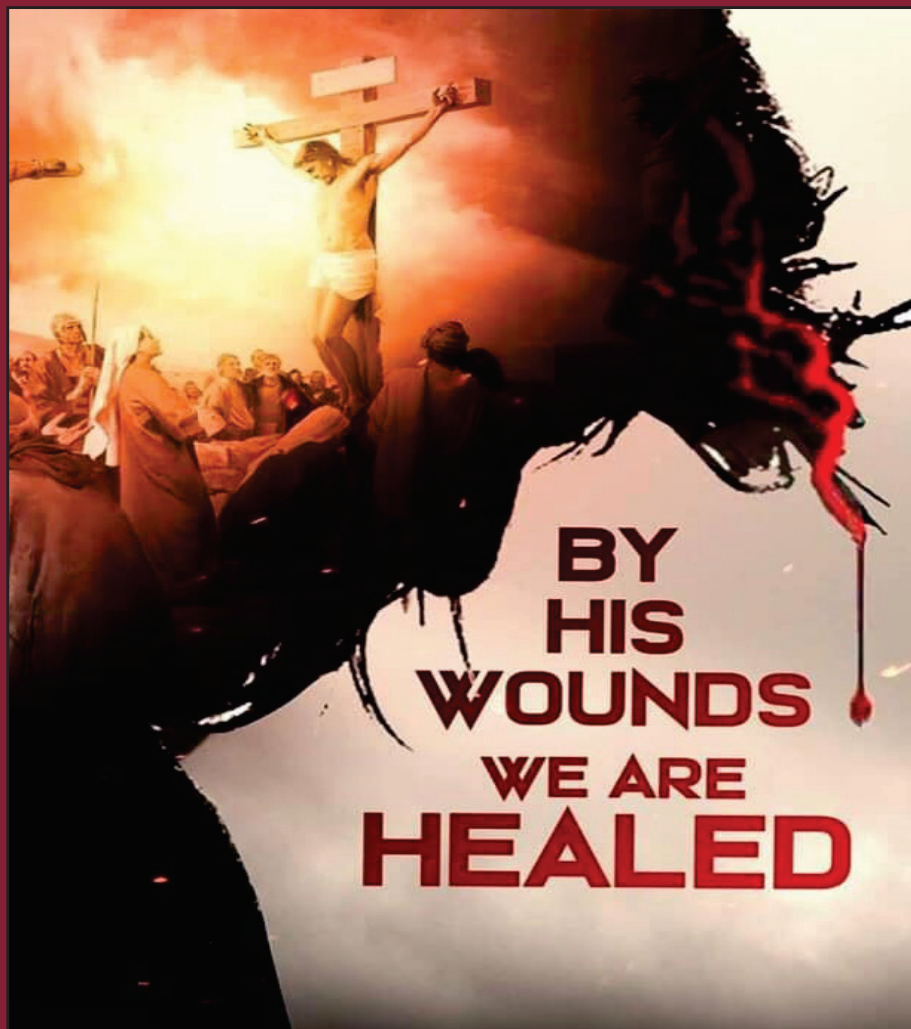


VOLUME ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTEEN

V THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL



**BY
HIS
WOUNDS
WE ARE
HEALED**

Father

Father,
I stand here in my smallness as a human,
looking up and up
into the vastness of Your works,
Your trees,
soaring a hundred feet into Your sky;
Your sky
reaching out into the endlessness of space;
Your rain
falling, suddenly, abundantly,
to fill the thirsty mouths of all Your living things
over every inch of glorious earth
stretching out beneath my feet.

I am stricken, Father,
humbled
by the awesome gulf
between the might of Your great power
and my own nothingness.

I am awed,
Brought to my knees in wonder
at Your works;
Brought to my knees in wonder
that You put into my heart
that precious word,
"Father."

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

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I've Heard the Word "Gospel"

Louis Rushmore

"I've heard the word 'Gospel,' but I don't know much about it," the young female cashier remarked as she tabulated my charges for three dress shirts I was buying. She had heard the word and could pronounce it, but she didn't know what it meant.

It seems that everything these days involves one's email address. Examples include digital receipts for restaurant or hardware store purchases, online shopping, accessing medical portals and paying utility bills. Usually, store personnel and customer support representatives cannot pronounce, spell or even are aware of what the two words in my email address mean – Rushmore@GospelGazette.com. I understand that many people today are unfamiliar with the word "gazette" or how to spell it, though even a local newspaper where I live still uses "Gazette" in its masthead. However, it is nearly unfathomable that the populace around us is entirely oblivious to what the Gospel is all about. Even the thesaurus associated with the Microsoft Word program with which I'm writing this article does not even have one synonym for the word "gospel."

All of this is symptomatic of a world that is lost! Although not merely a generational circumstance, especially younger generations have little to no knowledge about God, His Word or His church. The world does not have a moral compass and does not subscribe to divine standards, which ought to result in godly living. Christianity simply does not resonate with most of the people we encounter – even in our nation that was once inaccurately referred to as a Christian nation.

Religion is everywhere, but it is fading fast. The Pew Research Center demonstrated this noticeably in a 2019 article entitled, "In US, Decline of Christianity Continues at a Rapid Pace." The subtitle reads, "An update

on America’s changing religious landscape.” America certainly is not a Christian nation, and evidence abounds everywhere to which we turn and observe. Few drivers show any regard for traffic laws (e.g., speeding, reckless and aggressive driving, running red lights), which unnecessarily also result in tragic accidents and needless loss of life. Even disregard for traffic laws is symptomatic of a general indifference for authority – man’s or God’s. In addition, immodesty to the nth degree, immoralities proudly and publicly displayed, rampant crime and violence, as well as political scandals make up the unfortunate overview of America in our time.

Congregants are graying and dwindling in number, and fewer younger people attend worship services or even espouse Christianity at all. That explains the clueless reaction of the youthful clerk mentioned above to the word “gospel.”

Furthermore, the data shows a wide gap between older Americans (Baby Boomers and members of the Silent Generation) and Millennials in their levels of religious affiliation and attendance. More than eight-in-ten members of the Silent Generation (those born between 1928 and 1945) describe themselves as Christians (84%), as do three-quarters of Baby Boomers (76%). In stark contrast, only half of Millennials (49%) describe themselves as Christians; four-in-ten are religious “nones,” and one-in-ten Millennials identify with non-Christian faiths. (“In US, Decline...”)

The American Enterprise Institute:

...shows a steady erosion of religious affiliation and the corresponding rise of atheism and agnosticism. Generation Z (born 1997 to 2012) is the least religious in our history, with 34% reporting that they aren’t affiliated with a church, synagogue or another religious body. That’s nine points higher than for Generation X and five points higher than millennials. (Feder)

The Gallup Poll puts things into perspective and reveals an alarming reality – one that is apparent throughout our society.

For more than six decades, church membership in America was quite high: It was 73 percent in 1937, and remained in the low 70s for the rest of the century. But beginning around 2000, the number of Americans belonging to a house of worship went into a nosedive. Gallup reported last month that church membership had sunk to just 47 percent. **For the first time ever, only a minority of American adults are affiliated with a church.** (Jacoby emphasis added)

US citizenry continues to decrease affiliation with Christianity while non-Christian religions experience a modest increase in adherents. At the same time, "...the religiously unaffiliated share of the population [2019], consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or 'nothing in particular,' now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009" ("In US, Decline..."). "The data shows that the **trend toward religious disaffiliation** documented in" ("In US, Decline..." emphasis added) studies by multiple agencies is clearly discernible.

Not only do fewer Americans affirm affiliation with Christianity, but of those who do claim membership in some church, fewer of them attend worship assemblies more than once or twice a year. "The data shows that just like rates of religious affiliation, rates of religious attendance are declining" ("In US, Decline..."). "Many who profess belief don't walk the walk" (Feder), which contributes to the hypocritical influence on subsequent generations to walk away from their religious moorings, and this doubtlessly has been a large contributor as well to the diminishing number of young Christians in the churches of Christ.

The changes underway in the American religious landscape are broad-based. The Christian share of the population is down and religious "nones" have grown across multiple demographic groups: white people, black people and Hispanics; men and women; in all regions of the country; and among college graduates and those with lower levels of educational attainment. ("In US, Decline...")

"...The number of religiously unaffiliated adults in the U.S. grew by almost 30 million over this period" of 2009 to 2019 ("In US, Decline..."). In place of organized religion with God as its object, today, religion is often no religious affiliation, homosexual belligerency, reverse racial militancy and radical green earth. God-themed religion has been replaced with secularism; anyone and anything is the center around which everything revolves rather than God.

Political surveys also query respondents about their religious affiliations, if any, and frequency of attending religious services. Interestingly, liberal politics and more conservative politics reflect differently the trends to abandon the Christian religion.

Religious "nones" are growing faster among Democrats than Republicans, though their ranks are swelling in both partisan coalitions. And al-

though the religiously unaffiliated are on the rise among younger people and most groups of older adults, their growth is most pronounced among young adults. (“In US, Decline...”)

Today, fewer than half of white Democrats describe themselves as Christians, and just three-in-ten say they regularly attend religious services. More than four-in-ten white Democrats are religious “nones,” and fully seven-in-ten white Democrats say they attend religious services no more than a few times a year. Black and Hispanic Democrats are far more likely than white Democrats to describe themselves as Christians and to say they attend religious services regularly, though all three groups are becoming less Christian. (“In US, Decline...”)

“...The trends are clear – the U.S. is steadily becoming less Christian and less religiously observant as the share of adults who are not religious grows...” (“In US, Decline...”). That scenario presents the scope of the challenge that lies before the churches of Christ in America. Not only are we not doing a very good job of retaining our own young people in the Lord’s church, neither are we effectively reaching those outside the Lord’s church with the saving Gospel. Yes, we need to send the Gospel light abroad to various nations around the globe. However, America has just as much a need to be converted by the Gospel as, for instance, Hindus in India and Buddhists in Myanmar (Burma).

The 2009 edition of Churches of Christ in the United States identifies 12,629 a cappella congregations with 1,578,281 adherents nationwide. Those figures represent 526 fewer churches and 78,436 fewer people in the pews than just six years ago. ... Some experts blame the overall Church of Christ decline on the “graying of the pew” – churches marked by increasingly older memberships as young people leave” (Ross).

The rate at which the Churches of Christ is shrinking, already quite high, accelerated to over 2400 people each month (net), on average, during the last 3 years, based on an analysis of data released by 21st Century Christian... This is more than triple the already high rate of decline for the Churches of Christ from 2000 to 2015. ... The number of Church of Christ members shrank by over 5.6% from 2016 to 2019. Effectively, 1 in every 18 members disappeared from its congregations nationwide in just 3 years. That is more than 66,000 baptized, names-on-the-rolls members. And those who had young kids took those kids with them. This is a major acceleration in the decline of the Churches of Christ. At this

rate, the Churches of Christ will lose a quarter of its membership over the next 15 years, plus their kids. (Gardner)

Compiling statistics from various sources, it seems that “attendance in Churches of Christ peaked in about 1985 and has been in decline since about 1990, and the “Churches of Christ have lost more than 2,000 people and nine congregations a month since 2015” (Fillinger). At that rate of decline, “Churches of Christ would have about 4,000 congregations and 400,000 members by 2050” (Fillinger).

What are we going to do about biblical illiteracy inside and outside of the Lord’s church? **First**, we need to be aware of the crisis. **Secondly**, we need to care about the predicament. **Thirdly**, we need to act – individually and personally as well as collectively as congregations and the brotherhood.

In the first place, to be aware of the crisis of biblical illiteracy, we must acknowledge that spiritual matters are more important and more durable than with what we are most familiar in this physical, material and temporary world (2 Peter 3:7-12). We must get our priorities properly ordered (Matthew 6:33), which means that we must understand that “*...the love of money is a 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 6:10 NKJV). True Christianity is not an addendum to one’s life, but it is rather the main attraction, and vocations as well as material things are the supplements to life on earth. Until we embrace the spiritual over the physical, we cannot save ourselves or anyone else, despite the accessibility of the Gospel of Christ, which saves souls (Romans 1:16).

In the second place, contemplation of lost souls must be a most painful realization to those who have already been blessed with the saving power of the Gospel. Until we visualize some of our family members, a few of our fellow Christians with whom we worship, friends, neighbors, coworkers, store clerks, medical personnel, grocers and most people with whom we interact as being lost in sin without any real hope and headed for an eternity in a devil’s hell, we will not care enough to consider acquainting them with the Gospel. We can familiarize others with the Gospel directly through biblical teaching, but we also teach something by our behavior, by our speech (by what we say and by what doesn’t come forth from our mouths), by where we go (and by where we do not go) and by whether we act out our Christianity consistently all day every day.

In the third place, after we recognize the severity of biblical illiteracy within and without of the Lord's church, we must determine to do whatever we can to favorably and meaningfully impact precious souls with the opportunity to know God's Word – the Gospel in the New Testament – and the salvation that Jesus Christ offers (Colossians 1:14; 1 Peter 1:18-19) through it in return for obedience (Hebrews 5:8-9). Remember, though, we are not responsible for whether a person obeys the Gospel or disobeys it (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 1 Peter 4:17) after we have provided an opportunity to know God's Word – the Gospel; of a truth, our success before God lies not in how many people we convert but in how many people we teach the Gospel. Baptisms, on which occasions souls are saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 41; 22:16), are “icing on the cake” – “something extra that makes a good thing even better” (“Icing”).

Elders, deacons, preachers and other involved members of a local congregation ought to lead the balance of the church in active evangelism – sharing the Gospel with others far and near as we have opportunity or can make for ourselves more opportunities. Church leadership ought to demonstrate *how it's done* in their own lives as well as working in conjunction with less experienced church members. Church leaders, likewise, need to provide training and Christian literature to as many of the congregants who can be persuaded to participate in local and personal evangelism. Church leaders ought to strongly encourage the congregation to take evangelism seriously.

As self-starters and on an individual basis, Christians can and should be proactively willing to spread the Gospel amongst family, friends, acquaintances, coworkers and others with whom they interact. Every place and everyone is a potential opportunity to spread the Word of God – certainly by the way we act and by what we say (and by how we say it) but also by inviting someone to worship or Bible class, by offering to study the Bible together or by giving away a tract. Every meal out in a restaurant, every visit to a restroom, passing through any public place and virtually anywhere we can leave a tract. The tract that people seldom refuse and that everyone will pickup even if found lying on the floor is a one-million-dollar bill on one side and the plan of salvation on the reverse side; my cell phone number is one of the two numbers on it by which I can be contacted. None of your or my creditors or utilities will refuse payments accompanied by tracts. Remember, it's not our job to make anyone do anything, but it is our job to turn the world upside down with opportunity to know God's will for it (Acts 17:6). It's your job and my job in service of our Lord Jesus Christ to saturate our communities and the world with opportunity

to obey the Gospel, and some precious souls will obey the Gospel.

Do your part so that as many souls as possible in your sphere of influence can make the Christian pilgrim's journey to God's house (Hebrews 11:13-16). Make sure that you personally obey and continue to obey the Gospel. Take as many of your family members, friends, neighbors, coworkers and acquaintances as possible to Heaven with you. Don't wait until tomorrow; start today to make a difference in the pathway traveled by priceless souls around you. Be a soul winner and train other children of God to be soul winners. Imitate our Savior. ***“The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up...”*** (Acts 1:1-2). Until our Lord returns or until we pass from the scenes of life, let us be active in doing and teaching the Gospel.✝

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*What Does
the Blood of
Christ Tell Us?*

Jerry Bates



One of the first biblical accounts of which men become aware is the narrative about Cain and Abel. In Genesis 4, we read that Cain and Abel both offered sacrifices to God; however, God did not accept Cain's offering. Probably out of jealousy and envy, Cain became very angry and killed his brother. The writer of Hebrews referred to this account to make a point. *"To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of the sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel"* (Hebrews 12:24 NKJV). This verse compares the blood that Jesus shed on the cross to the

blood of Abel. Abel's blood cried out for vengeance and justice because of Cain's wrongdoing. On the other hand, rather than the blood of Jesus crying out for justice, it calls for mercy and forgiveness. Indeed, that is the very reason that Jesus shed His blood on the cross.

The blood of Christ declares the sinfulness of man. Sin is not a concept invented by preachers or some religious body. Paul boldly declared that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Paul quoted the Old Testament in Romans 3:10-12 when he said, *"There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable;*

there is none who does good, no, not one.” Rather than this fact depressing us, it should cause us to appreciate the gift of God even more, because Christ died for us! Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 53:6 that God “...*laid on Him the iniquity [sins] of us all.*” Jesus was offered to bear the sins of many. “*So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation*” (Hebrews 9:28). The blood of Christ offers us salvation from our sins.

Secondly, the blood of Jesus reveals God’s love for man. “*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him*” (1 John 4:9). God demonstrated or made plain His great love for man by sending His Son. Jesus said in John 15:13, “*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends.*” The greatest possible love is dying for a friend. However, it could be said that Jesus did not die for His friends, because mankind was lost in sin. All men were enemies of God when Jesus died for us (Romans 5:8). If the greatest love would be to die for one’s friend, what kind of love would motivate someone to die for his enemies? That is what Christ did!

Thirdly, the blood of Christ affirms that man is unable to save himself. Man has been able to accomplish remarkable things. Some medical procedures are astounding. Man has been able to go to the moon and back several times. We can send documents and pictures in a matter of seconds to almost any place in the world. We can even have a video chat with someone on the opposite side of the world, and it seems like you are there with him in person. Such achievements are truly marvelous.


However, man has not devised a means of saving himself from sin, and he cannot! The only possible remedy is the blood from a sinless man. Shortly before His death, Christ prayed that if it was possible, let His cup of suffering pass from Him. Yet, it was not possible. Christ is the only remedy. That solution was not discovered or devised by man. All the silver and gold in the world cannot save even one person. Peter declared in 1 Peter 1:18-19, “*Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*”

The writer of Hebrews continued in Hebrews 12:25 with a solemn, earnest exhortation. “*See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if*

they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven.” Going back to the giving of the Law by Moses, we are reminded that anyone who rejected Moses was punished. Even though he spoke the words of God and was clothed with divine authority, Moses was still only a man who spoke on the earth. Now, we are to listen to Jesus, Who lived on the earth for a short time, but ultimately, He was from Heaven, to which He returned. ***God... has in these last days spoken to us by His Son...***” (Hebrews 1:1-2). If one could not escape punishment for not accepting Moses, how much more shall we not escape if we reject Him Who speaks from Heaven? When we reject God, we despise the highest possible authority.

Jesus invites all to be saved through His shed blood. We must give earnest heed and careful attention to this invitation because it concerns our souls and our everlasting destiny. It is God’s wisdom; it is God’s way of mercy; it is God’s plan by which we can be saved. This is not a trivial matter or even secondary, as if something else might be just as important. In contrast, salvation is the only thing that ultimately matters. This invitation is one that we can refuse, but it is to our own destruction if we do so.

Revelation 1:5 declares, ***“...To him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.”*** If the blood of Christ washes away our sins, then the question obviously becomes, “How do I contact the blood of Jesus?” When the apostle Paul related what he was told to do by Ananias, he said, ***“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord”*** (Acts 22:16). The connection should be obvious. If the blood of Christ washes away our sins, and baptism is said to do the same thing, then we must contact the blood of Christ in baptism. Furthermore, Paul wrote in Romans 6:3, ***“Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”*** When one is baptized, he contacts the blood of Jesus that was shed at His death, and that blood washes away our sins.

If one rejects this simple command from God, what hope do we have? There is no escaping punishment if we reject the One Who speaks from Heaven! 

Jerry Bates is a missionary, Gospel preacher and one of the editors of the quarterly magazine *The Voice of Truth International*. He resides in Winona, Mississippi, USA.



The Seed Principle

Shane Fisher

Genesis 1:11-13 reads:

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth”; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed

is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the third day. (NKJV)

It is a wonderful truth that a watermelon seed can produce only a watermelon, and an orange seed can only produce an orange. According our great Creator’s design, this is what He established to be an enduring law that would last as long as time stands.

Luke 8:11 says, ***“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.”*** The parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-8) is important because Jesus taught us to listen carefully. Whenever we have the opportunity to hear the Word of God, we need to take great notice of the kind of attitude we have. Are we willing to receive it into our hearts as the truth?

Notice 1 Peter 1:22-25:

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its

***flower falls away, But the word of the LORD endures forever.”
Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.***

Peter’s audience had obeyed the truth, and their souls were purified. They had the Gospel preached to them, which was the truth that set them free from sin (John 8:31-32). Peter’s audience was born again through the Word of God (which is the incorruptible seed). It will never perish or pass away.

An honest individual will see throughout the conversion accounts in the New Testament that all of those who were taught the Word of God trusted and obeyed the **same** Gospel.

The church, that started in Jerusalem in A.D. 30, was comprised of individuals who had repented and were immersed in water for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38,41). The church continued to flourish in that city (Acts 4:4). Even Jewish priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7). It should be clear that while the apostles were there in Jerusalem that they continued to preach the same message of Jesus – His crucifixion, burial, resurrection, and receiving grace and justification by an obedient faith. The apostles planted the same pure seed – the Gospel of Christ – into good and honest hearts.

As time marched on, an inspired messenger named Philip went to and preached in Samaria. Acts 8:12-13 states:

But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done.

Philip planted the **same** pure seed – the Gospel of Christ – into good and honest hearts there.

An angel directed Philip to preach Jesus to the eunuch. Acts 8:34-39 records:

So the eunuch answered Philip and said, “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart,

you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”

Philip planted the **same** pure seed – the Gospel of Christ – into the Ethiopian eunuch.

Ananias told Saul of Tarsus how to become a Christian (Acts 22:16). He also planted the **same** pure seed – the Gospel of Christ – into a good and honest heart.

Peter was directed by the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel to Cornelius and his household, who become Christians in Caesarea several years after the church started (Acts 10-11).

The same pure seed – the Word of God – was planted **several years later** when the apostle Paul went on his missionary journeys and established various congregations in different localities (Acts 13-28). Over the next thirty years, he (along with other inspired writers) wrote letters to those different congregations of the Lord’s church (i.e., Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Hierapolians, Thessalonians, Pontusians, Cappadocians, Asians, Bythnians, Smyrnians, Pergamosians, Thyatirans, Sardisians, Philadelphians and Laodiceans. Would it cross anyone’s mind that each of those localities were taught a different **gospel** other than what the apostles taught?

It is true that some were being taught a false gospel by the Judaizers who infiltrated some congregations (see Galatians), and thus, Christians were on the verge of falling away from grace (Galatians 5:1-4). Yet, do we not see that the apostles and prophets were planting the **same** seed – the Gospel of Christ – into various localities? Do we not see that all of these congregations made up the one, universal church (universal body) in which all were baptized by means of the instructions that were revealed by the one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13), who purified their souls in obedience to the truth (1 Peter 1:22-23), leading them to be born again (John 3:3-5; 1 Peter 1:22-23) and to be justified by an obedient faith (Romans 5:1; 6:17-18)?

James 1:21 exhorts, *“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow*

of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” Notice the Word of God is able to save souls. Also notice we must receive it – the implanted Word – with strength under control. What if we receive the Bible plus what is taught in denominational manuals (which contain error) concerning salvation? Then we will **not** become Christians! We will not be saved!

If we receive the Bible, and only what the Bible teaches (which is the truth, John 17:17), then we will **only** become Christians (Acts 11:26). The Word of God (the incorruptible seed) will last forever. It can be planted in a good and honest heart that is receptive to obeying the Truth that will save souls.



Hear Jesus in Matthew 13:18-23:

Therefore hear the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside. But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

The soil represents the different types of hearts that will receive or not receive the Word of God. Some will not receive it at all. Some will receive it but only be for a short time. Some will receive it but allow the spiritual life of the seed to be choked out of their lives because they allow worldliness to creep back in and destroy them. Some will receive it, and in the long run, the seed (i.e., the Word of God) will produce fruit in them.

Our Lord said in Matthew 15:12-13:

Then His disciples came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.

Many of the Pharisees refused to obey John’s baptism, which was from Heaven (Luke 7:29,30; Matthew 21:24-27). They refused to enter into the preparation phase of the kingdom of Heaven while many tax collectors, harlots and other sinners did enter in by obeying John’s baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Matthew 23:13; Mark 1:4; Luke 7:29-30). Many of the Pharisees, who did not receive the Word of God, the implanted Word, had no root in their hearts to be filled with salvation. If they were not planted by God (did not receive the seed of His Word), then they would be uprooted (Matthew 15:13).

The modern application is that there are many who have adhered to manmade error and have not received the Word of God, the implanted Word, which is able to save their souls. They have not obeyed the truth, and therefore, their souls are not purified. If they have not obeyed the Gospel, then they have not been born again, and one must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5).

When all of these truths are combined together, we see a clear, distinct picture that a person must sow the pure seed (the Word of God, John 17:17) into his or her heart to become a Christian. It is a noble goal to go discover in the Word of God the divine plan for mankind’s salvation. Let us continue as sowers to plant the pure seed of the Word of God to all those around us!✚

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1932—2008

Which Law Is Binding Today?

J.C. Choate

Let's go to the Bible to see what it teaches. The Bible is the Word of God. We want you to know what it says, and it is our prayer that you will come to believe it and to obey it.

There is a God in Heaven, and He speaks to man today. He speaks through His Son, Jesus Christ, and His Word is recorded in the pages of the Bible, which is divided into two major books, covenants, wills or laws. One is called the Old Testament, and the other is called the New Testament. What is each one's significance? Are both binding today? Or, is just one of them binding? If only one is binding, then which one? I want to point out to you that all of the Bible is the Word of God. This includes both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It should be read and studied from the beginning to the end. The Old Testament chronicles creation, the beginning of man and of the Patriarchal Age when God dealt with the fathers of households. It tells of the history of the Jews and of the law and the prophets. The New Testament gives four accounts of the life of Christ, of His death, burial and resurrection, and of His ascension to the Father in Heaven. It records the beginning of the church and its spread throughout the world.

Yet, this brings us to the question once again: "Are both of these testaments binding today as a law, or is only one of them in force? If so, which one must we follow?"

Although all of the Bible is the Word of God, the fact remains that the Old Testament portion is no longer binding as a law. This will become obvious to anyone who honestly studies its content. For instance, God

has not commanded us to build an ark, to offer animal sacrifices, to go to Jerusalem once a year for worship, to give tithes and hundreds of other things that He commanded to those who lived during the time in which the Old Testament was binding. Those who lived then, back before the death of Christ, were to keep that Law because it was directed to them.

However, we are not living in that period of time, and so, that law is not binding on us. Paul said that it merely serves as an example. ***“Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted... Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come”*** (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 NKJV). ***“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”*** (Romans 15:4). So, the writings of the Old Testament were written and preserved for our learning and to serve as an example to caution mankind living today to not do the things that they did which were wrong. Paul said to the Romans, ***“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God; on those who fell, severity, but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off”*** (Romans 11:22).

When we say that the Old Testament is no longer binding, some want to use this as an excuse to say that we do not believe that this portion of the Scripture is the Word of God. Of course, that is not true. It is the Word of God, and it contains many wonderful teachings and principles that we need to learn and to apply to our lives, today. These teachings are in the form of examples and lessons but not as laws and commandments that are binding on us now.

Because of the Ten Commandments found in the Law of Moses, some would tell us that unless we teach that the Law of Moses is binding, we are encouraging murder, adultery and other moral evils. We need to realize that those so-called moral laws are actually statements of moral truths. Even before the Ten Commandments were stated in the Law of Moses, those things were wrong, and they continue to be wrong even under the law of Christ. The difference is that in the New Testament, not only are the overt sins condemned, but there is condemnation also of the thoughts of the heart that would result in committing the sins.

As far as the Law of Moses is concerned, including both the ceremonial

and moral portions of it, which included the Ten Commandments, it was never directed to those of us living today. Furthermore, it was not divided into ceremonial and moral portions, but the entirety was the Law of Moses; Israelites were called upon to keep **all** of it. Even James, one of the writers of the New Testament said, in speaking of the Law of Moses, **“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all”** (James 2:10).

I repeat; the Law of Moses – and that means all of it – was never given to you, me and the people of our time. Instead, it was originally given to the Jews, and specifically to those who were led out of the land of bondage – Egypt. In speaking of this very law, we read, **“And Moses called all Israel, and said to them. Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive”** (Deuteronomy 5:1-3). Then, he went on to list the Ten Commandments and chapter after chapter of additional commands. As you can plainly see, these words were specifically given to the people of Israel and to no one else.

Let me illustrate this point to you. Suppose you had a law here in our country that said that every citizen had to give \$100 each year to the government as some form of tax. Then, suppose someone led a campaign to change the law and to reduce that tax to \$50 each year. Now, who would want to go back to the former law? Even if they wanted to, they couldn't. Why? Because the new law blots out the former one on that particular point. This could be illustrated again and again in many ways. The fact is, God gave His people a law, and then He gave a new one. When He gave the new law, that automatically removed the former law.

Even before the new law was given, Jeremiah had prophesied:


Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with

the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brothers, saying. Know the Lord, for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more. (Jeremiah 31:31 -34)

In speaking of the new law, the writer of Hebrews quoted the prophecy that Jeremiah had made, and he showed that the new law is now in effect, through the death of Christ (Hebrews 8:7-13). Hebrews also shows that with the giving of the New Testament, the first covenant was taken away, and of course, it was Christ who took it away when He died on the cross (Hebrews 9:16-17).

The Lord said that He did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17-18). When Jesus was at the point of death. He said, ***“It is finished, and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.”*** In saying this, He signified that His work of fulfilling the prophecies of the Old Testament was completed and that the Old Covenant would cease to exist as a law. Paul wrote, ***“...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross”*** (Colossians 2:14). Therefore, John could say, ***“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*** (John 1:17).

Again, we read in 2 Corinthians 3 where Paul contrasted the Law of Christ with the Law of Moses, and he showed the Law of Christ was superior in every way. Hebrews declares that God speaks today through Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2) and that His law is the Law of Liberty (James 1:25).

We return now to the question we asked earlier: “Which law is binding today? It is the Law of Christ as set forth in the New Testament. Christ died for us, is our Saviour, has all power as well as has all authority in Heaven and in Earth. Therefore, we are to obey His teachings. We are bound to no other law. 

J.C. Choate, now deceased, was the Founding Editor of *The Voice of Truth International*.



The Beauty of Holiness

Byron Nichols

Batsell Barrett Baxter told of an old elder that he knew and came to greatly admire. The elder would often include in his public prayers the expression “the beauty of holiness” or “Lord, help us to see the beauty of holiness.” The humility and dedication of this very dedicated servant of God greatly enhanced the significance of these words for that preacher of great renown. Both of these godly men were surely influenced by David’s words in Psalm 29:2, which reads, ***“Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness”*** (NKJV). Psalm 96:9 says, ***“Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.”***

Definition of Holiness

Holiness is very closely related to “purity” and “sanctification.” The apostle Paul basically repeated Isaiah 52:11 in 2 Corinthians 6:17 when he penned, ***“Wherefore come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.”*** Holiness is contrasted with **uncleanness** and **impurity** in 1 Thessalonians 4:7 as Paul again stated, ***“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.”***

The Beauty of Jesus Was His Holiness

From all indications, it appears that Jesus was not physically attractive as a man. Isaiah wrote in prophecy about Jesus and said, ***“...He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him”*** (Isaiah 53:2). It is fair to say that the great majority of mankind is quite

impressed with the physical beauty of men and women. However, it has been acknowledged and affirmed for hundreds of years that there is greater beauty. Some of the world's most noted philosophers have called upon mankind to take notice of the beauty that is superior to the physical beauty of men or women. Blaise Pascal, a French philosopher, pointed to the greater beauty far back in the 1600's. He said, *"The serene, silent beauty of a holy life is the most powerful influence in the world, next to the might of the Spirit of God."*

Physical beauty ranks exceedingly high throughout mankind, resulting in the frequent sacrifice of other qualities that are much more valued in the eyes of God. His inspired spokesman Peter put it in these words in 1 Peter 3:3-4, *"Do not let your adornment be merely outward – arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel – rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."*

Examples of Holiness

Paul admonished Christians, *"Do not... share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure"* (1 Timothy 5:22). He later added, *"Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity"* (2 Timothy 2:19).

In becoming familiar with the young man David, we are blessed with a great biblical example of holiness. He had a good physical appearance, but that was of no concern whatsoever to God. The Lord picked David to be king **because of the kind of heart he had—because of what he really was** – *"...a man after My [God's] own heart..."* (Acts 13:22).

Several years ago, either in a class or in a sermon, I asked the question, "What is holiness?" My wife Gay told me later that she immediately thought of Emma Lou Morgan, a very godly lady in the congregation. Another wonderful example of holiness that comes to my mind was Iona Hartin, also a lady in that same congregation. A third outstanding example of holiness was Eulene Ramsey, another very dedicated lady who served the Lord in a special way as she voluntarily worked in the office of *The Voice of Truth International* for several years for no pay at all. She was a very capable, giving, and dedicated individual whose health was not good, but who was determined to serve the Lord and others. Living in the midst of Christians like these examples makes it possible for us to better recognize **holiness** in all of its beauty.

Let me share with you these thoughts that caught my attention some time back: “Holiness is a religious principle put into action. It is faith gone to work. It is love coined into conduct, devotion helping human suffering and going up in intercession to the great source of all good.”

After the death of a wonderful Christian, a letter addressed to him was found in his personal effects. The writer said the man had led him to Christ. He wrote these words to the man: “It was nothing you **said** that made me wish to be a Christian, rather it was *the beauty of holiness which I saw in your life.*” Yes indeed, holiness has its influence.

Some Tips on How to Attain Holiness

Here are just three of the many tips given to us by the apostle Paul that can help significantly in developing and displaying holiness:

1. *“...I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men”* (Acts 24:16).
2. *“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).
3. *“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good”* (Romans 12:9).

The beauty of holiness is beautiful indeed, requiring sincerity and diligence and gratitude.

Many of us have sung the lovely song many times, “Let the Beauty of Jesus Be Seen.” May you and I take these words very seriously.

**Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,
All His wonderful passion and purity;
May His spirit divine all my being refine,
Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.**

**From the dawn of the morning to close of day,
In example in deeds and in all you say;
Lay your gifts at His feet, ever strive to keep sweet,
Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in you.**



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The Promises of God

Hiram Kemp

There are many reasons to love and appreciate our God. However, one of the primary reasons to adore and to praise God is because He always keeps His promises. God is a God who cannot lie (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2). It is impossible for God to lie, and therefore, we can place our hope firmly in Him (Hebrews 6:18). The truthfulness of God should motivate God's people to see Him as the trustworthy God who always delivers whatever He says He will do. When God promises us something, we can be sure that it will come to pass. In this article, let us notice a few of the promises that God made to us and allow our faith to be bolstered as we contemplate His execution of those promises.

God's Abiding Presence

One of the things that God promised His people is His abiding presence. When Joshua replaced Moses, God promised Joshua that He would be with him wherever he went (Joshua 1:9). We read later of Joshua's success, which was no doubt based upon the presence of Yahweh (Joshua 21:43-45; 24:29-31). When Jesus came into the world, it is said He would *be called "Immanuel, which means God with us"* (Matthew 1:23). As Jesus' earthly ministry was ending and He was preparing to ascend back to the right hand of God, He promised His disciples that He would always be present (Matthew 28:20). The promise of Jesus' continual presence was not just true for those present when He uttered those words. Matthew wrote those words down, and they have been preserved for all of God's people down through the centuries. If our lives are free from covetousness, we will be able to be content with God's presence because He has said, *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Hebrews 13:5 NKJV).

God promised to be with us as His children, and we can live every day, confidently knowing no matter what, He is there. We can neither escape His presence nor should we want to escape from the presence of

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God (Psalm 139:7-11). God's presence gives us the courage to face the challenges because we realize that we do not battle alone. We are clothed with God's armor and surrounded by His presence (Ephesians 6:10-17). The enduring presence of God is one of the promises He made and kept. Let us be cognizant and grateful for God's presence as we live for Him.

God's Eternal Word

People have said negative things about the Bible throughout the centuries, but no one has been able to get rid of it. The Bible is here to stay no matter how much unbelievers and skeptics may despise it. God gave us the Bible, and He also promised that it would endure forever. The grass and flowers are transient, but the Word of the Lord endures forever (Isaiah 40:6-8). The prophet Isaiah wrote 700 years before Jesus Christ, but we can still read and study his writings today. When Jesus preached about the destruction of the Temple, He reiterated Isaiah's words. ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away”*** (Matthew 24:35). Furthermore, Jesus emphasized that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35). This means that the Bible is unchangeable, and it is indestructible. We should take confidence as we read our Bibles that we are reading the same words that were originally penned in Hebrew and Greek but have been preserved for us to read in English today. The God Who promised the Word has protected the Word from ruin or extinction. Peter wrote to Christians in Asia Minor, and he quoted from Isaiah to stress the abiding nature of the Word of God (1 Peter 1:23-25).

Jesus' Arrival and Advocacy


Jesus was promised in the Old Testament. The Old Testament promised that he would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Isaiah said he would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). We are even told that he would suffer terribly on humanity's behalf (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53). When we turn to the pages of the New Testament, that is exactly what and Who we find. The promised Messiah came and fulfilled every prophecy and promise that God made about Him in the Old Testament (Luke 24:44). Paul went as far

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as to say, *“For all the promises of God in Him [Christ Jesus] are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us”* (2 Corinthians 1:20). God did not simply promise that Jesus would come to die for us but that He would live to continually aid us during our earthly sojourn (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus is in Heaven right this moment serving as our Advocate (1 John 2:1-2). He is sitting at the right hand of God making intercession for the people of God (Romans 8:33-35). What God promised and delivered in Jesus is far beyond anything we could have expected. Jesus came to earth from Heaven so that one day we could go from Earth to Heaven (Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Eternal Life

The final promise worthy of our consideration is the promise of eternal life. Eternal life is the promise that God made before the world began (Titus 1:2). Our minds struggle to think back that far because we were not there, but God was, and He has been keeping His Word ever since. John simply stated that God promised us eternal life (1 John 2:25). We already possess eternal life in one sense if we are Christians (1 John 5:13). Still, we are waiting for the full realization of our eternal inheritance, which we will not receive until we see Jesus and are ushered into His presence forevermore. We do not have to doubt our salvation. If we are walking in the light, we are cleansed from our sins and assured of eternal life (1 John 1:7). God will not cast us out and no one can take us out of His hand (John 6:37; 10:29). Eternal life in the New Testament deals with both a **quality** of life and a **duration** of life. **We enjoy the abundant life now (John 10:10), and we will live forever when this life concludes (John 11:25).**

Thank God that He keeps His promises, and we can depend on Him. Read your Bible, looking for the promises of God, and cling to them. See God as the one Who fulfills everything He foretold. **God keeps His promises to us, and this should motivate us to keep our promises to Him** (2 Timothy 2:11-13). 

Hiram Kemp preaches for the Lehman Avenue church of Christ in Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA.

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The Lord Will Provide

Keith Kasarjian

One of the great statements in the entire Bible is found in Genesis 22. In verses 8 and 14 we read, “*God will provide*” and “*the Lord will provide*” (NKJV). To have a better grasp on all the ramifications of that declaration, we must understand the context that produced such an explicit statement of faith.

God had told Abraham to go to Mt. Moriah and sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-8). Not knowing that he was to be the sacrifice, Isaac asked his father “*where is the lamb for the burnt offering?*” (v. 7). Faithful Abraham replied to his son, “*God will provide*” (v. 8). Therefore, Abraham, Isaac and their helpers made the journey to Mt. Moriah where, as he was instructed to do, Abraham built an altar, arranged firewood under it and bound his beloved son as if he were a sacrificial lamb. Oh, the faith of Abraham!

However, before the knife could fall, God spoke to Abraham and told him not to follow through with sacrificing his son. Instead, Abraham sacrificed the ram caught in the thicket. Out of gratitude, Abraham called that place “*The Lord Will Provide*” (v. 8).

Indeed, the Lord did provide. He provided the sacrifice (v. 13) so that Isaac need not be sacrificed, and He promised (and subsequently provided) future blessings for Abraham and his descendants (vs. 15-18). Let’s not forget that God is the One Who provided Isaac. Even if Isaac had been sacrificed, it could still be said that God provided! Notice, though, that God’s provision was conditional. It was contingent. The same is still true today.

The Lord will provide **when we put our faith in Him**. It was a deep, abiding faith in the Almighty that caused Abraham to do the unthinkable. Only because he completely trusted God was he willing to sacrifice his son. **We know that faith is an absolute necessity to please God** (Hebrews 11:6), and yet, many times we find ourselves lacking it. We worry about

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the future, our finances, our health and a million other things because we've not trusted the Lord to provide. Sometimes we want to say, "If He will provide, then, I will trust Him," but all the while, God has declared, "Trust me, and I will provide."

The Lord will provide **when we obey Him**. Can you imagine the anxiety that Abraham faced the night before he was to leave for the mountain? He rose early (v. 3) to begin packing, and I wonder if it was because he could not sleep. No doubt his pillow was soaked by the streams of tears that flowed from his eyes all through the night. Yet, he went. Swallowing the lump in his throat, his shaking hand grasped the razor-sharp knife to kill his son. Why? Profoundly, he did so because God told him to do it. This is the man who had also given up his home (Genesis 12:1) and his son Ishmael (Genesis 21:10-12) for the same reason – **to obey God**. Question: **How far would you go to obey God?**

The Lord will provide...*when we put Him first*. Abraham put God ahead of feelings, family, emotions, and human reasoning. There is no doubt as to who was at the top of his priority list! God has promised to provide our needs when we put Him first (Matthew 6:25-33); we simply need to "test" Him (Malachi 3:10) to see that He keeps His promises.

What a great man was Abraham. What an excellent example he is for us. We serve a living, loving and providing God, and so we need not worry about the future, fear man or live without assurance. If I have put my complete faith in God, have wholly obeyed Him and have put Him first in my life, then I too can say, **"the Lord will provide."** †

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How Do You Measure Up?

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

But if you have bitter envy and [a] self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

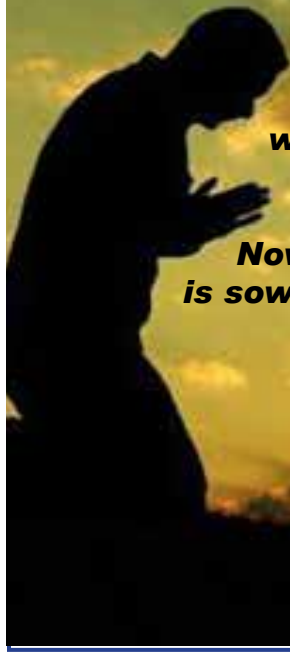
This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

James 3:13-18



From a City in Thailand to Collierville, Tennessee

Rebecca Rushmore

What does a city in Thailand have in common with Collierville, Tennessee? At first glance, most would say, “Very little, if anything.” However, a man visiting the Collierville church of Christ proved the two cities have a great deal in common.


The Voice of Truth International (VOTI) is a magazine of religious articles published quarterly. It is distributed in many countries around the world. The magazine is also translated into several languages for use in non-English speaking countries. Recently, a visitor arrived for Sunday services with a copy of VOTI in his hand. The gentleman retired several years ago and moved to the country of his wife’s birth, Thailand. When he attended a local church of Christ there, he discovered that no one in the congregation spoke or read English. However, when members realized he spoke English, a brother retrieved a couple copies of VOTI to give him.

Later, this Christian man read through the magazine and recognized something from home. At the end of one of the articles, he noted the biographical information indicated the writer of the article resided in Collierville, Tennessee, a city near his hometown. Collierville also happens to be next door to the town where a congregation



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of the Lord's church produces a radio broadcast this man is able to hear in Thailand. The gentleman determined to visit Collierville the next time he travelled home to visit his grandchildren. He did just that this past Sunday. With a copy of *The Voice of Truth International* in hand, brought all the way from Thailand, this brother in Christ worshipped with the Collierville church of Christ Sunday morning, and he wanted to see if the author of the article still attended there.

The value of literature to teach non-Christians and to edify the saved is not always evident, but it is not in vain (Deuteronomy 32:2; Isaiah 55:11). This event demonstrates two great points. First, distributors of Christian literature may never know all the impacts made by their efforts (Luke 8:11-15; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9). In this case, a Christian on foreign soil found edification (2 Corinthians 12:19) from literature in his own language (1 Corinthians 1:18; 1 Thessalonians 2:13), even though he was unable to easily communicate with fellow Christians in Thailand (1 Corinthians 14:6-19). Thai Christians had the resources and the interest to reach out with the Word to visitors to their congregation (1 Thessalonians 1:8). Second, two seemingly unrelated cities across the world from each other have a great deal in common – Christians. God's people can find a home and a Christian family no matter where they travel when they find the Lord's church (Romans 16:16; 2 Corinthians 13:13). 

Rebecca Rushmore is a Staff Writer for *The Voice of Truth International* and a school-teacher. She resides in Collierville, Tennessee, USA.

[Editor's Note: The article that led a Christian living in Thailand to Collierville, Tennessee was written by my daughter, Rebecca Rushmore, and published several years ago. She was present when the brother from Thailand visited, but had he come a couple of weeks earlier or a couple of weeks later, Rebecca would not have been present that Sunday morning in Collierville, Tennessee. It appears that God's providence may have been involved in the background to facilitate spiritual uplifting of a brother in a foreign land surrounded by unknown tongues (to him) through copies of VOTI and further encouragement upon meeting the author of one of the articles halfway around the world from where he lives. Truly, it's a small, small world! ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

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THE WORD OF GOD

The Sawdust in Our Spiritual Diet

Mike Riley


The story is told of a thrifty man who one day decided to save money on donkey feed. Every day, he would add increasing amounts of sawdust into the donkey's feed. Because the process was gradual, the donkey did not notice any difference as he cleaned up his manger. The man's plan was working well, until the donkey suddenly died because of living on 100% sawdust.



Similarly, spiritual food that contains the pure Word of God, once mixed with worldly sawdust [watered-down or social gospel], will eventually lead to spiritual death (2 Peter 2). Indeed, it is sad to see some members of the church act as though they cannot understand why so many spiritually malnourished Christians die [abandon the Lord's church] even after being members of the church for many years.

The psalmist recorded for us that God's Word is a *"lamp"* to the feet and a *"light"* to one's pathway (Psalm 119:105; cf., Proverbs 6:23). However, how can members of the Lord's body make application of that *"light"* in their everyday living if they remain ignorant of that light (Hebrews 5:12-14)? What is the use of chiding weak Christians about their little faith if spiritually strong Christians do not teach them enough of the pure Word for them to be able to develop strong faith (Psalm 51:12-13; Romans 10:17; 2 Timothy 2:1-2)?

All of the church pep rallies, sermons and lectures about Christian duty won't do much good for weak-in-the-faith Christians, until they are taught the pure Word of God (Proverbs 30:5; Psalm 19:7-8).

Brethren, if there is any sawdust in our spiritual diet, we need to get rid of it and start feeding our spiritually weak brethren the pure *"milk"* of the Word (1 Peter 2:2), gradually bringing them up to the *"strong meat"* of the Word (Hebrews 5:14 KJV), so they might grow into spiritually mature workers for the Lord and His church (1 Peter 2:1-2; Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Peter 3:18; Colossians 1:3-10). 

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Planting and Producing

Raymond Elliott

Farmers have planted the seed for this year's crops as evident by the plants of various kinds now growing. Even we who have gardens annually anticipate the time when we can enjoy working the soil. It is also a wonderful experience to be able to enjoy vegetables from the garden. There is an age-old truth that we would



like to bring to your attention once again, and that is, you always reap as you have sown. This seems very simple and elementary, but it is very profound.

In the study of the Parable of the Sower or Soils, as recorded in Luke 8, we learn that Jesus used the common and known to teach spiritual truths to those of sincere and honest hearts (8:10). Jesus said that the Seed is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). God's power of salvation today is the Gospel of His Son (Romans 1:16). The Word never changes. It will always produce after its kind. The soil is also most important because it represents the various kinds of hearts. If there is a failure in reaping, such cannot be blamed on the Seed, for therein is the God-given power to germinate and reproduce. James wrote that we should ***"...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls"*** (James 1:21 NKJV). Peter declared that we have ***"...been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever"*** (1 Peter 1:23). Wherein is the failure to produce? It must be in the soil or the heart of a man. Some hearts are like the hard ground, while others are like the stony or thorny ground. Please notice the following observations.

In order for the Seed (the Word) to be effective and to produce, the

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soil (the heart – mind or soul) must necessarily be prepared in order to receive the Seed (the Word or Gospel). It is written that Rehoboam did that which was evil “...*because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord*” (2 Chronicles 12:14). In contrast, we read of a faithful servant of God. “*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel*” (Ezra 7:10).

The Seed (the Gospel) must be sown (preached). The Seed (the Word) must be sown (taught). This is the responsibility of sowers (Christians). Jesus commanded His disciples to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to everyone (Mark 16:15). The more seed that is sown, the greater the harvest will be. Are we sowing the Seed of the kingdom as we should?

The Seed (the Word) will always produce after its kind. In Genesis 1:11-12, we learn:

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth”; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

This principle is true in the moral and spiritual kingdom, too. The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 6:7-8, “*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.*”

Whenever the Gospel of Christ is taught and obeyed, only Christians and churches of Jesus Christ are produced. One can be a Christian today just like in the first century by obeying the same Gospel of Jesus Christ. When a penitent believer is immersed in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, the Lord adds that person to His church (Acts 2:36-38, 47). **The Word of God only produces Christians only!** †

Raymond Elliott is a semi-retired preacher who lives in Prattville, Alabama, USA.

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

(Luke 12:49-53)

I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!

But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished!

Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division.

For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three.

Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

The general thinking is that the teachings of Christ will bring peace and love to the world – and that would be the result if Satan were not at war with everything that is good and right.

Ephesians 6:12 explains: ***“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”***

Though following the teachings of Christ brings peace to the Christian, often those around him oppose with hatred and anger everything for which he stands.

What does the passage say, that the “thing” Christ was bringing would be like a **fire**: purifying and cleansing

on the one hand but bringing hatred and division on the other hand. Matthew 25:34, Hebrews 4:3, Revelation 13:8 and other passages tell us that the salvation that comes to Christians through the sacrifice of our Lord was in God’s plan from the foundation of the world! In Luke 12:49, Jesus stated His distress that the plan would not be accomplished until He was “baptized” with His own suffering and death for our sins. The response to the long-term plan of salvation through our own birth into His one Family – the church – would result in major divisions in earthly families. Sadly, often the Christian’s worst “enemies” are those who hate him because he has turned from the lies and divisions of the world to Christ!

“I DON’T HAVE ENOUGH FAITH TO BE AN ATHEIST.”

Betty Burton Choate

Atheists declare that there is no God! They are rock solid in their conviction, but I wonder how they can claim to be ultra intelligent and reach such a conclusion?

Walking along a path, I see hoof marks – not *a horse* but simply the *indentions in the soil*. What do I conclude? A horse passed this way!

Journeying on, I spot a *bee* flying to its hive. Careful not to irritate the little workers, I watch as they continue the intricate construction of the hive for the residence of the “queen bee,” through whom future bees are produced. Each bee has its own shape, its own work and its own intelligence and life span – all according to “intelligent design.”

No, I didn’t see the Designer of the bee or the bee family, but I know there was a power that brought the whole thing into existence. Why am I so sure? I am sure **because since humans have existed in this world, no one has ever seen a single thing come into existence from nothing!**

On the other hand, we are told by scientists that every surface of everything is covered by bacteria, **one-cell living organisms**, too small for the human eye to see. Contrast that with life forms that we *can* see: grass, flowers, trees, each comprised of millions of individual cells filled with DNA instructions on what that particular cell is to do to enable the existence of the entire plant.

Plants

This world is an amazing place! Most of it is covered by lush, green vegetation, watered by rivers, streams, dew and rainfall. How many centuries passed before humans realized that the living plants “breathed” in carbon dioxide and “breathed” out oxygen? This circulation of air gases is vital for humans, because we breathe out carbon dioxide and breathe in oxygen! What a perfect balance God arranged!

To be sure that the balance continues, these plants have flourishing root

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systems and seeds by the millions! How did the seeds get there? The “flowers” of the plant were pollinated by bees or other flying insects. According to one scientific statement, “Pollen from a flower’s anthers (*the male part of the plant*) rubs or drops onto a pollinator. The pollinator then takes this pollen to another flower where the pollen sticks to the stigma (*the female part*). The fertilized flower later yields fruit and seeds.” Amazingly, even plants have male and female counterparts essential for their reproduction!

Within those seeds is the life and DNA of future plants. Unless humans get involved and destroy the cycle, it will continue year after year, increasing in numbers with each “generation.” Genesis 1:11-12 says:

Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth”; and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (NKJV)

Why are these plants so important? Because every living air-breathing creature sustains its life by eating the vegetation, seeds, and fruits that came into existence on God’s third day of creation! Without this great forethought, nothing created on the following days could have lived.

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After creating the lights (sun, moon and stars) to rule the day and the night, also so that the plants could live:

Then God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.” So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” (Genesis 1:20-22)

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Animals do amazing things. They are very intelligent, able to do whatever God intended for them to do: make homes, find food, defend themselves and couple with mates so that offspring can carry the species forward for future generations. They know their own languages and can communicate with each other. Some of them also can learn words in human languages! How many words in your language does your dog know?

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Humans are the crown of God’s creation, the only thing that is described as **made in God’s image**. *“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”* (Genesis 1:27). We don’t know that our physical bodies are in any way patterned after God’s spiritual body, but we do know that He endowed us with emotions that respond to events in our lives, as His emotions are described in Scripture. We know that He endowed us with minds that are capable of reading and understanding His message, also as recorded in Scripture. Through these abilities, humans partake of the nature of God in vital ways that everything else in creation lacks.

What HUMANS Lack

Atheists claim that humans are at the top of the intelligence pole. Yes, amazing things have been done by humans. We look at the monstrous cities that have been built by human hands. We see reports of machines that humans have flown into outer space, even to the moon! Amazing, life-saving surgeries are performed by human hands. It seems there is no end to what intelligent and hard-working humans have done and continue to do. **Yet, there are two very real limits to human ability: we cannot create anything from nothing, and we cannot breathe life into anything!**

No matter how real a “humanoid” seems to be, it is only a figure, perhaps a work of art, but it is made of materials that already existed – not something that a human spoke into existence. No matter how life-like the “creation” seems, it does not breathe, it does not move by its own volition, it does not think, and it does not reproduce. It is only a “work of art,” and

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it will never be anything more.

Conclusion

What can we conclude from our observations? An intelligence and creation-force, totally outside of our physical world, **exists!** This Being, Who has the power to simply speak whatever He desires into existence, is **real! Though human eyes cannot see Him, the presence of every physical thing around us demands that we confess His existence.** As science has progressed to the point of “seeing” the trillions of “cells” of every living thing, with their individual and complex DNA messages, we must simply fall in overwhelming submission to such power and intelligence!

Who is this “God”? How can we know Him? How can we worship Him? Even for these questions, He has supplied the answer. There is one Book that has been preserved through the long centuries. It has been challenged by unbelievers but has proven itself to be the inspired Word of God by hundreds of prophecies made hundreds of years before their fulfillment, yet each one proved to be true. This Book – the Bible – written through the inspiration of God by about 40 different men, over a period of 1500 years, in different languages, has been preserved in its entirety for humanity. It has been translated into more languages than any other book, more millions of copies have been printed than of any other book and it continues to be the “best seller” around the world.

The tremendous value of the Bible is that it tells us of God, of the beginning of creation, of the fall of humanity, of our Lord and Savior – Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Brother of humanity – Who gave His life for our sins so that we could become the children of God. The Bible teaches us how to live godly lives in this broken world and how to prepare for an eternity with our God. No other book has survived the challenges of time and of Satan to remain in our hands as has the road map to Heaven. It has been preserved by our God, to provide us with His message so that we can know Who created the wondrous world around us, Who breathed into our nostrils the breath of life and Who has promised our resurrection to life when our Lord returns at the end of time. †

Betty Burton Choate is the widow of J.C. Choate, founder of *The Voice of Truth International*. She resides in Winona, Mississippi, USA.

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The Incubator Bird

Micah Fetner

The incubator bird, also known as the megapode, is an Australian bird that instantly disproves evolution. The scientists who support evolution cannot figure out how this bird can still be around. All mother birds use their body heat to incubate their eggs except the incubator bird. Each egg is ½ a pound and is the size of an ostrich egg. The bird itself is only three to four pounds. Imagine trying to lay an egg that big when you are that small! Mother lays her eggs as normal. There are 25-35 eggs in each mound. Then, she piles up brush and debris up to twenty feet tall and fifty feet wide on the eggs. Then, she leaves, never to return. The heat of fermentation keeps it warm.

Next, the male takes over. He keeps the eggs at exactly 91 degrees. If it is 1 degree over that, the eggs die. If it is 1 degree below that, the eggs die. Also, the eggs must be kept at precisely 99.5% humidity or else they die! On top of that, the chicks have to breathe! So, in order to provide fresh air, the male digs down to the eggs every day. The air has to get into the shell.

The mother bird formed the egg with tiny holes, way too small to be seen. These holes are called pores. These holes are shaped like cones, the narrowest part inside the shell. When it can't get enough air, the chick removes the inside layer. As it grows, the chick strips off more and more, thus providing sufficient air and thinning the egg!

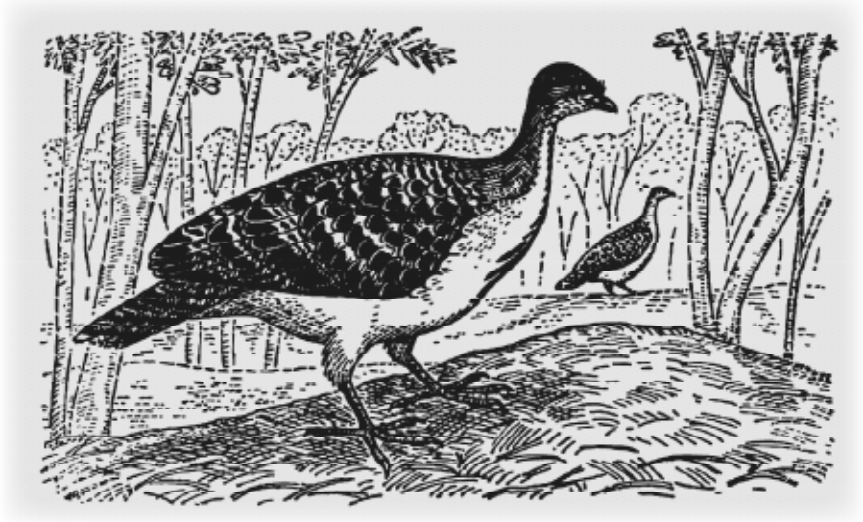
The baby has no egg-tooth but uses its sharp claws to break the egg. The male has to dig into or cover the nest in order to adjust the temperature or humidity. He tirelessly checks and adjusts the eggs for the incubation period.

The chick is unique when it hatches, possessing all of its feathers and ready to fly. Chicks receive no nourishment from their parents. Once they hatch, it takes them three days to get to the top of the mound.

If evolution were true, there wouldn't be any incubator birds. They would all have died millions of years ago that evolutionists ascribe to their theory. Evolution teaches that natural selection discards all useless body

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parts over millions and millions of years. Without each of these attributes, the bird could not survive. It would have died, as the chick would not be able to survive gestation, and dead things do not evolve.



If accident and chance ruled the universe, then there would be no incubator birds – or a universe, for that matter. Yet, there is a universe, and there are incubator birds. So, why are there incubator birds? Why do they have these perfectly designed attributes? There must be a Designer. ✝

Micah Fetner submitted and had published his first article in *The Voice of Truth International* – this article – when he was 12 years old. He’s a member of the Creekwood Church of Christ in Mobile, Alabama, USA.

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Seeking God

Jeremy W. Barrier

This is the first of several articles that are intended for those who have little or no understanding of Christianity. These articles will lead eventually into the teachings about Jesus, the church of the Bible and how to become a Christian.

What is a Christian? Who is a Christian? Do Christians meet in that large, beautiful building there? These are good questions. These are fair questions. I realize that if one is interested in learning about Christianity and knows little about it, this is an intimidating task! I think it is similar to asking a



question such as “What is the internet?” or “From where did the Internet come?” These are questions that are so simple, but sometimes it is difficult to answer them simply and easily. Such is the case with issues related to Jesus, Christianity and the church. As I begin to answer these questions and many others, I would like to **keep it simple** and begin by telling a short story that will help us begin this journey.

A few years ago, I was traveling through the Philippines. I had been spending a few days in the city of Cebu, where several million people call home, and I was visiting with friends and fellow Christians who live there. On one particular day, I was having coffee with a Christian, a Filipino friend of mine who we shall call Coco Mendoza. Coco is a tall, handsome charismatic individual who has the voice of an angel. In fact, Coco’s abilities to sing the best songs of Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra and Harry Connick, Jr., in his smooth-as-silk Baritone Bass voice, will easily sweep your heart and mind away. With such talents, Coco has had quite

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an interesting life in the entertainment business of the Philippines. This is where his story begins, as he offered it up to me over our coffee mugs.


Coco had been in the movie business for a few years. He was living in the capital city of the Philippines at the time, Manila. It is a huge, sprawling city that seems to continue without end and swallows whole regions under its metropolitan expanse. As a young man, Coco was trying to get a start in the entertainment business with the hopes of becoming a Director, but he immediately began to realize the toll that it was taking (and would continue to take) on his life. While his wife and two children were back in Cebu, Coco was working long hours, abusing alcohol and drugs, and feeling like he had lost his way. As happens with many of us, this spiral continued for quite some time until Coco realized that within weeks, possibly days, everything that he was and everything that he had was about to be taken from him. Coco needed help, and so he began to seek out a Higher Power. He was seeking to find God to help him through this dilemma. However, he had no idea of where he could find God, where he could find relief or how he should approach his many problems that were hitting him daily. Not knowing the best solution, Coco noted that there was a large, beautiful Catholic Cathedral, a large church building, located near the studios where he had been working, and he was quite determined to find God there for assistance. As a daily habit, Coco would stop in the Church every morning for a prayer service, called a Matins, and he diligently and deeply prayed from the depths of his heart, seeking God's help. Yet, his situation still was not changing. As this became a daily custom for Coco, he noticed, every day, that a priest would stand before the people and recite a prayer, and at a certain moment every week within the prayer, he would state the following words: ***"...Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these things shall be added to you."***

Coco was so intrigued by these soothing and pleasing words. What could they mean? Who uttered those words? Obviously, Coco was aware that the priest was uttering these words every day, but he was also convinced that the priest must be quoting the words of someone else. Could it be God's invitation? This was simply the beginning of a journey. Coco made the decision that he would make this journey. He determined that he would

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find out who had said these words, and what these words might mean for him. This was the beginning of Coco's amazing journey that led him to find God, to find Jesus, to understand Christianity, the church and to seek healing for himself and also to restore his family.

As we begin this journey, I need you to understand one thing. The one thing that you need to know is that if you have questions about God, Jesus, Christianity or the church, then ask your questions and seek answers. God has made clear that for those who ask, it shall be given, those who seek, they shall find. Those who knock, the door shall be opened to them. In short, you are living in a world and a universe that is not devoid of God's presence. There is an active God, a Creator, of all that we see, and in fact, He invites us to make a journey to find and discover His truth that has not only been revealed to us through our natural surroundings and the world about us but has also been revealed to us through a set of Writings that Christians often refer to as the Bible.

While I realize that we are getting too far ahead of ourselves, since there are so many terms, words and ideas that we haven't explained yet (e.g., Bible, Jesus, Christianity, etc.), I do invite you to seek the kingdom of God above all else. Be persistent. Seek to answer your questions as if the fate of your life now and in the future depends upon it. The words that Coco heard from the mouth of the priest within the Cathedral during Matins every day of the week were indeed the words of God! They were originally words spoken through the mouth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, almost 2,000 years ago, encouraging us that if we do seek we will find and that everything else in life will fall into place or be added to us. For those of you who want to look at these words for yourself, they can be found within the Holy Scriptures, or sometimes called the Holy Bible or just the Bible. If you open a Bible, look at one specific book entitled Matthew, and in chapter six and verse 33 (or often Christians will write simply Matthew 6:33), you will find the quote. Also, the verses that talk about asking, seeking and knocking are found in Matthew 7:7. In short, my point, above all else at this point is, **if you actively seek God, you will find God**. Don't give up on your journey. 

Jeremy W. Barrier is a missions evangelist and head of the graduate program at Heritage Christian University in Florence, Alabama, USA.

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Obedience to the Faith

Marilyn LaSrape

The following passages were brought to my attention by one of the sisters in a recent ladies' Bible class. I had mentioned the necessity of living in obedient faith to the will of God. Her comments made me realize that in all my years of striving to teach God's Word, this phrase in these two passages of the declaration "**for obedience to the faith**" had completely eluded me.

Romans 1:5 says, "*Through Him we have received grace and apostleship **for obedience to the faith** among all nations for His name*" (NKJV). Romans 16:25-27 says:

*Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began, but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, **for obedience to the faith** – to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.*

What does obedience to **the faith** look like? How is this done? In the *Gospel Advocate Commentary on the New Testament Epistles on Romans*, David Lipscomb made these observations on Romans 1:5.

Obedience which springs out of faith as its moving cause. No act of obedience is acceptable to God which is not prompted by faith in him who performs it. This shows that there is something in faith to be obeyed. This obedience is rendered not simply by believing; for that is to exercise the faith, not to obey it. But faith in Jesus the Christ as the Son of the living God demands a course of life in accordance with that which is believed, and to follow this course is to obey the faith by yielding to its demands. (22)

On Romans 16:26, he commented, "For the obedience to which faith in God leads" (282). Belief without obedience is called out in James 2:19

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in the most uncomplimentary way. ***“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the devils believe – and tremble!”*** Will Satan or any of his minions ever bow in obedience to the will of God?

Our Leader by perfect example, Jesus Christ, showed the world throughout the ages what obedience to the faith looked like and how it was done. Hebrews 5:8 proclaims, ***“though He was a Son, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.”*** No human mind or any group of human minds will ever be able to properly envision the suffering that Christ endured, whereupon, then, to show sufficient gratitude.

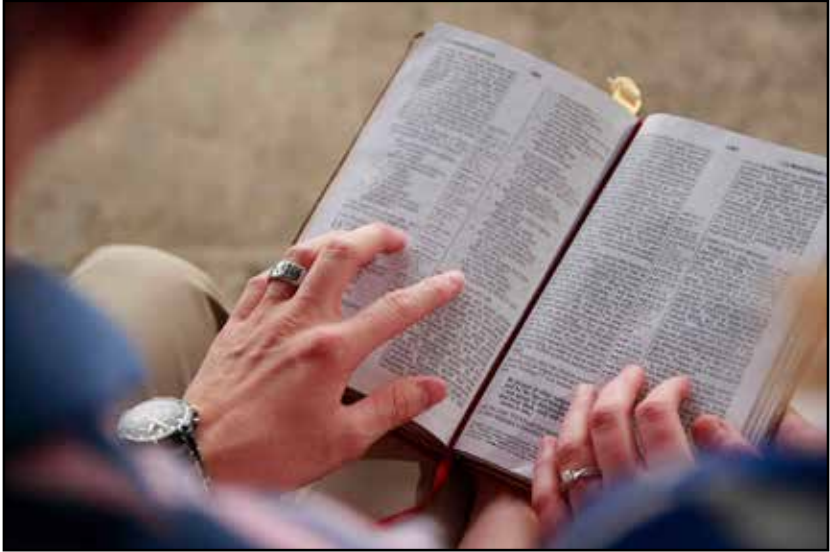
The book of Acts is the volume of conversions and of the establishment and spread of the church. The examples of conversion to the faith in Acts involve:

- Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2)
- Samaritans (8:5-25)
- The Eunuch (8:26-40)
- Saul/Paul (9:1-22; 22:3-21; 26:2-23)
- Cornelius (10:1-48)
- Lydia (16:14-15)
- Philippian jailor (16:30-34)
- Corinthians (18:1-11)
- Twelve disciples at Ephesus (19:1-7)

An extreme example of conversion being the result of obedience to the faith was in the action of numerous Jewish priests. Acts 6:7 records, ***“Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.”*** The word ***“obedience”*** demands action. Our cars would never move if we only believed they would carry us where we wanted to go. Our belief must be coupled with proper action.

Paul penned in Ephesians 6:10-11, ***“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles [schemes] of the devil.”*** Paul named several pieces of armor that are vital to our spiritual survival. In verse 16 he wrote, ***“Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”*** What is faith? Hebrews

SALVATION



11:1 reads, “*Now faith is the substance [realization] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” Obedience to the faith is acting upon what we have been instructed through divine revelation. How do we know this? Romans 10:17 is very clear. “*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*” Paul was bluntly clear to the church in Philippians 4:9. “*The things which you **learned and received and heard and saw** in me, **these do, and the God of peace will be with you.***” Isn’t that rich? Biblical faith in God is preceded by knowledge of His Word. **Obedience to the faith is imperative to inherit eternal life through Christ!** †

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[Editor’s Note: The faith about which the apostle Paul wrote throughout his epistle to Christians in Rome is **sandwiched between “obedience to the faith”** appearing in Romans 1:5 and Romans 16:26. Therefore, “**justified by faith**” (Romans 5:1) does **not** equate to saved by faith only. The sole “**faith only**” passage reads, “**You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only**” (James 2:24). ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

Verse Search



1. Of what did Paul say Christians should cleanse themselves? (7:1)
2. What did Paul say he had done to no one? (7:2)
3. What made Paul exceedingly joyful? (7:4)
4. What was Paul's situation in Macedonia? (7:5)
5. Whose coming comforted Paul? (7:6)
6. What other news comforted Paul while he was in Macedonia? (7:7)
7. What made the Corinthians sorry? (7:8)
8. Why did Paul rejoice over their sorrow? (7:9)
9. What does godly sorrow produce? (7:10)
10. What does the sorrow of the world produce? (7:10)
11. Why did Paul write the severe letter to the Corinthians? (7:12)
12. Why was Paul not ashamed of how he had boasted to Titus concerning the Corinthians? (7:14).
13. What made Titus' affections for the Corinthians even greater? (7:15)
14. How much confidence did Paul have in the Corinthians? (7:16)

(See the back cover for answers.)

VERSE SEARCH

1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

2 Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one. **3** I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. **4** Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.

5 For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. **6** Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, **7** and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more.

8 For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. **9** Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. **10** For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. **11** For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. **12** Therefore, although I wrote to you, I did not do it for the sake of him who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of him who suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear to you.

13 Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. **14** For if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was found true. **15** And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him. **16** Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything.

NOTES: This chapter shows Paul's deep love for the Corinthians. It also illustrates that love does not preclude rebuking someone. Paul wrote a severe letter to them, which brought sorrow for a while. However, Paul was glad because that sorrow produced repentance in their hearts, which was far more important than some temporary grief.



5-MINUTE BIBLE STUDY

Hope

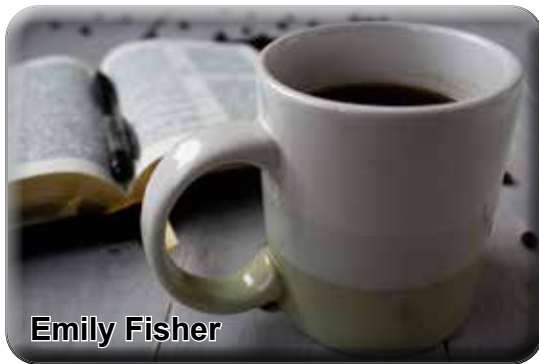
Paula Bates

1. “This hope we have as an _____ of the soul, both sure and _____, and which enters the Presence behind the veil.” Hebrews 6:19
2. “That they may set their _____ in God, And not forget the works of God, But keep His _____.” Psalm 78:7
3. “Now hope does not _____, because the love of God has been poured out in our _____ by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Romans 5:5
4. “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be _____ by law; you have fallen from _____. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the _____ of righteousness by faith.” Galatians 5: 4-5
5. “If indeed you continue in the _____, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the _____ which you heard, which was preached to every creature under _____, of which I, Paul, became a minister.” Colossians 1:23
6. “In hope of _____ life which God, who cannot _____ promised before time began.” Titus 1:2



- Answers:**
1. Anchor, steadfast
 2. Hope, commandments
 3. Disappoint, hearts
 4. Justified, grace, hope
 5. Faith, gospel, heaven
 6. Eternal, lie

Noting Your Bible



Hold Fast

There are many things in this life that we “hold” dearly, though despite some are so important to us now, in eternity, they will be meaningless. What does our Creator want us to hold dearly? If we do not diligently pursue Him, we will drift away and be lost. We all need encouragement and admonition at times to remain faithful to our Lord. A phrase that is used in Scripture to convey this is “hold fast.”

1. Note this topic in your Bible, and write next to it, “**Deuteronomy 11:22.**”
2. Turn to Deuteronomy 11 and underline verse 22. Hebrew Scripture often contains parallels – repeating the same thought in different words. Note here how Israel was to “keep all the commandments.” Circle the verbs: **love, walk, hold fast**, and next to this verse write, “**see 13:4.**”
3. Go to Deuteronomy 13, read the context here of recognizing and punishing a false prophet. Underline or circle the verbs in verse 4: **walk, fear, keep, obey, serve, hold fast**. Write, “**see Joshua 22:5.**”
4. Turn to Joshua 22:5. See also Joshua 23:8. The successor to Moses repeated this admonition to remain true to God. Israel failed to hold fast to God’s Word. Will I? Note here, “**see Isaiah 56:4.**”
5. Read Isaiah 56, and circle our phrase in verses 4 and 6. This is a beautiful prophecy of salvation for the “foreigner” – ultimately fulfilled in the church, the one body of Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-13). Write, “**see 1 Corinthians 15:2.**”
6. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, note what the Spirit through Paul instructed

those Christians to hold fast – that Word which he had preached, that is, the Gospel that they had received, in which they were standing and by which they were saved. Note here, “**see Philippians 2:16.**”

7. Turn to Philippians 2, noting the context of verses 12-16. Underline, “**holding fast the word of life**” and write, “**see 2 Thessalonians 2:15.**”
8. At 2 Thessalonians 2:15, underline “**stand fast and hold the traditions**” and circle “word or our epistle” at the end of verse 15 with a line or note going back to verse 14 – “gospel.” Traditions taught by God are to be kept. Let’s make sure we are holding God’s traditions that He has passed down to us through His inspired Word, rather than clinging to manmade traditions. Write, “**see 2 Timothy 1:13.**”
9. Turn to 2 Timothy 1:13. Paul conveyed to Timothy “**hold fast the pattern of sound words**” (see also Titus 1:9 – command to elders to keep “holding fast the faithful word”). Note here, “**see Colossians 2:19.**”
10. In Colossians, take the time to read the whole book, underline or circle our phrase in 2:19. Here, it is in the negative – some do not hold to the Head (Christ is the Head of the body, the church – Colossians 1:18). Write, “**see 1 Thessalonians 5:21.**”
11. Go to 1 Thessalonians 5:21, and again highlight our phrase. Paul’s closing admonitions include “holding fast to what is good and abstaining from every form of evil.” How can we do this? We must know the Word. Note here, “**see Hebrews 3:6.**”
12. At Hebrews 3:6, you may want to note that the books of Hebrews and Revelation contain “**hold fast**” the most out of the New Testament, and that is not surprising considering the theme of those books. Reference here, Hebrews 4:14 and 10:23. Highlight these passages, noting to what we are to hold fast. Take the time to study these further. Write, “**see Revelation 2:13.**”
13. Lastly, turn to Revelation 2:13 and write next to it, “**see also 2:25; 3:3, 11.**” Study and highlight these passages. We may need to repent as some of these congregations did, and then to hold fast to our Faithful Redeemer! ✝

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Average Guy

David Conley



January – “My New Year’s resolution is to start attending worship services regularly. I will begin as soon as I get over the holidays.”

February – “Wow! The weather is terrible! I’ll wait until the weather gets warmer.”

March – “There sure has been a lot of sickness in the community. I’d better not start attending worship right now. I wouldn’t want to catch a cold.”

April – “I’m sure no one will miss me at church since there will be plenty of attendance with the Easter crowd.”

May – “I have been stuck indoors all winter long! I need to get away, and the weekends are the only time I have.”

June – “Since I’m taking my vacation, I’ll start attending worship when I get back so I can be regular and won’t have to miss.”

THE CHURCH

July – “Sure is **hot!** I’m sure they will not have the air conditioning regulated just right at the church building. I think I’ll wait until it cools off some.”

August – “This is the time for the Gospel Meeting. I really don’t like visiting preachers. They don’t know us that well.”

September – “I can’t believe all the work it takes to get the kids back in school. I’ll take them to church when they get settled into their new school schedule.”

October – “You know how important the kids are to me. Since they are going to be stuck indoors all winter, I’d better take them up to the cabin before it turns too cold.”

November – “Sure is getting **colder!** I’m sure they will not have the heat regulated just right at the church building. I don’t want to be too uncomfortable.”

December – “Christmas shopping, parties, get-togethers, etc. I don’t have time for church right now, but I will make it my New Year’s resolution to start attending worship services regularly.”

Year after Year it goes. Don’t be the “Average Guy”!



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THE CHURCH


A GLORIOUS CHURCH

Dalton Key

The church described in the New Testament is no mere afterthought of God. Neither is it a meager substitute for an earthly kingdom that could not be established during the days of Christ's flesh. The inspired apostle Paul affirmed the church to be *"...according to the **eternal purpose** which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Ephesians 3:10-11 KJV).

God spoke through His prophet Isaiah Some 700 years before the church's establishment: *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it... for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"* (Isaiah 2:2-3).

Likewise, Daniel, looking forward to the days of the Roman Empire, the kingdom signified by the toes *"part of iron, and part of clay"* (Daniel 2:42) in king Nebuchadnezzar's dream, prophesied, *"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever"* (Daniel 2:44).

The church was established on Pentecost (Acts 2). The Roman kings were reigning, the Word of God was preached in Jerusalem, and all nations began flowing into the soul-saving kingdom of God. Heaven looks upon the kingdom as *"a glorious church"* (Ephesians 5:27). It was no accident. Heaven planned for it, prophesied concerning it and provided for it long before its actual inception. 

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

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THE CHURCH

The Beautiful Essential

Dwight Fuqua

David wrote, ***“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity”*** (Psalm 133:1 NKJV). We can neither say enough about the beauty nor overstate the importance of unity among God’s people. We must be one in life (one), in mind (two) and in teaching (three).

The beauty of unity is seen in the first century church. ***“Now all who believed were together”*** (Acts 2:44). ***“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul”*** (Acts 4:32). Sadly, the tragedy of division is seen in the religious world today and even wreaks havoc in the precious body of our Lord.

The apostle Paul presented three essentials of unity in Philippians 1:27. With conduct ***“worthy of the gospel of Christ”*** (one), we are to ***“stand fast in one spirit”*** (two) while ***“striving together for the faith of the gospel”*** (three). In other words, we must be united in life (one), in mind (two) and in teaching (three).

One

We must be united in life! Each must accept and submit to God’s will. Unity is only possible as we all are willing to “walk by the same rule” (Philippians 3:16). Paul exhorted, ***“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called”*** (Ephesians 4:1).

Two

We must be united in mind! ***“Be of the same mind toward one another”*** (Romans 12:16). ***“Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”*** (Romans 15:5-6). ***“Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship in the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of***

THE CHURCH

one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:1-2). *“Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you”* (2 Corinthians 13:11).

Three

We must be united in teaching! *“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (1 Corinthians 1:10). Unity is not found in our ability to be agreeable (ecumenism) but in our willingness to adhere to God’s platform: *“one body,” “one Spirit,” “one hope,” “one Lord,” “one faith,” “one baptism”* and *“one God”* (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Unity across our great brotherhood and in the local church takes constant work! In practical terms, it means *“with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Ephesians 4:2-3). **Unity is the beautiful essential. Never sacrifice the truth, but be willing to sacrifice yourself!** †

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THE POWER OF GOD'S WORD

Converts the Soul -- *Psa. 119:10*
Able to Save the Soul -- *1 Jn. 1:2*
Saved by Gospel -- *1 Cor. 15:2*
God's Power to Save -- *Rom. 1:16*
Baptism by It -- *1 Cor. 4:15*
Born by Word -- *1 Pet. 1:23*
Made Alive by It -- *Psa. 119:50*
Saved by Words -- *Acts 16:14*
Seed of Kingdom -- *Luke 11:17*
Sword of Spirit -- *Eph. 6:17*

Hebrews 4:12



Acts 20:32

Rom. 10:17 -- Produces Faith
Psa. 119:130 -- Word Gives Light
2 Th. 2:13 -- Word Works in Us
Jn. 17:17 -- Sanctified by Word
Jn. 15:3 -- Cleansed by Word
Jn. 8:32 -- Makes Man Free
1 Cor. 1:23 -- Served By Preaching
2 Tim. 3:16,17 -- Makes Complete
2 Pet. 1:3 -- Gives All Needed
Ecl. 1:3-8 -- Warns Not Reckless

TO MAKE KNOWN

THE

THE MANIFOLD WISDOM OF GOD

CHURCH

IT'S OUR JOB! EPH. 3:10-11

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Why the Changes?

Larry Murdock

Have you noticed the difference between Old Testament worship and New Testament worship? We read in the Old Testament of sacrifices, priests, festivals, clean and unclean animals, and clean and unclean food. We read of Sabbath days and special days observed by the Israelites of old. Why did all of that change?

Jesus' apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Colossae and said, "*...let no one judge you food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. Let no one cheat you of your reward...*" (Colossians 2:16-18 NKJV). The ordinances that God gave the Israelites that pertained to food and drink, festivals, new moons and Sabbaths were shadows. Christ was the One casting those shadows. When Christ came, we no longer look at the shadows, but instead, we look into the face of Christ. We become His disciples and follow His commandments. Our worship services in the Christian Age now follow the commands and examples of Christian worship as found in the New Testament. The rules of worship were changed! That's right!

God ordained the whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Why, then, did He change it? Well, God never intended for that system to remain. **After it served its purpose, God replaced it with Christian worship.** God was leading us to Christ – God's eternal sacrifice.

God's rules about sacrifice were given to the human family even in the days of Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel brought offerings. Cain's offerings were rejected, while Abel's offerings were accepted. God had rules of worship even then! Abel followed the command, but Cain did not. The Bible says that "*By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain...*" (Hebrews 11:4). **All of those Old Testament sacrifices were shadows of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.**

In Old Testament days, the Israelites had to continually bring their

WORSHIP

sacrifices to God's designated place for worship. God chose one big day in the year as the Atonement Day. To atone is to "to make amends : to provide or serve as reparation or compensation for something bad or unwelcome" ("Atone"). Literally, the word means to bring back into physical union what has been separated. Human sin has always separated people from their Creator. Isaiah said it this way:

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear. For your hands are defiled with blood, And your fingers with iniquity; Your lips have spoken lies, Your tongue has muttered perversity. No one calls for justice, Nor does any plead for truth. They trust in empty words and speak lies; They conceive evil and bring forth iniquity. (Isaiah 59:1-4)

What a mess in which sin leaves us! Mankind's biggest problem is his separation from God. Jesus came in order to bring us back together with God. How could Jesus do that? By removing our sins!

The Old Testament Day of Atonement was from God and taught to all who would listen so that the Israelites could be at one with God again. However, sacrifices did not happen just one day a year. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament commanded many kinds of sacrifices from the people. They were to be aware of their behavior all through the year. They were to observe certain times of the year as times of remembrance for the way God had interacted with His chosen people – the nation of Israel. God chose one family – descendants of Abraham – in order to guard and to preserve the knowledge of God in the world. He had them write it down so that it would pass down through the centuries even to this very day! God wanted you and me to know the background of the greatest sacrifice the world would ever know – the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Why, though, did God change the rules of worship? **The sacrificial system of the Old Testament had served its purpose of bringing us to Christ.** In the Old Testament era, sacrifices were offered continually. Under the New Testament, there is but One Sacrifice – the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

WORSHIP

Under the Old Testament, there was a priesthood who handled the sacrifices. Under the New Testament, the priesthood changed from top to bottom!

First of all, the high priesthood changed. Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first High Priest under God's rules of worship established on Mt. Sinai. Only Aaron's descendants could follow him in that role. In the New Testament, rules of worship note Jesus Christ is the High Priest. Yet, He was not a descendant of Aaron! How could Jesus be a high priest? Well, God changed the rule for the Christian Age. God predicted the change in Psalm 110:4 when David overheard God talking with His son, His anointed. ***"The Lord has sworn And will not relent, 'You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.'"***

In order to make Jesus the High Priest, God had to write a new covenant – a new agreement. Jesus signed the agreement with His own blood. Under the Old Testament, almost everything was dedicated to worship with blood – the blood of animals (Hebrews 9:22). Jesus dedicated and sanctioned the New Testament with His own blood (Hebrews 9:12; 13:12).

The priests of the Old Testament were all from the tribe of Levi. They were Levites. Yet, according to the New Covenant, Jesus has made all of His disciples to be priests! That's right! The apostle Peter called the newborn babes in Christ a ***"holy priesthood"*** and he said our job was to ***"...offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ"*** (1 Peter 2:5). A few verses later, Peter talked about this some more when he said, ***"...You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"*** (1 Peter 2:9). ***"Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased"*** (Hebrews 13:15-16). Never in the New Testament do you read of a special tribe of priests. You never read of the so-called clergy! Friends, **Jesus Christ is our High Priest, and every Christian is a priest before Him to offer up spiritual sacrifices.** The sacrificial system of the Old Testament changed to the sacrificial system of the New Testament. The old system was given to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

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Not only did the rules of sacrifice change, along with a change of priesthood, but some other things changed also. Remember Paul's list? ***“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths”*** (Colossians 2:16). In the New Testament, we find Christians meeting together for worship on the first day of the week, not the seventh or the Sabbath. The Sabbath day was the seventh day of the week. Christians met on the first day of the week. Acts 20:7 is one of the verses that shows this change. It was on a Wednesday when the apostle, along with doctor Luke, and seven other young brethren in Christ sailed away from Phillippi, headed for Troas. It took them five days to cross the sea. They arrived on Monday in the city of Troas. They stayed in the city for seven days. ***“Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day...”*** (Acts 20:7). The Christians in Troas met for the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Paul and his helpers did not meet with the church until the disciples came together for the purpose of breaking bread. This phrase is a reference to their observance of the Lord's Supper, which the Lord Jesus had commanded to be observed until He comes.

The church at Corinth also met on the first day of the week. The apostle Paul told the church at Corinth how to collect support for needy saints in Jerusalem, for whom they were contributing. He said, ***“On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come”*** (1 Corinthians 16:2). This first day of the week was the day when the disciples came together to break bread. Paul also said that he had commanded the churches of Galatia to do the same thing (1 Cor. 16:1). This was the practice of the churches of Christ in the first century. Church history tells us that Christians continued this practice for more than a hundred years before false teaching finally set in amongst them and they began to change their early practice. Churches of Christ today advocate going back to these early examples and reduplicating them even today. Therefore, on the first day of the week, you will find Christians – the churches of Christ – meeting to partake of the Lord's Supper, and while in the assembly, Christians will contribute so as

WORSHIP

to be zealous of good works that are bigger than what one Christian can do. If we believe that God's Word provides us with all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), then we will pay attention to the worship changes that God ordained when He established the New Testament.

Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (Hebrews 8:1-6).

Friends, the rules of worship have changed! You and I need to give heed to the new rules. 

Larry Murdock writes, records and produces Gospel messages for local and international radio. He preaches at the Gandy Church of Christ in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, USA.

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Kenney's Pennies

"Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, And You are exalted as head over all" (1 Chronicles 29:11 NKJV.) His rightful place!





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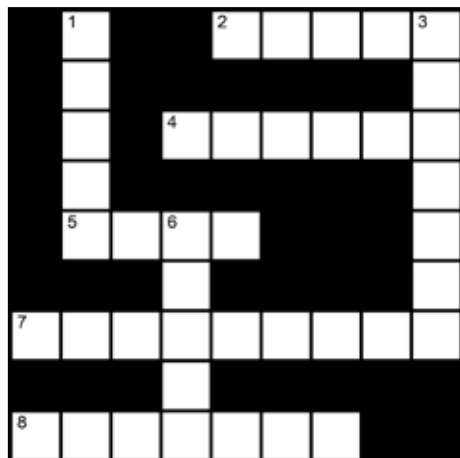
FAITH

Across

- 2 Faith without what is dead. James 2:26
- 4 What kind of faith did the apostles have when in the storm?
Matthew 16:8
- 5 What is the substance of faith? Hebrews 11:1
- 7 Who did Jesus tell that he had not found such great faith even in Israel? Matthew 8:10
- 8 How do we get faith? Romans 10:17

Down

- 1 What did Enoch not see because of his faith?
Hebrews 11:5
- 3 What man was full of the Holy Spirit and faith?
Acts 11:24
- 6 Who lost sight of Christ and began to sink into the water? Matthew 14:30



See inside back cover for the solution.

Sensible Women Build Their Homes

D.A. Adenugba



King Solomon said, *“The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish pulls it down with her hands”* (Proverbs 14:1 NKJV). How? For one, sensible women do not expose their families to the foes by their utterances, and they do not engage in physical combat with others. *“He who loves transgression loves strife, And he who exalts his gate seeks destruction”* (Proverbs 17:19).

A prudent woman bridles her tongue, realizing that life and death are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). A sensible woman is a wise woman who builds her house by being industrious, providing for the family (Proverbs 31:10-31).

Sensible women seek unity at home, in the church and everywhere (Ephesians 4:3). This is because in unity there is peace, rest of mind, growth and progress. *“Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion”* (Roman 12:16).

They serve the Lord persistently as Anna did, **without allowing troubles and trials to obstruct their devotion, commitment and loyalty to God** (Luke 2:36-38). Indeed, sensible women are godly women, seeking the things of the Lord always and first.

Are you a home builder or a destroyer? Be a builder of good things. Be sensible and wise. Rely on God’s inerrant Word in whatever you do. †

Adenugba D. A. preaches the Gospel in Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria.

THE CHRISTIAN HOME

COOL LIKE DAD

Derek Broome



One day recently, my youngest came running around the corner wearing a shirt that I just so happen to love. Now, before I tell you what the shirt said on the front, I need you to understand I did not buy this shirt for him. I'm honestly not sure where he got it, but I just wanted it to be clear that I did not buy it for him. On the front of my son's shirt, that I obviously love, are the words "Cool Like Dad." This shirt makes me smile every time I see it on him, and I will be a little sad when he outgrows it.

Yet, while I do smile every time I see this shirt, those three words have the ability to bring a grown man to his knees. In those three little words there is a comparison. You are seeing an example of where, in this case, a child patterns himself after a parent. For me, the idea of being a good example for my children has been in my thoughts and in my mind since the moment I found out that I was going to be a dad. This is something that I think about, pray about and talk about constantly with my wife.

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In a healthy way, parents – really all people – need to continually think about the example they set before others, and that includes the kind of example they present to their children. In numerous Scriptures, we are told after Whom we are to pattern our lives and what kind of an example we are to set for others. In Ephesians 5:1, we see that we are to be ***“imitators of God, as dear children”*** (NKJV). Children often imitate their parents or possibly an older sibling or relative. As children of God, we are to imitate Christ by the lives we live. As Christians, we should constantly examine our own lives to be sure that we are truly living for Him.

Do the things we do and say show honor toward God by demonstrating godliness everywhere we go? As a Christian man, husband, father and friend, I need to set a Christ-like example to my children and toward everyone I meet and know. This is actually something that we all must ponder and consider. In Scripture, the apostle Paul frequently wrote about the example he was trying to set, which we also ought to set for others. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul, in the context of giving all glory to God, said, ***“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.”*** This is a bold statement that is worthy of reproducing in our lives as Christians. Notice that Paul was not only aware that imitation occurs, but he embraced it with a bold and yet humble attitude. Paul did not want glory for himself or just the flattery that comes with imitation. Instead, he wanted to set a standard for his own life and demonstrate that the One truly worthy of being imitated is Christ.

As a dad, I love when my children imitate the good things that I do, but unfortunately, not everything I do is always good. It sometimes takes a bad action on my child’s part or maybe even some silly little t-shirt to wake me up so that I pay better attention to the kind of example I am setting. Like the young man Timothy, let us all strive to ***“be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity”*** (1 Timothy 4:12). Let us all strive daily to set a Christ-like example for all the world to see. ***“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”*** (Matthew 5:16). ✝

Derek Broome is a minister for the Siwell Road Church of Christ in Jackson, Mississippi, USA.

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WE ARE HUMAN

Robert Johnson

Another Super Bowl has come and gone [2016], celebrating the 50th one that has been played. Over the years, approximately 4.5 billion dollars have been spent on the commercials shown during the game, and a large contingent of viewers watch the game for the commercials more than the actual game. Each year the ads try to grab one's attention, presenting products in a way that both entertains and fixes them in the viewer's mind.

One commercial for this year's game was presented by Doritos, and it showed a husband and wife having an ultrasound of their unborn child. Part of the comedy used in this commercial was the child's interaction with what was going on with the parents. While meant to be entertaining and funny, and fix the Doritos' brand in people's taste buds, one group claims to have been insulted by it. NARAL, a pro-abortion group, tweeted they found the ad offensive because it promoted the "humanization of the fetus."


What an interesting way this group chose to voice its opposition, referring to an unborn child as such. If the child in the womb is not human, then what is it? Nature reflects the order God instilled in creation from the beginning, with everything producing "after their kind." Have men and women produced anything other than humans? I know of no woman giving birth to a dog, a cat, a monkey or anything other than another human being. It is rhetorical nonsense to speak of an unborn child as anything other than human. The commercial did not humanize a fetus, since a child conceived by human parents is human.

So, why talk in such a way like this? Simply put, if this group that advocates abortion admits to a child in the womb as human, then abortion is murder. Taking life through the ghastly procedures that are used in performing abortions, and selling body parts afterwards, is a reprehensible act and criminal in nature. It is a grisly industry which has become part of a society that no longer has a conscience. Of course, the child is human and

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alive! Many mothers, contemplating abortions, but seeing their unborn child through the marvel of technology of an ultrasound, decide otherwise. Why? It is unmistakably obvious it is a living human being, formed from the union of two people, but distinct in his or her own identity.

The Center for Disease Control statistically affirms abortions have declined over the past two decades. Those who advocate abortion, when they act as NARAL has over a TV commercial, show it is a lifestyle – a mindset – and they will use any tactic to deceive others into thinking it's simply a “glob of tissue,” not a human being, not a child with an eternal soul. This is what happens when society denies God and His will for life. Sin knows no end, and Satan will fight relentlessly to stop losing any ground that he's gained. Sin deceives and hardens the heart (Hebrews 3:13), and it is an effective tool for keeping people from seeing just how great an atrocity abortion truly is.

May we seek to have hearts that are tender and guided by the truth of Scripture. May we understand all life is valuable, from conception to its end. May we see abortion and euthanasia for what they truly are. Further, may we seek to restore the dignity inherent in life as it is created by God and sustained by Him. Those in Christ will live with Him eternally. ***“For it was You who created my inward parts; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I will praise You because I have been remarkably and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, and I know this very well”*** (Psalm 139:13-14). 

Robert Johnson preaches for the Lord’s church in Longview, Texas, USA.



Bible Word Scramble

Rebecca Rushmore

Write the first letter of each word indicated in the passages below.
Then, unscramble the letters to find the theme of the verses.

Exodus 25:8 1st word _____

Exodus 25:9 4th word _____

Exodus 26:1 15th _____

Exodus 26:7 19th word _____

Exodus 39:32 26th word _____

Exodus 40:35 7th word _____

Leviticus 16:16 39th word _____

Psalms 15:1 4th word _____

Hebrews 8:5 4th word _____

Hebrews 9:11 20th word _____

**Bible text: New King James (NKJV)
(See the back cover for answer.)**

Be Filled

Mark McWhorter

When one is thirsty, it is nice to have a filled glass of water, tea or milk. Sometimes when one is dirty, tired and sore, it is nice to have a tub full of hot water in which to soak. When on a long trip, it is good to have a tank full of gas. While these things are good or nice to have, there are some things that are much more important with which to be full.

Christians are to be filled with fruits of righteousness.

“Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God”

(Philippians 1:11 NKJV). It is very important that a Christian gives glory

and praise to God. This cannot be done if the Christian is not actively making sure that he is full of the fruits of righteousness.

Christians are to be filled with the knowledge from God. *“Filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding”* (Colossians 1:9). Christians cannot continue to grow in faith unless they continue to study God’s Word, the Bible. It is only from the knowledge it gives that a person can get wisdom and understanding.

Christians are to be filled with the fullness of God. *“That you may be filled with all the fullness of God”* (Ephesians 3:19). The fullness of God only comes by making sure our hearts are full of the love of Christ along with the knowledge from His Word.

Study your Bible. Make sure you are getting knowledge from God. Learn to have the love of Christ. Be busy developing the fruits of righteousness in your life. If any of this is hard to understand, ask an adult to help you. ✝

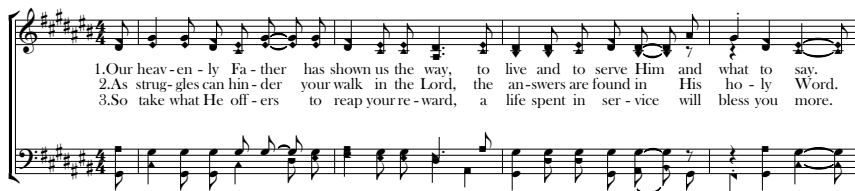


Mark McWhorter has written daily devotionals for youth for decades. He lives in Pell City, Alabama, USA.

HYMNS

Pearls of Wisdom

Words and Music
by: Paul Mays



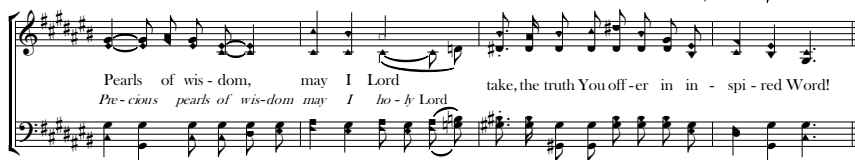
1. Our heav-en - ly Fa - ther has shown us the way, to live and to serve Him and what to say.
2. As strug-gles can hin-der your walk in the Lord, the an-swers are found in His ho - ly Word.
3. So take what He off-ers to reap your re-ward, a life spent in ser-vice will bless you more.



In ev - 'ry part of this brief earth - ly life, God loves His chil-dren as He shows us light!
For all temp - ta-tions He's made an es - cape, give up your life and let the Lord re-shape!
The light God shows us is pure through and through, live as He wants us to and see the truth!



Pearls of wis - dom, from Thy Word where Je - sus im-parts His lov-ing care for the world.
Pre-cious pearls of wis-dom from Thy ho - ly Word where



Pearls of wis - dom, may I Lord take, the truth You off-er in in - spi - red Word!
Pre-cious pearls of wis-dom may I ho - ly Lord

Paul Mays is a Christian hymn writer who resides in Roanoke, Virginia, USA.
Visit <https://www.youtube.com/user/neanderpaul> to listen to the hymns.



Kenney's Pennies *"But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them"* (Psalm 103:17-18 NKJV). Notice that the Lord's mercy is eternal, and mercy is not just a New Testament concept. Also, obedience to commandments is required, and obedience is not just an Old Testament concept.



H **Harmony of the brethren.** God expects us all to get along well with one another. We are to be one as God and Christ are one (John 17:20-23).

A **Adoration for God** – reverence. We are to revere God by putting Him first in our lives (Matthew 6:33).

P **Pray to God** for friends, family, self, for the sick (spiritually and physically), the leaders of our country and many other things. The trouble with prayer is it is so much easier to talk about, but it is not easy to do. We say I will pray for these things, but we don't take time to pray as we should (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Colossians 4:2; 1 Timothy 2:8).

P **Praise God** from whom all blessing flow. One of the great side effects of praise is that we begin to realize the precious nature of our relationship to God (Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 4:11).

Y **Yield not to temptation,** for yielding is sin. One of our sins is stubbornness. Let us turn to God for help, and He will help us overcome anything. God promised us a way of escape if we look for and accept His help (1 Corinthians 10:13).

N **Not to forsake the assembly of the church.** All services and Bible studies are important to worship and praise God, not just Sunday morning. We need the mid-week service for spiritual food and growth

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(Hebrews 10:25-26).


E **Evangelism.** The Great Commission says, *“Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15). This includes one’s own community. We should invite our friends and neighbors to study God’s Word (e.g., Bible classes) and to worship Him (Matthew 28:19-20).

W **Worship God in spirit and in truth.** We need to try as hard as we can to stay focused on what is taught or said during our worship to God. Try not to let what is going on around us distract us, no matter how cute the little ones are (John 4:24).

Y **Yesterday is gone.** We need to put it behind us and to press on to the future – starting afresh. Do not worry about the past or the future but work for today. This is all that God has promised (Matthew 6:34).

E **Eagerness to serve.** Let us all find jobs to do and do them well for the Lord (Colossians 3:23). There is work we all can do. No work is too small. We need to use our talents the Lord has given us (Matthew 25:14-30).

A **Association** is another word for fellowship. Fellowship can be worshipping, working, playing, eating or just spending time with one another. It is certainly up there with teaching, the Lord’s supper and prayer (Acts 2:42, 46).

R **Read** and study God’s Word daily. This will help us to grow into the kind of Christians God wants us to be. (2 Timothy 2:15). 

Martha Lynn Rushmore is a Staff Writer for *The Voice of Truth International* and *Gospel Gazette Online*. She and her husband teach extensively stateside and abroad. They reside in Ocala, Florida, USA.

[Editor’s Note: Some cultures observe the beginning of a new year at different times than beginning on January 1. Nevertheless, anyone can begin a new year for himself or herself by embracing the observations above. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]

Homesick

Akash Babu Pedapaga

Have you ever been homesick? I think at present, I might be one of the people who can clearly explain how homesick feels! It's been nearly three months since I came to the US. I had to leave my home, my people and everything I have in India for my Masters in the US. At first, I felt happy and excited, but my urge to see my home is exponentially increasing as days go by. I always cherish the good times spent with my dear ones, and I look forward to going back home after completing my education.



Last week, I was meditating on Revelation 21-22, and the idea that my home is Heaven hit me hard. The apostle Paul penned:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21 NKJV)

I just want to reflect on the thought of **how homesick we ought to feel for our eternal home.**

The other day, I saw a video on YouTube in which a mother recently took her kids to a brand-new home. The kids knew that they bought a home, but still, they were surprised by the size of the house. They asked, “Mom, why didn’t you tell us that our new house is this big?” The reality is that the children could only know how big and beautiful their new home **is after seeing it.** We might ask the same question to our Father or the apostle John

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after reaching Heaven! **Heaven is something that all the metaphors, poetry and prose in this whole world combined can't even describe a millionth part of what Heaven is like.** Jesus in John's Gospel (14:2) said that there are places for us to dwell in our Father's house, and He is going to prepare a place for His followers. The Greek word *moné* means an abiding place and is translated as "mansion" (John 14:2) and "abode" (John 14:23). What a great feeling! We have mansions in which to dwell for eternity in Heaven! The apostle Paul wrote, ***"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"*** (2 Corinthians 5:1).


I could personally connect the final verses of the book of Revelation to my present situation. Whenever I remember my home, the very first persons to strike my thoughts are my parents. Parents are the reason why every one of us loves home. It's neither the building nor the atmosphere. You won't feel at home when you can't hear your parents walking or talking at home. Revelation 21:22-23 speak about the glory of our Father illuminating Heaven.

The second most important set of family members I remember when I think about home is my brother. One can't imagine his or her life without siblings. Siblings always keep you engaged and knock on your door every hour of the day without any reason. Verse 24 speaks of the nations saved by the blood of the Lamb. All people (nations) are our brothers and sisters in Christ. First Thessalonians 4:17 records, ***"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."*** This is a great feeling! We get to live with our Eternal Father, our Saviour, the Holy Spirit and all the faithful children of God for eternity. We can visualize these things if we are walking by faith (i.e., living a true Christian life). ***"For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord"*** (2 Corinthians 5:7-8). We can feel the joyful anticipation of being in our eternal home only if we are focused on Christ. The other day a brother said, ***"The longer we live the Christian life, the more we feel homesick for Heaven."***

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Several passages in the Bible make us realize that the world in which we live today is not our home. Paul expressed his homesickness for Heaven as a **“groan”** (2 Corinthians 5:2). I would like to remind you that Earth is not permanent. **“For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come”** (Hebrews 13:14).

What if I lost my passport? What if I lost my visa? What if I lost my identity? There might be little chance for me to go back to my country. However, if we lose our spiritual identity (we are made in the image or identity of God, Genesis 1:27) there is no chance for us to go back to our eternal country. All of the people who are born on this earth have marred the image of God (Romans 3:10, 23). Yet, God sacrificed His only begotten Son so that we can regain His image (our original identity). Let me conclude with one of my favorite Scriptures from the letter to Hebrews. **“And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return”** (11:15).

My dear brothers and sisters, let us question ourselves. Am I thinking of the country in which I am supposed to live for eternity? Am I feeling the urge to go back to my Heavenly Father? If not, let us realize that **the materialistic world in which we live today is not our permanent residence**. Let us fix our eyes on things that are above (Heaven). Let us not fix our eyes on the world or on temporary sinful pleasures (Hebrews 11:25). Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith. Let us finish this run with endurance. 

Akash Babu Pedapaga is a driven young Christian man who is from and loves his home country of India. He is in the USA furthering his education, after which, he will return to his loved ones and beloved nation.

[Editor's Note: I first met Akash Babu Pedapaga 15 years ago when he was a precocious 13-year-old Christian boy and who was also my co-speaker for a preachers' seminar. About 100 Indian preachers packed the second story home of his mother and father, where each Lord's Day his father – a schoolteacher weekdays – preached as brethren assembled in his home (Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2). When it was his turn to speak, Akash Babu Pedapaga preached one of the best biblically prepared and masterfully presented sermons I have ever heard to this very day. He spoke perfect English and had another brother translate it into Telugu – his first language – for the body of preachers in attendance. I'm proud to know Akash Babu Pedapaga and his Christian family in India. ~ Louis Rushmore, Editor]



Rebecca Rushmore

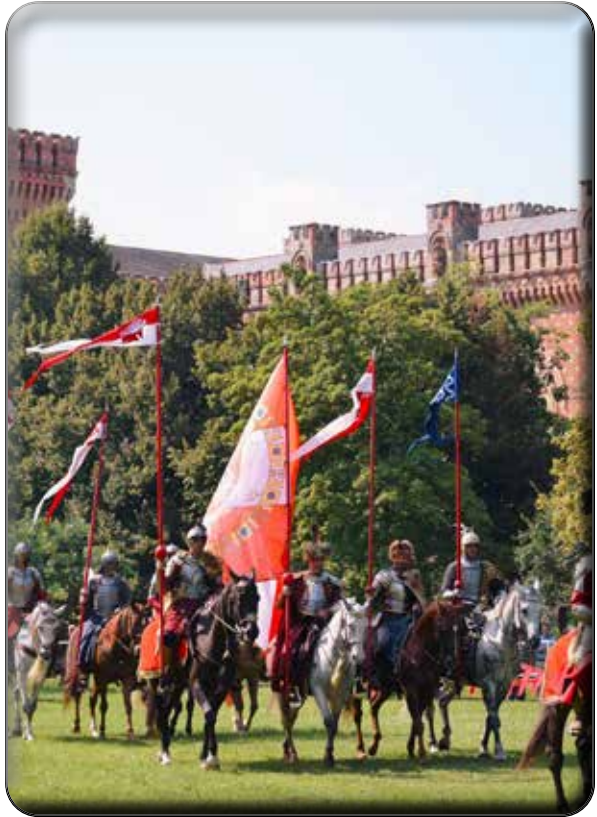
(answers inside back cover)

1. Where did King Saul die?
2. Who was made king over all the tribes except Judah after Saul's death?
3. How many children were born to David while he was in Hebron?
4. How old was Mephibosheth when his father Jonathan was killed?
5. How many years did David reign in Jerusalem over all of Judah and Israel?
6. What did David do with the precious metals he took from the nations he subdued?
7. Which prophet confronted David over his sin with Bathsheba?
8. Name the second son born to David and Bathsheba.
9. How long did Absalom live in Jerusalem before he saw the king's face?
10. What punishment did David choose when he sinned by numbering the people?

A Royal Banner

Rodney Nulph

“There’s a royal banner given for display to the soldiers of the King. As an ensign fair, we lift it up today, while as ransomed ones we sing. Marching on, marching on; for Christ count everything but loss; for the King of kings, toil and sing, neath the banner of the cross.” Christians are so blessed to lift up the ensign (flag or banner) of our King! A banner or a flag defines and identifies the ones under that banner. Thusly, as we raise high the banner of Christ, we identify with the Savior of the



world and allow His will to define and shape us. A royal people (1 Peter 2:9) under the royal King’s banner is how conscientious Christians live each day.

This past week, the White House’s south portico was draped with a Pride Flag between two U.S. flags to honor so-called “Pride” month. This ungodly action was done in an attempt to identify our American

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government as godless and as a call to all Americans to honor those who identify with the LGBTQ+ agenda. There are several problems with that attempt, but one major problem is that **not all Americans** and **no true Christians** rally around such disgraceful banners.

Shortly after the children of Israel left Egypt on their way to the Promised Land, they encountered an enemy of God's people, the Amalekites. After God defeated this arch enemy, Moses built an altar and called it "**Jehovah-nissi**" (KJV), which means "**The Lord is my banner**" (NKJV). (Exodus 17:15). How comforting for us to face the times in which we live with the Lord as our banner. What is the Lord's banner all about?

Firstly, the Lord's banner is **a banner of protection**. During the wilderness wandering, Moses, at God's command, made a banner of sorts for Israel to look at and be saved from venomous snakes (Numbers 21:4-9). Centuries later, Jesus reminded the people of His day that He was the ultimate fulfillment of that banner. "**And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life**" (John 3:14-15). Isaiah encouragingly prophesied, "**And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious**" (Isaiah 11:10). The banner under which Christians rally is not devised and advanced by man, but it is the invincible banner of protection that originates with our Lord!


Secondly, the Lord's banner is **a banner of connection**. One does not have to look very far in our world today to see that banners or flags of mankind bring about division and destruction. Violence, hatred and ungodly pride are the results of rallying under worldly banners. While manmade banners attempt to unite and connect people, the opposite is the reality. However, the banner of Christ is one that connects those who truly rally under it. Christ's banner destroys racial and ethnic boundaries, and it connects all of humanity regardless of background, color, nationality or economic status, etc. "**For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation**" (Ephesians 2:14). Although mankind seems oblivious to this fact, **Christ's banner is**

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the only banner that will ever bring peace to a divided world.

Thirdly, the Lord's banner is **a banner of liberation**. The flag that was recently raised on the White House's portico is said to liberate and free people. In fact, those who endorse the rainbow colored flag affirm that being you, no matter what that means (no boundaries), brings freedom and liberation from a narrow and constricted way of life.

Dear friends, that is a **lie** that the devil has been telling since he first deceived Adam and Eve. If it comes from the devil, you can be assured it is not true, for the devil **"...is a liar and the father of it"** (John 8:44). The Lord's banner does not restrict and confine but rather brings true liberation. **"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"** (John 8:32). **"Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed"** (John 8:36). Sadly, many will believe the lies the devil tells, but you and I do not have to believe those lies. True freedom and liberation come **only** by rallying under the Lord's banner, and that truth will **never** change (Matthew 24:35), no matter who says otherwise!

In a world filled with all types of flags and banners, Christians must be wise and careful under which flag they rally. **Rallying under a flag identifies, defines and directs us on our daily journey to eternity. None of the flags that originate with man will ever lead one to eternal bliss.** However, the wonderful banner of Christ solely leads us to a hope beyond our comprehension (1 Peter 1:3-4; Acts 4:12). The Lord's banner is a banner of truth and righteousness that gives victory over sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:55-57). The question comes to us, "What can we do in a world where many ungodly banners are being raised?" What can the righteous do? The same thing that the righteous have always done; "Though the foe may rage and gather as the flood, Let the standard be displayed; and beneath its folds, as soldiers of the Lord, for the truth be not dismayed!" **March on church, and do not lose heart!** 

Rodney Nulph is a Gospel preacher and the Associate Editor of *Gospel Gazette Online* magazine. He resides in Beavertown, Pennsylvania, USA.

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Beyond Their Power

T. Pierce Brown

Many times, I have said as I preached about some duty, “When you have done what you can, where you are, with what you have, this is all God expects of you.” I may have added on various occasions something like, “What more can you do? One can only do what he has the power to do.” Those statements may be basically true, but there is a more tremendous and significant truth in 2 Corinthians 8:3 where Paul said of the churches in Macedonia, *“For according to their power, I bear witness, yea and beyond their power, they gave of their own accord”* (ASV).

When I discovered that truth several years ago, although I continued to teach that every one of us should do what we can, where we are and with what we have, I added another greater truth. That is, when you do what you can, **God will enable you to do what you cannot do with what you did not have.** You will be able not only to give beyond your power but to do many other things beyond your power.

We could give examples from our own experiences and observations that prove this is true, but two illustrations from the Bible will be better. Peter did not have the power to walk on water, but he did walk on water (Matthew 14:29). The key to it is simple. When he heard the command of Jesus, he did it. He did what he could, where he was, with what he had, and the Lord then gave him power to do what he could not.

Again, in John 6:9, we have a lad with five barley loaves and two fish. The apostles thought, as we would have, *“...What are these among so many?”* One boy cannot use his lunch to feed five thousand! He did what he could, where he was, with what he had, and Jesus gave him the power to do what he could not with what he did not have.

One could argue, “Those were miracles, and God does not work that way today.” It is true that those were miracles, but the eternal principles of God remain true. God continues to do for us what He did to the Macedonians, for the principles are eternally true. For example, you may

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take a handful of corn. You may selfishly keep that handful for yourself and eat it, and you may prevent hunger pangs for a short period. Suppose you decided to sacrifice it and give it into the care of God so He could use it to feed other persons. Those hundred grains of corn could be put into God's earth, and each grain will produce at least 1,000 other grains, or what Jesus calls a hundredfold. That is just the first year, directly from what you did. It is possible, even probable, that your sacrificial deed would lead 100 or 1,000 others to do likewise, in which case the multitudes that would be fed would stagger the imagination.



There simply is no limit we can put on what God would be able to do through us if each one of us would simply do what we could, where we are, with what we have, and then try to make a sacrifice a little beyond our ability. Without asserting that God is working miracles today, I am neither afraid nor ashamed to assert that **if every Christian would take seriously what we have said, reading 2 Corinthians 9:8-11 in faith, and acting on that faith, there is no work on earth that God wants done that could not be done.** †

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A Charge to Young and New Christians

Ernest S. Underwood

Text: 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Introduction:

1. The charge was given to a young preacher.
2. It can equally apply to new converts.
3. In this lesson, I would like to “charge” all new members.

Discussion:

I. I Charge You Not to Be Ashamed of the Gospel (Romans 1:16).

- A. Of the Christ it proclaims.
- B. Of the life of sacrifice and purity it demands.
- C. Of the commands it binds.
- D. To proclaim it to others.
- E. To defend it.

II. I Charge You to Be Patient.

- A. With those who have not yet learned what you have learned.
- B. With the elders – they will be patient with you.
- C. With other new converts.
- D. With those whom you wish to convert.
- E. With yourself.

III. I Charge You to Be Optimistic.

- A. Concerning those who are yet lost.
- B. Concerning one’s local congregation.
- C. Concerning the persecution you may encounter.
- D. Concerning the church: its future – its glorious destiny.

IV. I Charge You to Never, Never, Never Give Up.

- A. Noah.
- B. Abraham.
- C. Paul.

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- D. Pioneer preachers.
- E. Welfare of generations to come may depend upon you.

V. I Charge You to Take Some Time to Rest and Relax (Mark 6:31).

- A. Remember that you have a family. †

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KENNEY'S PENNIES “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8 NKJV). The reference is to the Law of Moses. Grace, love and mercy were certainly part of the Old Testament, as were faith and obedience. God’s expectations for us remained the same (faith and obedience), but the provisions He made for our redemption are much greater under the New Testament through His Son.



Robison's Rubies

When the apostle Peter took up the theme that Christians ought to obey civil authorities, he wrote, “*For this is the will of God, that by doing good you*

may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men – as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God” (1 Peter 2:15-16 NKJV). Perhaps, when people see good Christian examples, they will be less likely to attack Christianity. Rather than Christians feeling they are above the law, they should remind themselves they are bondservants of God. Furthermore, according to Romans 13:1, He is the ultimate Author of human government. Unless ungodly demands are made (Acts 5:29), Christians ought to do good and obey civil authorities in order to shine as lights to the world (Matthew 5:16).

The Prophet Who Endured

Mark T. Tonkery

When we think of endurance, we do not usually think of the prophets of the Bible. Many times, we just read about them in short moments of their lives, such as Jonah, Obadiah, Nathan or even Elijah. We know really very little about them, and sometimes do not know if they ministered their whole lives or just for a short time. Yet, there is one prophet that the Bible talks about who ministered during the reign of five kings of Judah. God called him while he was still in his mother's womb (Jeremiah 1:5). He was a prophet for more than forty years to kings, princes, false prophets, priests and people of all social classes. He preached and prophesied with many tears and was also known as the Weeping Prophet. He loved people and wanted the lost to return to God. Most of the people he loved mocked him as well as were hostile and apathetic toward his message. Often, the people ignored his messages and threatened his life. He even saw fellow prophets being murdered. He himself was beaten and put in prison many times (Jeremiah 37:15).

One highlight in this prophet's life was that he saw the revival in the nation of Judah under the reign of Josiah, only to be grieved again when he saw the Jews returning to idolatry. He warned and warned the nation of Judah about the coming of the Babylonians, and then he witnessed his prophecies come true as the Babylonians came and destroyed Judah and the Temple.

He was from a family of Levite priests and was a very honest person who had a very deep relationship with God. He did not want the people of Judah to receive the judgment of God, and he was hoping that they would repent. With the coming judgment upon Judah, God forbade him to marry (Jeremiah 16:2). The book with his name on it shows his grief, sorrow and at times his loneliness. Yet, he was dedicated to serving God.

If you have not guessed by now, this prophet was none other than Jeremiah. He was a prophet who endured, even though at times he wept and wanted to give up (Jeremiah 9:2; 20:1-18). He, however, never did give up. Although we do not have a record of his death, everything we know about Jeremiah points

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us to believe that he died as a faithful follower of Almighty God.

What an example of endurance and faithfulness! He never gave up. He never surrendered and turned his back on God like the rest of the crowd. He endured. He was faithful. He was righteous.

What an example for us, as we run the Christian race and face many temptations, trials and discouragements. May we have the faith and the endurance Jeremiah exhibited. Like Jeremiah, we are never promised that life will be free of trouble or struggles. Hebrews 12:1 even en-

courages us by saying, ***“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”*** (NKJV). May we stay faithful to God, keep running the race and keep abiding in God’s Word, just like Jeremiah the prophet who endured. ✝

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See What John Saw

Terry Wheeler

Imagine you were the great apostle, aged and innocent and always helpful but now “quarantined” on a forsaken island because of your religion, a religion seen as subversive to the government. You are alone, without help, feeling every cold wind, hot sun and hunger pang, and it is not your fault.

What would be your attitude? I am afraid mine, after reveling in my righteous dilemma, could find me starting to fuss at God to “Get me outta here!”

What did John do? He was *“in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”* (Revelation 1:10). In other words, he set his mind on the things of God, and when Sunday came around, he worshipped Him Who is forever and ever. This enabled John to endure his trial for two years!

You see, if God is your companion through life, then you are never alone, even if there is nobody else around. God helped John and still used him for great good in this circumstance. Will God stay by your side? Oh, yes, all the way to the end! *“Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”* (Hebrews 13:5-6 NKJV). 

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Discrimination is deplorable. It essentially honors some people made in God’s image over other people made in that same image. Isn’t it maddening that sometimes people pick and choose whom they like based on looks, money or even race? We can be sure that God is not like that. Romans 2:11 affirms that God is not partial; He is no respecter of persons. Acts 10:35 reminds us that *“...in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him”* (NKJV). God accepts anyone from any nation, any place, either gender or any race upon one’s belief and obedience to Him. *“He is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,”* declares Hebrews 5:9.

Why Not Try Jesus?

David Conley



We find in Mark 5:24-43 that Jesus got off the boat and was met with much excitement! Many people had heard that He was coming to that shore, and they met Him there. Among the many people who came to Jesus was Jairus. He was one of the rulers of the synagogue, and he came and fell at our Lord's feet! This was an act of worship! Jairus knew that Jesus was indeed worthy to be worshipped.

Jairus begged Jesus to lay His hands on his daughter because she was at the point of death. He believed that Jesus could touch her and cause her to live! Jairus was desperate because his daughter was dying. He needed help! There is no doubt that this ruler tried everything to heal his daughter.

Why not try Jesus?

As Jesus went with Jairus, many people followed and thronged Him! Among those who pressed Him was a woman. She had a ***“flow of blood”*** (NKJV) for the last twelve years! She had been to many doctors and had spent

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all that she had, although she had gotten no better. When she heard that Jesus was in town she said, ***“If only I may touch his clothes, I will be made well.”*** She fought the crowd until she was able to touch Jesus. When she touched Him, Jesus felt power leave Him. He then asked, ***“...Who touched me?”*** The woman was afraid and fell down before him and told him what she had done. She basically said, ***“I’ve tried everything. Why not try Jesus?”***

Jesus told the woman, ***“Daughter, your faith hath made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.”*** As soon as Jesus said this, there came a messenger from Jairus’ house to tell him that his daughter was dead. Then, Jesus turned to Jairus and told him, ***“Do be not afraid; only believe.”*** Jesus raised his daughter from the dead!

Jesus explained to the sick woman and the fearful father that even though they had tried everything, they could **have faith and believe!** Why? Because they were now trying Jesus! I don’t want to live my life doubtfully and fearfully. I want to come to Jesus! I want to let Jesus heal me of my fears as I place my trust in Him! **If Jesus could heal a woman who had been sick for twelve years and also raise the dead, I know He can help me, too!** †

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How to Decide

Brian R. Kenyon

When we are unsure whether we should do something, ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Is what I am about to do **inherently sinful**? Inherently sinful refers to something that’s always sinful (like fornication, Galatians 5:19-21). **If so, don’t do it!** But if not...
2. Does what I am about to do **violate my conscience**? **If so, don’t do it** (Romans 14:23)! But if not...
3. Will what I am about to do **hurt my good Christian influence**? **If so, don’t do it** (Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Corinthians. 8:1-13).

May we always glorify God in our thoughts and behavior!

A Pack of Seeds

Charles G. Ramsey

I bought myself a pack of seeds to grace my garden fair,
And stuck them in my pocket. For months they waited there.
And when the time had come to see the flower's lovely face,
I thought it strange that only weeds were growing in their place.

How foolish then, Oh Christian, man, God's Word, you have indeed.

You carry it or hide it but do not plant the seed.

No fruit there grows in garden fair unless the seed you sow.

For you the Word of God must plant, then God will make it grow.



Why Then Are They Baptized for the Dead?

Sunny David

While teaching that Christ's resurrection was the greatest proof that our own resurrection will occur at His coming to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31; John 5:28-29), the apostle Paul asked the Corinthians, ***"Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?"*** (1 Corinthians 15:29 NKJV). Some have held that there was a custom practiced by some in the first century of baptizing people – living persons – for the benefit of the individuals who had died without baptism. Some think that in 1 Corinthians 15:29 the apostle was using an argument based upon what some Christians were doing at Corinth – practicing vicarious baptism, baptizing Christians on behalf of deceased acquaintances who, while under instruction and faith development, had died before completing their primary obedience to the Gospel (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

The obvious difficulty in imagining such allusion here is met by emphasizing that the apostle did not here evaluate such a practice with which he would have been in complete disagreement but merely mentioned it in an argument in making his overall case for the resurrection. Moreover, had such a custom existed there or at any other place in the first century, then, certainly the apostle Paul would have denounced it, as he did in every other case where Christians were deviating from the truth. He certainly would not have used such an unscriptural practice as an example to teach the most important truth about the resurrection – Christ's or ours.

The apostle rebuked the Corinthian Christians when some of them were causing division in the church (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:1-4). He rebuked them for their immorality that was defiling the church (1 Corinthians 5). In another instance, the apostle reprimanded the Corinthians for corrupting the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). One can no more obey

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God and have the blessing transferred to the dead, than he could disobey the Lord and have that condemnation imputed to some deceased person. **Proxy baptism is not in view here.**

In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle was particularly and specifically dealing with the doctrine of resurrection, which certain false teachers were denying. He argued that since Christ rose from the dead, so in the same manner all will rise from the dead. It was in the hope of resurrection of the dead that the Corinthians were baptized (Acts 18:8).

Before going through the act of baptism, one must repent or die to sin (Acts 2:38), and that is precisely what they had done. Before their baptism – their burial in the watery grave of baptism – they had, by repentance, died to sin. Through baptism, they were put in the grave of water as dead men and women. A living person is not buried in a grave, but a



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dead person is. Their baptism was a planting in the likeness of the burial of Christ and a raising in the likeness of Christ's resurrection from the dead. They were buried in the grave of water, through their baptism as dead men and women and were raised from the tomb of water to walk in the newness of life (Romans 6:3-5). The inference is that their baptism was in the very likeness of the death and burial and resurrection of Christ. Yet, if Christ had not risen, and the dead rise not, then their emblematic burial in water and coming out of the watery tomb of baptism had no meaning.

So, the question arose, "Why then are they baptized for the dead?" How vain a thing had their baptism been if there will be no resurrection? Would the Corinthians stand by their baptisms (which imitated the death, burial and resurrection of Christ) or would they renounce them? They themselves were baptized for the dead. That is, with the view that through their own death to sin by repentance, they were buried in the tomb of water and had come out of it, declaring their own death, burial and resurrection. Immersion of a believer in water symbolizes his death or separation from the old existence lived under the power of sin, and coming out of the grave of water baptism portrays the resurrection of Christ after His death.

The purpose, the scope and the connection of what the apostle said in 1 Corinthians 15:29 will admit of but one meaning – if the dead rise not, what shall they do who are baptized in the hope of the resurrection? One is "baptized into Christ" to live in Him and die in Him, and finally to be raised as justified and saved in Him. †

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Did You Know?

The world is full of references claiming the theory of evolution is a fact. Most sources state or at least imply that true science proves evolution and that those who do not believe in it are ignorant. However, many famous scientists believed in God and creation instead of evolution. Investigate the lives of Wernher Von Braun, Louis Pasteur, George Washington Carver and Sir Isaac Newton. If you look, you will find modern day scientists who also choose to believe God created everything instead of believing in evolution.



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Was There Law before Christ?

Louis Rushmore

“Was there law before Christ?” Most assuredly, there was divine law to which mankind was amenable before *“the law of Christ”* (Galatians 6:2). The first law included the simple instructions that God gave to Adam and Eve, namely, to tend the Garden of Eden, but not to eat the fruit of a specific tree (Genesis 2:15-17). God continued to communicate with mankind through fathers of families for the next 2,500 years, during a period of time referred to as Patriarchy. For about the next 15 centuries, Israelites were amenable to the Law of Moses or Judaism (1 Kings 2:3). However, non-Jews or Gentiles continued to be responsible to Patriarchy until the time of Christ, at which time the Law of Christ replaced or superseded both Patriarchy and Judaism (Ephesians 2:14-16). †

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DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY

Both Old and New Testaments Teach Heaven Is Not on Earth

Billy Bland

While man will live forever, it will not be on the earth. In fact, Peter, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote that when Jesus comes again, the heavens and the earth shall be “**burned up**.” Peter stated:

*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be **burned up**. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? (2 Peter 3:10-12 NKJV)*

Would not even a casual reader of the above text understand the earth and the works that are therein shall be **burned up**? Some however, might ask, “Does not the context also mention a new heaven and a new earth?” Yes, it does. After saying the earth will be burned up when the Lord returns, Peter then said, “*Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*” (2 Peter 3:13). The new heavens and the new earth are used as a figure for describing the future dwelling of God’s people. They are used in both the Old and New Testament (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22).

The current dwelling place of God’s people serve as a figure of the future dwelling place eternally in (the third) heaven (Matthew 5:12; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 1:5; 1 Peter 1:4; et al), the “new heavens and new earth” figuratively repre-

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sent the spiritual (not physical) dwelling place of the righteous. (cf., 1 Corinthians 15:48-54). This is one of the many examples in the Bible where physical symbols are used to illustrate spiritual concepts. (cf., 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Hebrews 12: 22-31; 1 Peter 2:5-9; 3:20-21; et al) (Moore)

Old Testament saints knew Heaven was the eternal home of the soul. King David knew his dead son could **not return** to him, but he could **go** to him. He said, *“But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me”* (2 Samuel 12:23). Obviously, David did not believe in a *renovated* earth. His son would **not return to him** on earth, but he would **go to him**. Abraham and his offspring knew they were strangers and pilgrims on earth, and they looked for a heavenly city. The writer of Hebrews stated:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

The Holy Spirit, through Paul, affirmed our eternal home is *“in the heavens”* and not here on earth. *“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens”* (2 Corinthians 5:1). Since it is *“eternal in the Heavens,”* it will never be here upon the earth. Paul, also said the Christian’s hope is *“laid up for you in Heaven.”* To the saints in Colosse, Paul said, “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you. Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, *“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of*

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*your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is **laid up for you in heaven**, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel”* (Colossians 1:3-5). Since our hope is laid up for us **in Heaven**, it is not laid up for us on the earth. Jesus taught, *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures **in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:19-21). Jesus contrasted **Earth** with **Heaven**.



The writer of Hebrews stated, *“This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence **behind the veil**, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”* (Hebrews 6:19-20). Our hope is *“behind the veil”* – where Jesus has entered (Heaven). Likewise, Paul stated that our affections should be on things which are above where Christ dwells. *“If then you were raised with*

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Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth..." (Colossians 3:1-5). Paul repeatedly contrasted the words above and Earth. The Christians' affections and hopes are on the above and not on the Earth. Paul reminded Christians that a child of God's citizenship is in Heaven where Christ is. *"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ"* (Philippians 3:20).

Finally, attention is given to the fact that our living hope and our inheritance is laid up for us **in Heaven**. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* (1 Peter 1:3-5). Peter affirmed that the Christian's inheritance is **reserved in Heaven**. The Christian looks forward to the time he will go to Heaven. There, he will be with God and with all of the redeemed from all ages. **May we each so live that Heaven will be our eternal home** (Matthew 25:31-46). †

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"As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything" (Ecclesiastes 11:5 NKJV). Doctors and scientists do not know everything. Do not rely wholly on those who are still trying to figure out how these things work but on the One who made these things happen!

DOCTRINE TO LIVE BY


Never Say Never

Eddie Cooper

I'm sure most have heard someone make the statement, "Never say never," and have repeated it ourselves. We may say, "I would never do such a thing," and then find ourselves doing that very thing. Parents have confidence in their children so much so that they are guilty of saying, "My child would never..." only to have their child at some point do that very thing. Have we done that? Maybe we have come to realize that in taking a humbler view, such things seem to be less likely to occur as we refrain from confidently using the word "never." As we view our humanness, the statements would be best couched in the words, "I hope it won't occur." However, is it true that we should never say never?

In contrast, we should always remember the promises of God to help us through life. Titus 1:2 reads, "***In hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began***" (NKJV). The phrase, "***God... cannot lie,***" signifies being free from falsehood. God's nature demonstrates that He never lies. The reason is that God is completely righteousness. Everything God has declared is trustworthy.

Some of the things we hope won't happen might unfortunately occur. However, when it comes to the eternal life that is promised to us through our relationship with Jesus, we can keep hope because our hope is in the One Who never lies.

While often even Christians should never say never because sometimes we falter, God is completely reliable. May we always take God at His Word. 



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PROVERBS 17:22



The Most Hilarious Things Court Reporters Have Ever Reported to Be Said in Court

ATTORNEY: Doctor, before you performed the autopsy, did you check for a pulse?

WITNESS: No.

ATTORNEY: Did you check for blood pressure?

WITNESS: No.

ATTORNEY: Did you check for breathing?

WITNESS: No.

ATTORNEY: So, then it is possible that the patient was alive when you began the autopsy?

WITNESS: No.

ATTORNEY: How can you be so sure, Doctor?

WITNESS: Because his brain was sitting on my desk in a jar.

ATTORNEY: I see, but could the patient have still been alive, nevertheless?

WITNESS: Yes, it is possible

that he could have been alive and practicing law somewhere.



ATTORNEY: Doctor, how many of your autopsies have you performed on dead people?

WITNESS: All of them. The live ones put up too much of a fight.



ATTORNEY: How was your first marriage terminated?

WITNESS: By death.

ATTORNEY: And by whose death was it terminated?

WITNESS: Take a guess.



ATTORNEY: The youngest son, the 20-year-old, how old is he?

WITNESS: He's 20, much like your IQ.



ATTORNEY: Now doctor, isn't it true that when a person dies in his sleep, he doesn't know about it until the next morning?

WITNESS: Did you actually pass the bar exam?



PROVERBS 17:22

ATTORNEY: Can you describe the individual?

WITNESS: He was about medium height and had a beard.

ATTORNEY: Was this a male or a female?

WITNESS: Unless the Circus was in town I'm going with male.



ATTORNEY: Do you recall the time that you examined the body?

WITNESS: The autopsy started around 8:30 p.m.

ATTORNEY: And Mr. Denton was dead at the time?

WITNESS: If not, he was by the time I finished.



ATTORNEY: ALL your responses MUST be oral, OK? What school did you go to?

WITNESS: Oral.



LAWYER: When he went, had you gone and had she, if she wanted to and were able, for the time being excluding all the restraints on her not to go, gone also, would he have brought you, meaning you and she, with him to the station?

OTHER LAWYER: Objection. That question should be taken out and shot.



LAWYER: What happened then?

WITNESS: He told me, he says, "I have to kill you because you can identify me."

LAWYER: Did he kill you?

WITNESS: No.



LAWYER: Was that the same nose you broke as a child?

WITNESS: I only have one, you know.



LAWYER: Did he pick the dog up by the ears?

WITNESS: No.

LAWYER: What was he doing with the dog's ears?

WITNESS: Picking them up in the air.

LAWYER: Where was the dog at this time?

WITNESS: Attached to the ears.



Instructions to the Sluggard

Gary C. Hampton

The Proverbs contain several bits of wisdom about and for the sluggard. The word sluggard means “lazy one,” so these are words to the lazy.

Proverbs 6:6-11 is the longest statement in the book to the lazy. The wise man here advised his lazy son (v. 3) to consider the ambitious ant. The



ant does not need a boss to make it work, and ants are constantly at work. In Israel, the most common kinds of ants were seed-feeders who lay up grain in the summer to consume during the winter. Verse 9 warns against too much sleep, of which some people are guilty (Proverbs 20:13; 26:14). Some stay in bed if they are not called until very late and do not have any accomplishments. The emphasis in verse 10 should be on the word little. When one appeals to be allowed to sleep a little longer, it almost always becomes a lot. The lazy man’s poverty (v. 11 *“your poverty”*) comes out of his own inaction (Proverbs 10:4; 2 Thessalonians 3:10). It should be kept in mind that God has always called the busy people (Exodus 3:1-4; Judges 6:11, 12; 1 Kings 19:19-21; Matthew 4:18-22; 9:9; 11:28-30; Acts 26:9, 18).

The lazy man sees the good things others possess and would like similar things for himself, but he does not have the will or the ambition to obtain them (Proverbs 13:4; 19:24; 12:27; 21:25). He will always find excuses for why it can’t be done (Proverbs 20:4; 22:13; 26:13). Because he works so little at a time, he produces nothing and becomes kin to the destroyer of what is produced (Proverbs 18:9). Proverbs 15:19 describes his work and ambition like **walking down a path of thorns, very slowly.** †

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

The Survival of the Church of Christ in America

Rob Whitacre

The churches of Christ in America are on a steady decline. A recent projection from a Christian university predicted that we will lose 70% of our congregations and members by the year 2049. If you carry the numbers even further, by the year 2069 there will be almost no visible traces left of the church in America. Those who seek **rationalization** minimize our losses by pointing to similar declines among our denominational neighbors. Those who seek **explanation** (should we dare say excuses) cite increased distractions, entertainment, secularization, busyness and muchness.

While all of these things may be true, they do not change the numbers. The only way to address this crisis is by **evangelization!**

If churches of Christ are going to survive in America, they must return to their roots and once again train the saved to teach the lost.



FROM THE HEART OF

Unfortunately, at least two generations have risen who do not know evangelism. We have children who have grown up in homes and have never seen their parents conduct a personal Bible study. Remaining still is a generation who remembers a time when churches grew. Christians carried around a film projector in the trunk of their cars and showed their family, friends and neighbors the Jule Miller Bible Study Series. We were the fastest growing religious body in America. We excelled at soul winning! I believe those days can return if we train the saved. *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”* (2 Timothy 2:2 NKJV). Here are four proven biblical things we can do to help turn things around.

Invite People into Our Homes

“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:42) Have we forgotten that our homes are tools for bringing souls to Christ? The mat in front of too many Christian doors essentially reads, **“Come Back Later”** instead of **“Welcome.”** Open homes equal open hearts. Our first century brethren had open homes. They were eating together, praying together and studying together (Acts 2:46; 20:20). We have found that over 90% of those we engage in Bible study from our homes obey the Gospel.

Extend Christian Hospitality.

I am afraid that this Christian attribute is almost lost in modern America. Hospitality is defined as “love of strangers.” The Greek word is used in Hebrews 13:2, where it says, *“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.”* All Christians are commanded to display hospitality, and elders are to be proven in this qualification (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8). Our hospitality to others should never be the reason behind their Gospel obedience, but the lack thereof could be the reason they don’t obey. Take someone out to eat, deliver a meal, cut their grass, send Compassion Cards (www.handiworkbyhannah.com), take them a new mover’s basket or extend another act of kindness.

FROM THE HEART OF

When You Are with the Lost, Harken.

Everyone wants to be heard. James said, *“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath”* (1:19). Spend a lot of time asking about family, hobbies, past experiences and things enjoyed. This is a time to find common ground and to develop friendship and trust. As you listen, take mental notes of things that may need to be emphasized during a study. Has the person with whom you are conversing been divorced? Does he or she have any organized religious background? Does he or she have family who is devout in any particular religion?

When the Lost Say Things about which Scripture Disagrees, Hesitate.

It is very **important** to listen. This is not the time to refute, reprove, rebuke or instruct, regardless of what is said. Refrain from expressing your political, cultural and social views. Remember, you are building a relationship, and not everyone believes, thinks and lives like you. In addition, this is not the time to address tongue speaking, miracles, various millennial theories, Bible versions or other errors that lead you away from the cross. Remain focused! You want to take them to the battlefield of Golgotha and show them the kingdom of God and the blood of Christ. If we truly respect the power of the Word, we must stop telling everyone what we think and how we **feel** and start **showing** people the truth. **The quicker we get someone into the Bible, the sooner God can begin working on their hearts.**

Congregational training in evangelism is the key to winning souls and changing those heart-wrenching projections about our future in the United States. We literally have hundreds of thousands of untrained soldiers in our pews. We serve an offensive God who has a winning strategy. **If we can once again learn to fight for God, He will fight for His people.** Any failure is on us and not Him. If we don't act now, we will need other countries to send missionaries here to reestablish the Lord's church in America – in the not so distant future.

We began the **House to House/Heart to Heart School of Evangelism** in

FROM THE HEART OF

2018. Since that time, we have recorded over 2,000 baptisms. We are a full-time school that offers congregational training and a one-year curriculum to focus Christians on the one mission of the church. Our school has **seven principles, six steps to success and one mission!** You can learn more by going to our website at www.evangelism.housetohouse.com or by contacting me at Rob@housetohouse.com.



Statistics

Total baptisms (2018-2022) reported from U.S. Congregation: **2,345**

Total Seminars Conducted (2018-2022): **181**

Congregational Enrollments (2023): **33**

Remote Enrollments (2023): **28**

Student Enrollments (2023): **129**

States Reporting (2023): **18**

Total baptisms (2023) reported from U.S. Congregations: **859** ✝

Rob Whitacre is the Director of House to House/Heart to Heart School of Evangelism and resides in Jacksonville, Alabama, USA.



For pennies per household you can spread the Gospel in your city through this doctrinally-sound monthly paper. It will even be personalized with the local church's address and news. Phone:

256-435-9356; email: info@jvillecoc.org; Website: www.HousetoHouse.com.

What Can You Do to Help Spread the Word?

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

So you are born into an unbelieving home, you live according to the religion of your parents, you grow old, and you die, thrust into eternity to meet the God you never knew. What unspeakable tragedy! The scenario is LIFE for the majority of the people of the world.

Through mass media — radio programs, TV, and literature — we are doing all we can to bring God’s Word to people who have so little hope. More than half of each issue of *The Voice of Truth International* is sent free of charge to churches and individuals who have few or no other study materials, to aid in their spiritual growth. We ask brethren to help us with \$35 a month, to cover the \$8,000 postage bill incurred with every issue. Will you please have mercy on these souls and help us share the saving Gospel with them?

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P.O. Box 72, Winona, MS 38967

To speed up your announcement that you want to help,
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◆ I want to order the complete set of volumes in print (118 issues) for the reduced price of \$2.00 per copy. My address is given below.

◆ Please send special prices for WBS teachers and their students.

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◆ I want to send \$30.00 per month (or a multiple), for a box of 35 copies (or multiples) of each issue of the magazine as they are printed. Churches are also urged to use boxes in this way. Or you may send one payment of \$350.00 per year for four issues. This will help us to send more copies to the mission fields.

◆ We want to give \$_____ each month to help send this magazine to mission fields of the world, including the USA.

◆ As a congregation we want to help print and circulate copies of each issue of this magazine by making a special contribution to this effort. We can specify where the copies we pay for will be used, whether in our personal work, in jail ministry, overseas, or...

(Return this form in an envelope, along with your check, to the following address, stating your wishes.)

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ANSWERS TO PUZZLES

Verse Search (page 51)

1. All filthiness of the flesh and spirit.
2. Wronged no one; corrupted no one; cheated no one.
3. He was joyful in his tribulations.
4. He was troubled on every side.
5. Titus.
6. The mourning of the Corinthians, and their zeal for Paul.
7. Paul's letter.
8. Their sorrow led to repentance.
9. Repentance.
10. Death.
11. To show Paul's care for them.
12. It was true.
13. They received him with fear and trembling.
14. Confidence in everything.

Scavenger Hunt (page 81)

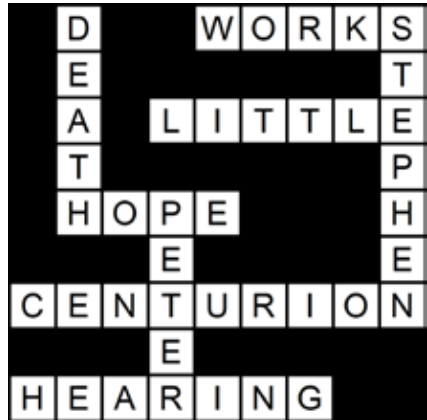
1. Mount Gilboa (1:6-10)
2. Ishbosheth (2:8-10)
3. 6 (3:2-5)
4. 5 years old (4:4)
5. 33 years (5:5)
6. dedicated them to the Lord (8:11)
7. Nathan (12:1-15)
8. Solomon (12:24)
9. 2 years (14:28)
10. 3 days of plague (24:10-15)

Bible Word

Scramble (page 73)

tabernacle

Bible Find (page 67)



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

I AM DEATH

I am death...
I prey on all mankind;
I come at the darkest hour
When they know not;
I still the heart beat
And the life blood stops its flow;
I rob men of their future
And turn fair beauty into dust;
I take man from the living
And place him in the grave;
I send him forth to face
Eternity in another world.

You can't avoid my stealthy call
For I will come;
Yea, be prepared to meet me:
I am Death.

J.C. Choate