loyalty : How long will you limp between many opinions ? Choose this day whom you will serve !

Why An Invitation?

Dowell Flatt

At the close of each sermon, I extend the invitation of the Lord. This has been done for many years. Exhortations are given to alien sinners and erring Christians as a means of urging them to obey the Lord. Why do we do these things? Is it just a way to end a sermon? It is because all accountable need to obey the Lord. When we obey him, several things happen.

(1) Obedience makes the Father happy. He gave the ultimate sacrifice, his only begotten Son, to make our obedience possible. (John 3:16). The loving Father does not want any to "perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9).

(2) Obedience makes the Son happy. Though he had the option of calling for the twelve legions of angels, Jesus went to Calvary to die for the sins of the world. (Matthew 26:53; 27:50).

(3) Obedience makes the angels happy. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." (Luke 15:10).

(4) Obedience is commanded. (Acts 10:48). The Apostle Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." The other possible translation of the word *commanded* would be, "He *ordered* them to be baptized." Either translation demonstrates the necessity of obedience to God. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5).

(5) Obedience brings the forgiveness of sins. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23). Since the birthday of the church, the same Gospel has been presented as the means by which sins are forgiven. (Acts 2:38). The eunuch "went on his way rejoicing" *after* he had obeyed the Gospel. (Acts 8:39).

(6) Obedience makes it possible for God to add us to his church. (Acts 2:41, 47). That church will be presented to the Father as "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such

thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:27).

(7) Obedience brings salt to the earth and light to the world. Others see these good works and glorify the Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16).

(8) Obedience is important because of the uncertainty of life. Man is but "of few days, and full of trouble." Though he comes forth as flower, he is soon cut down. As a shadow, he flees and continues not. (Job 14:1-2). His life is as a appearing "for a little time." (James 4:14). Knowing not "what a day may bring forth," man should not boast concerning the morrow. (Proverbs 27:1).

(9) Obedience is important because of the uncertainty of the second coming. Just as surely as Jesus came to Bethlehem, he will come again. (Acts 1:11). Though the coming is certain, the time is uncertain. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh." (Matthew 25:13).

(10) Obedience is important because of the uncertainty of the hardness of heart. Jesus spoke of those who "could not believe." (John 12:39). Paul described those whom God gave up. (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). It is possible to become "past feeling" with a conscience that has been "seared with a hot iron." (Ephesians 4:19; 1 Timothy 4:2).

(11) Obedience is possible. God does not require the impossible. His Son promises rest for the heavy laden. (Matthew 11:28-30). His commands are not designed to be additional burdens. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." (1 John 5:3).

(12) Obedience is possible now. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2). Today is the day for listening to his voice. (Hebrews 4:7).

It is no accident that the Good Book offers the Great Invitation one more time in its last paragraph: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

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