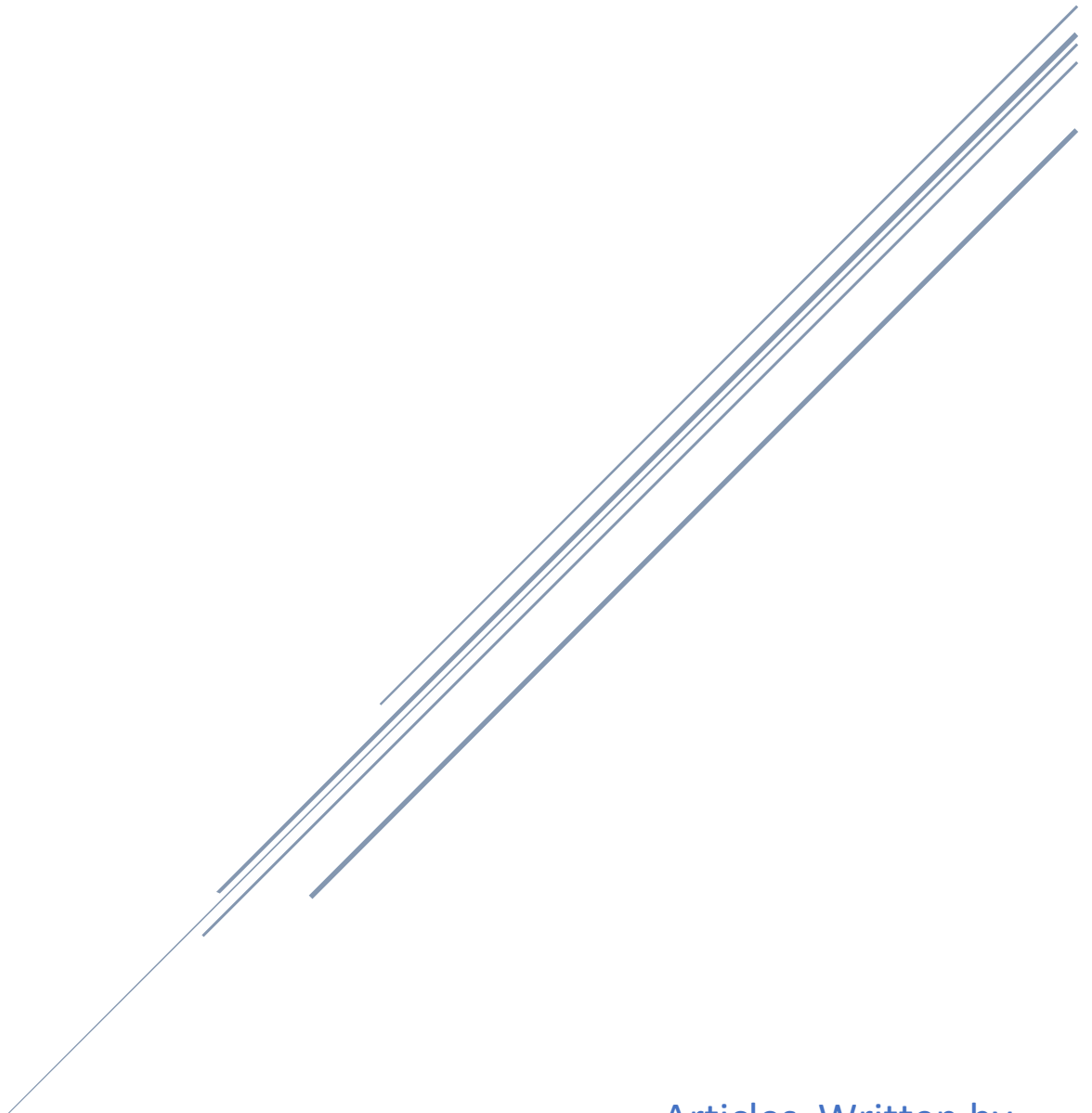


# FROM THE DESK OF DAVID



Articles Written by  
David E Paden Jr

# Bulletin Articles

By David E. Paden Jr.

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## A Friend of God

There is a word that has such a sweet sound to everyone who hears it. It's the word "friend." Is that not just a most beautiful word? It's a word that brings a smile to the face of everyone who hears it. Friendship is something that we crave, like food and water. We seek it out. When we move into a new town or start a new job, what is the first thing we begin to look for? We are looking for friends. We do this because friends are so meaningful to us. Some friends are just as close as blood relatives. "A man *who has* friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend *who* sticks closer than a brother." (Prov. 18:24) Though there are many other things we could say about friends, consider the following passage with me. "And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God." (Jam. 2:23) Notice that Abraham is identified as "the friend of God." This is not the only time in the scriptures where this statement is made. "But you, Israel, *are* My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend." (Isa. 41:8) "Are You not our God, *who* drove out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and gave it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?" (2 Chron. 20:7) What a compliment! When God thought of Abraham, He not only thought of him as His friend but His friend forever. What caused Abraham to be the friend of God? He was obedient to the Lord in the life he lived. "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going." (Heb. 11:8) "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," concluding that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." (vs. 17-19) Because of his continual life of obedience, he was recognized as the forever friend of God.

What about you? Does God think of you as His friend? Do you live every day knowing that God is always going to be your friend? God wants to be our friend just as He was the friend of Abraham. What does it take to be a friend of God? Listen to the scriptures. "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." (Jn. 14:15) In other words, it takes obedience. Was that not true of Abraham? He lived a life of obedience and as a result, he was the friend of God. When we live a life of obedience, striving to keep the commandments of the Lord, we too can live every day with the constant assurance that we are friends with God.

## A Lesson Learned on the Road to Emmaus

In Luke 24:13-35, the writer Luke records an occasion when two disciples of Jesus were traveling to a village called Emmaus. This section of scripture is sometimes referred to as "the road to Emmaus." What is the purpose of this passage and what applications can be made in Christian life today? The primary subject that the author is discussing in this section of Scripture is the resurrection of Jesus. In the previous paragraph, when Mary Magdalen, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and Salome went to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus, He was not there. They found the stone rolled away and the tomb was empty. Two angels appeared to the women announcing the resurrection of Jesus (Lk. 24:1-12). When these women reported this announcement to the apostles and all the other disciples, they did not believe them (vs. 11). They wanted more than an

announcement. They wanted evidence. Therefore, as two of the disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, Jesus drew near and began to walk with them. Though in the beginning, their eyes were restrained from knowing that they were walking and talking with Jesus, the purpose of this appearance was to give the disciples physical proof of the resurrection, which was what they desired. What was the conclusion? Not only did they believe in the resurrection of Jesus, but they also returned to Jerusalem and shared the message with the other disciples.

What applications can be applied to Christian life today from this story? Since the resurrection of Christ is the main subject that Luke is emphasizing, as Christians, we need to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. The topic of the resurrection should intrigue every human being, for death is eminent to all (Heb. 9:27). Death is an appointment that no one will escape. Because Jesus rose victoriously from the grave, and since He is the resurrection and the life (Jn. 11:25), He makes a victorious resurrection possible for humanity. For those who need evidence concerning the resurrection, point them to the most reliable source of information known to humankind. Point them to the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). That is what Jesus did. His physical appearance to the disciples did not open their eyes to His identity. Jesus used the Scriptures to open their eyes (vs. 27-32). We must follow the example of Jesus today. That is what the apostle Paul did. When he came to Thessalonica, he entered the synagogue on three Sabbath days and preached to them about the resurrection of Jesus. Paul used the scriptures as proof for the resurrection (Acts 17:1-3). The word resurrection is found 42 times in the New Testament. The story of the resurrection of Jesus is in all four gospels (Matt 28:1ff; Mk. 16:1ff; Lk. 24:1ff; John 21-22). It was the message of the apostles (Acts 4:1-2). Since the resurrection of Jesus was the message of the apostles, it is the foundational message of Christianity (Eph. 2:19-20). Christianity itself hinges upon the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:13-14). Let us point people to the Scriptures, for they so profoundly teach that we serve a risen Savior and because of His resurrection, we too have hope in the resurrection of our bodies someday.

## **A Man After God's Heart**

In Paul's sermon at Antioch, in which he briefly recounts the history of Israel, he refers to the statement made by God concerning David: "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will." (Acts 13:22; 1 Sam 13:13-14) What an awesome and humbling compliment. Wouldn't you agree? What does it mean to be a man after God's own heart? It simply meant that David was loyal or faithful to the Lord. If there is a statement that should characterize every person who wears the name of Christ, it ought to be this one. It ought to be said of every Christian that we are people after God's own heart. We are loyal to Him. How is this possible? Let's see what David did. If we do the same things David did, then won't we be people after God's own heart? So what did David do?

David loved the Word of God. "Oh, how I love your law!" (Psa. 119:97) If we are going to be loyal to God, we too must love God's Word. Why love God's Word? Everything that I need to know about faithfulness is found in God's Word. When I love God's Word, I'll read it, study it, meditate upon it, commit it to my memory, and live by it and as a result, we will be loyal!

Second, David loved to pray. "I will call upon him as long as I live (Psa. 116:12-13). David believed in prayer. There's no doubt in my mind that his faithfulness was due

to his active prayer life. The same is true of us today. If we are going to be loyal to God, we must be people of prayer. We must constantly be in communication with our heavenly Father. If we ask Him every day to help us be faithful, we have the promise that He will. "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you." (Jn. 16:23)

Third, David loved to praise God. "Seven times a day I praise you." (Psa. 119:164). The word praise means to boast or to commend. The word seven suggests thoroughness. The idea is that David thoroughly and completely praised the Lord every day that He lived. If we are going to be faithful, we too must live every day praising God to the highest. When we spend our time praising God, we will be loyal.

Fourth, David hated every false way. "I hate every false way." (Psa. 119:104) In other words, he hated sin. That's the key to being loyal to God. We must identify sin and hate it. As a result, we stay as far away from it as we possibly can, because we know that sin will keep us from being faithful to the Lord.

Good people, we can be men and women after God's own heart if we simply follow the wholesome teachings found in God's Word.

## **A Preacher Like Stephen**

In the opening verses of Acts 6, a problem has arisen within the church. The widows are being neglected. The solution to the problem was solved through the selection of seven men who would spend their time fulfilling their needs. One of the seven men chosen was a man named "Stephen." As I read about Stephen, I learn that he was more than one who served tables. He was the kind of preacher that every preacher should seek to follow today. What made Stephen a great preacher of the Gospel?

Stephen glorified God in his message. He did so by reminding the people to whom he spoke of God's actions in the past (Acts 7). The goal of every preacher should be to glorify God in every message that he presents (Psa. 86:12; Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31). Such is accomplished when we remind individuals of all the good things God has done for us in the past and present (Psa. 68:19).

Second, Stephen preached a message of repentance. Repentance of all humanity is the desire of God (Lk. 13:3, 5, Acts 17:30-31). Likewise, Stephen, being a man with a good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, faith, and power (Acts 6:3, 8), desired the repentance of the religious leaders, to whom he preached. Such should be the desire of every preacher. Every time that he presents a message, his prayer should be that he presents it in a way that will prick the hearts of the people just like on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37), and lead them to a changed life.

Third, Stephen spoke the truth regardless of the outcome of the message presented. When Stephen convicted the religious leaders of their rebellious attitudes (Acts 7:51-53), indeed he was aware of the consequences that such words would bring, yet he did not even let the thoughts of death keep him from presenting the message. The goal of every preacher should be to preach the truth in love, just as Paul commanded (Eph. 4:15). He should strive to make sure that his words are accompanied with grace and seasoned with salt (Col. 4:6). While it should never be his intention to offend, at the same time, he must preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). He must preach the word, being eager to present the message regardless of the time (2 Tim. 4:2). Like Stephen, he cannot be afraid to say what needs to be said, regardless of the consequences. At the end of the

day, the goal of every minister is to receive the approval of God and not man (Gal. 1:10; 2 Cor. 10:18).

Oh, how we need more preachers like Stephen!

## **Addicted To the Ministry of The Saints**

Chances are we all know someone right now who suffers from some kind of addiction. What does the word addiction mean? It means to devote or surrender oneself to something habitually or obsessively. Addiction is a compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance characterized by tolerance and well-defined psychological symptoms upon withdrawal. There are many different types of addictions in our world today. There are substance-related addictions which would include, but are not limited to tobacco, alcohol, street drugs, and prescription drugs. Then there are behavioral addictions. Such would include gambling, food, the internet, video games, work, etc. Just think about the definition for a moment. Anything that we devote ourselves to or surrender to becomes an addiction. While most of the time, when we think of the word addiction, we think of something negative, there is something that we should all be addicted to. "I beseech you, brethren, ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints." (1 Cor. 16:15) Notice if you will that these Christians had addicted or devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints. The word "ministry" in this passage means service. Therefore, they were addicted to serving their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Is this Bible verse descriptive of you and the life you live? Are you addicted to serving your brethren? The Bible commands us to serve one another. "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." (Gal. 5:13) "As each one has received a *special* gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Pet. 4:10)

What's the motivation for serving others? First, when we serve others, we're serving Christ. "And the King will answer them, Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matt. 25:40) The King in this passage has a reference to Christ. In this passage (Matt. 25:34-46), Jesus is encouraging His disciples to serve one another. Why should we serve one another? In serving one another, we serve Christ. This principle can also be seen in Paul's letter to those at Colossae. "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." (Col. 3:23-24) Notice the teaching of this passage. The work that we do should be done as if we are doing it for the Lord. Why? The service that we extend toward our brethren, is the service we extend toward Christ. What a blessing it is to know that we can serve Christ! According to the scriptures, this is accomplished when we serve one another. Consider also the reward for serving others. We will receive an "inheritance." (Col. 3:23-24) What is our inheritance? It's an eternal home in Heaven. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" (Matt. 25:34).

The house of Stephanas had addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints. What a compliment! Can the same be said of the church today? Remember, in serving others, we serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



## An Unwelcome Visitor

Have you ever had an unwelcome visitor? No, I'm not talking about someone knocking on your door who you didn't want to see that day. I'm talking about something different. I experienced an unwelcome visitor just a few days ago while traveling down the road. It was such a beautiful spring day, I decided to roll the windows down and enjoy the crisp, spring air. Suddenly, a bee flew in my window and hit me in the shoulder. At first, I didn't think anything about it, because, at the time, I didn't know what had just hit me. As I continued down the road, I realized what had just hit me on the shoulder. It was a huge bee! It was crawling across my truck seat. I immediately took a newspaper and removed the bee from my truck. Why did I remove the bee? Why didn't I just allow it to remain in my truck? The bee posed a threat to me. If I had left him alone, there was the possibility that he could have stung me and caused me to have a wreck. That bee was simply an "unwelcome visitor" in my vehicle.

As I think about this experience, it reminds me of another "unwelcome visitor," who often finds a way to slip into our lives. You and I know him as Satan. If there has ever been an unwelcome visitor in our lives, it's the devil! He's always watching and waiting for an opportunity to fly into your life. When the time is right and you least expect it, he usually jumps right in. This is why we are warned not to give place to the devil (Eph. 4:27). "To give place to" means to give in to or to yield to. The idea is that we should not make ways or open doors wherein the devil may enter our lives. Regardless of our efforts, sometimes he still finds a way in. As soon as we recognize that he has slipped in, our main goal should be to remove him. Why? His ultimate goal is to cause us harm spiritually and eventually destroy us. Such is why we are warned, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Pet. 5:8) How do we keep this unwelcome visitor from entering our lives?

**We must submit to God.** James sates, "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." (Jam. 4:7) The word "submit" means to yield to one's admonition or advice. Why must we submit to God? Satan is a very powerful and deceptive being. Paul described him as having the ability to transform into an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). The apostle John states that "the whole world lies *under the sway of the wicked one.*" (1 Jn. 5:19) Satan is an adversary who we battle daily. We are only fooling ourselves if we think that we can defeat him on our own. We need greater power. When we submit to God, we are admitting that we cannot make it on our own and we certainly can't defeat Satan. Submission to God equips us with the power to resist Satan and as a result, he will flee. "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (1 Jn. 4:4; See also Phil. 4:13) We will never successfully remove the devil from our lives if we do not submit to God.

**We must appeal to Scripture.** Consider the temptation of Jesus. When Satan tried to slip into the life of Jesus, our Savior appealed to scripture (Matt. 4:1-10). When Jesus kept using scripture, the devil eventually fled. The implication is if we appeal to Scripture, the devil will flee from us. Therefore, let us read the Bible, study it, meditate upon it, memorize it, and make it a daily part of our lives (Psa. 1:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:15).

**We must Pray.** Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat." (Lk. 22:31) Jesus continued by saying to Peter, "...I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail." (vs. 32) What's the implication of this

passage? Prayer aids us in escaping the clutches of Satan. Such is one of the many reasons why Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray. "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation." (Matt. 26:41)

Satan is truly an unwelcome visitor, but his goal is not to just visit. He wants to dwell, rule, and dominate our lives. Let's always be on the lookout for him and never let him in!

## **Answering Romans 10:9**

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Rom. 10:9) Many will conclude from this verse that all one must do to be saved is confess Jesus and believe. While this verse discusses the subject of salvation, is the Bible teaching from this verse that the only thing that one must do to be saved is just confess and believe? Consider some other passages in the Bible that likewise discuss salvation. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:" (Eph. 2:8) Paul told the people at Rome, "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Rom. 8:24) "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts 2:21) The Philippian Jailor was told, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." (Acts 16:31) "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mk. 16:16) "Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved: but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once." (Prov. 28:18) "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved." (Matt. 10:22)

There are eight verses that we just read which all discuss salvation. Each one stated that we are saved by something different. Which one is correct? The answer is all of them are. How do I know that? Listen to what the Bible states. "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain." (1 Cor. 15:1-2) According to this passage, we are saved by the gospel. This teaching can also be found in the book of Romans. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Rom. 1:16) What is the gospel? It is the good news about Jesus Christ. The only place where we can find the good news about Jesus is in the Bible. Here's the point. Ultimately, we are saved by the gospel, which tells us that we are saved by grace, hope, calling on the name of the Lord, faith, confession, baptism, endurance, and living an upright life. What can I learn from this? Never be guilty of taking one verse from the Bible and drawing a conclusion when the Bible has much to say about the subject. Good people, if we are going to be saved, it will be because we chose to do all of what God's Word teaches concerning salvation, and not just the parts that we see fit. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21)

## **Are all the books in the New Testament Inspired?**

One of the most fascinating patterns that one will see when he reads and studies

the New Testament is the fact that all 27 books claim to be inspired by God. Consider with me a brief survey to support this point. Matthew begins with the phrase, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ." Linking Christ's lineage to the record of the Old Testament is an acknowledgment that this book is a continuation of messianic truth. There is implied in the repeated assertion that Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (5:17-18, 21) and that the book of Matthew is an authoritative account of that fulfillment in Christ. The author closes his book with the command of Christ to teach the truth of Christ to all nations (28:18-20), which by implication is precisely what the book of Matthew professes to do (10:7). Mark begins his letter with the statement, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God as it is written in Isaiah the prophet." (1:1) His connection to the prophets who were inspired implies inspiration of the book of Mark. The Book of Luke has a statement about its character. In his writing Luke claims that it is an authentic "account of the things accomplished that Theophilus "might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught" (1:1, 4). Because Luke was closely associated with Paul, it has an apostolic connection as well. John is likewise clear about the nature of his gospel, saying that it is written "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name" (20:31). The book of Acts is a continuation of Luke and of what Jesus "Began to do and teach" (1:1), Acts claims to be an authentic record of the teaching of Christ through the apostles. The author of the book of Romans claims to be an apostle of Jesus Christ (1:1). In 9:1; Paul says, "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit." 1 Corinthians contains what "God revealed...through the Spirit (2:10; 7:40). Paul also reminds his readers, "The things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment" (14:37). 2 Corinthians is introduced by an apostle of God (1:1), who strongly contests for his authority (10:8; 12:12) and declares his lofty revelations from God (12:1-4). Galatians states the case for its author's divine authority as strongly as any book in the New Testament: "Paul, an apostle not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father)" (1:1). "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ (1:12). The book of Ephesians claims to be written by an apostle (1:1) and declares itself to be a revelation of the mystery of God (3:3). Philippians comes as from an apostle and with the standard greetings "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:2). Colossians also was written by "an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1), with greetings "from God our Father" (1:2), as an authoritative refutation of heresy (2:4, 8), with a command to be circulated and read in the churches (4:16). In 1 Thessalonians 5:27, the author charges the church "to have this letter read to all the brethren" and in 4:15 he states, "for we say to you by the word of the Lord." 2 Thessalonians is a God-given pronouncement about a false letter "as if from" Paul (2:2). It closes by saying, "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him" (3:14). 1 Timothy was written by "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God" (1:1). The author of 2 Timothy instructed his son in the faith to "retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me" (1:13), and he charged Timothy "in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus" to "preach the word" (4:1-2). The book of Titus claims to come from Paul "an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1:1), with the instruction to "let these things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority." (2:15). Philemon claims authority from the apostle Paul (1:1) and brings salutation "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3). The author of Hebrews introduces his message as the voice of God through Christ "in these last days" (1:2) and concludes his epistle with authoritative exhortations (13:22).

James writes as a “servant of God” (1:1) and speaks with authority about doctrine and practice. 1 Peter is from “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1) and claims to be an exhortation on “the true grace of God” (5:12). 2 Peter is written by “a bond servant and apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1), this epistle gives commandments from the Lord (3:2). 1 John comes from an eyewitness (1:1) who is proclaiming Christ so that the believers’ “joy may be made complete” (1:4) and that the reader may be assured of eternal life (5:12). 2 John writes a “commandment” (1:5), warns against deceivers (1:7), and claims to possess “the teaching of Christ” (1:9). 3 John is written by one with apostolic authority (1:9) who claims to have “the truth itself” (1:12). Jude claims to be a record of “our common salvation” and “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (1:3). Revelation begins by saying, “the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave” (1:1) through John, who considered himself to be one with the “prophets” (22:9). The book ends with the most severe warning in the Bible (22:18-19). The point is very clear. Virtually every book in the New Testament contains a claim for its authority in one manner or another. The cumulative effect of this self-testimony is an overwhelming confirmation that the New Testament writers claimed inspiration and we can trust that the New Testament is the Word of God.

### **Are Good Morals Enough?**

Can good morals save? Many are convinced that if an individual is a good moral person, he or she will be saved. It doesn’t matter what you believe or where you go to church. All that matters is that you live every day just being a good moral person. As with all religious questions, our first question should be, “What does the Bible say?”

Since we are talking about salvation, let’s begin with that subject. Who are those who will be saved? “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 7:21) This passage teaches that our home in heaven is dependent upon us following the will of the Father. Consider another passage. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” (Heb. 5:8-9) According to this passage, one must obey Jesus to obtain salvation. Question? What if an individual is a good moral person, yet that person has never obeyed God? What if that person has never done the will of the Father? Can those people be saved? If so, why then are these passages even in the Bible? Good people, the Bible is clear. If we are to be saved, we cannot rely on good morals alone. We must be willing to follow the will of the Father.

Consider with me some examples of individuals who were good moral people, but they were lost. How about the rich young ruler (Lk. 18:18-23). He went away sorrowful. Consider Cornelius. “A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.” (Acts 10:2, 6) Though these were good moral men they were lost. “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matt. 7:22-23)

While we must be good moral people, the Bible is clear, good morals alone will not save. Salvation is dependent upon contacting the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 1:9) through the act of baptism (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16) and living a faithful Christian life (Rev. 2:10).

### **Are There Apostles Living on The Earth Today?**

Some would answer yes to the above question. It is believed by many that it was part of God's plan to always have 12 apostles in the church and therefore there are 12 apostles living today. According to the Bible, Jesus handpicked 12 apostles (Matt. 10:1-5). When Judas committed suicide, Matthias was soon chosen to fill the position of Judas (Acts 1:26), thus signifying that God planned to always have 12 living apostles. What does the Bible teach?

To determine if apostles are living on the earth today, we must look at the qualifications of an apostle. There are at least three qualifications identified in the Bible. First, an apostle had to have seen the Lord and been an eyewitness of Christ's resurrection. "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection." (Acts 1:21-22; see also Acts 22:14; 1 Cor. 9:1) Second, an apostle had to be specifically selected by the Lord. "And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen." (Acts 1:23-24) Third, he had unlimited miraculous power. This means he could heal all manner of sickness, including raising the dead. "Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick." (Lk. 9:1-2) They also could impart miraculous gifts to others. "And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied." (Acts 19:6) "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established." (Rom. 1:11)

Let's sum up what we have studied thus far. To be an apostle, you had to physically see the Lord. If an individual is an apostle today, he would be at least 2,000 years old. Second, to be an apostle, you had to be handpicked by the Lord. Religious groups who have apostles today are picked by man and not by God. Third, to be an apostle, you had to have unlimited miraculous power. When was the last time you heard of someone raising the dead? The apostles had that power (Acts 9:36-42). When was the last time you heard of an individual spending the day at the hospital healing the sick? The answer is very clear. According to the Bible, no apostles are living on the earth today.

### **Are There Christians in all Churches?"**

A very common and popular statement among religious people today is, "There are Christians in all churches." Too often people believe this to be a true statement without ever examining the Scriptures to see if it is true. Most do not follow the command of the Bible to "Prove all things and hold fast to that which is good." (1 Thess. 5:21). Most religious people are not like the Bereans, who searched the Scriptures daily to see if the things that are taught are true (Acts 17:11). For a conclusion to be drawn, we must honestly ask the question, "Are there Christians in all churches?" and let the Bible determine our answer.

To begin with, most people would be surprised to learn the statement, "There are Christians in all churches," cannot be found in the Bible. Since the Bible commands, "Prove all things..." (1 Thess. 5:21), and the Bible does not state there are Christians in all churches, one should immediately be concerned. On judgment day, we will be judged

by the Bible (Jn. 12:48; Rev. 20:12). Why should one believe and promote a statement that cannot be found in the Bible?

Second, to state that there are Christians in all churches is to imply that all churches are pleasing to God. Such is not the teaching of the Bible. The Bible teaches that Jesus built only "one Church." Christ promised to build "His" Church. (Mat. 16:18) Christ did "not" promise, I will build "a" church, or I will build my "churches," or I will build "one" of my churches. Christ promised "I will build my Church," in the singular. The apostle Paul taught there is only one true Church. In numerous passages, he taught there is only one body. "There is one body and one Spirit..." (Eph. 4:4; See also Rom. 12:4-5; I Cor. 12:12; I Cor. 12:20; Col. 3:15). The body is identified as the Church. "And he is the head of **the body, the Church...**" (Col. 1:18; See also Eph. 1:22-23). Since the body is the Church, and there is only one body, the logical explanation is, that there is only one Church. That one Church is identified in the Bible as the Church of Christ. "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." (Rom. 16:16) Why did Paul identify the church as "the churches of Christ?" It wasn't because that just happened to be the denominational church that he was addressing. He addressed the Church as "the churches of Christ" because that was the only Church that existed in his day. If one would do a careful historical study, he/she would be surprised to learn that all of the different denominational churches that exist today didn't exist in Paul's day. They are all churches that were established by man and therefore, they are not the one Church that one can read about in the Bible.

Finally, to state that there are Christians in all the churches is to imply that there are many ways in which one can become a Christian. If you were to randomly call each religious group in the phone book and ask the question, "What must I do to be saved?" You would get several different answers when the Bible gives only one answer. Salvation is dependent on God's grace (Eph. 2:8) and our obedience to His will. Jesus has promised salvation only to those who are willing to obey Him. "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him." (Heb. 5:8-9; See also Matt. 7:21-23). Obedience requires faith in God (Heb. 11:6), repentance of sins (Acts 17:30), confession of faith in Christ (Matt. 10:32-33), and baptism for the remission of sins (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38). Only by taking these steps can one become a Christian. If one or more is left out, one is not a Christian.

While God desires that all mankind be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and become Christians (Acts 26:28-29), the Bible does not teach that there are Christians in all the churches. This teaching is a doctrine that is foreign to the Bible.

### **Are You Ready?**

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Tim. 4:6-8) What did Paul mean when he stated, "my departure is at hand?" Picture if you will a ship that has left the dock and is about to leave the bay, never to return. The ship or vessel in this passage is the life of the apostle Paul. As he writes this passage, he has been condemned to death and he knows that the time of his death is approaching quickly. What amazes me so much about this passage is Paul's attitude. He knows that he's about

to die and notices how he responds. "For I am now ready." Amazing, isn't it? According to the Bible, death is imminent for all of us. As I think about myself and every person who is reading this writing right now, we are all going to die (Heb. 9:27) No one will escape death. Is this your attitude when it comes to death? It can be. How? First, you must be prepared. The reason Paul could have this attitude is because he was prepared. He had fought the good fight. He had lived his life every day for the Lord Jesus. Will you do that? Will you live your life every day, putting Christ first in everything you do? Second, Paul had finished his course. In other words, he had never given up. Paul had experienced many difficulties in living the Christian life, but never once did he allow any of those things to sway him and cause him to turn his back on the Lord. Will you do the same? Will you endure to the end, not allowing anything to keep you from pressing forward? Third, Paul had kept the faith. The word "kept" means to guard or protect. Paul lived his life always standing for the truth. "I am set for the defense of the gospel." (Phil. 1:17) Will you do the same? Will you live every day defending the truth of God's Word? Fourth, Paul knew his reward. That reward was one he had never known before. It was a crown of life. He knew that the moment his physical life ended, true life would begin for him, eternal life with the heavenly Father. Again, will you do the same? Realize that an award is awaiting all who fight the good fight of faith and finish their course. That reward that we will receive is far greater than we can ever begin to imagine. When we put these principles into practice in our lives, then when it comes to death, our attitude can be, I am now ready. Are you ready for death?

### **Are You Ready for the Rapture?**

Often in discussions with religious friends, the subject of "the Rapture" will come up. The Rapture is part of a doctrine known as Premillennialism which dates to 1830 and originates with a man named John Nelson Darby. The rapture teaches that Jesus will secretly return for the Church, resurrect the dead members, and judge the whole Church. At this time a great tribulation will begin which will last for seven years. During these seven years of tribulation, the battle of Armageddon will take place. Following this horrible battle, Jesus will return for a third time, destroy the antichrist, sit on a literal throne in Jerusalem, and reign over all the earth for 1,000 years. Though the doctrine of the "rapture" is believed by many, when compared to the Bible, there are many problems with this doctrine.

To begin with, the Coming of Jesus will not be a secret event. The Bible states, "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven." (1 Thess. 4:17). According to Revelation 1:7, when that time comes "every eye shall see Him." The second coming of Jesus will be a visible event. Not only will the second coming of Christ be a visible event, but it will also be an audible event. There will be a shout from heaven with the voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God (1 Thess. 4:17-18).

A second problem with the rapture is too many comings of Christ. According to the rapture, Christ will return "two" more times. According to the Bible, there will be only one return of Christ. When He returns, the dead will be resurrected (Jn. 5:28-29), the faithful who are alive will meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17-18), the earth will be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10-11) and we all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). The Bible does not portray a third coming of Christ.

A third problem with the Rapture is there are too many resurrections portrayed. The "rapture" teaches two resurrections: one of the saints and 1,000 years later one of

the wicked. The Bible teaches There will only be one resurrection. “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (John 5:28-29).

A fourth problem with the rapture has to do with Jesus establishing His kingdom and reigning on earth. According to the Bible, Jesus will never set foot on this earth again. The Bible teaches that we will meet Him in the air (1 Thess. 4:17) and the earth upon which we now live will be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10). Concerning the kingdom, advocates of the rapture believe that Jesus came to the earth the first time to establish His kingdom. When the Jews rejected Him, He established the church instead. The “rapture” teaches that someday Jesus will return to the earth to establish His kingdom and reign on the earth for 1,000 years. According to this doctrine, there is a distinction made between the kingdom and the church, but a careful examination of Matthew 16:18-19 will show that they are synonymous interchangeable terms. Jesus promised to build His “church” and he promised to give Peter the keys to the “kingdom.” Jesus was not discussing two different institutions, but one in the same. When the church was established on the day of Pentecost, the kingdom of Christ came into existence (Acts 2). Paul told the Christians at Colossae that they had been translated or placed in the kingdom of Christ (Col. 1:13) How could someone be placed into something that did not exist? The kingdom is already in existence.

While the second coming of Christ is a crucial subject and one that we must adhere to, the doctrine of the rapture is false and one that we as Christians must reject.

### **Are You Weary from Doing Good?”**

One of the most rewarding blessings in life is doing good for others. I love the fact that doing good not only benefits the lives of those to whom good is performed, but it also blesses the lives of those who do the good deeds. Just stop and consider how it makes you feel when you do a good deed. It gives you a sense of accomplishment and brings joy to your heart that cannot be expressed in words. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the Bible commands Christians to live every day doing good. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Gal. 6:10) Though we can never get to the point that we do too much good in this life, there is, however, a danger that many fall into while doing good. The danger is growing weary while doing good. “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” (Gal. 6:9) The word “weary” in this passage means to lose heart or to give up and quit. Paul is saying don’t get tired of doing good. This is not the only time that Paul would give this admonition. He gave the same warning to the Christians at Thessalonica (2 Thess. 3:13).

What would cause one to get tired of doing good? It could be a lack of desired results. Too often when individuals involve themselves in doing good, they have certain expectations, and if those expectations are not met, they tend to give up. It could be due to a lack of help. In many cases, 10% of the church members are doing 100% of the work. A continual overload of work will often cause one to grow weary. Then again, it could also be related to criticism or persecution. Often Christians will be criticized or ridiculed while



doing good. Such is extremely discouraging and causes many to grow tired of doing good. Regardless of the cause for growing weary, how can we avoid it or overcome it?

Remember the example of Jesus. The Bible states that Jesus “went about doing good.” (Acts 10:38). Why did Jesus live every day doing good to others? While many good reasons could be suggested, one that stands out in my mind is to leave us an example to follow. Peter states that Jesus “left us an example that we should follow in His steps.” (1 Pet. 2:21). As I think about the life of Jesus, I’m aware of the fact that He suffered persecution and was criticized many times after doing a good deed. I think about the many times that He was no doubt disappointed due to the actions of the people. I also think about how He must have felt when he considered the great work that needed to be done and so few who were willing to pitch in and give a helping hand. Yet amidst these difficulties, Jesus never got tired of doing good. Remember, He left us an example that we should follow in His steps. If He never grew tired of doing good, neither should we!

Prayer will also help keep one from growing weary. In Luke’s account of the gospel, Jesus told His disciples, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” (Lk. 18:1) The word “faint” is the same word that Paul used in referring to good works. Notice what Jesus admonished His disciples to do to avoid growing weary. We ought to always pray. The implication is that if we are individuals who find ourselves continually going to God in prayer, we will never find ourselves growing tired of doing the Lord’s work.

Finally, focus on the reward. Consider the last part of the passage. “And let us not grow weary while doing good, **for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.**” (Gal. 6:9) The reward that the Christian will someday reap or receive is the crown of eternal life (2 Tim. 4:6-8). If we could just look beyond the difficulties and look to our reward we would never, ever grow tired of doing good. Growing weary while doing good is a possibility. Let’s determine that it is a choice that we will never make.

## **Are we a Christ-Centered Church?**

In Ephesians 3:10-11, the Bible teaches that the church is God’s eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10-11). That means that God had the establishment of the church planned long before He created this world or mankind. Jesus reminded the people to whom He preached of God’s plan by promising to establish or build the church (Matt. 16:18-19). We can read about the establishment of this church in Acts 2. It began on the day of Pentecost around AD 33. As we think about the church that was planned before time, promised by Jesus, and established with power on the day of Pentecost, it would do us well to consider the focus of the Church. What should be our focus when it comes to the church? According to the book of Hebrews, we are to live our lives “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...” (Heb. 12:2). The word “looking” means to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something. The individual we must fix our eyes, mind, and attention upon is Jesus. When it comes to church, He is our focus.

Why should Jesus be our focus of attention? Are there Biblical reasons why the church should be Christ-centered? Consider first that Jesus is the **builder** of the church. In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus promised that He would build the church and He kept His promise. Second, He is the **foundation** of the church. “For other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 3:11) The word “foundation” represents every characteristic of the Church. Jesus is the “chief cornerstone.” (Eph. 2:20) He determines the means of salvation, the way one worships, and the way one lives his life. Third, Jesus is the **owner** of the church. It belongs to Him, and the purchasing

price was His blood. "...Shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28). Fourth, Jesus is the **head** of the church. The Bible states, "And He is the head of the body, the church..." (Col. 1:18). The Ephesian writer informs us that God "put all things under His feet and gave Him to be head over all things to the church." (Eph. 1:22). Since Jesus is the builder, foundation, owner, and head of the church, the church must be Christ-centered.

How do we express to others in our community and around the world that we are a Christ-centered church? First, we must wear His name. The people of the New Testament church identified themselves as "Christians" (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16). Never in the Bible do you read of individuals identifying themselves as Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Catholics, etc.... Consider also the name of the church. The church of the Bible was identified as the "Church of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). Since Jesus is the builder, foundation, owner, and head of the church, can we honestly and biblically say that we are Christ-centered if we do not identify with Him? If an individual or a religious group wears a name that cannot be found in the pages of God's Word, is it a Christ-centered Church? No, it is not. Second, we must abide by the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 1:9-10). The word "doctrine" refers to teaching or instruction. The word "abide" means to stay or remain. It also means that we must reject all doctrines that are contrary to the doctrine of Christ. Where do we find the doctrine of Christ? It is found only in the Bible. Third, we must follow the example of Christ. The apostle Peter states that Jesus left us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet. 2:21-25). As Christians, we must constantly examine the life that our Lord lived while here on earth and strive to live as He lived. Finally, we must spread the message of Christ. As Jesus commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16), we must do the same. We must take the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the message of salvation (Rom. 1:16) to all mankind.

If we desire to please God, the church must be Christ-centered. When we follow the teachings found within God's Word, we will show others that we are a Christ-centered church.

### **Are we Justified by Faith Only?**

The word "justified" is a word found throughout the pages of the New Testament. It comes from a word (dik-ah-yo'-o) which means to render one righteous. The word "righteous" (dik'-ah-yos) refers to the condition acceptable to God. Therefore, when the Bible speaks of an individual being justified, it's referring to an individual who is accepted by God. What is it that makes one accepted by God? Many in the religious world preach and teach that one is accepted by God at the point of faith. A proof text that is so often used is Romans 5:1. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This passage teaches that one is justified by faith. As students of the Bible, we have the responsibility of declaring the whole counsel of God when we teach (Acts 20:27) When one teaches that an individual is justified by faith only, has he declared the whole counsel of God? Listen to the Bible. "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." (Jam. 2:24) Good people, that verse just destroys the justification by faith-only doctrine. Other things are involved in the doctrine of justification.

The Bible teaches that man is justified by **God's grace**. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 3:24) We are justified by

**the blood of Christ.** “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” (Rom. 5:9). We are justified by **our words.** “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matt. 12:37). We are justified by **humility.** “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Lk. 18:14). The **doers of the law** are justified. “For not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.” (Rom. 2:13). We are justified by **works.** “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way?” (Jam. 2:21, 24, 25).

What is the conclusion of the matter? We are not justified by faith only. We are justified by God’s grace. Through God’s grace, I learn about a Savior who shed His blood for me. When I have faith in God’s ability to save me and I humbly submit to God’s will and I am baptized which brings me in contact with the precious blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16), I am then in a justified condition. To stay justified, I must live every day doing or keeping God’s law. When I take those steps then God justifies me and keeps me justified.

### **Are we Saved by Confession Only?**

In Matthew 10:32-33, Jesus states “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.” What is the significance of Jesus confessing man before His Father in heaven? The Bible teaches that there is going to be a great day of judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). On that day, Jesus will either confess that He knows us before the Father, or He will deny us. Jesus confessing that He knows us or approves of us is dependent upon us confessing Jesus. In Romans 10:10, the Bible states, “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation.” This passage teaches that salvation cannot be attained unless one is willing to confess. Many believe that one is saved the moment that he repents and confesses his faith in Christ. What does the Bible say? Consider the following Scripture. “...If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Rom. 10:9-10) This passage teaches that one must confess faith in Christ if he desires salvation. To argue with that would be to argue with the teaching found in the Bible. Does this verse teach that one is saved at the point of confession? Read the passage carefully once again. “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus.... you will be saved.” That part of the passage without a doubt connects confession to salvation. Notice verse 10. “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation.” It is interesting to know that the words righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) and salvation (σωτηρία), go hand in hand. One who is righteous is in a condition acceptable to God. One who is saved is in a safe position spiritually speaking. In the second place, notice that confession is made “unto” salvation. The word “unto” (εἰς) means “towards.” According to this passage, one is not saved at the point of confession, but he is one step closer “to” being saved. It would be as if I wanted to travel to the state

of Arkansas from Georgia. I could say, "From Georgia, the state of Alabama leads me unto Arkansas." Let me ask you a question. Can I get to Arkansas by simply traveling through the state of Alabama? No. I must travel through Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi to Get to Arkansas, however, when I travel through the state of Alabama, I'm one state closer to Arkansas. In the same way, our confession of Christ as the Son of God is extremely important. It is part of our salvation. When we confess our faith in Christ Jesus as the Son of God, we are one step closer, one state closer to salvation. The final step that leads one to salvation is the act of baptism. The Bible teaches that salvation is found "in" Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:10). How does one get "into" Christ Jesus? Consider the following Scriptures. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:3-4) "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). Notice in both passages that baptism doesn't lead us "unto" salvation, but it puts one "into" Christ Jesus where salvation is found.

What is the conclusion of the matter? While confession is an extremely important step in the process of salvation, one is not saved at the point of confession. One is saved at the point of baptism (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21).

### **Are we Saved by Grace Only?**

Many believe that man is saved by Grace only. Listen to the following quote. "We believe that the salvation of sinners is wholly of grace." Listen to another quote: "The Bible teaches that salvation is always and only by grace through faith alone." On and on we could go, many are convinced that one is saved by grace only. The passage used to prove this position is Ephesians 2:8. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God." The question we should ask is, "Does the Bible teach this doctrine?"

Let us begin by considering the consequences of this doctrine. First, the word "only" is not in the Biblical text. Read the passage with me once again. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God." Is the word only in this scripture? No, it is not! How did it get there? It was added by man which is a clear violation of scriptures. "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you." (Deut. 4:2) "If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book." (Rev. 22:18-19) Notice the severity of this sin. When we add to God's Word, He has promised to remove our names from the Book of Life.

Second, the word "only" is a word of exclusion. Therefore, when it is used, it excludes everything else that the Bible has to say about salvation. For example, the Bible teaches one is saved by the gospel. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." (Rom. 1:16) The Bible teaches that one is saved by enduring. "But he who endures to the end will be saved." (Matt. 10:22) The Bible teaches that one is saved by

faith and confession. “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” The Bible teaches that one is saved by faith and baptism. “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” (Mk. 16:16) The Bible teaches that we are saved by Jesus' blood. “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” (Rom. 5:9) Now, if we say that one is saved by “Grace only” then that excludes everything else. We must conclude that we are not saved by the gospel, endurance, faith confession, baptism, or even the blood of Christ. What is the conclusion of the matter? Man is not saved by “Grace only.” Man is saved by God’s grace when he believes the gospel, confesses his faith, is baptized, and allows the blood of Christ to cleanse him from every sin.

### **Be Strong and of Good Courage**

“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.” (Deut. 31:6) These words were spoken by Moses to the children of Israel as they were about to cross over into the promise land. The same words were spoken to Joshua in verses 7-8. What was the purpose of this statement? Moses knew that as they crossed over into the promise land, they would encounter literal giants and nations that would cause them to lose heart. He wanted them to know that God would be with them and never forsake them, He would help them, and they would defeat every nation that stood before them.

How can we apply this passage to our lives today? Just like the people of Moses’ day were headed toward a promise land, Christians today are headed toward a promised land. Our ultimate destination in life is heaven (Jn. 14:1-4). As we make our journey toward the promise land, we too will encounter giants along the way that may cause us to lose heart. It may be a temptation, for every individual is tempted (Jam. 1:14). It may be some kind of fiery trial like persecution, sickness, or just a bad habit that one is trying to overcome (1 Pet. 4:12). Whatever that giant may be, don’t let it cause you to lose hope. Be strong, have courage and don’t be afraid. Know that the Lord is with you (Matt. 28:20), He will never leave you (Heb. 13:5), and with His help, you will defeat every giant that stands in your way. The apostle Paul would confidently state, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13) When God is in my life and on my side, I can have that same kind of strength and encouragement. So, remember, whatever giant you may face in life, be strong and of good courage!

### **Bearing One Another’s Burdens**

People who work with ocean-going ships will tell you that it’s critical to check the way the cargo load is distributed in the vessel. If the cargo is too heavy, the ship will ride too low in the water and won’t be able to travel at a good speed. If the load is too light, the ship will ride too high in the water and bob like a cork, especially when storms hit. The ship needs the proper amount of cargo for it to make the best progress across the ocean. This reminds me of a passage in the book of Galatians where Paul said, “Bear one another’s burdens... For each one shall bear his own load” (Gal. 6:2, 5). The word

“burden” in this passage refers to anything heavy or troublesome. This could refer to any particular hardship that one is experiencing (Temptation, trials, work, etc....). As Christians, there are many things in the journey of life that burden us (Gal. 6:5). Sometimes those burdens become so heavy that we become weary and find it difficult to live the life of a Christian. At the same time, when we are not bearing our burdens in life (Gal. 6:5) and the burdens of others (Gal. 6:2), it makes it difficult for us to relate to those who are bearing a heavy load in the kingdom of God. In essence, we find ourselves much like that sea-going vessel. We are too heavy with burdens to the point that we are about to sink, or we are too light, to the point that we are just bobbing around, doing nothing which benefits others. We need to find the proper balance between bearing our burdens and helping others to bear their burdens. What is the key to identifying this balance?

Bearing burdens, whether it be my own or the burdens of others, requires spiritual maturity. In Galatians 6:1, Paul called upon those who are “spiritual” to restore those who are overtaken in a trespass. Paul was referring to those who were spiritually mature. What does it mean to be spiritually mature? One who is spiritually mature is one who consistently seeks to do the will of the father (Matt. 7:21), he/she reads and meditates on God’s Word (Psa. 1:2) and is completely dependent on God’s Word for his guide in life (Psa. 119:105). Spiritual maturity is the element that causes one to see the need to bear my burdens in life. This can be seen in Galatians 6:4. After Paul appealed to those who were spiritual, he then reminded them “...let each one examine his own work....” Spiritual maturity also causes me to help others with their burdens. It causes me to recognize that in bearing one another’s burdens, I am striving to fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Spiritual maturity causes me to look beyond my burdens and look to those who have greater burdens, with the intent of offering an understanding spirit and a helping hand.

If the key to bearing one another’s burdens is spiritual maturity, what is the key to spiritual maturity? It goes back to a principle that Jesus expressed during his earthly ministry. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn. 13:34). Peter repeated this command in his letter. “...love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Pet. 1:22). In 1 Peter 4:8 he stated that love will cover a multitude of sins. Peter meant that love is the element that helps us get through tough times in our lives as Christians. Love is that characteristic that causes one to do the will of God (Jn. 14:15). When we have this kind of love in our lives, it helps to create spiritual maturity which creates the proper balance that we so greatly need in our lives as Christians. When we have love, we bear our burdens, and we help others to bear their burdens.

## **Becoming Like Jesus (Part 1)**

In almost every aspect of life, growth is a common expectation. When a business begins, the founders expect growth. When children are born, both doctors and parents expect those children to grow. Likewise, when an individual is born into the family of God, growth is expected. “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...” (2 Pet. 3:18). The goal of Christian growth is to become like Jesus. The apostle Paul states, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Rom. 8:29). The word “conformed” (σύμμορφος) means to be similar in form, nature, or style. The word “image” (εἰκὼν) means that which represents something else in terms of basic form and features, form or appearance. At the point of baptism, when conversion to Christ takes place, it

should be the purpose and desire of every Christian to become more like Christ. How can Christians become more like Christ? Consider three things that every Christian can and must do to be like Christ. To be Christ-like, one must be crucified with Christ, have the attitude of Christ, and live like Christ.

First, to be like Christ, one must be crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20). One of the most astounding features about Christ is that He never sinned (Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22). Sin is the one thing that keeps a man from being like Christ. Therefore, if we are to be like Christ, we must put to death our old man of sin, which takes place at the point of baptism. In the act of baptism, not only do we obtain remission of sins (Acts 2:38), but we also put to death and bury the old man of sin (Rom. 6:1-18). This does not mean that we will never again give in to sin (Rom. 3:23; 1 Jn. 1:8, 10), but it does mean that we no longer live our lives enslaved to sin. We live our lives in obedience to righteousness (Rom. 6:16), no longer participating in the sins of the flesh, but living and walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25).

Second, to be like Christ, one must have the attitude of Christ. The apostle Paul states, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 2:5) The word mind (φρονέω) means to think, to form an opinion, to develop an attitude based on careful thought. What was the attitude of Jesus? It was sacrificial. Jesus was in the form of God. Being in the form of God means that He was equal with God and able to enjoy all the glories that the Father enjoyed (Jn. 17:5). Jesus emptied Himself of that glory and was made in the likeness of man. He became a servant (Phil. 2:5-7) The author of Hebrews illustrates the purpose of Jesus becoming a man. He had to become like His brethren that He may experience temptation and become a faithful High Priest (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). What a sacrifice! The attitude of Jesus also included humility. The Bible states, "...He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:8). What an amazing thought! The creator and sustainer of this world, the creator of man, had to learn obedience (Heb. 5:8-9) and experience the most horrific and shameful death known to man. The death of the cross was an instrument of shame to the Jews (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13). In Roman Society, the word cross was an obscenity, not to be uttered in conversation. What would motivate Jesus to allow the death of the cross? It was His humble, submissive attitude. "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (Jn. 6:38) In the Garden of Gethsemane, as he struggled with pain and agony that was ahead, He states, "Father, If it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours be done." (Lk. 22:42) If Christians are going to become more like Christ, we must have the attitude of Christ. We must be sacrificial in our lives. The apostle Paul states, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (Rom. 12:1; See also 2 Cor. 12:15; Gal. 2:20). I must also practice humility. I must live every day in humble, submissive obedience to God's will (Jam. 4:7, 10). How is this possible? This attitude requires a renewal (ἀνακαίνωσις) of our minds (Rom. 12:2), which is a complete change for the better. Every day we must strive to have the attitude of Jesus.

## **Becoming Like Jesus (Part 2)**

Last week we began a study of becoming like Jesus. We saw that to be like Christ one must be crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20) and have the attitude of Christ. In writing we want to notice that to be like Christ, one must live like Christ. How can we live like Christ?

The apostle Peter states, “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps.” (1 Pet. 2:21). To be like Jesus, we must look at the life He lived, look at His characteristics and strive to live like Him. What were some of the characteristics of Jesus?

Jesus was Righteous. The word righteous (δικαιος) means to be in accordance with the standards of God. The apostle John described our Lord as “Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 Jn. 2:1). John wants his audience to know that Jesus was the most righteous individual who ever lived. If we are going to be like Christ, we must strive to be righteous. As Christians, we can be righteous, just as Jesus is righteous. This is possible when we practice righteousness. “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.” (1 Jn. 3:7) The word “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη) refers to the practice of doing what is right. When we live our lives by the word of God, we will be righteous, and we will be on our way to being more like Jesus.

Jesus was also compassionate. The word compassion (σπλαγγίζομαι) means to have pity or sympathy toward someone. It is a word used to describe intense emotions. To be compassionate is to look upon the ills of others and desire to change that condition. Jesus was continually demonstrating compassion wherever He went. It was compassion that caused Jesus to heal the sick (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 20:34; Mk. 1:41), feed the multitudes (Matt. 14:14; 15:32), and raise the dead (Lk. 7:11-15). If Christians are going to become more like Jesus, we must learn to be compassionate (1 Pet. 3:8; 1 Jn. 3:17). We cannot live life like the Priest and Levite. We must strive to be like the Samaritan who saw his fellow man’s need, had compassion, and fulfilled that need (Lk. 10:30-37).

Jesus was forgiving. What is forgiveness (ἀφίημι)? It is a release from sin or dismissal from the consequences of sin. Jesus taught His disciples to pray for forgiveness (Matt. 6:12) and to extend forgiveness (Matt. 6:14-15). Jesus not only commanded forgiveness, but He was also a great example of forgiveness. Being the Son of God, Jesus had the power to forgive sins (Matt. 9:6). Jesus offered forgiveness to the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 8:11), to the thief on the cross (Lk. 23:39-43), and He forgives today when we confess our sins (1 Jn. 1:9). One of the most significant examples of Jesus willingness to forgive was while He hung on the cross and cried out “...Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Lk. 23:34). It was because of His death on the cross that man can experience forgiveness today (Eph. 1:7). If Christians are going to be more like Christ, we must also practice forgiveness. The forgiveness that God extends to us is dependent upon the forgiveness that we are willing to extend to others (Matt. 6:14-15). Let us as Christians practice unlimited forgiveness (Matt. 18:21-22; Lk. 17:3-4), just as Jesus extends unlimited forgiveness toward us (1 Jn. 1:9).

Jesus was loving. The Bible describes God as love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). Jesus personified the Father while on earth (Jn. 14:7-11); therefore Jesus is love. When Jesus died on the cross, He demonstrated the most excellent example of love that has ever been known by man. (Jn. 15:13; Rom. 5:8) If we are going to be like Christ, we too must practice love. The greatest commandment given to man is to love God and his fellow man (Matt. 22:36-40). Love is the identifying mark of discipleship (Jn. 13:34-35; 15:13).

Finally, Jesus was prayerful. Christ was a great example of prayer. Throughout the scriptures, Jesus encouraged His disciples to pray (Matt. 6:5-15; Lk. 18:1). Jesus not only encouraged others to pray, But He also set forth a great example by praying (Matt. 14:19; 15:36; 26:39-44; 22:44; Jn. 17). I suppose the most extraordinary example of prayer is when Jesus spent an entire night praying (Lk. 6:12). If Jesus needed to pray, where does that place man today? If I am going to be like Him, I must have an active prayer life.



Christians are encouraged to pray (Rom. 12:12; 1 Tim. 2:8; 1 Thess. 5:17; Jam. 5:15) We have been promised that God will hear and answer our prayers (Psa. 34:15-19; Matt. 7:7-8). We can have confidence in prayer (1 Jn. 5:14-15). As individuals of righteousness, our prayer should be, "Lord, help me to be like Jesus."

The story is told of a father who wanted to teach his son how to plow a straight row. The father went to the far end of the field and drove a wooden stake into the ground. He told the son that if he affixed his eyes to the wooden stake, the row he plowed would be straight. The son followed his father's advice. As a result, the row he plowed was perfectly straight. The author of Hebrews presents a similar illustration. He encourages, "Looking unto Jesus, the author, and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:2) If we wish to become more like Jesus, we must affix our eyes upon him each day of our lives.

## Being Thankful

The word thanks, in its different forms, is found 123 times in the Bible. The central theme of certain chapters in the Bible is that of thanks (Psa. 100). The repetitive nature of this word instructs the Bible reader that the subject "thanks" is important. Consider just a few of these scriptures concerning thanks. "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Eph. 5:20) "and be ye thankful." (Col. 3:15) "In everything give thanks." (1 Thess. 5:18) Clearly, God expects His people to be thankful. As this holiday season of "Thanksgiving" is upon us, let us consider just a few of the many things we should be thankful for in the lives we live.

Let us be thankful for the "**church**," that institution through which we are saved (Eph. 5:23; 1:22-23). What a blessing it is to live every day knowing that I am a member of not just any church, but the church I read about in the Bible. How great it is to know that when I obeyed the gospel, God added me to "the Church of Christ," (Rom. 16:16) that wonderful blood-bought institution (Acts 20:28). I'm so thankful for the church.

Let us be thankful for "**salvation**." It is God's desire for every individual to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). As a result, He has promised salvation to everyone willing to obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9). What an honor it is to live every moment of every day knowing that Salvation is mine and no one can take it from me.

Let us be thankful for "**heaven**," that sweet place of rest for the faithful Child of God (Heb. 4:9-11). Wouldn't it be wonderful to be in a place where we are free from the aches, pains, and disappointments that this life has to offer? That place in heaven! (Rev. 21:4, 23, 25, 27) I'm so grateful that Heaven is not just a dream that I have, but someday God will make it a reality.

Let us be thankful for the "**Bible**," God's message to man (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Psa. 119:11, 105). Isn't it great to know that God has not placed us here on the earth without guidance? He's given us a book that leads, guides, and directs man in a way that will always be right. I love the Bible and I'm so thankful for it.

Let us be thankful for "**prayer**," the means of communicating with our heavenly Father. What a privilege it is to be able to call upon our heavenly Father 24/7, 365 days out of the year. God is never away or unavailable. He's always there awaiting my call (Jn. 14:13; 1 Jn. 3:22; 5:14).

Oh, there are so many other things we ought to be thankful for. The list is almost endless. The apostle Paul puts it best. "Giving thanks always for all things..." (Eph. 5:20) Regardless of what we do, let us live every day being thankful.

## **Bible Faith**

How often do you hear people speaking about "salvation by faith alone?" This call is usually accompanied by "inviting Jesus into your heart and your prayer of faith will save you." Again, we may have heard it said, but is this what the Bible teaches?

The Bible teaches that we are saved by faith. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1) The word "justified" in this passage means to declare one righteous and would be equivalent to being saved. Though this passage does teach that we are justified by faith, it does not say that we are justified or saved by "faith alone." Listen to another Bible writer. "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." (Jam. 2:24) How can one argue with this passage? It teaches that one is NOT justified by faith alone. Faith does justify an individual, but what kind of faith justifies? Is it the kind of faith that merely accepts the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? Does it mean that I simply believe in a God who sent Jesus? What kind of faith justifies?

According to the Bible, it's an active obedient faith. Faith is a life process. It includes actions, convictions, and trust. Faith will lead us to work as James teaches in the last half of James chapter 2. Faith will lead us to stand fast when persecuted or ridiculed. Faith will lead us to trust God even when we may not understand why He commands what He does. Faith is a whole package that insists on the whole man responding to God. Each time we have an example of faith in the New Testament we also see those people doing something as a result. "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." (Heb. 11:4) Abel's faith moved him to act and offer a proper sacrifice to God. Noah's faith caused him to move with fear and prepare the ark (Heb. 11:7). Abraham's faith caused him to obey and go in search of a land that God had told him about (Heb. 11:8-10). The people on Pentecost believed. Their faith moved them to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). The Ethiopian eunuch believed. His faith moved him to stop the chariot and ask to be baptized (Acts 8). Saul was told to go to Damascus and was later taught and baptized by Ananias (Acts 9). It is impossible to find any Biblical example of salvation through a prayer of faith or by asking Jesus into one's heart. These sayings sound good, but they are not Biblical or true.

Biblical faith always leads to more than conviction. It changes people's lives and attitudes. Listen to the following passage. "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees, they did not confess it, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue." (Jn. 12:42) These men had faith but were unwilling to act on their faith. Did that faith save them? Did it justify them? No, it did not. Faith is more than being convinced about the status of Jesus or even your need to be saved. Faith calls on us to respond by repenting (Acts 17:30), confessing our faith in Christ (Matt. 10:32-33), being baptized (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21), and committing our entire lives to Him (Rev. 2:10). Biblical faith is a life humbly shaped and molded by God's Word. So, the question before you today is, "Do you have true Biblical faith?"

## **Brother Lukewarm**

Brother Lukewarm was a good person. He was a devoted family man and a likable character. He was a sharp businessperson, too. People say he just had a nose for sound investments. However, as well-rounded as he was in his worldly and family affairs, Brother Lukewarm forgot God.

At the morning worship assembly, his mind regularly made withdrawals from singing, praying, and preaching. Come Sunday and Wednesday nights, he seemed to have a low-interest rate as he rarely returned for those worship services. Of course, this lackluster allegiance to the Lord's church made a statement to his neighbors and co-workers. They thought it odd that he could deposit himself at the fishing hole and ball game for three hours at a time but complained to them about the preacher's 25-minute sermon.

Brother Lukewarm did not have much interest in saving the lost, for he never approached one soul with the Gospel. It did not register with him that his influence contributed to his children's leaving the church when they left home. He had not ensured their faithfulness by leading family devotion and being involved in the work of the church, nor did he invest much time in teaching them God's Word. Neither did he realize that he was living his life on the wrong side of the ledger. He did not check out what pitiful return the Bible shows such a life to produce.

One day, as Brother Lukewarm went about his affairs, Christ returned. Brother Warm was surprised to find himself on the Lord's left hand. By and by Brother Warm was called to give an account of his life. Though he was moral and honest, he could not be given credit for being evangelistic or faithful. As he heard the word "depart from me," Brother Warm wrung his hands at the external expense of robbing God through neglect and un-involvement.

I don't know of anything that does more harm to the church than that of Lukewarm members. Perhaps this is why Jesus condemned this attitude (Rev. 3:15-16). How can we avoid this attitude? We must live every day loving (Matt. 22:38-39). We must also live every day serving God (Matt. 4:10). If we live every day loving and serving God with every fiber of our being, then it will never be said of us that we are lukewarm Christians.

## **Calling on The Name of The Lord"**

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Rom. 10:13) This is a quotation from Joel 2:32. The apostle Peter made this same statement in Acts 2:21. These passages teach that those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. The question is, what does it mean to call upon the name of the Lord? Well, what does the Bible say?

Let's begin first by noticing what it does not mean. Many believe that it simply means to recognize that Jesus is Lord and to say a prayer and ask the Lord to save you. Listen to the words of Jesus. "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into

the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 7:21) The phrase “Lord, Lord” refers to a confession with no action. What’s Jesus saying in this passage? Those who simply confess Christ and call upon his name will not be saved.

What then does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? Consider the text of Romans 10. Look at verse 14. “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” From this verse, we learn that calling on the name of the Lord involves preaching and believing what is preached, but it doesn’t stop there. Read on with me. “And how shall they preach, except they are sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?” (Rom. 10:15-16) According to these verses, calling on the name of the Lord involves obeying the gospel. So what have we seen so far? Calling on the name of the Lord involves preaching, faith in the message preached, and obedience. With that thought in mind, go with me to Acts 2:21. “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” What does Peter do immediately following this statement? He, along with the other 11 apostles began to preach the gospel. What happens? Look at verse 37. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men, and brethren, what shall we do?” The phrase “they were pricked in their hearts” is just another way of saying they believed the message. There’s preaching and there’s faith. What’s left? Obedience or action toward the message is required. Consider verse 38. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Consider the command given to Paul. “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16) What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? According to the Bible, the gospel must be preached, one must have faith in the gospel, and one must be obedient, which involves repentance and baptism. When we have taken these steps, we can safely say that we have called on the name of the Lord. Have you called on the name of the Lord?

## **Calling Sin, Sin**

One of the major problems with the world today is that it tries to make sin look good, glamorous, and the “in” thing to do. Television and advertisements are constantly portraying sin as the acceptable and normal thing to do. Alcohol consumption is portrayed as though it always brings us the best things in life. Fornication is normal. Homosexuality is normal. Adultery is normal. Society has taught us to steal if we don’t get caught. The world calls sin everything under the sun except what it is – that’s SIN! Sin is referred to as an alternative lifestyle, a sickness, sowing wild oats, and a victim of society. Regardless of the flowery terms that are given, it does not change the fact that sin is sin. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul. “Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.” (Rom. 7:13) The Bible says that sin is exceeding sinful. If we are ever going to change this world in which we live, that’s the way we must look at sin. It is exceedingly sinful. It works death in us. “For the wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23) Think about cancer for a moment. It begins

small and then spreads throughout your body until it consumes your organs and chokes the life right out of you. Sin does the same thing. If sin is not recognized, named, and treated, it will spread like cancer until it consumes and destroys us. "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment deceived me, and by it slew me." (Rom. 7:11) That's what sin does. It deceives us into believing that it is something it is not. Why is that? How is that? Satan is the one behind sin. "And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light." (2 Cor. 11:14) That's why we should abhor sin (Rom. 12:9). We should seek to remove it from our lives. "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil." (Isa. 1:16)

Let us never be guilty of giving a name to sin other than the name it deserves and that is SIN! "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20)

## Can I Be Forgiven?

Chances are we all know someone convinced that their sins are so great that God could never forgive them. When I encounter a person who is struggling with this difficulty, one of my favorite verses on forgiveness that I appeal to is 1 John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." While I understand that John is writing specifically to Christians, there are some principles concerning forgiveness found within this passage that apply to all.

First, one must be willing to confess sins. The word "confess" means to acknowledge and to declare openly the wrong that one has done. Some believe that if we can forget about sin and ignore it, then time will heal the wrong that was committed. Such is not the case according to the Bible. A sin that is overlooked and ignored is much like cancer or gangrene that is ignored. If cancer or gangrene is ignored, it will spread throughout the body and eventually consume the victim. Sin is the same way. If it is left alone, it will spread, hardening the heart of the individual. If forgiveness is to take place, one must acknowledge that he/she is guilty of sin.

Second, one must understand that forgiveness is about God, not man. Forgiveness is about the "faithfulness" of God. He has promised to forgive man (Psa. 103:12; Jer. 31:34). The Psalmist declares that the Lord is "ready to forgive." (Psa. 86:5). God keeps His promises (2 Pet. 3:9). Forgiveness is also about God being "just." The word just means righteous. I find it interesting that throughout the scriptures, man is encouraged to be righteous, and practice righteousness, but when the word "just" or "righteous" is applied to God, it is talking about something that He "is." He is the perfect example of righteousness. He will always keep His word and do what is right. Consider Ephesians 4:32. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." The word "forgiving" in the context of this passage means to do a favor to someone or to give grace. Forgiveness is about God's grace to man. According to Ephesians 2:4-8, God's grace is the expression of His mercy, love, and kindness toward man. Now, this does not remove man's part when it comes to forgiveness. Man is still required to be obedient (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9); however, one must understand that forgiveness is about the greatness of God.

Third, there is no sin so great that God cannot forgive. John states that God can forgive us of "all unrighteousness." Any sin, regardless of its nature or depth, God can forgive if one will acknowledge the sin, repent and be obedient. Consider the church at Corinth. Some of the members were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals,

sodomites, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners, and yet they were washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Consider the apostle Paul. He was a blasphemer, persecutor, an insolent (violent) man, and considered himself to be the chief of sinners, yet he was saved (1 Tim. 1:13-15). There is no sin so great that God cannot forgive. To say that God cannot forgive is to limit His incredible power.

## Can I Be Righteous?

Did you know that the word “righteous” is found upwards of 500 times in the Bible? What an astounding number! What does this word mean? The word righteous is defined as a condition acceptable to God. Why is this word found so many times in the Scripture? Could it be that God wants us to be righteous, that He has made it possible for us to be righteous and He wants us to live every day in confidence of our righteousness?

Consider first that God wants man to be righteous. He does not want us to find ourselves in an unacceptable position on the day of judgment (2 Pet. 3:9). God desires that all men be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). This is why we are admonished to be filled with righteousness (Phil. 1:11), to be slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:19) and to pursue righteousness (2 Tim. 2:22). Unless we are righteous, heaven cannot be our home.

Second, God has made it possible for man to be righteous. Righteousness does not lie within the physical, sincerity, just being religious, or human perfection (Phil. 3:6-9). True righteousness is found only in Christ Jesus. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Cor. 5:21) Notice that the Bible states that we become the righteousness of God “in Him.” That’s why the Bible encourages us to seek “His righteousness.” “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matt. 6:33). We must be in Christ Jesus if we desire to be righteous. How does one get into Christ Jesus? Listen to the Scriptures. “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:26-27) “Or do you not know that as many of us as were **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into His death?” (Rom. 6:3) According to these two passages, we do not believe “into” Christ. We do not repent “into” Christ. We do not confess “into” Christ. The only way one can get “into” Christ is through the process of baptism. Those who have not been baptized are not in Christ and therefore are not righteous before God.

Third, we can live in confidence every day that we are righteous. If you were to ask Christians the question, “Are you righteous?” sadly, many would hesitate in their answer or they would respond with “maybe,” or “I hope so” and even still, there would be those who would say “no, I don’t believe I am.” What does the Bible teach? The Scriptures present a very clear message that as God’s children, we can live every day in “confidence” of our righteousness. Listen to the words of the Psalmist. “Blessed are those who keep justice, *And* he who does righteousness at all times!” (Psa. 106:3) Though there are many blessings which come to those who are righteous, one of the greatest blessings is living in confidence of your righteousness. Consider the many examples of those who were righteous. The Bible states that Noah (Gen. 7:1), Abraham (Jam. 2:21-26), Lot (2 Pet. 2:7-8), Zacharias and Elizabeth (Lk. 1:5-6), and Able (Heb. 11:4), just to name a few, were all righteous before God. Consider the depth of righteousness. How righteous are we? Consider the following passage. “Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.” (1 Jn. 3:7). What an astounding thought! What confidence! Christians are as righteous as Christ.

Brothers and sisters, the Bible is very clear. We can be righteous. God wants us to be righteous, He has made it possible for us to be righteous and we can live every day in confidence that we are God's righteous children. Spread the word!

## Can You Walk on Water?

Do you remember the story in Matthew 14:22-33 (Found also in Mark 6:46-52; John 6:16-21), where Peter walked on the water to meet Jesus? That's a very impressive story. Wouldn't you agree? What is it that impresses you most about this story? Is it the fact that Jesus walked on water? Is it the fact that Peter walked on water to meet the Lord? Perhaps you're impressed with the part where Jesus got into the boat and the storm stopped. Maybe you're just impressed by this story. What impresses me the most about this story, is the fact that Peter overcame an obstacle that stood between him and Jesus. That obstacle was a lack of faith (Matt. 14:31). Peter's lack of faith kept him from getting to Christ. Thus, he ventured out onto the water, in hopes of overcoming that obstacle.

There comes a time in every Christian's life when obstacles come into our lives and stand between us and Jesus. Those obstacles range from death, sin, temptation, worldliness, depression, and a whole host of other things. These things keep us from Christ. What are we to do? We must follow Peter's example. We must venture out on the water and seek to overcome that obstacle. Wait a minute, someone may say. Didn't Peter, at one point, begin to sink into the water? Yes, he did. No one can deny that point. Then that makes Peter a failure in overcoming his obstacle, doesn't it? No, it does not. Even though Peter did begin to sink into the water, he recognized that Jesus was the only one who could save him and help him in overcoming his obstacle.

Is there some kind of obstacle in your life that is standing between you and Jesus? Whatever that obstacle may be, why not turn to God for help and strength in overcoming that obstacle? He has promised to give us the strength to overcome all things (Phil. 4:13). Maybe you have already ventured out onto the water. Maybe you are trying to overcome an obstacle, but you find yourself sinking. Remember, you haven't failed. We all sink into our problems from time to time. Just remember to turn to Jesus. He will give you the strength to rise above your obstacle. He will give you the power to walk on water.

## Casting All Your Care Upon Him

I suppose we have all been there in life. We've all experienced burdens that were difficult for us to bear. We have all been in the position, feeling that if we take one more step, we may indeed fall beneath the load that is upon us. What can we do when we find ourselves in situations of such nature? Consider the message of the apostle Peter. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." (1 Pet. 5:6-7) Most scholars believe that this was a quotation taken from Psalm 55:22 where the Psalmist said, "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." As Peter wrote to this group of Christians who were experiencing great persecution, he knew that there would be times when they would experience great burdens. What advice did he give them?

**First, we must recognize the reality of burdens.** Life is literally filled with situations that can weigh us down. The sooner we come to grips with this reality, the sooner we will be able to overcome burdens. The Psalmist knew that we would

experience burdens (Psa. 55:22). Paul also understood this reality. The “care” of the church was upon him daily. (2 Cor. 11:28) According to our text, Peter likewise was aware of this difficulty. While living the Christian life is the greatest choice anyone could make, Christianity does not free one from burdens. Consider a song that we often sing in our assemblies. “Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? No, there’s a cross for everyone and there’s a cross for me.”

**Second, we must recognize our need for help.** Perhaps this is why Peter encouraged his readers to “humble” themselves before he admonished them to cast their care upon the Lord. One who is humble is not proud and haughty. He recognizes his position in life. It is his humble disposition that causes him to realize that with God he is everything and without Him, he is nothing. I must realize that while the Bible teaches that I must bear my own burdens (Gal. 6:4), there are some burdens in life that I cannot bear alone. Perhaps that is why, in the same context of scripture the Holy Spirit said, “Bear ye one another’s burdens...” (Gal. 6:2) Sometimes we need the help of our brothers and sisters in Christ to get beyond a difficulty. What about those burdens that are beyond man’s ability to bear? That’s where God comes into the picture. Peter said, “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” The word “careth” means to care or to be concerned. When God sees us struggle with burdens in life, He is truly concerned. That’s why He says, “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 10:28).

**Third, realize that every burden will pass.** This can be seen in the phrase, “that he may exalt you in due time.” The phrase, “in due time,” refers to a limited or fixed period of time. The Psalmist said, “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” What was David saying? Regardless of what we may be experiencing in life, in time, if we remain committed to the Lord and trust Him, He will bring every difficulty to pass.

Now, here’s the icing on the cake. When we follow this advice, notice what happens. God will sustain us (support us), exalt us, and never suffer or allow us to be moved. Is that not beautiful? Do you have a burden that you can no longer bear alone? Why not give it to the Lord? Not only will He help you with that burden, but He will also lift you to a position in life where you can see beyond your difficulties.

## Can We Understand the Bible Alike?

In our daily Bible discussions with people of the world, you will often hear the phrase, “That’s just your interpretation.” Embedded within this statement is the idea that the Bible has multiple meanings, and we cannot understand them alike. Such is most definitely not true. Consider the words of the apostle Peter. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as *they were* moved by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:20-21) Since Scripture is not a result of man’s private interpretation, but rather a result of God’s message to man, we do not have a right to our own personal and private interpretation of divine matters. There is only one interpretation to be taken when it comes to the Bible and that interpretation has been given by God himself. Our job is to read the Bible, understand it, and obey it (Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 5:8-9)

The Bible is filled with passages that let us know that God’s Word was written on a level that we can all understand and understand alike. Consider some of those passages with me. “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Jn.



8:32) This is a universal passage in which Jesus plainly states that we can know the truth. How can we all know something if we can't understand it alike? It's not possible. The reason Jesus would make this statement is because He knew that we could understand the Bible alike. "But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (Matt. 4:4) According to this passage, our spiritual life is based upon the nourishment that we receive from the word of God. Such implies that the Bible contains a universal message that all men can understand and have a prosperous spiritual life. "Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God." (Matt. 22:29) The Sadducees were mistaken concerning the resurrection due to their lack of knowledge concerning the Scriptures. Does this not imply that had they read and studied the Scriptures they could have had a proper understanding? Certainly, it does. "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11) This passage implies that the Bereans could search the Scriptures and draw the same conclusions together. "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common." (Acts 4:32) Notice that the Bible speaks of these individuals as being of one heart and one soul. The only way this could be possible is if they understood the message alike. In the words of Amos, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3) "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 divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment." (1 Cor. 1:10) In this passage, Paul is pleading for unity. How can unity be attained? We must all speak the same thing. The only way this is possible is if we all understand alike. "Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind." (Phil. 2:2) "Nevertheless, to *the degree* that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind." (Phil. 3:16) In both passages, Paul admonishes us to be of the same mind. That phrase means to think the same thing. How is such possible if we cannot understand the Bible alike? "How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." (Eph. 3:3-4) "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (Eph. 5:17) These scriptures teach that we can understand the Bible when we read it and we can understand what God's will is for you and me. Listen to the words of the apostle John. "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (Jn. 20:30-31) According to this passage, God's Word was written for the very purpose of causing man to have a united belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

The truth of the matter is, we can understand God's word and we can do His will. It's all a matter of wanting to. Those who say, "We can't understand the Bible alike," are simply using that statement as an excuse to do things that are contrary to God's Word.

## **Characteristics of a Leader**

Leadership is one of the great qualities needed in the church today. While the church needs great elders to lead, every Christian should strive to be a leader. If we want

to be great leaders, we must follow the greatest leader who lived. That leader is none other than Jesus Christ. Such is why the apostle Paul stated. **Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.** (1 Cor. 11:1) Consider with me the context of John 13:5-19 as we contemplate the characteristics of the great leader Jesus.

Leadership involves humility. I believe this can be seen in verse 5 where Jesus took a basin of water and began to wash his disciples' feet. What impresses me so much about this passage is that Jesus was the Lord and master of the disciples. Washing feet was a slave or a servant's job. This was something that the disciples should have done for Jesus and yet Jesus is doing it for them. What did it take for Jesus to do this? I believe it was humility. Though He was and still is the Savior of the world, He did not allow His position to cause Him to disrespect or look down upon anyone, even Judas whom He knew would betray Him. From all indications, Jesus washed the feet of Judas, just as He washed the feet of the other disciples. Jesus treated everyone equally. In my opinion, humility is the heart and soul of a good leader. Regardless of his talent or position, he always treats others equally with dignity and respect. Even when it comes to his enemies, he always does what's right and he does his very best. It's his attitude of humility that keeps him from thinking that a job, title, or position is below him.

Leadership involves inclusion. According to verse 8, Peter did not want Jesus to wash his feet. I don't believe that Peter was being disrespectful. I believe Peter responded the way he did because he knew that Jesus was the Christ (Matt. 16:16). With his Jewish background, he may have even thought of Christ as the king who would restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). Maybe he did not feel worthy of Jesus washing his feet. Regardless of the reason why Peter did not want Jesus to wash his feet, look at the response of Jesus. "If I do not wash you, you have no part with me." As I look at this verse, I see the principle of inclusion. Jesus is saying to Peter, "I need to wash your feet so we can be connected." I believe the success of any organization hinges on the principle of inclusion. Every individual must feel as if he is a part of the whole. He/she must see himself/herself as part of the DNA that gives strength and backbone to an organization. This will cause them to recognize their importance and when people feel important, they will participate and give their very best. That's why good leaders need to practice inclusion. They need to make every person feel as if they are needed and important.

Leadership involves selflessness. I believe this can be seen in verses 13-14. Jesus was their Lord and Teacher. He was their leader and yet He washed their feet. Why? It needed to be done. He saw something that needed to be done for them and He did it. That's what a good leader does. While he does not neglect himself, he realizes that life is not all about him. He realizes that successful leadership is accomplished when you think about the people below you, beside you, and before you. He's always pushing himself out of the picture and thinking about those things that can be done and need to be done for others. This requires an attitude of selflessness.

Leadership involves being a servant. After Jesus had washed the feet of the disciples, He specifically told them that he had given them an example of what He had done (vs. 15). What was the example? I believe Jesus was teaching His disciples to be a servant. Why did He want them to be servants? These men were about to take part in the beginning of the greatest institution known to man. The church was about to be established and they were going to be the leaders. Jesus knew that they would not be successful in leading people to the church if they did not learn to be servants. I believe that being a servant is the gateway to being a great leader. People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care. A good leader shows people how much he

cares about them. He does this by living every day as a servant. Regardless of his position, he never stops serving others.

## Characteristics of a True Friend

On a scale of 1-10, what kind of rating would you give a true friend? If we are honest, we're going to say 10. When we are looking for friends, do we look for 5's, 6's, or good 7's? No. Again, if we would be honest, we look for people who are 10's. Our goal in life is to get to heaven. Our choice of friends in this life will either help us attain that goal or it will deter us from it. The apostle Paul warned, "Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits." (1 Cor. 15:33) I do not believe that Paul is saying do not be friendly to those who are evil. We will never be able to win them to Christ if we are unfriendly. Paul is, however, warning of the dangers of spending quality time with those who are of the world. The proverb writer also encourages us to be careful when we choose our friends. "The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray." (Prov. 12:26) Why should we be careful in the choosing of our friends? If we choose the wrong friends, we could be led astray. Though there are many qualities we could and should look for in a friend, consider with me the following three characteristics.

**Choose friends whose lives are filled with love.** "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." (Prov. 17:17) Notice the word adversity. It refers to distress, trouble, or acute pain either physically or mentally. Why do I want a friend whose life is filled with love? It's the kind of individual who will love you regardless of the situation. It's easy to love someone when times are good. What about when times are difficult? What about when that individual is struggling with temptation, sin, or some addiction? If there is one element that will get an individual through every difficulty in life, it's love (1 Pet. 4:8). That's why we need to be friends and choose friends whose lives are saturated with love. They love at all times!

**Choose faithful friends.** "A man *who has* friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend *who sticks* closer than a brother." (Prov. 18:24) Notice the latter part of this passage. The phrase "sticks closer" literally means to cleave or to cling to. The point being made is the fact that true friends are faithful. This doesn't mean that they never make mistakes, but it does mean that you can depend on this person. Faithful friends are hard to find. "Most men will proclaim each his own goodness, but who can find a faithful man?" (Prov. 20:6) That's why we need to look for friends who are faithful and we need to be faithful friends.

**Choose honest friends.** "Open rebuke *is* better than love carefully concealed. Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful." (Prov. 27:5-6) Have you ever needed someone to be truthful with you and they weren't? Most of the time people will not be honest for fear that if the person knew the truth, it may hurt them. Therefore, individuals will often conclude, "I just love them too much to tell them the truth." According to this proverb, we do more harm by concealing the truth than we do by revealing it. Such is why we need friends who are always honest, even if the message they share with us may cause us pain. True friends may not always tell us what we "want" to hear, but they will always tell us what we "need" to hear.

Though this is not an exhaustive list of characteristics to look for in a friend, it is a good start. Remember, if we wish to find friends who are loving, faithful, and honest, we must exhibit those characteristics in the lives we live.

## **Christ Gave Himself For Me**

In Galatians 2:20 Paul states, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The word "crucify" in this passage means to impale on a cross which resulted in death. What had Paul impaled or crucified? It was the old life he had lived (Rom. 6:6). Have you ever considered everything that Paul gave up to serve Christ? He gave up his religious heritage (Phil. 3:5), family heritage (Phil. 3:5), religious party (Acts 23:6), and his devotion to the Law (Phil. 3:6). Why was Paul willing to give up so much? Why was he willing to change the life he lived and live every day letting others see Christ living in him? Look at the last part of the passage. "Because He loved me and gave Himself for me." Paul did what he did because of what Christ gave for him. What did Jesus give for us?

He gave a back to be beaten for me. The prophet Isaiah states, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes, we were healed." (Isa. 53:5) The word "wounded" means to pierce or to wound. The word "bruised" means to be crushed. The word "stripes" means "wounds" or "blow-marks." The Apostle Peter quoted this verse (1 Pet. 2:24). The word "stripes" in Greek means "wounds that trickle with blood." This was no doubt the scourging Jesus received (Jn. 19:1).

He gave a shoulder to carry the cross for me. "And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull which is called in Hebrew Golgotha, where they crucified Him." (Jn. 19:17-18). According to Roman law, if an individual was condemned to death, he was forced to carry his cross to Golgotha where the crucifixion was to take place. According to Luke's account, a man named Simon, a Cyrenian was compelled to help carry the cross of Jesus (Lk. 23:26). Why was Simon compelled to help? Could it be that He fell beneath the load?

He gave a cheek to be slapped for me. He was struck by one of the officers as He was on trial before the high priest (Jn. 18:22) and He was struck repeatedly following His conviction (Matt. 26:67-68). He was also slapped by the soldiers following His scourging (Jn. 19:3).

He gave a Head to wear a crown of thorns for me. Matthew and John teach us that the soldiers platted a crown of thorns together, placed it upon the head of Jesus, and then took a reed and smote Him on the head, pressing the crown of thorns down into the scalp of Jesus (Matt. 27:27-31; Jn. 19:1-3).

He gave His blood to be shed for me. The shedding of Jesus' blood did not begin at the cross. It began during the scourging (Jn. 19:1). It has been suggested that Jesus could have been easily found the day He was crucified. Just follow the trail of blood from the scourging room to Golgotha, the place of His crucifixion. Every drop of blood that Jesus shed was for me (Acts 20:28).

Jesus gave so much to you and me. What will you give to Jesus? Would you like Paul be crucified with him? (Rom. 6:3-4)

## **Christian Fellowship (Part 1)**

The sequoia redwood trees located in California are some of the largest trees in the world. The tree known as "General Sherman" is noted as THE largest known living

single-stem tree on Earth! It is 275 feet tall, 25 feet in diameter, and is approximately 2,500 years old. Most would conclude something that huge must have an incredible root system that goes down deep to stand that tall. Surprisingly, that's not the case at all. The sequoia redwood trees have a unique root system that is a marvel, compared to their mammoth size. There is no tap root to anchor them deep into the earth. Their roots are relatively shallow. They only go down 6-12 feet. What's so amazing is the fact that these trees rarely fall over. They can withstand strong winds, earthquakes, fires, storms, and prolonged flooding. How can something that weighs up to 500 tons and reaches over 250 feet in height remain standing with roots only going down about 10 feet? Their root system is intertwined with the other redwood trees. In essence, they hold each other up.

As I think about the sequoia redwood trees, it reminds me of Christianity. Being a Christian does not shield one from the adversities of life. Christians experience the same storms of life that any other individual may face (Sickness, disease, death, trials, temptations, persecution, etc.) What causes Christians to stand firm during these trying times? Some may say it's faith. While faith is extremely important, especially during trying times, what about Christian fellowship? One of the greatest blessings Christians get to enjoy is that of fellowship. Do you realize that at the very center of the Christian life is the word "fellowship?" Consider the following passage. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42) When the church first began, Christians "continued steadfastly" in "fellowship." The phrase "continued steadfastly" refers to an act of devotion or constant readiness. Why did they continue in fellowship? "Fellowship," like all the other acts mentioned in this passage, was needed to secure faithfulness. The early Christians held each other up! We need fellowship! Many do not recognize its great importance. Some Christians are content with just being a "member." Membership is not the same as fellowship. Membership means you have your name on a list or roster. Fellowship means that you are committed to worship, ministry, and the strength and vitality of a congregation. So, what is fellowship?

Webster defines fellowship as the relationship of people who share interests or feelings. In the Greek, the word Fellowship comes from the word (κοινωνία) koy-nohn-ee'-ah. Typically, this word is defined as "joint participation." Fellowship is much deeper than joint participation. Think about the root system of the redwood trees. Fellowship is a relationship of inner unity among believers that expresses itself in outer co-participation with Christ and one another in accomplishing God's will on earth.

As we think about fellowship, I must understand the necessity of it. As we have already seen, when the Church first began, one of the first characteristics that they actively devoted themselves to was fellowship. The Church cannot grow and thrive without fellowship. Consider the "one another" passages in the Bible. The Bible teaches that as Christians, we are to be hospitable to one another (1 Pet. 4:9), we are to care for one another (1 Cor. 12:26), we are to pray for one another (Jam. 5:16), we are to restore one another (Jam. 5:19-20), we are to teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16) and we are to serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13). What is the purpose of these "one another" scriptures? To stress fellowship! A congregation that does not devote itself to fellowship will not grow, thrive, or survive!

How is fellowship established? Our fellowship with Christians must begin with God. "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3) Based upon this passage, our fellowship must be vertical (with God) before it can be horizontal (with man). How is fellowship established with God? The Bible teaches that we

are called into fellowship with God. “God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Cor. 1:9). How does God call us? God calls us by or through the gospel. “To which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thess. 2:13-14). When an individual is obedient to God (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9), through faith (Heb. 11:6), repentance (Acts 17:30), confession (Matt. 10:32-33), and baptism (Acts 2:38), he/she is added to the Lord's Church (Church of Christ – Acts 2:47; Rom. 16:16) and enters fellowship with God. It is at this moment, that he/she also enters fellowship with the brethren (1 Jn. 1:3). To remain in fellowship with God and the brethren, one must walk in the light (1 Jn. 1:7) by following Jesus and His teachings.

Are you in fellowship with God? If not, why not take the necessary steps today so that you may be in fellowship with God and turn experience the fellowship of the Church? Next week, Lord willing, we will discuss the benefits and examples of fellowship.

## **Christian Fellowship (Part 2)**

Last week, we began a discussion of “Christian Fellowship.” In that writing, we defined fellowship, discussed the necessity of it, and examined the process of establishing fellowship with God and the brethren. In this article, I would like for us to consider the benefits of fellowship and then look at some ways we can enjoy fellowship.

Let's begin by looking at some benefits of fellowship. What are the benefits of fellowship? To begin with, fellowship builds faith. As Christians, God expects our faith to grow (2 Pet. 3:18; Lk. 17:5). Though this task can be accomplished through several different things such as Bible study, worship, ministry, and church works; spiritual growth is also accomplished through fellowship. The Proverb writer states, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” (Prov. 27:17). What's the point of this verse? The more time we spend with faithful Christians, the stronger our faith becomes.

Fellowship builds unity. God desires unity. “Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* For brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa. 133:1; See also Jn. 17:21; 1 Cor. 1:10). The early Church had all things in common (Acts 2:44-45). In other words, they had unity! Why were they so unified? They were devoted to fellowship (Acts 2:42). Fellowship builds unity!

Fellowship builds the Kingdom/Church. Our mission as Christians is to help cause the Church to grow. How do we accomplish this task? We must teach people the Gospel (Matt. 28:19-20). What attracts people and opens the door to evangelism? Though many answers can be given here, Christian fellowship is certainly one of them. When Christians regularly meet together, people in the community will be drawn to that fellowship. This creates an opportunity to teach them the gospel and therefore the local body will grow and increase. The more fellowship we enjoy, the more lost souls will be brought to Christ (Acts 2:47).

What are some examples or different ways we may enjoy Christian fellowship? To begin with, worship is a great example of fellowship. Consider the five acts of worship (singing, praying, preaching & teaching, Lord's Supper & giving). Each of these acts is designed to simultaneously bring Christians into fellowship with God and with one another. Therefore, a Christian's attitude when it comes to worship should be that of the Psalmist. “I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go into the house of the LORD.” (Psa.

122:1) Every time we come together for worship, we are involving ourselves in fellowship with God and the brethren.

Another example of fellowship is congregational Bible study. Why do we have Sunday morning and midweek Bible study? First, it promotes the spiritual growth of every Christian. Second, it creates and builds fellowship. When you attend Bible study regularly and begin to hear the questions and comments coming from those around you, that experience builds fellowship.

A third example of fellowship is "Fellowship meals." Something special happens when Christians are found eating together. It's called fellowship! There's something about humans that makes us bond together better when we share meals. I guess God just made us that way. But what happens is this: we sit around together and share our lives. We talk about our joys and our pains, our struggles, and our triumphs. We can begin to bear one another's burdens; celebrate with each other and cry with each other. All of this and much more comes from a common meal we share.

A fourth example of fellowship is "ministry." In 2 Corinthians 8:4, Paul encouraged the brethren to be a part of the "Fellowship of the ministering to the saints." The word "ministry" refers to the services rendered to others. Think about some of the ministries at Lafayette (One Soul for Thee campaign, Thursday meals, L2L, Tuesday Bible class, Tuesday Ladies class, Care Groups, etc....) All of these are wonderful ministry opportunities not only to promote church growth but also enhance Christian fellowship. That's why our attitude should be that of 1 Corinthians 15:58. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

As Paul opened his letter to the Philippians, he began by thanking God for their fellowship (Phil. 1:3-5). Are we of the same mindset? Let's live every day, striving to recognize the importance of Christian fellowship and thank God for this wonderful attribute.

## **Church Government**

The Bible teaches that when it comes to church government, Jesus is the head. "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body." (Eph. 5:23) However, it's also important to understand that when the church was established, God planned that "elders" govern the church while it is on earth. "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:" (Tit. 1:5) Why did Paul leave Titus in Crete? That he may set things in order in the church. What was God's planned order? God's order was that elders be ordained in every city where the church existed. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." (Acts 14:23) After Paul established congregations of the Lord's church, he went back and appointed elders. Why? This was part of God's plan. Therefore, the scriptural plan of church government has Christ as the head and elders watching over the flock. What are some different names for elders? They are identified as "overseers." "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church." (Acts 20:17) Notice if you will that Paul calls for the "elders" of the church. In his discussion with them, he refers to them as "overseers." "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) The word "overseer" simply means superintendent.

Elders are also known as “Bishops.” “Paul addressed “the bishops and deacons.” (Phil. 1:1) The word “Bishops” likewise means superintendent. Therefore, Paul is not identifying a different group of men, but identifying the fact that a “bishop,” an “elder” and an “overseer” are referring to the same office. There is also the name “Pastors.” “Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD.” (Jer. 23:1) Notice if you will that the responsibility of the “pastors” was to take care of the sheep which were God’s people. In Acts 20:17, 28 we saw that the responsibility of taking care of the sheep was that of the elders. Jeremiah said it was the job of the pastors. What can we learn from this? Jeremiah is not identifying a different office. He is simply identifying the fact that a pastor is an elder. What can we learn from all of this? It is God’s plan that elders govern the church. Elders are known as overseers, bishops, and pastors. It’s also interesting that you never find an example in the Bible where one pastor, bishop, overseer, or elder was presiding over a congregation of God’s people. With every congregation, there was always a plurality of elders, yet a common practice in our religious world today is a single pastor presiding over a congregation. Those churches which follow this pattern are not following Biblical church government.

## **Church Membership**

When an individual becomes a Christian, according to the Bible, he/she is added to the New Testament church. (Acts 2:47; Col. 1:13) A question often asked is, “Must an individual place his/her membership at a local congregation after becoming a Christian?” No Bible verse specifically teaches this principle; however, it is strongly implied throughout the New Testament.

Consider the word “church” as used in the Bible. There are at least two different ways in which the word church is used in the New Testament. Sometimes when we see the word church, it’s being used in a “universal sense” to refer to the church, throughout the world. For example, Ephesians 4:4 teaches there is “one body.” The body is identified as the “church.” (Col. 1:18). The conclusion of these two passages is the fact that there is only one church. When Paul penned this passage, he was referring to the church in a universal sense. Consider the promise of Jesus. “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matt. 16:18) When Jesus made this promise, He too was referring to the church in a universal sense. The word “church” is also seen in the New Testament in a “local sense.” For example, there was the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1; 11:22); Antioch (Acts 11:26), Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1), Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:2), the churches of Galatia (Gal. 1:2) the church of the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1) and the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:11). All of these were local congregations of God’s people. They were all members of the universal church, but they had dedicated themselves to the local congregation where they resided.

Now, back to the question, “Must I place membership with a local congregation upon becoming a Christian?” The Bible strongly implies that we should. Think about what placing membership in a local congregation suggests. It says, “I’m dedicated to the work in this area.” “You can depend on me to be here in attendance.” “You can count on the money that I contribute so the work of the church can be planned and continue.” Each year, most elderships sit down and draw up a schedule of the events that they plan for the congregation to be a part of for the following year. If people were not committed to being faithful members of a congregation, it would be very difficult for them to accomplish



any of those events. How could they plan out a VBS, community outreach, gospel meetings, evangelism workshops, or door-knocking campaigns if they could not depend on a faithful membership to show up and work? How could they support mission work or be a part of any act of benevolence if there was not a commitment from a faithful membership to give of their means each week? (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7)

Consider the organization of the local congregation. According to scripture, the make-up of the local congregation should consist of **elders** (also known as bishops, pastors, or shepherds) who lead (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), **deacons** who serve (1 Tim. 3:8-13), and **members** who submit to the oversight of the elders (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17). If people did not place their membership in local congregations, this plan of organization would be useless. Consider Paul's admonition to the elders of the church at Ephesus. After he called for the elders of the church (Acts 20:17), he instructed them to feed the flock of God and take care of them. How could this possibly be accomplished if people had not identified themselves with the local congregation at Ephesus? Consider the teaching of Hebrews 10:24-26, which teaches that Christians are not to forsake the assembling of the saints. If an individual has not dedicated himself/herself to a local congregation, how could you know who was forsaking the assembling of the saints?

Membership at a local congregation suggests dedication and dependability. Though no Bible verse commands one to place membership, it certainly does imply it. Remember that implication is just as important as a direct command.

## Compassion

One of the most beautiful stories found in the Bible is the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). What is it about this story that you find to be most impressive? Is it not the compassion that the Samaritan exhibited toward a stranger? If there has ever been a characteristic that we greatly need as Christians, it's compassion.

What Is Compassion? It's a word that refers to affection, tenderness, or mercy. It's that deep inward feeling that we get when we see someone in need. It's that pain in our stomach when we are moved greatly by passionate feelings like grief, sorrow, heartache, pain, or sympathy. Compassion is not feeling sorry for someone, but it is having deep abiding feelings for people and their plight in life.

Why should Christians practice compassion? First, Jesus was compassionate. There are so many occasions in the life of Jesus where He exhibited compassion. He expressed compassion when He saw the people without a shepherd (Matt. 9:36), when He fed those who were hungry (Matt. 14:14; 15:32), when He healed the sick (Matt. 14:14; 20:34; Mk. 1:41), and when He raised the dead (Lk. 7:11-15), just to name a few. The Bible teaches that Christians are to follow in the steps of the Savior (1 Pet. 2:21), therefore, we must strive to be compassionate. "Finally, all *of you be* of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, *be* courteous." (1 Pet. 3:8)

Second, we should be compassionate because Christianity is an active religion. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. 15:58) Based upon the teaching of this passage, Christianity is an active, moving religion. What is the force that moves us? It's compassion! Consider the story of the prodigal son. What moved the

father to run to greet his son? “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.” (Lk. 15:20) It was his compassion. Compassion moves Christians to be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Third, we should be compassionate due to the great power found within compassion. Compassion enables us to do so many things. Compassion encourages forgiveness. It is through compassion that God forgives us. “He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea.” (Micah 7:19) “But He, *being* full of compassion, forgave *their* iniquity, And did not destroy *them*. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away And did not stir up all His wrath.” (Psa. 78:38) Likewise, compassion causes us to forgive one another. “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Eph. 4:32) Compassion empowers us to be Patient. Consider the father in the story of the prodigal son. “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. (Lk. 15:20). This Father had been patiently awaiting his son's return. What motivated him to be patient? It was his compassion. Compassion will likewise motivate us to have the patience we need to endure to the end (Lk. 21:19). Compassion causes one to seek and save the lost. We recognize the command to take the gospel into all the world (Matt. 28:19-20). What gives us the strength to share the message of salvation? What moved Jesus? “And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.” (Mk. 6:34). It was His compassion. When we have compassion, it gives us the strength to spread the gospel.

Compassion helps us to bear one another's burdens. Often in life, brethren will become weighed down with burdens that are beyond their ability to bear. As Christians, we have the responsibility of helping them. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:1-2) What gives us the power to help bear those burdens? It's compassion. We see the pain of our brethren and it moves us to help.

There are most likely many other reasons why we should be compassionate but let us take these to heart and strive to practice compassion each day of our lives.

## **Deliverance**

One of the many promises found in the Bible is that of deliverance. “The righteous cry and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.” “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.” (Psa. 34:17, 19) Whether it's temptation, a trial, sickness, disease, or whatever it may be, we have the promise that God will deliver us. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul. “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (2 Tim. 4:16-18) What is Paul saying in this passage? He's letting us know that

the Lord delivered him and he was confident that the Lord would continue to deliver him, regardless of the difficulty. How can I know that God will deliver me?

God knows what He's doing. Have you ever taken your vehicle to a mechanic and got the drift that he just didn't know what he was doing? That's not the case when it comes to the Lord. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." (2 Pet. 2:9) The Lord knows what He's doing. He's been in the delivery business since the beginning of time. He's delivered every faithful servant who has ever lived and nothing has changed.

God can deliver me because He is in control. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen." (Matt. 6:13) Notice in this prayer that Jesus is encouraging His disciples to pray for deliverance. How can I be confident in deliverance? Listen to the verse again (second part). What is this verse saying? God is in control! He always has been, and He always will be in control. Satan doesn't want you to believe that. He wants you to believe that He's in control. In 1 Peter 5:8, he's described as a roaring lion. Why do lions roar? They do this to express their dominion over their territory. Every day, Satan walks the earth roaring. He wants you to think that he's in control, but he's not. God is in control and therefore, we can always depend on the deliverance of the Lord.

Friend, do you need deliverance? Why not turn to the Lord and ask for His help? It's just like the song we sing. "He is able to deliver the."

### **Determining What's Right & What's Wrong**

Most people generally understand there is a difference between that which is right and that which is wrong. For example, if I were to list several words such as cheat, kindness, lie, goodness, steal, love, murder, self-control, adultery, hospitality, fornication, friendliness, homosexuality, helpful, lesbianism, etc., and asked an ordinary person to categorize these terms, he/she could do it, regardless of their religious background. It is important to know that God wants us to do what is right. "And you shall do *what is* right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may be well with you, and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the LORD swore to your fathers." (Deut. 6:18). How is it that we can determine what's right and wrong? We need a standard. Do we have such a standard? Yes. It's the Bible. The Bible is our standard for everything in life, including determining what's right and what's wrong. Consider with me some questions that will help to determine right from wrong.

**"Is it condemned in the Bible?"** There are certain things that the Bible explicitly describes as being sinful and therefore wrong. Sins like fornication, idolatry, adultery, drunkenness, and homosexuality as named in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. In Galatians 5:19-21, there are 17 different sins identified as "works of the flesh," and the passage concludes by saying that those who participate in such activities will not inherit the kingdom of God.

**"Will it harm me spiritually?"** The most important part of man is the spiritual. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26) That is why we are commanded in the Bible to live a life of purity (Jam. 1:27; Eph. 5:25-27). We are to be examples of purity (1 Tim. 4:12). We are to think about pure things (Phil. 4:8). We are to keep ourselves pure (1 Tim. 5:22). Anything that will keep me from being spiritually pure should be classified as being wrong.

**“Will it harm my influence?”** One of the most powerful forces you have in life is your influence (Matt. 5:14-16). It takes a lifetime to build up a good influence, but only moments to destroy it. Such is why we must guard our influence. “Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it *spring* the issues of life.” (Prov. 4:23). Anything that will remotely harm my influence should and must be labeled as that which is wrong.

**“Will it lead me into bad company?”** David chose to be friends with those who feared God. “I *am* a companion of all who fear You, And of those who keep Your precepts.” (Psa. 119:63). Why did David make this choice in life? He knew that the wrong friends could ruin his Godly influence and his character. “Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” (1 Cor. 15:33) I should always honestly ask myself, “Will this activity lead me into bad company?” If the answer is yes, then I should avoid it.

**“Will it hinder me in performing my Christian duty?”** Every Christian must “fear or reverence God.” Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all.” (Eccl. 12:13) How do we express our reverence for God? We must put Him first in our lives. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matt. 6:33) So often in life, the things of the world hinder individuals from their Christian duty. Sometimes we develop a greater love for the world than we do for God. Such is why we are encouraged not to love the world (1 Jn. 2:15-17) and entangle ourselves with the affairs of this life (2 Tim. 2:4). If something will hinder me from my Christian duty, then it should be classified as wrong.

**“Will I want to hide this action?”** Everywhere we go people are watching us taking special notice of our actions, the words we speak, and the choices we make in life. Couple that thought with the fact that we are to be examples for others to follow in this life (1 Tim. 4:12; Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 11:1). Not only are others watching me, but most importantly, God is watching me. He knows and sees all. “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.” (Heb. 4:13) With every action in life, whether it be in word or in deed, I should ask myself, would I want to hide this action from my family members, friends, and church members? If the answer is yes, then it should be classified as wrong.

**“If Christ were here, would He disapprove?”**

Jesus Christ is our great example in life. We have the responsibility to follow in His footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21). As Christians, He is with us every step of the way in every day we live (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5; Lk. 22:61). I must realize that everything I do in life, Jesus is standing right beside me watching intently. Since He is my perfect example and I am to follow in His footsteps, I should honestly ask myself, “Would Jesus approve or disapprove of this action?” If I conclude that He would disapprove, then it should be labeled as wrong.

As one can see, many questions can be asked that will help one determine which is right and which is wrong. Regardless of the choices we make in life, let’s always let the Bible be our standard. After all, it will be the standard of judgment when we stand before God (Jn. 12:48; Rev. 20:12).

## **Did Anyone spit on Me?**

Occasionally, someone quits attending the services of the church because as they say, “someone hurt their feelings.” When someone does this, who are they taking it out on? Let’s think about it. Who designed worship? God did. Who commands us to worship? God does (Jn. 4:24). Who is it that we worship? Once again, it’s God (Jn. 4:24). So in

actuality, when we stop attending the services of the church, who are we taking our frustrations out on? God! What has He done to deserve such treatment? Think about Jesus for a moment and some of the things that he experienced while He was on earth.

They spit on Jesus. "Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck *Him* with the palms of their hands." (Matt. 26:67) Did anyone spit on me? In this same passage, you can also see that they struck Him in the face with their hands. Has anyone struck you in the face? They also beat him on the back. "So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged *Him*. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put *it* on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands." (Jn. 19:1-3) Do you understand the severity of scourging? Has anyone ever scourged you? From this same passage, they pressed a crown of thorns upon the head of Jesus. Has anyone ever done that to you? Then the Bible states that they hung Him on a cross to die. Have you ever been crucified? They did all this to Jesus and more. Yet He did not quit because He came to pay the price for our salvation.

If you ever think about quitting just remember what Jesus went through and he didn't quit so why should we?

### **Did Dinosaurs Exist? (Part 1)**

If there has ever been a subject that truly fascinates virtually everyone, children especially, it's the subject of dinosaurs. My son Andrew loves dinosaurs. Through the years, he has collected many toy dinosaurs, and he plays with them regularly. One day as he was playing with them, he asked the question that probably looms within the mind of many. The question was "Daddy, did dinosaurs really exist?" That's an excellent question, wouldn't you agree? Have you ever asked yourself this question or maybe someone asked it of you?

Some make the mistake of teaching that dinosaurs never existed. However, the evidence that dinosaurs did exist is overwhelmingly undeniable. If dinosaurs never existed, how do you explain the two-story tall Tyrannosaurus rex skeletons on exhibit in museums across the country? How do you explain dinosaur remains that have been found on all seven continents, from North America to the Antarctic? There are tons of fossilized dinosaur bones that have been recovered from all over the globe. Vast fossil graveyards of dinosaurs are found in North America, Africa, Asia, and other places. Over the past two centuries or so, millions of dinosaur remains have been discovered around the world. To say that dinosaurs never existed is to deny indisputable evidence. There's no doubt that dinosaurs lived. The question is when?

Evolutionists advocate that dinosaurs evolved from some ancient reptile 200 million years ago and they became extinct around 65-70 million years ago. Based upon the theory of evolution, man allegedly evolved approximately 2-3 million years ago and thus was separated from the dinosaurs by some 65 million years. Those who believe in creation reject this idea. The Bible teaches that God created everything in six literal days (Exod. 20:11; 31:17; Col. 1:16). According to the Biblical record, dinosaurs were created on days five and six. On day five, God created "great sea creatures." (Gen. 1:21) The Hebrew word is *tanninim* which can mean dragon, serpent, sea monster, or dinosaur. The *tanninim* in this passage represented a large class of creatures including dinosaurs (Gen. 1:21; Job 7:12; Psa. 148:7; Jer. 51:34). On day six, creatures of their "kind" were created (Gen. 1:24-25). The word "kind" refers to the same species.

Those who do not believe in the Biblical account of creation often conclude, “If dinosaurs existed, why doesn’t God mention them?” This argument can be answered by pointing out the fact that the Bible is not a taxonomical book. The Bible’s main purpose is to tell us about God and His scheme of redemption, not to list every animal God created. Simply because the Scriptures do not mention an animal does not mean that the Bible teaches that animals never existed alongside humans. There are many animals that the Bible never specifically mentions, including cats, kangaroos, elephants, aardvarks, anteaters, platypuses, and penguins, just to name a few. To say that these animals did not cohabit the earth with man because the Bible does not mention them would be false. To assume that dinosaurs and humans never lived together because the Bible doesn’t mention dinosaurs is equally erroneous.

Based upon the Biblical and the physical evidence, it seems clear that dinosaurs did exist, contemporary with man. In next week’s article, we will examine other Biblical evidence that points to the existence of dinosaurs contemporary with man.

## **Did Dinosaurs Exist? (Part 2)**

In last week’s writing, we saw that dinosaurs did at one time exist on earth and they were created on days five and six. Since man was created on day six (Gen. 1:26-27), man and dinosaurs coexisted on the earth together. In this week’s article, we want to examine some Biblical evidence that points to this coexistence.

In the book of Job, there are two creatures referenced that appear to be dinosaurs. The first one is identified as Behemoth (Job. 40:15-24). The word “behemoth” is found nine times in the Old Testament. It means “beast.” This Hebrew term suggests “one of the largest creatures.” In verse 19 this creature is described as being “the first of the ways of God.” The word “first” or “chief” signifies “first” in “size and strength.” This simply means that he is physically the largest of God’s creatures. Some try to say God was describing a mythical beast, but that cannot be the case. The Bible teaches that this animal existed during Job’s day. God said to Job, “Look now at the behemoth, which I made along with you.” (Job 40:15)

Consider the description of Behemoth. He is a grass-eater (40:15). His strength is in his loins (40:16). He moves his tail like a cedar (40:17). His bones are strong like brass (40:18). Only God can subdue this animal (40:19). He eats on the mountains, unharmed by the beasts that roam there (40:20). He can drink up a river (40:23). Snares cannot harm him, he breaks through them with his nose (40:24). What was this creature? Some believe that a hippopotamus is being described. Have you ever seen a hippo’s tail? It is small and limp; nothing like a “cedar.” One of the ways hippos were captured was by piercing the nose and forcing it to breathe through its mouth, by which a fatal blow could be administered through that open mouth. A hippo can be subdued by man. Therefore, the behemoth is not a hippo. Some believe an elephant is in view. Again, though an elephant is a massive animal, look at the animal’s tail. It’s also interesting to note that elephants were tamed and domesticated thousands of years ago. That hardly describes an animal that only God could subdue. Others say it is a rhino. Once again, a rhino is a very large animal but look at the tail.

There’s one final suggestion. What about a dinosaur? A brachiosaurus had a large, thick tail that could accurately be described as “like a cedar.” The brachiosaurus is estimated to have weighed about 85 tons, standing as tall as a five-story building. A

brachiosaurus meets all the characteristics described. He was indeed a grass eater. He would have had no problem drinking up vast amounts of water. Climbing mountains would have posed no problems, and the other animals would have left it alone, based solely on its size. Its bones are large and strong (like bars of iron). A logical conclusion is that Job was describing a dinosaur in this passage. Why is it that a dinosaur is rejected as a candidate for behemoth? The common perception is that dinosaurs became extinct long before man arrived on Earth, approximately 65 million years ago. However, based on the Biblical evidence, an animal very similar to a brachiosaurus lived during the days of Job.

In next week's article, we will continue to consider the Biblical evidence of man and dinosaur's co-existence by looking at another animal mentioned in the book of Job.

### **Did Dinosaurs Exist? (Part 3)**

For the previous two weeks, we have been examining the existence of dinosaurs. Based upon Biblical evidence, not only did dinosaurs exist, but they co-existed with man. The inspired writer Job described a creature that he called "behemoth" which can easily be identified as a dinosaur, perhaps a brachiosaurus. There is a second creature that Job describes in his writing which he named "Leviathan" (Job 41:1-34) Consider the description of this creature.

Let's begin first with the word "Leviathan." This word is found five times in the Old Testament (Job 3:8; 41:1; Psa. 74:14; 104:26; Isa. 27:1). In Isaiah 27:1, the leviathan is described as a serpent and a dragon. The Psalmist states that he lives in the sea (Psa. 104:26). These passages should help us to understand that Leviathan appears to be some kind of sea creature.

Consider the description of Leviathan. It cannot be caught with a hook or a noose (41:1), will not plead with man (41:3), is not a pet to be played with or kept (41:5), cannot be caught for food and clothing (41:6), spears and spikes have no effect on him (41:7), the sight of him will cause people to be cast down (41:9), no one has the courage to stir him (41:10), no one can bridle him (41:13), no one can force his mouth open (41:14), his scales are so seamlessly together that they cannot be parted (41:15-17), his eyes glow (41:18), he breathes fire from his mouth and smoke from his nostrils (41:19-21), his neck is incredibly strong (41:22), his scaly skin is firm and cannot be forcefully moved (41:23), he has no fear – his heart is firm as a millstone (41:24), iron and brass weapons are like attacking it with straw or rotten wood (41:26- 29), weapons placed underneath it are useless, he spreads them out in the mire (41:30), he makes the deep to boil (41:31), and no earthly creature or person has control over this animal (41:33-34). What a description!

What was Leviathan? Some believe that this was a mythological creature, however, the scriptures reveal that God created this creature (Psa. 104:25-26) and Job was aware of this creature. Some believe this was a crocodile, however, a crocodile is very susceptible to spears and swords. It is easy to force a crocodile's mouth open because its jaws are built with strength to close. The underside of the crocodile is easily penetrated. The crocodile does not breathe fire. While the crocodile is a reptile that lives in the water and though he is very fierce, Job does not appear to be describing a crocodile. Is it possible that this could be a dinosaur? Perhaps it was a Plesiosaurus. A surprising find in 2008 revealed by the Natural History Museum in Oslo, Norway was one of the

largest dinosaur sea predators ever found. It was a Plesiosaurus, which is estimated to be over 50 feet long. The teeth that remained are still sharp enough to cut wood. One possibility is that Job was describing a Plesiosaurus. Perhaps another possibility is that Job was describing a “dragon.” Remember the phrase “after its kind” which means “of the same species” (Gen. 1:24-25). Some may laugh and say, “Seriously! Job is describing a fire-breathing animal. That’s just ridiculous.” Consider the Bombardier Beetle. These beetles are most notable for the defense mechanism that gives them their name. When disturbed, they eject a hot noxious chemical spray from the tip of their abdomen with a popping sound. If God could create an insect that has the power to shoot out a fiery spray, could He not have created a dinosaur that had the same capabilities?

Did dinosaurs exist? To deny this is to disregard the overwhelming physical evidence and Biblical evidence which exists today. Based upon the Biblical evidence, dinosaurs not only existed, but they co-existed with man.

### Different Terms, Same Office

As one reads and studies the Bible, one will see Bible writers use different words interchangeably about the same subject. A good example is the use of the words elder, bishop, shepherd, and pastor. Though some believe that these are terms identifying different individuals, a careful examination of the Scriptures will prove that these terms are used interchangeably on different occasions in the New Testament. They are not different offices, or different levels of leadership in the church, but descriptive terms used for the same leadership ministry in the church.

For example, in Acts 20:17, Paul called for the “**elders**” of the church to meet him in Miletus. The word “**elders**” (*presbuteros*) refers to one who is advanced in age, which possibly suggests wisdom, knowledge, and experience. In Acts 20:28, these men are identified as “**overseers**” (*episkopos*) which refers to individuals who have the charge to make sure that things are done properly. In Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:2, this same Greek word which is translated “overseers” in Acts 20:28 is translated “**bishops**,” therefore bishops and overseers are individuals of the same office. In Acts 20:28, these men are also given the command to “shepherd” the church. The word “**shepherd**” (*poimaino*) means to feed or tend to. In Ephesians 4:11, as Paul is discussing the different gifts working within the church, he states that God “gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” The word “**pastors**” (*poimen*) refers to one who serves as a guardian or leader or a “shepherd.” In Titus 2:5, Paul told Titus, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” The word “**elders**” in this passage is from the Greek word *presbuteros* which is seen in Acts 20:17. In verse 7, Paul identified these men as “**bishops**,” which is from the Greek word *episkopos*. Incidentally, this is the same word that is used in Acts 20:28 which is translated “**overseers**.”

What is the conclusion of the matter? According to the Bible, the terms elder, bishop, overseer, shepherd, and pastor are not referring to different offices within the church, nor are they referring to different levels of leadership. They are terms used interchangeably throughout the New Testament, referring to the same office.

### Does God Care What I Wear?



Just open your eyes and look around. You cannot watch a movie, a commercial, or a sporting event without seeing bodies that wear minimal clothing. Springtime is full-blown, summer is just around the corner, and with the warmer temperatures, people are beginning to undress. The skirts, dresses, and shorts are getting shorter, the blouses are getting lower, and the young men are compelled to remove their shirts. Sadly, the world views this kind of behavior as normal. As a Christian, I should ask myself the sobering question, "Does God care what I wear?" Many would respond by saying NO! God loves me regardless of what I wear. While that is true, such is not good logic. God loves the sinner, but He expects him to be obedient (Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 5:8-9). God loves me regardless of how I dress, but he expects me to follow His standard of dress. Does God have a standard when it comes to dress? When Adam and Eve realized that they were naked, they sewed fig leaves together and made for themselves "coverings." This word means "loin covering." (Gen. 3:7) Evidently, whatever they were wearing did not meet God's standard. He made the tunics of skin and clothed them (Gen. 3:21). The word "tunic" is defined as a long shirt-like garment. How can one examine these scriptures and not conclude that God does have a dress code that He expects man to follow?

Let's begin with the word "nakedness." When this word is seen in the Bible, it can be defined in at least two different ways. It can refer to nudity (Lev. 18:6-19). This would refer to the complete uncovering of the human body. This word can also refer to improper or inadequate clothing. Think about the clothing that God commanded Moses to make for the priests (Exod. 28:42; Isa. 47:1-3). Moses was commanded to make them "linen breeches." The word "breeches" refers to undergarments, trousers, or pants. These pants were to cover the area "from the loins to the thighs" or as the Bible teaches, "their nakedness." Medically speaking, the loins represent the area from the bottom rib on the human body to the pelvis. The thigh represents the area from the pelvis to the knee. Based on the above passages, nakedness does not necessarily refer to the complete exposure of the human body. It also can be applied to one who does not adequately clothe his/her body. If the priests would have dressed inappropriately, would they have pleased God? Certainly not! If Christians today do not dress appropriately, can they be pleasing to God? Absolutely not!

What kind of attire pleases God? Consider the following passage. "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. (1 Tim. 2:9-10). According to this passage, there is a proper way to dress. When we follow this code that is given, we profess godliness in the lives we live. What is the proper way to dress? We are to dress "modestly" which means to dress decently. We are to dress with "moderation" or in a way that expresses good sound judgment. Finally, we are to dress with "propriety" which means that we are to dress in a way that expresses honor and reverence toward God. The apostle Peter encourages his readers to be "chaste" when it comes to their conduct or manner of life (1 Pet. 3:1-4). The word "chaste" means to be pure, innocent, or blameless. Sadly, in our culture today, instead of wearing clothing that is "chaste," many wear clothing that causes them to be "chased" by others. What a shame!

What is the conclusion of the matter? God does care what we wear! Let us as Christians separate ourselves from the world and wear clothing that brings honor and respect to God and His glorious gospel.

## **Does Man Inherit Sin?**

A common struggle of all mankind is with sin. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (1 Jn. 1:8, 9) Many believe that man's struggle with sin can be described in a doctrine known as "Original Sin." This doctrine states that sin is inherited. According to the website [compellingtruth.org](http://compellingtruth.org), "Because of Adam and Eve's disobedience, sin has been an "inheritance" for all their descendants. Romans 5:12 tells us, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." We inherit our sinful nature like the way we inherit our parent's physical characteristics. David wrote, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5)."

Notice the two scriptures used to prove man inherits sin. Consider the first one (Rom. 5:12). This passage does not teach that sin is inherited. It simply states that "death" is inherited. The death that Paul is referring to is physical, not spiritual. Consider Psalm 51:5. Did David say in this passage that he inherited sin; that he was born a sinner? No, he did not. David simply stated that he was conceived in a sinful environment, and was born into a sinful world.

The Bible teaches that sin is "not" inherited. "Fathers shall not be put to death for *their* children, nor shall children be put to death for *their* fathers; a person shall be put to death for his own sin." (Deut. 24:16) "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." (Ezek. 18:20) "So then each of us shall give an account of himself to God." (Rom. 14:12) In each of the passages, the Bible states that man is responsible for his own sins and not for the sins of others, thus man does not inherit sin.

Consider the consequences of espousing the doctrine of "Original Sin." To conclude that man is born in sin is to reflect upon the character of God. "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Gen. 1:26-27) Man was made in the very image, likeness, or resemblance of God. To conclude that man is born a sinner is to conclude a sinful God created him. Such is most definitely not the teaching of the Bible. God is holy, pure, and free from sin (1 Pet. 1:15-16). God created man in the same fashion. Listen to the words of the wise man Solomon. "Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes." (Ecc.. 7:29). Notice how God made man. Man was made "upright." This word means right, pleasing, or righteous. The word "righteous" refers to one who is in the right relationship with God. According to this passage, every individual who is born into this world is spiritually perfect in the eyes of God.

Second, the doctrine of "Original Sin" teaches that man will be punished eternally for the sins of others. "For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23) The word wages means payment. According to the Bible, the payment for sin is death. In the context of this passage, the writer is discussing eternal death. According to the doctrine of "Original Sin," man is doomed eternally the moment he is born for he has inherited the sins of his parents. Is this the teaching of the Bible? Absolutely not! Consider how the Bible writers go to extensive detail to let the readers know that we are responsible for our own sins and not for the sins of others (Deut. 24:16; Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 14:12). In Matthew chapter 18, the disciples were discussing the idea of who was the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus responded by calling a little child,

setting him in the midst, and telling His disciples unless they were converted and become as little children, they could not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:1-4). Why did Jesus use the example of a little child? What is the one thing that a little child has that man doesn't have? It's innocence. Man is not born in sin. He is born in innocence, pure and free of sin.

Third, the doctrine of Original Sin violates the Biblical definition of sin. According to the Bible, sin is not something we inherit, but rather it is a violation of God's law. "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." (1 Jn. 3:4) Sin is unrighteousness or failing to live a life acceptable to God. "All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death." (1 Jn. 5:17) Sin is knowing to do good and not doing it. "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin." (Jam. 4:17) Is it not obvious from these three passages of scripture that sin is something that we commit or do and it's not something we inherit?

So, what is the conclusion of the matter? Does man inherit sin? Are babies born in sin, doomed to eternal hell? According to the Bible, man does not inherit sin. Sin is something man chooses to do.

### **Does the Bible Authorize Women Preachers?**

A growing trend that can be seen in churches today is that of women preachers, teachers, song leaders, and even women elders. It is believed by many that the church as we know it today is the product of a male-dominated society and therefore the push is to have more and more women fill the pulpits and other positions of leadership. While leading in worship is of great importance, the question I should ask is does the Bible authorize women preachers when men are present?

In chapters 11 and 14 of the book of First Corinthians, the apostle Paul deals with disorders in the worship assembly. "Now in giving these instructions, I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it." (1 Cor. 11:17-18) Notice the phrase "come together as a church." That phrase is speaking directly about the worship assembly. In the same context of scripture, the Bible states, "But I want you to know that the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor. 11:3). The word "head" refers to authority. Therefore, God intends for women to be subordinate to men in worship. The women in the Corinthian church were not following this teaching. As a result, through the inspiration of God, the apostle Paul made the following statement concerning women in the church. "For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church." (1 Cor. 14:33-35) Notice the statement, "in all the churches of the saints." It is linked directly to the phrase, "let your women keep silent in the churches." This was not a cultural problem, as many have concluded, but rather a universal command.

Consider another passage. "But if I am delayed, *I write* so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Tim. 3:15) In this passage, Paul is telling Timothy how Christians are to conduct themselves in the church. In the same context, he states, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach

or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” (1 Tim. 2:11) The phrase “to have authority over” means to assume a stance of independent authority, to give orders to or to dictate. It is God’s plan that men lead in public worship and not women. This can be seen in the very forefront of this passage discussing women’s role in the worship assembly. “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.” (1 Tim. 2:8) When women preach, direct the singing, lead prayer, or serve in any leadership position while men are present, the passages we have just consider have been violated.

## **Does the Bible Need to be Interpreted? (Part 1)**

The Bible is God’s inspired message to man (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). It is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psa. 119:105). It is sufficient (2 Pet. 1:3). Man does not need another revelation of any kind (Gal. 1:6-9), for it completes man (2 Tim. 3:17). The Bible can be read and understood (Eph. 3:3-4; 5:17). While all these principles are clearly stated in the Bible, does the Bible need to be interpreted or explained? Some may respond, No! The Bible does not need to be interpreted. Man needs to read it, study it, accept it, and obey it. Consider the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8). The Bible teaches us that he was riding along in his chariot reading from the prophet Isaiah. When Philip joined him, he asked him the following question. “Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8:30) The Eunuch responded by saying, “How can I, unless someone guides?” (vs. 31) When it comes to the Bible, we must read it, study it, accept and obey it, but as the story of the Eunuch implies, the Bible also demands that we interpret the message that is found therein.

Jesus recognized the importance of interpreting the Scriptures. In His discussion with the Sadducees concerning the resurrection, Jesus said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.” (Matt. 22:29) The word “knowing” means to understand. The reason the Sadducees did not understand is that they had not interpreted or explained the Scriptures adequately. As Jesus walked along the road to Emmaus with Cleopas and another disciple the Bible states, “And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” (Lk. 24:27). The word “expounded” means to interpret or to explain or to help someone understand a subject or matter by making it plain. In verse 45, the Bible states, “And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.” The word “opened” means to explain or interpret. The apostle Paul was likewise one who saw the need to interpret the Scriptures. When He came to the city of Thessalonica, he entered the synagogue, and for three Sabbaths, he explained the Scriptures to the people (Acts 17:1-3). The word “Explained” is the same word as found in Luke 24:45. Just as Jesus saw the need to explain or interpret the Scriptures, Paul recognized the same need. As Paul wrote to Timothy, he encouraged him, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15) The phrase “rightly dividing” means to handle correctly, to hold a straight course, to teach the truth directly and correctly without distortion. These Scriptures teach that God expects Bible students to interpret or explain the Scriptures.

As one can see, the Scriptures must be interpreted or explained. Next week, we shall consider the benefits of proper Biblical interpretation of the Scriptures.

## **Does the Bible Need to be Interpreted? (Part 2)**

In last week's article, we asked the question, "Does the Bible need to be interpreted?" Some would say no. The Bible does not need to be interpreted. I am afraid that many come to this conclusion without a proper understanding of the meaning of the word interpretation. The word "interpretation" refers to the act or process of explaining. As we saw from Jesus and other New Testament writers, the Scriptures must be "rightly divided." (2 Tim. 2:15) To rightly divide the Scriptures requires explanation. In this writing, we will discuss some benefits when we correctly interpret the Scriptures. While there are many benefits of interpreting scriptures, consider just two.

First, when proper interpretation takes place, it gives the Bible student a better understanding of the original meaning intended by the author. Too often, when we read and study the Bible, we begin with the idea of "what does this mean to me or how can this help me today?" While the Bible is designed to benefit all who read it (Rev. 1:3), such a process is not a proper interpretation. The books that are found within the Bible were not written initially for Christians today. They were written to followers of God who lived hundreds of years ago. With that thought in mind, when I read a book of the Bible, I should first ask the question, "What did it mean to the people who read the letter for the first time?" "What was the intentional meaning of the author." Once we have drawn this conclusion, we can then ask, "How can it be applied to Christians today?" Only by determining the original meaning can we adequately apply it to man today. That requires proper Bible interpretation.

Second, proper interpretation of the scriptures prevents doctrinal error. Paul spoke of those who would depart from the faith, giving heed to doctrines of demons. (1 Tim. 4:1). The apostle John warned of many false prophets in the world. (1 Jn. 4:1) That which causes so many to espouse doctrinal error is because of the improper way in which they interpret the Scriptures. Many espouse doctrinal error because they develop their "own interpretation" of the Scriptures. According to the apostle Peter, there is no "private interpretation of the Scriptures." (2 Pet. 1:20-21) The word "private" means pertaining to oneself or belonging to oneself. The word "interpretation" refers to the act or process of explaining. While many may believe that we all have our own private interpretation of what the Bible means, that is not the teaching of the Bible. When the Holy Spirit moved those holy men to write, there was one central message that God intended for the people to receive. Proper Bible interpretation keeps one from developing his own understanding of the Scriptures. It causes the Bible student to ask the question "What was the original message of the author?" What did it mean to the people who read it for the first time?

Does God expect man to interpret His message? According to the Scriptures, He does. Through prayer, humility, reverence, and a desire to always please God, we can interpret the Scriptures in a way that brings honor and glory to His name.

## **Does the Bible Speak of a Judgment?**

Does the Bible teach there will be a day when all men will be judged? Based on the way that many are living their lives today, it is my conviction that many do not believe in judgment. Many today have the same mindset as those who lived in the days when the apostle Peter wrote his letter of inspiration. "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2 Pet.

4) They are convinced that Jesus is not coming back and there will not come a day when they will be required to answer for the choices they've made in life. But what does the Bible teach?

“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give an account of it in the day of judgment.” (Matt. 12:36) Not only does this verse teach there will be a judgment, but it also teaches us that we will be judged by the very words we speak. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (2 Cor. 5:10) According to this verse, we learn four things about judgment. First, there will be a great day of judgment. Second, everyone will be there. No one will escape that great day. Third, Christ will be our judge. Fourth we will answer for the lives we have lived while here on earth. It's much like the teaching of Romans 14:12. “So then each of us shall give an account of himself to God.” Also, consider the teaching of the apostle John. “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” (Rev. 20:12) What does this verse teach about judgment? There will be a day of judgment, everyone will be there, no one will escape, and we will be judged by the books. What are the books? They are none other than the words of God found in the Bible! “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” (Jn. 12:48) What's going to judge a man on that great day of judgment? According to this passage, it's the words of Jesus. Where are the words of Jesus found? They are found only in the Bible. Consider another passage that speaks about judgment. “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” (Heb. 9:27) This verse not only teaches that there will be a judgment, but it is an appointed day, and once again, it is a day that I will not escape. When will that time come? It will come after death. On and on we could go, the Bible is clear. There will be a day of Judgment. On that day everyone will be there, Christ will be our judge and I will be judged based upon the way I lived in this life. The question is, are you ready for that great day? If not, why not get ready today by being obedient to the gospel of Christ?

## **Doing Good**

A young man opens the door for an elderly sister in Christ who is about to enter the church building. A box of get-well cards is purchased and sent to Christians who are sick. A visit is made to someone in the hospital. A meal is prepared for someone who is sick or shut in. A friend listens to a brother or sister in Christ who is struggling with a temptation. A Bible study is held with a person who does not know the truth. What do the aforementioned actions have in common? They are all acts of goodness. As the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Galatia, he encouraged them to seek out and take advantage of opportunities concerning good. “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Gal. 6:10). Does this passage of Scripture describe you in your Christian life? It's descriptive of the life Jesus lived. The Bible describes our Savior as one “...who went about doing good...” (Acts 10:38) Do you live your life like Jesus?

Consider the great value of living a life of doing good. It glorifies God. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16) As Christians, we serve a God who has a tremendous reputation.

He is a God of love, grace, mercy, and comfort. He is dependable. He has never failed us and there will never come a time when He will do so. What causes an individual to come to such conclusions concerning God? It's the influence of those who are already serving God. Through the good we do as Christians; the hearts of people are opened, and they see God as He is and turn to Him in obedience (1 Pet. 2:12). As a result, God is glorified!

Good deeds are also valuable in the fact that they encourage. As Christians, we should seek to encourage our fellow Christians (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13). One of the many ways that we can encourage one another is through good deeds. Imagine a young man who has just been converted to Christianity. Because of this conversion, he is rejected by his own people, and due to his previous choices in life, he is now all alone, and no one will accept him. How do you suppose he felt? How would you feel? Thankfully, a man named Barnabas encouraged this young man through good acts (Acts 9:26-29). Because of the encouragement of Barnabas, this young man went on to become a great and faithful servant of God. We know him as the apostle Paul. Do you see the value of good deeds? Good deeds often give us the encouragement we need as Christians to be faithful to the Lord.

As a Christian, your purpose in life is to do good. We have been created for this purpose (Eph. 2:10). Oh, how pleased God is when we live our lives fulfilling this purpose (Heb. 13:16). In closing, consider the words of the apostle Paul. "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:10).

## **Don't Be Deceived**

Have you ever been deceived before? How did it make you feel? Let me guess. Were you hurt or discouraged? Did you get angry? No one likes to be deceived. When we are deceived, it often increases our ability to discern, and we are more cautious when we are presented with similar situations. Wouldn't it be great if people had the same attitude toward "SIN?" Usually, when we discuss the subject of sin, we refer to its power to separate one from God and eventually cause spiritual death (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 6:23). There is however, another very detrimental characteristic of sin. Sin can "deceive." Listen to the words of the apostle John. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 Jn. 1:8). Also consider the words of Paul. "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment deceived me, and by it killed *me*." *According to Paul*, sin can deceive which brings about separation from God and eventually eternal death. One of the great dangers of sin is the fact that sin is deceptive. What are some ways in which sin deceives us?

First, sin promises liberty, but brings slavery. "For when they speak great swelling *words* of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage." (2 Pet. 2:18-19) Oh, what a true proverb this is. Sin is constantly saying, "If you take me in and make me a part of your life, then I will give you true freedom." What a lie that is! Sin does not offer man freedom. It enslaves. Jesus said, "The truth shall make you free." (Jn. 8:32) Free from what? Listen to verse 34. "Jesus answered them, "Most

assuredly, I say to you, whoever sins is a slave of sin." Oh, sin promises liberty, but it brings slavery.

Second, sin appears to be attractive, but it is hideously ugly. Consider the alcohol commercials on TV. Good-looking men and women are portrayed as having the time of their lives while drinking, when in fact, they are filling their lives with sin (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35). It reminds me of the words of Isaiah. "From the sole even to the head, *There is no soundness in it, But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment.*" (Isa. 1:6) In the context of this Scripture, Isaiah is not discussing physical sickness. God's people were spiritually sick. They were Spiritually sick because their lives were filled with sin. The sin in their lives is identified as a "putrefying sores." That's a sore oozing infection. Sin often appears to be attractive, but it's not.

Sin appears to be insignificant when it is so major. Eve took a little bite of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6). Lot's wife took a little look back (Gen. 19:26). The one talent man had a little neglect (Matt. 25). Ananias and Sapphira told a little lie (Acts 5:1-11). Sin, though it may seem small, has the same consequence. It's spiritual death (Rom. 6:23). Oh, sin appears to be insignificant, but every sin is major.

Have you been deceived by sin? If so, why not repent and determine from here on out that you'll not allow sin to deceive you ever again?

## **Do You Have Hope?**

The concept of "hope" is an idea found throughout the New Testament. A very powerful force in the life of a Christian is that of hope. The apostle Paul would identify it as one of the three great characteristics of the Christian life (1 Cor. 13:13). What is hope? Hope is often defined as the desire for something to happen. It is a wishful expectation. For example, if it's been really dry someone may say, "I sure hope it rains soon." There is no confidence within a statement of such nature. It's just a wishful thought. As used in the Bible, the word "hope" is not defined as a wishful thought, but rather a confident expectation or a solid assurance. A great illustration of this definition can be seen in the offering of Abraham's son Isaac. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, "In Isaac, your seed shall be called," concluding that God was able to raise *him* up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." (Heb. 11:17-19). Though the word hope is not found in this passage, the idea is certainly there. Abraham was willing to offer his son Isaac, knowing that God could raise him from the dead. That's hope! It's knowing that God is able (Eph. 3:20). It's a confident expectation.

Consider with me the great power of hope. It is through hope that we have salvation (Rom. 8:24; 1 Jn. 3:3). What a comforting thought that is. Salvation is not something that we wish for, but rather it's a confident expectation. You live every day knowing that it's yours. It is through hope that we have courage & strength (Psa. 31:24). Two characteristics that we desperately need in the Christian life are courage and strength. We need courage to stand up and fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12). We need strength so that we may press on in the battle. Hope grants unto us both courage and strength. It is through hope that we have protection (Psa. 33:18). God is always watching over those who confidently put their hope in Him. It is through hope that we have stability. The author of Hebrews referred to our hope as the anchor of our soul (Heb. 6:19). An



anchor holds a ship in place. It gives a ship stability. Likewise, hope causes the Christian to remain steadfast throughout the Christian life. Finally, it is through hope that we have happiness. Most every person in our world today is in pursuit of happiness. However, many live never attaining true happiness. Perhaps they are searching in the wrong places. According to the Psalmist, true happiness is acquired when we put our hope in God. "Happy *is he* who *has* the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope *is* in the LORD his God." (Psa. 146:5).

I suppose one of my favorite thoughts concerning hope in God is that it will never disappoint! "Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Rom. 5:5) Life is filled with things and circumstances that have the power to disappoint us. Hope in God will never disappoint us. Such is why as Christians we need to be prisoners of hope (Zech. 9:12), abound in hope (Rom. 15:13), and hope always, regardless of the situation (Jn. 13:15).

God is the only one who can provide this kind of hope. He is described as the "God of hope" (Rom. 15:13). This is the reason the Psalmist would say, "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You." (Psa. 39:7). Is your hope in God? If not, why not place your hope in him today?

## Do you know the Lord?

How often do you hear people ask the question, "Do you know the Lord?" Don't get me wrong. This is an extremely important question. One cannot be saved if he does not know the Lord. In the great judgment scene, Jesus is pictured as telling individuals to depart from Him because He never "knew" them (Matt. 7:23) In His return, He is portrayed as returning with His mighty angels, "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that **know not God**, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." (2 Thess. 1:7-9) Knowing God is of utmost importance.

"What does it mean to know the Lord?" Most individuals, who ask the question "Do you know the Lord," do not themselves have a complete understanding of what it means to know the Lord. The typical belief is that to know the Lord means that you believe that Jesus is the Christ. Knowing the Lord means so much more than simply acknowledging the fact that Jesus is the Christ. What then does it mean to know the Lord?

The word "know" comes from a Greek word which means to have knowledge of; to understand or to become acquainted with. The word "acquaint" means to cause to come to know personally or to become familiar with. In summation, to know Jesus means that I have knowledge of who He is, I understand every detail about Him, and I am personally familiar with Him. Do you know the Lord this way? Are you familiar with His deity, His character, His power, His purpose, His love, and His desire? To know someone to this degree requires one to spend countless hours with an individual. Perhaps this is why we are encouraged to study the scripture (2 Tim. 2:15). The Bible is the one source that tells us about the life He lived. To know the Lord also requires that they do His will. The apostle John stated, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." (1 Jn. 2:3)

What happens when we truly know the Lord? To begin with, we have the promise of answered prayer. "And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." (1 Jn. 5:15) Every time I approach my heavenly Father, I can be confident that He will not only hear me, but He will also answer

me. Why? I know Him. In the second place, I have the love of Christ in my life. Everyone is loved by someone, but when we “know the Lord,” we become acquainted with the greatest love that has ever been known by man. We have the love of Christ in our lives. “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph 3:19) In the third place, I have eternal life. Just imagine the thought of never dying. This thought will become a reality when we live our lives “knowing Jesus.” “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may *continue to believe* in the name of the Son of God.” (1 Jn. 5:13).

Oh, there are other ways in which God will bless us when we come to know His Son, but these should whet our appetites and create a desire within us to want to know the Lord. Do you know the Lord? If not, why not come to know Him today through obedience to His will? (Heb. 5:8-9)

### **Do You Remember Your Birthday?**

Birthdays are so very special and important. A birthday signifies when an individual becomes a part of this world. Andrew will be four in just a couple of months. It just seems like yesterday he was born. When I think of him, and the birth dates of my three girls, I am reminded of how special birthdays are. I’m also reminded of how grateful we should be for another birthday in life. We should all be thankful, regardless of our age that God has blessed us with the opportunity to live another year upon this earth.

Do you remember your birthday? I know what you are probably thinking right now. “That’s a silly question. Everyone remembers when they were born. No one forgets that day.” This may be your reasoning if you think I am referring to your physical birthday. I’m not talking about your physical birthday. I’m talking about your spiritual birthday. The Bible teaches there are two births that we experience in this life. There is a physical birth. Job said, “Man that is born of woman is few days and full of trouble.” (Job 14:1) The birth to which Job was referring is the physical birth we experience. There is also a spiritual birth. Jesus said, “...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (Jn. 3:5) While our physical birth is extremely important, it is not the most important birth that we experience in this life. If one is simply born into this world physically and is not born spiritually, then when this life is over, all is lost. On the other hand, if one experiences spiritual birth, he has the kingdom of heaven and eternal life to look forward to. So, I ask the question again. Do you remember your birthday? Do you remember the day you were born into the family of God? I certainly remember mine. It was November 10, 1982, on a Wednesday night. It’s a time I’ll never forget as long as I live.

Why should we take the time to remember our spiritual birthdays? Well, think for a moment. Why do we take the time to remember our physical birthdays? It’s the time when a very special person became a part of a family and began to touch the lives of individuals. In the same way, when one is born spiritually, it is a time when one becomes a part of a very special family, the family of God. (1 Tim. 3:15) It is a time when one begins to touch the lives of many individuals because he is letting the gospel of Jesus Christ shine forth in the life he is living (Matt. 5:16). Most importantly, we should remember our spiritual birthday because God does. At the beginning of this writing, I referred to the birthdays of my son and my three girls. Those are dates I will always cherish. Why is that? It is because they are my children. In the same way, the day we were born spiritually is a day God will

never forget. It is the day we gave our hearts and lives to Him. It is the day when we determine that we will always live for Him and with Him. It is the day when we became His children. It is a day that He truly cherishes.

While physical birth is a wonderful blessing, let us remember that the most important birth in life is spiritual birth. Have you been born into the family of God? If not, why not make that choice today? Be obedient to the gospel of Christ and let that decision change your life forever.

### **Driving the Corrupt Out of Your Life**

“Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan, across from Jericho, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places; you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess.’” (Num. 33:50-53) Notice if you will, the first thing that God commanded His people to do when they entered the land of Canaan. They were to drive out all the inhabitants of the land. Why? These people did not look to Jehovah as their God; the supreme being in life. What would happen if they failed to drive these people out? “But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. Moreover, it shall be that I will do to you as I thought to do to them.” (Num. 33:55-56) As we study Bible history, we learn that God’s people did not heed His warning. They did not drive all the inhabitants out and as a result, the people turned their hearts away from the Lord.

What can we as Christians learn from this today? People have the power to change our hearts. That’s why it is crucially important that we associate with the proper people in life. If the Gospel cannot change them, then like the children of Israel, we must separate ourselves from them. Listen to the warning of the apostle Paul. Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” (1 Cor. 15:33) What is the purpose of this statement? It is to remind us that when we spend time with people who do not put the Lord first in their lives, they have the possibility of corrupting us. Think about Lot. “And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds.” (2 Pet. 2:7-8) Do you know what the word “vexed” means? It means to tire down or to exhaust with labor. Living among those unrighteous people depleted Lot of his spiritual strength. In the same way, if we spend most of our time associating with the unrighteous, they will deplete us of our spiritual strength. That’s why it’s so important that we befriend and spend time with those who love the Lord and have one goal in mind. That goal is making heaven their home! Let us follow the pattern of King David. “I am a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts.” (Psa. 119:63).

### **Dusty Shoes**

I love to wear shoes that are polished and shiny. One of my pet peeves is to see a man with a nice suit and tie on, and his shoes are dirty. One Sunday following the morning worship services, I happened to look down at my shoes, and lo and behold they were covered in dust. Not only were they dusty, but they had also lost their shine. I

realized that everywhere I had gone that morning, my dusty, unpolished shoes were right there with me. I had taught Bible class, preached, and associated with brethren while wearing those dusty shoes. Needless to say, I was embarrassed. What did I do? I made sure that my shoes were polished before I went to evening worship services.

When I think of those dusty shoes, it reminds me of how sin slips into the life of a Christian. We as Christians often give in to sin, not realizing we have done so. When this happens, we carry that sin with us everywhere we go. We carry it with us to school, to work, to play and even to church services. Then one day, we realize that our lives are filled with sin. What does it do to us? It embarrasses us. Sometimes that embarrassment is so severe that it causes many to turn away from the faith.

What are we to do? How can we overcome the terrible problem of sin entering our lives, and avoid the embarrassment that comes with sin? We must practice self-examination. How is it that my shoes became so dusty? It was because I didn't take the time to examine them. How is it that we are unaware of sin that enters our lives? We don't take the time to Spiritually examine our lives. Paul said, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith." (2 Cor. 13:5) How do we examine our spiritual lives? This can be done by looking at the Bible. James said, "But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." (Jam. 1:25) Just as an individual would look into a physical mirror to make sure things are in order, the Christian must look into the spiritual mirror, which is the Bible, to make sure his spiritual life is in order.

If we do realize that we have sin in our lives, let us not allow the embarrassment of sin to get us down. Let us turn to Jesus, ask for His forgiveness, and continue to press on in the Christian life (1 Jn. 1:9).

## **Essentials For the Lord's Work**

The word "essential" refers to things extremely important or things that are a necessity. Think with me about some things that are necessary for the human body to survive. What about oxygen? Do you realize that you can only live approximately 3-4 minutes without air? What about blood? Your body has approximately 1.3 gallons of blood. If your body sustains more than 40% blood loss, you will begin to die. What about water? Do you realize that after three days without water, you begin to die? What about food? After about 3 weeks without it, you begin to die. Certain things in life are essential for human life to continue. With that thought in mind, consider the Church. The Bible describes the Church as a body. "For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ." (1 Cor. 12:12; See also Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18). Just as there are essentials for the survival of the human body, there are likewise essentials for the survival of the spiritual body, the church.

First, the Church needs a **Powerful Faith**. Think about how powerful faith is. We cannot please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). It's through faith that we obtain eternal life. (1 Jn. 5:13). Faith gives us the power to overcome the world (1 Jn. 5:5). Faith has the power to move mountains (Matt. 17:20). Just as the body begins to die when we are depleted of blood, the Church will weaken and die without faith. That's why every member which composes the Church needs to be like Stephen, individuals who are "full of faith." (Acts 6:5) Our attitude must be that of the apostles. We should ask God every day, "Lord increase our faith." (Lk. 17:5).

Second, the Church needs a **Joyful Heart**. As Christians, we are commanded to be joyful. “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Phil. 4:4) The word joy in this passage means to be glad. We have so many reasons to rejoice. Consider the fact that we are God’s children (1 Jn. 3:1-3). Is that not a wonderful reason to rejoice? As God’s children, we have been blessed with so many spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Consider the ultimate blessing of God’s children. Someday, if we live faithfully to the Lord, we will receive a crown of life (2 Tim. 4:7-8). Heaven will be our home! The Church must be filled with joy! Think about blood, oxygen, food, and water. If your body does not have these essential elements, you will not survive. In the same manner, if the Church does not have joy, it will not survive.

Third, the Church needs **Prayer**. Think about the human body. Every part of the body is made up of cells. All cells need food, water, and oxygen to survive. When we take food and water into our bodies, they are broken down and sent into the bloodstream. The blood takes those essentials along with the oxygen which it gets from the lungs to the different parts of the body where they are needed. Think of prayer in the same way. The Church needs certain things to survive. For example, faith and joy, are two elements that we have just discussed. The Church also needs strength and endurance along with many other things. How does the Church receive these much-needed essentials? It’s through the process of prayer! “...The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (Jam. 5:16) The Church cannot survive without prayer.

Fourth, the Church needs a **Persistent Effort**. If your body is going to survive, you must consistently eat, drink liquids, and take in oxygen. The moment that you stop, then you will begin to die. The same is true when it comes to the Church. We must live every day reading and studying God’s Word, striving to increase our faith in God. We must strive to have greater joy than the day before and pray that God will give us the strength we need to press forward. “He who endures to the end shall be saved.” (Matt. 24:13)

As Christians, we are a part of the greatest institution in the entire world. We are members of the Church, the beautiful body of Christ. Let us live every day with the determination that we will do everything within our power to make sure that the Church continues.

## **Evangelistic Motivation**

As Christians, it is our responsibility to share the gospel of Christ with others (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16; 2 Tim. 2:2). In other words, we are to be evangelistic. The goal of evangelism is not winning Bible arguments or winning someone to a point of view. Consider the words of Jesus. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mk. 16:15) “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” (Matt. 28:19). The phrase “make disciples” means to cause one to be a pupil, a student, or a follower. When these parallel passages are combined, they teach that our goal as Christians is to present the gospel story of Jesus to individuals in such a way that they see their need for Jesus in their lives and they are compelled to obey the Lord and become His disciples. How do we motivate Christians to practice evangelism?

First, we must cause Christians to see the great power of evangelism. In evangelism, we are communicating the gospel which is the greatest message that man has ever known. It not only has the power to save (Rom. 1:16; Jam. 1:21), it also has the

power to keep an individual saved (1 Tim. 4:16). The gospel also can change the lifestyle, character, and eternal destiny of individuals.

Second, evangelism must become the top priority in our lives. Jesus encouraged His followers to “seek first the kingdom of God.” (Matt. 6:33) When most people think about evangelism, they think about a Bible study that they may have with someone. While I understand their point of view, evangelism is more than just a one-time event. It must be a priority in my life, and that requires a lifestyle. I don’t just do evangelism; “I live it.” People should be able to look at my life and see that the message of evangelism has had such an effect on me that I can’t help but share the good news with others. If I do not make evangelism first in my life, most likely, I will not be evangelistic.

Third, evangelism is not just an event. It is a process. This can be seen in the statement of the apostle Paul, “I planted, Apollos watered but God gave the increase.” (1 Cor. 3:6) Too often when we study the Bible with individuals, we want a quick response and if people do not obey the Gospel as quickly as we think they should, we often give up. We must remember that not everyone obeys the gospel the first time that they hear it. Most people do not. Sometimes it takes weeks, months, and even years of different individuals planting and nourishing the word of God in the hearts of individuals before they obey. When we remember that evangelism is a process, it teaches us to be patient and keeps us from giving up so quickly.

Let us as Christians see the need to be evangelistic and practice evangelism in the lives we live.

## **Facing The Son”**

Do you like flowers? I certainly do. I love all the different types of flowers. I suppose that’s one of the things that I love most about springtime. All the beautiful flowers begin to bloom and blossom. Every spring, I’m reminded of what an awesome, majestic, and powerful God we serve. Do you have a favorite flower? Though it would be hard for me to pick just one, I do love “sunflowers.” Its bold brown head and the yellow petals that surround it are a beautiful sight. It is a view that should draw a smile to the face of every lover of flowers. It certainly does mine. I suppose that what impresses me the most about sunflowers is their “heliotropic” nature. Sunflowers exhibit what is known as heliotropism. “Helios” means sun and “tropism” means a turning movement. When sunflowers are young and tender, they track the sun across the sky during the day. At night the sunflower head will turn in a random direction but then at dawn, it turns right back toward the East to face the sun. As they get older and mature, they face the east for the duration of their life span.

When I think of the beauty of a sunflower, it reminds me of the beauty of a Christian. There is beauty in every individual, for we were all created in the very image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). There is, however, a greater beauty that exists in the life of the one who is living for Christ Jesus. What causes the life of a Christian to be so beautiful? It’s because Christians live their lives facing **“the SON.”** The apostle John states, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7) The Bible teaches that Jesus is the “light of the world” (Jn. 8:12). To “walk in the light” means to live our lives following or facing Jesus. Notice the results of living a life facing Jesus. We have fellowship with God and our brothers and sisters in Christ and we are cleansed from all sin. Can you think of a more beautiful portrait? I certainly can’t. Such is why we are encouraged by the writer

of Hebrews, “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith...” (Heb. 12:2). By living our lives looking to Jesus, not only do we live a beautiful life spiritually speaking, but we also are provided with the strength to maintain that beauty (Phil. 4:13).

Are you facing Jesus Christ “**the SON**” in the life you are living? If not, why not turn to Him today? Surrender your life in complete obedience to His will (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9). Maybe at one time in your life, you were facing the “Son” but you are no longer facing Him. Perhaps you have taken refuge in the shade of sin. Realize your need to face Him once again. He will give you the power to regain and maintain your beauty as a Christian.

### **Filled with Compassion**

In Luke 7:11-17, the great power of Jesus can be seen as he raises the widow of Nain’s son from the dead. The setting of this story is right on the heels of Jesus healing a centurion’s servant in Capernaum. As he leaves Capernaum and approaches the city of Nain, Jesus encounters a funeral procession at the city gate. The one deceased was the only child of a widow. Jesus spoke to the mother, encouraging her not to weep. He then stops the procession by touching the coffin and commands the young man to arise. One can only imagine the joy that must have filled the heart of that mother and the sheer astonishment that the people around her must have experienced. What was the purpose of this astounding miracle? The motive appears to be in verse 13. This event was an expression of the Compassion of Jesus. Raising this young man from the dead was not the only time Jesus exhibited compassion. It was His compassion that led him to feed the multitudes (Matt. 14:14-21; 15:32), to heal the sick (Matt. 14:14; 20:34; Mk. 1:40-41) and even raise the dead (Lk. 7:11-15). Why was Jesus compassionate? I believe the Psalmist sums it up best when he states, “But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.” (Psa. 86:15). Jesus was compassionate. Second, He was leaving Christians an example to follow (1 Pet. 2:21).

How can this principle be applied to the Christian life? First, compassion should be an attribute in the presence of every Christian (1 Pet. 3:8). Just as Jesus was compassionate, we are to be compassionate. When we fail to practice compassion, we fail to express the love of God (1 Jn. 3:17). Second, compassion must be known. As Jesus approached the city of Nain, He had with Him His disciples and a large crowd of people. There was also a large crowd of people who accompanied the widow of Nain. It was in this setting that Jesus displayed compassion. Indeed, every person especially the mother, walked away convinced that Jesus was compassionate. Such should also be true of every Christian. Though we should avoid practicing compassion for personal exaltation, when people leave our presence, they should know that we are compassionate. Third, an attitude of compassion requires one to have a constant conscientious awareness of the need. While compassion should be a hallmark in the life of every Christian, there are certain times when it is needed the most. For example, in times of death, such as in the story. Other times would be when individuals are experiencing pain (emotional & physical), trials, temptations, and suffering. Just as a doctor knows when to administer the appropriate amount of medication precisely, the Christian should know precisely when to apply the healing ointment of compassion. Fourth, we should consider the results of compassion. Luke informs us that the people glorified God. Is that not the purpose of the Christian life? We are to live in such a way that people glorify God (Matt. 5:16). When we are compassionate, it shows individuals not only who we are as Christians, but most

importantly, it expresses to them what an awesome God we serve. Just as God is full of compassion, let us as Christians be filled with compassion likewise (Psa. 86:15).

## **Finding Favor in The Eyes of The Lord**

In Genesis 6:8, the Bible states, “But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.” The word “favor” in this passage means charm or elegance. To find grace or favor in someone’s eyes means to be an object or recipient of another’s favor, kindness, or mercy. As Christians, our goal in life should be to live every day finding favor in the eyes of the Lord. What can be done to assure ourselves of this great blessing? Consider the character of Noah.

He was a righteous man (Gen. 6:9). One who is righteous is in a right relationship with God. He has done the things necessary to be called righteous by God and he continues to do so (Psa. 119:172). As Christians today, we must strive to be righteous, just like Noah. “Blessed *are* those who keep justice, and he who does righteousness at all times!” (Psa. 106:3) When we live every day seeking righteousness (Matt. 6:33) and allowing our lives to be filled with the fruits of righteousness (Phil. 1:11), we will find ourselves in a right relationship with God and we will find favor in the eyes of the Lord.

He was “perfect in his generations.” (Gen. 6:9). This does not mean that he never violated any of God’s commands. It simply means that he was unblemished or innocent. Noah did not join in with the wickedness by which he was surrounded. He chose to rise above the wickedness and live for God. Christians today must strive for perfection. We live in a world that is filled with darkness or sin (1 Jn. 5:19). Like Noah, we cannot join in with the wickedness that surrounds us.

He “walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). The word walk suggests a movement in a certain direction. Noah was continuously moving in the direction that God would have him to move. This is how he maintained his righteous and blameless attitude. If we wish for God to look favorably upon us today, we too must walk with God. The way that we walk with God is by following in the footsteps of Jesus. The apostle Peter states, “...He left us an example that we should follow in His steps.” (1 Pet. 2:21) “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 Jn. 1:7) When we strive to live our lives in the same manner as Christ, we will find ourselves walking with God and He will look favorably upon us.

Finally, Noah was obedient. Noah didn’t do just some of what God commanded him. He did everything God commanded him. Twice the scriptures say, “Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.” (Gen. 6:22; 7:5). As a result, God looked favorably upon him. If we wish for the same look in life, we too must live our lives in constant obedience. “Though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” (Heb. 5:8-9)

Have you found grace in the eyes of the Lord? Such is not an impossibility. If we will simply be righteous, strive for perfection, walk with God, and live a life of obedience, the Lord will look favorably upon us all.

## **Fulfilling Your Ministry**



In 2 Timothy 4:5, Paul encouraged Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” The word "ministry" refers to service rendered to another. It relates to helping those who are in need, regardless of what that need may be. Ministry is much more than just standing in the pulpit and preaching or teaching a Bible class. Ministry is about service. The one who is served in ministry is King Jesus. He is served Him by seeking to do good to all, especially those who are members of His Kingdom (Gal. 6:10). In Matthew 20:28. The Bible states, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." The word "serve" in this passage means to minister. Jesus left heaven to minister to me. Just as the angels ministered to Jesus following His temptation (Mk. 1:13), when I live my life ministering to others, I am ministering to Jesus (Matt. 25:40).

Ministry involves ministering to those in the body. The Bible states that as we have the opportunity, we must do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). The word “household” refers to those who belong to the immediate family. The family to which Paul was referring is the church (1 Tim. 3:15). In ministering to the believers, one must take into consideration every individual and group within the church (family groups, single parents, widows, widowers, singles, the elderly, teens, and so forth). Ministry to such a degree requires a strategic plan. The first step in developing a strategy is to have a vision, mission, and values statement. This step clarifies why the ministry exists and what it is trying to accomplish. In the words of Solomon, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” (Prov. 29:18). Second, a plan must be developed. The plan maps out the necessary steps to achieve the mission and vision. The plan can be short-term or long-term, but regardless there must be a plan. Third, goals must be developed. Goals are important because they provide direction, clarify job roles, and give something to strive for. Fourth, there must be appraisals. At the end of the year, the leaders of the church must reflect on the work that took place during the year and celebrate the success.

Not only must the congregation minister to the believers, it must also minister to the community in which it resides. Christians have the responsibility of sharing the gospel message of salvation and making disciples (Rom. 1:16; Matt. 28:29-20). Such demands that the church minister to those outside the body of Christ. Jesus ministered to the people. The writer Luke describes Jesus as one who went about doing good (Acts 10:38). He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, fed the hungry, and raised the dead (Matt. 15:30; 21:14; 14:14-21; Lk. 7:11-15). Through His acts of kindness, it opened the door of opportunity to teach those who were lost (Matt 4:23-25). If the church is going to be successful in ministering to those in the community, we must follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We must seek to help those who are in need. We must feed the hungry, help the helpless, and comfort the bereaved.

## **Getting Beyond the Past”**

A reality that we are all aware of is the fact that we often fail God. The Bible teaches that every man is tempted (Jam. 1:14) and with temptation, there will be times when we fail. When we fail God, I suppose one of the most difficult things for us to do is move beyond that point. We often find ourselves with the attitude of David, begging God over and over again to forgive us (Psa. 51). One of the worst things we can do as Christians is to “live” in our past. What we can do to get beyond our past?

**Know that God wants you to get beyond the past.** Listen to the words of the

prophet Isaiah. “Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness *And* rivers in the desert.” (Isa. 43:18-19). God wants us to move forward in life. He wants us to have a new start. Consider the attitude of Paul. “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13-14) What did Paul say? He left the past in the past and moved forward in life. We must follow the same principle. The Christian life is portrayed as a race in which we look forward and we never look back (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Lk. 9:62).

**Recognize your failures.** Some may believe that the recognition of failures may keep one from going forward, but I believe it’s the opposite. If we do not recognize our failures, we may find ourselves like Felix (Acts 24:25) or King Agrippa (Acts 26:28), who believed God’s Word and even trembled at its teachings, but had no desire to improve their lives. We need to be like David (Psa. 51:3), Paul (Rom. 7:14-25), Peter (Matt. 26:75), and many others who recognized their failures and desired to be better.

**Repent of your failures.** Once we recognize our failures, we must be willing to repent of the wrong we have committed toward God. God demands repentance. “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17:31). Repentance involves recognition that we have wronged God (Psa. 51:4), Godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10), retribution if possible (Lk. 19:1-10), and a will to do better (Matt. 26:75; Acts 2:14).

**Know that God will forgive & forget your failures.** God has promised to forgive us when we repent. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 Jn. 1:9; See also Psa. 51:2; Prov. 28:13). God has not only promised to forgive our failures, but He has also promised to forget them. “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” (Heb. 8:12; See also Acts 3:19). Knowing that God will forgive and forget our failures should motivate us to live better lives.

**Ask God to help you move beyond your failures.** God has promised to hear and answer our prayers. “*The righteous* cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD *is* near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.” (Psa. 34:17-18; See also Jn. 14:14; 1 Jn. 5:14). He may not give us exactly what we want, but He will help us move beyond our failures. His grace is sufficient to sustain us through any trial that life has to offer (2 Cor. 12:8-9).

**Live every day beyond your failures.** The Greatest thing about Christianity is the fact that every day we have a fresh new start (2 Cor. 5:17; Isa. 43:19). Have you failed God in the past? Forget about it. Put it behind you. Today is a new opportunity to do better. Today is an opportunity to live letting our lights shine bright for Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:16) Can you think of a better way to improve your past, present, and your future?

We can put the past behind us. It just takes determination. Let’s put the past behind us and live every day like we have never lived before.

## God’s Place for You

When God spoke this world into existence, everything had its place. (Gen. 1, 2) This can be seen from the fact that every time God spoke something into existence, He responded by saying, “It was good,” meaning that everything God created was not only

perfect, but it also had its perfect place. On the sixth day, God created man in his own image (Gen. 1:26-27), placed man in the garden, and gave him two commands. He was to dress and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15), and he was “not” to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). This was man’s place. It was God’s will that man stay in the garden, eat of the tree of life, and live forever. Man, however, did not follow God’s plan. Man ate the fruit that was forbidden and as a result of his disobedience, he was driven from the garden. In essence, because of man’s choice to sin, he left his God-given place in life. (Gen. 3:1-6)

Things haven’t changed much since Adam and Eve, have they? Man is constantly getting away from the purpose and place that God created for him. The world is filled with things that take man farther and farther away from God. The words of the wise man Solomon still echo today. “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.” (Eccl. 7:29). Where is God’s place for you? What is His plan and purpose for you in life?

**To begin with, His place for you is in Christ Jesus.** Why does He want you in Christ? Salvation is in Christ. Paul said, “Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the **salvation which is in Christ Jesus** with eternal glory.” (2 Tim. 2:10). In Christ is the place where I can start over. “Therefore, if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17) The word “creature” in this passage means “creation.” In Christ, it does not matter who I was or what I may have done wrong. All that matters is who I am right now. I am a new creation. How does one get into Christ? One gets into Christ through the process of baptism. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been **baptized into Christ** have put on Christ. (Gal. 3:26-27)

**In the second place, God wants me in the church.** Why does God want me in the church? The church is the place of the saved. Notice, if you will, where God placed the people who were saved on the day of Pentecost. “Praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to **the church** daily such as should be **saved**. Why did God place the saved in the church? Consider Ephesians 5:23. “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body.” The words “church” and “body” are synonymous in scripture. “And he is the head of **the body, the church...**” (Col. 1:18) With that thought in mind, God placed those people who were saved in the church because it is the vessel of salvation. How does one get into the Church? One gets into the church through the same process that one gets into Christ. It is through baptism. “For by one Spirit are we all **baptized into one body**, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:13)

**In the third place, God wants you in faithfulness.** “...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” (Rev 2:10) The word “faithful” in this passage refers to the character of one who can be relied on. Why does God want me in faithfulness? He wants me to hear those beautiful words, “...Well done thou good and faithful servant...” (Matt. 25:21).

What about you? Are you in the place where God wants you to be? Are you in Christ Jesus? Are you in His church, the vessel of salvation? Are you living in faithfulness, striving to do His will daily? When we do these things, not only will we find ourselves in the place where God wants us to be in this life, but someday we will find ourselves in that heavenly city, eating of the tree that gives us eternal life, the future place where God

wants us to be. “Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life and may enter in through the gates into the city.” (Rev. 22:14)

## **God’s Thoughts About You**

Do you ever find yourself thinking about what others may think about you? I’m sure we all do occasionally. It’s good that we are concerned with the fact that others are looking at the lives we live. It helps us to be more Christ-like in our choices. However, it can also be dangerous. If we consume ourselves with what others think about us, instead of helping us, it can weigh us down and keep us from being effective in the kingdom. How do I deal with this challenge?

First, realize that regardless of your efforts or accomplishments in life, there will still be those standing in the shadows who will think badly of you. Consider Christ for a moment. He was the Son of God. He lived His life constantly doing good for others (Acts 10:38). He even gave His life for the sins of mankind and people treated Him like a criminal. On one occasion, Jesus healed a man who was demon-possessed, blind, and mute, and the Pharisees accused Him of healing the man through the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons (Matt. 12:22-24). If people thought badly of Christ, chances are they will occasionally think badly of you, regardless of your efforts.

Second, instead of consuming your thoughts with what others are thinking about you, let your mind be consumed with what God thinks of you. Consider the following passage. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” (Jer. 29:11) God’s thoughts of you are of peace and not evil. Others may have thoughts of evil toward us, but not God. When we are living faithful Christian lives, He only has thoughts of peace concerning us. God thinks so much of you that He has a future planned just for you. Your future is an eternal home in heaven with God someday (Jn. 14:1-4). He’s also given you a hope that will help you endure life until that future is revealed (Heb. 6:19). So, remember, the next time you’re tempted to focus on what others are thinking about you, stop and think about what God thinks of you. After all, those are the thoughts that matter the most.

## **God Will Take Care of You**

“I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.” (Psa. 37:25) Don’t you just love passages of scripture like this one? David was one who regardless of the surrounding circumstances, he was convinced that God was going to take care of him. David wasn’t the only one who was convinced of this truth. The apostle Paul states, “...for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.” (2 Tim 1:12) “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Phil 4:19) Do we have the same kind of faith? Are we convinced that God can take care of us? We should be. God has promised, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matt 6:33) The “things” in this passage refer to the necessities of life. Notice the promise in this passage. If we put God first in our lives, He is going to take care of us! We often sing a song in worship services entitled, “God will take care of you.” Listen to the words of this song. “Be not dismayed whate’er betide, God will take care of you; Beneath His wings of love abide, God will take care of you. God will take care of you. Thro’ every day, o’er all the way; He

will take care of you, God will take care of you.” I have four children who are convinced that I’m going to take care of them. Why? That’s what I’ve always done. In the same way, as God’s people, we should be convinced that God is going to take care of us. Why? We are His children. That’s what He has done from the very beginning. He’s never failed to take care of us, and He never will. So, here’s our challenge today. Regardless of the circumstances, know that God is going to take care of you. If you ever question the ability or desire of God to take care of His children today, just consider the following scripture and realize what He has given in the past. “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32) God will spare no cost in expressing His love for you. He’s going to take care of us!

### **Going the Extra Mile**

A little boy was playing in the mud when the sight of a neatly dressed little girl carrying a bouquet of flowers stirred within him a mischievous spirit. Picking up a handful of mud, he splattered her immaculately white dress and shoes. At first, her face flushed, but then she smiled and tossed a flower from her bouquet in the direction of the little boy. How ashamed he was! His unkind fun had been spoiled by a flower being given in exchange for a handful of mud.

I’m sad to say that we live in a world of wickedness. We live in a world where people mistreat one another, even when others are striving to do good. What is our initial response when such happens? Many are overwhelmed with the attitude of vengeance. When people are mistreated, they immediately begin to think of how they can repay the individual for the ill-treatment that has been bestowed upon them. If I may, let me ask a question. What does vengeance accomplish? It accomplishes absolutely nothing. In fact, in most cases, it only makes the person more bitter than what they already were before they received vengeance. So, how can we avoid vengeance? We need to have the attitude of the little girl in the story. When people hurt us, we need to strive to help them. Imagine how different this world would be if we all tossed flowers in exchange for mud.

I know many would say impossible. There’s no way we can have an attitude of such nature, but we can. Listen to God’s Word. “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Rom. 12:19-21) Listen to the words of Jesus. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Matt. 5:28-38) Let us not practice vengeance, but love.

### **Hanging on the Words of Jesus**

“And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.” (Luke 19:47-48) The phrase “very attentive” in this passage comes from the word *ek-krem'-am-ahee*. This is a compound word (*ek* - from; *krem'amahee* - to hang) which means “to hang from.” It refers to someone who is listening closely to what one is saying. This can also refer to an English equivalent that we often use; “to hang on to the words” of someone. In the context of the passage at hand, the people were “hanging on to the words of Jesus.” Does that describe you? Do we go beyond reading and studying God’s word? Do we hang on to the message as we read it? Can you think of one who can bless your life in the way Christ can? Consider with me how we are blessed when we hang on to the words of Jesus.

The words of Jesus give us eternal life. In John chapter 6, many of the disciples stopped following Jesus because they could not accept His teachings. Jesus turned to His remaining 12 and asked them, “...Will you also go away?” (vs. 67) Listen to the response of Peter. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (vs. 68) What kept Peter from turning away from following Jesus? Peter knew that Jesus could lead them to something that no one else could. Jesus had the words that imparted eternal life. If we wish to have eternal life today, we must follow the example of Peter and hang on to the words of Jesus. None other can give us eternal life.

The words of Jesus guide us. If there is one thing that we all need as we travel through life, it’s guidance. In the words of Jeremiah, the prophet, “O LORD, I know the way of man *is* not in himself; *It is* not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” (Jer. 10:23). “Your word *is* a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.” (Psa. 119:105) Can you think of any other source that can safely guide us through any and every obstacle we may face in life? I certainly can’t, but God’s word has that ability. Therefore, we ought to hang on to the words of Jesus.

The words of Jesus purify. The prophet Jeremiah states, “*Is* not My word like a fire?” says the LORD...” (Jer. 23:29) When we think of fire, we often think about destruction. However, there are several positive purposes of fire. One of which is to purify. Just as fire has the power to purify, God’s word has the power to purify mankind and free Him from sin. Listen to the Psalmist. “How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.” (Psa. 119:9) When I live my life in complete obedience to God’s word, my life is made pure in the eyes of God and kept pure (Psa. 119:11). There is no other message that has the power to free us from sin and keep us free, but the words of Jesus can. Therefore, we ought to hang on to the words of Jesus.

Finally, the words of Jesus give us hope. What is hope? Generally, when the word hope is used, it refers to a wishful thought. The word hope as we see it in the Bible does not refer to a wishful expectation, but a confident one. It refers to something we know is going to happen. The words of Jesus give us hope. Such is why the Psalmist states, “...I hope in Your word.” (Psa. 119:114; See also 130:5) We ought to hang on to the words of Jesus because they give us something that nothing else in this life can give us; Hope!

Do you live your life hanging on to the words of Jesus? If not, why not recognize how the words of Jesus can bless your life and begin living by them today?

## **He Is Able**

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” (Eph 3:20) Don’t you just love that verse?

This is one of the many passages in God's Word that describe His great power. What is the purpose of this passage? This passage is designed to give God's people strength and to remind us that we serve a God who is "ABLE!" I'm reminded of the time when King Nebuchadnezzar threatened to cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace, and they so courageously exclaimed, "Our God is **able** to deliver us." (Dan. 3:17) Do we have the same attitude today? Do we believe that God is Able? God can do far more than we can ever begin to imagine. Consider with me just a few things that God can do.

**He is able to save.** Many do not obey God for fear that He is not able to save them. Consider David for a moment. He was an adulterer, a liar, a murderer, and yet he was forgiven. (Psa. 51) Consider the words of the apostle Paul. "This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." (1 Tim. 1:15) I love the message of the Hebrew writer. "Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." (Heb. 7:25)

**He is able to answer prayers.** The Bible encourages us to have an active prayer life. "Pray without ceasing." (1 Thess. 5:17). Many, however, choose not to pray for fear that God is not able to hear their prayers. The Bible does teach that if an individual harbors sin in his heart God will not hear him (Psa. 66:18), however, the Bible also teaches that God is able to hear and answer the prayers of His faithful children. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." (1 Jn. 5:14-15) In this passage, we are informed that we can be confident that God hears our prayers. Not only does God hear our prayers, but He also responds to them. This is implied by the phrase "He hears us." Hearing implies a response, and God's response to His children is always favorable. It may not be the answer we are looking for, but it will always be that which is best for us.

**He is able to bless our lives.** Every day that we live, we are showered with numerous blessings. Think of the song "Count your many Blessings." Have you ever tried to put this song into practice? I'm sure that time, paper, and ink would expire before we accomplished a task of such depth. What is the source of our blessings in life? GOD!!! The Psalmist said, "Blessed be the Lord, *Who* daily loads us *with benefits*, The God of our salvation!" (Psa. 68:19) Who blesses us? God! How often does He bless us? Daily! How can He bless us every day that we live? It is because He is **ABLE!**

This certainly is not an exhaustive list. There are many other things that God is able to do. Perhaps these thoughts will cause us to realize that the God we serve is a God who is ABLE!

## Help During Temptation

The story was told of a young man who entered the study of a minister one day. This young man had recently obeyed the gospel and had become a Christian. The temptations in this young man's life were almost overwhelming and he told the minister that he just didn't know how much longer he could live the life of a Christian. The minister had a feather pin sitting on his desk and he responded to the young man by saying, "Did you know that this pen can stand on its end?" The young man responded, "No." The minister stood the feather pen on its end and stated, "See, it's standing up." The young Christian responded by saying, "But you're holding it." The minister kindly stated, "But of

course. Did you expect the pen to stand by itself?" "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." (Jam. 1:14) The Bible teaches clearly that temptation is something that we all experience. No one can rise above it. Do you ever feel overwhelmed by temptation? Do you ever get to the point where you don't believe that you can overcome temptation? Maybe that's the problem. We think that temptation is something that we must overcome on our own. Temptation is something that I will never get through on my own. I need help. The good news is we have help. God is there to help us through every temptation that we experience in this life. Just like the minister held up the pen, God will hold us up. "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. 10:13) Here's the challenge for us today. The next time you find yourself overwhelmed by temptation, call upon God. Ask for His strength, His wisdom, His guidance and know that He will carry you through.

### How Deep Is Your Love?

"I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, *who is worthy* to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies. (Psa. 18:1-3) What a beautiful passage of Scripture. As we read the writings of David, it is clear that he had a great love for God. This is just one of many sections of Scripture where David expressed this love. Why did David have such a deep love for God?

The Lord was his Strength. David referred to the Lord being his strength twice in this passage. David meant that the Lord was his energy, his force, and his source of strength in life that enabled him to press on. This strength can also be seen in the phrase "horn of my salvation." Horns are emblems of strength and power. Just as an animal's horns give it strength and power, the Lord gave David strength and power.

David loved the Lord because He was David's protection. There are several words David uses to express the protection of God in this passage. Consider the word "rock." It means high ridge or cliff. This metaphor pictures God as a rocky, relatively inaccessible summit, where one would be able to find protection from enemies. The phrase "my rock" represents a sure, unchanging eternal confidence and support. Consider the word "fortress." It refers to a strongly fortified position that is not susceptible to outside influence or disturbance. There's the word "shield." A shield was a soldier's weapon of defense, used to ward off the blows of enemies, shielding him from arrows or swords. Finally, there is the word "stronghold." This was a fortified place, usually positioned on a rocky eminence beyond the reach of enemies, where one could look down upon their enemies without alarm.

David loved the Lord because He was the one who delivered Him. The word "deliverer" means to bring into security. Not only did the Lord give David strength and protect him, but He also delivered him in times of trouble and allowed him to be brought to a place of safety and security.

Notice if you will the results of David's deep love for the Lord. He determined that the Lord was His God, he trusted in God, he called upon the Lord and he praised Him. We know how much David loved the Lord, but the question is, "How much do you love the Lord?" Do you love Him as deeply as David did? Do you love Him enough to make



Him your God, to trust Him, to call upon and praise Him? What will motivate you to love God to this degree? Know that God extends the same strength, protection, and deliverance to you and me that He offered to David. In the words of Jesus, let us love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Matt. 22:37-38; Mk 12:30).

## **How Do We Keep Our Children Faithful?**

I suppose if there is one wish that all parents share it's the desire that their children become Christians and be faithful. How do we accomplish this great challenge? There are many things that you and I can and must do to keep our children faithful; however, parents need to understand that children must keep themselves faithful. I know that's not what many want to hear. I know that as parents, we would love to be faithful for them, but we can't. Being faithful is a choice that everyone must make (Rev. 2:10). I am faithful to the Lord today because I have chosen to be faithful. No one forced me. The same is true of our children. If they are going to be faithful, they must choose to be faithful. Now, there are some things that we can do to "help" them be faithful. Consider the following with me.

We must teach them the Law of the Lord. After all, it's the law of the Lord that instructs us in the realm of faithfulness. What other source teaches one how to be faithful? If our children are going to be faithful, we must give them instructions as to how they can be faithful. That's why we are admonished, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." (Eph. 6:4) It was the wise man Solomon who said, "Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6) We must teach them to love God's Law which is the Bible (Jn. 17:17). Why should we teach them to love God's Word? Consider the words of the Psalmist. "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." (Psa. 119:97) When we love truth, we will read it, study it, and meditate upon it all day long. As a result, our lives will be blessed beyond measure (Psa. 1:1-5).

We must teach them the value of worship. We are living in an era of time when many young people consider worship to be dull and boring. Many are going off to college and becoming unfaithful in attendance. Could it be that this attitude sprouts from the fact that children are not being taught how important worship is? Consider the words of David. I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD." (Psa. 122:1) Why was David filled with joy when it came time to worship God? He recognized the importance of worship. We must teach our children that worshiping God is one of the greatest blessings we have in life. We must teach our children that God desires them to worship Him (Jn. 4:23-24). We must teach them that when we worship God, it is an expression of our love for Him (Jn. 14:15) and it is a necessity to worship God faithfully (Heb. 10:24-25).

We must teach them to love the Church. Jesus loved the Church so much that He gave His life for it (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25). Why should we teach our children to love the Church? When an individual develops a love for something, then he becomes dedicated to it. When children develop a love for the Church, they likewise will become dedicated to her. They will work in the Church (1 Cor. 15:58) and faithfully serve her all the days of their lives.

We must teach them to put the Lord first in life. How many adults do you know right now who spend every day "working" God into their lives? Such should never be the case. God should come first and everything else should be worked in. I firmly believe that this problem can be solved if we teach our children at a very young age that God "ALWAYS"

comes first in life. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matt. 6:33)

I’m sure there are other things that we can do, but this is a good start. If we take the necessary steps, I believe with all of my heart that we can help keep our children faithful. Let’s determine today that our children are going to be faithful and nothing or no one is going to keep us from that effort.

## How Does God Communicate with Man Today?

Many in our world today believe that God speaks to them audibly and tells them to do certain things. Some believe that God tells them to sell their vehicles, houses, land, and other personal belongings and give them to others. Many denominational preachers believe that God tells them what to say in a message. Regardless of what one may say that God has told them to do, this idea revolves around the subject of communication. The question we want to ask is, “How does God communicate with man today?” Let’s see what the Bible has to say. “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.” (Heb. 1:1-2) This passage teaches that God has always communicated with man. In times past He spoke to man by the prophets. Of course, there were other means by which He communicated with man (dreams, angels, etc.), but that’s not the emphasis of the passage. The focus of this passage is how God communicates with man today. The scripture teaches that in these last days, God has spoken to us by His Son. This is why Jesus could say, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” (Jn. 12:48) The words of Jesus will be those which we will all answer to on the day of Judgment (2 Cor. 5:10). The question is, “Where do we find the words of the Son?” Those words are found in the Bible. “The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” (Jn. 14:26) According to this passage, when the Holy Spirit came, He reminded the apostles of the words of Jesus. That’s why the apostle Paul could say “we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Cor. 2:16) The Holy Spirit gave guidance to the Bible writers to write the words of Jesus. “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were moved* by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Pet. 1:20-21) How do we know that the Holy Spirit reminded the Bible writers to write the words of Jesus? Do you remember the promise of Jesus? He said the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring to remembrance all the things that He had said. Also, consider the words of Paul. “But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 1:10-11) Where did Paul receive His message? It was from the revelation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the words of Jesus are found in the Bible.

Also, consider the fact that the Bible is sufficient. “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17) According to this passage, God’s Word makes us complete and it thoroughly equips us, meaning that with God’s Word in our lives, we don’t need

anything else. Listen to the words of Peter. “As His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” (2 Pet. 1:3) According to this passage, once again, the Bible gives us all that we need. Listen to the words of Jude. “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” (Jude 1:3) Jude said God’s Word had been “once delivered” meaning there are no other additional messages from God. The Bible is God’s only means of communication to man. Those who believe that God has spoken to them outside the Bible are not only claiming that God’s Word is not enough, but they are also contradicting clear Bible teaching. Consider the seriousness of the sin of saying that we have received a message separate and apart from the Word of God. When Paul wrote to those in Galatia, he states, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” (Gal. 1:6-9) According to this passage, if an individual receives a message that can’t be found in God’s Word, or if they receive a message different from God’s Word, they are to be accursed.

According to the Bible, the only way that God communicates with man today is through His Holy and Divine Word, the Bible. Think about it this way. What would we know about God, prayer, heaven, communication, or anything without the Bible? We would know nothing. That proves the point. It’s through the Bible that we learn about God and it’s through the Bible that He communicates to us today.

For some people, the Bible is just not enough. Sometimes people want to believe something so badly that they will reject the revealed truth of the Scriptures and seek a direct response which God will allow them to believe. “The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason, God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thess. 2:9-12)

## **How does God Forgive?**

One of the most beautiful teachings found in God’s Word is the fact that He has promised to always forgive mankind as long as he is willing to turn from sin and live for Him. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 Jn. 1:9) Listen to verse 7. “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 Jn. 1:7) Did you hear that? When we confess our sins, turn from them, and walk in the light as He is in the light, God is “faithful and Just” to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness or sin. How does God forgive?

He remits sin. “Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) The word “remission” refers to the removal of sins. It means letting them go as if they had never been committed. Is that not beautiful? To know

that God has removed every sin and that He will always treat me as if I never committed them. What a blessing!

He blots out the sin. "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." (Acts 3:19). "I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins." Return to Me, for I have redeemed you." (Isa. 44:22) The phrase "blotted out" means to erase, to wipe away, to obliterate. Think about the word obliterate. If something has been obliterated, it has been destroyed beyond the state of recognition. That's the way God forgives our sins.

He remembers the sin no more. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." (Heb. 8:12) Again, what a beautiful thought. When God forgives us, He wipes our sins from His memory.

Finally, He treats us as if we have never sinned. Consider the story of the prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-24). When this son returned home, he treated the son as if he had never wronged him. The father in the passage represents God's attitude towards us when we've been forgiven.

The greatest news that I have to share with you today is the fact that God's forgiveness is still available today. It's available through the blood of God's Son (Rev. 1:3). How do we contact that blood? Through the act of baptism (Acts 22:16). If you have not been baptized and contacted the precious blood of Christ, why not do so today?

## How Does God See You?

How do you see yourself as a Christian? Every day as we look in the mirror, we draw conclusions about ourselves. Do you see yourself as important? Do you see yourself as a success? Do you see yourself as needed? Do you see yourself as a powerful influence in God's Kingdom? Whatever conclusion you may have drawn, consider for a moment how God sees you.

He sees **A Beautiful Loving Bride**. Think of how a husband sees his bride for the first time. Do you have that picture in your mind? That's the way God sees you. The Bible teaches that the church is the bride of Christ (Rom. 7:4). When God sees you, He sees a beautiful bride whom He loves so much (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8).

He sees **His Child**. Consider for a moment a parent when he/she sees his/her child. Think of the love, joy, and compassion that fills the heart of every parent when the thought of their child crosses their mind. The Bible teaches that I am God's child (Gal. 3:26; 2 Cor 6:18; 1 Jn. 3:1). As His children, God has more love, joy, and compassion than we can ever begin to imagine.

He sees **His Image**. Children often resemble their parents. How often do we look at a child and say, "You look just like your mom or dad?" The Bible teaches that man is created in the "image" of God (Gen. 1:26-7). The word "image" means likeness or resemblance. God is described in the Bible as a Spirit (Jn. 4:24). Though we do not resemble God physically, we do resemble Him spiritually. Such is why we are admonished to be holy because God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16).

He sees **His Purchased Possession**. Consider a child. The Bible teaches that a child is "a heritage" or a gift from the Lord (Psa. 127:3). A gift is something that has been purchased and given into the possession of another. Children are the possession of parents. Likewise, Christians are a purchased possession. We are God's children (1 Jn.

3:1) and we belong to God. He purchased us with the very blood of His Son (1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Cor. 6:19; 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

He sees **A New Creature**. Think of a child once again. As a father of four children, I was blessed to be present at the birth of each one of my children. As each one was born, I thought to myself, "What a creation!" I held within my arms a new creation with a fresh start in life to be anything he or she wanted to be. The Bible describes Christians as "new creatures" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The word "creature" means a creation or a created thing. When we become Christians, we have a fresh start in life to be as great as God would have us to be.

He sees **His Family**. Think of the joy that the thought of a family brings your way. Just the mention of the word "family" will bring a smile to almost everyone's face. As Christians, we are God's family (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 2:19-21; Phil. 3:20). God is our Father; Christ is our Brother and we are all His children (Gal. 3:26-27). Our names are written in God's family book called "The Book of Life" (Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23).

Oh, there are many other ways that God sees us, but here's the challenge for you and me today. Let's "live" our lives every day the way God sees us.

### **How does one Contact the Blood of Christ?**

There is not a more crucial subject in the Bible to discuss than that of the importance of the Blood of Christ. It is only by His blood that we have our sins forgiven. Jesus said, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28) It is by the blood of Christ that we are made near to God. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:13) God "loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." (Revelation 1:5) The blood of Christ delivers us from Satan and transfers us into the kingdom or church of Christ. "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13) It is through the blood of Christ that we're sanctified. "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate." (Hebrews 13:12) On and on we could go. The Bible stresses the great importance of Christ's blood.

How is it that God applies the blood of His Son to my life? Some would say that through God's Grace, He just freely bestows upon us the blood of His son, however, there is not one Scripture that teaches this principle. Others say that it is at the point of faith that God applies the blood to the life of the sinner, but again, where's the Biblical passage to prove this position? There is none. How then does God apply the blood of His Son to our lives? "And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed<sup>[a]</sup> us from our sins in His own blood." (Rev. 1:5) This passage teaches that it's the blood of Christ which washes away our sins. No one can successfully argue against this teaching. "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) In this passage, Paul was told to be baptized to have his sins washed away. Wait a minute, someone may say. It's the blood of Christ that washes away our sins. That's exactly right, however, Paul was told that baptism washes away sins. Do you see the connection? It is in the act of baptism that God applies the blood of His Son to our lives and washes away our sins.

Some may conclude, "That's water salvation." No, that's "blood salvation." We are saved by the blood of Christ when we submit to His will and are baptized into Christ Jesus. Anyone who teaches differently teaches a doctrine foreign to the Bible.

## **How To Accomplish the Impossible**

Many things in life appear to be virtually impossible for us to do. Spiritually speaking, there are also times in our lives when we feel like God has asked us to do something impossible. When we are met with such occasions, we may conclude that we cannot do what He wants. How can we get beyond this way of thinking? How can we accomplish the seemingly impossible tasks that God gives us? Consider the text of Matthew 14:13-21.

First, one needs to know God will sometimes give seemingly impossible tasks. Consider when Jesus commanded His disciples to feed the multitude. What made this task an impossibility? The area was a deserted place (vs. 13, 15). The word "deserted" refers to an uninhabited region or locality. Second, it was late (vs. 15). It was the end of the day, which meant the market would have been closed. Third, they only had five loaves and two fish (vs. 17), which was a young boy's lunch (Jn. 6:9). Finally, there were more than 5,000 people present (vs. 21). When these facts are taken into consideration, looking through the eyes of the disciples, it does not take one long to recognize what an impossibility this must have been. Do we ever find ourselves in the same position as the disciples? Occasionally, Christians are presented with commands that seem almost impossible to accomplish. For example, Christians are to express happiness when persecuted (Matt. 5:10-12), have love for enemies (Matt. 5:44-48), have joy in trials (Jam. 1:2), forgive as Christ forgives (Eph. 4:32), and strive to do good to all (Gal. 6:10). In looking that these commands and others of like nature, they may seem almost impossible to accomplish. As Christians, we must know that God is going to present us with such challenging tasks.

Second, one must know that objection is a natural reaction. When one is presented with what seems to be impossible, our natural reaction is to object. This is exactly what the disciples did. When Jesus told them to feed the people, they replied, "We have here only five loaves and two fish" (vs. 17). They were saying, "We cannot do this!" We do the same thing today. "How can I love my enemy, have joy in trials, forgive like Jesus, and do good to all?" Such is impossible. How do we get beyond this reaction?

First, we must realize that things only seem impossible for us because we have not found the solution yet. God created man to succeed, to win, to be victorious (Rom. 8:37; 2 Cor. 2:14; Phil 4:13). God did not create us to fail. Things that are impossible with men are possible with God (Lk. 18:27). We need to keep looking for the solution to our difficulties.

Second, we must make our resources available to Jesus. This is what the disciples did (vs. 17-18). In like manner, when we find ourselves facing a difficult task, we must take our available resources and give them to Jesus. What resources do we have available? We have God's grace which is sufficient to help us overcome any obstacle in life (2 Cor. 12:9). We have faith which is capable of moving mountains (Matt. 21:21). We have the avenue of prayer (Matt. 7:7; 1 Jn. 5:14-15), which is an availing power (Jam. 5:16). What happens when we give our resources to Jesus? He will expand our resources. In this story, Jesus took two fish and five loaves and turned it into enough food to feed over 5,000 people. Not only did they all eat, but they were all satisfied (vs. 20).

They also had an abundance. The disciples took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained (vs. 20). What can we learn from this? When we give our resources to Jesus, He will expand those resources until they are more than sufficient for the task, he has given us. God has promised to give us what we need (Phil. 4:19; Isa. 40:29-31), but He is also able to give more than what we need (Eph. 3:20). God will always keep His promises (2 Pet. 3:9).

Have You been met with the seemingly impossible? Remember the words of the apostle Paul. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:13) So Things that seem impossible only mean you haven't found the solution yet.

## **How To Handle Rejection in Personal Evangelism"**

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen. (Matt. 28:19-20) 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 Tim. 2:2). These two passages of scripture make it clear that the mission of the Christian is to take the gospel into the world. What a blessing it is to teach someone the gospel, to hear them say yes, and watch them obey. Sadly, many do not say yes. Many reject the message that is taught. If there is one thing that keeps Christians from being evangelistic, it's rejection. It stops many of us cold in our tracks. How do we handle rejection in personal evangelism?

**First, we must understand our mission.** Our mission is to teach. Once we teach, it's up to the individual to respond to the message. Too often we don't think this way. We think that everyone who hears the message is going to respond favorably and that's not always true. So, if we could just focus on our mission, which is to teach, perhaps it would help us to better handle rejection.

**Second, know that people are going to reject the message.** "Consider the prophets. Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending *them*. Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers. "Therefore, you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not obey you. You shall also call to them, but they will not answer you. (Jer. 7:25-27). Notice that God told Jeremiah that the people were going to reject the message. Things are no different for us today. I need to know that people are going to reject the message today. Just consider the parable of the Sower. Only one out of four was recognized as good ground (Matt. 13:3-23).

**Third, don't take rejection personally.** This is probably one of our greatest struggles in evangelism. When we take the time to present the message and rejection takes place, we think that we are being rejected. Such is not the case. Consider the following passage. "Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them." (1 Sam. 8:4-7) When the people decided that they didn't want Samuel or his sons to rule

over them anymore, Samuel took it personally. God however revealed to Samuel that the people had not rejected him, but rather they had rejected God. When it comes to personal evangelism, every Christian needs to understand this principle. When people reject, they are rejecting God and His message. Jesus states, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." (Jn. 12:48) Consider the words of Paul. "Therefore, he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit." (1 Thess. 4:8) According to these two passages, when people reject, they're not rejecting us personally. They're rejecting God's message. "He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. (Mk. 7:9). If we were promoting our own message, then a feeling of personal rejection may be understandable, but we're not. We're promoting the only message that has the power to save their souls. It's the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16)

Brothers and sisters, rejection is going to take place. Regardless of the rejection, what we must do is just keep on keeping on in sharing the message of Christ with others. Don't ever quit!

## **How to Identify the New Testament church (Part 1)** **It is not a Denomination.**

How do we identify things in this life, whether it is a person, a place, or a thing? Don't we identify things by marks of identity, or characteristics? If you had never met me before, someone could describe me, and you would pretty much know me when I walked through the door. With those thoughts in mind, consider the church. The Bible teaches there is only one church. Christ Promised to Build "His" Church. "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt 16:18). In this passage, Christ did not promise, to build "a" church or "one" of my churches. Christ promised "I will build 'my' church," in the singular sense. The Bible teaches there is only one true New Testament church. There is only one body. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Rom. 12:4-5). "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1 Cor 12:12). "But now are they many members, yet but one body" (1 Cor 12:20). The Bible also teaches that the "body" is the "church." "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col 1:18). Since the body is the church and there is only one body, the logical, and Biblical explanation is, there is only one church. How do you know which one is the right one? In the yellow pages that I have on my desk, there are 7 ½ pages of church listings. Consider the News Paper. It is filled with churches that all claim to be the church of the Bible. Are all of these churches the right one? Not according to the Bible. How then can one tell which one is the right one? We must look for marks of identity or certain characteristics. Consider with me one of those identified characteristics of the New Testament Church.

To begin with, the New Testament church is "not" a denomination. Many who are religiously affiliated are happy to admit that they are members of a denominational church. What Is Denominationalism? The word denomination is defined as a religious body with a distinct name and doctrine which separates it from other religious bodies. It does not



claim to be the church as a whole but only a part of it, or a section of the body of Christ. The New Testament church is "NOT" a denomination. It is the true church, the whole body of the saved, the original church revealed in the Bible long before denominations came into being. It is also important to know that denominationalism is sinful. The word denomination comes from the word "denominator" which means "division." Division is a direct violation of God's Word. It is God's desire that man be unified. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psa. 133:1). The plea of Jesus before His death was a plea for unity. "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (Jn. 17:20-21). The apostle Paul pleaded for unity. Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10). The most interesting thing concerning this passage is not only does Paul make a plea for unity, but he also informs his readers of the process that brings about unity. We must all speak the same thing! How is this possible? We must all follow the teachings found in God's Word. As one can see from the above-mentioned passages, denominationalism is a clear violation of scripture and a violation of the very last plea of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The New Testament cannot and must not be identified as a denomination among the denominations, because denominationalism is sinful. In part two of "How to identify the New Testament church," we will discuss the fact that the New Testament church was established by Christ.

## **How To Identify the New Testament Church (Part 2)** **It has a Scriptural Builder**

Every religious group that exists in the world today was established by some man. For example, the Lutheran church began around 1530 by a man named Martin Luther. The Presbyterian Church had its beginning in the early 1600s. It was established by John Calvin and John Knox. The Methodist church was established in 1739 by John Wesley. The Baptist church was established in 1607 by John Smythe and Thomas Helwys. Roger Williams was responsible for establishing the very first Baptist church in America in 1639. The Seventh Day Adventist church was established in 1863 by William Miller and Ellen White. The Mormon church was established in 1830 by Joseph Smith. There are many others that we could name, but the fact that a religious body exists is proof that it was founded by someone. There are many religious bodies in the world today, which have different names, doctrines, and practices. Each one was either scripturally or unscripturally founded by either the divine or a human builder. It is important to know whether the establishment of a church is scriptural or unscriptural. If a church was founded by an unscriptural builder, that church must be unscriptural, and I cannot be a part of it and be right with God. Why? It is the work of man and not of Christ. The Psalmist said, "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalms 127:1). One of the identifying characteristics of the New Testament church is that it was established or built by Christ. The prophet Daniel spoke of a kingdom that would never be destroyed (Dan 2:44). Every kingdom that is established bears the possibility of falling. The kingdom that Daniel spoke of would never fall. What would be different about this kingdom from other kingdoms? What would give it the strength to stand forever? It would be built by Christ. As Jesus was with his apostles, he promised to build his church. "And

I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (Matt. 16:18-19). When examining this passage, the first thing that needs to be understood is the fact that the church and the kingdom are the same. Though they are different words, they are interchangeable words. When Jesus was speaking of his church, he was speaking of his kingdom and vice versa. In the second place, not only does Christ promise to build his church, but he also states that He would give Peter the keys to his church/kingdom. What are the keys? Keys are a means of entrance. Therefore, Jesus promised Peter that he would be the one who would tell the people what they must do to enter the kingdom. As the book of Luke closes, Jesus is once again with his apostles and the church has not yet been established. He instructs them to wait in the city of Jerusalem until they have received the power from on high (Lk. 24:46-49). In Acts 2, the apostles are in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and they are all filled with the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). Peter and the other eleven apostles stand up and begin to preach the gospel of Christ to the people who are present (vs. 14-36). When the people heard the message, they asked Peter and the other apostles, “what shall we do?” (vs. 37) Peter responds by saying, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 2:38) In this passage, Peter and the other apostles used the keys that had been given to them by the Lord and opened the passageway into the kingdom/church. In Acts 2:47 the Bible states, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” Up until this point, the church/kingdom has been spoken of as something that would be established in the future (Mk 9:1; Lk 24:46-49; Acts 1:5-8). From this point on, it is spoken of as something already in existence (Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:22, 26; I Cor. 1:2; Col. 1:13-14). In Acts 11:15, Peter stated that the Holy Ghost fell on the Gentiles as on the Jews in the “beginning.” What was Peter referring to when he used the word beginning? It was the beginning of the church. Therefore, the church that Jesus promised to build was established in Acts 2, in the city of Jerusalem, which would have been around AD 33. Not only did Jesus build his church, but he is also the foundation of it. A building or institution cannot be stronger than the foundation on which it rests. If a house does not have a good solid foundation, it will not stand long. Likewise, if a church does not have the proper foundation, it will not stand. Jesus is described as the “foundation” of the church. The apostle Paul states, “For other foundation can no man lay that that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Cor. 3:11) The Bible refers to Christ as the “chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20). The chief corner stone was the perfectly cut rock that determined every characteristic about the building. Jesus is not only the founder/establisher of the church, but he also determines every characteristic of the church (Doctrine, worship, etc.). Dear friend, is Jesus the builder of the church you are a part of, or was it established by some man? Is Christ the foundation of the church you are a part of? Are the things which are taught and practiced found in the pages of the New Testament? Make sure that the church you are a part of has its founder and foundation as Christ.

### **How to Identify the New Testament Church (Part 3)** **By the name it wears**

If you were trying to help someone identify another person whom he/she had never met before or someone whom he/she had met but did not know, how would you go about doing that? You would probably begin by giving them a common description which would include the color of their hair & eyes, their height, weight, and whether they wore glasses. Then again, the best way to identify a person is by his or her name. You certainly can't go wrong there. The same principle can be applied when it comes to the church. Since there are so many different churches in the world today, one way of identifying the one New Testament church is by the name it wears.

Consider first that the name is important. Some would say that the name doesn't matter, but the Bible teaches otherwise. When God created the first man and woman, He named them (Gen. 5:1-2; 3:20). Not only did He name them, but the name that He gave them is of great importance. The name Adam is defined as the first man (1 Cor. 15:45). The name Eve is defined as life or living; the first woman (Gen. 3:20). If the name is not important, why did God name man? Throughout Biblical history, God has changed the names of certain individuals. Take for example the name "Abram" which means exalted father. God changed "Abram's" name to "Abraham" which means father of many nations (Gen. 17:5). The name "Sarai" means princess. God changed "Sarai's" name to "Sarah" which means mother of many nations (Gen. 17:15). Consider also "Jacob," which means supplanter or one who overthrows by tripping. God changed his name to "Israel," which means one who fights victoriously with God (Gen. 32:27-38). To say the name of the church is not important is to reflect upon the wisdom of God and accuse Him of doing foolish and useless acts.

If the name is not important, why does the Bible condemn human names? As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he was thankful that he had baptized no one except Crispus and Gaius. Paul was not underestimating the importance of baptism. He didn't want people calling themselves after his name (1 Cor. 1:10-15). If there is nothing in a name, why does the Bible condemn human names?

It's also important to recognize the fact that there is great meaning in a name. People often name their children after different Bible characters (James, John, Peter, Paul, Joshua, etc.). If there is nothing in a name, why not name children after other names found in the Bible (Satan, Lucifer, Jezebel, etc.)? Would anyone call a good honest American "Judas," or "traitor?" Why not call a truthful man a "liar," or call a good citizen a "criminal?" Such actions are not practiced because we recognize the fact that there is great meaning in a name.

Why is the name so important? To begin with, the Bible teaches that Christ built only one church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4; 1:21-22; Col. 1:18); however, the world is filled with churches with different names. How can one possibly identify the one true church that Jesus promised to build? The one church that we read about in the Bible can be distinguished from the others by its name. In the second place, the name is important because we want to follow the Bible. The apostle Peter said, "If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever" (1 Pet. 4:11). We understand that we must follow the Bible when it comes to worship (Jn. 4:24), the plan of salvation (Heb. 5:8-9), the organization of the church, etc. We must also follow the Bible when it comes to the name! In the third place, the name is important because of the one the church is married to (Christ). God has always referred to His people as His bride. God was married to physical Israel (Jer. 3:14). Today, He is married to the church "Wherefore, my brethren,

ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, *even* to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God "(Rom. 7:4). When a bride gets married, whose name does she wear? She wears her husband's name. If the church is the bride of Christ, what name should it wear? She should wear her husband's name! (Christ) In the fourth place, the name is important because of the one who purchased the church. Christ purchased the church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25; 1 Cor. 6:19-20). The purchasing power was His blood. If Christ purchased the church and it belongs to Him, shouldn't the church wear His name? In the fifth place, the name is important because the name Christ is the only name where salvation is found. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). According to this passage, the only name that carries salvation is the name of Jesus. Shouldn't the church wear the name of Jesus? In the sixth place, the name is important because we must have authority for the name we wear. We must have authority for the things that we do in the Christian life (Col. 3:17; Acts 4:1-10). We must also have authority for the name the church wears.

What name did the New Testament church wear? It was identified as "the church" (Acts 8:1), "the church of God" (I Cor. 1:2), "the churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), "the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12), "the church of the living God" (I Tim. 3:15), and "the church of the Firstborn" (Heb. 12:23). Many who claim to be religious, wear names which are foreign to the Bible. Is this not a dishonor to God, Christ, and the Bible? If we wish to identify the New Testament church, then we must search for one that bears a Biblical name and brings honor to Christ.

## **How To Identify the New Testament Church (Part 4) By the Names the Member's Wear**

In our last discussion concerning the identification of the New Testament church, we discussed the importance of the name of the church. In this discussion, we want to consider the importance of the names that the members wore. To begin with, the preacher should wear a Biblical name. Consider some of the names that are worn by many who would identify themselves as ministers of the gospel. There is the title "reverend." The word reverend is found only one time in the English translation of the Bible. "He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant forever: holy and reverend is his name" (Psa. 111:9). The word "reverend" means to be feared or to tremble at. As used by the Psalmist, it refers to someone who is to be held in awe, or to be worshiped. The Bible is clear that man cannot be worshiped (Acts 10:25-26). God, however, can be worshiped and is worthy of our worship (Jn. 4:24; Rev. 19:10). There is not one example in the Bible of a respected minister who referred to himself as a reverend. One never reads of "Reverend Paul, "Reverend James," or "Reverend Peter." They referred to themselves as servants of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1; Jam. 1:1; II Pet. 1:1). Preachers should not and must not be referred to as "Reverend." There is the title "pastor." Though many ministers refer to themselves as a pastor, the Bible places a very clear distinction between the word pastor and preacher, implying that they are two different works. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11). The term "pastor" comes from a Greek word which means shepherd. The Bible teaches that "elders" are pastors. Consider the resemblance of their work. In Jeremiah 23:1-2, the "pastors" were given the responsibility to take care of the "sheep" or "flock." In Acts 20:17, 28, the "elders" were given the same responsibility. Such

reasoning reveals that the titles “elders” and “pastors” are referring to the same class of individuals. The minister or evangelist of the church is not a pastor unless he has been appointed to the office of an elder. Then there is the title “father.” The audacity of a mere man wearing the name “father” is indeed repulsive. Jesus himself clearly warned, “And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven” (Matt. 23:9). According to the Bible a preacher is identified as a minister, a preacher, or an evangelist (Eph. 4:11). The only other permissible name that he could wear would be elder or pastor, if and only if, he is qualified, and he has been appointed to that office. Not only is the name of the minister an important identifying characteristic, but the names also that Christians wore in the first century, are likewise important. How were they identified? They were called “disciples” (Acts 20:7), “saints” (I Cor. 1:2), “Beloved of God” (Rom. 1:7), “brethren” (I Cor. 15:6), “Sons of God” (Rom. 8:14), “children of God” (I Jn. 3:1), “heirs of God” (Rom. 8:17), “royal priesthood” or “priest” (I Pet. 2:9), and finally, they were called “Christians” (Acts 11:26). These are the names Christians wore to identify themselves as members of the New Testament church. Notice if you will, that one will not find an example in the pages of God’s where there was a hyphenated Christian (Christian-Baptist, Christian-Methodist, Christian-Episcopalian, Christian-Presbyterian, Christian-Lutheran, Christian-Pentecostal, etc.) While these thoughts may seem fruitless to many, they are of utmost importance when it comes to identifying the New Testament church. In the words of the apostle Peter, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 4:11).

### **How To Identify the New Testament Church (Part 5) It Gives a Scriptural Answer to the Question What Must I do to be Saved?**

This week in our discussion of how to identify the New Testament Church the identifying mark that I would like for us to consider is the fact that it gives a complete scriptural answer to the question, “What must I do to be saved?” If you were to randomly call the religious groups in our area and ask them, “What must I do to be saved?” you would get several different answers. Some would say you are saved by God’s grace and there’s nothing you need to do to be saved. Others would say that you are saved by faith and faith alone. The moment you believe, you are saved. Others may say that you’re saved by repentance and faith. Regardless of the answer we receive, we should always ask ourselves the question, “What does the Bible teach?”

The Bible teaches that God wants all to be saved. “Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim. 2:4) When it comes to salvation, there are two sides. There’s God’s side and man’s side. God’s side is Grace. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God.” (Eph. 2:8) What about man’s side? Is there anything that God requires of mankind for salvation to occur? Listen to the Bible. Man must be obedient. “Though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” (Heb. 5:8-9) According to this passage, man’s salvation hinges upon his obedience. What is involved in obedience? We must hear God’s Word. “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing

by the word of God.” (Rom. 10:17) We must believe that Christ is the Son of God. “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins.” (Jn. 3:16) We must repent of our sins. “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17:30) We must confess our faith in Christ as the Son of God. “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 10:32) We must be baptized for the remission of sins. “Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) At this point, the Bible teaches that God adds an individual to the Church, the body of those who are saved (Acts 2:47)

Friend, if you are a member of a Church that does not teach the plan that was just revealed from God’s Word, you’re in the wrong Church. I plead with you that you will search out the Church that teaches the full complete plan that is found in God’s Word.

## **How To Identify the New Testament Church (Part 6)** **The Bible is its Only Creed**

This week in our discussion of how to identify the New Testament Church the identifying mark that I would like for us to consider is the fact that the Bible is its only creed, manual, or rule book. Almost every religious group has a church manual. On the shelves in my office right now, I have numerous copies of church manuals that express the beliefs, practices, and rules of many denominational churches. Sadly, most members of those denominational groups are not aware of those books which delegate what the beliefs of the congregation are. The Church of the Bible has only one creed book or manual. It is the Bible. Why must the Bible be our only creed book?

First, the Bible is the inspired word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The men who wrote the Bible were under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Creed books are not inspired by God. They are composed of men.

The Bible contains all that man needs to live righteously (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). If the Bible contains all we need, then we certainly do not need a creed book or manual to govern our spiritual decisions. One cannot live righteously by following a human creed.

The Bible is not subject to change. According to the Bible. God's word has been "once" delivered (Jude 3). God repeatedly warns against changing His Word. (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19) and those who change God's word are to be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9). Human creeds are revised and updated every few years.

Man will be judged by the Bible (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12; Jn. 12:48). On the day of Judgment, God will not ask, “What denomination were you a member of, reach back and pick up that manual and then judge you by what it states. All men will be judged by the Bible and the Bible alone.

Human creeds cause division. God wants unity (Psa. 133:1; Jn. 17:20-21; I Cor. 1:10). "ALL" human creeds have different teachings, thus causing division.

Friend, once again, if you are a member of a Church that is governed by a manual or creed book, please know that you are not a member of the Church you read about in the Bible. Please search the Scriptures and become a member of the Church that has the Bible as its only guide. In the words of the Psalmist, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psa. 119:105)

## Humility

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.” (Jam. 4:10) Notice if you will that the subject emphasized in this passage is humility. The apostle Peter has a very similar plea in his letter. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” (1 Pet. 5:6) The word “humble” is a word which can be found throughout the Bible. It’s a word found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It’s also clear that God expects His people to practice humility in the lives they live. What does the word humble mean? It means to make low; to have a modest opinion of oneself. Sometimes the Bible is its very own best dictionary. “Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child. Let Israel hope in the LORD from henceforth and forever.” (Psa. 131:1-3) The word “haughty” means to be proud or exalted. The Psalmist said that his heart or mind is not exalted. Neither are his eyes. He goes on to say, “neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.” In other words, he recognized his position in life. Notice the last part of the passage. Picture if you will a mother carrying a child. That child is submissive to its mother. He is dependent on her. He recognizes everything that he is, has and hopes to be is dependent on that mother. Now, transition everything that we have just said toward God. If we are going to practice humility, we must never have a proud attitude of ourselves. We must recognize our position in life and we must be submissive and completely dependent on God, realizing that with Him we are everything and without Him, we are nothing.

Why should we be humble? First of all, because we are commanded (Jam. 4:10). Second, to obtain salvation. Consider the story of the Pharisee and the Publican. The Pharisee mentioned the word “I” 5 times in two verses. What was his problem? He had no humility. The Publican was filled with humility (vs 13). Which of the two men were justified or saved? “And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (Lk. 18:13-14) Dear friend, will you humble yourself under the almighty hand of God and obey Him so that He can save you?

## I Believe, Therefore I Speak

In 2 Corinthians 3:13, the Bible states, “And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, I believed and therefore I spoke, we also believe and therefore speak.” The principle that is being expressed in this passage is the need to believe the written message and teach it to others. While many read and study the Bible daily, few share the message with others. Consider some Biblical principles that we should spread near and far.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). The word “inspired” means “God breathed.” According second Peter, the Bible writers were moved by God to speak and write the Scriptures. Therefore, the Bible is God’s message to man today. Since the scriptures are inspired by God, they are sufficient. They complete man, giving him everything he needs to please God. (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). The Bible not

only completes man, but it is also our complete authority in religion today (Jn. 4:24; Col. 3:17; 1 Pet. 4:11).

There is only "one" church of the New Testament. Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). The establishment of this church can be seen in Acts 2:1-47. This is the first time in the New Testament that the church that Jesus promised to build was spoken of as being in existence. From this point on throughout the New Testament, the Bible teaches that there is only one body (Romans 12:4-5; I Corinthians 12:12, 20; Ephesians 4:4; Colossians 3:15). The body is identified as the church (Colossians 1:18). Since the body is the church and there is only one body, the logical explanation is, there is only one church. That church is identified in the scriptures as the "Church of Christ" (Romans 16:16).

Worship must be based upon New Testament doctrine. It should consist of preaching and teaching God's Word (Mark 16:15; Acts 20:7; 2 Timothy 4:2), prayer (Acts 2:42; 12:5), singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:7), and observance of the Lord's Supper upon the first day of every week (1 Corinthians 11:25; Matthew 26:17, 26-29; Acts 20:7; Exodus 20:8). The singing is to be strictly acapella without the accompaniment of mechanical instruments of music (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

There is a Biblical pattern for church organization. According to the Scriptures, each congregation is to consist of elders (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5), deacons (Phil. 1:1), preacher(s) (Eph. 4:11), and members (Phil. 1:1). Only men can serve in leadership positions such as elders, deacons and preachers (1 Tim. 3:1-13; 1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-12). Each congregation is autonomous. The preacher is not a pastor (unless he is serving as an elder), but rather he is a minister or an evangelist who serves under the oversight of the elders (Acts 20:17, 28; Heb. 13:7, 17).

God has a plan for saving man. God's plan requires faith in Jesus Christ (John 8:24) repentance of sins (Luke 13:3), confessing Christ before men (Matthew 10:32), and being buried with the Lord in baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:26-27). It is at the point of baptism that one is saved (Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21; Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5) and is added to the New Testament church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 5:23). One must then strive to live a faithful life to the Lord (Rev. 2:10) by walking in the light as He is in the light (1 Jn. 1:7).

This is not an exhaustive list. There are many other Biblical principles that Bible believers must stand upon and speak to please God. Regardless of what the Bible teaches, let us determine that we believe and therefore we will speak.

## **I Never Intended to Quit!**

Brother Gus Nichols told the story of a man who had not attended one service of the church in four years. This man told him that he had never thought of "quitting" the church. Brother Nichols reminded him that he had: Withdrawn his presence from the worship services, failed to sing and pray with fellow Christians, to partake of the Lord's memorial supper and the fellowship of the saints, and refused to give his moral support to the activities of the congregation, and withdrawn his financial support, for he had not given one dime to help carry on the Lord's work. Then he asked, "What else would you have to do in order to 'quit' the church? In case you ever decide that you no longer desire to be a member, what other steps will be necessary to 'quit' the church?" As the true status dawned on the brother, his expression reflected his sober thoughts. He replied,



"Why, Brother Nichols, I have quit already, haven't I? Well, I surely didn't mean to! And I don't know when I did it...but I've quit the Lord and His church! I'll tell you right now...I'm coming back." He did, too. At the next service, he was restored and three years later, he was still faithful.

How many in the church today find themselves in the same position as this good brother? No one ever purposefully plans to quit the church. Steps are involved. Sin has a progressive nature about itself. "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers." (Psa. 1:1) Notice the progression of sin in this passage. One is walking, then he begins to stand and before you know it, he finds himself caught up in the depths of sin. The same is true of those who quit the church today. They begin by not giving their time and effort to church. Second, they stop being the Christian examples God needs them to be. Third, they distance themselves from any kind of fellowship activities that the church promotes. Fourth, they stop giving of their means like they should. Fourth, they stop attending the services of the church. In this step, it's not the fact that they just altogether stop attending one day. It's a gradual process. They start by missing Wednesday night Bible study. They justify this absence by thinking that it's the middle of the week, they have work, and the kids have school the next day. The Wednesday night absence leads to an absence from Sunday morning Bible study. The Sunday morning absence leads to Sunday evening absence and before you know it, they stop attending Sunday morning worship and have completely quit the church. This is not something that they intended to do. It's not something they planned out. It just happened. Dear reader: do you find yourself in this position? Have you quit the Lord and His church without intending to do so, or are you on the pathway of quitting? If so, recognize your position and be restored today. Don't wait another moment. Make things right with God now! "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25)

### **Important & With Purpose**

The world is filled with people who live every day feeling as if they are "NOT" important. Because of this prevalent attitude in our society, many continually question their existence and wonder what their place and purpose is in life. If you have ever found yourself in this position, please consider the following passage with me. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10) The first thing that you should notice from this passage is that you are important. How do I know that? The Bible states that you are God's "workmanship." This word refers to a work of art or a masterpiece. You are God's masterpiece. You're God's special, unique, perfect creation. You have been created in the very image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Such is why the Psalmist would exclaim, "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well." (Psalm 139:14) Therefore, you exist today because God chose to make you a part of this world. Second, God desires that you be in Christ Jesus. The most interesting thing about being in Christ Jesus is the fact that this is a place where we all fit in. It doesn't matter who you are, where you're from, what your qualifications are, what gifts or abilities you may or may not have, or even how bad your past may be. In Christ Jesus, you have redemption (deliverance) and forgiveness of all of your sins. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph.

1:7) The way we get into Christ is through faith and baptism. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:26-27; See also Rom. 6:3-4). Third, what is your purpose in life? Look at the next part of the passage. You were created for good works that you should walk or live in them. God created you so you could carry on His work. Is that not awesome? The creator and sustainer of the world and universe created me to carry on His work! Such is why we are commanded, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matt. 5:16) It's through our acts of kindness that God is glorified. So, are you important? Certainly, you are! Where is your place? It's in Christ Jesus. Why are you here? You are here because God created you. What is your purpose? Your purpose in life is to live every day doing good for others. Are you in Christ Jesus where you can fulfill your purpose in life?

### **Is Being Religious Enough?**

Statistics say that 8 out of 10 people in the world are religious. That's about 84% of the population. That percentage includes Christianity, Islam, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. Many believe that it doesn't matter what you believe religiously. Pleasing God and being saved only demands that one be religious. Can this conclusion be supported by biblical truths?

Let's begin by examining some individuals in the Bible who were religious. Consider the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-22). This man was interested in eternal life, and he had kept the Ten Commandments from his youth up. He was a very religious person, however, simply being religious didn't save him. Consider the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40). This man had traveled some 400-500 miles to Jerusalem to worship. As he returned home, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah. Again, the Bible describes a very religious man, however, simply being religious didn't save him. Finally, consider Cornelius (Acts 10:1-6; 11:14). The Bible describes Cornelius as "A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:2). Again the Bible describes a very religious man, however simply being religious didn't save him. What do these men have in common? They were all religious men, but they were religiously wrong. What conclusion can be drawn? Simply being religious doesn't make one right with God. One must be religiously right. This can be seen by examining the word religion. The word religion is defined as the reverential worship of God and is found only four times in the Bible. In Acts 26:5 Paul refers to the false religion of the Pharisees. In Colossians 2:18, the Bible speaks of the false religion of angel worship, and in James 1:26, the Bible speaks of vain or empty religion. Only once is the word religion spoken of in a positive sense. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jam. 1:27). This passage indicates that the only kind of religion that is accepted by God is pure and undefiled religion. What is pure and undefiled religion? The word "pure" means clean, free from sin and guilt, free from anything false or insincere. The word "undefiled" means not defiled, unstained, or unspotted. Solomon said, "Every word of God is pure" (Prov. 30:5). The Psalmist said, "Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it" (Psa. 119:140). Jesus said, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (Jn. 15:3). Peter states, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth" (1 Pet. 1:23). According to the Bible, pure and undefiled religion is attained by being obedient to God's Word. When one

obeys the word of God (Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 5:8-9) through faith (Heb. 11:6), repentance (Acts 17:30), confession (Matt. 10:32-33), and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), the Lord adds that person to His glorious Church (Acts 2:38, 47) and his religion becomes acceptable to God.

### **Is Eating Pork Sinful?**

This question may arise from reading the Old Testament because it was wrong for the Jews under the Law of Moses to eat pork. In Leviticus 11, God gave the Israelites a list of animals that were permissible to eat, but the text specifically labels swine or pork as unclean and forbidden. "And the swine, though it divides the hoof, having cloven hooves, yet does not chew the cud, *is unclean to you.*" (Lev. 11:7) Because of this teaching, some religious groups have concluded that since the eating of pork was forbidden under the Old Testament, then it is forbidden today. What does the Bible teach?

"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." (Col. 2:14) What is being referred to in this passage? It's the Old Law which the Jews lived by. Paul said that at the death of Christ, the Old Law was taken away and nailed to the cross. In other words, Christians do not live by the Old Law today. The Hebrew writer would confirm this teaching. "In that He says, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." (Heb. 8:13) As a result, the rules and regulations about clean and unclean animals do not apply today.

Evidence that the food laws have been abolished can be seen in Acts 10. In this chapter, Peter has a vision in which all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth (Acts 10:12). That would have included swine. God speaks to Peter and says, "Rise, Peter: Kill and eat." (Acts 10:13). Peter responds as a typical Jew would. "Not so Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." (Acts 10:14) Listen to what God states in verse 15. "What God has cleansed you must not call common." This passage teaches that the food regulations have been altered.

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God *is good*, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." (1 Tim. 4:1) This passage teaches that the food laws and regulations of the Old Testament do not apply today.

### **Is Man Justified by Faith Only?**

The word "justified" is a word found several times in the pages of the New Testament. It comes from the word (dik-ah-yo'-o) which means to render one righteous. The word "righteous" refers to the condition acceptable to God. Therefore, when the Bible speaks of an individual being justified, it's referring to an individual who is accepted by God. What is it that makes one accepted by God? Many in the religious world preach and teach that one is accepted by God at the point of faith. A proof text that is so often used is Romans 5:1. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This passage teaches that one is justified by faith. As students of the Bible, we have the responsibility of declaring the whole counsel of God when we teach (Acts 20:27) When one teaches that an individual is justified by faith only,

has he declared the whole counsel of God? Listen to the Bible. “You see then that a man is justified by works, and **not by faith only.**” (Jam. 2:24) Without a doubt, this passage destroys the justification by faith-only doctrine. How then is a man justified? Consider with me what the “whole counsel of God” has to say about being justified.

The Bible teaches that man is justified by **God’s grace.** “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Rom. 3:24) Man is justified in or by **the name of Christ.** “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” (1 Cor. 6:11) Man is justified by **the blood of Christ.** “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” (Rom. 5:9). Man is justified by **faith.** “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 5:1) Man is justified by **his words.** “For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matt. 12:37). Man is justified by **humility.** “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Lk. 18:14). The **doers of the law** are justified. “For not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.” (Rom. 2:13). Man is justified by **works.** “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” “Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way?” (Jam. 2:21, 24, 25).

What is the conclusion of the matter? An individual is not justified by faith only. The word “only” is a word of exclusion. Therefore, to conclude that one is justified by faith only is to exclude God’s Grace, the blood of Christ, our words, humility, and doing or keeping the law of Christ. Are we willing to exclude any of the afore-mentioned principles? Certainly not! How then is an individual justified? I am justified by God’s grace. Through God’s wonderful grace, I learn about a Savior who shed His blood for me. He and He alone is the only one who has the power to save me (Matt. 28:18; see also 1 Cor. 6:11). When I have faith in Christ’s ability to save me and I humbly submit to His will, I am then baptized which brings me in contact with the precious blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16). At this point, I am in a justified condition. To remain justified, I must live every day doing or keeping God’s law (Rom 8:1-2).

As Bible students, let us never be guilty of taking one or two verses on a subject and drawing a conclusion. Such is a practice of Satan himself (Matt. 4:5-6)! When it comes to Bible subjects, let us always ask ourselves, “What does the whole counsel of God say about the matter?”

## Is God Your Refuge?

Imagine that you are outside, and it begins raining. The rain gets harder and harder. The lightning begins to flash, the thunder begins to clap and rumble across the atmosphere and the ground feels as if it is moving. You’re terrified. What do you begin to do? You immediately begin to seek shelter. You look for a structure that can confidently protect you from the surrounding elements. You look for refuge! Once you identify that refuge, you run to it, and you remain there until the storm has passed.

Now, consider with me that a different kind of storm is brewing. The company where you’ve worked for 30 years is beginning to struggle. You go to work on Monday

morning and your boss says, "I'm sorry, but due to cutbacks, we are going to let you go." What are you to do? You need this job to help provide for your family. Or you're a loving devoted wife. One day your husband comes home and tells you he doesn't love you anymore. He loves another woman, and he wants a divorce. What are you to do? You've been married for 25 years! Or maybe it's late at night and you receive a call from the local hospital. A dear friend or loved one has been involved in an automobile accident and things don't look good. You need to get to the hospital immediately. What are you to do? Or maybe you've been sick for quite some time now and the doctors just can't seem to pinpoint what's wrong, until one day you walk into the doctor's office, and he drops the cancer bombshell on you. You sit there with a blank look on your face and then terror begins to set in. What are you to do?

What are you to do when life seems to rain and pour calamity? Consider the words of the Psalmist. "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble." (Psa. 46:1) As one considers this passage, try to keep David in mind. On his path to becoming one of the greatest kings of Israel, he experienced a tremendous amount of calamity. What did he do when difficult times arose? To whom did he turn? He turned to God. David knew that although he could not stop the calamity from happening, he could turn to God for protection and the strength to make it through that difficult time in his life.

The same is true of us today. Distress in life is much like a rainstorm. When a storm begins, we do not have the power to stop it. We can, however, seek shelter until the storm passes. In the same way, when we are met with difficult situations in life, we do not always have the power to stop them. We can, however, run to the source who will offer protection and strength during that storm. That individual is God. Is God your refuge? He's a very present help in times of trouble.

## **Is Jesus Worthy of Worship?**

Certain religious groups do not believe that Jesus is God or Deity and therefore, He should not be worshiped by Christians. What does the Bible teach?

Let us begin by noting that the Bible teaches that a being identified as Deity is worthy of worship. "I will call upon the LORD, *who is worthy* to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies." (Psa. 18:3). "You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve." (Matt. 4:10). Then he said to me, "See *that you do not do that*. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." (Rev. 22:9). These passages make clear that God or Deity is worthy of worship. With that thought in mind, Jesus is identified in the Bible as "God" or "Deity." "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (Jn. 1:1) In verse 14, the Word is identified as Jesus. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (Jn. 1:14) According to what we have just seen, God or Deity is the only one worthy of worship. Jesus is identified as God or Deity in the Scriptures; therefore, Jesus is worthy of worship.

Also consider that on several occasions in the New Testament, worship was rendered to and accepted by Jesus. "And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." (Matt. 8:2). "And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God." (Matt. 14:32-33) "And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held Him by

the feet and worshiped Him.” (Matt. 28:9) There are three examples and many others that could be appealed to which teach that worship was offered to Jesus and not one time did he ever reject the worship or rebuke those who worshiped Him.

Contrasts that thought with the fact that both ordinary men and angels rejected worship. “As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man.” (Acts 10:25-26) “And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!” (Rev. 19:10) In these two examples where worship was offered to both men and angels, worship was rejected and the act was rebuked. However, when worship was offered to Jesus, He neither rejected it nor rebuked the individuals who offered the worship. What is the conclusion of the matter? Jesus is worthy of worship because He is identified in the Bible as God or Deity. In the words of the apostle Paul, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil. 2:10-11)

## **Is Jesus Your Hero?**

Is there a person in your life who you admire greatly? Is that individual courageous and of great character? Is that individual one whom you might refer to as a hero? I suppose almost every individual has a hero in his/her life. It may be your mother or father or perhaps both. It could be an older brother or sister. Then again, it could be a close friend. Regardless of who your hero may be, we all have one. Do we ever think of Jesus as a hero? Consider with me three reasons why Jesus should be your hero.

First, He loves you. While everyone is loved by someone, No one loves us as much as Jesus. He expressed this great love when He gave His life at Calvary. “Greater love has no one than this than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (Jn. 15:13) He loved you first before you ever had the opportunity to love Him (1 Jn. 4:19). His love for you is unconditional (Rom. 5:8-9). You may stop loving God, but He will never stop loving you. Even when you give in to sin, He still loves you (Rom. 8:35-39). His love for you cannot be measured. In the words of the apostle Paul, His love for man passes all knowledge (Eph. 3:19). Because of His great love for you, Jesus deserves to be your hero.

Second, He suffered for you. Suffering is something that we’ve all experienced to a certain degree. Regardless of how much suffering we may have experienced in life, no one has ever suffered as Jesus did. He suffered in the garden of Gethsemane. Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe the pain that Jesus experienced while in the garden. He experienced agony (Luke 22:44), exceeding sorrow (Matt. 26:38) and feelings of terror (Mk. 14:33) which caused Him to fall to ground (Matt. 26:39) and pray (Mk. 14:35), “Oh Father, let this cup pass from me.” (Matt. 26:39; Mk. 14:36; Lk. 22:42). His prayer was so intense that He began to sweat (Lk. 22:44). He suffered when He was scourged (Jn. 19:1). He suffered at Calvary. They nailed His hands and feet to the cross and He hung there in agony and pain from 9 am – 3 pm (Mk. 15:25, 34-37). During this time, He was mocked and ridiculed to no end. Jesus then gave up the ghost (Mk. 15:37; Lk. 23:46; Matt. 27:50; Jn. 19:30). The scriptures teach that Jesus suffered, but why? He suffered so we wouldn’t have to (Isa. 53:5) He suffered so we could be righteous (2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus became sin, something that He never committed (1 Pet. 2:21-22), all so we could become righteous. Because of what He suffered; Jesus deserves to be your hero.

Third, He is your Savior. Sin is something that we all struggle with (Rom. 3:23). It is a constant battle every day that we live. When we give in to sin, it not only separates man from God (Isa. 59:1-2), but it also enslaves him. "...Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." (Jn. 8:34). If you remain in sin, it will eventually bring about spiritual death (Rom. 6:23). The good news is Jesus has the power to free man from sin. In John 8:32, the Bible states, "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." The truth, which is God's word (Jn. 17:17) reveals unto us that Jesus came to save man from sin. "This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." (1 Tim. 1:15; Lk 19:10). No one else has the power to save man from sin, but Jesus does. Because Jesus was willing to be your Savior, He deserves to be your hero.

I know there are many who we may term as being heroes in our lives, but if there has ever been an individual who is "worthy" of the title "hero," it's Jesus Christ. Is He your hero?

### **Is Purgatory a Biblical Doctrine?**

According to Catholic teaching, "Purgatory" is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions. This is the doctrine of a second chance after death. The idea is if an individual dies in sin and enough saints pray for this individual, he or she may still have a hope of heaven as their home. Does the Bible teach the doctrine of Purgatory?

Listen to what the Bible teaches. "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." (Heb. 9:27) Good people, this verse is crystal clear. There is no second chance after death. The rich man knew this in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.' (Lk 16:24-26) If the doctrine of "purgatory" was a Biblical teaching, why didn't the rich man ask to be freed from that place of torment? Better yet, why didn't Abraham offer him comfort by letting him know that there was a possibility that he would someday possibly escape that place of torment? Notice also, that in verses 27-31, the rich man asked Abraham if he would send Lazarus back to warn his brothers who were still living on earth. How did Abraham respond? They have Moses and the prophets. What did Abraham mean by that statement? The only opportunity they had was here on earth. The same is true today. There is no such Biblical doctrine known as "purgatory." The only opportunity we have to save our souls is the time we have on earth. Once that time is over, our destiny is sealed.

### **Is Temptation A Sin?**

"But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (Jam 1:14-15) As one can see, the subject of discussion in this passage is

that of temptation. Many believe that it is a sin to be tempted. In other words, the moment that one is tempted, he is guilty of sin. Is that the teaching of the Bible?

Consider the passage that was just read. Upon examination of this passage, sin is a result of giving in to temptation. The temptation itself is not a sin. Consider the consequences of holding the position that one has sinned the moment he is tempted. The Bible teaches that Jesus was sinless. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:" (1 Pet. 2:21-22) "Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" (Jn. 8:46) How could Jesus make such a bold statement? He had never sinned. With that thought in mind, consider the fact that the Bible also teaches that Jesus was tempted. "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." (Matt. 4:1) "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15) Not only do these passages teach that Jesus was tempted, but they also teach that He was tempted in the same manner that we are tempted today. The only difference between Jesus and you and I is the fact that Jesus never gave in to temptation. With that thought in mind, if we conclude that temptation is sin, we must conclude that Jesus was guilty of sin. That would go directly against the teaching of the Bible.

What can we conclude from this? It is not a sin to be tempted. However, it is very important to understand that temptation can lead to sin. Therefore, we ought to pray every day that we are "not" led into temptation and if we are, we should pray that God will give us the strength to overcome it.

### **Is the Book of Mormon from God?**

The Book of Mormon is a book based on the revelation received by a young man named Joseph Smith. It is identified by those who adhere to it as another revelation of Jesus Christ and upheld as the Word of God and is just as important as the other 66 books that compose our Bibles today. It is believed that this book is needed to be truly complete in the eyes of God. Is the Book of Mormon from God? Do we need the Book of Mormon today? What do the scriptures say?

"All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16-17) According to this passage, Scripture completes man and thoroughly equips him for every good work. In other words, the Bible gives man everything he needs in life. If the Book of Mormon is needed, then Paul was incorrect. Not only that, but the Holy Spirit was also incorrect because the Holy Spirit was the one who inspired Paul to write this passage. Consider the words of the apostle Peter. "As His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue." (2 Pet. 1:3) Peter states that God has given us "all things" that pertain to life and godliness. If the Book of Mormon is needed, then Peter, like Paul was misleading. The truth of the matter is that both Paul and Peter were correct. We have everything we need when it comes to the Bible.

What about the message that Joseph Smith received in the spring of 1820? Was this message from God? The Bible states. "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another;



but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” (Gal. 1:6-9) According to this passage, there is only one Gospel message. That message is found in the Bible. Those who claim to have a different message from the Bible or an additional message are to be accursed.

For some people, the Bible is just not enough. Let us never be guilty of being those people. Evidence shows that the Bible is sufficient. It provides man with everything he needs to be saved and to stay saved. (1 Tim. 4:16)

### **Is the Building the Church?**

There are many words or subjects upon which the Bible places a tremendous amount of emphasis. One of those words is the word “church.” The word “church” is found some 80 different times in the New Testament. A word of such prominence is certainly worthy of our study and meditation, wouldn’t you agree? Sadly, there are many misconceptions about the church. One of those misconceptions is the idea that the building is the church. Individuals often refer to the place where they gather to worship as their “sanctuaries.” What does the Bible teach? Consider the following Scriptures. “Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.” (Acts 8:1, 3) The word “havoc” means to ruin or destroy. Was Saul persecuting and seeking to destroy church buildings? Careful consideration of the text will give evidence of the fact that Saul was persecuting and seeking to destroy those who were disciples of Jesus. This can be seen in Acts 9:1. “Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.” The word “still” has reference to the persecution that began in Acts 8:1. Those whom Saul is still persecuting are disciples of Christ or the church. Consider other compelling Scriptures that teach that the people are the church. “Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.” (Acts 11:22) “Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword....Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.” (Acts 5:1-2, 5) The Bible teaches that the people, those who are disciples of Christ are the church.

Does the Bible also teach that the building is the sanctuary? Consider the following Scripture. “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.” (1 Cor. 3:16-17) According to this passage, Christians are God’s sanctuary, His Temple, His holy place, not the building. The apostle Peter sums it up best. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. As Christians and members of the New Testament church, let us call Bible things by Bible names.

## Is The Preacher the Pastor?"

A common practice in the religious world today is to refer to the minister or preacher of the congregation as a "pastor." Is this practice following Biblical teaching? Let's begin by noticing that the Bible makes a distinction between an evangelist and a pastor. "And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some **evangelists**, and some **pastors** and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12). Notice if you will the different groups mentioned in this passage (Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors & teachers) Notice also, that this passage makes a distinction between those who are "evangelists" and those who are "pastors." Not only is there a distinction in the words, but there is also a distinction in the meaning of the words. The word "evangelist" comes from a word that means a bringer of good tidings, whereas the word "pastor" means shepherd or presiding officer. According to the Bible, a pastor is an "elder," a "shepherd," or a "bishop." Listen to the words of Jeremiah. "Woe be unto the **pastors** that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD." (Jer. 23:1-2). Consider the responsibility of the "pastors" in this passage. They were to watch over the sheep, which represent God's people. Now turn your attention with me to a New Testament passage. "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the **elders** of the church." (Acts 20:17) Who did Paul call together? It was the elders of the church. What did he say to these elders? "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to **feed the church of God**, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) The responsibility of the elders is the same as the responsibility of the pastors. What can be learned from this comparison? The elders and pastors are not different offices, but the same.

Another interesting thing about the office of a "pastor" is that you never see an individual pastor serving over a congregation. According to the Bible, there is always a plurality of elders serving over congregations. Paul called for the "**elders**" of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17). "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain **elders** in every city, as I had appointed thee." (Tit. 1:5) What does this teach? There must be a plurality of "pastors" or "elders" in a local church. No one man can be identified as the sole "pastor" of a church. There must be a plurality.

Finally, consider also, that there is not one example in the Bible of a minister referring to himself as a "pastor" in the sense that preachers are referred to as pastors today. Paul was a minister of the gospel of Christ (Col. 1:23). Never once does he ever refer to himself as a pastor. Why not? Paul clearly understood there was a difference between pastors and preachers and though he was a minister, he was not a pastor. The only minister in the Bible who is also identified as a pastor was Peter (1 Pet. 5:1). Peter was both a minister and a pastor or elder. Therefore, a preacher can serve as one of the "pastors" or "elders" of the church, if he meets the qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). Can a preacher be the sole "pastor" or "elder" of a church? He cannot if he desires to follow the New Testament teachings.

**Jesus Is Precious**

“Therefore, to you who believe, *He is precious...*” (1 Pet. 2:7) The word “precious” refers to that which is of great value. While many things may be considered valuable, to a Christian, Jesus is the most valuable being known to man. Why? If someone were to ask you the question, “Why is Jesus so valuable to you,” how would you respond?

First, He is precious because He is my Savior. “Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Lk. 2:10-11) “This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” (1 Tim. 1:15) I’m so thankful that Jesus came into the world to save me. Let’s make it personal. Jesus is my Savior and for that reason, He is precious.

Second, He is precious because He is my Mediator. Sin separates man from God. “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.” (Isa. 59:1-2) Therefore, when we sin, we need a “Mediator,” someone who will stand between us and God and plead our case. That man is none other than Jesus Christ. “For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (1 Tim. 2:5-6) “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 Jn. 2:1)

Third, He is precious because he is my Ransom. In the passage we just noticed a moment ago (1 Tim. 2:5-6), we learned that Jesus is our mediator. Notice that the passage also states that He is our “ransom.” The word “ransom” refers to the price paid for redemption. The moment that I learned what sin was and I gave in to it, I needed redemption. The Bible teaches that Jesus paid the price that I owed. The payment was His very own blood. “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.” (1 Pet. 1:18-19)

Fourth, He is precious because He is my Example. How great it is to live the Christian life. How great it is to live every day knowing just exactly what God expects of us. Do you realize that would not be possible were not for the perfect example of Jesus Christ? “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” (1 Pet. 2:21)

Oh, there are countless reasons why Jesus is precious to me, but the question is, “What about you?” Is Jesus precious to you?

## **Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross**

Jesus, keep me near the cross; There’s a precious fountain, Free to all, a healing stream, Flows from Calvary’s mountain. Do you know that song? It’s one of my favorite church songs that I can remember singing during worship when I was a little boy. The reason I love this song so much is because of the message it teaches. The song’s plea is that we live our lives near the cross. Why should we want to live near the cross?

It’s near the cross that I see the depth of sin. We are all guilty of sin. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” (1 Jn. 1:8, 10) We understand

what sin does to us. It separates one from God. "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." (Isa. 59:1-2) If I live and die in sin, it will keep me from having a home in heaven. "For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23) How often do we think about the depth of sin? How often do we think about what it took to make us right with God? "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor. 5:21) There's the depth of sin. Jesus had to become sin so we could become righteous.

I want to stay near the cross because it's there that I see the love of God. I believe that every Bible reader understands that he is loved by God. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (Jn. 3:16) If I want to see the ultimate proof that God loves me, I just need to look to the cross. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) You see. It's near the cross that I see the true love of God.

I want to stay near the cross because it's there that I see God's willingness to save. "For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim. 2:3-4) "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Pet. 3:9) Is it not clear in both of these passages that God wants all to be saved? That's His desire. It was due to the cross that this was made possible. I want to stay near the cross. What about you?

## **Jesus Washes the Feet of His Disciples**

The apostle John records one of the most beautiful stories in the Bible. It is when Jesus washes the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17). The purpose of this story is identified in verses 15-16. Jesus is giving His disciples an example to follow. What was the example? It was the need to be a servant (vs. 16). What I find so amazing about this story is that chapters 1-12 of John cover the majority of Jesus' life. Chapters 13-21 cover the last week of His life. Jesus had spent approximately three years of His life on earth, teaching and training His disciples. The lesson that He would emphasize the most before His death was the importance of being a servant.

How can this be applied to Christian life today? Christians can be a part of many different works within the Church today. As a follower of Christ, the most significant position that anyone can ever hope to aspire to is a "servant" (Matt. 23:11) because that is what our master Jesus was. He was a servant. "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matt. 20:28) Consider the life of Paul (Rom. 1:1), James (Jam. 1:1), Peter (2 Pet. 1:1), and Jude (Jude 1:1). Though these were men of great ability, they simply identified themselves as servants of God. As Christians, we must likewise see ourselves as servants. Until we see ourselves as servants, we will never live like servants. We must also recognize the importance of serving. The purpose of serving is to glorify God. "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Pet. 4:10-11).

Through every act of service, whether it is worship (Heb. 10:24-26), being a good example (1 Tim. 4:12), encouraging others (Acts 4:36; Heb. 3:13), or being Evangelistic (Matt. 28:19-20), I bring honor and glory to God (Matt. 5:16). When we live every day serving God and one another with every fiber of our being, God will someday reward us for our efforts (Col. 3:23-24). Let us be servants like Jesus!

## **Just Preach Christ**

It is not difficult to conclude that we live in a world of religious division. As we read and study the Bible, we learn that such is not pleasing to God. God desires that we have unity. This was the plea of Christ before His death (Jn. 17:20-21) and the plea of the apostle Paul as he addressed the Christians at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10). Many will conclude that we can all have unity if we just preach Christ. I agree 100%! If we are to attain unity, we must preach Christ! This was the message that the early church preached (Acts 5:42; 2 Cor. 4:5). This is the message we are commanded to preach today. "Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching." (2 Tim. 4:2) What is the Word? The Word is identified as Jesus Christ. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (Jn. 1:14) There is no doubt about it. We must preach Christ! The question that should be asked is "What does it mean to preach Christ?" What is involved in preaching Christ?

**First, we must preach the Bible.** The apostle Peter states, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..." (1 Pet. 4:11) The Bible is the one book that teaches us everything we need to know about Christ, therefore, when we preach Jesus, we must preach the Bible. We must preach the entirety of the Bible. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul. "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:27) The "whole counsel of God" is God's Word in its completeness. Too often man is guilty of depleting from, adding to, or changing God's message in some fashion. Anytime that we alter the message of God, we fail to preach Christ.

**Second, we must preach about salvation.** This was the message of Paul. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Rom. 1:15-16). Notice that involved in the "gospel" is the message of salvation. There's no way possible one can adequately preach Christ and not preach about salvation. It's also important to understand that when we preach Christ, we must give the complete Biblical plan of salvation. According to Scripture, salvation does not occur until one is obedient (Heb. 5:8-9; Matt. 7:21-23). Obedience requires faith in God (Heb. 11:6), repentance of sins (Acts 17:30), confession of faith in Christ (Matt. 10:32-33), and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Salvation does not take place until these steps are completed. One must then remain faithful to the Lord (Rev. 2:10) If this Biblical plan is added to or depleted from, one has failed in preaching Christ.

**Third, we must preach about the Church.** According to the Bible, one cannot properly preach about Christ and leave out the church. Christ and the church are uniquely connected in the New Testament. Jesus promised to build the church (Matt. 16:18). He gave His life for the church (Eph. 5:25). The church belongs to Christ. He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23). He is the Savior of the church (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18). The church is the bride of Christ (Rom. 7:4). The church even bears His name, "...the churches of Christ salute you." (Rom.

1616). How can one honestly preach Christ and leave out the details about His one church? Such is impossible!

Many will conclude that it is not necessary to preach about salvation and the church to preach Christ, but what does the Bible say? If we are going to truly preach Christ, we must preach the whole counsel of God, which includes the message of salvation and the church.

## Kindness

Despite his busy schedule during the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln often visited the hospitals to cheer the wounded. On one occasion he saw a young fellow who was near death. "Is there anything I can do for you?" asked the compassionate President. "Please write a letter to my mother," came the reply. Unrecognized by the soldier, the Chief Executive sat down and wrote as the youth told him what to say. The letter read, "My Dearest Mother, I was badly hurt while doing my duty, and I won't recover. Don't sorrow too much for me. May God bless you and Father. Kiss Mary and John for me." The young man was too weak to go on, so Lincoln signed the letter for him and then added this postscript: "Written for your son by Abraham Lincoln." Asking to see the note, the soldier was astonished to discover who had shown him such kindness. "Are you really our President?" he asked. "Yes," was the quiet answer. "Now, is there anything else I can do?" The lad feebly replied, "Will you please hold my hand? I think it would help to see me through to the end." The tall, gaunt man granted his request, offering warm words of encouragement until death stole in with the dawn.

If there was one word you could choose to sum up the actions in the above paragraph, what would it be? Would it be "kindness?" If there has ever been a characteristic that is needed throughout the world, it's the attitude of kindness. Consider with me three important thoughts concerning the subject of kindness. To begin with, everyone can practice kindness. I think this is what I find most interesting about kindness. You don't have to be extremely talented to practice it. It can come in the form of a smile, a handshake, or an encouraging word. How we can express acts of kindness is almost limitless. Such is why we are commanded, to "be kind to one another." (Eph. 4:32)

Second, everyone needs kindness. The young man in the above story needed kindness, but I would suggest that President Abraham Lincoln was also in need of kindness. Regardless of our social status or our financial position in life, we all need kindness. Even those who are unkind need kindness. Jesus said, "But love your enemies, do good and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil." (Lk. 6:35) Though our overall tendency is to avoid being kind to the unkind, they are the ones who need kindness the most. If someone is unkind, it's because that's what they have been taught. The only way to change them is to be an example of kindness and then teach them.

Third, kindness should be practiced around the clock. We should practice it at home, at work, in worship out in public, or wherever we may be. In other words, we should always practice kindness. There should never be a day or a time when we cease to practice kindness. Consider the life of Jesus. He went about living His life every day doing good (Acts 10:38). We should follow His example. Such is why we are commanded, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:10). In the words of Mark Twain, "Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see." Let us strive to practice kindness.

## Let Jesus Be Your Friend

“A man *who has* friends must himself be friendly, But there is a friend *who* sticks closer than a brother.” (Prov. 18:24-NKJV) Most of the time when we read this passage, we interpret the first part by saying, “If we are going to have friends, we must be friendly to others.” What a true teaching that is. Friendship depends on our willingness to extend friendship. We often interpret the second part by saying, “There are certain friends we have in this life who are closer than physical brothers.” Again, that is a very true statement. There are some friends we have in this life that we think of as physical brothers and sisters. Is this the proper understanding that one should have concerning this scripture?

Consider the New American Standard translation of this passage. “A man of too many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” That’s a very different rendering, isn’t it? According to this translation (and many others), the more friends you have, the greater your chances of failing. It does not appear that Solomon is discouraging individuals from having friends, but rather it seems that he is instructing his readers to choose friends wisely. Why would he be giving this advice? Sometimes in life, those whom we call friends can disappoint us. Perhaps this is why the Bible warns, “Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” (1 Cor. 15:33) Perhaps that is why the Psalmist states, “I *am* a companion of all who fear You, And of those who keep Your precepts.” (Psa. 119:63) Again, if we choose the wrong friends, we can be greatly disappointed. With that thought in mind, look at the second part of the passage. “There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” In other words, there is one friend we all have in life, who will never disappoint us. Who is it? That friend is Jesus Christ. He is a friend who will always be there for you. “Lo, I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20) “I will never leave or forsake you.” He’s a friend who always knows and understands how you feel. “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as *we are*, yet without sin.” (Heb.4:15) He is a friend who cares for you. “Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.” (Psa. 55:22) He is the one who is always there with the “Balm of Gilead” when life’s wounds are deep (Jer.8:22) “He is a friend who gave His life for you. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” (Jn. 15:13) He is a true friend to the very end, who will never, ever disappoint you! The question is, have you made Him your friend? You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” (Jn. 15:14) Will you do what Jesus commands and be His friend?

## Let Us Be Thankful!

“Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph. 5:20) “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thess. 5:18) “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, *And* into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name.” (Psa. 100:4) What is the theme in each of the aforementioned scriptures? It’s being thankful. It is evident that as we read and study the Bible God wants us to be thankful in the lives we live. What does it mean

to be thankful? Consider with me Psalm 100:1-5 as we consider what it means to be thankful.

It means to be **Active**. As you read through this Psalm, notice the words shout, serve, come, know, enter, be thankful, and bless. What do all of these words have in common? They are all words of action. That teaches us that being thankful is about being active.

It means to be **Excited** before the Lord (vs 1). Consider the phrase “Make a joyful shout...” This phrase means to shout out or to split the ears with noise. In other words, express excitement! Why should we be excited? Think about the song we often sing entitled, “Count Your Many Blessings.” Have you ever honestly tried to do that? We are all blessed beyond measure and the Psalmist states that we are blessed with new blessings every day of our lives (Psa. 68:18). If you’re looking for a reason to get excited, just think of how blessed you are.

It means **Service** to the Lord (vs. 2). The Psalmist states, “Serve the Lord with gladness.” Serving the Lord is not only a requirement to please the Lord (Deut. 10:12-13), but it is also the greatest choice one can ever make in life. How do we serve the Lord? We serve the Lord by serving others (Matt. 25:31-46). Such is why the Bible encourages us to serve one another (Gal. 5:13). Notice how we are to serve the Lord. We are to serve Him with “gladness.” It should make us happy that we have the blessed opportunity to serve our Lord Jesus Christ.

It means we are **Dependent** on God (vs. 2). The Psalmist exhorts that we “come before His presence.” Coming before the Lord is an expression of complete dependence.

It means that we **Know** God (vs. 3). What do you know about God? The Psalmist states that He is the Lord, He is God, He made us, we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.

It means that we are in the **Presence** of God (vs. 4). We are to enter “His gates” and “His courts.” These phrases suggest that thanksgiving is about being in the presence of God Almighty. Therefore, every chance I get, I’m going to worship Him so that I may be in His presence and express my gratitude.

It means to **Bless** God (vs. 4). The word “bless” means to speak good of or to worship. The Lord’s name is mentioned five times in this short chapter. The writer also refers to God another eleven times using personal pronouns.

Now, look back over this Psalm with me. What have we learned? We’ve learned that being thankful means being excited before **God**, serving **God**, coming before **God**, getting to know **God**, being in the presence of **God**, and blessing **God**. Do you see a theme here? Being thankful is all about God! Let us live every day recognizing the blessing of the Lord in our lives and let us be thankful!

## Let Your Women Keep Silent in the Churches

In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, the Bible states, “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.” What did Paul mean when he said that women are to be silent in the churches?

Consider the broader context of this passage. The main subject being discussed in 1 Corinthians 14 is speaking in tongues (vs. 1-5), but regardless of the subject, notice that the apostle Paul is discussing the assembling of the saints. This can be seen in verse



23, “Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place” and in verse 26, How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together.” These verses speak directly about the time when the saints assembled. With that thought in mind, now read verses 34-35. Paul’s inspired conclusion was that when Christians gather as an assembly, women are to be silent. Many have concluded that this was a cultural problem and therefore it does not apply to the church today. Notice the statement, “in all the churches of the saints” (vs. 33). It is linked directly to the phrase, “let your women keep silent in the churches.” This was not a cultural problem, as many have concluded, but rather a universal command. Does this mean women are to be silent while in the assembly? What about singing? “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16) The phrase “one another” is a reciprocal term universally applying to both men and women. If women are commanded to keep silent, and yet they are to sing, in what aspect is a woman to be silent in the assembly?

Consider a parallel passage. “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” (1 Tim. 2:11) The phrase “to have authority over” means to assume a stance of independent authority, to give orders to, to dictate or domineer. According to this passage, the extent of a woman’s silence in the assembly is that she cannot assume a leadership position when the saints are assembled. It is God’s plan that men lead when the saints assemble. This can be seen at the very forefront of this passage. “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.” (1 Tim. 2:8) The Biblical conclusion is that women cannot preach, teach, direct the singing, lead prayer, wait on the Lord’s table, or serve in any leadership position while Christian men are present.

Does this teaching belittle women? No, it does not. Women are on an equal plane with men spiritually speaking (Gal. 3:28). Does this mean that she is not allowed to teach at all? No, it does not. The passages that have been considered forbid a woman to lead in the assembly where Christian men are present. They do not forbid a woman from teaching children, other women (Tit. 2:3-5), or even men outside the assembly of the saints (Acts 18:26). This teaching would most definitely not forbid the leadership of women during a Ladies’ Day, for there are no men present to have authority over. Does this forbid a woman from asking questions or commenting in Bible class? Asking a question or making a comment is not exercising authority over a man who is teaching.

## **Lights In a Dark World**

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world.” (Phil. 2:15) Notice if you will the admonition given in this passage of scripture. The Bible writer is encouraging his readers to do all things without grumbling or disputing and to prove themselves to be blameless and innocent children of God, but why? They were lights in the world. Is that not awesome? Do you ever think of yourself as a light? You should. “You are the light of the world.” (Matt. 5:14). Think how powerful light is for just a few moments.

Light has the power to guide. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psa. 119:105) Think about streetlights at night that can guide you safely to your

destination or lights on a car that reveal the things before you. As a light of the world, you have the power to guide people to God and His Word which has the power to forever change their lives.

Light has the power to warn. "But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light." (Eph. 5:13) Think about a lighthouse. What is its purpose? Its purpose is to warn of rocks and shallow waters. As a light, you have the power to warn of spiritual dangers that people may be facing in life. Who knows that by the shining of your light, you may turn some souls to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Light has the power to banish darkness. "The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness." (Gen. 1:2-4) As you think about this passage, imagine that time if you will. When God created the world, there was complete darkness and then God said let there be light, and the darkness was banished. Why? Light and darkness cannot co-exist. Sin is often described as darkness. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 Jn. 1:6) As the light of the world, you and I have the power to light the way of those living in sin. We have the power to banish darkness with our mere presence.

Light has the power to warm, comfort, and cheer. "The light is pleasant, and *it is good for the eyes to see the sun.*" (Eccl. 11:7) Why do sick people get worse in the night, but show improvement at the breaking of the day? Light just has the power to warm and cheer you up. As the light of the world, that power lies within you. You have the power to take a person who is bent, broken, or brought low due to some circumstance and lift them up all because you are the light of the world.

Remember, you are the light of the world. Let's all be sure to let our lights shine brightly so that we may be able to banish the darkness around us.

## Loving Them to Christ

One of the greatest challenges we have in the church today is winning souls. We know the command. It's so clearly taught in the Bible. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) We just struggle to fulfill this command. What if there was a characteristic that would help us fulfill this great request? Would you practice it every day in the life you live? Okay. Here it is. It's love! Can you think of a more powerful characteristic? Love originates with God (1 Jn. 4:7), is proof that I have been born again and I know God (1 Jn. 4:7), is sacrificial (1 Jn. 4:9), describes the character of God (1 Jn. 4:16), perfects and gives confidence (1 Jn. 4:17), removes fear (1 Jn. 4:18), is proof that I love God (1 Jn. 4:20-21), and to sum it up, love is the greatest emotion the soul can enjoy (1 Cor. 13:13). I'm thoroughly convinced that if we completely saturate our lives with love, our success rate in winning souls for Christ Jesus will skyrocket! So, consider with me some areas where we must exhibit love.

***To begin with, we must love God.*** After all, He certainly is worthy of our love, isn't He? The apostle John said He loved us first (1 John 4:19). Our love for God must be supreme. Jesus said, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is *the* first and great commandment." (Matt. 22:37). How do we show God, we love Him? This is done by doing his will. Jesus said, "If you love me,

you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15). When Christians love God the way they should, souls will be won!

**Second, we must love the Church.** If souls are going to be won to Christ, we must possess a true genuine love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. (1 Pet. 1:22) Too often brethren pretend to love one another. There is perhaps nothing that will turn an individual away from the truth quicker than hypocrisy. Our love must be genuine! Our love must also be continual. The Hebrew writer states, “Let brotherly love continue.” (Heb. 13:1) Too often brethren practice “conditional” love and not “continual.” When it comes to the love that we have for our brethren, there should be no boundaries. Our love for our brethren should be like that of Christ. Christ’s love for the church was exceptional. He was willing to give His life for the church (Eph. 5:25). When Christians have a true, genuine love for the church and people outside the church can see that love, then souls will be won.

**In the third place, we must love ourselves.** Jesus commanded “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt. 22:39) Why must we love ourselves? How can we extend love to our fellow man when we don’t love ourselves? Such is an impossible task. When we fail to love ourselves, we fail to secure ourselves spiritually. Likewise, we will not be interested in the spiritual security of our fellow man. When we love ourselves, we will love our own souls and the souls of others, which will result in church growth.

**Finally, we must love our fellow man.** The second greatest commandment given is to love our fellow man (Matt. 22:39). Why should we love our fellow man? Who do we care about the most in this life? It’s those people we love. When we love someone, there is nothing we will not do for them. The same is true when it comes to our fellow man. When we love them, there is nothing that will keep us from seeking to bring them to Christ.

How can we successfully bring people to Christ? We must love them to Christ. Are you practicing the kind of love in your life that will lead people to Christ?

### **Making The Best of 2017 (Can be adapted for any year)**

Here we are at the beginning of a new year. Today is the first day of 2017. It seems like 2016 just began and now we’re starting a new year again. If the Lord permits us to live another 364 more days, we will be at the end of another year. While none of us are certain what the future holds, wouldn’t it be great to get to the end of another year, look back, and be pleased with the choices that we have made? Sure, it would! How can we accomplish this enormous task? Listen to the words of the apostle Paul. “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Eph. 5:15-17)

To begin with, we must look carefully at how we walk. The word “walk” as used in the scriptures is a metaphor used for lifestyle. The word “carefully” means accurately or exactly. Paul is saying that there is an accurate or exact way that we should live our lives. What is that accurate way? It’s living our lives based on the teachings of God’s Word! Such is why the Psalmist would say, “Your word *is* a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105) “Your word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:11). Life is filled with choices, many of which can negatively affect us. However, when we live our lives based on God’s Word, we will always make the right choices in life.

Second, make the best use of your time. There are 24 hours in a day, 168 in a week, 720 in a month, and 8,760 in a year. How do you plan on using your time? While approximately half of that time will be required for work and sleep, we are still left with a lot of time on our hands. How will we use it? Why not use some of it to work for the Lord? Can you think of a better way to use your time? Live your life obeying God (Matt. 7:21; Heb. 5:8-9), forgiving those in need of forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; Matt. 6:14-15), reading, studying & meditating on God's Word (Rev. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:15; Psa. 1:1-2), using your talents (Matt. 25:15; 2 Tim. 1:6), teaching the lost (Matt. 28:19-20), and restoring the erring (Jam. 5:19-20). While there may be occasions when you spend your time and regret how you used it, you will never regret the time you use for God!

Third, live every day understanding what the will of the Lord is. The will of the Lord is something that we can all understand. What is the will of the Lord? God's will is for His law to be in our hearts. "I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." (Psa. 40:8) When God's law (Bible) is in our hearts, we will not only "walk" in a way that is "accurate" but we will also live every day making the best use of our time.

The year 2016 is behind us and regardless of the mistakes we may have made, there is nothing we can do to bring it back. We can however strive to make 2017 a much better year. The choice is yours. Let's make this the best year ever!

## **Manic Monday**

Lord willing, if we make it through the day and night, tomorrow will be Monday. Before you say it, I know; Mondays can be such a drag! Am I right? How many of us get up on Monday morning with the attitude, "I'm just not looking forward to this day?" Sadly, much of the American population has this attitude. Why do people dislike Mondays? Monday is the beginning of a new work week. It's the day when you're going to start all over again and try to accomplish everything you accomplished last week or perhaps even more. Mondays can be the beginning of a long, dreadful work week, and as a result, we have a tendency not to be so upbeat on Mondays. How can we get beyond the dreadful Monday blues?

Recognize that each day we are permitted to live is a day of deliverance. Consider the words of the Psalmist. "This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:24) David didn't look at the days as Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc. Every day that he was permitted to live, he looked at it as a deliverance. This can be seen in the phrase "the day which the Lord had made." David knew that since he was alive and well, it meant that the Lord had delivered him and saved him from his enemies yet another day. Do we have the same attitude? Do we realize that if it's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, or whatever day it may be, God has delivered us once again from our enemies, especially our most fierce enemy, Satan himself? What a blessing!

Second, we must recognize that each day is an opportunity to make a difference. David knew that each day that he was permitted to live was an opportunity to do good and make a difference in the lives of others. Do we have the same realization? This world is filled with people who are hurting, both physically and spiritually. They need someone who can come along in life and give them a glimmer of hope. They need someone who can make a difference in the lives they live. As Christians, let us be that light (Matt. 5:16)! As we awake each day, let us praise God for another opportunity to do good and help change the circumstances of individuals' lives (Gal. 6:10).

Third, we must realize that each day is a day that God Himself has designed. David certainly understood this principle. Such can be seen in the statement “This is the day the Lord had made...” Do we have the same attitude? Do we realize that every day is handcrafted and ordered by God almighty? The light of day comes only because the Lord commands it. Each day that we awake, oh how blessed we are to be a part of a day that our magnificent Creator has designed. Also consider the fact that as you read this article, so many are on their deathbeds. Think about how they long for another day, just like this one. Consider also, that many never saw the light of this day. Do you realize just exactly how blessed you are?

I know that this is a difficult task, but instead of looking at the day as a “Manic Monday,” let us look at each day as a day of deliverance, an opportunity to make a difference, and the opportunity to be a part of something designed by God. If this is our attitude, then we can do what the rest of the passage teaches. We can rejoice and be glad!

### **Mary, The Mother of Jesus**

In our world today, people are always talking about mothers who make a difference. From a worldly perspective, she is always the mother who works a 40-hour-plus week. Following work, she goes home and cooks and cleans, involves her children in all sorts of sporting activities, is a member of the PTA, etc. While all of this is commendable, is this truly the kind of mother who makes a difference in our world today? Consider Mary, the mother of Jesus for a moment. If there was ever a mother who truly made a difference, it was Mary, wouldn't you agree? What was it about Mary that caused her to make such a difference?

To begin with, Mary was highly favored of the Lord. “And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.” (Lk. 1:28). The phrase “highly favored” in this passage means to be encompassed with favor or friendly regard. In other words, Mary lived her life in such a way that she was great friends with the Lord. Can you think of a better compliment? Wouldn't it be great if every mother made it her sole purpose in life to be friends with the Lord? Mothers who are friends with the Lord live every day doing His will (Jn. 15:14). Those are the kind of mothers who truly make a difference.

Second, Mary was a trusting mother. When the angel of the Lord spoke to her and informed her that she was going to have a baby, notice her response. “And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.” (Lk. 1:38). What's so spectacular about this statement? Mary was not yet married. She had never physically been with a man. What did it take for Mary to conclude that she was going to give birth to a child and yet she had never been with a man? It took TRUST! Mothers who trust in the Lord with all their hearts are the ones who truly make a difference (Prov. 3:5). Oh, how we need mothers with this kind of trust.

Third, Mary magnified the Lord. “And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord.” (Lk. 1:46). The word “magnify” means to make great or to enlarge. The word soul means breath or life. Do we realize what's being stated in this passage? With every breath of her life, Mary magnified God. Oh, how we need mothers who live every day magnifying the Lord with every breath. Mothers who are living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1) and live every day showing people the gospel of Jesus Christ through the lives they live (Phil. 1:27) are truly the kind of mothers who make a difference.

Fourth, Mary was humble. “For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.” (Lk. 1:48). Have you ever wondered why God chose Mary to bring His Son into this world? The Bible states that God had “regarded the low estate” of Mary. In other words, she was a woman of great humility. She recognized her position in life. She realized that everything that she was and everything she hoped to be depended on God. We need more mothers today like Mary who are blessed with humility (Jam. 4:10). Those are the mothers who truly make a difference.

Fifth, Mary knew the scriptures. As Mary revealed unto Elizabeth that she was going to give birth to Christ, she stated, “He hath helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever.” (Lk. 1:54-55). This was a quote from Psalm 98:3 and Jeremiah 31:3, 20. What is so interesting about this statement is the fact that Mary was not reading from a scroll that she had in her hands. She was making a quotation from memory. She knew the scriptures! Oh, how we need mothers who are filled with the knowledge of God’s Word. We need mothers who read, study, meditate upon, and memorize God’s Word (2 Tim. 2:15; Psa. 1:1-3).

Oh, there are many other things that we could say about Mary, but I think you get the picture. Mary was truly the kind of mother who made a difference. We need more mothers like her today.

## Ministries of the Church

When you think of the word minister, what comes to your mind? Often, we think of the preacher (1 Tim. 4:6). What do you think of when you think of the word “ministries?” Again, we often think of the preacher (2 Tim. 4:5), because both words are used in connection with the preacher. Consider if you will the word “ministry.” It is found 33 times in the New Testament. It is defined as a servant and a servant executes the commands of God. It is the responsibility of every Christian to execute the commands of God (Jn. 14:15). The point that I am making is that the title “minister” does not belong to one individual, but to every person who is a faithful Christian (1 Cor. 12:5; 16:15; Eph. 4:11-12; Rev. 2:19). Biblically speaking, every Christian is a minister in the kingdom of God. Why do we need to know this? People often perform their best when they know that they are important and needed. Every Christian is “important” and “needed.” What are some ministries of the church?

What about **Worship**? Remember the definition of ministry. It refers to those who execute the commands of God. The Bible commands us to worship (Jn. 4:24). When we think of worship, it consists of five acts (Acapella singing, Praying, Lord’s Supper, Giving, and Preaching). What if we thought about worship as a ministry? How would it change each act of worship? How would it affect the people around me?

What about **Benevolence**? The early church was extremely benevolent. The Bible records them selling their possessions and laying them at the feet of the apostles to distribute to those who were in need (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-37). The purpose of their benevolent attitude was to express that they were one. Christians today must be benevolent. Brothers and sisters in Christ have the responsibility of taking care of one another (Gal. 6:10; Heb. 13:6). What if we thought of benevolence as a ministry? How would it affect our giving?

What about **Edification**? The word edify means to build up. Edification was practiced by Christians when the church first began. Luke states that they continued with one another (Acts 2:42). One of the purposes of continuing with one another was to encourage, edify, or build up one another. Every member of the church needs edification and it is every Christian's responsibility to edify. "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." (1 Thess. 5:11). What if we thought of edification as a ministry? How would it affect our edifying?

What about **Evangelism**? The gospel of Christ has the power to save the souls of mankind (Rom. 1:16). Christians are commanded to take the gospel into all the world (Matt. 28:19-20). This is what each member of the early church did (Col. 1:23; Acts 8:4). We must follow their example today. In being evangelistic, we not only save our souls, but we help to save the souls of others (1 Tim. 4:16). What if we thought of evangelism as a ministry? How would it affect our evangelistic efforts?

Finally, what about **Fellowship**? The early church understood the importance of fellowship (joint participation). In Acts 2:42, the Bible states that they continued in fellowship (Consider also verses 44-47). Every day, they were either in the temple or in someone's home involved in fellowship. They understood the importance of fellowship, and Christians today should do the same. Fellowship causes our faith to grow, it creates unity, and causes us to develop a stronger relationship with one another as Christians.

Remember, as a Christian, you are a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us serve God acceptably and thank Him for all His ministers!

## **My Feelings Were Hurt**

I suppose one of the most disheartening statements that one could ever hear is the phrase "I quit!" It is, however, a statement that we hear quite often. People quit their jobs, school, hobbies, diets, etc. The list is almost endless as to the things that people give up on in life. While there are some things in life that we ought to quit (sinful things), there are some things we should never give up on, like the church. How sad it is to hear someone say, "I quit" when it comes to the church.

Though there are many reasons given as to why people give up on the church, one of the most frequent that is given is, "Someone hurt my feelings." Because of hurt feelings, many stop being faithful to the Lord. Think for a moment. When someone becomes unfaithful to the Lord, who are they taking it out on? Let's think about it. Who designed worship? God did. Who commands us to worship? God does (Jn. 4:24). Who is it that we worship? Once again, it's God (Jn. 4:24). So, in all actuality when we stop attending the services of the church and we become fruitless in the kingdom of our dear Lord, who are we taking our frustrations out on? God! What has He done to deserve such treatment? Think about Jesus for a moment and some of the things that he experienced while He was on earth. They spit on Jesus. "Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands." (Matt. 26:67) Have you ever had someone to spit on you because you were a Christian? I must say that I have not. Even if they did, that would not be a valid reason to give up on Christianity. In this same passage, you can also see that they struck Him in the face with their hands. Have you ever been struck in the face for serving Jesus? They also beat Jesus. "So then Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe. Then they said, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they struck Him with their hands." (Jn. 19:1-3) Do you understand the severity of

scourging? In scourging, they would beat an individual almost to death. Has anyone ever scourged you? From this same passage, they pressed a crown of thorns upon the head of Jesus. Has anyone ever done that to you? Then the Bible states that they hung Him on a cross to die. Have you ever been nailed to a cross for serving Jesus? They did all this to Jesus and so much more. Yet, Jesus did not quit because He came to pay the price for our salvation.

So, if someone ever hurts your feelings and you're tempted to quit, just remember what Jesus experienced while He was on earth. As you contemplate the evil things that Jesus experienced, always remember that He never did quit and let us follow in His footsteps (1 Pet. 2:21).

### **Not Far from The Kingdom**

Imagine being so close to something extremely valuable, but something stands in between you and that object. You are just too far away. Do you have that picture in your mind? Now turn your attention to the book of Mark chapter 12. Throughout the life of Christ, He often experienced encounters with the scribes, Pharisees, chief Priest, elders, and rulers of the temple. Often when Jesus was questioned by these individuals, their motives were insincere. They were usually seeking to find some kind of fault with Jesus. In Mark 12, we have recorded an occasion when Jesus encountered one of the scribes; however, this confrontation was very different. This scribe came to Jesus with the question, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Jesus responded with a quote from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18. The scribe then did something uncommon of scribes in the gospel accounts. He commended Jesus for how he answered. Jesus responded to this scribe by saying, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." (Mk. 12:34) What did Jesus mean by this statement? The phrase "kingdom of God" can refer to at least two different things. It can refer to the church. This can be seen in Matthew 16:18-19 as the words church and kingdom are used interchangeably. This can also be seen in Colossians 1:13 where Paul told those of Colossae that they had been translated into the kingdom of God's dear son. The institution into which they had been translated was the church, the vessel of salvation for mankind today (Acts 2:47; Eph. 5:23). Then again, sometimes the "kingdom of God" may refer to heaven itself (Mk. 9:47; 14:25). Which one was Jesus referring to? I would suggest both. The "kingdom" or "church" was on the verge of being established. Though it had not yet been established, Jesus taught that it was at hand (Matt. 4:17), meaning that it would be established in the near future. Jesus was teaching this man that he was not far from being a part of the church, God's earthly kingdom, and that he was not far from making heaven his home. Notice if you will that Jesus said, "You are 'not far' from the kingdom of God," meaning, that he was not a member of the church and he did not yet have heaven as his home. He was close; it was within his reach, but he wasn't quite there. We don't know anything else about this scribe. Did he obey the gospel and become a member of the church when it was established on Pentecost? Did he take the necessary steps to secure heaven as his home? We don't know. The Bible is silent concerning his future actions. All we know is that he was "close."

How many individuals are in this same position today? They are so "close" to becoming members of the Lord's Church and having heaven as their home. They know what God requires of them. They've heard the message repeatedly, but something stands between them and the kingdom. Maybe they find themselves like Demas. They have a greater love for the world than they do for the kingdom (2 Tim. 4:10). Maybe it's friends



or family members who prohibit them from being a part of the kingdom. They fear the loss of such close earthly bonds. Perhaps they are fearful that they will not be good enough for the kingdom or they cannot possibly succeed in living the faithful Christian life. There are multiple reasons why many today are so “close” to the kingdom, but not quite there. What about you? Where are you concerning the kingdom? How sad it will be on the day of judgment for those who are so “close,” but not close enough. Let us be sure to take the necessary steps in becoming a part of God's kingdom, the church, and let us live faithful to the Lord so that heaven will be our eternal dwelling place.

## **Others Are Watching**

Do you realize that everyone is being watched by someone? Just consider a few scriptures with me. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16) Why should we let our lights shine? Others are watching us! “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” (Phil. 1:27) Why should we let our conduct be worthy of the gospel? Others are watching us! “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” (1 Tim. 4:12) Why be an example in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity? Others are watching! Never did this become a true reality to me until I had children of my own. Those little eyes are always watching everything that you do. You are being watched by friends, family members, church members, young people, you name it. Most importantly, you are being watched by God. “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” (Heb. 4:13) “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good.” (Prov. 15:3) “The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. From the place of His dwelling He looks on all the inhabitants of the earth.” (Psa. 33:13-14) There is no place that I can travel where God will not see me. “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, “Surely the darkness shall fall on me,” Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You.” (Psa. 139:7-12)

Remember, someone is always watching us! Such is why we ought to live lives that are pure and holy. “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Pet. 1:15-16) Let us live lives that glorify the Father in heaven, who we serve.

## **Our Sense of Direction**

Have you ever heard stories of how an animal was given to someone, taken miles away from its home, and yet somehow the animal seems to find its way back? In visiting with the elderly, I cannot tell you how many different stories I have heard of animals finding their way back home. The stories have varied between dogs, cats, squirrels, raccoons, and even ducks and geese. Do you ever wonder how animals may do this? It is because

they have a good sense of direction. Where did they get this sense of direction? The only logical answer is that God gave it to them. When God created the animals, He must have given them a sense of direction for the very purpose of helping them find their way back home.

Just as animals were created with a sense of direction, human beings were also created with a sense of direction. The Bible teaches that man is created in the “image” of God (Gen. 1:26-27). The word image means “likeness” or “resemblance.” How is it that we resemble God? We cannot resemble Him physically, for God is a Spirit. (Jn. 4:24) We resemble Him Spiritually. This is why Peter said, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” (1 Pet. 1:15-16) God created us to be holy, just as He is holy. Holiness is in a way our sense of direction as Christians.

Have you ever known of a wayward child of God, who remained out of the service of the Lord for many years and yet they somehow found their way back to the Church? How is it that they found their way back? Could it be their sense of direction? Could it be that they remembered that God created them to be holy, just like Him? Could it be that they allowed that holiness to lead them back to the Church of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

The sad thought is many are away from the Lord's Church, right now as I write and as you read. Why haven't they returned? It seems as if they have lost their sense of direction. If an animal is taken away from his home and contained for some time, he will eventually lose his sense of direction. Not only that, but he will also lose his desire to return to his master. In the same way, when we as Christians stay away from the Church for some time, we will lose our sense of direction. Sadly, to say, we will also lose our desire to return home.

Departing from the Church is not an impossibility. It is something which we all can do (1 Cor. 10:12). How do we avoid departing from the Church? We must always remember our sense of direction. We must remember that we were created to be holy, just like God. This will not only help us remain in the Church, but it will also help us to return if we happen to depart.

## **Overcoming Anxiety**

In Philippians 4:6, the Bible states, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” The word anxious (μεριμνάω – mer-im-nah'-o) can mean to be apprehensive, to have anxiety, or to be unduly concerned. It can also mean to care for or to be concerned about something. As can be seen from the definition, the word is occasionally used in a positive sense in the New Testament (2 Cor. 11:28; Phil. 2:20), but it generally has a negative meaning. Based on the context of Philippians 4, Paul is using the word anxious in a negative sense. It is also interesting that the word “anxious” is imperative in Greek; therefore Paul is commanding his audience not to be anxious or overly concerned about anyone or anything. How is that possible? We are people who are surrounded by things in life, which significantly contribute to anxiety. Every person has either recently experienced anxiety, is currently experiencing anxiety, or will probably experience it soon. So how do we overcome anxiety? Consider Paul's advice. When we come face to face with trying circumstances in life, instead of being anxious, we should pray. Paul then uses four different words to describe how we should pray when we are anxious.

The first word is “prayer” (προσευχή – pros-yoo-khay') which refers to a petition addressed to deity. If we are to be successful in overcoming anxiety, we must appeal to Jehovah God, the only one who can help in all circumstances. Such is why Peter admonishes, “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (1 Pet. 5:7) The second word is “supplication” (δέησις – deh'-ay-sis) which refers to an urgent request to meet a need, exclusively addressed to God. When we come face to face with anxiety, we should approach God with urgency. Anxiety can cripple the faithful child of God and render him useless in the kingdom of God. If we hesitate in seeking to overcome anxiety, it may eventually overcome us. The third word is “thanksgiving” (εὐχαριστία – yoo-khar-is-tee'-ah) which refers to the expression or content of gratitude. Why would Paul encourage his readers to be thankful while seeking to overcome anxiety? According to the Psalmist, God daily loads us with blessings or benefits (Psa. 68:19). It is challenging for one to be overcome by anxiety when he is focused on the many blessings that God has bestowed upon him. The fourth word is “requests” (αἴτημα – ah'-ee-tay-mah) which refers to a specific request. Though God already knows our every need before we approach Him, we need to name that which is troubling us in life.

What will God do when we pray in this manner when we are anxious? He will exchange our anxiety for “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.” (vs. 7). The peace or tranquility that one will receive is the peace of God. Such peace is far beyond the human mind's ability to appreciate and comprehend. What will God's peace do for us in life? It guards or protects our hearts and minds in such a way that we will not lose heart in life (2 Cor. 4:16).

## **Overcoming Conflict**

The word “conflict” (ἄγών) as found in the New Testament, can have two possible meanings. It can refer to a competition like a contest or a race. It can also refer to a struggle against opposition. As one considers the Christian life, both definitions can be applied. The Christian life is referred to as a race. Such can be seen in the writings of the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 9:24-27). The Christian life also involves many conflicts. Consider the life of the apostle Paul. During his missionary journeys, he was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and run out of town by his countrymen (2 Cor. 11:24-28). On one occasion, Paul was stoned, taken outside the city, and left for dead (Acts 14:19). Though the conflict that Christians experience today may not be as severe as that which Paul and others endured, the Bible does promise that those who live godly lives will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). How do Christians press forward amidst conflict? Consider the text of Hebrews 12:1-2.

Overcoming conflict in the Christian race requires Reflection. This can be seen in verse one when the writer states, “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses.” Who was this great cloud of witnesses? The writer is referring to the many individuals in chapter eleven who found themselves facing adverse circumstances, and yet through their faith, they overcame them. He is encouraging them to reflect upon these individuals and follow in their footsteps.

Overcoming conflict in the Christian race requires Release. The writer encourages the readers to “lay aside every weight.” The word “lay aside” means to put away. This is an aorist tense verb that requires immediate action. “Every weight” refers to a burden or an encumbrance. They were also encouraged to put away the sin that so easily ensnared

them. The phrase “easily ensnared” means easily distracting or controlling tightly. The sense is something that would wrap around the body and hinder movement. Though the writer does not identify the burden or the sin, the emphasis is to put away anything that would hinder their focus from running the Christian race.

Overcoming conflict in the Christian race requires Endurance. The writer states, “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” The word “endurance” refers to an individual who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose in life. Conflict can discourage and cripple Christians. That is why the author encourages perseverance. It is the characteristic that keeps individuals focused on their purpose in life.

Finally, overcoming conflict in the Christian race requires Focus. The writer states, “looking unto Jesus, the author, and finisher of our faith.” The word “looking” means to direct one’s attention without distraction. It refers to focused attention in the sense of “to look away” from everything else and to focus on one object or person. The present tense of this verb denotes continuous action. The individual on whom we are to focus our attention is Jesus. Why focus on Jesus? He is the author and finisher of our faith. The word “author” refers to a pioneer, leader, originator, or founder. The word “finisher” refers to one who brings something to a successful conclusion. Jesus is one who experienced conflict and overcame it. When we focus our attention on Him and follow in his footsteps, we too will overcome.

When we apply these principles to our lives, we will overcome conflict, and like the apostle Paul, we can confidently state, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

## **Overcoming Temptation**

The story was told of a young man who entered the study of a minister one day. This young man had recently obeyed the gospel and had become a Christian. Facing almost overwhelming temptations he told the minister that he just didn’t know how much longer he could live the life of a Christian. The minister had a feather pin sitting on his desk and he responded to the young man by saying, “Did you know that this pen can stand on its end?” The young man responded, “No.” The minister stood the feather pen on its end and stated, “See, it’s standing up.” The young Christian responded by saying, “But you’re holding it.” The minister kindly stated, “But of course. Did you expect the pen to stand by itself?”

The Bible teaches clearly that temptation is something that we all experience. “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.” (Jam. 1:14) No one can rise above temptation. Do you ever feel overwhelmed by temptation? Do you ever get to the point where you don’t believe that you can overcome it? Maybe that’s the problem. We think that temptation is something that we must overcome on our own and we can’t. Temptation is something that I will never get through on my own. I need help. The good news is we have help. God is there to help us through every temptation that we experience in this life. The Bible states, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. 10:13) Notice what this passage teaches.

First, God is in control of the load limits when it comes to temptation. He knows what each person can take, and He will not allow us to receive more than what we can handle. Such is why we are admonished, “Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” (Psa. 55:22) God wants to help us, but we must be willing to turn to Him and ask for His help.

Second, notice if you will that with every temptation, regardless of its nature, there is a way of escape that has been provided by God Himself. This does not mean that there is one way of escape from all temptations, but it does mean that God has created an escape route with every temptation we face. We must look for that route when we encounter temptation.

So, here’s the challenge of every Christian. The next time you find yourself overwhelmed by temptation, call upon God. Ask for His strength, His wisdom, and His guidance, and know that He will carry you through.

## **Perpetual Virginity**

I suppose one of the most fascinating points of interest concerning the birth of Christ is that He was born of a virgin. Isaiah prophesied, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (Isa. 7:14) This prophecy was fulfilled in Matthew 1:18-25. Mary, a virgin gave birth to Christ. Many maintain that Mary was not only a virgin during the conception but also afterward, for the rest of her life. This doctrine is known as the “Perpetual Virginity” of Mary. Does the Bible teach that Mary remained a virgin for the totality of her life?

The Bible teaches that Mary was a virgin before the birth of Christ. “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.” (Matt. 1:18) The phrase “before they came together” refers to the sexual union of a man and a woman. In the book of Luke, when the angel appeared unto Mary and told her that she would give birth to a son, she responded, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?” (Lk. 1:34) What did Mary mean when she said, “I know not a man?” Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” (Gen. 4:1) Without a doubt, the phrase “to know a man or woman” refers to the sexual union between a man and a woman. So, the Bible is clear. Mary was a virgin when the Christ was born. The question that we want to answer is did she remain a virgin through the entirety of her life? If one can prove that Mary had other children, then the doctrine of “Perpetual Virginity” would be false. Consider the following Scriptures with me. “While He was still talking to the multitudes, behold, His mother and brothers stood outside, seeking to speak with Him. Then one said to Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, seeking to speak with You.” (Matt.12:46-47) “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?” (Matt. 13:55) Not only does Matthew identify these people as direct relatives of Jesus, but he records that even the multitude knew that they were the relatives of Jesus. “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and remained with him for fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.” (Gal. 1:18-19) On and on we could go, the Bible teaches that Mary had other children after the birth of Christ. What is the conclusion of the matter? The doctrine of “Perpetual Virginity” is not

taught in the scriptures.

## **Polishing the Pulpit Experience**

For the past two years, Kelly, myself, and the entire family have been blessed to attend Polishing The Pulpit which is held annually in August in Sevierville, Tennessee. Each year as the time approaches for this wonderful spirit-filled event to begin and we prepare to leave, people will ask us, "What is Polishing The Pulpit?" It's at that moment that my heart is filled with feelings of excitement, a big smile forms on my face and I say, "Let me tell you about PTP." Though I love telling people about PTP, it's really difficult to describe PTP. It's just one of those events that you must attend to truly understand and grasp it. Then, once you attend, you're hooked. There's no looking back. The moment you leave on Thursday, you're talking about next year's session and it can't get here fast enough!

What is PTP like? What would I compare it to? Some have described PTP as being like a gospel meeting, a preacher's workshop, a summer Church camp, an elders retreat, a Ladies' day, or a Vacation Bible School, but I would suggest that it's so much more. What I love most about PTP is that it doesn't just focus on one area or one group of individuals. There are classes for preachers, missionaries, elders, deacons, ladies, teens, children, college-age, and seniors. There are classes for singles, couples, and families. There are classes on archeology, marriage and family, parenting, homeschooling, evangelism, youth ministry, senior ministry, doctrine, special interest, and Christian evidence just to name a few. There are also counseling sessions where trained professional Christian counselors meet privately with those who find themselves struggling in life. PTP is an event that focuses on so many different areas that there is no other event like it on Earth today.

Who is PTP for? It's for everyone! Many may be turned away from this event because it is known as "Polishing The Pulpit." It sounds like something just for preachers. In the beginning, when this event first began, it was just for preachers. The event began with the idea to have an event that would help recharge preachers and help them in their ministry. After some time, it was suggested, why limit this to preachers? Let's invite their wives. Then it was suggested, why limit this to preachers and preacher's wives? Let's invite Elders and deacons. Again it was suggested, why limit this to just these members? Why not have classes for every member of the congregation, including their children? As a result, PTP has grown to over 4,000 in attendance because it is an event for every member of the Church, regardless of your age and I would admonish "EVERY" member to attend if possible.

What will PTP do for you? It will renew your spirit. PTP is known as the place to "refresh, renew and recharge." There comes a time in every Christian's life when he/she becomes tired, worn, weary, and in great need of renewal. In my opinion, at PTP you will experience a level of renewal like you have never known in life. Why? There are Bible classes that begin early in the morning and continue until late at night. Each class is designed to point you to the one who has the power to renew us. That's God! The Psalmist states, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psa. 51:10). The prophet Isaiah encouraged, "But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (Isa. 40:31) After a week at PTP, you feel and understand the true power of such passages. PTP will renew your spirit.

What will PTP do for you? It will motivate you. The word motivation is defined as the force or influence that causes someone to do something. Every faithful Christian aspires to be better and do better in life. Think back for a moment on all the different groups of people that PTP addresses. Think of the many different subjects that are covered. PTP will motivate you to be a better spouse, a better parent, a better child, a better preacher, a better Bible class teacher, a better elder, a better deacon, and a better Christian. It will motivate you to be more evangelistic, more understanding, more outgoing, more patient, more knowledgeable, and more aware of the current conditions of the Church. Just try to imagine singing with over 3,000 other Christians. Imagine being in an environment where over 200 speakers cover more than 700 different topics in seven days. You can't help but be motivated. PTP will motivate you beyond measure because every speaker points you to the true source of motivation and that's Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:13).

What will PTP do for you? It will ground you in the faith. Many brotherhood events are held annually each year just like PTP which I will not attend due to the lack of Biblical soundness. One of the things that I truly love about PTP is the fact that it is rock solid when it comes to the teaching of the Bible. In 1 Peter 4:11, the Bible states, "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God..." In every classroom setting you enter at PTP, you hear the oracles of God. You never have to be concerned about hearing something that's not found in the Bible. Those who direct PTP carefully select speakers who speak with a "Thus saith the Lord." As a result, those who attend PTP leave grounded in the truth of God's Word.

Many other things could be said concerning PTP, but you'll never know what it's truly like until you decide to attend. Make plans to attend PTP next year. It's a choice that you will never regret.

## **Pure & undefiled Religion**

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (James 1:26-27) The principle which the writer James is emphasizing in this passage is the need to practice pure and undefiled religion. The words "pure and undefiled" refer to that which is free from corruption, evil desire, or sin. The word religion can be defined as worship (Col. 2:18). It can also be defined as an expression of devotion to a system of beliefs (Acts 26:5). So, "pure and undefiled religion" refers to worship or religious acts that are free from error or sin. When the writer James penned the book there was the possibility of being religious and not being religiously correct. Such is implied by the statement "if anyone thinks he is religious." That which keeps one from being religiously correct is the failure to allow God's Word to be our standard of authority (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). When the Bible is not our guide, our religion fails to be pure and undefiled, which also results in our religion being incorrect.

Such is very descriptive of the country in which we live today. A large portion of those who live in the United States are religious. According to [pewforum.org](http://pewforum.org), 84.2% of the American population professes to be religious. In addition to being religious, most people "think" they are religiously correct. However, many of them are religiously incorrect because they refuse to rely upon the Word of God as their standard for religion. As a result, their religion is not pure and undefiled and is rendered religiously incorrect. How can we assure ourselves that our religion is pure and undefiled?

First, it must be directed toward God. Many religions are directed toward idols gods that have been invented by man. This is unacceptable. The Bible teaches there is only one God and He alone is worthy and deserving of religious service (Deut. 6:4; Eph. 6:4; Matt. 4:10). Religious service that is directed toward any being other than Jehovah God is not pure and undefiled religion.

Second, it must involve self-control. The word “bridle” (vs. 26) means to keep in check or to control. One of the greatest ways religion can become defiled and corrupted is through the erroneous use of the tongue. Every false religion that exists today is a result of the improper use of the tongue. Perhaps this is the reason James admonishes his readers to control, monitor, or keep a tight rein on their tongues. If we desire to practice pure and undefiled religion, we must believe and practice only those things which are found in the Bible. In the words of the apostle Peter, “If any man speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God...” (1 Pet. 4:11)

Third, our religion must involve benevolence. James instructs his readers to “visit the fathers and widows in their trouble.” The word “visit” means to examine with the eyes with the intent to help. Perhaps this is the reason Paul instructed the brethren in Galatia, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Gal. 6:10) A religion that fails in the realm of benevolence cannot honestly practice pure and undefiled religion.

Fourth, we must practice inward purity. The word “unspotted” means to be untainted in character, to be pure and without fault. Paul admonished Timothy, “Keep yourself pure...” (1 Tim. 5:22). It is virtually impossible to practice pure and undefiled religion when our personal lives become spotted with the sins of the world. Such is why we are admonished not to love the world or the things of the world (1 Jn. 2:15-15). Purity in religion requires a pure life.

Let us live every day striving to practice “pure and undefiled religion!”

## **Refreshing the Hearts of the Saints**

Most scholars believe that the book of Philemon was written by the apostle Paul, to a Christian named Philemon. Paul was writing to him concerning a runaway slave whose name was Onesimus. Paul had met Onesimus while in prison, had converted him, and now he was sending him home, encouraging Philemon to receive him as a brother in Christ. Paul gives several compliments to Philemon throughout the letter, but one of the most noticeable compliments that he gives to him I believe is found in verse seven. “For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.” The word refreshed in this verse means to cause one to recover and to collect his strength. The Biblical text is unclear as to what specific act Philemon had done to refresh the brethren, but one thing is clear, he brought joy to a desperate situation and lifted the spirits of those brethren. Can the same be said of us today? Do we live every day seeking to refresh the hearts of our brethren? Every day our brethren experience difficulties that deplete them of their strength, both physically and spiritually. They need someone to help them regain their strength so they can carry on through the Christian life. Will you be the one to be there for them? What can we do to help refresh the spirits of our brethren? Consider if you will the attitude of Philemon.

**To begin with, he was a beloved friend.** This can be seen in verse one. The word ‘beloved’ refers to one who is worthy of love. Philemon was worthy of love. Why? Perhaps it was because of his desire to work. In the very same verse, he is identified as



a 'fellow laborer.' This word refers to a companion in work. When it came to the work of the church, Philemon was willing not only to work, but he was willing to work 'with' the brethren. How sweet and refreshing it is when brethren work with you. This was the kind of person Philemon was. Perhaps another reason why Philemon was so beloved is because of his love for the brethren. When you know you are loved by others, you desire to love them back. Philemon is described as having love for 'all' the saints (vs. 5). The love that Philemon exhibited greatly affected his brethren. It brought them great joy and consolation (encouragement).

**Second, Philemon was faithful.** The letter opens with a salutation (vs. 1-3). In verses 4-6, Paul offers a prayer. Involved in this prayer is a request which can be seen in verse six. Paul prays "that the sharing (communication) of your faith may become effective." Paul is not addressing the subject of evangelism as some would believe, but rather his prayer is that Philemon would receive Onesimus as a brother in Christ. Where is the faithfulness in this request? Consider verse 21. When Paul made this request, he was confident that Philemon would do exactly what he requested. Why? Philemon was faithful! Oh, how refreshing it must have been for the brethren to know that Philemon would always do that which was right.

**Third, Philemon was willing to go the extra mile.** When Paul wrote to Philemon, requesting that he receive Onesimus, he was confident that Philemon would not only receive him, but that he would do much more (vs. 20). If Paul was aware of this fact, then certainly those who were constantly around Philemon were. To know that he was willing to go above and beyond the call of duty must have been a tremendous strength for them.

What motivated Philemon to refresh the hearts of the saints? It was his faith in the Lord Jesus (vs. 5). When our faith is what it ought to be, we too will be those who refresh the hearts of the saints.

## Regardless of Our Smell

I don't know exactly when we receive our sense of smell, but it is apparent that young children either don't have it yet or just do not care about smell. Wouldn't you agree? I remember one time, several years ago, I had been working in the yard one day during the heat of the summer. While I was outside, I became hot and sweaty, and I was covered with dirt. In addition to that, I smelled bad. As I sat on the ground resting, my little girl came up to me, wrapped her arms around my neck, and kissed me on the cheek. She didn't do it just once, but she did it repeatedly. As I sat there, I wondered, why does she keep doing this? I'm dirty and I stink! The longer I thought about it, the more I realized that she did not care how dirty I was or how bad I smelled. She just wanted to show me how much she loved me. This occasion has stuck with me through the years. I don't think I'll ever forget that moment. One of the reasons why it sticks with me is because it reminds me of God and how much He loves us regardless of our smell.

Sin is often referred to in the Bible as a sickening disease (Isaiah 1:4-6). When sin enters our lives, it not only makes us look bad but spiritually speaking it also makes us stink. Perhaps this is the reason why so many will not turn to God. Many believe that their lives are so filled with sin, that there is no way possible that God could love them. Such is not true. God's love is much like a child's love. Regardless of how sinful I may be, He still wants me to know how much he loves me, and I can be forgiven. Just consider the story of the prodigal son (Lk. 15:11-32). The father in this story represents our heavenly Father. When the son expressed an attitude of repentance for the wrongs he had

committed, his father received him back with open arms, regardless of his wrongs. Why? He loved him! God likewise is willing to forgive us of all wrongs when we repent simply because He loves us. There is nothing we can do which will cause God to stop loving us. The apostle Paul asked the question, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39) According to these inspired words, nothing can keep us from the love of God, not even sin. Are you lost in sin, thinking that God could not possibly love and forgive you? Well, think again. Regardless of our sins, God still loves us, and He wants us to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). Why not turn to God today and let Him wrap His loving arms around you? Let Him show you how much He loves you. That's what He wants to do, regardless of how we smell!

### **Rejoice In the Lord Always**

"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice." (Phil. 4:4) How often do you find yourself casually reading through the Bible and you come across passages like this one and say to yourself, what a wonderful thought, and then just pass on to the next verse? We do it quite often, don't we? Whenever we do this, I'm afraid we make a great mistake when it comes to Bible study. We fail to recognize the depth of the meaning of a passage. Take for example the passage at hand (Phil. 4:4). Let's begin with the word rejoice. Before we define this word, let's note that this word is an imperative. That simply means that it is a command. This is not optional. It's a double imperative. "**Rejoice** in the Lord always, and again I say **rejoice**." What does the word rejoice mean? It means to be glad. It refers to a feeling of great joy or pleasure. As one continues to examine this passage it signifies how often one is to rejoice. Christians are to rejoice "always." The word "always" originates from an Old English word which means "all the way." As used in our text, it implies that joy is something that can and should be always experienced throughout life. It also implies that true joy is not determined by circumstances. Many believe that joy can only be experienced when times are good. Is that what the Bible teaches? Consider the following verse. "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:2) There are at least two things that can be learned from this passage about joy.

First, joy can be experienced during times of difficulty. Even amidst the horrific death on the cross, Jesus experienced joy. Just as Jesus experienced joy during difficult times, likewise, Christians can do the same today. "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds." (Jam. 1:2) The word "trials" refers to every kind of temptation imaginable. The phrase "count it all joy" literally means to be full of joy. According to this passage, joy can be experienced even when we experience all sorts of temptations. Consider another passage. "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed." (1 Pet. 4:12-13) The phrase "fiery trial" refers to an

intense temptation. According to this passage, even amidst the most severe trials that life has to offer, we can still have joy. Joy is something that I can always have, whether times are good or bad. Joy is something that no one can take from me. I can give it up, but no one, not even Satan himself can take it from me.

Second, notice if you will that it was “joy” which gave Jesus the strength to endure the cross. “...who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.” Joy caused Jesus to be able to look beyond the pain of the cross and recognize the result of His difficulty which was salvation for mankind. In the same way, joy is that characteristic that propels us through difficult times causing us to recognize the benefit of trying times. When we learn to rejoice always, we are blessed with endurance, character, hope (Rom. 5:3-4), increased faith (Jam. 1:2-3), fellowship with Christ, and ultimately, a home in heaven with God (1 Pet. 4:12-13). Joy certainly causes us to press on in life.

Notice, if you will, that this kind of joy is found only in one place. One must be in the Lord. When one is in the Lord, this kind of joy can be ours. How does one get into the Lord? We must be baptized into Christ. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:27) I’m not going to ask if you want this kind of joy, because I know you do. I’m going to ask, “Are you in the place where you can experience this kind of joy?” If you’re not, what are waiting for?

## **Remaining Steadfast**

Have you ever taken the time to consider the importance of a postage stamp? It’s a very valuable piece of sticky paper. Not only is it valuable, but it’s also very powerful. It continues to amaze me how a stamp can take a letter anywhere in the world. Though these two qualities are extremely important, the true usefulness of a stamp resides in its ability to stick to one thing until it gets there. If it was not designed to stick to the letter or package, its value and power would be less meaningful.

Now, consider a Christian for a moment. Christians are valuable. Jesus describes Christians as the light of the world (Matt. 5:16). Peter describes Christians as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people of God’s possession (1 Pet. 2:9). Christians are also described as being powerful. Christians are blessed with the wonderful power of God (Eph. 3:20-21) which gives them the ability to accomplish all things (Phil. 4:13). Though these characteristics are extremely important, the true usefulness or success of Christian living is the ability to stick to one thing or the ability to remain “steadfast” (1 Cor. 15:58). What does it mean to be steadfast? It means to be firmly or solidly in place. How can I remain steadfast in my life as a Christian?

First, we must recognize the source of steadfastness. True steadfastness resides in God and His Word. God is described as “...the living God and steadfast forever...” (Dan. 6:26). There will never come a time when God will stop being steadfast, therefore if I desire to be steadfast, my faith and trust in God must increase as each day passes. The more faith I have in God, the more steadfast I will become. Second, steadfastness comes from God’s Word (Heb. 2:1-2). It is the Bible which describes in detail the steadfast character of God. Therefore, the more we read, study, and meditate upon the scriptures, the more steadfast we will become.

Second, we must recognize the benefits of steadfastness. Being steadfast blesses my life in so many ways. It removes fear (Job 11:15; 2 Tim. 1:7), helps me to abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58), keeps my work in the Lord from being vain (1 Cor. 15:58), anchors my soul (Heb. 6:19), helps me to endure the trials and temptations of life

(Jam. 1:2-5) and helps me to resist the devil (1 Pet. 5:8-9). Most importantly, it is through steadfastness that we can remain in fellowship with Christ (Heb. 3:14). What a blessing!

Third, we must realize that God made us to be steadfast. Remember that stamps are designed to stick to that which you place them. Likewise, Christians were designed by God to be steadfast. As Christians, we are God's unique creation. He not only created us to do His will but to be successful in doing so (Eph. 2:10). Such is why the apostle Paul would state, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:13) Paul knew that God created him to be successful and steadfast. It would do us as Christians well to have the same conclusion today.

Fourth, we must have the desire to be steadfast. While we must recognize the source of steadfastness, the many blessings that come from being steadfast, and the power to be steadfast, it is equally important that we recognize the need for desire. If we do not have desire, we will never be steadfast. Brothers and sisters, we can be steadfast, and we must. In the words of the apostle Paul, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord..." (1 Cor. 15:58)

### **Responding Favorably When Convicted of Sin**

In Romans 3:23, the Bible states, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Sin is a struggle that every Christian experiences. The apostle John states that if one concludes that he does not struggle with sin, he is a liar and God's word is not in him (1 Jn. 1:8, 10). One of the responsibilities of a Christian is convicting others when they are guilty of sin (2 Tim. 4:2). When individuals are convicted of sin, they respond in several different ways. Some become angry, others become hardened, and then some respond like David in 2 Samuel 12:13, "I have sinned against the Lord." David had a penitent heart and was not only willing to admit his sin, but he was willing to accept the consequences. Such is the way that a Christian should respond when he is guilty and confronted with sin. What qualities in David made this attitude possible?

The key characteristic of David that caused him to respond in such a favorable manner when Nathan confronted him was the fact that he was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). To be a man after God's own heart refers to "loyalty." Consider Acts 13:22. "I have found David, the *son* of Jesse, a man after My *own* heart, who will do all My will." God chose David because He knew David would be devoted to doing His will. Couple this idea with the fact that the Spirit of the Lord dwelt within David (1 Sam 16:13), which means that David allowed the Spirit of the Lord to help influence his decisions in life. David responded in a favorable way when he was convicted of sin because he was loyal to God.

Second, David acknowledged his mistakes in life. In Psalm 51:3, the Psalmist states, "For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin *is* always before me. The word "acknowledge" means to know and to perceive, but it also means to confess (Psa. 32:5). David was "always" willing to acknowledge his mistakes. Such is the attitude of every faithful Christian. He never "passes the buck." If he has made a mistake, he is willing to accept the blame.

Third, David desired to do better. In Psalm 51:10, the Psalmist states, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." Once David was confronted with his fault, he was not satisfied with his present condition. He wanted to improve his character and be a better Christian. Such is the quality of every faithful

Christian. When he is confronted with his mistakes, his goal is to recognize those mistakes, correct them, and strive to do better in the future.

Fourth, David realized that he needed the help of others. David needed Nathan to confront him with his fault, just like every Christian today needs those who are willing to help them recognize when a mistake has been made. At the same time, David needed a greater force to help him change. He needed God. The word "create" in Psalm 51:10 is used only of God in the Old Testament. It is the same word used when God "created" the heavens and earth (Gen. 1:1), humanity (Gen. 1:27), and the heavenly hosts (Isa. 40:26). David needed God to help him change. Only God could grace him with the power to improve his character. Such is why David appealed to the mercy and lovingkindness of God (Psa. 51:1). Such is characteristic of every faithful Christian today. He recognizes his need for help, especially the help of God. He is the one who strengthens us to overcome every obstacle in life (Phil. 4:13).

### Responding to God's Love

Imagine a man who is elected president of the US. Oh, he's such a good president. He's much like King David in the OT times. He's a shepherd who loves the people of his kingdom. He does everything within his power to help the people. He balances the budget, puts our country on the road to being debt-free, brings in industry, provides jobs for the jobless, homes for the homeless, and affordable insurance for those who are without. Regardless of your political view, you know with all your heart that he loves the people of this country. Imagine a virus, for which there is no cure begins to track across our country. Every day, thousands of people are dying. At the rate of death, within 6 months, the entire population would be obliterated. After running tests on every individual possible, the doctors determine the president's son is not only immune to this virus, but the blood that courses through his veins holds the cure. The doctors need his blood and the DNA from his body to cure an entire nation of people. This father is in a dilemma. If he spares his son, an entire nation of people will die. If he sacrifices his son, an entire nation of people will live. He makes the most difficult decision of his life and offers his son. As a result of this sacrifice, an entire nation of people is spared. Why does he make this decision? He loves people. On a special day, that has been elected, each American is allowed to respond to this love. What do you say? What do you do? How do you respond to a man who through the sacrifice of his child has saved not just you and your family, but an entire nation of people? He's given you the gift of life!

In 2 Corinthians 9:15, the Bible writer states, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift." What was God's unspeakable, indescribable, inexpressible gift? It was Christ! (Jn. 3:16). God looked upon a world that was sick with sin (Rom. 3:23). He knew that the consequence for our sin was death (Rom. 6:23). The only cure was the blood of His one and only son (1 Jn. 2:2). How do you respond to something of such magnitude?

**We must Recognize God's love.** We need to know the love of Christ (Eph. 3:19). The word "know" means to grasp the meaning or significance of something, to comprehend, to understand. God's love is described as immeasurable (Eph. 3:18-19; Jn. 15:13-14), unconditional (1 Jn. 4:19; Rom. 5:8-9; Eph. 2:4-5), everlasting (Jer. 31:3; Lam. 3:22-23), inseparable (Rom. 8:35-39) and powerful!!! God's love makes sonship possible (1 Jn. 3:1), covers sin (1 Pet. 4:8), casts out fear (1 Jn. 4:18), and gives us the power to conquer (Rom. 8:37-38).

**We must Reciprocate God's love.** We are to love God (Matt. 22:37-38; Mk. 12:30). Why should we love God? He loved us first (1 Jn. 4:19). We express our love for God by keeping His commandments (Jn. 14:15).

Let us always be thankful to God for His marvelous love (Psa. 136:1-3, 26) and respond by living our lives following His will.

## **Responding To God's Word**

Isn't it interesting how people respond differently to the same message? Take for example the people on the day of Pentecost. After Peter and the other apostles concluded their message, the Bible states, "Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) Now, consider the audience of Stephen. After he concluded his message, the Bible states, "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with *their* teeth." (Acts 7:54) Notice if you will in both passages you have the phrase "cut to the heart." It means to pain sharply. Both groups of people heard the Gospel of Christ, and both responded differently. The people on the day of Pentecost responded in obedience by believing, repenting, and being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). The people in Stephen's day responded by gnashing upon him with their teeth, stopping their ears, running upon him and stoning him to death (Acts 7:54-57).

What can we as Christians learn from this today? Nothing has changed. The gospel still has the power that it had in the first century. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." (Rom. 1:16) It still has the power to save, which is so beautifully proclaimed in the passage that we just read. It still has the power to convict people of sin. "Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." (Tit. 1:9) Though the gospel is filled with such power, people still respond differently when they hear the gospel message. There will be those who when they hear the message of God, will readily accept it and do what it says. Then again, there will be those who will reject the message, regardless of how eloquently it is presented. Right now, as you are reading this article, you're either going to accept it or reject it. The question is, what will you do? May I encourage you to always accept God's Word and let us never be guilty of rejecting His beautiful message of salvation. Let God's word be a staple in your life. Let it be a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path. Read it, study it, meditate upon it, and most importantly, let us always obey it. Remember the words of Jesus, "blessed *are* those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28)

## **Restoring the Erring Brethren"**

"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." (James 5:19-20) As one examines this passage of scripture, he recognizes that there are times in life when Christians "wander from the truth." What does this mean? The word "wander" means to go astray. "Truth" has reference to God's Word (Jn. 17:17). One who has erred from the truth is no longer following the teachings of the Bible. It may be that he is no longer attending worship services faithfully. It may include those who are in attendance but are not faithfully

following the teachings of the Bible. Then again, this could also include those who have been led away from the Lord's Church into a denominational group.

What causes or leads Christians to wander away from the truth? The apostle Paul describes this condition as being "overtaken in a trespass." (Gal. 6:1). The word "trespass" refers to the moral failure to keep a command. The word "overtaken" means to take before. As used in the context of this scripture, it refers to an individual who has allowed sin to catch him by surprise, suddenly and without notice, before he is aware of what has happened. Such is the case with many individuals. Due to a lack of study and meditation upon God's Word, many find themselves caught in sin and they don't even realize it. Such is why we are admonished to keep our hearts with diligence (Prov. 4:23). To keep the heart or mind means to guard or protect it. God's Word is the element that protects us from sin (Psa. 119:11). Others wander away from the truth due to their love for the world (1 Jn. 2:15). Many have a greater love for the world and the things of the world than they do for God. As a result, they find themselves drifting away.

Regardless of the reason why an individual wanders away from the truth, the most important part of James 5:19-20 is our responsibility toward that individual. We have the responsibility of "turning him back" (Jam. 5:19) or "restoring" (Gal. 6:1). The word "restore" means to mend what was broken or repair it. It also means to make one what he ought to be. When one wanders away from God, he has broken his relationship with God. He is no longer living the life he should live (1 Jn. 1:7). Those who are "spiritual" (Gal. 6:1) or faithful in service to God have the responsibility of bringing them back or "converting them." (Jam. 5:19) How is this accomplished? Consider the word "convert." It means to turn toward. Figuratively speaking, it means to turn to the worship and service of the true God. It's the same word that Peter used as he encouraged obedience of the people in Acts 3:19. What message did Peter use to "convert" the people? It was the story about Jesus Christ. People who wander away from the truth have forgotten what Christ has done for them. They need to be reminded of the many ways in which He has blessed their lives (Eph. 1:3).

What happens when brethren who have wandered away are restored? A soul will be saved from death, a multitude of sins will be covered or forgiven (Jam. 5:20), burdens will be lifted, and we fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Can you think of a greater accomplishment? Do you know someone who is an erring brother or sister in Christ? Why not determine today that you are going to reach out to them? Why not seek to bring them back to Christ before it is everlasting too late?

## **Salvation In the Church?**

I recently heard a preacher make the statement, "Salvation has nothing to do with the church. If you're going to be saved, it will not be because you were a member of any church." For years individuals have maintained this position with no Biblical proof to support their belief. The question one should ask is what does the Bible teach?

Let's begin with the question "Does the church save?" The answer to that question is no. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the one who saves. "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matt. 1:21; See also Acts 4:12) So the answer is clear. The Church does not save. Jesus saves. Does this conclusion mean that the church has nothing to do with salvation? Absolutely not! It's much like the Bible. The Bible itself does not save; however, it contains a message of salvation. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to

salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” (Rom. 1:16; See also Jam. 1:21) If one is obedient to the message of the Bible, he will be saved (Heb. 5:8-9; Matt. 7:21). In the same way, the church does not save, but according to the Bible, it contains those who are saved. “Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47) Where did God place the people who were saved? He placed them in the church. Why? The Church was and still is the vessel of salvation. This passage teaches that the saved are in the church. What conclusion can be drawn from that? All who are outside the church are lost. It’s much like the ark in the days of Noah. Did the ark save? No, but it was God’s vessel of salvation, just as the church is God’s vessel of salvation today. Just as everyone outside the ark was lost (Gen. 7:21-23; 1 Pet. 3:20), everyone outside the church today is lost.

Consider the question, “Must one be in the kingdom of God to be saved?” Listen to the Bible. “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” (Col. 1:13-14). According to this passage, the kingdom is the place where one escapes darkness. It’s the place where God puts those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and have been forgiven. What is the kingdom of God’s dear Son? Many would conclude that the word “kingdom” in this passage refers to heaven. Though the word kingdom can and often does refer to heaven in the New Testament, it also refers to the church (Matt. 16:18-19). Which one was Paul referring to in his letter to those at Colossae? They were not actually in heaven at the writing of this letter. Paul was referring to the church. Therefore, those who are in the church, God’s vessel of salvation, are saved.

Also, consider the question, “Must one be a part of God’s Family to be saved?” Listen to the Bible. “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” (1 Tim. 3:15) According to this passage, the church is the “house of God.” What is God’s house? It’s His family. Can one be saved and not be a part of God’s family? Absolutely not!

Also, consider the fact that Jesus shed His blood for the church. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28) “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” (Eph. 5:25) To conclude that the church is not important and that one can be saved outside the church is to conclude that the death and blood of Christ is not important. The Bible is clear. The church is God’s vessel of salvation, and one cannot be saved outside the church.

## **Setting the Lord Before You**

“I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.” (Psa. 16:8) Life is filled with decisions. Every day that we live, our lives are bombarded with decisions that we are forced to make. When your alarm clock went off this morning, you had to decide to either get up or hit snooze and go back to sleep. Now some of the decisions you and I are forced to make are very easy. Then again, many of those decisions are extremely difficult and sometimes exhausting. Have you ever been confronted with a difficult decision? I’m certain that you have. Did you struggle in making



your decision? There's a good possibility you did. Think about this for a moment. The next time that you find yourself confronted with a difficult decision, why not consider the advice of the Psalmist? David said that he had always set the Lord before him. What did David mean when he made this statement?

For David to set the Lord before him, simply meant that he made his decisions in life based on the will of God. How often did David do this? The scripture states that he did this "always." This word means "equally." The force of this word means that David set the Lord's will before him in every situation. You know, the same must be true for us today. The Bible states, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you." (Matt. 6:33) If we are going to make it through difficult decisions in life, and we want the assurance that whatever decision we make will always be the right one, then we must keep the Lord's will in mind. Notice the result of always setting the Lord before us. First, God will be at my right hand. The phrase "right hand," especially when applied to God, signifies great strength, favor, power, and victory. "You have a mighty arm; Strong is Your hand, *and* high is Your right hand." (Psa. 89:13) "The right hand of the LORD is exalted; The right hand of the LORD does valiantly." (Psa. 118:16) When we make our decisions based upon the Lord's will, not only will we be graced with the strength of God to press on in life, but we will always be victorious in the decisions we make. Second, we will not be moved. This phrase has reference to stability. When the Lord is with us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5) and we make our decisions according to His will, we will always be successful in the decisions we make in life. So, here's the challenge today. Try making all your decisions today and every day with the Lord's will in mind. If we follow this advice, we will be blessed with the continual presence of the Lord in our lives and we will possess a strength that is beyond our wildest imagination.

### **Should Babies be baptized?**

For some religious groups, the baptism of infants is an option and for others, it is a necessity. The question that we should always ask concerning religious practices is what does the Bible say? Does the Bible teach that infants must be baptized? According to those who advocate infant baptism; yes. According to an article I recently read concerning infant baptism, the article stated, "The Bible teaches that infants are born sinful and are in need of forgiveness." The scripture used was Psalm 51:5 "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me." Does this verse teach that children are born in sin? Absolutely not. David is simply saying he was conceived in a sinful environment, and he was born in a sinful environment. David did not say he was born a sinner. Therefore, the argument used to prove infant baptism is not valid.

To participate in a religious practice, we must have Bible authority. "And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Col. 3:16) In word or deed refers to our speech and our actions. The word "name" in this passage means "authority." This passage teaches that we must have Bible authority for the things we do religiously speaking. Consider another passage with me. "If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God." (1 Pet 4:11) If the religious practice that we are a part of cannot be found in the Bible, can we honestly participate in it and be right with God? In all the Bible, there is not one command to baptize infants. Even those who advocate infant baptism will admit to this fact. Second, there is not one example of an infant ever being baptized. Again, those who advocate infant baptism will admit to this. Third, there is not the first implication in the scripture which

teaches that infants should be baptized. If there is no command, no example, and no implication, can we advocate infant baptism? No, we cannot.

### **Should Preachers Be Called Reverend?"**

A common practice in many English-speaking religious groups is to designate the names "Reverend," "Right Reverend," or "Most Reverend," to those who are identified as clergymen or preachers. Should religious titles of such nature be used and worn by men today?

Consider first that there is no Bible authority to wear such names. "And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Col. 3:17) The word "name" in this passage means power or authority. According to this passage, we must have the authority of Christ for the things we say and do, religiously speaking. Without that authority, we cannot be pleasing to God. There is no Bible authority to wear such names or titles.

Second, there is no Bible example. There is no mention in the scriptures of "Reverend Paul," "Reverend James," "Reverend Peter," or "Reverend John." These men simply referred to themselves as "servants of Jesus Christ." "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:1) James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jam. 1:1) Simon Peter, a servant, and an apostle of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:1). These men did not accept these titles and neither did they wear them. Even when Bible writers spoke of other ministers of the gospel, they did not give them names or titles that lifted them above other Christians. Peter simply referred to Paul as "our beloved brother." (2 Pet. 3:15) Peter was aware of the credentials of Paul. He recognized how the people held him in such high esteem. Why didn't Peter give Paul a title of such recognition as "reverend?" Peter, like others in his day, understood the importance of Bible authority. "If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Pet. 4:11) The truth of the matter is, that there is no Biblical or historical record of any of these great Godly men ever being referred to as "Reverend." According to history, this practice did not begin until the late 1800's.

In the third place, consider the fact that the scriptures condemn the wearing of religious titles. "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. "Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ." (Matt. 23:8-10) Wearing religious titles like "reverend," "Father," "Pope" etc., elevates one brother above another. The Bible condemns this practice. Paul commanded, "not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. but also teaches that we are all on in Christ Jesus." (1 Cor. 4:6) The Bible teaches that we are all one in Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28) When men wear religious titles like "reverend," "father," "pope," etc., they are inviting praise to themselves instead of praise to God.

What is the conclusion of the matter? Can a man wear religious titles such as "reverend," "father," or "pope" and be pleasing to God? According to the Bible, he cannot!

## **Should Christians Practice Sabbath Day Worship?"**

A practice that you will see as you read through your Bible, especially in the Old Testament, is Sabbath-day worship. Some religious groups believe that the Sabbath day is still binding on Christians today. What does the Bible teach?

“And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.” (Deut. 5:1-3) Notice if you will that this covenant was with Israel and Israel alone. Notice an even more clear passage of scripture. “It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.” (Exod. 31:17) According to these two passages, Sabbath day worship was a covenant between God and the physical children of Israel, therefore it is not binding to Christians today.

In the second place, notice that Sabbath-day worship was a part of the Old Law. That law or covenant was fulfilled and removed at the death of Christ on the cross. “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.” (Col. 2:14) What did the handwriting of ordinances refer to? It referred to the entire Old Law. If the Old Law, which included Sabbath day worship, was nailed to the cross, is it still binding today? Absolutely not! The Bible teaches that we live by a New Law. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Rom. 8:1-2) Under the New Law, man is commanded to worship on the first day of the week, which would be Sunday.

In the third place, Biblical evidence shows that the early church came together to worship on the first day of the week, which was Sunday and not the Sabbath. The Church was established on the first day of the week. In Acts 2:1, the day identified is the “day of Pentecost.” “And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.” (Lev. 23:15-16) The word “Pentecost” means fifty. According to this passage, the day of Pentecost was fifty days past the seventh Sabbath. That would have placed the beginning of the church on the first day of the week, which would have been Sunday. According to Acts 20:7, the disciples at Troaz came together to worship on the first day of the week, which would have been Sunday. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, the Christians at Corinth met each first day of the week and offered a collection. If Sabbath day worship was still in effect after the church began, why don’t we see Christians observing this day? Why don’t Bible writers encourage Christians to observe the Sabbath Day? The reason is clear. Sabbath-day worship was no longer in effect. God’s new day of worship was the first day of the week which was Sunday.

**So Great Salvation**

In Hebrews 2:1-4, the author encouraged the recipients of the letter not to neglect “so great a salvation.” Implied within this statement is the fact the salvation that the Christian enjoys is a “great salvation.” What makes our salvation so great?

First, the **Person** of Salvation makes our salvation great. The person of salvation is Jesus. It was the angel of the Lord who announced to the shepherds, “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” (Lk. 2:11) In Ephesians 5:23, Jesus is identified as the “Savior” of the body, which is the Church (Col. 1:18). The apostle Peter informed the people, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) Jesus is the only one who can offer salvation to mankind.

Second, the **Place** of salvation makes our salvation great. The Bible teaches that the church is the place of salvation. On the day of Pentecost, the church is the place where God added those who were being saved (Acts 2:47; See also Eph. 5:23). What’s so great about the Church? It is the only vessel of salvation that we read about in the New Testament (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 4:4; Rom. 16:16). It is a blood-bought institution. It was purchased by the blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28). The church is the place where we are reconciled to God (Eph. 2:16). The church is God’s family (1 Tim. 3:15).

Third, the **Plan** of salvation makes our salvation great. What is so great about the plan to save man? It was prophesied. The person of salvation was prophesied. In Matthew 1:21, the angel told Joseph that Mary would bring forth a son, his name would be called Jesus, and he would save the people from their sins. In verses 22-23, the Bible reveals unto us that this was a fulfillment of prophecy (Isa. 7:14). Not only was the “person” of salvation prophesied but also the “place” of salvation was prophesied. Isaiah prophesied that the Lord’s house, which is the church (1 Tim. 3:15), God’s vessel of salvation (Acts 2:47) would be established in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-4). Acts chapter two records the beginning of the church which is a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy.

Fourth, the **Power** of Salvation makes our salvation great. Consider the extent of salvation. God desires that all be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), therefore, God has made salvation available to all (Tit. 2:11; 1 Tim. 1:15; Rom. 1:16; Jam. 1:21).

Fifth, the **Price** of salvation makes our salvation great. What was the cost of our salvation? The apostle Paul states in the book of 1 Corinthians 6:20 that we were bought with a price. The apostle Peter identifies the price of redemption. It was the blood of Jesus Christ. “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.” (1 Pet. 1:18-19; See also 1 Jn. 2:2).

We are all blessed to experience great days in this life, but the greatest day of our lives is when “so great a salvation” was made available to mankind. Do you have this great salvation in your life?

## Someone Is Watching Over Us

Have you ever watched a child sleep? Isn’t it just amazing how they seem to sleep so soundly, without worry or care in the world? How is it that they sleep so soundly? Could it be that they know a higher power is continuously watching over them? In my house, that higher power is my wonderful wife, Kelly. Not only does she care for them throughout the day, but even when they are asleep, she still cares for them. Every night after we put our children to bed and they fall asleep, I watch her check on them several times until we

go to bed. I have even seen her wake up in the middle of the night, for the simple purpose of checking on the children. The next morning, the children wake up smiling and happy to live another day. How is it that they can go to sleep so peacefully and wake up the next morning without a care in the world? It's because my wife continuously watches over them.

Have you ever stopped to think about what goes on when you are asleep? The world does. Time, work, and even crime and violence continue. The FBI predicts that one in every thirty-six homes in the United States will be burglarized this year. What a frightening thought! How can we possibly go to bed each night and sleep with such ease, not be worried and terrified that something bad is going to happen? We know that a higher power is watching over us. Just as my loving wife is always watching over our children through the night, our Heavenly Father is ever watching over us (His children) throughout the night. The apostle Peter said, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers..." (1 Peter 3:12) The word "over" refers to a fixed position. The Lord is "always" watching over His children. He never takes His eyes off of us. He is always checking in on us to make sure that we are alright. If we happen to cry out, He is there awaiting our cry, ready to assist us in any way He possibly can. Listen to the words of the great Psalmist. "The eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous, And His ears *are open* to their cry. The face of the LORD *is* against those who do evil, To cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. *The righteous* cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles." (Psalm 34:15, 17) What a beautiful thought!

As you fall asleep tonight, remember this. God is ever watching over you. He is awaiting your call, should you need Him, and He will deliver you out of any trouble that you may encounter. Allow these thoughts to sink deep within your mind and cause you to sleep more peacefully than you have ever slept before.

## **Sometimes God Says No**

One of the greatest blessings we have as Christians is the power of prayer. God wants us to be people who pray. "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Matt. 7:8-9) We are promised that God will hear and answer our prayers. "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their cry. The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles." (Psa. 34:15, 17) The Bible teaches we can have confidence in prayer. "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." (1 Jn. 5:14-15) Our prayers are powerful and important. "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (Jam. 5:16) Prayer should be a constant daily part of every Christian life.

Though prayer is so important, and it should be a part of every Christian life, there is an important aspect of prayer that we sometimes overlook. There may be times when God denies our request. For example, he denied Abraham when he pleaded for the continued existence of two cities (Gen. 18:23-32). He also denied David when he pleaded for the life of his child (2 Sam. 12:16-23). He denied Paul as he pleaded three times to remove his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:8-9). He even denied Christ. "He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup

pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*.” Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done.” And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.” (Matt. 26:37-44). What can we learn from these passages? There may be times in my prayer life when God says no to me.

What must we do when God says no? We must trust Him. “For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Nor *are* your ways My ways,” says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isa. 55:8-9) We must trust that as our Heavenly Father, God knows best and He is always going to take care of us and give us the things we need in life. In the words of the apostle Paul, “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.” (1 Cor 10:13). We must be confident in the fact that God’s grace and mercy will carry us through. “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9) Brothers and sisters, sometimes God says no. When He does say no, it’s easy to get discouraged, but we can’t do that. We must trust that God knows best and keep on praying.

### **Strengthen Yourself in The Lord**

In the book of First Samuel chapter 30, we find the historical story of David and his men of war returning home to the city of Ziklag. When they returned home, they found the city in complete ruins. While they were away, the Amalekites burned the city and took captive the wives and children of the soldiers. The Bible states that they “lifted up their voices and began to weep until they had no more power to weep.” In verse six, the Bible informs us that David’s men of war blamed him for this catastrophe and they were thinking about stoning him. How do you think David felt? In verse 6 the Bible states that David was “greatly distressed,” which means that he was greatly troubled in his mind. What did David do? How did he respond? Listen to the rest of verse six. “Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.” What did the Bible say? “David strengthened himself in the Lord.” What does this mean? In other words, David placed his complete trust in the Lord. “Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?” (Psa. 56:3-4) “In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Psa. 56:11) How often did David place his trust in the Lord? “Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.” (Psa. 62:8) David knew that if he would put his complete trust in the Lord, everything would be okay. “Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass.” (Psa. 37:5)

Life is not a bed of roses. Life is filled with trials, tribulations, temptations, sickness, disease, and death, just to name a few. There will be times in our lives when these events will take place and we will find ourselves feeling just like David. We will be “greatly distressed.” What should we do? We need to follow David’s example. We must trust in the Lord knowing that He will bring everything to pass. Do you trust in the Lord?

## **Striving Not to Complain**

You've been around the type before. All they seem to do is complain. They complain about the weather, the economy, their jobs, family situations, etc. You name the situation, and they will find a complaint about it. It's almost as if they "live" or perhaps "love" to complain. How many of you know church members who do the same thing? Maybe you're one of those people who likes to complain. Does God approve of this kind of attitude? Consider the following passage with me. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings." (Phil. 2:14). What did Paul mean in this passage and why did he give this admonition? The word "murmurings" refers to complaining, grumbling, or negative behind the scenes talk. The word disputing means to argue. Many will go to this passage and conclude that one should never complain or argue. That's not the teaching of the Bible. Paul stated earlier, "I am set for the defense of the gospel." (Phil. 1:17) What then is the Bible admonishing? In this context, the Bible is describing someone who is constantly complaining and arguing about anything that comes along. Why is Paul admonishing that we avoid murmurings and disputings?

According to the Bible, complaining was the downfall of Israel. "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:10-12). If complaining resulted in the destruction of many of God's people in the days of old, what will be the result of God's people today who constantly complain? Destruction! Therefore, if there is one characteristic that we as Christians must seek to avoid it is complaining.

How can we avoid the sin of complaining? Consider with me Philippians 2:15-16. "That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." We live in a world that is filled with people whose lives are crooked or corrupt. That which has corrupted their lives is sin. They are also perverse. They have departed from the accepted standard of moral and spiritual values, which is the Word of God. As Children of God, we have a tremendous responsibility. We must live lives that are without fault (blameless) and free from evil (harmless) that we may shine as lights to those who are in corrupted by sin. Such is accomplished by "holding fast the word of life." The "word of life" is identified by the apostle John as Jesus (1 Jn. 1:1). "Holding fast" means to maintain a grasp on someone or something. When we cling tightly to Jesus by keeping His commandments (Jn. 14:15) and seeking to do His will, we help lead people from a world of darkness to a Savior who can turn their lives of sin into lives that are blameless, harmless, and without fault.

What happens when we as Christians spend much of our time complaining? We fail to be blameless, harmless, and without fault. We fail in being shining lights in this world of sin and darkness (Matt. 5:14-16). Ultimately, we loosen our grip on Christ in life, we drift away from God, and we find ourselves in a spiritually lost condition. If possible, let us strive not to complain.

## **Taking The Lord's Name in Vain**

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” (Exod. 20:7) This familiar passage of scripture, as you know is the third of the Ten Commandments. As one can see, God is forbidding man from taking His name in vain. What does it mean to take the name of God in vain? The word “vain” in this passage means unreal or lacking, substance, or genuineness. It refers to the empty or fraudulent representation of the name or reputation of God. The Bible teaches us that God is holy. “Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!” (Psa. 99:9) The Bible also teaches that His name is holy. “And you shall not profane my holy name, that I may be sanctified among the people of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you.” (Lev. 22:32) The word “holy” in these two scriptures means to be sacred. To be “sacred” means to be worthy or entitled to reverence or respect. If there has ever been a being who is worthy of respect and reverence, it’s God (Eccl. 12:13). Taking the Lord’s name in vain is in essence a failure to give God the respect and reverence He deserves.

How does one take the Lord’s name in vain? First, this can be done through our speech. Many believe that taking God’s name in vain consists of coupling the word “God” with a curse word. While this is certainly an example of frivolously using God’s name, most do not realize that there are other ways in which we commonly take God’s name in vain. For example, in our world today, people make statements such as “Oh my God,” “Good God,” “Good Lord,” “Lord have mercy,” and so forth. A commonly used abbreviation in conversation, whether in the world or on social media is “OMG.” Such is short for “Oh my God.” Little do these people realize that they are guilty of taking God’s name in vain. Remember, if God’s name is not being used in a way that gives Him respect, then it’s not being used properly.

A second way one can be guilty of taking God’s name in vain is through their actions or how they live their lives. Many would limit the sin of taking God’s name in vain to just our speech, however, taking God’s name in vain goes far beyond our speech. We are commanded to live holy lives. “But as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Pet. 1:15-16) Remember that the word “holy” means to live a life of reverence. As Christians, our lives should give reverence to the God we serve. When we fail to live holy lives, then through our actions, we are guilty of living a life of taking God’s name in vain.

How can we avoid taking God’s name in vain? First, we must change the way we think. The wise man Solomon stated, “For as he thinks in his heart, so *is* he...” (Prov. 23:7) As mankind, we generally act upon the things that we think about. Therefore, if an individual is guilty of taking God’s name in vain, it’s usually the result of an internal problem. What can we do? Listen to the words of Paul. “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.” (Rom. 12:2) If we are to change the way we speak and live, we must renew our minds or change the way we think. How should we think? Strive to think like Christ thought. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:5) Christ lived every day reverencing the Father in every aspect of His life. If we follow His example, we will never be guilty of taking God’s name in vain.

Second, remember that as Christians, we are holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16). We have the responsibility of reverencing God and exalting Him in the lives we live. “Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!” (Psa. 34:3) If we live every day with this great challenge at the forefront of our thoughts, then we will never be guilty of taking God’s name in vain.



Third, consider the consequences. The text states, “the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” The word “guiltless” means unpunished. In other words, there will be consequences for those who are guilty of taking God’s name in vain. What are the consequences? “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matt. 12:36-37) “Idle words” are words without labor or words which are vain. The word condemnation means to pronounce guilty. The ultimate consequence of taking God’s name in vain is to stand before God on the day of judgment and hear the word “guilty.” What a sad day that will be for many.

Taking God’s name in vain is a serious offense. Let us as Christians never be guilty of this sin. Let us live every day magnifying His holy name through our speech and through the lives we live.

## The Bible

There are so many books in our world. Books that are very valuable and contain priceless information. But you know, I don’t know of a book that is more valuable or more important than the Bible. I’m certain that every reader this morning has a Bible, but if not, may I encourage you to...

Buy a Bible. “Buy truth, and do not sell *it*, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding.” (Prov. 23:23) The Bible is a book that is readily available to all. The Bible is the bestselling book of all time. It has been translated into more languages and dialects than any other book in history. And everyone needs a Bible for it alone tells the plan of salvation. Once you buy a Bible, may I encourage you to...

Investigate the Bible. Don’t just buy it, but read it, study it, and meditate upon its teachings. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15) Knowledge is power and Biblical knowledge is eternal. That’s why we are admonished to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). Once you buy a Bible and investigate it, may I encourage you to...

Believe the Bible. “So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.” (Rom. 10:17) Trust what you read and obey what you trust. We cannot believe in God and refuse to believe His word. Believe with all your heart mind and soul that what you read is God’s Word. Once you buy a Bible, investigate it, and believe it, may I encourage you to...

Love the Bible. “O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” (Psa. 119:97) Think of the Bible like air and food. You not only need air and food to survive, but you also learn to love it! Love the Bible in the same way. Love it to such a degree that you cannot live your life without it. We cannot love God and not love His word. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.” (1 Jn. 5:3) When we love the Bible, we will faithfully proclaim its truths. Then finally, once you buy a Bible, investigate it, believe it, and love it, may I encourage you to...

Exemplify the Bible. Live it out in your life. The apostle Paul admonished Timothy to be a good example in the life he lived. “Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.” (1 Tim. 4:12) How can we be assured that we are good examples? Live

your life by the Bible! Let it be your guide for living. “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.” (Psa. 119:105)

The Bible is truly the most valuable book in all the world. If you do not own one, may I encourage you to buy a Bible, investigate it, believe it, love it, and exemplify it in the life you live.

## **The Bible Influences**

The Bible is the greatest book because of its influence. The library shelves are filled with books that have impacted and changed the lives of so many who have read them. But there is not a book that has influenced and continues to influence the lives of as many people as the Bible. It is by far the most influential book that has ever been known by man.

It's a book that tells us about salvation. Salvation is something that Man craves. He is continuously in search of it. God has promised salvation to all who will obey Him. “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation. (Heb. 5:8-9) Where do we find salvation? Listen to the words of the apostle Paul. “And that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. 3:15) Where did Timothy find wisdom that leads to salvation? He found it in the sacred writings. What is that? It is none other than the Bible.

It's a book that tells us that we are not alone in this life. “lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:20) “I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU.” (Heb. 13:5) Isn't it great to know that we have such a wonderful Lord who is with us every step of the way through life? What book tells us about the presence of God in our lives? It's none other than the Bible.

It's a book that tells us about strength. Strength is something that we need to survive. “Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, <sup>21</sup> to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (Eph. 3:20-21) Did you hear what this passage just taught? We have the strength of God working in our lives. Such is why the apostle Paul could say in such a profound way, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13).

Oh, the list is almost endless. The Bible is truly a blessing to everyone who reads it and makes it a part of their lives. The question is, “will you make it a part of your life and allow it to influence the life you live?”

## **The Bible is God's Word**

There are so many books in our world today that are bursting with knowledge and great power. Books that change the lives of those who read them. But you know, I don't know of a book that is greater than the Bible. Do you? What makes the Bible so great?

It is God's Word. The Bible is not like all the other books in the world today that are composed of man's thoughts, feelings, or opinions. The Bible is a book from the one who created this world in which we live. It's from the one to whom we owe for our existence. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for

every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17) Notice if you will that all scripture is inspired by God. That means that it is from the breath of God. When we read the Bible, it is our creator speaking to us. “For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Gal. 1:11-12) Did you just hear the words of the apostle Paul? The words that he spoke, the words that he wrote were not from man. Where then did he get his message? He received it from God! That’s what makes the Bible so special. It’s not a man’s message to man, but rather God’s message to man. Listen to the words of the apostle Peter. “But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” (2 Pet. 1:20-21) Consider with me the word “moved” in this passage. Picture if you will a sailboat. How that boat moves is through the wind. The wind blows into the sail and moves the boat along the water. In the same way that the wind moves a boat across the water, the Holy Spirit of God moved those men and told them what to write. On and on we could go. The Bible is the greatest book in the world because it is from God.

### **The Bible is Powerful**

The Bible is great because of its great authority. Authority is something that we all understand. Though many sources possess great authority, no book is as authoritative or as powerful as the Bible.

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb. 4:12) Listen to the power in this passage. It begins by letting us know that the word of God is “living and active.” So many refer to the Bible as a dead letter. Oh, how wrong they are. Second, it’s sharper than a two-edged sword. It has the power to separate or divide. It has the power to judge. As we stand before God in judgment, the Bible will be the source that will judge us all.

“For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.” (1 Pet. 1:23) Hear the words of Peter in this passage. God’s word is the source that causes one to be born again. We would know nothing about the New Birth were it not for the Bible. Not only that, but Peter states also that the Word of God is enduring. The Word of God will exist forever. Listen to the words of Jesus. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.” (Matt. 24:35) According to Jesus, the Bible will never pass away or be destroyed. Can that be said of any other book? Absolutely not!

Finally, the Bible contains a message that can save souls. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Rom. 1:16) Note that Paul states that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation. Where do we find the Gospel? It’s found in the pages of the Bible. Listen to the words of James. “Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.” (Jas. 1:21) The Bible contains a message that can save the souls of man.

Oh, there are many other reasons we could give, but I’m sure you get the picture. The Bible is the greatest book in the world, because of its great power.

### **The Bible is Sufficient**

The Bible is the greatest book in the world because it is sufficient. What does the word “sufficient” mean? It refers to having or providing as much as is needed. The Bible is a book that gives us everything we need in life. “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16-17) Notice if you will that the Bible makes the man of God “adequate.” What does the word adequate mean? It means to be fully sufficient. The Bible is sufficient when it comes to teaching or doctrine. When I have the Bible, I don’t need any other message. Such is why the apostle John would write and instruct his readers, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into *your* house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.” (2 Jn. 1:10-11) The Bible is sufficient when it comes to reproof. The word reproof refers to the exposing of one’s sin. How do I know when I’m guilty of sin? How do I know that I have done something I ought not? The Bible tells me. It reveals to me what sin is and when I’m guilty of sin. The apostle Paul states, “What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law.” (Rom. 7:7) The Bible is sufficient when it comes to correction. Not only does the Bible point out sin in my life, but it also tells me what I need to do to correct the situation. That’s why the Psalmist states, “Your Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against you.” (Psa. 119:11) The Bible is sufficient when it comes to righteousness. What is righteousness? It is simply living in a condition acceptable to God. The Psalmist states, “Let my tongue sing of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness.” (Psa. 119:172) On and on we could go. The Bible is clear. It is sufficient. It provides man with everything he needs in life. Listen to the words of the apostle Peter. “Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.” (2 Pet. 1:3)

### **The Bible Will Judge Us**

The Bible is the greatest book in the world because we are going to be judged by it someday. The Bible teaches that there will be a great day of judgment. “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.” (Matt. 25:31-33) What’s being portrayed in this passage? It’s the great judgment seen of the entire world standing before Jesus. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (2 Cor. 5:10) In this passage, the Bible portrays once again a great day wherein we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.” (Rev. 20:12) Notice if you will in this passage that not only does the Bible portray a great judgment seen, but it also indicates what man will be judged by. The Bible states that the books were opened. What were the books? We know that one of the books is the Book of Life. What about the other books? Are they not the books that compose the Bible that we have in our possession today?

Listen to the words of Jesus. "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day." (Jn. 12:48) Where do we find the words of Jesus? In no other place than the Bible. "For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor. 2:16) When we stand before God on that Great day of judgment, we will all be judged by the same source; the Bible. That's why it's the greatest book in the world. The question is, "Are you living your life by the Bible."

## **The Blessed Man"**

Do you want to be happy? Most people do. Happiness is like a drug we're addicted to, and we will do anything to obtain it. Sadly, many are not truly happy in life. According to an article by huffingtonpost.com, based upon an online poll of 2,345 US adults, only 33% of Americans said they were very happy. That leaves a whopping 67% who were not happy. Why? Perhaps they are looking for happiness in all the wrong places. Many are convinced that happiness is in the world or the things of the world and it's not. That's why the apostle John encourages, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." (1 Jn. 2:15) John understood that there is nothing in this world that can bring true, lasting happiness. Where then is happiness found? Listen to the Psalmist. "Blessed *is* the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper." (Psalm 1:1-3) The word "blessed" in this passage means happy, therefore, the Psalmist is discussing the principles of true happiness. How can I be happy?

First, the truly happy man avoids sin at all costs. Notice the three groups of people mentioned in this passage. The "ungodly" refers to an individual whose life is filled with sin and is in fact against God. The word "sinners" is self-explanatory. It refers to someone who is constantly living in violation of God's Word. The word "scornful" refers to individuals who are proud or arrogant and love conflict. To sit in the seat of the scornful means to identify with this group and practice their behavior. Let's put together what we have thus far. The truly happy person will not listen to the advice of those who are ungodly, he doesn't spend quality time with those who are sinners, and he certainly doesn't identify with their sinful practices. In other words, he avoids sin at all costs. Why? He understands the progressive nature of sin. Notice the analogy. Sin often enters our lives when we listen to the advice of those who are sinners. As a result of listening to sinful advice, we find ourselves standing or living in sin. Once an individual remains idle in sin, he begins to identify with sinners, and his life is completely consumed with sinful practices. Sin is progressive! The blessed man also understands the destructive nature of sin. Sin separates one from God (Isa. 59:1-2) and eventually brings about spiritual death (Rom. 6:23). The blessed man knows that the one thing that can take away his happiness is sin and therefore, he avoids it at all costs.

Second, the truly happy man is the one who gains his happiness from God's Word. Look at verse two. "His delight (pleasure) is in the law of the Lord." He understands that true happiness is found in God's Word. That's why he meditates upon it day and night. He knows the more he reads, studies, and mediates upon God's Word, the happier he will be. Notice the beautiful imagery the Psalmist uses. He is portrayed as a well-nourished fruit-bearing tree whose leaves never wither. That's what God's Word does for

the Christian. It nourishes him (Matt. 5:6). When he applies it to his life, it causes him to bear fruit (Jn. 15:8). If he remains in God's Word, his faith will never wither, and he will always be successful in everything he does. Perhaps this is why Joshua was encouraged, "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Josh. 1:8) God knew that His word would not only bring Joshua and the people of Israel success, but it was the only source that could provide true lasting happiness. Do you have true happiness? If not, why not focus your attention on God's Word?

## **The Celebration of Christmas"**

"Christmas" is an annual holiday celebrated by many. On this day, millions of people commemorate the birth of Jesus. Many consider it as one of "the most holy" of religious holidays. But were you aware that Christians in the New Testament did not celebrate the birth of Jesus as an annual observance? Most Protestant churches did not begin celebrating Christmas until the 19th century. How then did the yearly observance of Jesus' birth get started? Should the Lord's church support and promote December 25 as the birth of Christ?

Consider the birth of Christ from a historical point of view. According to history, Sextus Julius Africanus popularized the idea that Jesus was born on December 25 in his *Chronographiai*, a reference book written in 221 AD. This conclusion assumed that Jesus died on March 25 and prophets died on the same date as their conception. Thus, if Jesus was conceived on March 25, then He was born nine months later (assuming a gestation period lasting exactly nine months).

What does the Bible teach concerning the time of the birth of Christ? The Bible simply states that Christ was born in the days of Caesar Augustus, while Quirinius (51BC–AD 21) was governing Syria (Lk. 2:1-6). Most scholars place the year of Jesus' birth between 4 BC – 3 AD, however, the actual year, month, and day are uncertain. Evidence places the birth of Christ either in the spring or summer. According to Luke 2:8, the shepherds were still in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night. According to historians, shepherds in Palestine only kept their flocks out in the fields during the warm dry months of spring and summer. Sheep were normally brought into centrally located pens or corrals as the weather turned colder and the rainy season began, especially at night. Even with this information, it is still difficult to pinpoint a month and especially a day when Christ was born.

If we do not know exactly when Jesus was born, how did the annual celebration of His birth begin? The earliest reference to Christmas is in 357 AD, by a bishop named Liberius. Soon after, it was introduced to the councils of Constantinople (379), Antioch (380) and Alexandria (430). Interestingly, the celebration of Christmas as the birth of Christ was not widely accepted at first. During the Reformation, Protestant churches condemned Christmas as "trappings of popery" (Christmas means "the Mass of Christ", or "mass on Christ's day"). England's Puritan rulers banned it in 1647 but reinstated it in 1660. Puritans of New England disapproved of Christmas and outlawed it from 1659-1681. Christmas even fell out of favor in the US after the American Revolution, since it was considered an English custom. Interest in Christmas in America wasn't revived until the early 1800's. Even then, it was still renounced by many religious leaders. The famous

English preacher and writer Charles Spurgeon wrote, “We have no superstitious regard for times and seasons. Certainly, we do not believe in the present ecclesiastical arrangement called Christmas ... we find no scriptural word whatever for observing any day as the birthday of the Savior; and consequently, its observance is a superstition, because (it's) not of divine authority ... probably the fact is that the 'holy days' (were) arranged to fit in with the heathen festivals (1871). As one can see, the annual observance of the birth of Christ has been adopted only after great controversy.

Does the Bible support an annual observance of the birth of Christ? The answer to that question is no. There is not one reference in the Bible of the early church celebrating the birth of Jesus as an annual observance. The only event of Jesus' life that was celebrated regularly was His death, done weekly in the observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:20-34). The apostle Paul expressed great concern about observing days, months, and years (Gal. 4:9-10). Since the Bible does not support the annual observance of the birth of Christ, can Christians do so and be right with God? Can and should the Lord's church support such an occasion? What Christians do religiously must be done with Bible authority (Col. 3:17; Acts 4:7-10). Consider the evidence we have seen thus far. There is no Bible command or example to annually observe the birth of Christ on December 25. Historians do not record the early Church practicing this event annually. Therefore, the conclusion should be clear. There is no Bible authority for an individual to single out a particular day of the year and observe it annually as the birth of Christ. Does this conclusion mean that the birth of Christ is not important? Absolutely not. The birth of Christ is of utmost importance. We should praise God every day that Christ was born, but at the same time, we cannot draw conclusions and invent days of celebration that are not backed by scripture.

How should Christians view Christmas? Use it as a teaching opportunity. Though the Bible does not teach that December 25 is the birth of Christ, many believe that it is. Since many people are thinking about the birth of Christ, use those thoughts as a bridge to discuss with people the gospel of Christ. Many espouse erroneous beliefs simply because they have not been taught. Let's teach them the gospel and help free them from their religious error.

Christians can use this time of the year to spend time with family and enjoy one another's company. Many view this time of the year as a time of joy and happiness when friends and family members unite to enjoy the love, joy, and fellowship of one another. Why not take advantage of this wonderful opportunity?

## **The Christian & Easter**

Today is the second most celebrated day of the entire year. On this day, many are celebrating what is known as “Easter Sunday,” the day in the year set aside to remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Christians, we should all understand the importance of the resurrection of Christ. As we think about this day, let us ask ourselves several questions. How did the resurrection of Christ become connected with the term “Easter?” Should Christians join in with the other religious groups and celebrate “Easter” as the resurrection of Christ?

Let us begin with the origin of Easter. Many believe that the term “Easter” has its origin in the Bible. “And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after **Easter** to bring him forth to the people.” (Acts 12:4). The problem with the word “Easter” is it was not a

proper rendering of the Greek text. The English word “Easter” was translated from the Greek word *pascha*, which means “Passover.” In the context where this word is used, it has direct reference to the Passover feast (Not the resurrection) which the Jews observed yearly to remind themselves of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Exod. 12:1-20; Num. 28:16-18; Deut. 16:1-8). The actual origin of the word “Easter” is uncertain. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the word “Easter” is an 8<sup>th</sup>-century term derived from “Estre,” an Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring. The celebration of Easter as the resurrection of Christ did not begin until 325 AD when Constantine and the Council of Nicaea ruled that Easter must fall on a Sunday, the day when Christ rose from the grave (Matt. 28:1-6; Mk. 16:1-6). The date set was the first Sunday after the full moon following the northern hemisphere's “vernal equinox.” This takes place twice a year, occurring around March 20/21 and September 22/23 each year. It is the time of year when the nights and days have equal lengths of time. Therefore, Easter is observed anywhere between March 22 and April 25 every year.

How should a Christian view Easter? Should we join in with the rest of the religious world and celebrate a particular Sunday of the year as the resurrection of Christ? While every Christian should recognize the theological truths concerning the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor. 15:11-4, 3-20; Matt. 28:1-6; Mk. 16:1-6), we must likewise recognize the dangers of selecting a certain day out of the year and celebrating it as the resurrection of Christ.

Consider the first-century Christians. They were aware of the Hebrew calendar (Acts 2:1; 1 Cor. 16:8). Yet, there is not one example in the entire New Testament where they celebrated any specific Christian festival, including the resurrection of Christ. The only day that was celebrated by the early church regularly was the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Consider the fact that the apostle Paul warned against observing special religious days. “You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.” (Gal. 4:10-11). Why did he warn these brethren? He knew that the observance of special days was a tradition of men (Matt. 15:9). He knew that the traditions of men were vain and could also lead to apostasy. (Gal. 5:4).

Finally, as Christians, we must have Bible authority for our religious beliefs and practices (Col. 3:17). We must call Bible things by Bible names (1 Pet. 4:11). While the resurrection of Christ is extremely important, to set aside one day out of the year and celebrate it as the resurrection of Christ is to do so without Bible authority.

Does all of what we have studied mean we should not celebrate the resurrection of Christ? Absolutely not! We should praise God every day that Jesus rose victoriously from the grave. However, to choose a particular day out of the year and say this is the day that we should celebrate the resurrection of Christ is to do so without Bible authority.

## **The Cost of Christianity**

God desires that all men be saved and be identified as Christians. This can be seen in Paul’s statement to Agrippa (Acts 26:28). Sadly, many choose not to become Christians in this life. Though there are many reasons given, one of the most given reasons is the cost that one must pay to be a Christian. There is a price that must be paid to being a Christian. Let’s turn the tables. Consider the cost or the price we must pay if we choose not to become Christians.



It will cost us Salvation. Christians are assured of salvation (1 Jn. 5:13). “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” (1 Jn. 5:13)

It will cost me answered Prayer. The Christian has the blessed assurance that God will hear and answer His prayers. “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” (1 Jn. 5:14) An individual who chooses not to become a Christian will forfeit the right to answered prayer. The Psalmist states, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.” (Psa. 66:18).

It will cost me Peace. True peace comes from God. “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:7) The Peace of God is enjoyed only in Christ “Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus”(1 Pet. 5:14)

It will cost you your Soul. A man’s soul is his most valuable possession (Mk. 8:36-37). “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” When an individual says no to Christianity, he condemns his very own soul.

Finally, it will cost you Heaven. “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matt. 25:30) “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Matt. 25:46) Heaven and eternal life have been reserved for those who are Christians. Those who say no to Christianity, say no to a heavenly home.

Yes, many allow the cost of Christianity to keep them from Christianity, but when you stop and think about it, can you afford not to become a Christian? Why not be obedient to the gospel of Christ today, through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism and become a New Testament Christian?

## **The Danger of Minimizing Sin”**

We live in a world where we are being told that the word “sin” sounds too harsh. It’s too condemning. Many preachers and religious leaders today refuse to speak against sin. It is believed by many that we should adopt more respectable and less offensive names for sin. As a result, sin is spoken of as immature development, negative goodness, misdirection, a defect of temper, and a mere mistake. Lust is called love, pornography is called art, lying is coloring the truth, dishonesty is shrewdness, car theft is joyriding, cursing and obscenity is emphatic speech, drunkenness is alcoholism, fornication is sowing wild oats, adultery is an affair, homosexuality and lesbianism are alternative lifestyles, and murder is a release from a previous traumatic experience. Abraham Lincoln once asked a group of individuals, “If you call a sheep’s tail a leg, how many legs would he have?” They promptly answered, “Five.” “Wrong,” Lincoln responded, “Calling it a leg doesn’t make it one.” Oh, what a statement of truth! Whitewashing sin does not change it from what it is. It’s still sin. As Christians, we have the moral responsibility to always distinguish between that which is right and wrong, that which is good and evil, and never should we be guilty of calling evil good! “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20)

Consider the danger of minimizing sin. When we minimize sin, we make sin inconsequential. We sound out a strong message that regardless of the sins committed,

there will be no consequences. That's not what the Bible teaches. The Bible describes sin as divisive, deceptive, destructive, and dominating. Most importantly, consequences will be suffered from every sin that we commit. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." (Gal. 6:7) According to the laws of reaping and sowing, if we sow sin in our lives, we will certainly reap the consequences. Such is why the Proverb writer states, "Whoever rewards evil for good, Evil will not depart from his house." (Prov. 17:15) Listen to the words of the apostle Paul. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23) The word "wages" in this passage means payment. In other words, there is a price that must be paid when we sin. If we remain in sin, that price is eternal death.

Let us stop treating sin lightly. Let us never be guilty of minimizing sin. It is not a surface freckle. Sin is poison in the blood. Sin will take you farther than you'll want to go, keep you longer than you'll want to stay, and cost you more than you'll ever want to pay. When it comes to sin, let's see what it is and call it what it is.

### **The Death of a Saint"**

I suppose one of the most difficult challenges we face in life is that of death. I don't know of anything that we as humans experience that can be compared to the pains that one experiences when it comes to death. Death is something that we do not understand and as a result, we struggle to accept it. Regardless of our views concerning death, it's something that we must all face someday (Heb. 9:27). How do we cope with death? The reason that I use the word "cope" is because death is something that you never really get over. You just learn to live with it and accept it as you continue your journey through life. How do we accomplish this great task? We must turn to God's Word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. The Bible has much to say about death and if we could view death from a Biblical perspective, then we will be blessed with the strength to cope with this great giant. What does the Bible say about death?

**Death is precious.** "Precious in the sight of the LORD *is* the death of His saints." (Psa. 116:15) The word precious refers to that which is prized or valued. Usually, when we think of the word precious, we think of a child or a grandchild. We don't normally think of death as that which is precious. The Bible teaches that the death of a saint is precious. We must understand that the Psalmist is not teaching that God receives some kind of delight, pleasure, or satisfaction in the death of a saint. God treasures the lives of His faithful children, and He wants them to live and prosper (Jn. 10:10; 3 Jn. 2). On the other hand, we must realize that Saints belong to God (Eph. 2:19-20). They have been purchased by the precious blood of His Son (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Due to these facts, the death of a faithful Christian is precious to God in the sense that His child is finally home to be with him forever more, never to leave His presence.

**Death is a release.** Think about the many difficulties we face in life to which we are shackled (pain, sickness, disease, death, temptation, sin, persecution, etc...). Now, think of death as a release. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21:4) The phrase "former things" refers to every difficulty that man has experienced since the fall (Gen. 3). In death, the Christian is released from those difficulties. What a blessing!

**Death is a rest.** "Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." (Rev.

14:13) Rest is something that is appealing to all. At the end of a hard day's work, we look forward to sitting down or lying down and enjoying peaceful rest. According to this passage, true rest is found in the Lord. When we die in Christ Jesus, we are privileged to enjoy a rest like we've never experienced before. Unlike the rest that we enjoy in this life, the rest that the faithful Christian gets to enjoy will be eternal.

**Death is a gain.** Though we are blessed beyond measure by God each day that we live, we are constantly made aware of the fact that life is filled with losses. We often think of death as a loss and to us it is, but to the Christian, there are no losses in death. There's only gain. "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better." (Phil. 1:21-23) What was it that Paul gained? It was a heavenly home with His eternal Father. "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Cor. 5:1)

**Death is victory.** It is so difficult for us to see death as a victory. When death occurs, we immediately think of it as a defeat, because life has been taken away. The Bible describes death as a victory. "So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Cor. 15:54) How is there victory in death? Heaven is a spiritual dwelling place (Jn. 4:24). Flesh and blood and anything corruptible cannot enter heaven (1 Cor. 15:50; Rev. 21:27). In death our bodies are changed to an incorruptible state that we may be able to enter heaven and live eternally. This is all made possible through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:56). It's in death that true life begins; therefore, death is a victory for the Faithful Christian.

Death is painful. It's a sting that no one can begin to describe until you experience it. Knowing this great pain, in the words of the apostle Paul, "Let us comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. 4:18)

## The Death of Uzzah

"And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." (2 Sam. 6:6-7) Have you ever read this passage and asked yourself the question, "Why did God strike Uzzah dead?" The Bible states that it was because the anger of the Lord was kindled. The word kindled there literally means to have hot anger. What was it that made the Lord so angry?

To begin with, the transportation of the Ark of the Covenant was wrong. "And the children of the Levites bare the ark of God upon their shoulders with the staves thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the LORD." (1 Chron. 15:15). According to Exodus 25:14, there were rings on the sides of the Ark. Staves or poles were run through the rings and the ark was to be borne upon the shoulders of the Levites. How was the ark being transported when Uzzah was struck dead? According to 2 Samuel 6:3, they placed it upon a new cart. They had the wrong transportation.

In the second place, the wrong people were transporting it. The Bible is very clear in 1 Chronicles that the Levites were to transport the ark. If one looks at the context of the scripture in 2 Samuel 6, one will learn that Uzzah was not a Levite, and neither were any

of the Levites present when the ark was being transported. So, the wrong people were transporting the ark.

In the third place, a strict command was given by God not to touch the ark. "And when Aaron and his sons have made an end of covering the sanctuary, and all the vessels of the sanctuary, as the camp is to set forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of the congregation." (Num. 4:15) So, was God just punishing Uzzah? Yes. Why? His commands were violated.

What lesson can we gain from this today? We live in a religious world where people are continuously changing, adding to, or taking away from God's Word. God gives man a very plain plan of salvation and what does man do? He changes it. God tells man to worship Him and gives man a pattern for worship and what does man do? He changes it. On and on we could go. Man is continuously changing that which he does not have the right to change. Our goal in life is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13). Does that mean that God is going to start striking people dead because they are violating His will? No. There will come a day when we will all stand before God and answer for the way we lived our lives (2 Cor. 5:10). On that day if we have violated God's, will then we will suffer the consequences just as did Uzzah.

## **The Faith that Saves**

In Romans 5:1, the Bible states, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1) The word "justified" in this passage means to render or proclaim one to be righteous. To be righteous is to be in a right relationship with God. In Hebrews 11:6, the Bible states, "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." When consideration is given to these two passages of Scripture, one cannot help but see the great importance that the Bible places upon faith. It is through one's faith that he is justified or saved and without faith, it is impossible to please God. The question that is often neglected when it comes to faith is "What kind of faith justifies and pleases God?" Is it the simple conviction and confession of the fact that Jesus is Lord?

Consider the following passage. "Though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." (Heb. 5:8-9) According to this passage, salvation is given only to those who are willing to obey Jesus (See also Matt. 7:21-23). Therefore, the faith saves is the faith that obeys. The kind of faith that pleases God is an active obedient faith. One of the most significant chapters in the Bible where this principle is emphasized is in Hebrews 11. The phrase "by faith" is found eighteen times in this chapter. The chapter begins and ends with those who "obtained a good testimony through faith" (vs. 2, 39). This phrase means they gained approval (NASB). The approval that they gained was the approval of God. That which caused them to gain the approval of God was faith. Such is why the writer would say, "but without faith it is impossible to please God." (vs. 6) This chapter is about individuals who through their faith pleased God and gained His approval. What kind of faith did they have? Let us examine the text.

In verse four the Bible states, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Can." Abel's faith was one which pleased God, but what kind of faith did Abel have? It was an obedient faith. He offered the kind of sacrifice that was according to

God's will. How can we be sure of this? The Bible states that Abel's sacrifice was offered "by faith." In Romans 10:17, the Bible states, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Since faith comes by hearing the word of God and Abel offered his sacrifice by faith, then implied is the fact that God told Abel what kind of sacrifice to offer and that is precisely what Abel did. In verse five, the Bible states, "By faith Enoch... pleased God." How did he please God? It was through his faith. What kind of faith did he have? It was an active, obedient faith. In Genesis 5:24 the Bible states, "Enoch walked with God." To walk with God means to live in accordance with His will. In verse seven the Bible states, "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet see, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household." Again, Noah's faith was one which pleased God, but what kind of faith did Noah have? It was an active obedient faith. He moved with fear and was obedient to God by preparing the ark as God commanded. The list goes on. Hebrews 11 is filled with examples faith. What kind of faith? It was an active obedient faith.

Let us go back to our question. What kind of faith that brings about justification and pleases God? It is an active obedient faith. Biblical faith always leads to more than conviction and confession. It changes people's lives and attitudes. Listen to the following passage. "Nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it so that they would not be put out of the synagogue." (Jn. 12:42) These men had faith but were unwilling to act on their faith. Did that faith save or justify them? Did it please God? No, it did not. Faith is more than being convinced about the status of Jesus or even one's need to be saved. Faith calls on man to respond by repenting, being baptized and committing our entire lives to Him (Acts 2:38-42).

## The Fatherhood of God

Today, as you know, is Father's Day. On this day, countless individuals will take the time to honor their fathers. Typically speaking, on Father's Day, ministers will stand before the brethren and consider several Biblical fathers, who are great examples for us to follow today. While considering Biblical examples is an excellent idea, why not consider the greatest example in existence today; that is our Heavenly Father? What makes God such a great Father figure?

**First, God Loves Us.** Many passages in the Bible tell of God's love for His children. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (Jn. 3:16) "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! (1 Jn. 3:1). Upon examining these passages, do you know what I find so amazing about God's Love? There's nothing that you and I have ever done to deserve God's love, and yet He loves us. Is that not amazing? God doesn't wait for us to meet His expectations, measure up to His standards, or make Him proud before He loves us. He simply loves us & He loved us first. "We love Him because He first loved us." (1 Jn. 4:19) "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) God's love for us is complete, constant, & unconditional. Another amazing concept concerning God's love is the fact that nothing can separate us from it (Rom. 8:38-39). God may be angry when we disobey Him, saddened when we stray from Him, or sorrowful when we sin, but He never stops loving us. What a great example for us to follow today. We need to be fathers who love our children unconditionally. We need to be fathers, that regardless of their failures, we still love our children.

**Second, God Cares for Us.** The word “care” means to feel affection or love and concern for somebody. The Bible teaches that God cares for us. “Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (1 Pet. 5:7) As a result of His constant care, He provides us with everything we need in life. “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:19). Do we care for our children in this manner? Do we have such concern for our children that we will make any sacrifice necessary to provide for them and express to them how meaningful they are to us (1 Tim. 5:8)?

**Third, God Watches Over Us.** God sees all things. “And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.” (Heb. 4:13). God not only sees all things, but He is constantly watching over us. “For the eyes of the LORD *are* on the righteous, And His ears *are open* to their prayers...” (1 Pet. 3:12). Why does God watch over us? He watches that He may protect us. “But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard *you* from the evil one.” (1 Thess. 3:3) Do we as fathers watch over our children? Are we concerned about the choices they make in life and the individuals they associate with? Is it our desire to protect our children so that they may have a hope of a home in Heaven someday?

**Fourth, God Instructs Us.** He has given us His Word to help us make proper decisions in life. “Your word *is* a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psa. 119:105) God’s instruction is sufficient. “As His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” (2 Pet. 1:3; See also 2 Tim. 3:16-17) Are we fathers who instruct our children? “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Prov. 22:6)

**Fifth, God Strengthens Us.** God gives strength to His people. “He gives power to the weak, And to *those who have* no might He increases strength.” (Isa. 40:29). How does God strengthen us? He strengthens us through His word. The apostle Paul commended the Ephesians elders to the word of God (Acts 20:32). Why? It could build them up! God also strengthens us through His presence. He has promised that He will never leave or forsake me (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). His continual presence in my life strengthens me. Every day we make sure that our children have the proper physical nourishment they need to survive. Do we likewise focus our attention on our children’s spiritual needs so that they may be strengthened?

Many will conclude that it is virtually impossible to have the character of God, however, such thinking contradicts Biblical teaching. Jesus states, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Matt. 5:48). We can be like our Heavenly Father. It’s just something we must determine to do.

## The Glorious Church

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.” (Eph. 5:25-27) In this passage of Scripture, the Bible describes the church as “a glorious church.” The word glorious in this passage means, to be held in high esteem. Though there are many things that we may exalt in our lives, there should be nothing that we hold higher than the Church of our Lord. Why is the church glorious?

The church is glorious because it has a glorious **Master**. “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.” (Eph 2:19-20) The Bible identifies Jesus as the “chief cornerstone” in this passage. In the time of the apostle Paul if you were going to construct a building, you began with what was called the “chief cornerstone.” This particular stone determined every characteristic about the building. When the Bible states that Jesus is the “chief cornerstone” it means that He determines every characteristic about the church. Why? He is the master of it! “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” (Col. 1:18) The Church is glorious because it has a glorious Master.

The Church is glorious because it has a glorious **Mission**. What is the mission of the Church? It’s the same mission as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Lk. 19:10). “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:19-20) Can you think of a greater mission than to take part in saving the souls of mankind?

The Church is glorious because it has a glorious **Message**. What is the message of the Church? It’s the Gospel of Jesus Christ! “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” (Rom. 1:16) What is the gospel? According to 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, it’s the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because He lived, died, was buried, and rose from the grave on the third day, I have hope that I too will someday resurrect from the Grave. Can you think of a greater message?

Yes, the Lord’s Church is glorious. The question is, “Are you a member of this glorious church that we read about in the Bible? If not, why not obey the gospel of Christ (Rom. 10:16) through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism for the remission of your sins and allow the Lord to add you to His glorious Church (Acts 2:38, 47)?

## **The God of Second Chances”**

What is it about God that impresses you the most? Maybe it’s the fact that He simply spoke and this world came into existence. Maybe it’s His ability to be in all places at one time. Maybe it’s His ability to hold this universe together. Many things impress me about God, but I suppose the thing that impresses me the most is the fact that He is a God of second chances. Have you ever been given a second chance? If you have, you recognize the importance of a second chance. A message that I love to share with people is the fact that the God we serve is a God of second chances.

Consider David. Though he is referred to in the Bible as a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22), he was guilty of many things which were contrary to God’s will. He was guilty of adultery. Bathsheba was the wife of Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 11:3). David had no right to her. Such was a clear violation of God’s law (Exod. 20:14, 17). He was also guilty of murder. When Bathsheba sent word that she was with child (2 Sam. 11:5) and David could not cover up his sinful action, he ordered Uriah to the front of the battle that he may be killed (2 Sam. 11:15-17). Without a doubt, David was guilty of sin, yet, when Nathan confronted King David with his sin, note two things - David’s confession and God’s response. In 2 Samuel 12:13, “So David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the

Lord.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin you shall not die.’ (2 Sam. 12:13) Don’t get me wrong. There were consequences for the sins David committed, but the most important fact to remember is that God gave him a second chance, and David made good with the opportunity given to him by God.

Consider Peter. Peter denied that he knew the Lord three times! (Matt. 26:70-75; Mk. 14:66-72; Lk. 22:54-62). He was a stumbling block to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-14). Yet, even though he did deny the Lord, and he was a stumbling block, he was forgiven. In his writing of 1 Peter, listen to what he stated. “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.” (1 Pet. 1:3) The phrase “begotten us again” means to be born again; to have one’s mind changed so that he lives a new life and one conformed to the will of God. How could Peter write about such forgiveness? He had experienced forgiveness. He had been given a second chance and he wanted others to know about it.

Consider Paul. Our first introduction to Paul is in Acts 8 where he is spoken of as consenting to the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1). The word “consenting” means to agree with, to be pleased with, and at the same time to applaud. Paul is also spoken of as making havoc of the church (Acts 8:3). The word havoc means to treat shamefully or to devastate and ruin. He is also described as breathing out threats and slaughter against the disciple of the Lord. (Acts 9:1-2). He lived every day threatening to murder God’s people. Yet, Paul was forgiven. He was given a second chance (1 Tim. 1:15).

Oh, I’m sure there are many others whom we could refer to, but aren’t you glad that God is a God of second chances? What’s the greatest evidence that God is still the God of second chances? He’s given us another year to live. 2014 may not have turned out the way you wanted it to. Perhaps you made many mistakes that you wish you hadn’t. Here’s what you must keep in mind. The God we serve is a God of second chances. Let me encourage you to look at this wonderful opportunity that God has blessed us with and take full advantage of it. The Psalmist wrote, “I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ And You forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psa. 32:5). God is waiting to give you a second chance! Will you accept it?

## **The God Who Pardons**

“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.” (Micah 7:18) Notice the word “pardon” in this passage. What does it mean? It means to pass over. That which God passes over is our sins and transgression. Isn’t it wonderful to know that we serve a God who is willing to “pass over” or “pardon” our sins? Not only does the Bible teach that God pardons, but he abundantly pardons us. “Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.” (Isa. 55:7) Listen to how the prophet Nehemiah describes God. “...But You are God, Ready to pardon, Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them.” (Neh. 9:17) What a beautiful and yet comforting thought. We serve a God who pardons our sins, He abundantly pardons and He is ready to pardon.

What causes God to pardon man? It’s the blood of Christ. Do you remember in the days of Moses when the death angel passed over each house where he saw the presence



of the blood? God passes over or pardons man today when He sees the presence of the blood. "Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." (Rom. 5:9) "And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." (Rev. 1:5) According to these two passages, it's the presence of the blood of Christ that justifies an individual and washes away or forgives or pardons one's sins. How does one contact that blood? "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) Remember, according to Revelation 1:5, the blood of Christ washes away sins, but in this passage, we are told that baptism washes away sins. Is there a contradiction? No. It's in the act of baptism that one contacts the blood of Christ and is blessed with the pardon of God. Once we contact the blood, we must walk in the light as He is in the light (1 Jn. 1:7). As a result, we have the continual presence of Christ's blood in our lives and we have the pardon of God.

Friend, do you have God's pardon? If not, why not take the necessary steps today so that you may have His pardon today?

### **The Hope of Rising Again"**

"For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease." (Job 14:7) The central theme of this passage is the "hope of rising again." What does the word 'hope' mean? Most of the time when people use this word, they refer to a desire they have or some kind of wishful thinking. The word hope, as found in the Bible, has a different meaning. It refers to an "expectation." It's not just something that one desires. It is something one looks forward to receiving. The writer of the book of Hebrews described the word hope as 'an anchor of the soul' (Heb 6:19). An anchor is something that gives stability. It causes a ship or a boat to remain in place. Hope does the same for the Christian today. It gives stability and causes an individual to remain in place. The apostle Paul used the word hope in connection with salvation. "For we are saved by hope..." (Rom. 8:24) Salvation is not something that is wished for. It is something that Christians expect. The anchor that gives God's children this confidence is the fact that Jesus Christ gave His life so all Christians could have salvation (Jn. 3:16). With these thoughts in mind, consider what Job was saying. Job was pointing out the clear fact that cutting down a tree will not cause its existence to cease. Even though it has been cut down, there is still hope, there is confidence, and there is expectation that it will sprout again. Why or how is that possible? It is because its roots are deep within the earth. The roots can spout forth a branch, and once again become a tree.

How can this help me as a Christian? The Bible compares the life of a Christian to a tree. "He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers." (Psa. 1:2-3). Just as trees are often cut down in this life, Christians are in a sense cut down on occasion. Christians are often cut down by sin. Just as a mighty wind has the power to cripple a tree, sin can do the same thing to a Christian (Rom. 6:23). Christians can also be cut down by the words and actions of others. We live in a world today where very few have a great love for their fellow man, as the Bible commands (Matt. 22:39). As a result, through words and actions, many Christians are cut down to the ground. Then again, there are times when we cut ourselves down. When we lack faith and confidence in ourselves, it is much like taking an

axe and swinging away at a tree. Eventually, if you keep striking the tree, it will fall. If we continue to lack faith and confidence in ourselves, we too will eventually fall (Phil 4:13).

There are many other reasons why Christians are cut down in this life (persecution, sickness, disease, loss, etc.). Regardless of the reason, we have the hope that we will rise again. How is this possible? It is because our roots are deep within Jesus. "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving." (Col. 2:6-7) Our roots in Christ give us the confidence and expectation that we will someday, sprout forth a new branch, and slowly but surely, begin to rise again. Have you as a Christian been cut down? Regardless of the reason, please do not feel that your life as a Christian is over. Continue to put your faith in the Lord and be confident in the fact that you will rise again.

### **The Importance of Moral Integrity**

In John 14:6 Jesus states, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus was not only the ultimate representative of truth, but He lived by the truth. This was something that even His enemies could not deny (Matt. 22:16). As Christians, we are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus (1 Pet. 2:21) and represent the truth of God's Word in our lives, for the truth, is the only means of setting people free from sin (Jn. 8:32). Therefore, it is of extreme importance that Christians practice moral integrity.

What is moral integrity? The word "moral" refers to a standard of what is right and wrong. The word "integrity" refers to moral uprightness. The Christian's moral compass or standard of right and wrong is the Word of God. The Bible is our standard of morality because it is inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), it is sufficient (2 Pet. 1:3), and the promises that are found therein are true (2 Pet. 3:9-10). Only by following the Bible will I find myself making the best choices in life. Such is why David would say, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you." (Psa. 119:11) "Your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." (Psa. 119:105) Those who practice moral integrity are those who are living their lives by the Word of God.

Why should we practice moral integrity? We live in a world where people are in search of genuineness. It seems that people no longer do things just because the Bible commands it. They are looking for individuals who are genuine, real, or authentic. They are looking for people who have been purchased by the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19), and that blood has changed the lives they live forever. While a life of honesty is a demand of those in the world today, many fail to realize that God has always demanded genuineness in the lives of His people. In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul commended Timothy for his "unfeigned faith." The word "unfeigned" means sincere, real, genuine, true, or without hypocrisy. Why does Paul commend Timothy for his genuine Christian lifestyle? He commends him because that is the kind of life God expects every Christian to live. Though it is offensive to the world when we practice hypocritical Christianity, it is even a greater offense to God because He demanded authenticity first. As Christians, we must strive for genuineness because that is what God expects.

We must also realize that actions speak louder than words. The Gospel message has the power to save (Rom. 1:16). Because of the Gospel's great power, we must preach and teach the good news; however, if people do not see the gospel in the lives we live, they will not be convinced to obey. Paul expresses this in his letter to the Christians in

Thessalonica. He states, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only..." (1 Thess. 1:5). According to the latter part of that verse, it was revealed to them through the lives that they lived. In 1 Peter 2:11-12, Peter encourages honorable conduct among the Gentiles. The purpose of this demand was that the people might observe the good works and glorify God. Such is why Paul would command, "Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ." (Phil. 1:27) When people look at us as Christians, they should be able to see the gospel living in us.

## **The Importance of The Blood of Christ**

Do you realize the importance of the blood in your body? Right now, the average adult has about five liters or 5 1/2 quarts of blood coursing through their veins. As you read this article, your blood is working overtime to sustain life in your body. It delivers the necessary substances such as nutrients and oxygen to cells in your body, so you live and function. It removes wastes such as carbon dioxide and lactic acid in your body. It's helping to regulate your core body temperature. The most important fact about your blood is you can't survive without it. Your life is dependent on your blood. You could survive if you lost approximately 30 % of your body's blood, which would be about 1 1/2 quarts of blood, but beyond that, your body would begin to go into shock, your organs would begin to shut down and you would eventually die. Of course, this should be no surprise to doctors and other medical professionals. The Bible emphasized the importance of blood many years before this discovery was made. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood." (Lev. 17:11)

Would you believe me if I told you there is another kind of blood even more important than our own. It is the blood of Jesus Christ. Just as one cannot survive physically without blood, one cannot survive spiritually without the blood of Christ. Consider with me how vital the blood of Christ is. Jesus Himself stated, "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. 26:28). According to this verse, the blood of Christ is the element that remits or removes my sins. The apostle Peter states that the blood of Christ redeems us. "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Pet. 1:18-19) The word "redeem" comes from a word which means to release. That which the blood of Christ releases us from is sin. The blood of Christ also establishes peace between man and God. "And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." (Col. 1:20) Do you see how powerful the blood of Christ is? We cannot survive spiritually without it.

How does one contact the blood? Listen to the words of the apostle John. "And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood." (Rev. 21:5) Notice if you will, the Bible states that the blood of Christ washes away our sins. How do I contact this blood? Listen to the Bible. "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) Wait a minute. I thought the Bible stated that the blood of Christ is the element that washes away our sins. It did say that. In the book of Acts, the Bible states that baptism washes away sins. Do you see the connection? According to the Bible, it's in the act of baptism that an individual contacts the blood of Christ and is saved. Dear friend, have

you been baptized into Christ, into His blood where you might have remission of your sins? If not, why not do so today?

## **The Importance of the Lord's Supper**

One of the New Testament acts of worship found in the Bible is that of the observance of the Lord's Supper. According to the Bible, the Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus on the night of the Passover (Matt. 26:17-30). The elements of the Lord's Supper consist of unleavened bread (vs. 17) and the fruit of the vine or grape juice (vs. 29). These two elements do not become the body and blood of Jesus, but instead, they represent His broken body and shed blood on the cross. If these elements become literal flesh and blood, Jesus was encouraging cannibalism, something that is forbidden in the Bible (Gen. 9:6).

What is the purpose of the Lord's Supper? Consider the text of 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. First, it is a memorial. "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." Every time we eat the bread and drink the cup, it reminds us of what Jesus did for us. It reminds us of how He died on the cross and shed His blood for us. Second, it is a proclamation. Listen to verse 26. "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he comes." The word "shew" means to announce, to make known, or to proclaim publicly. Every time Christians partake of the Lord's Supper, it is a proclamation of faith in the efficacy of the Lord's death. It is also a proclamation of one's faith in the fact that Jesus is coming back. Third, it is a Communion. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16) The word "communion" means fellowship. When we partake of the Lord's supper, we are experiencing fellowship. We are in fellowship with God and with His body, the church.

How often should the Lord's Supper be observed? According to the Scriptures, the early church observed the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week. In Acts 20:6, Paul and his companions arrive in Troas. They purposefully wait seven days in Troas. For what purpose did they wait? They wanted to be with the disciples on the first day of the week when they came together to break bread (Acts 20:7). What did it mean to break bread? Most scholars would agree that the phrase "to break bread" has direct reference to the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34). Just as the Lord was raised on the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1), the church was established on the first day of the week (Acts 2:1), and the collection of the saints took place on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:1-2), the Lord's Supper is to be observed every first day of the week.

## **The Lord is my Shepherd**

In Psalm 23, the Psalmist states, "The Lord is my Shepherd." Is that not just a most beautiful thought? The Lord is my shepherd, the one who leads and guides me through this life. But why? Why did David identify the Lord as his Shepherd?

First, because of what the Lord offers. What does the Lord offer? Peace. Listen to verse 2, “He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters.” Don’t you imagine the picture of peace in this passage? That’s what the Lord offers us. Regardless of what we may be experiencing in this life, He always gives us peace. The Lord also offers contentment. Look back to verse two again. “He makes me to lie down in green pastures.” Do you see the contentment in that passage? The idea is if we allow the Lord to be our Shepherd, he will help us to be content in whatever circumstance we may find ourselves. The Lord also offers restoration. Listen to verse 3. “He restores my soul.” The phrase “restores my soul” literally means he causes my life to return to me or to bring me back from destruction. Sin has the power to destroy us (Rom. 6:23). When we allow sin to come into our lives, as a good Shepherd, the Lord restores us repeatedly when we repent (1 Jn. 1:9). Oh what a blessing that is. The Lord truly provides like no other Shepherd. “I shall not want.”

Second, He guides. Listen to verse three. “He leads me in the paths of righteousness.” As humans, we don’t always know what decisions we should make. Isn’t it great to know that we have a Shepherd who will always lead us to do that which is right?

Third, He protects. Listen to verse 4. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” The valley in this passage can refer to death or any fearful situation in life. Life is filled with frightening times. With the Lord as your shepherd, you have nothing to fear because he will always protect you.

Fourth, He provides. Listen to verses 5-6. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever. Is that not beautiful? Even our enemies cannot stop God from fellowshiping and providing for us. And of course, the ultimate thing that He provides us with is a heavenly home.

David made the Lord the Shepherd of His life. Will you do the same?

## **The Place of Joy**

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you *is* not tedious, but for you *it is* safe.” (Phil. 3:1) The theme of this verse is “to rejoice.” The idea of joy is the theme of the book. The words joy, rejoice, and rejoicing are found seventeen times in the book. As we read the book of Philippians, we must conclude that God wants us to have joy! What does the word “joy” mean? The word can mean happiness or gladness, but the meaning is deeper. Joy is an inward experience that does not depend on outward circumstances. Joy is a gladness that is experienced because of what our actions are accomplishing in this life. Consider the example of Jesus. The author of Hebrews states, “...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame...” (Heb. 12:2). How could Jesus experience Joy while experiencing the shameful death of the cross? He knew what his actions were accomplishing. Where is this kind of joy found? Look at Philippians 3:1 again. Joy is found “in the Lord.” The phrase “in Christ” is found eight times in the book. Why is it important for Paul to use this phrase so often? True joy is found in one place and only in one place. That place is in Christ Jesus. True lasting joy is not found in the world or the things of the world. That is why the apostle John would say, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world—

the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” (1 Jn. 2:15-17) The world and things of the world may bring you temporary joy, but never will they bring you everlasting joy. Why not? Everything in this world will someday pass away. That is why if we want true joy, we need to be in Christ Jesus. The question we should ask is “How does one get into Christ?” Listen to what the Bible states. “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:26-27) Listen to another verse. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:3-4) How did those people get into Christ? They were baptized into Christ.

Are you in Christ Jesus? If not, why not determine before the day's end to be found in Him? Be baptized into Christ and begin to experience joy as you've never known.

### **The Power of Kindness**

On January 20, 1989, when President George Bush was inaugurated as President everyone was waiting to hear what kind of a challenge he would give to the United States as a nation, his challenge was that we strive to be a kinder and gentler nation. That was 28 years ago. I wonder where we stand today. In a US News & World Report poll, 89% of Americans think that rudeness and a lack of kindness have become a serious problem. In the words of one individual, “we have become a society in which the milk of human kindness has spoiled.” We live in a world where kindness is needed. We need to be kind in our actions (Acts 10:38; Gal. 6:10), our speech (Prov. 31:26; 25:11), and especially in our attitude (Col 3:12-13). When our attitude is not right, it generally reveals itself through our speech and actions.

Why should we practice kindness? First, to be like God. God is described as love (1 Jn. 4:8) and love is kind (1 Cor. 13:4). Therefore, to be like God is to be kind. “Blessed be the LORD, For He has shown me His marvelous kindness in a strong city!” (Psa. 31:21). Second, to receive kindness. We all desire that people exhibit kindness toward us (Prov. 19:22). If we are to receive kindness, we must extend kindness (Matt. 7:12). Third, to comfort others. There will be many times in life when you or someone you know may need comfort. While there are many ways to bring about comfort, one of the greatest ways is through the act of kindness. (Psa. 119:76) Fourth, to win souls. As Christians, we have the responsibility of winning souls to Christ (Matt. 28:19-20). If we are going to win souls, we must make ourselves spiritually attractive. Kindness makes a person extremely attractive. It opens the hearts and minds of unbelievers. If we are going to win the world, we must melt it, not hammer it.

To whom should we practice kindness? We should be kind to everyone! In the words of the apostle Paul, “And be kind to one another...” (Eph. 4:32) The word “one another” means to reciprocate. That teaches me that we should be kind to those who are kind to us (Matt. 7:12). We should also be kind to those who are unkind to us. I know this is extremely difficult, but Jesus commanded us to be kind even to those whom we might think of as enemies (Lk. 6:35) Remember also, if someone is unkind, it's because that's what they have been taught. The only way to change them is to be an example of

kindness to them. Let us be like the natives on the island of Malta who practiced unusual kindness (Acts 28:2).

When should we practice kindness? We should practice kindness always. There should never be a time when we are unkind. One of the characteristics of the fruit of the spirit is "kindness." (Gal. 5:22-23). Concerning the fruit of the Spirit, the Bible states, "Against such there is no law," which means there is no restraint. There should never be a limit as to how much kindness we can exhibit. We should be kind when times are good and when times are bad. Just keep in mind the kindness of God (Isa. 54:8-10). God always practices kindness, regardless of our actions. Therefore, let us be people of kindness. Let us live every day spreading the kindness of God wherever we may go.

### **The Power of the Resurrection**

A message that you see throughout the New Testament is the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection was the message that the apostles were compelled to preach. "Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." (Acts 1:22) This is the reason the apostles Peter and John were arrested in Acts 4. "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide." (Acts 4:1-3) Listen to Acts 4:33. "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all." (Acts 4:33) Why were the apostles preaching about the resurrection of Christ? There is great power in the resurrection. "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, (Here, Paul is asking the question, what is the greatest example of God's power. Read on with me.) according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:19-23) The entire Christian system is built upon the fact that Jesus was resurrected from the grave. "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." (1 Cor. 15:13-14) Think about the scriptures and how valuable they are to us. "They came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ." (Acts 17:1-3) In this passage, Paul discusses the resurrection of Christ. What did he use to explain the resurrection? He used the scriptures. Do you realize that if Christ did not resurrect, then the scriptures are in vain? Do you understand how important the resurrection of Christ is? Why not tell someone today that Jesus rose from the grave to save them from their sins?

### **The Power of Truth**

“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Jn. 8:31-32) The subject which is being emphasized in this passage is truth. There are at least three things we can learn about truth in this passage.

First, we can know the truth. Jesus states, “You shall know the truth.” This teaches that truth does exist. Truth is real! What is truth? God’s Word is truth. “Sanctify them through your truth, your word is truth.” (Jn. 17:17) You do not have to wonder if someone is speaking the truth when they speak. You can know if the truth is being spoken by comparing it to God’s Word, the Bible.

Second, not only can we know the truth, but truth has the power to set us free. Free from what? SIN! “Jesus answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.” (Jn. 8:34) Sin enslaves us. It burdens us and weighs us down. Are you struggling with sin right now? Have you become a slave to money, alcohol, drugs, or pornography? Are you failing in your relationship as a spouse or as a parent? Is your life filled with resentment, jealousy, hatred, or racial prejudice? These and many other things we could mention are all sins and sin weighs us down. It burdens us. The good news is truth can free you from all of the burdens of sin!

Third, truth is found in Jesus. “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (Jn. 14:6). According to this passage, Jesus is the truth. Therefore, if we desire to know Him and be freed from sin, we must be in Him. Remember the words of Jesus. “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (Jn. 8:31-32) The question is, how do I get into Christ where I can experience this freedom? “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal. 3:26-27) “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Rom. 6:3)

Are you in Christ Jesus where you can experience freedom from sin and true knowledge of Jesus Christ? If not, why not do so today?

## **The Price We Must Pay**

I don’t know of anyone who doesn’t like new things. Who doesn’t like the smell of a new car, a new truck, or a newly built house? We like new clothes, new jobs, taking vacations to new places, etc. There are many reasons why we choose not to purchase those new things we desire. The main reason we choose not to do so is because of the price or the cost of the item. Even when we need an item, many times we will allow the price to deter us.

This idea reminds me of the Christian life. The Bible teaches there is a cost to Christianity. Jesus asked the question, “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it?” (Lk. 14:28). In the same context Jesus said, “So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” (vs. 33) Jesus was teaching there is a price one must pay to become a Christian. It’s going to cost me my time (Rom. 12:1; Gal. 2:20; 6:10), my money (1 Cor. 16:1-2) and it may even cost me my job, my family, or my friends. The sad news is that many view Christianity as that new car or new house. Their thinking is that it just costs too much to be a Christian. Even though they are in such great need of salvation, they choose not to become Christians.

How can we help individuals get past the thought that the price of Christianity is too



much? First, we must reveal to them that the price of Christianity is not beyond our ability to pay. The apostle John said, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." (1 Jn. 5:3) The word "burdensome" means heavy in weight. The Bible is teaching us that the Christian life is not so burdensome that we can't live it. Did not Jesus say that His yoke was "easy" and His burden was "light?" (Matt. 11:28-30)

In the second place, we must get people to realize that God gives us the strength and the power to pay the price of Christianity. Many fail to realize that when one becomes a Christian, the power of God resides within us (Eph. 3:20-21). Such is why the apostle Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:13) We can live the life of a Christian.

In the third place, we must get individuals to see their great need for salvation. When it comes to salvation, we are not dealing with a house or a car or a new wardrobe of clothes. We are dealing with the most valuable possession in the world, a person's soul. "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). According to this passage, man's soul is invaluable. Thus, man can never give too much to save his soul. Take for example a family who needs a vehicle. Even though there is a great need, this family may choose not to purchase it because of the price. There will eventually come a day when this family recognizes how greatly they need a vehicle. Once they are aware of this need, they will make any sacrifices necessary to obtain this means of transportation. The same is true when it comes to Christianity. When one truly recognizes his great need for salvation, he will make any sacrifices necessary to obtain salvation. The cost of Christianity will not be an issue.

Are you willing to pay the price of Christianity? If not, please consider the price Jesus paid so we could become Christians. Jesus gave His life so we could be partakers of the Christian life (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25).

### **The Problem of Abortion**

Do you know that 1 out of every 3 pregnancies end in abortion? Do you know that more than 1 out of 3 women in the U.S. have an abortion by the time they are 45 years old? Did you know that an abortion is performed every 20 seconds? (3/minute, 180/hour, 4,320/day, 1,576,800/year) Since 1973 in the ruling of Roe v. Wade there have been approximately 61,495,200 babies aborted. Are you ready for this one? More babies have been murdered through abortion than service men and women who have died in all of the American wars combined. Again, the question that one should always ask is, "What does the Bible have to say about abortion?"

To begin with, the Bible teaches that man is God's greatest, most valuable creation. "So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Gen. 1:27) Do you realize that every time an abortion takes place it is a slap in the face of the one who created us all?

Many seek to justify abortion by saying that the unborn fetus is not a living human being. Do you know that at six weeks of pregnancy, which is the time most women learn that they are pregnant, the baby's heart is already formed and is beating at a rate of about 150 times per minute? At 10 weeks all the baby's organs are formed and functional. The baby currently is very active, swallowing fluid and moving his arms, hands, legs, and feet. Science exhibits the fact that life begins in the womb. That's exactly what the Bible teaches.

The Bible teaches that life begins in the womb! “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.” (Jer. 1:5) How could God have known Jeremiah before he was born, if the unborn fetus is not a living human being? “Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age. (Lk. 1:36) Notice that Elisabeth was pregnant with a “son” not a lifeless piece of matter or tissue. In Luke 1:41, the Bible states that the “babe” leaped in her womb. The word ‘babe’ in this passage comes from the Greek word **βρεφος**. In Luke 2:12-16, The same word is used concerning Jesus who was approximately 2 years old at the time. The point I’m making is that whether in the womb or out of the womb, the Holy Spirit referred to John as a human being.

If the evidence is so clear that life begins in the womb and abortion is wrong and sinful, why then is it so greatly supported? It’s because we have become a nation that does not recognize the value of human life. Let’s ring out the message that abortion is wrong and human life is valuable.

## **The Problem of Transgenderism**

A growing trend in our world today is with transgender relationships. Many are not satisfied with their sexual status and therefore they are seeking to change. Men are seeking to become women and women are seeking to become men. This is not a new or a recent problem. It has been present for years. It is estimated that approximately .03% of the US population is transgender, which would be around 700,00 people. I suppose one of the more recent examples would be that of Bruce Jenner, an Olympic Gold Medalist who appeared on the Wheaties cereal box in 1977 and is now recognized as a woman bearing the name Caitlyn Jenner. What does the Bible say about transgender relationships? Many will boast that the Bible does not mention the subject of transgender. While the words “transgender” or “transsexual” are not found in the Bible, it’s important to understand that the acts of transgenderism are found in the Bible.

Consider Gender in and of itself. Gender is a part of God’s sacred creation. Gender is God’s idea. When He created Adam and Eve, he never asked them if they were comfortable or happy with their assigned sex. Listen to Genesis 1:26-27. “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. According to this passage, not only were we created in the very image of God, but my gender is part of my identity which was given to me by God Himself. It’s His plan for my life and I cannot change it. Just as a deer cannot be changed into a fox or a sheep into a dog, a man cannot be changed into a woman and a woman cannot be changed into a man. Gender is a part of our creation. Abraham Lincoln once asked a boy, “If a dog has four legs, and you call its tail a leg, how many legs does it have?” The boy answered, “It has five legs.” Abraham Lincoln replied, “Nope, it just has four legs. Calling a tail, a leg does not make it a leg. Bruce Jenner may be called Caitlyn now and people of the world may view him as a woman, but in the eyes of God almighty who created Bruce, he will always be identified as a man.

Transgenderism is something that is not approved by God. Why then is it such a problem today? I’m afraid it’s because too many who refer to themselves as Christians have become soft, lax, and complacent on such issues. Good people, it’s high time that

we stand up and speak where the Bible speaks and let people know that God does not approve of such choices in life.

## **The Proper Mode of Baptism**

The Bible teaches that Baptism is an important part of man's salvation. It saves (Mk. 16:15-16; 1 Pet. 3:21), remits sins (Acts 2:38), places one in Christ (Gal. 3:27), and brings one in contact with the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16). The question that we would like to consider today is "what is the proper mode of baptism?" Some believe that Bible baptism consists of sprinkling water or pouring water in a repeated fashion upon the head of an individual. Others contend that Bible baptism requires an immersion or a burial in the water. Since Baptism is a Bible subject, what does the Bible say?

Let us begin with the meaning of the word baptism. The word "baptism" comes from the Greek word (βαπτίζω) which means to dip, immerse, submerge, or overwhelm. Now, if an individual has water sprinkled, or poured over him, has that individual been dipped, immersed, or submerged in water? No. Therefore, has the individual been baptized properly? No.

Listen to the writer of Romans. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:3-4) Notice if you will that this Bible writer refers to Baptism as a burial. Listen to another passage. "Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with *Him* through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (Col. 2:12) These two passages refer to baptism as a burial.

Notice an example with me. Consider the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch in Acts 8. The Bible states, "And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him." (Acts 8:38) Why did both Philip and the Eunuch go down into the water? So, Philip could immerse him. According to the Bible, the proper mode of baptism is immersion. Any other mode such as sprinkling or pouring is not supported by the Bible.

## **The Sin of Fornication**

The word "fornication" comes from the Greek word "porneia," from which we get our English word "pornography." This word is found 26 times in the New Testament and has a very broad application. It is defined as illicit or unlawful sexual intercourse. It includes homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals, close relatives, and those to whom you are not related. It can also be applied to those who are married or unmarried. In this article, I would like to focus our attention on sexual intercourse that takes place outside the marriage relationship.

Do we recognize what a serious problem we have concerning fornication today? The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report that by the age of 20, nearly 3/4 of teenagers will have had sexual intercourse. The rate of teens who have had intercourse before the age of 15 is higher in the United States than in other developed nations. Why do we have this problem? It's because sex before marriage is looked upon as being normal. There was a time when virginity was a sacred thing. Boys, girls, men, and women alike, saved themselves for that one special individual in marriage. Today, however, if you are 15-20 years old and you are not sexually active, you are mocked, the center of

jokes, and the conclusion is, "There must be something wrong with you." Do you remember how the media treated Olympic track and field star Lolo Jones in 2012? The media even blamed her fourth-place finish on the fact that she was a 29-year-old virgin. The question that we should always ask is, "What does the Bible say about fornication or sex before marriage?"

To begin with, the sexual relationship is not bad. God created man as a sexual being, however, the sexual relationship is to take place only in marriage. "Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." (Heb. 13:4) The word "bed" in this passage refers directly to sexual intercourse. According to the Bible, this activity is honorable as long as it takes place only in marriage. Look back to the passage and notice that there is a distinction between sex in marriage and sex outside marriage. Outside marriage, the sexual relationship is referred to as fornication and those who are guilty of such will be judged or condemned by God. Listen to the following passage. "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9-10) According to this passage, fornication is classified as unrighteousness and those who are guilty of such will not inherit the kingdom of God. In Galatians 5:19-21, fornication is identified as a work of the flesh and those who are guilty of such, once again, will not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, they will not have heaven as their home.

The good news is that forgiveness is available for those who are guilty of fornication. In the list of those who were classified as unrighteous in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul concluded by saying "Such were some of you." Some of the people in Corinth were practicing fornication, which was a violation of God's will. However, they had changed, seeking to follow God's will. Man can do the same thing today as the Corinthians. He can repent and have confidence that God will forgive him (1 Jn. 1:9) If you know someone who is practicing fornication, please share with them the message of God and let them know that forgiveness is available.

### **The Sinner's Prayer**

A common plan of salvation in our world today is the "Sinner's Prayer." In a video I recently watched, the minister stated, "Today is the day of salvation. If you have come to that conclusion, I want you to bow your head and pray this prayer with me. Dear Lord Jesus. I know that I'm a sinner. I know that you died on the cross and rose from the grave to save me from my sins. I ask that you forgive me of my sins and come into my heart and save me and be Lord of my life. Amen." The minister then informed the listeners that if they said that prayer with him, they were saved. When it comes to religious conclusions, we are obligated to ask the question, "Can this teaching be found in the Bible?" What does the Bible say about the sinner's prayer?

Notice if you will that the Bible teaches "But the salvation of the righteous *is* from the LORD." (Psa. 37:39) Where does a man learn about the salvation of the Lord? Everything we need to know about salvation comes from one and only one place: the Bible. "The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul." (Psa. 19:7) Since salvation is from the Lord and not from man, and the only place we learn about salvation is in the Bible, then shouldn't we be able to find this plan in the Bible? Certainly, we should. Here's what's so interesting. There are so many who believe in the sinner's prayer and yet, there

is not one example in the entire Bible of an individual who was not a New Testament Christian who was told to say a prayer of such nature. There are several examples in the Bible where individuals were in a lost condition and prayed, but they were not saved through that prayer.

For example, consider the apostle Paul. "Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him, the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. (Acts 9:10-11) In this passage, Saul (Paul) is praying. He prayed for three days. Did the prayer that he uttered save him? "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 Bible teaches that at the point of salvation, our sins are remitted or forgiven (Acts 2:38, 47). According to Acts 22:16, if Saul was saved while praying, then he was saved, and he still had sin. As one can see, prayer did not save Saul. Consider the example of Cornelius. The Bible describes Cornelius as a devout (extremely religious) man who "prayed to God always." (Acts 10:2) Was he saved through prayer? No! He was commanded to send for Peter who would tell him what he ought to do (Acts 10:6). So clearly, prayer alone did not save Saul, Cornelius, or any other individual. Therefore, the conclusion of the matter is man cannot be saved through prayer alone. According to the Bible, Man is saved through obedience (Heb. 5:8-9). Obedience requires faith in God (Jn. 8:24), repentance of sins (Acts 17:31), confession of faith in Christ (Matt. 10:32-33), and baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). When we have completed these steps, we have salvation. While prayer is extremely important, the Bible does not teach that we are saved through prayer alone.

### **The Thief on The Cross & Baptism**

According to the Bible, baptism is a necessary part of one's salvation. "Peter *said* to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38) "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 3:21) These scriptures teach that one must be baptized to be saved. Sadly, even after reading such scriptures, some do not believe that baptism is a part of one's salvation. Those who argue against the Biblical teaching concerning baptism are quick to refer to the thief on the cross. It is often stated, "The thief on the cross was saved without being baptized. Why then must one be baptized today?"

First, there's no way to prove that the thief was not baptized. Concerning John's baptism, the Bible teaches that "All the land of Judea, and those from Jerusalem, went out to him and were all baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins." (Mk. 1:5) The Bible also teaches that John's baptism was for the remission of sins (Mk. 1:4). The thief on the cross could have very well been in this number. One could argue that the thief was baptized just as easily as one could argue that he was not.

Second, the thief on the cross lived and died on the other side of the cross, under a different law that did not require baptism. In Luke 23:42, the Bible states that Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins. Once Jesus died, and sealed the covenant by His blood, all accountable beings became subject to the terms of His last will and Testament. "For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place

for the redemption of the transgressions that were *committed* under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid *only* when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives." (Heb. 9:15-17). One might as well ask why Ezekiel or Jeremiah was not baptized to ask the same about the thief. All three of these men lived and died under the Old Testament, a law that was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way at the death of Christ. "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." (Col. 2:14) Thomas Jefferson, though President of the United States, never paid income tax. Why not? He lived before income tax was introduced and required. Today, we live under a different law that states we must pay income tax. In the same way, spiritually speaking, we are under a different law than the thief on the cross. Today, we live by the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:2) The law of Christ today requires baptism. Such is why Peter stated in Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized for the remission or forgiveness of sins."

### **The Unjust Steward**

In Luke 16:1-9, Jesus gives the parable of the unjust steward. In this story, a master accuses a steward or manager of wasting his master's goods. As a result of this accusation, the steward lost his position. The steward immediately began to wonder how he would survive. His conclusion was to reduce the debt of those who owed his master in hopes that when he lost his position of stewardship, they would show him hospitality. What is the meaning of this parable and what applications can be made in Christian life today?

The focus of this parable is on the need for disciples to be wise and generous with the resources God has given them. Jesus did not commend this man because he was unjust. He praises him because he uses his money wisely. What applications can be made in Christian life today? First, God expects Christians to be good stewards. The Bible teaches that everything belongs to God. "Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God; also the earth with all that is in it." (Deut. 10:14). The phrase "the earth with all that is in it" would also include the money that we possess (1 Tim. 6:17). When we conclude that all things belong to God, it helps us to understand that what we have in this life has been entrusted to us God, and He expects us to be good stewards of those possessions (1 Cor. 4:1-2). As Christians, we have the responsibility of taking the resources that God has given us and using them wisely. "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good that he may have something to give him who has a need." (Eph. 4:28)

A second lesson that one can gain from this parable is that Christians should be as concerned about their spiritual welfare as the people of the world are about their financial welfare. The parable describes a man who is extremely concerned about his financial future. As a result, he makes wise decisions so he can have a financially secure future. Christians should have this kind of attitude when it comes to eternity. The promise of eternity has been made to every faithful follower of Christ (1 Jn. 2:25). For that promise to be a reality, we must live every day making wise decisions. In the words of Jesus, "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.” (Matt. 6:19-21)

### **There’s a Great Day Coming”**

That is the title of a popular hymn that we often sing during worship services. The purpose of this song is to remind us that a great day of Judgment is coming, and we must prepare our lives for that day. The Bible emphatically teaches there will be a day when all men will be judged. The Bible states, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10). According to this verse, we learn five things about judgment. First, judgment is a certainty. The word “must” refers to an obligation or a necessity. It is inevitable (Acts 17:30-31). Second, judgment will be universal. “All” will be judged. We will all give an account of ourselves to God (Rom. 14:10-12; Jude 1:14-15). Third, judgment will be personal. Consider the phrase “that each one may receive.” Though the judgment will be a universal event, we will individually stand before God and answer for the lives we’ve lived (Rom. 14:10-12). Fourth, Christ will be the judge. The text states, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” All judgment has been given to Christ (Jn. 5:22; Acts 10:42; 17:30-31; Rom. 2:16) and He will be the one who determines our eternal condition. Fifth, judgment will be a repaying. The word “receive” communicates the idea of getting or receiving back something that is owed or deserved. The things we will answer for include both our words (Matt. 12:36-37; Eph. 4:29) and our actions (Rev. 20:12).

Consider another scripture about judgment. “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” (Rev. 20:12) What does this verse teach about judgment? First, there will be a great day of judgment, and everyone will be there. No one regardless of their position in life will escape. Second, we will be judged by the books. What were the books? Are they none other than the words of God found in the Bible? Listen to the words of Jesus. “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.” (Jn. 12:48) What’s going to judge man? According to this passage, it’s the words of Jesus. Where are the words of Jesus found? In the Bible! The Bible will be the standard of judgment on Judgment Day.

Since Judgement is a reality, what should our attitude be concerning Judgment Day? Consider the statement of Paul just before he referenced the judgment. “Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him” (2 Corinthians 5:9). Paul states, “We make it our aim to please God.” The word “aim” means to be ambitious, to aspire, or to consider something an honor. That which Paul aimed was “to be well-pleasing to Him.” The phrase “well-pleasing” means to be acceptable; and fully agreeable. Because of judgment, Paul aspired to live a life that was pleasing to God. If we are going to be prepared for judgment, we also should seek to please God.

The Bible is clear. There will be a day of Judgment. You will be present on that great day. The question is, are you ready for that great day? If not, why not get ready today by being obedient to the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4; Rom. 6:3-4)?

### **Things that Affect Happiness**

As I read and think about Psalm chapter 1, I can't help but be reminded of how this Psalm begins. It begins with the word "blessed" which means "happy." I believe this is the aspiration of everyone, wouldn't you agree? Everyone wants to be happy and successful in life. Based upon the teaching of Psalm 1, happiness and success are affected by the following three things: the counsel that he listens to, the path that he chooses, and the position where he finds himself in life. Therefore, consider with me several questions that every Christian should ask himself.

First, who am I listening to? Who am I turning to for advice and counsel? Why is it so important to ask these questions? Every Christian, regardless of his experience finds himself in need of advice or counsel. If I choose to listen to the wrong advice, I may find myself making the wrong decisions in life. As a Christian, I must always seek "godly counsel." I must spend time with those who will encourage me to make decisions that will cause me to be pleasing to God. I must spend time with the Bible, God's Word for it contains the greatest counsel that has ever been revealed unto man.

A second question that I should ask often is what path am I following? What is the importance of this question? Every path leads to a destination. Therefore, I should constantly ask myself, "Where will this path take me?" If I fail to ask this question, then I may find myself one day "standing" in a position that is not productive. As a Christian, I must always seek to follow the productive path. That is the path of righteousness which is revealed in God's Word. Such is why the Psalmist would say, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105)

A third question that I should ask is what is my position? Is it a position of honor and dignity? Is it a position that others will look to and aspire to be in that same position or is it a position of scorn and contempt? These questions are important because as a Christian, my life is an open book. Others are looking to me for guidance. If I listen to the wrong advice, make the wrong decisions in life, and choose to follow the wrong path, then I will find myself in a position that is not profitable for me and for those who are following me.

A fourth question that I should ask is what is my delight? What is it that makes me feel great? What brings me more joy than anything? According to the Psalmist, my greatest delight should be "the law of the Lord." It should be my meditation day and night. Why? The law of the Lord is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, and righteous (Psalm 19:7-9). It completes me as a Christian (2 Tim. 3:16-17). By making God's Word my delight and allowing it to be my counsel in life, I'll find myself as a leader making the right decisions, following the proper path, and being in the right position. That position is described as a stable position. I'll be "planted." It's a fruitful position. I'll bear fruit at the appropriate time. It's a thriving position. I'll never find myself in a withering away like a dead leaf or worthless like chaff. It's a prosperous position. If I rely on God's Word for my counsel, I will always be prosperous in whatever I do. Most importantly, I'll have the approval of God in the choices that I make as a leader. "The Lord knows the way of the righteous."

### **This is the day which the Lord had Made**

I know, tomorrow is Monday and Mondays can be a drag. Why do we dislike Mondays? Monday is the beginning of a new work week. Monday is the day when you're going to start all over again and try to accomplish everything you accomplished last week



or perhaps even more. Mondays can be the beginning of a sometimes-long work week, and as a result, we have a tendency not to be so upbeat on Mondays. How can we get beyond the dreadful Monday blues?

“This is the day which the Lord had made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalm 118:24) First, David didn’t look at the days as Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc. Every day that he was permitted to live, he looked at it as a deliverance. David knew that since he was alive and well, it meant that the Lord had delivered him and saved him from his enemies yet another day. Do we do the same? Do we recognize that God has delivered us once again from our enemies especially our most fierce enemy, Satan himself?

Second, David also understood that today is another opportunity to make a difference. Do we do that? Do we realize that every day that we live, we can let our lights shine and make a difference in the lives of others?

Third, David understood that he was a part of another day that the Lord Himself had made. Do we do the same? There are so many right now who are on their deathbeds. They long for another day, just like this one. Many never saw the light of this day. Do you realize just exactly how blessed you are?

If we look at each day that we are permitted to live as another day of deliverance, another opportunity to make a difference, and the opportunity to be a part of something created by God, we can do the rest of the passage. We can rejoice and be glad.

## **Those who have a broken heart**

What comes to your mind when you think of heartbreaking things? We may think of sickness. When individuals become sick and the doctor states, “There’s nothing else I can do,” it crushes the heart of those individuals. We may think about the loss of a loved one. Death has tremendous shattering power. It can be so devastating that sometimes just the mere thought of an individual no longer physically being a part of your life can be heartbreaking. Perhaps a broken home comes to mind. Divorce is so destructive. Many who have experienced divorce have said that they felt as if their life had been completely shattered. Then again, you could be thinking about sin. Imagine a beautiful crystal dish that slips from your hands, hits the hard floor and shatters into numerous pieces. Sin can leave our lives shattered, feeling as if we may never put things back together again. Regardless of what may come to your mind, the truth of the matter is many things in life have the power to leave individuals broken-hearted. What should we do when we find ourselves in this situation? Consider the following verse. “The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit.” (Psalm 34:18)

To begin with, we must recognize the reality of this problem. The word “broken” means “to be broken into pieces, to reduce to splinters, to shatter or to be crushed.” The word “contrite” means “to beat out thin.” The Psalmist uses these words to remind his readers that there will be times in life when we feel like glass that has been shattered or a piece of metal that has been heated and beaten out thin. Too often in life, people live their lives with the fairy tale mentality. Consequently, when they experience heartbreaking situations, they are unprepared. We must realize that there will be things in life that will leave us heartbroken and beat thin.

Second, realize that God is near. When bad things happen, we often think that God’s presence is no longer in our lives. Such is not the teaching of the Bible. The Psalmist said that God is “near!” The word “near” means “to be close by or to be by the side of.” God is always present. He has promised to be with us always and to never leave

or forsake us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). Even when our lives are shattered by sin, He is there in the shadows, patiently waiting to help us put things back together.

Third, realize that God will save me. The word “save” means “to deliver or to give victory to.” This word, as used in this passage, appears to have a two-fold meaning. To begin with, God promises to deliver us physically. The apostle Paul said, “And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!” (2 Tim. 4:18) Paul was confident that God would always be there to deliver him from every evil work in life. Likewise, Christians today can have that same confidence. Whatever breaks our hearts, God will be there to ultimately give us victory. Second, God promises to deliver us spiritually. The phrase “broken heart” not only refers to an action that brings heartache but also to the attitude that one is to have when one’s life is crushed by sin. In another Psalm, David said, “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—These, O God, You will not despise. (Psa. 51:17) In a close examination of this text, it will be discovered that David is explaining to his audience what God expects of those who sin against Him; a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Jesus said in His sermon on the mount. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” (Mat. 5:4) The word “mourn” in this passage refers to the act of grieving. Jesus is talking about individuals who look at their lives, realize that they are guilty of sin, and they mourn. According to the Psalmist, when one responds in this way God is there to deliver him.

The question is not “will we experience heartache” but rather it is “when.” So, the next time you experience something that breaks your heart, take comfort in the fact that we serve a God who is nearby and ready to help.

### **Three Things the Devil Wants To Do”**

Based upon the teaching of the Bible, the devil is real and not a figment of the imagination. He’s not some cartoon character that man has made up. He is just as real as you and me! He is described in many ways in the Bible. He is referred to as a murderer and a liar (Jn. 8:44), as one who deceives the world (Rev. 12:9), as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), and a roaring lion, who is constantly seeking someone who he may destroy (1 Pet. 5:8). Though there are many things that he wants to accomplish, let us consider three things specifically.

**First, he wants to keep you out of the Church.** The devil knows so much about the Church. He knows the saved are in it. He knows when an individual is obedient, God places that person in the Church. “Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47; See also Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18) He also knows that we glorify God through the Church. “To Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Eph. 3:21; See also Matt. 5:16) Then again, he knows that Jesus is the head of the Church and therefore Jesus controls the lives of those who are in the Church. “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.” (Col. 1:18) He also knows that the mission of the Church is to preach the gospel of Christ which has the power to save man. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” (Rom. 1:16; Matt. 28:19-20). Because of His great knowledge of the Church, he desires to keep people out of it.

**Second, he wants to get you back in the world.** What a happy time in life it is

when an individual is saved and God adds that person to the Church, God's vessel of salvation. Little do most people realize, that the moment that an individual is saved, Satan begins a vicious effort to get that person back in the world from which he came. Sadly, he is often very successful in his efforts (Gal. 3:1; 2 Tim. 4:10; Jam. 4:4). Even when we consider our day and age, we know his success rate has not abated. He is still pulling countless souls back into the world from which they came. Why does he want you back in the world? He knows that in the world, your condition is worse. "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Pet. 2:20-22; See also Heb. 10:26) Therefore, once you become a Christian, Satan's effort is to get you back in the world.

**Third, he wants to render you inactive in the Church.** God wants Christians to be active in the Church. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Cor. 15:58). Satan doesn't want you to be active. Why? He knows that as long as you are active in the work of the Church, he will never be able to win you back, so he so cleverly says, "If you want to be a member of the Church, that's fine, just don't do anything. Be inactive." How does Satan keep people inactive in the Church? He encourages them to be "lukewarm" just like the Church at Laodicea. He knows that if we are lukewarm, we will be rejected by God. "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth." (Rev. 3:15-19). He also keeps Christians inactive by keeping them ignorant of God's Word. He knows that a lack of knowledge of God's Word will eventually lead to destruction. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..." (Hos. 4:6). Therefore, he encourages Christians, "Don't study your Bibles. It takes too much time and effort." He keeps people inactive by encouraging them to be absent from worship services. Satan says, "You can have the Church. You can be a member of it. Just don't attend regularly." He knows that if he can get you to develop this attitude, then even though you are a member of the Church, you truly belong to him. Such is why we are commanded not to forsake the assembling of the saints (Heb. 10:25).

While there are many other objectives of the devil, his ultimate goal is to destroy us and keep us out of heaven. Remember the words of Peter. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Pet. 5:8). Let's determine today that we will not let him be successful. Let's be faithful to the Lord and His Church and live every day defeating the efforts of the wicked one.

### **Time With the Family"**

One of the things I truly cherish in this life is the time I get to spend with my family. When I have been away all day, I can hardly wait until I get home, just so I can spend time with my loving wife and my four precious children. I sometimes find it very difficult to study and get my work as a minister completed, because my mind is still at home with

them. I must admit that I am very selfish when it comes to the time I get to spend with my family. Why? The “time” I spend with my family is what causes us to be the family we are. For example, Husbands and wives are to love one another so much that they would be willing at any given moment to give their lives for one another (Eph. 5:25-33). What causes a husband and wife to have this kind of love for one another? It is the valuable time that they spend together. Parents are commanded to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). What is the key element in accomplishing this great task? It is the time that parents spend with their children; for without this time, there would be no way possible that this task could be accomplished. Children are commanded to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1). Once again, how is it that such a task is accomplished? It is because of time. The more time children spend with their parents, the more they respect them and recognize them as authority figures in their lives. It all depends on time. When we fail to spend time with our family, we cease to be a real family. We are just husbands, wives, children, or just members of the family. Though we are related, we are not the true family that we should and could be. Time is of the essence when it comes to a family.

The same principle is likewise true when it comes to the church. The Bible teaches that the church is a family. “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” (1 Tim. 3:15) The word house in this passage refers to a family. Thus, the church is a family. When an individual is baptized into Christ, he/she becomes a child of God (Gal. 3:26-27). He is then placed within God’s family, the church (Acts 2:47). What causes the church to be a family? It’s not because we are church members or children of God. It’s because of the time that we spend together. The time we spend together worshiping God on Sunday, and Wednesday, during gospel meetings and Vacation Bible School, causes us to be the family we are (Jn. 4:24). The time which we spend together abounding in the work of the Lord causes us to be a family (1 Cor. 15:58). The time which we spend in fellowship with one another causes us to be a family (1 Jn. 1:7). When we fail to spend the proper time with our church family, we fail to be a real family. We simply become members. We are still related. We are brothers and sisters in Christ, but we are not the family we should and could be. Just as time is of the essence when it comes to our physical family, time is of the essence when it comes to our spiritual family.

Let us all be sure that we spend quality time with our physical and spiritual family. Time is the essence of being a family.

## **Tongue Speaking**

One of the many miraculous gifts that were given to God’s people when the church first began was that of tongue speaking. Several religious groups today believe that the Holy Spirit enables them to speak uncontrollably in an “unknown tongue.” Do men today have that miraculous power?

Let’s begin by defining what it means to speak in tongues. If you were to listen to an example of tongue speaking today, I’m sure that you would conclude that it sounds like uncontrolled babbling. Does the Bible define tongue speaking in this way? “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:4) Here is an example of the apostles speaking in tongues. What did that mean? “And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.” (Acts 2:6) To

speak in a tongue was to speak in a different language, not an uncontrolled conglomeration of utterances.

Does the Holy Spirit today enable man to speak in languages that he has never studied today? In First Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul discusses the distribution of miraculous gifts. In this list, he specifically makes mention of tongue speaking. "To another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues." (vs. 10) At the end of chapter 12, Paul encourages these people not to covet or desire these miraculous gifts, but to focus on love. Why does Paul instruct these Christians to focus their attention on love? Paul knew there would come a day when the miraculous gifts would come to an end. How do we know that? Listen to the Bible. "Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away." (1 Cor 13:8) The Bible teaches there would come a day when miraculous powers, including that of tongue speaking, would come to an end. When would that time come? In verse 10 the Bible states, "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." According to James 1:25, the perfect is the Bible thus after the completion of the Bible the miracle of speaking in tongues ended.

### **Wait on the Lord**

"Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" (Psa. 27:14) Do you ever find yourself praying for something, and then wondering if you are ever going to receive it? Do you ever find yourself struggling with a trial or temptation, and wonder if you will ever overcome it? Do you ever find yourself wanting to improve the quality of your spiritual life, and yet you can't seem to take the necessary steps involved? If you find yourself asking these questions and many others of such nature, the answer is given to us by the great Psalmist. We must "wait for the Lord." Notice if you will that this statement is found twice in this verse, at the beginning and the end. What does it mean to "wait for the Lord?" The word wait means 'to look eagerly for or to expect.' When we are met with uncomfortable situations in this life, one of our greatest problems is the fact that we give up too quickly. In addition to giving up, we do not "expect" to get beyond the difficulties that we are facing.

How can we overcome this problem? We must learn to "wait for the Lord." We must realize that God is in control, and He is going to help us. We should "expect" His help. After all, He has promised to help us. "...for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" (Heb. 13:5-6) God is very capable of helping us. "...He is able to aide those who are tempted." (Heb. 2:18). In addition to waiting for the Lord, we must also have courage. The word courage means to take hold of or have a firm grip. Not only must I look for the Lord's help, but I must also live as if He has already answered my prayer.

The result of waiting for the Lord is both encouraging and uplifting. The Psalmist said that God will strengthen my heart. The word heart refers to the mind or inner spirit of man. Often, when a man's inner spirit or heart is broken, he loses the ability to wait for the Lord. However, if I can find the courage to wait on Him, He will bless me with the strength to continue this process.

Are you struggling with a problem in life? Do you find yourself lost and you don't know what to do? Why not try waiting for the Lord? Ask the Lord to help you and then

expect His help. Before you know it, He will begin to rain down blessings upon you like you wouldn't believe (Psa. 68:19).

"But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (Isa. 40:31)

## Was Jesus Created?

A prominent teaching in the New Testament is the fact that Christ has always existed and that He is God or Deity. The apostle John states, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." (Jn. 1:1-2) Notice first the reference to the phrase "the Word." What was the Word? Consider verse 14. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." It seems clear that "the Word" in this passage is referring to none other than Jesus Christ. Second, notice that the Bible states that Christ was in the beginning with God. When one considers the existence of God, the Bible teaches that He has always existed. "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations Before the mountains were brought forth, Or ever You had formed the earth and the world, Even from everlasting to everlasting, You *are* God." (Psa. 90:1-2) Since Jesus was in the beginning with the Father and the Father has always existed, then Jesus likewise has always existed. Third, notice that the text states that Jesus was God. This simply means that He was Deity. He had all the rights and privileges of God. He was not below the Father or above Him, but rather He was equal to Him. "Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." (Jn. 5:18) "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God." (Phil. 2:5-6) Now, consider the words of Isaiah. "And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I *am* He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me. I, *even* I, *am* the LORD, And besides Me *there is* no savior. (Isa. 43:10-11) According to the inspired words of Isaiah, no God existed before the Father, and no God was formed after Him. Since Jesus is God, then based upon the teaching of Isaiah, there is no way possible that He could have been created. Jesus has always existed.

With that thought in mind, consider with me a false doctrine in our world today concerning the existence of Christ. The religious group known as the Jehovah's Witnesses teaches that Jesus did not exist eternally with the Father, but rather he was a created being. The verses that are often appealed to prove their position are Colossians 1:15 where Paul refers to Jesus as "the firstborn over all creation" and Revelation 3:14 where the apostle John states that Jesus is "the beginning of the creation of God." Do these passages teach that Jesus was created?

Let's begin with the word "firstborn." The Greek word is pro-tot-ok'-os which usually refers to the first offspring to be born. For example, Ruben was the first child to be born to Jacob (Gen. 49:3). Due to this meaning, many have concluded that Christ was the first one to ever be born or created. In drawing this conclusion, many fail to realize another meaning is often applied to the word "firstborn." This word also has a metaphorical meaning. It points to someone having special status and occupying the rank and privilege of being the firstborn. For example, consider the following passage. "I have found My servant David...With My holy oil I have anointed him, Also I will make him *My* firstborn,

The highest of the kings of the earth.” (Psa. 89:20, 27) Notice if you will that David is referred to as the “firstborn.” Was David the firstborn of Jesse’s sons? No. Eliab was the firstborn. David was the youngest (1 Chron. 2:13; 1 Sam. 16:1-16). Why then did God refer to David as His firstborn? When David became king of Israel, he experienced the honor and supremacy as if he had been the firstborn son of a family. In the same way, when Christ is referred to as the “firstborn over all creation” it is not referring to his beginning but to His supremacy and honor.

What about the phrase in Revelation 3:14, “He is the beginning of the creation of God?” The word “beginning” comes from the word ar-khay' which often means the first person or thing in a series. However, it’s important to understand that this word has another meaning. It can refer to the leader or person that commences. Which meaning must we apply to this passage? Based on what we have previously studied, the most appropriate meaning would be the second one. Jesus was not the first to be created, but rather He is the creator of everything. “All things were made through Him, and without Him, nothing was made that was made.” (Jn. 1:3) “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” (Col. 1:16)

What can we conclude from this study? Jesus was not created. He is God’s eternal unique Son (Jn. 3:16; 1 Jn. 4:9) who has always existed with the Father. He is Supreme and is worthy of honor due to His great work.

## **Was Jesus Deity?**

The New World Translation states, “In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god (little “g”).” (Jn. 1:1) The “Word” in this passage refers to Jesus Christ. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” Now, let us go back to John 1:1. Why does this translation identify Jesus as “a god” with a little “g?” Perhaps it’s because those who adhere to the New World Translation do not believe in the deity of Christ, therefore this version is designed to rob Him of this right. What does the Bible teach?

Let’s begin with the New World Translation. It clearly states, in referring to Jesus “the Word was a god.” First, I need to understand that the articles “a” and “an” are not in the original language. They were added by men. Why? It fits the belief of those who do not believe that Jesus is God. It’s also interesting that after a thorough examination of 45 different translations, not one translated John 1:1, “the Word was a god.” Every translation that I examined translated John 1:1, “The Word was God.” (I encourage you to do this same study yourself.) What can we conclude? The New World translation is inaccurate in its translation of John 1:1.

Second, the Bible teaches that Jesus was God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (Jn. 1:1) The Word is identified as Jesus later in the chapter. “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” (Jn. 1:14) Listen to another passage from God’s Word. “Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.” (Jn. 20:27-28). If Jesus was not God, this would have been a perfect opportunity for Him to straighten things out, wouldn’t you agree? Listen to what Jesus

said in the very next verse. “Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (Jn. 20:27-29) What was Jesus saying to Thomas? You are right Thomas. I am God/Deity and blessed are those who believe the same thing. Listen to another scripture. “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, *even* in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” (1 John 5:20)

The prophets spoke of Christ as Deity. “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” (Isa. 7:14) This is a direct reference to the birth of Jesus Christ. The word “Immanuel” means “God with us.” “And I (God) will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me (God) whom they pierced.” (Zech. 12:10) Who was pierced on the cross? It was none other than Jesus (Jn. 19:34), therefore proving that Jesus once again is God.

## Welcome

One of the great joys I get to experience in life as a father is the greeting I get when I walk through the door after I have been gone all day. Every day when I arrive home and open the door, my five-year-old son Andrew screams out “Daddy!” He then comes running to me and gives me a big hug and a kiss. While it is difficult for me to leave home each day, there is joy in my heart and a smile on my face because I know the welcome I will receive when I return home.

How meaningful is a warm greeting? A kind smile, a firm handshake, and a personal introduction are things that can be labeled as priceless. If there is one thing that we should be known for as members of the Lord’s Church, it’s the welcome that people receive when they attend our Bible classes and worship services. I’m not saying that we should scream out the name of everyone who walks through the doors, run to them, and give them a big hug and kiss, but every individual who attends should enter the building feeling welcome and leave longing to be back. This attitude depends on a good welcome.

The Bible demands that we extend a hearty welcome to individuals. Paul commanded that we should “seek to show hospitality.” (Rom. 12:13). The word “hospitality” refers to the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers. The word “seek” means to run after swiftly to catch something. Consider Romans 16. The words “greet” and “salute”, which come from the same word, appear 21 times in this chapter. This word means ‘to receive joyfully or to welcome.’ Christians should be those people who run toward the opportunity to make people feel welcome.

Not only does the Bible teach us to make everyone feel welcome, but it also instructs us concerning how we should welcome people. Consider the following verse. “Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Rom. 15:7) We are to welcome people in the same way that Christ has welcomed us.

While a friendly welcome should most definitely be extended to our members, a warm welcome should never be limited to just the members of the congregation. It must also be extended to those beyond our membership. Perhaps you have worshiped at those congregations that made you feel when you walked through the front door as if it was a congregation for “members only.” They were practicing the exclusion factor. Maybe you felt like Israel who was told by Edom, “You shall not pass.” (Num. 20:19). Maybe you felt



like Jesus when the people did not welcome Him. (Luke 9:51-56). For most people, when they worship with a congregation that does not make them feel welcome, they usually do not return. That's why it is so important that we make everyone feel welcome regardless of who they are. The writer of the book of Hebrews encourages, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers..." (Heb. 13:2) Church growth depends on a good hearty welcome. We need to be like the people Paul encountered on the island of Malta. Luke describes these people as individuals who showed them "unusual kindness." (Acts 28:2) In other words, the islanders made Paul and the other members of the crew feel welcome. What an attitude for us to follow today. We should be people who express unusual kindness to people.

### **What Can I Do for the Lord in 2022? (Can be adapted to any year)**

The Lord is Good. Wouldn't you agree? The Psalmist states, "Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good! For His mercy *endures* forever." (Psa. 136:1) "Oh, taste and see that the LORD *is* good; Blessed *is* the man *who* trusts in Him!" (Psa. 34:8). When we consider the goodness of the Lord, it should cause us to ask the question, "What can I do for the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" (Psalm 116:12)

**You can obey the Gospel.** The gospel is God's power to salvation (Rom. 1:16), but salvation comes only to those who are willing to obey the gospel (1 Pet. 4:16-17). Why not begin this new year by obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ?

**You can be Faithful.** God desires that all His children remain faithful to Him. Such is why God commands "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of Life." (Rev. 2:20). Faithfulness is not beyond our ability. It does, however, require a decision (Psa. 119:30), diligence (2 Tim. 2:15), and devotion (Matt. 7:7-8; 1 Jn. 5:14-15). Why not plan on being faithful to the Lord in this new year?

**You can be an Example.** As Christians, we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). Through our influence and example, we have the power to lead souls to Christ. Let us vow in this new year that we will live in such a way that as the apostle Paul said, "Be followers of me because I follow Christ." (1 Cor. 11:1)

**You can live a life of Purity.** Why should we live our lives in purity? Only the pure in heart will be blessed to see and be with God for eternity (Matt. 5:8). How can I live a life of purity? I must live my life by God's Word. "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word." (Psa. 119:9) Why not plan on living a life of purity in this new year?

**You can be Thankful.** We are all blessed beyond measure. The Psalmist states, "Blessed be the Lord who daily loads us with benefits." (Psa. 68:19). How often do we thank God for the many blessings that He bestows upon us? In this new year, why not take time every day to reflect upon your many blessings and express gratitude? Let us have the attitude of the apostle Paul. "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Thess. 5:18).

**You can practice Love.** Christians are to be characterized by love. Jesus said that by love, all men would know that we are His disciples (Jn. 13:34-35). Who should we love? We should love God (Mark 12:30), our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Pet. 1:22), and our fellow man (Mark 12:31). In essence, we are to love all regardless of who they are. Why not plan on practicing love in your life in this new year?

Oh, there are many other things that we could do for God in this new year, but no matter how much we do for God, we can never come close to even scratching the surface of what He has done for us, much less what He plans to do for us in the future. Let us abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58; Eccl 9:10) and let us work heartily in this new year (Col. 3:23-24).

## **What Did I Do to Deserve This?**

Have you ever heard someone make this statement before? Maybe you've even made this statement yourself. Many make this statement in anger and confusion, trying to make sense of some wrong that they feel has been burdened upon them. As Christians, we must realize that life is not always fair, and it certainly is not a bed of roses. Sometimes bad things happen, even to good people. Consider the words of Job. "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble." (Job 14:1) What is the meaning of this passage? The word "trouble" means turmoil which can refer to a state of extreme confusion or a state of constant commotion. In this passage, Job informs the readers that life is filled with difficult circumstances, many of which we do not understand. Consider the writer of this passage. As the book opens, Job is portrayed as a very good man. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil." (Job 1:1) Job was blameless which means that he was wholeheartedly striving to please God. He was upright. This word means to be just or righteous. Not only did Job have a good relationship with God, he also had a good relationship with his fellow man. Next the passage states that Job feared or revered God and that he turned away from all evil. Job was most definitely a good man! Though Job was a good man, he experienced horrific tragedy in his life. He was recognized as the wealthiest man in the east (1:3), and yet he lost everything in just a few hours. He had ten children, all of which were killed at the same moment (1:2, 18-19). He lost his health. He was smitten with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the top of his head (2:7). Even his wife encouraged him to curse God and die (2:9). Job is a prime example of bad things happening to good people. Most people when confronted with times of such difficulty will respond by saying, "Why me?" May I suggest that instead of making the statement "Why me," in a negative sense, why not use it in a positive sense? Why not make it in wonder and amazement at the greatness of God?

For example, what did I do to deserve the amazing grace of God? It's through God's marvelous grace that we are saved (Tit. 2:12). It's through His grace that we are strengthened and given the ability to press on in the Christians battle (2 Cor. 12:8-9). It's through God's grace that we can approach Him in prayer through confidence (Heb. 4:16). What did we do to deserve this?

What did I do to deserve forgiveness? Oh, how blessed we are to know that forgiveness is available to all (Acts 2:38; 10:43). How blessed we are that Jesus was willing to shed his blood that we might have forgiveness (Eph. 1:7). What a tremendous comfort it is to know you can pillow your head at night and know that forgiveness is yours (1 Jn. 1:9). What did we do to deserve this?

What did I do to deserve the promise of answered prayer? As Christians, we are promised that God will always hear and answer our prayers (Psa. 34:15-17). What a blessing it is to call upon our heavenly Father and know that He will always hear and will always be available. What did we do to deserve this?

What did I do to deserve God's presence? God has promised to always be with us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). The Psalmist states, "The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all to call upon Him in truth." (Psa. 145:18) Don't you just love that verse? The Lord is not far away. He is Near! He is ever so close, and He has promised to be with us every step of the way throughout life. What did we do to deserve this?

We could continue, but do you get the picture? A surefire way to overcome difficulties in our lives is by overshadowing those difficulties with positives. If you're looking for some positives, just consider the following passages. "Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits, The God of our salvation! (Psa. 68:19) "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." (Jam. 1:17)

### **What Does God Require of You?**

Isn't it great to know exactly what someone expects of you? Imagine being in a classroom setting and the teacher says, "Alright students. Be sure to do your homework tonight. We'll have a test on it tomorrow," but she didn't tell you what your homework was. That would be terrifying! Imagine you've just started a new job and it's your first day. Your boss leads you to your desk and says, "At the end of the day, I want a full report of your work on my desk," but he doesn't tell you what job he wants accomplished. Again, how terrifying! As a student and an employee, I would not want to be in either situation. I suppose that's one of the many things I love about living for God. As Christians, we never have to wonder, "What does God expect from me?" We can know exactly what He expects. Listen to what God expected of Israel. "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, *and* to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" (Deut. 10:12-13) Notice if you will, God specifically states five things that He expected of His people. He expected them to fear Him (reverence Him) to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve him, and to keep His commandments. How long did He expect them to do this? Listen to another passage. "Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always." (Deut. 11:1) In other words, God wanted them to always live this way.

If there was one word we could use to sum up what God expected of Israel, what would it be? Obedience! Do we realize that God expects the same of us today? He expects us to be obedient. "Though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." (Heb. 5:8-9) Some may say, "This is just too much of a challenge." Is it? According to the Bible, God never places a requirement upon us that we cannot keep. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." (1 Jn. 5:3) The word grievous means "heavy in weight or beyond our ability to keep." Brothers and sisters, we can be obedient. As Christians, we can do everything that God expects of us and then some. Are you living an obedient life?

### **What Does it Mean to Usurp Authority?**

“But I do not allow a woman to teach or usurp authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” (1 Tim. 2:12) What is the meaning of this passage? The word “usurp” means to exercise over. In the area of leadership in the Church, God has determined that men take the leadership position and not women. As a result, when women teach in a public setting where Christian men are present, they would be guilty of exercising authority over the men. This is something forbidden by God. This is why the apostle Paul would state, “The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says.” (1 Cor. 14:34) Many have drawn the false conclusion from these two passages that women cannot be a part of any godly works of service in the church. Is that what the Bible teaches? Is a woman not to be visible in visiting, teaching others, or calling on those in spiritual need?

“When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they \*came to the tomb when the sun had risen.” (Mk. 16:1-2) Following the burial of Jesus, while the disciples seemed to spend most of their time hiding behind locked doors (Jn. 20:19), these women took the lead and went to anoint the body of Jesus. They were acting in service to God and His Son. They did not wait for others, even men, to take the lead in service. They were correct in doing this.

“Now in Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which translated *in Greek* is called Dorcas); this woman was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did.” (Acts 9:36) Here is another disciple who was continually doing good deeds. When she died, the whole community mourned, because her many acts of service were so deeply appreciated. Her life abounded with acts of kindness, of which God approved.

Having a life filled with acts of kindness, service and good deeds is not usurping authority. Usurping authority means taking the role of another person who has been given the responsibility for a certain action. God teaches that men are called to lead in the public assembly. For a woman to take that role would be to usurp God's authority. But to act in areas not specifically limited to a man is never and cannot be usurping authority.

## **What Does the Bible Teach About Homosexuality?**

I'm certain that almost everyone is aware of the growing problem of homosexuality in the world today. According to a study in 2011, the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, a sexual orientation law and public policy think tank, estimates that 9 million (about 3.8%) of Americans identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. As we consider this issue, it's important to understand that this problem is not being abated, but rather it is increasing intensely as each day passes by. With the growing number of those who are practicing homosexuality and those who support such lifestyles, we should ask ourselves, what does the Bible have to say about this subject?

God's plan from the very beginning has always been one man for one woman. Never has God sanctioned same-sex relationships (Gen. 2:21-25). Same-sex relationships were condemned under the OT. “If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood *shall be* upon them.” (Lev. 20:13) Consider the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was due largely to the homosexual element that existed in the city (Gen. 19:24-28). Not only were same-sex relationships condemned in the OT, but they are also condemned in the NT. “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their

women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” (Rom. 1:24-27) According to the Bible, when men lust after men and women lust after women, they deviate from the original plan set forth by God in the very beginning. Consider another passage with me “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Notice the words homosexuals and sodomites, both of which refer to same-sex relationships. This passage teaches that those who seek a relationship with the same sex are guilty of being unrighteous and will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Not only are same-sex relationships condemned in the Bible, but also the approval of such is condemned. “Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.” (Rom. 1:32) According to the Bible, we cannot practice same-sex relationships and we certainly cannot condone them and be right with God. Let us stand for the truth and let people know what the Bible has to say about such issues.

## **What God Sees in You**

How do you see yourself? Though many look at themselves and recognize their importance in life, many do not. Many view themselves as someone who is of little importance in this world. Why do we see ourselves this way? We don't see ourselves as God sees us. We focus our attention on outward appearances (1 Samuel 9:2). What we need to do is look beyond the physical and focus on the inward (1 Sam. 16:1; 6-12). We need to see ourselves the way God sees us. What does God see when He looks at a Christian?

First, He sees His child. Consider how parents feel when they look at their children. They are overwhelmed with joy as they think, “That’s my child.” The apostle John states, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God.” (1 Jn. 3:1) As Christians, we are children of God (Gal. 3:26) and just as parents look upon their children with joy, God looks upon us with a heart filled with joy because we are His children. Second, God sees His image. Children often bear the resemblance of their parents. The Bible teaches we were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). The word image means likeness or resemblance. Just as children often resemble their parents physically, as Christians we resemble our heavenly Father spiritually through lives of holiness (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Third, God sees a beautiful loving bride. Think of how a man feels as he sees the woman walking down the aisle who is about to become his bride. He is overwhelmed with joy. The Bible teaches that the church is married to Christ (Rom. 7:4), therefore the church is the bride of Christ. When God sees us, He sees His beautiful bride whom He loves so much (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Fourth, God sees a purchased possession. The Psalmist states, “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD...” (Psa. 127:3) The word “heritage” means gift, inheritance, or possession. Children are the possession of parents. The Bible teaches that Christians belong to the Lord. The apostle Peter states, “But 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 Pet. 2:9) The phrase “special people” refers to possession or property. The apostle Paul states, “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Cor. 6:19). The purchasing power was the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19). As God looks upon us He sees a purchased possession that was secured with the blood of His son. Fifth, God sees a new creation. Think of a child as he/she enters this world. As I was blessed to gaze upon each one of my children when they were born, I thought to myself, “What a creation!” I held within my arms a brand new being with a fresh start in life to be anything he or she wanted to be. As Christians, we are “new creatures” (2 Cor. 5:17). The word “creature” means creation or a created thing. When we become Christians, we have a fresh start in life to be as great as God would have us to be.

The next time you look at yourself, don’t focus your attention on what you see on the outside. Look within your heart and see the person God created you to be.

### **What Impression Are You Leaving?**

Some time ago, I was traveling down the road, headed to the hospital to visit a sick friend. It had been raining most of the morning and naturally, everything outside was wet. Suddenly, a leaf became plastered to my windshield and without a moment’s notice, the wind quickly carried it away. Though the leaf was gone, the imprint of that leaf remained on my windshield. As I stared at that imprint, it reminded me of a very important principle in life. Every day we leave an imprint upon the people we associate with. What does that imprint look like? Does that imprint say, “I love God?” Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength...” (Mk. 12:30). According to Jesus, loving God is the most important thing we can do in life. How do we impress upon people our love for God?

To begin with, we must recognize God’s love for man. The Bible admonishes us to “know” the love God has for us (Eph. 3:19). Do we know how much God loves us? He loved us so much that He gave His only begotten Son (Jn. 3:16). His continual love for man can be seen in the way His love is described in the Scriptures. It’s described as being immeasurable (Eph. 3:18-19; Jn. 15:13-14), unconditional (1 Jn. 4:19; Rom. 5:8-9; Eph. 2:4-5), everlasting (Jer. 31:3; Lam. 3:22-23), inseparable (Rom. 8:35-39), and extremely Powerful (1 Jn. 3:1; 1 Pet. 4:8). I suppose one of the thoughts about God’s love that amazes me the most is found in the book of first John. The apostle John states, “We love Him because He first loved us.” (1 Jn. 4:19). Isn’t that just amazing? We didn’t do anything to earn or deserve God’s love and yet He loves us. Once we recognize God’s love for man, it compels us to love God wholly or completely (Mk. 12:30). Loving God is our life. There is nothing greater that we strive to do than to love God. Once we reach this point in our lives, we are now ready to impress upon people our love of God. How do we do this? We must love our neighbor (Mk. 12:31). Who is my neighbor? It’s my fellow man. It’s our brothers and sisters in Christ (Jn. 13:34-35; 15:12). It’s the people we associate with and encounter on a regular daily basis. This also includes our enemies (Matt. 5:44). We must also love ourselves. Jesus states, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mk. 12:31) As a Christian, you are God’s unique creation (Gen. 1:26-27). You are His masterpiece (Eph. 2:10). When you don’t love yourself, you fail to show the love of God in your life. How do we accomplish this great challenge? We must become love. The Bible states, “God is love.” (1 Jn. 4:8). If we are going to reveal our love for God, we too must become love (1 Cor. 13:4-8). Second, we must “abide in love” (1 Jn. 4:16). The word

“abide” means to remain. It refers to one who does not leave a certain realm or sphere. The realm or sphere we are to remain in is God’s love. How do we remain in God’s love? We do this by keeping His commandments (Jn. 15:9-10).

Impressions often last a lifetime, and they are very difficult to change. Let’s strive to leave the best impression possible on the people we chance to meet in everyday life. Let’s show them how much we love God.

## **What is Right with The Church of Christ?**

The prophet Daniel spoke of a kingdom that would be established and would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44). The writer of the Book of Hebrews referred to this kingdom as “a kingdom which cannot be shaken.” (Heb. 12:28). As I write this article, and examine my life, there are so many things for which I’m extremely thankful. That which I am most grateful for is the fact that I am a member of the Church of Christ, which is identified as the one true Church of the Bible (Rom. 12:4-5; 16:16), the church that Daniel prophesied about and the Church that the Hebrew writer identified. Why am I so grateful to be a member of the Church of Christ?

**First of all, it has the right builder.** Every religious organization that exists in our world today was established or built by some man. The Lutheran church was established by Martin Luther. The Presbyterian church was established by John Calvin and John Knox. The Methodist church was established by John Wesley. The Baptist church was established by John Smythe, Thomas Helwys, and Roger Williams. The Mormon church was established by Joseph Smith. All of these churches, and many others we could add to the list, had their beginning with man and not with God, therefore not one of them represents the church of the Bible. The founder of the Church of Christ is Christ Himself. He promised to build His church (Matt. 16:18-19). That promise was fulfilled in Acts 2. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Rome, he addressed them as “the Churches of Christ.” Why did Paul identify the Church in this manner? None of the denominational churches that exist in our world today existed back then, therefore, Paul addressed them as “the Churches of Christ.” How great it is to be a part of the Church that has been built by the Lord (Psa. 127:1; 1 Cor. 3:11).

**Second, the head is right.** With every religious organization, there is a head man, a council, or headquarters that determines the beliefs and practices of that denominational group (Examples: Southern Baptist Convention, Methodist Council of Bishops, Catholic Church/the Pope, etc.). The Bible teaches that Jesus and Jesus alone is to be recognized as the head of the Church. “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.” (Eph. 5:23). “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,” (Eph. 2:20) In ancient days, the “chief cornerstone” was the stone that the builders would lay first in constructing a building. It determined every characteristic of the building. When the Bible speaks of the Church, Jesus is identified as the “head” of the Church and the “chief cornerstone.” Not only did He design and develop every characteristic concerning the Church (terms of salvation, worship, Christian living, etc.), but he also is completely in charge. He determines the beliefs and practices of the Church and not man. Councils and headquarters exist today without the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17) What a blessed privilege it is to be able to tell people that I am a member of the Church which has Jesus as its head.

**Third, the manual is right.** Most religious groups have manuals, creed books, and discipline books which are used to govern the lives of the people (Baptist manual, Methodist discipline, Book of Mormon, etc.) All of these books are manmade and exist without the sanction of God. The Bible must be our only manual or creed book. Why? It's inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21), it contains all that man needs to live righteously (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3), it is not subject to change (Jude 1:3; Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:6-9) and we will someday be judged by it (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:12; Jn. 12:48). Can any of these principles be applied to the manmade creed and discipline books that exist among religious groups today? Absolutely not! I'm thankful to be a part of the Church that points to the Bible as our only manual or creed book.

Oh, there are many other reasons why I'm so thankful to be a member of the Church of Christ, the Lord's Church. These are just a few. What about you? Are you a member of the Lord's Church, the Church you read about in the Bible? If not, why not become a member today?

### What is the Church Worth to You?

There are many things in this life that we consider to be of great value to us. When the word "value" is mentioned, we may think of a spouse, children, grandchildren, parents, a job, a home, etc. How often do we consider the worth of the Church? What is the church worth? Let's ask a few Bible characters.

**To God, The Church Was Worth His Son.** God gave His only begotten Son for the Church. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (Jn. 3:16). The phrase "only begotten" means one of a kind. There was no other individual who could do what Christ did for you and me. I suppose one of the most mind-boggling thoughts is the fact that God gave His Son while we were sinners. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8). It sounds like the church is worth a lot to God, wouldn't you agree?

**To Christ, The Church Was Worth His Blood.** The blood of Christ was the purchasing power of the Church. "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." (Acts 20:28) We are redeemed by the blood of Christ. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Eph. 1:7) The word redemption means "to buy back." Redemption requires a redeemer which is one who pays a ransom and then releases us. Jesus Christ is our redeemer. The price He had to pay for our release from sin was His shed blood.

**To Paul, The Church Was Worth All That He Had Gained.** Paul was a very powerful and recognized individual. He was a Jew, born in Tarsus and taught by Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). At one time he was a Pharisee (Acts 26:4-5). Paul was willing to give up everything for the Church. "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." (Phil. 3:4-8).

I suppose the list is almost endless. As one can see, the church was extremely valuable to many we read about in the Bible. What about you? What value do you place on the church today? What is it worth to you? If you treasure the church and recognize its great value, why not express that attitude by being obedient to the gospel of Christ and



living a faithful Christian life as a member of the church you read about in the Bible?

## **What is the Gospel?**

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: (1 Cor. 15:1-4) In this passage, Paul is revealing unto his audience that the message he preached was the gospel. What was the gospel? The word "gospel" means good news or glad tidings. Everywhere Paul went, he preached the gospel. He was ready to preach the gospel in Rome. (Rom. 1:15). In Romans 15:20 he states that he strived or labored to preach the gospel. He was compelled to preach the Gospel. He knew it was his obligation. In 1 Corinthians 9:16, he states, "woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." Why was Paul compelled to preach the gospel?

First, the gospel gives us strength. The word "stand" means to make firm, to fix, or to establish. In other words, it means to strengthen. If there is one thing we need to live the Christian life, it is strength. The gospel gives us strength. How? The Gospel is not man's message. It was the message of God. "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:11-12) Many messages grant strength unto us, but there is no message as powerful as the gospel of Christ. The gospel is a faultless message, a perfect message and it causes us to stand in perfect strength. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

Second, the gospel saves. Paul states, "by which ye are saved." The gospel is the only message which carries the power of salvation. There is not another message in all the world we could turn to and obtain salvation. Why? The gospel tells us about the one who came to save us. That is Jesus Christ. Without Him, there would be no salvation. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12). Why did Paul preach the gospel? It gave the people two things they desperately needed; strength and salvation. Are you preaching the gospel in the life you live? If not, why not begin today?

## **What Is the Unpardonable Sin?**

"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age to come*." (Matt. 12:31-32). Often when reading this passage, individuals are left with the impression that there is a sin which one can commit for which there is no forgiveness. Some have concluded that this sin is identified as murder. This conclusion is not valid, for David and Paul were both guilty of murder (2 Sam. 11-12; Acts 22:4-5), and yet they were both forgiven (Psa. 51; 1 Tim. 1:15). Others believe the unpardonable sin is adultery. Again, this is not a valid conclusion, for the people in Corinth were guilty of adultery and yet they too were forgiven

(1 Cor. 6:9-11). Then some believe that the unpardonable sin is simply blasphemy in and of itself. Again, this is not a Biblical conclusion, for Paul himself was guilty of blasphemy and yet he was forgiven (1 Tim. 1:13-15). This leaves us with the conclusion, "What is the unpardonable sin that Jesus was discussing?"

Any time that I struggle to understand a passage, a good rule of thumb is to always turn to scriptures that I can clearly understand which discuss the same subject. Since the main subject of discussion is forgiveness, what does the Bible teach about forgiveness? "Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." (Acts 8:22) "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn. 1:9) From these two scriptures, the Bible teaches that all sin which is repented of and confessed can and will be forgiven.

Another thing that we should take notice of is the fact that this sin is specifically against the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when you talk about the unpardonable sin, you must talk about the "Blaspheming of the Holy Spirit." The word "blaspheme" means to slander or insult, especially concerning speech. The word "blasphemy" as used in our text refers to the violation of the glory, majesty, and power of God. Remember, as we have already noticed that all sin that is repented of and confessed can and will be forgiven (Acts 8:22; 1 Jn. 1:9), including blasphemy (1 Tim. 1:13-15). Therefore, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not referring to a single one-time sin, but rather it is the sinful state that results from a "repetitious rejection" of God and His mercy. This repetitious rejection results in the rejecter's heart becoming hardened (Heb. 3:7, 8, 13; Prov. 29:1; 28:14), his conscience seared (1 Tim. 4:2) and his soul calloused (Eph. 4:19). Consider if you will a man on a raft who is rapidly floating toward a massive waterfall. Death will be imminent if he is not turned from his path. Now imagine that someone is standing on the bank of the river and throws him a rope which he rejects. Someone throws him another rope and he rejects it. Then someone throws him a third and final rope, but he rejects it too. If the man continues to reject these extensions of salvation, he will eventually plummet to the bottom of the waterfall and die. In the same way, through the years, God pleaded with sinful man. He did so through the prophets of the Old Testament but was rejected. He sent His Son, but he too was largely rejected. He sent His Holy Spirit to the apostles who guided them into all truth, and they too were rejected. Those who reject this final plea are much like the man who rejected all three opportunities for salvation. Once we persistently reject the message of God, we get to the point of no return.

So, what is the unpardonable sin or the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? It appears to be the continual rejection of God, His word and will for mankind. When one lives his/her life continually rejecting God and refusing to repent and confess sins, this person can never receive forgiveness, neither in this life, nor in the life to come. Brothers and sisters, let us never be guilty of this sin. Let us live every day in complete humility, recognizing our sins and turning from them that we may always have forgiveness. In the words of the apostle John, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 Jn. 1:7)

### **What is the Work of a Preacher?**

It is my conviction that every person has a purpose in life (Rom. 8:28). In the parable of the talents, God gave to each man according to his ability (Matt. 25:15). When it comes to preaching, many preach because of desire. While desire is a necessity, I believe that

preaching is much deeper than just a desire. In Galatians 1:15-16, Paul states, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles..." In this passage, Paul states that it was God's plan for him to be a preacher. It is my conviction that it is God's plan for certain ones to be preachers of the Gospel today. I do not believe that this is a miraculous calling. We are called by the gospel of Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14). It is the gospel of Christ and the love of the souls for man that creates the desire to preach, but I must not forget that God does have a hand in those who become preachers of the gospel.

Three words in the New Testament describe God's worker known as a preacher. He is described as a minister, a preacher, and an evangelist. These words not only describe God's worker, but they also reveal what God expects of the minister. The word "minister" means one who is a servant. It refers to one who executes the commands of another. The one who the minister serves is Jesus (1 Tim. 4:6). The word of a minister involves preaching the word (2 Tim. 4:2). The minister must instruct the brethren in the things of Christ (1 Tim. 4:6). He must also remain balanced in his messages, by preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). He must take heed to the ministry and seek to fulfill it (Col. 4:17). He should strive to not neglect the great work to which God has called him. He must seek to carry out his duties as a minister faithfully and carefully.

The word "preacher" is defined as a herald or messenger vested with public authority, who conveyed the official messages of kings, magistrates, princes, or military commanders, or who gave a public summons or demand and performed various other duties. In the New Testament, he is God's ambassador and the herald or proclaimer of the divine word. He must proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:1-7; 4:1-5) which must be obeyed. As a preacher, he must remain faithful and true to the message of God. He must always be ready to proclaim God's message regardless of the consequences (2 Tim. 4:2).

The word "evangelist" is defined as one who announces glad tidings or one who brings good news. The good news is the gospel which represents the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:1-4). It is through this message that salvation is extended to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). In New Testament times, Christ gave evangelists (Eph. 4:11-12) to bear His good message. Paul warned preachers to "do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (1 Tim. 4:5). As gospel preachers today, we have the responsibility to carry on the commandment of spreading the gospel of Christ (Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:2).

The most important commitment of a gospel preacher lies within the fact that he is a servant of God (Rom. 1:1; Tit. 1:1; Jam. 1:1; Jude 1:1). When he devotes his life in service to the Lord, he then will be the preacher, minister, and evangelist that God would have him to be. Being a servant of Christ also demands that the minister is not guilty of neglecting his family. The minister is to be an example to the believers (1 Tim. 4:12). Others should be able to follow him as he follows Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). The same Bible that teaches that he must be faithful as a preacher, minister, and evangelist also teaches that he must be faithful to his family. He must provide for his family physically (1 Tim. 5:8) and spiritually (Eph. 6:4). He must love his wife as Christ loves the church (Eph. 5:25). Such requirements demand that he spend valuable time with his family expressing his love and concern for them. What kind of example would he be if he spent his time striving to save the world and lost his own family in the process?

I believe the most transparent picture of what I should be accomplishing in my life is being a minister. For the past twenty-five years, God has blessed me with the opportunity to be a minister of His blessed kingdom. Of all the jobs and opportunities, I have been given in life, nothing is dearer to my heart than ministry.

Being a minister involves more than just standing behind a pulpit or podium and preaching a sermon or teaching a Bible class. Being a minister consists of serving and helping others. The word "minister" refers to one who executes the commands of another. It relates to helping those who are in need, regardless of what that need may be. The one I serve is King Jesus. I serve Him by seeking to do good to all, especially those who are members of His Kingdom (Gal. 6:10). Paul thanked God for enabling him and making him a part of the ministry (1 Tim. 1:12). Likewise, every day I thank God for my ability. My goal in life is to fulfill the ministry that God has placed within my hands (Col. 4:17; 2 Tim. 4:5). I pray that He blesses me with the strength to be a faithful minister just like Epaphras (Col. 1:7) and Tychicus (1 Tim. 4:6).

I came to this understanding when I read Matthew 20:28. The Bible states, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." The word "serve" means to minister. Jesus left heaven to minister to me. Just as the angels ministered to Jesus following His temptation (Mk. 1:13), when I live my life ministering to others I am ministering to Jesus. "And the King will answer and say to them, Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me." (Matt. 25:40).

## What Is Today?

What is today? You may be thinking to yourself right now, "Well, David, it's Sunday." Technically you are correct. But is that it? Is it just Sunday? Too often we look at each day as just another day of the week. As a result, we fail to recognize the responsibility that lies within each day that we have been given to live. Let us look at today and every day that we've been blessed to live as so much more than just another day.

**Today is the Lord's Day.** Sunday is extra special in the fact that it is "the Lord's Day." It's that specific day of the week when the disciples came together to worship God (Acts 2:1; Lev. 23:15-16; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Today, we have the wonderful privilege of expressing to God how thankful we are for every blessing that He has bestowed upon us. We have been given the opportunity to praise Him in song (Col. 3:16), approach Him in prayer (Heb. 4:16), give of our means (1 Cor. 16:1-2), partake of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7) and listen to God's Word be proclaimed (2 Tim. 2:2). How blessed we truly are! In the words of the Psalmist, I was glad when they said unto me, let us go to the house of the Lord." (Psa. 122:1)

**Today is the day of salvation.** Behold, now is "the acceptable time," behold, now is "the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2) Maybe as you read this article you know that you're not a Christian. You've never been obedient to the gospel of Jesus Christ. You don't know why you've never obeyed. You're just clearly aware of the fact that you're not saved. If you find yourself in that condition, today is the day to obey! God has blessed you with this wonderful opportunity. Don't pass it up! Believe that Christ is the Son of God (Jn. 8:24), repent of sins (Acts 17:30), confess your faith in Christ as the Son of God (Matt. 10:32-33), and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). Make today the day of salvation!

**Today is also the day to share the gospel of Christ.** We have the commission to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:19-20) The apostle Paul states, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim. 2:2) Just as God has blessed us with another opportunity to be saved, He’s blessed us with the opportunity to share a message that will save us. Why not take advantage of this opportunity today? Talk to that person that you’ve been meaning to share the gospel with, but you just keep putting it off. Don’t wait another minute. Look at today as the day that you’re finally going to tell your friend, neighbor, or loved one about the gospel of Christ.

**Today is the day of restoration.** You know someone right now who at one time was a faithful brother or sister in Christ, but now they’re not. They’ve become unfaithful. They’ve wandered away from the fold of God. The Bible teaches that it’s your responsibility to bring them back. “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:1-2) “My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” (James 5:19-20) Maybe you’ve been meaning to reach out to this person, but again, you’ve just been putting it off. Don’t wait another moment. Realize that their soul is hanging in the balance. Realize that today is the day of restoration! Seek to bring them back and rejoice that sins are covered (1 Jn. 1:9).

We could go on and on. The point is, never look at today or any other day as just another day of the week. Look at every day as an opportunity to do something good for God.

## **When God Says Yes**

Prayer is a most important part of the Christian life. That’s why we are admonished to “...continuing steadfastly in prayer...” (Rom. 12:12) and “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). I want us to begin today by discussing the different ways that God may answer us when we pray. Listen, God always answers His children. “I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me *and set me* in a broad place.” (Psa. 118:5) “In the day when I cried out, You answered me, *And* made me bold with strength in my soul.” (Psa. 138:3) What is the Psalmist saying? God always answers His children. How does He answer us? To begin with, sometimes God says YES. God often grants the petitions we ask of Him. Hannah asked for a child and God granted her request (1 Sam. 1:11). Hezekiah prayed that God would spare his life and He did (Isa 38:2-5).

What is necessary for God to answer yes? We must put Him first in our lives. To begin with, we must ask according to His will. “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” (1 Jn. 5:14) Notice that we can have confidence in prayer, but we must ask things according to God’s will. This was the problem with those to whom James wrote. “You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup>You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend *it* on your pleasures.” (Jam. 4:2-3) We must ask things according to God’s will. Second, we must

put God first in our lives. “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matt. 6:33) Many people choose to live a worldly lifestyle and accuse God of not listening to them and answering their prayers. If God is going to say yes, we must live our lives every day doing His will. “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” (1 Jn. 3:22) When we live our lives with faith that God will hear and answer our prayers and ask things according to the will of God and we strive to do His will, there will be times when God will answer yes to our prayers.

## **When Life Gives you, Lemons make Lemonade**

I love lemonade! Summer will be here before you know it and there is nothing better on a hot summer day than a tall glass of ice-cold sugary sweet lemonade. How refreshing it is! Though I love lemonade, it may surprise you that I despise lemons. The very sight or even thought of a sour lemon sets my teeth on the edge and causes my lips to pucker. How can someone despise lemons and yet love lemonade? It’s because of the ingredients added to the lemons. Water and sugar added to sour lemon juice create a sugary sweet liquid. With that thought in mind, consider the fact that life is not always a bed of roses. We live in a world where bad things happen. Being a Christian does not shield one from misfortune, pain, suffering, temptation, trouble, or what we may refer to as sour situations in life. Being a Christian does, however, help. In Christ Jesus, we are blessed with a power that is greater than we can ever begin to imagine. We are blessed with the power of God (2 Tim. 1:7; Eph. 3:20-21). God’s strength gives us the power to overcome every difficult situation in life (Phil. 4:13). In fact, God gives us the power to take sour times in our lives and turn them into lemonade. How is this possible? It’s much like the lemon juice which becomes lemonade. Such is a result of the ingredients that are added to the lemon juice. In the same way, times of adversity can be sweetened through the things that we add to it. What can we add to difficult times to make them better?

**How about God’s word?** The Psalmist states, “How sweet are Your words to my taste, *Sweeter* than honey to my mouth!” (Psa. 119:103). Consider the purpose of sugar in lemonade. The sweetness of the sugar overpowers the bitterness of the lemon. In the same way, the sweet promises that are found in God’s word overpower the adversity that one may be facing in life, and in the words of the Proverb writer, it creates pleasurable circumstances and even brings healing power to the heart and soul. “Pleasant words *are like* a honeycomb, Sweetness to the soul and health to the bones.” (Prov. 16:24). This is why we should spend as much time as we possibly can reading, studying, and meditating upon God’s word.

**Second, we need prayer.** Prayer should be a part of our daily lives (1 Thess. 5:18), especially when we are experiencing times of trouble. In the words of James, “...the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” (Jam. 5:16). The word “effective” in this passage is defined as having the strength to overcome. Prayer gives Christians the power to move beyond the shadows of darkness that life sends our way and move into rays of light beaming from heaven.

There are probably other spiritual ingredients that we can add to our lives to help sweeten sour situations but let us always remember that God is with us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). When life gives you lemons, let us always turn to God for help; for He will give us the ability to turn lemons into lemonade!

## When My Soul is Cast Down”

In Psalm 42:6, the Psalmist states, “O my God, my soul is cast down within me.” The phrase “cast down” means to be sunk or to be in despair. Despair refers to the complete loss or absence of hope. Most of us can identify with his situation. Life has a way of overwhelming us with circumstances and events that cause us to be “cast down.” You and I cannot stop life from happening. Even when we choose the path of righteousness, bad things still happen. The question that we should ask is what should we do when life has dealt a blow that leaves us feeling cast down?

First, we must recognize the **Presence of God**. In Psalm 42 and 43, David uses the word “God” 18 times in 16 verses. That is not taking into consideration the personal pronouns that he also used about God. When David felt cast down, he remembered that God was there with him. It is easy to think we are all alone when feelings of despair come our way. We must realize that we are never alone. God is always there. In Psalm 46:1, the Psalmist states, “God is our refuge and strength, **a very present** help in trouble.” In Hebrews 13:5 the Bible states, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” God is always with us during times of despair.

Second, we must recognize the **Power of God**. Concerning God David said He is my life (42:8), my rock (42:9), my strength (43:2), and my exceeding joy (43:4). Each of the metaphors David used is directly related to the great sustaining power of God. David was able to get beyond his feelings of despair because of the power of God. Nothing has changed concerning God’s power. The power that was available to David is likewise available to God’s people today (Eph. 3:20-21; Phil. 4:13).

Third, we must remember to **Pray to God**. Such is what David did (42:8) and we must follow his pattern. We must turn to God and ask for His strength during our times of despair. Jesus Himself said, “And whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (Jn. 14:13). In Matthew 7:7 we are told, “Ask and it shall be given to you; seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.” God has promised to give us the things we need in this life. If we are asking Him to help us through our times of despair, will He not fulfill our request?

Fourth, we must remember to **Praise God**. Though David felt cast down, it did not keep him from offering praise to God (42:5, 11; 43:5). What caused David to praise God during times of despair? It was his hope in God (42:5, 11; 43:5). The word “hope” refers to a confident expectation. David was confident in the “help of His countenance” (42:5). This phrase refers to “salvation.” When the word salvation is used in the Bible, though it can refer to the salvation of the soul, when used in the Old Testament, it often refers to deliverance. David praised God during times of despair because he remembered that God had always delivered him in times past and God would continue to deliver him. God will do the same for us, therefore we must remember to Praise Him.

We cannot stop times of despair from coming our way, but we can take measures to help us overcome. May God bless us with the strength and courage to do so.

## When the Lord Stands with us

In 2 Timothy 4:16-18, the Apostle Paul speaks of his first defense and states that no one stood with him. Some believe that Paul’s first defense refers to his trial in Jerusalem (Acts 23:1-10). Others believe this is a reference to his trial in Caesarea (Acts 24:1-22). Whenever this defense took place, it was not of utmost importance. The main

point of the passage is found in verse 17 where Paul states, "But the Lord stood with me." What does it mean that the Lord stood with Paul? This is a direct reference to the Presence and Support of God. Why does Paul confidently say that the Lord stood with him? This was a promise that God had made to other faithful servants of God (Abraham; Isaac - Gen. 26:3; Jacob - Gen. 31:3; Moses - Exod. 3:12; Joshua; Jos. 1:5; Jeremiah - Jer. 1:5). Paul knew that God would likewise stand with him. God has also promised His presence and support in our lives. He has promised to always be with us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5; Rom. 8:38-39). He has also promised to support us just as He did Paul (2 Tim. 4:17). As long as we seek to do His will, God will always stand with and support His people.

What happens when the Lord stands with us? In verse 17, Paul states that he was "strengthened." Just as God strengthened Paul, He will strengthen us today. How does He strengthen us? He does so through His Word (Psa. 119:28; Acts 20:32), through prayer (1 Jn. 5:14), and the brethren (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Cor 1:3-4). Such is why we should devote ourselves to reading God's Word, praying without ceasing, and spending time in fellowship with our brethren (Acts 2:42). A second blessing that occurs when the Lord stands with us is deliverance. Paul states that he was "delivered" by the Lord. The word "delivered" means to rescue from danger. God has promised to rescue us from danger. The Psalmist states, "When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles...Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psa. 34:17,19). A third blessing that occurs when the Lord stands with us is "preservation." In verse 18, Paul states that the Lord would deliver him and "preserve" him. The word "preserve" means to save. In Psalm 32:7, the Bible states, "You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance." Paul knew that whatever state he found himself in, God would always preserve him. Nothing would keep him from entering God's heavenly kingdom. Do we as Christians have the same conviction? Just as God promised to preserve Paul, He will likewise preserve faithful Christians today.

There may be times in our lives when we feel as if everyone has forsaken us. When that time comes, let us always remember the one who will never forsake us. Let us remember the one who has promised to always stand with us to the very end. Let us remember God!

## **When Trouble Keeps Coming**

What is trouble? The word "trouble" is defined as a state of distress, affliction, difficulty, or need. Life is filled with trouble, wouldn't you agree? Do you ever find yourself in a position where it seems like trouble just keeps coming? Just as soon as you overcome one difficulty, you are hit head-on by another one. Consider Job with me for a moment. Within the first two chapters of the book of Job, it is recorded that he lost his wealth (Job 1:13-17), his children (Job 1:18-19), his health (Job 2:7-8), and the support of his wife (Job 2:9-10). All these events occurred within hours of Job's life, not weeks, months, or years. Truly, Job experienced continual trouble in his life. The question that we should ask is what did Job do when trouble kept coming?

**He worshiped God.** The Bible teaches that when Job experienced adversity, he immediately worshiped God (Job 1:21). It was his dedicated worship toward God that helped him to overcome his adversities in life. What should we do when we are met with difficulties in life? We should worship God. Why should we worship God? We should



worship God because it is a requirement (Jn. 4:23-24), but we should also worship Him because it causes us to reflect on His great majesty. God is all-powerful. His power remains in me when I put Him first in my life (Eph. 3:20-21). His power gives me the strength to be able to overcome any situation that I may face (Phil. 4:13). How sad it is that when many experience trouble, the first thing they do is stop worshiping God. Anytime I leave God out of my plans, things do not get better. They only get worse.

**He trusted in God.** It amazes me that regardless of what Job faced in life, he never lost his trust in God. “Though He slays me, yet will I trust Him. Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him.” (Job 13:15). Even the thoughts of death did not turn the faith and trust of Job. If we are going to overcome trouble, we must follow the example of Job and always trust in God (Prov. 3:5-6).

**He recognized the reality of trouble.** Many live in a spiritual fairytale world believing that once you become a follower of God, all your difficulties just vanish away. Job is a perfect example of one who followed God, and yet he still experienced troubles. How could Job have the attitude he had? (He worshiped God, He trusted God, etc.) He knew that trouble was a part of life (Job. 14:1-2). If we are to be successful in overcoming trouble, we must realize that trouble is a part of life, and being a Christian doesn’t stop trouble from coming. Every person who is reading this article has either just overcome trouble, you’re facing trouble now or trouble is in your future. The sooner we recognize and accept this fact, the sooner we will be able to deal with troubles.

**He knew God was with him.** There were many things that Job did not understand. Job asked God the question “why” sixteen times in their discourse. Though there were many things that Job did not understand, one thing that he was certain of was God’s presence in his life (Job. 23:10). We may never understand why we experience certain trials in life, but one thing that we always need to be confident in is the presence of God. He will always be there for me (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

Trouble is a part of life. That’s something that no one can deny. The question is, how will you respond when trouble keeps coming your way? Let’s strive to have the attitude of Job in hopes that someday, all the trouble that we know and experience in this life will come to an end (Rev. 21:4).

## **Which Church Should I Join?”**

A common thought in the religious world today is “join the church of your choice.” The reasoning behind this theme is that “one church is as good as another.” Many believe “we are all traveling different roads but going to the same place.” What’s the problem with this thought? No one in the Bible was ever told to join the church of their choice. The Bible teaches that upon salvation, one is added to the church. “Praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (Acts 2:47) Who does the adding? The Lord! According to the Bible, upon one’s obedience (Heb. 5:8-9), he/she is delivered from the power of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. (Col. 1:12-13). What is the kingdom? The word “kingdom” in this passage refers to the church (Matt. 16:18-19). Therefore, when one is baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27; Rom. 6:3-4) at that point he is added by the Lord to the church, the vessel of salvation (Eph. 5:23).

Which church is an individual added to upon his obedience? Consider with me the “oneness” of the church. The Bible does not teach a multiplicity of churches, but rather, the Bible teaches there is only one true New Testament Church. This can be seen in the

promise of Christ. Our Lord promised to build only "one" church. "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it." (Matt. 16:18). Notice that Christ did "not" promise I will build "a" church, I will build my "churches," or I will build "one" of my churches. What Christ did promise was "I will build my church," singularly. The Bible teaches there is only one true New Testament church. The Bible teaches that there is only "one body" (Rom. 12:4-5; I Cor. 12:12, 20; Eph. 4:4; Col. 3:15). The body is identified as the church. "He is also head of the body, the church..." (Col. 1:18; See also Eph. 1:22-23). Since the body is the church and there is only one body, the logical explanation is that there is only one church.

What church does Christ add Christians to? The only named church in the Bible is the Church of Christ. "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." (Rom. 16:16). Why did Paul identify the church as the church of Christ? It was not the fact as many would conclude that the churches of Christ just happened to be the religious denomination that Paul was addressing at the time. In this era of time, it was the only church which was in existence. The New Testament church which is the Church of Christ began around 33 AD (Acts 2). According to history, the religious denominations which exist in our world today did not exist in Paul's day. For example, the Catholic church began in 606, the Lutheran church in 1530, the Presbyterian church in 1536, the church of England in 1535, the Methodist church in 1539, the Episcopal church in 1589, the Baptist church in 1611, the Mormon church in 1830 and the Seventh Day Adventist church in 1863. Not only do these churches and many others that could be added to the list begin at the wrong date, but they were also established by man. According to the Bible, Christ is the one who must be the builder and not man. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." (Psa. 127:1).

What church is an individual added to? According to the Bible, when one is obedient to the gospel of Christ, he/she is added to the only church that one can read about in the New Testament which is the Church of Christ.

## **Who Is Your Authority in Religion?"**

Knowing what the rules are and where to find them are essential for almost any endeavor in life. Consider the realm of sports. In any field of athletic competition, an established rulebook and an established authority is a must. When teams meet to compete in the athletic arena, they do so having agreed upon an established rulebook. The principle of having an established set of rules or a set authority is a widely accepted principle in our world today and everyone understands the importance and necessity of having a recognized authority or an established rulebook.

Now, let's turn our attention to something far more important than any sporting event. Let's turn our attention to the realm of religion, and ask: Is there a single authority in religion? The answer to that question is yes. It is God! He is the creator of everything we know. "For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: "I *am* the LORD, and *there is* no other." (Isa. 45:18) "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands." (Acts 17:24) Aren't these two verses crystal clear as to the fact that God is the creator of all things? Mankind is included in the "all things." "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over

every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. “So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Gen. 1:26-27) If you were the originator of a business and you built that business from the ground up, wouldn’t you have the right to determine the rules and regulations in that business? God is the creator of all things, including man. Everything belongs to Him. Doesn’t He have the right to set the rules and guidelines for each of us? God is man’s authority in religion and every other aspect of life. He has given us His inspired word, the Bible (2 Pet. 1:19-20) as a rulebook. It is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path (Psa. 119:105). It completely furnishes us with everything we need to successfully live our lives in a way that will ultimately please God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3). When we understand this principle, then we will have the attitude of Peter and the other apostles. “But Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29) Who is your authority in religion?

### **Who is Your One?**

(Can be adapted for any year)

Today is January 29, 2023. It is hard to believe that we are already one month into the new year. Many made resolutions for the year. Some of them may have been physical (eating better, exercising, having regular check-ups, etc.). Many of them may have been spiritual (reading, studying, and memorizing the Bible every day, praying more, giving more, doing more for the Lord, etc.) May I suggest that as we begin the next month that we determine in our minds right now that we are going to be instrumental in bringing one person to Christ. Right now, as you read this article, you are aware of someone who is lost. If you think about it, you know many who are lost. It may be a neighbor, friend, coworker, or someone you meet on an average day. The truth of the matter is that we are surrounded by people who are lost. Will you pick out one soul and determine to bring that person to Christ? Why should we do this?

It’s your responsibility. Jesus’ first and last command to His disciples was to reach others (Matt. 4:19; 28:18-20). It is every Christian’s responsibility to reach others. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen” (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16). The future of the church depends on Christians reaching others. Paul told Timothy, “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 Tim. 2:2).

Striving to reach one is a Biblical pattern. Consider the calling of the disciples (John 1:35-46). Jesus called Andrew and Andrew followed the Lord. Andrew found Peter and Peter followed the Lord. Jesus found Philip and Philip followed the Lord. Philip found Nathanael and Nathanael followed the Lord. Do you see the pattern? Each person who was called to follow Christ reached out to someone else and encouraged them to follow Christ. Can we not follow the same pattern today? We can and we must!

What’s going to happen when we decide to reach one? Souls are going to be saved! The Gospel has soul-saving power (Rom. 1:16). When we teach it to others and they obey, not only does it save them, but it also saves the soul of the soul winner. Paul encouraged Timothy, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:16). Our soul’s

salvation depends on us teaching others. As you read this article, if you are not a soul winner, your soul is lost.

Do you have your one soul in mind? Remember that someone took the time to reach you. Why not take the time to teach that one soul what you know about the gospel?

### **Whose Voice Are You Listening to?**

In John 18-19, we have recorded the occasion when Jesus was in the halls of Pilate, on trial for His life. Pilate, being a man of great authority, was in a dilemma. Should he free Jesus or have Him put to death (Jn. 19:10-11)? As Pilate listened, he heard two voices. He heard the voice of the people as they shouted, "Crucify Him." He also heard the voice of Jesus, informing him that He was innocent and that He had come into the world to bear witness to the truth (Jn. 18:37). Pilate was convinced of Jesus' innocence (Jn. 18:38) and wanted to free Him (Jn. 19:12), but what choice would he make? Whose voice would he listen to? You are aware of the rest of the story. Instead of listening to the voice of Jesus, Pilate gave heed to the voice of the people around him (Jn. 19:12-13).

How often do we find ourselves just like Pilate? We're in a dilemma. We are presented with the opportunity to do what is right or what is wrong. As we think about the choice that is before us, we hear two voices. We hear the voice of the world, and we hear the voice of Jesus. Which voice will you heed? Which voice will you allow to influence the decisions you make in life? Sadly, many listen to the voice of the world and make decisions that they often regret for the remainder of their lives. Why not listen to the voice of Jesus? He is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn. 14:6). He will always lead you in the paths of righteousness (Psa. 23:3). By listening to the voice of Jesus, you'll never live with regret, but rather, you'll live in confidence, knowing that your decisions will be those which always please God. Every day Jesus stands at the door of your heart knocking (Rev. 3:20). He wants into your life. He wants to help lead and guide you through this life. He wants to help you make the right decisions in life. Will you open the door, invite Him into your life, and allow Him to influence the decisions that you make today? Remember the words of the Hebrew writer, "Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart." (Heb. 3:15). Listen to the voice of Jesus.

### **Why Are You a Christian?**

Why are you a Christian? Can you give five quick reasons why you are a Christian? Ready, go. Okay, how about three reasons? Are you struggling to come up with one good reason as to why you are a Christian? Sometimes we are so caught up in the act of living the Christian life, that we fail to stop and prepare ourselves as to why we do so. The apostle Peter states, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to answer every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). The phrase "be ready" means to be prepared. The word "answer" refers to a verbal defense or a reasoned statement. In this passage, Christians are admonished to be prepared to give answers as to why we are Christians. So why are you a Christian?

I am a Christian because of Influence. If we are going to be true to this discussion, we must admit that we are all Christians because of influence. Christianity is a taught religion (Rom. 10:17). Every person who becomes a Christian is influenced by someone. It may have been the influence of your parents, your spouse, friends, coworkers, or sometimes

a stranger knocking on your door. Regardless of who it may have been, you are a Christian because of influence.

I am a Christian because of the Evidence. Christianity is based upon the existence of God. There is overwhelming evidence for the existence of God (Rom. 1:20). God has provided us with the Bible which is a book of divine guidance (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Faith and evidence go hand in hand (Heb. 11:1).

I am a Christian because of God's Desire. The name "Christian" is the prophesied name that God intended for His people to wear (Isa. 62:2). Such is why in the New Testament; God's people were called Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16).

I am a Christian because of the Sacrifice made for Christianity. The name "Christian" means one who follows Christ. Don't we follow Christ because of the sacrifice He made for us? He emptied Himself (Phil. 2:5-7). He became a sin (2 Cor. 5:21). He died on the cross.

I am a Christian because Christianity gives me purpose. People in the world are always asking, "What is my purpose?" Christianity is a purpose-filled life. As a Christian, I am God's masterpiece (Eph. 2:10). I have been created to do good (Eph. 2:10; Gal. 6:10). In striving to do good, I bring glory to my heavenly Father (1 Cor. 10:31; Matt. 5:16).

I am a Christian because Christianity Gives Hope. The only thing this life has to offer is death (Heb. 9:27). Christianity offers life after death (1 Jn. 2:25; 5:13).

The reasons are countless as to why I am a Christian. The question is will you express your love for God by becoming a Christian today?

## **Why God Allows the Righteous Suffer?**

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all." (Psa. 34:17) The word "affliction" in this passage refers to bad, unpleasant, or evil things. We live in a world where bad things happen. The sad reality of the passage at hand is the fact that those who are righteous are not exempt from suffering. Do you ever ask yourself why? Why do those who are righteous suffer? Let me begin by saying it is not wrong to ask questions of such nature. However, it is very important to the strengthening of our faith that we come to the proper conclusion. Consider with me if you will several possibilities as to why God allows the righteous to suffer.

**Suffering keeps this world from becoming too attractive.** The Bible teaches that we are "Pilgrims" & "Sojourners" here on earth (1 Pet. 2:11-12). This world is not truly our home. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). God has prepared something better for us. "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Cor. 5:1) One of the many blessings of our heavenly home is the fact that there will be no more suffering (Rev. 21:4). Think about it for a moment. If there was no suffering, there would be no desire to leave this present temporary world. There would be no desire for an eternal home with the heavenly Father. As a result, people would not prepare themselves spiritually for the next life.

**Suffering makes us more dependent on God.** God wants us to depend on Him (Prov. 3:5). Far too often in this life, we think of ourselves as self-sufficient; that is until we experience suffering. When someone experiences suffering and a half-dozen of the most skilled men in their profession tell you "They have done all they can and it is completely out of their hands," you suddenly realize how much you depend on God. At no other time is one more likely to realize that we depend upon God for our very breath!

(Acts 17:28)

**Suffering causes us to be more appreciative.** We are all blessed beyond measure in this life (Psa. 31:19). Since God blesses us daily, it's easy to take those blessings for granted and not receive them with gratitude toward God. Suffering is the one thing that opens our eyes and helps us to appreciate more fully...Good health, good friends, and a loving family.

**Suffering helps us to be more sympathetic.** The word sympathy is defined as caring about and being sorry for someone else's trouble, grief, or misfortune. Jesus was very sympathetic to those in His surroundings (Matt. 9:36; Mk. 1:41). As Christians, we are commanded to be sympathetic. We are to "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). If there is one thing in life that will help us be more sympathetic, it's suffering. When we experience affliction, it helps us to comfort those who are suffering (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

**Suffering causes Christians to put forth their best effort.** The Bible commands Christians to bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). We are to think more of others than ourselves (Phil. 2:3-4). Suffering often brings these qualities out of us. Think about what happens when people around us suffer. We pray more fervently. We call, visit, send flowers and cards, prepare food, offer financial support, and on and on the list goes. When we see others suffer, it often brings our best.

As one can see, suffering can be beneficial, but not if we see suffering as man sees it. We must look at suffering through the eyes of God (Isa. 55:8-9), knowing that it is a bridge to something much better.

## Why God Should Be Your Refuge?

In Psalm 46:1, the Psalmist states, "God *is* our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble." We live in a world filled with trouble, torment, trials, tribulations, temptations, pain, persecution, sickness, sorrow, disease, and death. Where do we turn when things of such nature come our way? The Psalmist turned to God for refuge. The word "refuge" refers to a shelter. It indicates a place of safety, protection, and security. Why should we make God your refuge in life?

First, God should be our refuge because of ***His Power***. The word "strength" in our passage refers to power. When trials come our strength is drained. God is an everlasting strength during times of weakness (Deut. 33:27; Isa. 40:28-31). When His strength is in us there is nothing, we can't accomplish (Eph. 3:20-21).

Second, God should be our refuge because of ***His Presence***. The Psalmist describes God as "a very present help in trouble" (vs. 1b; See also vs. 5, 7, 11). When others fail and when all forsake us, God will always be there (Psa. 142:4-5). We have stability in our lives when God is present (vs. 5).

Third, God should be our refuge because of ***His Provision***. The word "help" as used by the Psalmist means assistance (vs. 2). God not only gives us the things we need in life (Phil. 4:19), but He also assists us when we are in need (Heb. 2:18). The word "aid" means to come to the help of. God will never leave or forsake us. He will always provide us with the things we need in this life.

Fourth, God should be our refuge because of ***His Protection***. According to the Psalmist, those who make God their refuge have no fear (vs. 2-3). The word "fear" means to be afraid or frightened. When the Lord is our Refuge, we have nothing to fear, not even death (Psa. 23).

Is God your refuge? If not, why not make Him your refuge through obedience to His will? If God is your refuge, why not share this great message with those who are struggling through life?

### **Why Should We Attend Gospel Meetings?”**

The time for our gospel meeting has finally arrived. It's an event that we have planned for, prayed for, and worked toward. What is your reaction? When it comes to gospel meetings, I have often observed the following attitudes. Some look forward to gospel meetings. They anticipate their arrival, and they attend every service possible. These individuals even visit gospel meetings conducted by sister congregations in the area. Others do not appear to care for gospel meetings and make little effort at all to attend. Why is there a difference in these two attitudes? Perhaps the difference is due to a failure to appreciate why it is good to attend gospel meetings, and especially why we should try to attend every service during our gospel meeting. Consider with me if you will, three reasons why we should attend gospel meetings.

First, we should attend to support a great message. While I realize there are many great messages to be heard in the world, there is no greater message than the gospel of Jesus Christ. God's Word is powerful (Heb. 4:12). It has the power to produce faith (Rom. 10:17), to save our souls (Rom. 1:16), to cleanse us (Jn. 15:3), and build us up (Acts 20:32). Can you think of a message more powerful? Wouldn't you agree that a message of such power is worthy of our support? Our presence during the gospel meeting shows our support for the great message Christ has to offer the world. What does our absence show?

Second, we should attend to receive a great message. Gospel meetings have a two-fold purpose. One purpose is to evangelize. Gospel meetings are designed to seek and save the lost by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. They provide the opportunity for friends, family members, neighbors, and strangers to hear the gospel. A second purpose of gospel meetings is to edify. "And let us consider one another to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (Heb. 10:24-25) Notice if you will that the purpose of gathering with the saints is to stir up our love and good works and to edify or build us up. Consider a passage mentioned earlier. "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (Acts 20:32) Gospel meetings are designed to edify. Our presence shows that we desire to receive the great message Jesus has to offer. What does our absence show?

Third, we should attend to send a great message. Think about what a gospel meeting allows you to demonstrate. It demonstrates your priorities in life (the kingdom of God comes first) (Matt. 6:33). It demonstrates your attitude toward the gospel (you are not ashamed of it) (Rom. 1:16). It demonstrates your concern for the lost (you have compassion for them) (Matt. 9:35-38). It demonstrates your support for your brethren (you want to encourage them) (Rom. 15:1-2). Gospel meetings reveal so much about us. Consider what it reveals if you choose not to attend.

Yes, gospel meetings are important and well-needed today. Will you recognize their importance and plan to attend every service?

### **Will Sin Exist in Heaven?”**

A thorough study of the subject of angels will present one with the Biblical fact that there was a time when angels sinned (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 1:6-7). This Biblical fact has led many to ask the question, "Can man sin once he gets to heaven?" While there are many things that the Bible teaches concerning heaven, it seems clear that heaven is a place where we will be free from sin. Consider the words of the apostle John that he penned through the inspiration of God, concerning heaven. "But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life." (Rev. 21:27) This verse begins with an absolute exclusion. Certain things will "NOT" enter or exist in heaven. What are these absolutes?

There will be nothing in heaven that defiles. The word defiles can refer to that which is common or unclean, depending on how it is used in the context of the Scripture. Since the next two exclusions are abominations and lies, it would be most appropriate to apply the latter definition. Therefore, there will be nothing unclean, evil, or corrupt in that great place. Only righteousness will dwell in heaven (2 Pet. 3:13). What is it that defiles man spiritually? It's sin (Matt. 15:11, 17-20; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-20). If heaven is a place where defiled things will not enter, sin will not be present.

Nothing will enter heaven that causes an abomination. The word abomination refers to that which is detestable or that for which exists a deep dislike. It is a word that is often used in the scriptures to describe those who are wicked and evil (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Prov. 6:16-19; 12:22; 15:8, 26; 16:5; 28:9; 11:20; 20:10). Therefore, wickedness, evil, and sin will not exist in heaven.

Nothing will be there that causes a lie. The word lie refers to whatever is not true. It has reference to one who practices falsehood. The Bible teaches that Satan is a liar and the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). It is the devil who deceives man and tempts him to sin (Jam. 1:14-16). The devil is even identified in Scripture as the "tempter." (Matt. 4:3). Since the devil is the originator of lies, and all liars will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 21:8; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10), that means that the devil who tempts man to sin will not be in heaven. If the tempter will not be in heaven to tempt man to sin, it seems only logical to conclude that there will be no sin in heaven.

Also consider the teaching of Revelation 21:4. The apostle John states, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." What is the cause of death, sorrow, tears, and pain? It's sin. Sin is the gateway to many of the pains that we experience in this life. If heaven is a place where all of the former things will be no more, then heaven must be a place where sin will not exist.

## **Will the Coming of Jesus be a Secret Event?**

As one studies the Bible, he will find many promises. One promise that the Bible stresses is the fact that Jesus is coming again. Jesus Himself stated, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (Jn. 14:2-3). Because of this promise, many preachers and religious groups have tried to predict the coming of Christ. One religious group predicted that Jesus would come in 1874. They again predicted that He



would come in 1914 and yet he did not come. This same religious group teaches that when Christ does come, it will be secret, unseen to human eyes. What does the Bible say about the second coming of Christ?

Notice first, that the Bible teaches no one knows when Christ is coming again. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." (Matt. 24:36) "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." (Mk. 13:32-33) "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you." "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." (1 Thess. 5:1-3) These passages and many others teach that the coming of Christ is an event that no one can predict. Only the Heavenly Father knows that great day.

What about the idea of the Second Coming being a secret event? Does the Bible teach this? Listen to the Bible. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:16-17) At the ascension of Christ, as the disciples stood there watching, the angels stated. "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11) "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen." (Rev. 1:7)

The Bible teaches that Jesus is coming again and when He does, everyone will know it. It will not be a secret event. It will be an occasion that everyone will acknowledge. When is that time? No one knows except the Heavenly Father. That's why it is so important that live our lives every day prepared to meet the Lord. Are you prepared to meet the Lord?

### **Will the Earth Continue Forever?"**

A common belief in our world today among religious people is the idea that the earth will continue forever. The following scriptures are used to support this position. "One generation passes away, and another generation comes, But the earth abides forever" (Eccl. 1:4) "You who laid the foundations of the earth, So that it should not be moved forever." (Psa. 104:5) At first glance, it appears that these verses are teaching that the earth will last forever. Is that the message that God intends for Bible readers to gain? To answer this question, let's ask another question. Does the Bible contradict itself? The answer is no. "God is not the author of confusion." (1 Cor. 14:33) With that thought in mind, consider other scriptures which teach that the earth is not eternal. Jesus Himself stated, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." (Matt. 24:35). The word "heaven" in this passage refers to the visible things in the sky and universe. The sun, moon, stars, etc. The phrase "pass away" means to perish, to come to an end, or to disappear. According to this passage, there will come a time when this world will be destroyed. Consider the powerful teaching of the apostle Peter. "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? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Pet. 3:10-13) The word “heavens” is the same word that Jesus used earlier. Therefore, Peter is referring to the visible things in the sky and universe. The word “elements” includes everything in the universe. “The earth and the works that are in it” refers to the earth itself and everything that has ever been made by man. Peter states that these things are going “pass away” (come to an end or disappear), “melt with fervent heat” (to be consumed by heat) and “be burned up” (to consume with fire). Peter is very clear in his teaching that someday this world will be destroyed. According to Peter, this will take place at the second coming of Christ. Consider another teaching of Jesus. “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (Jn. 14:1-3) If this earth is going to be recreated and be the eternal dwelling place of man, then Jesus misled His apostles. Jesus said, “I’m going to prepare a place for you.” That place is not this earth.

With the above passages in mind, no one can honestly conclude that this earth will continue forever. What then did the Bible writers of Ecclesiastes and Psalms mean? Consider the passage in Ecclesiastes. “One generation passes away, and another generation comes, But the earth abides forever.” (Eccl. 1:4) First, we must understand that the word “forever” does not always mean “eternal.” According to Exodus 21:5-6, if a servant wanted to serve his master through the duration of his life, the master would pierce the servant's ear and he would be his servant “forever.” What is the meaning of the word forever as used in this context? It refers to the duration of the servants’ life on earth, not throughout eternity. Second, we must ask ourselves what was the message that the Bible writer intended for the audience to receive. Was his emphasis on the duration of the earth? No. The Bible writer is emphasizing man's work on the earth (vs. 3). Regardless of our efforts on earth, nothing remains permanent. Generations pass away and others appear. The earth will continue “forever” as the standing scene of this ceaseless change. However, when Jesus returns, this earth will be destroyed and those who are faithful Christians will be ushered into a new dwelling place (Rev. 2:1-4).

### **Words of Wisdom & Kindness”**

In describing the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31, the Bible states, “She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue *is* the law of kindness.” (Prov. 31:26) The word “wisdom” means skill or prudence. The word prudence refers to quality, skill, good judgment, and common sense. In other words, when the virtuous woman speaks, what she says is worth listening to because she speaks words of wisdom. Notice the second part of the passage. “On her tongue is the law of kindness.” The word “law” in this passage is defined as instruction. The word “kindness” occurs around 200 times in the Old Testament. In this context, it refers to the flow of a mother’s milk. Just as a mother’s milk nurtures, strengthens, and is always full and flowing. While there are many who when they speak, their words are not worth listening to, such is not the case with the virtuous

woman. According to this passage, when the virtuous woman speaks, her words are always worth listening to because she speaks words of wisdom that nurture, provide strength, and promote growth.

Can this be said of you? I know that the writer is describing the virtuous woman, but regardless of our gender, shouldn't we be people who when we speak, we speak with words of wisdom? Shouldn't we be people who only speak about those things that are worth listening to? Shouldn't we all be people who possess the law of kindness in our speech? Certainly, we should!

What's the key to the success of the virtuous woman? First, she is virtuous. "Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth *is* far above rubies." (Prov. 31:10) The word "virtuous" in this context is a very powerful word. It means to have moral worth or an understanding of what's right and wrong. It refers to a person of great character and integrity, whose strength is like that of an army. What causes one to have the aforementioned characteristics which results in being virtuous? It's none other than God's word. "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God's word is the only true source of morality. The virtuous woman is well aware of this fact and therefore she makes God's word a part of her daily life. As a result, she can choose words of wisdom, words that provide strength and growth.

Second, she fears the Lord. "Charm *is* deceitful and beauty *is* passing, But a woman *who* fears the LORD, she shall be praised." (Prov. 31:30) The word "fear" means to reverence or respect. The virtuous woman lives every day recognizing that the words she speaks will either reverence God and show her respect for Him, or they will show others that she does not fear God. Therefore, she carefully chooses her words to represent her fear of the Lord. As a result, every word that she speaks is truly worth listening to.

We all can be people just like the virtuous woman. We can be people who speak with words of wisdom. We can live every day speaking only those things that are worth listening to. We can possess the law of kindness in our speech. What must we do? We must practice moral worth, and we must fear the Lord in the lives we live.

## **Worship that Pleases God**

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (Jn. 4:23-24) When one reads this passage, it's clear that we must worship God. Worship is not an option. It's something that we must do if desire to please God. It's also interesting that God wants to be worshiped. This passage teaches that God is seeking individuals to worship Him. In the third place, this passage teaches us what kind of worship pleases God. It's true worship. This lets me know that God doesn't just accept any kind of worship that I dish at Him. I must make sure that the worship I offer is that which is acceptable. What is acceptable worship?

To begin with, it is worship that has God as its object. In our world today, people worship various things. They worship man, angels, and all sorts of things made with the

hand. Man is not worthy of worship (Acts 10:25-26). Angels are not worship (Rev. 19:10). Nothing made with the hands is worthy of worship (Exod. 20:3-4). As the passage teaches, God is the only object worthy of worship (Mat. 4:10).

Second, acceptable worship has the right attitude. It is to be in spirit. When we come together to worship, we should be there for one reason and one reason only. We are there to please not ourselves, but rather our heavenly father. Any time we come together with the attitude, what can you do for me, our hearts are not right with the Lord, and our worship is not accepted.

Third, acceptable worship is based upon the right standard. What is that standard? It is to be "in truth." What is truth? (Jn. 17:17) God's Word is truth. There are 108 verses in the Bible where the word worship is found. Do you know what is emphasized more than anything? It's how to worship. Good people, God has a standard. It is the Bible. The worship that we offer must comply with that standard and if it does not then our worship is not accepted.

So, how can we worship and know that our worship is accepted? Let's make sure that God is the object of our worship, that we have the right attitude, and that we are following the right standard. When we follow these simple steps, we can be assured of the fact that our worship is not only accepted, but also it will be true worship.