



The Blood That Speaks

Lewis Willis

The writer of Hebrews compared the blood of Christ to the blood of Abel, the son of Adam and Eve, who died at the jealous hands of his own brother, Cain. He said, "And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:24). There are several messages which are conveyed by "the blood that speaks." Consider these things with me.

The Blood Speaks of Love. John 3:16 speaks of the love of God, who gave his only begotten Son to die for us. Jesus lovingly shed his blood for the sake of our souls.

The Blood Speaks of God's Eternal Purpose. In Revelation 13:8, the apostle writes ". . . of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Those whom God says are "chosen," were chosen "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). This was the purpose of God regarding the slain, blood-stained Lamb, Christ Jesus.

The Blood Speaks of Redemption. Sinners are "redeemed," purchased, or bought back from the condemnation of their sins. Paul wrote: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:14). Now, how is that man redeemed? The word says it is "through His blood," so the blood speaks proclaiming that redemption has been brought down. Are you redeemed?

The Blood Speaks of Cleansing. The Scriptures teach: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fel-

lowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Saul of Tarsus was told to arise, be baptized, and "wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16). Without the cleansing message of his blood that speaks, we would know nothing of such cleansing.

The Blood Speaks of Peace. The peace considered is peace with God. Through sin, man makes himself the enemy of God (Jas. 4:4). There is no peace between God and his enemies! Therefore, because sin brings this alienation from God, sin must be removed or forgiven. The blood of Christ removes the sin, and peace with God is realized. Paul said Jesus "made peace through the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). Without the blood of Calvary, there would be no peace. That blood still speaks, offering peace to God's sinful enemies today!

The Blood Speaks of Heaven. Those who are cleansed by the blood of Christ are said to be in Heaven. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple" (Rev. 7:15). Heaven would be unknown to us without the precious blood of Christ which speaks of this place of rest for our souls. Will you be blessed with peace in Heaven?

Yes, the blood of Christ speaks "better things" than the blood of Abel. These are profound blessings! Think about it!



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People Who Destroy Churches

Mike Willis

While most Christians contribute their money, energy, and time to building up churches, there are others whose work destroys churches. Sometimes these men are consciously trying to accomplish their destructive deeds; more often, they are working zealously in the name of Christ to do what they think is best. Nevertheless, the end result of their actions is the destruction of the cause of Christ. In some respects, these latter are the more serious threat to the cause of Christ because they are unaware of their sin and continue to repeat their wickedness, thinking that they are doing good. Let's think of some who destroy churches.

Those who think that the church is an evil to be eradicated. The one who comes to my mind as a Bible example of this conduct is Saul of Tarsus. After the mob stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, Saul "made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3). All of the time that he was doing this, he thought he was doing what was best in his service to the Lord. Later he said, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (Acts 26:9-11).

There are those today who are equally as vicious against the church. The liberal media hardly has a kind word to say about religion; it regularly depicts religion on television as wrong-minded, tradition bound, and hypocritical. A politician who speaks openly about his religion is, by that very fact, suspect. Those who oppose abortion, oppose homosexuality and gay marriages, and teach sexual abstinence to teenagers are a threat to the liberal agenda and must be opposed. To these people, being a member of a "fundamentalist" church is about as dim-witted as one can become. Like Saul of Tarsus, these people view the evangelical church as a distinctive evil that needs to be eradicated from American society.

Those who are false teachers. The apostle Paul faced the threat of false teachers to his work in Corinth. He spoke of the damage they can do to the Lord's church. He warned the Corinthian Christians saying, "For I am jeal-

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Tactics of Intimidation

Joe R. Price

The wall of Jerusalem was “broken down, and its gates (were) burned with fire,” bringing distress and reproach upon Israel (Neh. 1:3). Nehemiah, cupbearer of King Artaxerxes, petitioned God for mercy and the king for assistance in rebuilding the wall. Both requests were granted, and Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to accomplish the task (Neh. 1-2).

The wall that surrounds the church, “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” the “general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” — a wall of separation between what is common and what is holy — is in disrepair today (Heb. 12:22-23; Micah 4:1-4; Ezek. 42:20; 44:23). The incursion of immorality, the proliferation of false teaching, the love of other things, and the deterioration of neglect are just some of the things that contribute to the crumbling of the wall that divine truth erects around the city of God, the church of Christ.

The walls of ancient Jerusalem were rebuilt by stone and timber and hard work. The walls of heavenly Jerusalem, the church, will be built up and maintained by doing the hard work of teaching, believing, and obeying the word of God: “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); “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). To attempt to build the walls of the church with the mortar of the social gospel, organizational restructuring or any other thing that deviates from the “pattern of sound words” will weaken its defenses and lead to its moral and spiritual collapse.

God continues to look for those who will stand in the gap and build the wall of truth and holiness that protects his people: “So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one” (Ezek. 22:30). He found none in Ezekiel’s day, and Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon. In Nehemiah’s day, people were found who worked together to rebuild the wall of the city and remove the reproach that had fallen upon the land.

As in Nehemiah’s day, God’s people must “rise up and build,” working hard to close the gaps through which the enemy overruns and overwhelms souls. The reproach of sin among God’s people must be removed, and in-

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nocent souls must be protected (Neh. 2:17-18; 4:6; 2 Cor. 10:3-6). Today as then, we must build in faith, knowing that by doing so, “the God of heaven Himself will prosper us” (Neh. 2:20; Rom. 8:31-39).

There were enemies who did not want the wall of Jerusalem rebuilt. They wanted Nehemiah to fail miserably. These opponents did their best to hinder and defeat that noble work. It goes without saying that similar objectives exist today. The tactics of intimidation that were used anciently to frustrate and defeat the work of Nehemiah and the Jews are still used today by the enemies of righteousness. Like Elymas, who tried to turn Sergius Paulus away from the faith, there continue to be “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” who serve darkness rather than light (2 Cor. 11:13-15). Nevertheless, the light of God’s word will expose every fraudulent claim to divine approval as it illuminates the way of truth (John 3:19-21).

TACTICS USED TO INTIMIDATE

As we work to build and fortify the walls of Zion, it is imperative that we take note and learn from the tactics of intimidation used to obstruct Nehemiah’s work, lest we be coerced into ceasing this noble work.

Scorn. Derision was heaped on Nehemiah and the Jews as they “set their hands to this good work” (Neh. 2:18-19). They were laughed at, held in contempt, and misrepresented as rebels against the king. Even so today, Christians can expect to “suffer for doing good” by being defamed as evildoers (1 Pet. 3:14-17). Nehemiah responded with the assurance that God would prosper their faithful work. Likewise, we must not faint in doing good (2 Thess. 3:13; Gal. 6:9).

Mockery. Name calling has always been in the arsenal of the opponents of truth and the people of God. It is much easier to pin a label on someone than it is to listen carefully to them and discern their words and deeds. Nicodemus knew this when he tried to stay the hasty objections of the chief priests and Pharisees against Jesus: “Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?” (John 7:51). But, they had already made up their minds: “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee” (John 7:52). When evil things are falsely said against you, Jesus said to rejoice in your heavenly reward and remember the ancient prophets who received similar treatment (Matt. 5:11-12).

**Life is like a ladder, every step
we take is either up or down.**

Conspiracy to cause confusion. The work of rebuilding the wall continued, and the opponents were enraged (Neh. 4:7). They “conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion” (Neh. 4:8, 11). God’s people must remain vigilant against the efforts of those who would creep in unnoticed to wreak havoc against the grace of God and the power of his gospel to save (Jude 3-4; 1 Cor. 16:13; Gal. 1:6-10).

Internal strife. There was an outcry against fellow Jews who were lending money to their poor brethren with interest, then taking their children as slaves when they could not repay (Neh. 5:1-13; Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:35-38). It is sad, yet true, that God’s people are not immune from sinning against one another (Eph. 4:25-32). Such sins give Satan and his army great opportunities to attack the weakened defenses of the saints. While saints bite and devour one another, the forces of error are filled with glee. Division within the church harms our effort to spread the gospel to the lost (John 17:20-21). When we love one another, others will know we are disciples of Jesus (John 13:34-35). We must regularly examine ourselves against the divine standard of love (1 Cor. 13:4-7; 1 John 4:7-21).

Compromise. The good work of building the wall of Jerusalem is stymied if the attention of those doing that work can be diverted from it. Like Sanballat and Geshem, who wanted to talk with Nehemiah, the opponents of truth can consume our time and keep us from doing the needed work of the kingdom (Neh. 6:1-4). Good judgment must be used as to when to shake the dust off of one’s feet and move to others who will hear the gospel (Matt. 10:14; Acts 13:44-48).

Blackmail and lies. Threats and misrepresentations were leveled against the Jews when earlier attempts to intimidate them into submission failed (Neh. 6:5-9). Take heart when you are falsely accused as you do the work of edifying the people of God in truth; remember Nehemiah. Follow the example of Jesus and do not revile in return; “and do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled” (1 Pet. 2:20-23; 3:14).

Deception. False friends with evil motives are used by Satan to try to defeat the work of God (see Neh. 6:10-14). In the name of God they try to make you afraid for being faithful to the Lord. Do not be afraid; do not sin (Neh. 6:13; Heb. 13:5-6).

The wall of Jerusalem was finished, because the work was done by our God (Neh. 6:15-16). Do God’s work without fear (Phil. 2:12-13). Remain faithful and do not be intimidated (Heb. 10:39).

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Is The Truth Whatever You Want It To Be?

Dennis Tucker

Recently, I watched an interview with the governor of Minnesota. He was asked about comments one of the men running for President had recently made. Jesse Ventura's reply was that the truth is whatever one thinks it is. Reality is whatever we want it to be.

This got me to thinking. Many people today believe what the governor said. They do not know the truth even if it jumps up and bites them. Pilate asked the question, "What is truth?" (John 18:38a). At one time man sought the truth. The word "science" means to know. As mankind has progressed, they say the truth is an unknowable. Now we are to the point that the truth is irrelevant.

Who cares what the truth is on any subject? In politics the spin misters take facts and use them to say whatever they want. In business accountants can take numbers and make them look good or bad. In religion it no longer matters what one does or does not believes.

Let me state plainly, the truth on any subject is determined by God and his laws. You may disagree, but the truth in science and physics has been determined by God, the creator of the universe. There are no new natural laws. They were put in place in Genesis 1 just as two plus two equals four. That is the truth and does not change because you believe the answer is five. Spiritually, the truth is determined by God's word. Look at the following passages: "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). These passages stress the importance of the truth. A lie cannot and will not save us. A lie does not become the truth just because we believe it to be the truth. Only the truth will set us free, only the truth will save us.

The truth has been revealed to mankind. Jesus came to reveal the will of God. The Bible contains the Law and the very thoughts of God. "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10).

The problem today is not a lack of truth. Our problem is a lack of respect for the truth. People want to substitute their feelings for God's word. Situation ethics has taught us that everything and anything is permissible in any given circumstance. That is wrong! Lying is always wrong. Stealing is never right. Murder, the taking of innocent life, is sin. The fornicator, the adulterer, and the homosexual will be lost if they die in their sins. That is the truth. Jesse Ventura and our society are wrong. Truth is not whatever we want it to be.

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“Forgetfulness” and “Fruitfulness”

Bill Cavender

A man does not, cannot, and should not remember all the rains, torrents, and floods, and all the troubles, testings, and trials, which come to him in the course of his life. He should repent of all his sins, errors, and mistakes, and in faith obey the Father in heaven in seeking for mercy, grace, kindness, and forgiveness through the blood of Jesus, according to the gospel.

“And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh called Joseph’s name Zaphnathpaaneah (‘the man to whom secrets are revealed,’ or ‘a revealer of secrets,’ or maybe, in England’s offices, ‘Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor, High Treasurer, Chief Justice,’ according to Adam Clarke, I:237); and he gave him to wife Asenath (‘she belongs to Neit,’ a deity of Egypt) the daughter of Potipherah priest of On (‘Heliopolis,’ the city of the sun). And Joseph went over all the land of Egypt. . . . And unto Joseph were born two sons, before the years of famine came: which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him. And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh (‘forgetfulness, forgetting,’ from ‘nashah,’ ‘to forget’): For God, saith he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father’s house. And the name of the second called he Ephraim (‘fruitfulness, fruitful,’ from ‘parah,’ ‘to be fruitful’): For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction” (Gen. 41:44-45, 50-52). Adam Clarke comments: “He called his sons by these names, because God had enabled him to FORGET all his toil, disgrace, and affliction, and had made him FRUITFUL in the very land in which he had, suffered the greatest misfortune and indignities” (I: 238).

Joseph’s recorded life and history begins when he was seventeen years old (Gen. 37:1-2). He was thirty years

of age when the Pharaoh “made him ruler over all the land of Egypt,” second only to Pharaoh himself (Gen. 41:39-43, 46). In these thirteen years, the Holy Spirit records in the Sacred Scriptures: Joseph’s dreams; Jacob’s favoritism; the ten brothers’ envy and hatred; the casting of Joseph into the pit; the sale of Joseph into slavery, instigated by Judah, for twenty shekels of silver (two shekels for each of the ten brothers); Potiphar’s (who was “captain of the king’s guard,” literally “the king’s executioner”) purchase of Joseph, to be a slave and house-servant; Potiphar’s material prosperity due to God’s blessings upon Joseph; Potiphar’s trust and confidence in Joseph; Potiphar’s wife’s enticements of Joseph and her false accusations; Joseph being cast into prison due to the false charges; his advancement in the prison by God’s providence; his interpretations of the dreams of Pharaoh’s butler and baker, who were in prison; his interpretation of the dreams of the Pharaoh two years after the dreams of the butler and the baker; Joseph’s advice to Pharaoh regarding the meanings and effects of his dreams; and Joseph’s elevation from prisoner to prime minister by the Pharaoh, all in thirteen years, ages seventeen to thirty (Gen. 37:1-41:46).

“And the seven years of plenteousness, that was in the land of Egypt, were ended. And the seven years of dearth began to come, according as Joseph had said: and the dearth was in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt

there was bread” (Gen. 41:25-32, 43-44). Joseph would have been thirty-seven years of age when the seven bountiful years were completed. His two sons were born within those seven bountiful years.

He was thirty-nine years old when he was revealed to and reconciled with his brethren, in the second year of the seven years of famine. “For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be eating nor harvest. . . . And there (i.e., in the land of Goshen in Egypt) will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, all that thou hast, come to poverty” (Gen. 45:6, 10-11).

After those twenty-two years in Joseph’s life (ages seventeen to thirty-nine) of absence, separation, and alienation from his father and brothers, Joseph commanded his brothers to return to Canaan and to bring Jacob (“Israel”) and all their families to Egypt where they would be cared for in the choice part of Egypt, the land of Goshen. They did so (Gen. 45:9-28; 46:1-34). If all the events of these two chapters were accomplished during the second year of the famine, with five years of famine remaining, then Joseph was thirty-nine years of age when his father, Israel (Jacob), came to Egypt to live.

Jacob said, when first he was introduced to the Pharaoh by Joseph, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage” (Gen. 47:9). Jacob, being one hundred thirty years of age and Joseph being thirty-nine years of age, then Jacob was ninety-one years old when Joseph was born (Gen. 30:22-24). “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the whole age of Jacob was a hundred forty and seven years” (Gen. 47:28). Thus,

Joseph would be fifty-six years of age “when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people” (Gen. 49:33).

After twenty-two years, during the second visit of his brethren from Canaan to Egypt to purchase grain (food), Joseph revealed himself to his brethren after the heart-rending, highly-emotional appeal of Judah for the life of Benjamin (Gen. 44:1-34; 45:1-4). It was then that Joseph spoke those profound, truthful, often-quoted words which are ever since uttered by faithful men and women regarding our Father’s providential oversight of and care for his children: “Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord to all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt (Gen. 45:5-8).

In Zophar the Naamathite’s first speech and response to Job, he uttered a great truth, i.e., “Because thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away” (Job 11:16). These were concluding words of Zophar’s recommendation to sinners (in this case, to Job), that “if thothu prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him; if iniquity be in thine hand, put it far away, t not wickedness dwell in thy tabernacles. For then shalt thou lift up thy face without spot; yea, thou shalt be steadfast, and shalt not fear” (Job 11:13-15). A man does not, cannot, and should not remember all the rains, torrents, and floods, and all the troubles, testings, and trials, which come to him in the course of his life. He should repent of

all his sins, errors, and mistakes, and in faith obey the Father in heaven in seeking for mercy, grace, kindness, and forgiveness through the blood of Jesus, according to the gospel. He must learn to forgive and forget those sins and trespasses against him (Matt. 6:14-15; Luke 11:4). The capacity and ability to forget, as God made us capable of “forgetfulness,” is a blessing indeed. Job could, and did, “forget” his misery of earlier years (chapters 1 and 2, and other chapters) and in his many, latter years of “fruitfulness” could again have ten children, friends, brothers, sisters, wealth, twice as much in flocks and herds, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and afterwards die, “being old and full of years” (Job 42:10-17). In the happiness of his latter years he could well learn “forgetfulness” regarding his former misery. The memory of his deceased children would never be erased. They died in faith and Job would ever be thankful for them (Job 1:1-5, 13-22; 2:9-10). “Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away.”

Joseph had much to forget and forgive in the land of his affliction after he was reconciled to his brothers and reunited with his aged father. I’ve often wondered what Joseph might have said and done to Potiphar and to Potiphar’s wife after he had become prime minister of Egypt, second in authority under the Pharaoh. He could have retaliated against this evil woman. I’ve wondered why Potiphar sent Joseph to the prison instead of killing him, after Potiphar’s wife’s false accusations against Joseph. I’ve wondered what Joseph might have said to Pharaoh’s butler who unthankfully forgot Joseph in prison, after Joseph had so blessed him by interpreting his dream. I’ve wondered what words Jacob’s ten sons said to their father when they returned to Canaan from Egypt the second time and had to confess to their father that they had lied to, deceived, betrayed, and grieved him for twenty-two years, that Joseph was alive, and that they must

all leave Canaan and move to Egypt. And I've wondered what Jacob said to his ten lying, deceptive sons. Other facets of this sad, interesting narrative and human tragedy which God over-ruled for good and for the accomplishments of his purposes, can we wonder about. One thing is for certain: Joseph, his ten brothers, Jacob, Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, and all involved in this long period of separation, sorrows, tears, trials, deceptions, and lies had much "forgetfulness" to practice, forgiveness to extend to others, and "fruitfulness" to sow and harvest. So it is with us in the course of our lifetime.

In the upper room, before he was betrayed by Judas later that night, our Savior said, "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world" (John 16:21). In death the next afternoon, Jesus would temporarily leave his apostles. They would sorrow. But their sorrow would be turned into joy when he arose from death. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. . . . And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:20, 22). Truly, "Thou shalt forget thy misery, and remember it as waters that pass away" (Job 11:16).

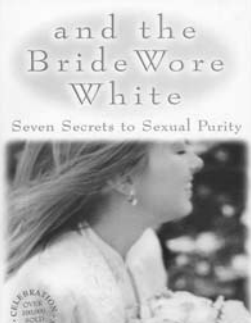
The narrow, restricted way which leads to heaven (Matt. 7:13-14) is strewn with stones of temptations and sins, crosses of weary prisoners of sorrows and separations, and with pilgrims of weary feet who have oft passed through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4-5). There is a cross for everyone. Our Lord was "a man and sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:1-12), and "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1-4). Our misery may be of physical want and soul, misery of rejection and loneliness, misery of age

and approaching death, misery of fear and uncertainties, yet through faith, hope, and love of God in Christ, we "shall forget our misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." At the times of heartaches, unexpected reverses, and sudden problems and difficulties, we think that "we shall never get over this and we will never forget." But we will! Time is a great healer. Tomorrow will be a different day and next year, if we live, our circumstances will be altogether different. The present struggle and strife will not be long. It will soon be over. "This too shall pass." You "will forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away." There will be smooth waters ahead once we have traversed the rapids and weathered the storms.

Our Father intends that his children be a "forgetful" and "fruitful" family. He "is merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:8-13). We must repent of our sins, be cleansed from their guilt through the blood of Jesus through the obedience of faith, "forget" them, and be "fruitful" in the work and service of Jesus henceforth. When our Father forgives, he then forgets. We should do likewise, forgiving and forgetting our own sins and the sins of others against us, when repentance and obedience have occurred. "Forget your misery, and remember it as waters that pass away."

Paul said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). Paul was a Manasseh and an Ephraim. He could lay aside and forget the past. and be fruitful in the Lord's kingdom the remainder of his life. We should imitate him. Be a child of God who is named "Manasseh Ephraim!"

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AND THE BRIDE WORE WHITE

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Resurrections a-Plenty

Frank Himmel

Resurrection from the dead is a core component of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Early departures from the faith included some who denied the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12) and others who said it had already occurred (2 Tim. 2:18). Premillennialism makes neither of these mistakes, but does err considerably in its depiction of resurrection.

HOW MANY?

Jesus Christ is the first fruits of those who are asleep (1 Cor. 15:20). In ancient Israel, the offering of first fruits consecrated the harvest (Lev. 23:9-14), becoming the guarantee for it. So it is with Jesus. He was not the first to be raised, but he was the first to be raised never to die again (Rom. 6:9). His resurrection is therefore the assurance of our own.

In premillennialism, no less than three resurrections follow Christ's. First comes that of Christians, who will be raised at the beginning of the tribulation. Seven years later is another, that of Old Testament saints, along with those who during the tribulation become Christians but die. Finally, at the end of Jesus' thousand-year reign is the resurrection of the evil.

The Bible, in contrast, identifies one bodily resurrection, that of everyone. Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil

deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29).

Premillennialism says at the rapture the "church age saints" (Christians) will hear Jesus' voice, but not Old Testament saints or the wicked. When he calls again seven years later, more will hear, but still not all. Not until the third call do the wicked rise. Are they hitting the snooze button? Does a lifetime of not listening to Jesus makes them slow to hear him in death? No, Jesus said all will hear and rise at once. Premillennialists say not so. Whom do you believe?

Paul made a similar observation in Acts 24:15: "having a hope in God . . . that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." How many does that sound like, one or three?

Three times in John 6, Jesus promised to raise up all who belong to him "on the last day" (vv. 40, 44, 54). Martha looked forward to the resurrection of her brother Lazarus "on the last day" (John 11:24). But look at what else will happen that same day. Jesus warned, "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" (John 12:48). The judgment of the wicked is at the last day, the same day as the resurrection of Jesus' followers, not 1,007 years later.

2 Thessalonians 1:9-10 presents the same time frame. Paul says the

wicked "will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed." The day Christ is glorified in his saints is the day the wicked will pay the penalty of eternal destruction. No thousand years in between.

DOES IT MATTER?

Is all of this just an intellectual debate about what will happen when Jesus returns? Does it make any practical difference? At the very least, it should make adherents of premillennialism reconsider. If the theory is wrong on this matter, could it not be on others, too?

Looking further, there is something fundamental at stake. Resurrection relates to Jesus' reign. These multiple resurrections are necessary to enable Christ to reign with his saints on a utopian earth for a thousand years prior to the final judgment. That misses both the time and nature of Jesus' reign.

Jesus reigns now, not beginning at some future date (Rev. 3:21). His throne is in heaven, not on earth (Acts 2:33-36). His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). It is a spiritual one in which we have forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14). If he were not reigning now, where would that leave us? No king, no priest, no forgiveness, no hope. No thanks!

Money:

Its use can be one barometer of a Christian's spirituality

You can't use your money and resources to simply accumulate earthly treasures and then expect to reap any more than those earthly treasures and pleasures. You reap what you sow! The point, I suppose, is this: To get the most for your dollar — invest in the spiritual.

Most of us are familiar with the Bible's teaching that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). We know the evil that is done to gain money and what it buys.

But have you ever considered that the way we use and spend our money is a measure, gauge or barometer of our spirituality.

That is, in part, what the Apostle Paul seems to be teaching in Galatians 6:6-10. Listen to what he writes:

Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

The context of this passage, which often is ignored, is the use of our earthly resources, which would include particularly our money.

Paul begins by showing that "those who are taught" should share with those who teach them. This sharing or partnership, often referred to in Scripture as "fellowship," involves Christians who are taught spiritual things sharing their physical blessings

with the teacher. Several other New Testament passages show the same thing regarding support of both elders and preachers.

Then the apostle sets forth a proverb or truism: God won't be mocked or treated contemptuously in this regard. What a man sows, he will reap.

The context still is in regard to the use of our resources relative to the kingdom and teaching. Paul says if we "sow to the flesh" we will reap corruption, but if we "sow to the Spirit" we will reap everlasting life.

You can't sow one kind of life and reap another. You can't make all your investment in the material, worldly and earthly and then expect to reap a spiritual life.

Jesus made the same point, with the same context, when he said, "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."

You can't use your money and resources to simply accumulate earthly treasures and then expect to reap any more than those earthly treasures and pleasures. You reap what you sow! The point, I suppose, is this: To get the most for your dollar — invest in the spiritual.

Paul supported this view in two other passages. He wrote, “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

And then in 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, “But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Notice the relationship again and again between how you use or invest money and the results or rewards. Observe also that it is not just a reference to sinful uses versus righteous uses, but a matter of how our physical blessings are used or not used for spiritual ends.

The bottom line is this. Don’t think that you can outwit God and reap spiritual blessings when you’ve only sown for the obtaining of physical blessings. “Sowing to the flesh” regards using our money for things that give fleshly joy and gratification. That fleshly joy is what you reap and it is temporary and corruptible — not everlasting.

This fleshly approach was the one exemplified by the Lord in his account of the rich man in Luke 12:16-21.

Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops? So he said, I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid

up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

“Sowing to the Spirit,” on the other hand, refers to doing things to assist the Holy Spirit and benefit man’s spirit. Paul previously gave an example of doing this in the section we read in Galatians. When one shares in the propagation of the gospel by financially assisting those who teach, he sows to the Spirit. But this certainly isn’t the only way to sow to the Spirit. Relieving the suffering of brethren and helping the poor of this world both manifest God’s love and glorify God and the work of the Spirit. These uses of our resources reap for us “everlasting life.”

The Galatian text urges us to do good to all men, especially those of the household of faith. The context is not what the church is authorized to do from the treasury but, rather, what an individual is to do.

Two errors are often made in this regard. Liberal brethren, who don’t want to be bound by the directives and examples of Scripture, seek to open the church’s purse to fund a campaign to feed and clothe the whole world. But, sometimes, brethren who think they are being conservative and limited by the word err in not personally and individually doing anything for non-Christians. Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us to do good to our neighbor and shows who is our neighbor.

The Apostle does not define in the passage in Galatians just how much of our money or resources we are to spend on “sowing to the Spirit.” Elsewhere, we saw, he said “not sparingly.” It is logical to conclude that our investment will mirror what we hope to reap.

Paul does urge us not to “grow weary” in doing good. We should not become sporadic, negligent, or quit because we don’t see an immediate harvest. We should continue faithfully spending and being spent in the kingdom — trusting that God will give the everlasting life he promised.

As financial advisors today might say, it’s “short-term investment” versus “long-term investment.” Spiritually, short-term investments produce only temporal and temporary reward. The long-term is the eternal.

Money, like time, is really just a “measure” of our lives. Money is nothing in itself. It merely establishes a value for the time we expend in our lives and becomes a means of exchanging the efforts of our life for things we need, want and value. Time and money also are alike in that how we use either one determines, to a large degree, our future. And this seems to be one of Paul’s points in Galatians 6:6-10.

If we use most of our money and time for self-gratification — that gratification is our reward. If we use our time and money for the Spirit’s work and for the spiritual in general — then everlasting spiritual life with God is the harvest.

Paul just wants to be sure we don’t fool ourselves or think God can be fooled. You can’t spend most of your time and money on fleshly, earthly matters and then harvest a spiritual crop.

So, if you want to do an analysis of your personal spirituality, look at your checkbook. Examine your spending habits. See where your priorities lie. It may shock you to learn how you’ve been using your life, but it certainly will tell you what sort of return on your equity you can expect.

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New Year's Hesitations

Larry Ray Hafley

"I've made my New Year's hesitations," the man said. "Oh, don't you mean you've made your New Year's resolutions?" said his friend. "No, I mean 'hesitations' because I hesitate to think that I might actually have to keep 'em."

Is that the way we pledge and promise to keep our resolve to serve God? "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few . . . a fool's voice is known by multitude of words. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" (Eccl. 5:2-5).

Count the cost (Luke 14:25-33). Pay the price (2 Tim. 3:12). Let the Lord, who has purchased you, help you bear your burdens (Matt. 11:28-30; Gal. 6:5). Then, by the power of prayer through fervent faith, make firm your resolution to serve him without hesitation!

"Sex On TV Influences Teens"

Larry Ray Hafley

So said a headline in the paper, followed by these words:

Teenagers who watch a lot of television with sexual content are twice as likely to engage in intercourse as those who watch few such programs, according to a study today in the September issue of *Pediatrics*. The study covered 1,792 adolescents ages 12 to 17 who were quizzed on viewing habits and sexual activity. Both regular and cable television were included. "This is the strongest evidence yet that the sexual content of television programs encourages adolescents to initiate sexual intercourse," said Rebecca Collins, a Rand Corp. psychologist who headed the study (*Houston Chronicle*, 9/7/04).

Well, imagine that! What we watch on television influences our behavior! Frankly, I am not amazed. When smoking fell into disfavor, it was banned from advertizing. Smoking used to be the "in," the "cool thing." Thus, in movies and on TV, real action heroes and beautiful women, debutantes, were portrayed as smokers. However, characters today are rarely shown smoking. Why? Because "the . . . content of television programs" affects the behavior of both adolescents and adults!

Have you ever wondered why the entertainment crowd goes out of its way to paint homosexuals as normal and their behavior as being upright and moral? Do you know why homosexuals are never seen as deviant perverts on television? Because they know "the content . . . of television programs" affects the attitudes, actions, and moral standards of the viewer, they present the homosexual as upstanding citizens and as being misunderstood by evil, hate-filled bigots, or "homophobes." So, why should they be surprised that what people watch on TV has an affect on them?

Why not apply the same wisdom to drinking alcoholic beverages? As watching sexual activity promotes fornication, so watching drinking as an acceptable behavior helps to produce death, divorces, and drunks. Why not admit that the same is true with respect to drinking as to sexual behavior? The liquor industry would never drink to that proposal. Neither the media nor the government is not about to attack the alcohol industry like they have the tobacco companies. Why? Money and hypocrisy, ungodliness and worldly lusts, that is why.

As devoutly and ardently as we may desire it, we cannot expect that society will repent and reform. Though we may not win the battle with the world, we can win it within ourselves. We can overcome the world (1 John 5:4, 5). We can help our children to overcome temptation by living lives of light and by leading them in those well lit paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

The Christian Life: Sacrifice and Progress

Richie Thetford

The Christian life is a life of sacrifice and progress. Jesus showed us what sacrifice really is when he went to the cruel cross and gave his life in order that each one of us might have forgiveness of sins through obedience in him. His sacrifice paved the way of eternal salvation to all those who obey him (Heb. 5:9). What Jesus asks of us in return for his sacrifice is that we sacrifice our life to do his will and continue to progress along the way.

OUR SACRIFICE

The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 12:1-2: “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. 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.” The word “sacrifice” does not mean that which may be convenient for us to do. When we truly sacrifice for the Lord we are putting him first (Matt. 6:33; Col. 3:2) in our life and all the material pleasures, wants, and even our own self-will second. When we really do that, then we are making sacrifices for the Lord. Many things are included in our sacrifice for the Lord. One of the areas in which we are expected to sacrifice for him is in our giving. We should give to the Lord’s cause our money to the extent of sacrifice — not that which is convenient or left over. We should also be willing to work in Christ’s vineyard to the extent of sacrifice — not only when everything else that we must do gets done first. That is usually why there is not a lot of work (physically and spiritually) getting done for the cause of Christ. We are not sacrificing our time to ensure first things are taken care of first!

Our bodies are also to be offered as a sacrifice to the Lord. I ask you to read those two verses again. Notice that our bodies are to be sacrificed to God as being holy and acceptable. Anything that we are doing with our body that is not considered holy and acceptable to God is sinful and we are not making sacrifice for him. Paul says this is

our reasonable service, meaning it should be a voluntary service because we love God to the extent that we want to do everything that is pleasing to him. Our lives should be lived (sacrificed) so that others can see in us that we are proving those things which are only good and acceptable in the eyes of God. Can that be said of each one of us? Are we really living for God and not ourselves or someone else? We sacrifice to God because of his mercies toward us. Brethren, it is our “reasonable service!”

OUR PROGRESS

We live in an age of progress. We see progress in education, travel, and farming. Progress is God’s order. Plants and trees grow and all nature rises higher. God has always expected man to progress in life. But what about the Christian? We are not talking about a progress to a higher life socially and financially. In fact this kind of progress for an individual is often an impediment (Matt. 6:25). We are not talking about progress intellectually only because the Devil is wise, but not good. Even Solomon’s wisdom did not keep him from sin. The Christian’s progress should be a progress in faith, love, and devotion to God. Paul wrote in 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.” We should always strive to grow in the Lord. Let us run the race so that we might obtain the crown of life (1 Cor. 9:24), pressing toward the mark (Phil. 3:13-14).

I would encourage all of us to look at our life and make sure that we are really sacrificing and progressing in the Lord’s work. If we are not, then make the necessary changes that will “prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

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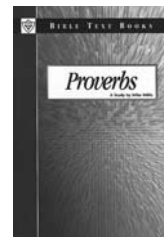
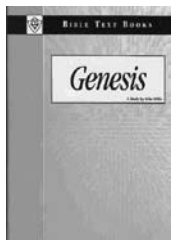
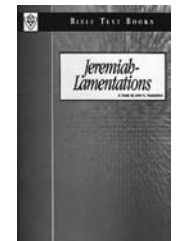
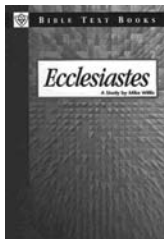
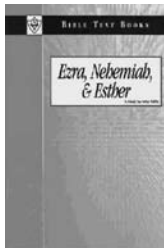


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Belizean Briefs

Bobby L. Graham

On the flight from Huntsville, Alabama to Houston, Texas, we had to hold over New Orleans for about twenty minutes because of strong thunderstorms in the Houston area, only to learn that we were then being diverted to Corpus Christi, about 150 miles down the coast from Houston. After staying on the ground there for a couple of hours, we arrived in Houston too late for me to make the flight to Belize City. Since weather caused this late arrival, the airline would not switch me to the final flight of that day to Belize City on another airline at their expense and I had to spend the night at a nearby hotel (going on that final flight at my expense would have cost me close to \$450 but the hotel, meal, and telephone only \$75). Though our circumstances differed, I remembered Paul's hindrance in visiting the Christians in Rome (Rom. 15:22). Ken McDaniel, also traveling to Belize from St. James, Missouri, spoke in my place that night; and I arrived the next day. From November 1-11 we spent our time teaching the people of Belize the truth of God's word. Our time there overlapped the stay of Denny Freeman from Florida four days. Fellow-workers who devote themselves to the task of turning souls to Christ are truly a comfort to one another (Col. 4:11).

Two Able Translators: On my last trip to Belize in 2002, a young man named Adolfo, who had recently been converted to the Lord, translated some for me. On this last trip, he and Abraham were both working in this capacity. Adolfo now usually works with Dana in the Orange Walk area, while Abraham usually helps Greg Whipple in Corozal and San Narcisso. About a year ago Dana and Carol Whisler moved to Orange Walk Town to start a new work for the Lord, leaving Greg Whipple with the group in San Narcisso. Separated by about twenty-five miles, the two groups are able to visit each other at the Sunday and mid-week services because of different meeting times. The more mature ones at San Narcisso do more of this than the recent converts from the new work. The old congregation now has approximately 75 in attendance on Sundays, and Orange Walk has 15-20 local people, which is usually swelled by a number from the other church. What a joy to witness the mutual love for the saints and understanding of the need for such gospel teaching that these brethren manifest in

their willingness to visit and encourage each other (Col. 1:4). Brethren in more established works in the U.S., who rarely do anything to strengthen their fellow-Christians in nearby congregations, could learn a valuable lesson from these fairly new Christians.

Church House/Guest House: Have you preachers ever lodged in a church building while preaching away from home? I have done so more than once, sleeping in a classroom on a cot provided by the National Guard and showering in a stall installed in the restroom, eating at restaurants, and snacking in our "bedrooms." Across the road from the Whisler's house we stayed in a house also used for the meetings of the saints, necessitating our moving our personal belongings to other areas on Thursday night and Sunday. By pushing the pews back we found room for two of us to place air mattresses, while another stayed in a bedroom of the same house. With the air mattress on the floor as my bed, the front pew as my dresser and towel rack, a couple of nails on the walls as my closet, an indoor restroom, snacks in the house, and meals in Carol's kitchen across the road, we fared fine. Who would claim that such "eating in the meeting house" or sleeping is wrong under such conditions? The church can scripturally provide a place for gospel teachers to live, sleep, and eat, whether in a separate facility or the same facility where the church meets, as part of its support of such workers (2 Cor. 11:8; Phil. 4:15-16). Doing such a work does not give the right to provide for social/recreational occasions or to use such occasions to draw outsiders. It is probably good for us who have so many luxuries to have to do with less at times. After all, there are few real necessities in life (1 Tim. 6:8). Serving like Phoebe in Cenchrea, Carol has helped many visiting workers (Rom. 16:2).

"The One True Church": Few who have seen this old tract by James R. Cope have forgotten it. Filled with basic Bible information about God's plan for the church, it served as our handout material in the villages and at the public services on this trip. For five nights I also spoke on the material in the tract to strengthen the church. Two hundred copies in English, supplied by two area congrega-

tions, went with me to Belize. We were unable to locate the Spanish version of the tract, once available, for this trip (if you know about it, please contact me). How long has it been since you taught or requested similar fundamental lessons to the church where you labor? I am persuaded that more of this kind of material must be taught repeatedly to discourage the drifting that commonly develops in many churches (Eph. 4:4-6).

Daily Studies: From the beginning the progress of the Lord's work in Belize had been much dependent upon private studies. They are, in fact, the backbone of Greg and Dana's efforts (Acts 20:20). It has always been our practice when visiting there to teach publicly and privately. Those not doing the public preaching spend more time in such private studies, of course, than those needing to prepare for public teaching. Studies take place both far and near under conditions (like sometimes wading through mud) that vary much, from concrete block houses that are more commodious to the pole-and-thatch houses that are actually cooler under the tropical sun. Most of the people give at least lip service to belief in the Bible, and many are from a Roman Catholic background (though not practicing). Studies are much more easily set up in Belize than in our country, particularly in the rural villages, where life's pace is slower. Even then much study is usually needed to turn one to Christ in the practice of pure Christianity. Even some of our brethren depend more on handouts, giveaways, frivolity, schools, and other institutions to supplement the evangelistic work of the local church in drawing people to Christ. A Christian, familiar with the work of the institutional church in Corozal because of his personal involvement there in the past, seemed surprised when I told him of the good progress made in the village of San Narcisso. I could not keep from thinking that his surprise was partly based on his knowledge that we never employ the carnal attractions that his group uses (a school connected with the Corozal church, baby dedications, Christmas programs presented by the children, etc.). Jesus, often cited as the authority for such church efforts, never used even his miracles of healing to attract people to the gospel but to certify the gospel as credible, and there is a major difference. When some followed because of the food that he miraculously provided, he turned them away by his teaching (John 6:66). When will brethren learn that all such attempts impeach God's wisdom, devalue the gospel of Christ, prostitute the local church, and denigrate the lost as being available to the highest bidder (Rom. 1:16)?

New Faces: What a joy to meet new Christians, to see restored saints back at work for Christ, and newborn infants. The gospel does work, sometimes more slowly in some because of their spiritual hindrances placed in its path. The same basic spiritual needs exist in all human beings, and the same spiritual power operates in the gospel in all who believe it (Rom. 1:16). Special delight comes when children

grow up to become young men (or at least on the verge of becoming such) and develop into able song leaders and translators like Giovanni Suarez. Does your congregation use young men or seek to train them for further use? Let us encourage our young brethren in their development (1 John 2:12-14).

Rainy Days in Belize: The rainy season (especially strong in October and November) lasts into early November, with showers four or five times daily on some days. Village dirt roads sometimes become impassable to vehicles, but the time is easily used advantageously in encouraging the nearby brethren and being encouraged by them, lesson preparation, prayer, teaching the translators from the Bible and about the English language, writing notes for Belizean Briefs, house cleaning, and needed rest. Even Paul looked forward to being filled (satisfied) in his visit with the Roman Christians on his way to Spain (Rom. 15:24).

Love of Money: On every trip that I have made to Belize, in some way the love of money has entered the picture (1 Tim. 6:10). I suppose it is inevitable in a poor country, where any American is viewed as rich, having something to hand out. After all, Belizeans who often see money or clothes being offered by religious groups can be easily influenced to improper motivations to obey the gospel. Some have turned back and walked no more with Jesus after the "loaves and fishes" stopped, or at least they finally decided there would be no handouts. The absence of such carnal offers in the gospel work being done has caused a few to think that the church in San Narcisso lacks "love," when true love was there all along. Simon the sorcerer was not the last one to be carnally motivated (Acts 8:18-24).

Butcher, Baker, Candlestick Maker: Having to visit different shops is the way it used to be in our country and still is in much of the world. The modern supermarket or superstore, while becoming more prevalent, is absent from many places. It is not uncommon to buy your meat from one shop, your tortillas or your bread from another, and your bananas, onions, and plantains from another. Do we appreciate the convenience that we have learned to expect in our way of life? Though we do not have to be ashamed by it or reject it, we ought to learn the importance of using our extra time wisely and not filling our lives with frivolous pursuits of things or pleasure. If we are not careful, we might end up traveling the same dead-end streets traveled by Solomon, as he learned the vanity of all earthly pursuits when God is left out. Do we try to serve God more fully by redeeming the time (buying up the opportunities), as Paul urged in Ephesians 5:16?

Seven Women: When Dana and I went to one study, I did not know to expect seven women. When all had arrived, there were seven of them, some having babies in arm or on the shoulder. Would that many non-Christian men have

turned out for a study? I thought of Isaiah 4:1, where the prophet spoke of the condition following war's depletion of the male population. Seven women were seeking the same man to be a husband, apparently according to the custom of taking a near kinsman as Ruth took Boaz. Women often have to raise children after husbands/boyfriends selfishly abandon them. In our study as we looked at the church, it was obvious that the oldest one had already studied the Bible some with Dana. Never should we avoid a study with one whose condition in life is steeped in sin simply on that account. What other means is there for rectifying one's condition than the gospel of Christ? Who can better understand her need for salvation in Christ than the one convinced of her sin? Too often we tend to judge who is teachable without allowing the gospel to be the sifter.

Mrs. Rodas: This seventy-seven year old diabetic, with no feeling in her feet, was suffering from rat bites on her toes that happened during her sleep. Yes, rats infest many areas of Belize and enter the poorly built houses. Born in Belize, her great-grandfather had come from China and her great-grandmother from Spain. Many years earlier she had been baptized by a Seventh Day Adventist pastor, because she had read baptism's requirement in the Bible; but she had also rejected the human laws imposed by the Adventists when she did not find them in the Bible. She told them that she was not subject to their Sabbath and dietary laws because she was a Gentile, not a Jew. When she said she currently does not believe in any church or religion, we taught her of the Lord's plan for the one true church, kindly but firmly stressing this as Christ's will and urging her to believe what the Bible teaches. She remarkably stated her belief in whatever the Bible says. We commended her statement of faith but reminded her that faith is more than saying one believes (Jas. 2:14-26). Pray for her to consider the teaching and to conclude its divine origin.

Chocolate Cake: In speaking of the one true church one night, I used an illustration of a husband who bought his wife a chocolate birthday cake, which he liked but she didn't like. The cake was not for her, but for him. So it is when people offer God worship or service in any matter that fails to please him. It is faulty reasoning that says God must like it and accept because I do (Isa. 55:8-9). Just as the wife could say to her husband, so the Lord would say to us, "Chocolate cake! It is not for me." The duty of man is to learn what God desires and to render it to him (Eccl. 12:14; Matt. 7:21; 15:9). Only then can he avoid giving God "chocolate cake."

Ken McDaniel: After a four-year absence, Ken went on his second trip to Belize with me. He is not only an amiable fellow-worker in the Lord, but also a tireless worker in private studies and public teaching, concentrating more on the former, in which he has much experience and takes much delight. Ken has also traveled twice to India, where

the work is different in that most of it is done in teaching the preachers and church leaders and then public teaching at night. Ken has worked valuably with the church in St. James, Missouri for the last five years, spending much time in private studies.

Lamanai: On this sixth trip to Belize I can say that I have never seen any of the famous Belizean resorts that draw the rich and playful. I also had never seen the most famous Mayan ruins of Lamanai until this trip. These ruins dating to about 1000 A.D. are a testament to the polytheism of the Mayas, who sometimes practiced human sacrifice. Their highest temple was built to honor the rain god, probably the one they noticed was most often blessing them. This war-like people, once scattered over the Yucatan Peninsula and northern Central America, disappeared as a people, though there are many Mayan descendants living today in Belize and adjoining countries. One descendant is a ninety-year-old woman in the San Narcisso church; she was converted from Catholicism early this year. If you wonder what to say to such people, you might study Acts 17, where Paul addressed similar polytheists in ancient Athens. Observe that he began with belief in the true God and moved to Jesus Christ, to whom they and all other aliens would give account (v. 31).

Room for Another Congregation: New congregations begin unwisely/dishonorably because of anger, envy, disagreement on matters of judgment, misunderstandings, and other reasons. Wise and honorable beginnings result from unscriptural or unrighteous actions/attitudes that are not corrected. The new church in Orange Walk Town began as a result of the vision of Dana and Carol Whisler. Their plan was to help to strengthen the group around Corozal and then to move away to start another work in western Belize, possibly Spanish Lookout. Different factors made it wise to locate the new work closer to the existing work — some twenty-five miles away. In the next few years, it might be wise to start another work, possibly in the population center of Corozal. The San Narcisso group actually began there (when I first went to preach in early 1999 they were in Corozal) and later moved to the village some fifteen miles away. There are already enough Christians living in Corozal to begin a new congregation, and enough people needing the gospel certainly live there. Studies in Corozal are harder to obtain than in rural areas, but they will come. When a new work begins, I trust the brethren will be supportive of it, as they have been of the work in Orange Walk.

Moral Breakdown: Stealing, lying, drunkenness, and prostitution abound in some areas of Belize, just as they do in other parts of the world, including the United States, with minimal government intervention to stop some of the activities. Stealing is so rampant that many of the sugar cane farmers, knowing of the sharp decline in cane prices,

refuse to plant corn or other vegetables in a diversification effort, because they fear their crops will be stolen by their neighbors. Will such a time ever come in our country, when people will not be able to have their own gardens for fear of dishonest neighbors? Christians do not share such fear of each other, for they view themselves as being members and helpers one of another (Eph. 4:25, 28).

Longing for Home: Ten days to two weeks is not very long, but complete separation from home is more difficult for some to adapt to than for others. Memories of home often come, reminding us of a wife/husband, children, grandchildren, parents, and brethren. God's people should never feel at home in this world; it is never a friend to grace. Most that surrounds us stands in opposition to what we stand for. For this reason the Lord warns us to stay aloof from the world (Jas. 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17). The Christian's separateness is indicated by such words as "sojourner" (a foreigner in a strange land) and "pilgrim" (a tourist, a traveler on a journey), reminding him that heaven is his true and permanent home. His blessings, rights, privileges, and laws all come from heaven, where his citizenship is centered (Phil. 3:21). He doesn't need to settle down too much, grow too comfortable in this world, or adapt too much to its ways, for he must soon continue his journey and leave it all behind. We are not home yet! Home beckons more strongly as our spiritual family leaves us to go home. Like the Hebrew Christians thinking of abandoning Christ for a return to Moses, we "have here no continuing city, but seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14).

A Note from Carol (received as I was writing these briefs): This past Sunday, Brother Dale, gave a lesson on how much effort do we put forth to get to Church. He used as his example of encouragement something brother Denny observed and shared with him. One Sunday Denny was here, he saw feeble old brother Juan pushing a friend in a wheel chair to church. It is around a one mile walk. Understand that brother Juan's knees were so bad that there were days he could not walk himself and he has serious episodes of seizures. But it mattered to Juan that he got to church and that he brought his friend. As Dale told the story I watched brother Juan smiling ear to ear. Juan died two days ago. But only after seeing his friend he pushed to church get baptized into Christ. We now have a new brother Louis.

Two years ago Juan was a lonely drunk, but he changed, he repented and was faithful. He died with the hope of heaven on his heart, knowing he had a family that loved him, and knowing he had the privilege of sharing Christ with others. What a privilege to be here and see such faces. I will treasure in my heart that smile on his face.

Trying to make a difference in Belize (if only my body will cooperate)

Your sister,
Carol

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Reverencing God In Our Worship

Heath Rogers

“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him (Ps. 89:7).

Our society has become more relaxed and casual than it used to be. This change in attitude is seen in our appearance, heard in our speech, and displayed in our lack of respect for various things that used to receive our honor. For example, marriage was once an honored institution. However, the proliferation of no-fault divorce and, more recently, the attempts to legally recognize homosexual marriages, have cheapened this divine institution in the eyes of many people. People used to respect the dead. Cars used to pull over for a funeral procession. Now drivers think nothing of weaving in and out of a procession. Some cities have stopped providing police escorts for funeral processions (unless the deceased was a policeman), leaving mourners to fend for themselves as they lay their loved ones to rest.

Religion has fallen prey to this attitude as well. For several years now, various denominational churches have been offering alternative “casual” worship services. They extend an invitation for visitors to “come as they are.” One advertisement says, “Jesus worshiped in sandals, so can you.” Another reads, “Jeans are worship clothes too.” These are just additional signs of denominationalism trying to accommodate changes in society. Sound churches of Christ may not be offering casual worship services, but I’m afraid this trend has still found its way into some of our assemblies. “Casual” may describe a growing segment within our society, and this attitude may be seeping into the church, but is it the right attitude to have toward God? Can we do what Psalm 89:7 requires of us with a casual attitude?

“Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28-29). This passage warns us to be careful to serve God acceptably, which means there is an unacceptable way to serve God. If the acceptable way is

with “reverence and godly fear,” wouldn’t the unacceptable way be with a careless and casual attitude?

Brethren often talk about the need to worship God in truth (John 4:23-24). Time is well spent in identifying the acts of worship authorized in the New Testament. However, we also need to consider the quality of our worship. Are we offering God the quality of worship he has the right to expect from us? Do we reverence God in our assemblies? What are some things we can do that will help us worship God acceptably?

Remember — There are some things that we need to remember as we assemble to worship God.

1. Remember what we are coming together to do. We are coming together to worship God. We are not “going to church.” How many times do we hear brethren say that they are “going to church”? If that statement accurately reflects their thinking, then simply arriving at the church building accomplishes what they have set out to do. A more accurate statement would be “We are going to worship.” Couldn’t that change in our thought process have an effect upon the way we look at what we come together to do? We are not coming together to listen to the preacher, to see or be seen, to make others happy, etc. We assemble to worship God.

We would do others a favor by remembering that they are assembled to worship God too. Disgruntled members sometimes use the five minutes just before worship to give the elders or preacher a piece of their mind. Now, how can we expect these men to worship God just after they have received complaints or criticism? I once had a sister in Christ “lay into me” just minutes before I was to teach an adult Bible class. After listening to her rant and complain for a few minutes I told her that she had all week to call me and talk to me, and that I did not appreciate her poor, yet deliberate, timing. I preached for one church that had its business meeting before Sunday evening worship ser-

vices. I honestly can't tell you how many times I have had to try to preach just minutes after hearing the men discuss whether or not I needed to be fired. I was certainly not in a frame of mind to worship, but they didn't care.

Most elders, deacons, and preachers are accessible during the week. We need to remember and respect why we are assembled on the Lord's Day.

2. Remember who God is. No man has seen God, but the Bible lets us know what it is like to be in the presence of God. When the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai, the sky was filled with lightening, the whole mountain quaked, the top of the mountain was on fire, the smoke ascended thick and black like out of a furnace, and the children of Israel trembled (Exod. 19:16-19). When the prophet Ezekiel saw the Lord coming in a fiery whirlwind, in the brightness of a rainbow, with the noise of a great army, he fell on his face (Ezek. 1:28). When John saw the great throne scene from heaven he noted that "the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne" (Rev. 4:10).

How would we react if we saw the same thing today? The same way they did! These scenes are recorded so that we might show God the same reverence and fear that his holiness and majesty demand.

3. Remember why God is worthy of our worship. To worship means to show religious devotion or reverence to one. We show this to God because the Bible teaches he is worthy of it. "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2). Worship is due God on our part because he is our Creator (Pss. 100; 95:6-7). We owe our very existence to him.

It is impossible for us to worship God with reverence and godly fear without remembering the purpose of our assembly, who God is, and why we worship him.

ATTITUDE

Once we truly grasp who God is and why we are worshipping him, one of the first things to change will be our attitude towards worship. Worship is something about which we cannot be casual.

1. The Heart. Worship must come from the heart (Matt. 15:8). In order to accomplish this, our hearts must be prepared to worship. Worship is something that demands preparation, which requires our time and attention. We expect those who are leading in the worship services to prepare themselves (the preacher, the song leader, etc.). Likewise, those participating in the worship must prepare their hearts. Preparation starts on Saturday night, by making

sure we and our families are home and in bed by an early hour. Time needs to be spent on Sunday morning reading Scripture, praying, listening to gospel singing, etc. This way, we will enter the assembly with hearts prepared to offer praise to God.

2. Humility. The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector teaches us that a proud man is not acceptable to God. "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" (Luke 18:14). We need to pause and reflect upon who we are in relation to God.

3. Respect. Our hearts must also express respect for who God is and the occasion for which we have assembled. God told the prophet Isaiah, "but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:2b). We need to take God, and his word, seriously. When Ezra opened the book of the Law, all the Jews who had assembled "stood up" (Neh. 8:5). Why did they stand up? Why do those in a courtroom stand when the judge enters? Why do all the guests at a wedding stand when the bride walks down the aisle? These actions show respect and honor. We need to learn to show that same respect and honor for what happens during our worship services. This will be impossible if our worship services are relaxed and casual.

OUR DRESS

One of the ways we show a respectful attitude is by the way we dress for an occasion. In spite of this fact, the argument is sometimes made that, "Since God looks upon the heart (1 Sam. 16:7; 1 Pet. 3:3-4) then it doesn't matter to God how I am dressed for worship. Since it doesn't matter to God, and since God is the reason I have assembled, then it shouldn't matter to anyone else how I am dressed." I ask you, is this a reverent attitude? No. Does the same argument apply to other situations? Let's see.

Does it matter how a person dresses when he goes to the bank to get a loan? Does it matter how a person dresses when he shows up for a job interview? Does it matter how one dresses when he shows up in court? Mom and Dad, does it matter how a boy is dressed when he comes to pick up your daughter for a date?

How would you dress if the family of a deceased friend asked you to serve as a pallbearer for their loved one? Would you show up in your work clothes, in jeans and a "Rock-N-Roll" T-shirt? Would you wear sweat pants and house shoes? No, you would wear your best. Yet I have seen and heard of men waiting on the Lord's supper dressed in the attire I have just described. Have we forgotten that the men waiting at the Lord's table are officiating at the memorial of the body and blood of the Son of God? How

does society tell us to dress for such an occasion? We are expected to wear our best. Yet, brethren occasionally have to sit and watch as a brother in Christ (whom they have seen before in a tie and jacket) waits on the table in shabby clothes. It is an insult to brethren who are assembled to worship God in reverence and godly fear. It is also an insult to God who looks into the heart of this person and sees the lack of respect that is evident in his choice of clothing.

OUR CONDUCT

Another way we show a respectful attitude is by the way we conduct ourselves. Different situations call for different kinds of behavior. What is appropriate for one occasion may not be for another.

The apostle Paul said that worship services are to be conducted “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). Those leading in the worship need to be heard, and make sure everything is done in a manner so that no one is confused or distracted. However, everyone who is present has a role to play in making sure the services are decent and in order.

One way we show respect for worship services is by being on time. The times of services are the same every week. You know how long it takes for you to get ready and to drive to the building. Sure, emergencies happen, but to be habitually late is disrespectful and rude.

Can we stop the restroom and water fountain parade? The Jews may have stood up when Ezra read the law, but they didn’t wander back and forth to the restroom. I know there are emergencies, but healthy people don’t have to go to the bathroom a couple of times an hour every week. The break between Bible Class and worship is the time to visit the facilities. The fact is that some brethren just don’t want to stay seated. They are bored with the services and think that the brethren will excuse their walking around if it looks like they are going to the restroom.

A distraction that is becoming more common in worship services is the cell phone. It’s easy to forget that we have them with us, especially if our minds aren’t prepared to worship. Movie theaters sometimes remind audiences to turn off their cell phones. Do we need a similar reminder on our Power Point presentations that run before our worship services begin? I visited a courtroom a couple of years ago and the bailiff instructed us that all cell phones were to be turned off before court began. In spite of the warning, one went off during court. When it did, the judge and lawyers stopped, and the bailiff escorted the person out of the courtroom! If you absolutely can’t be without a cell phone during the four hours a week that you are assembled with the saints, then do the brethren a favor and buy one that vibrates instead of rings.

One of the more tolerable distractions in worship ser-

vices is a crying baby. All that babies know to do when they are hungry, tired, sick, messy, etc., is to cry. Everyone who has had a baby knows this. Most congregations have a cry room or nursery where mothers can take babies and tend to their needs. The cry room needs to be used, and when the baby is taken care of and quiets down, the mother needs to return to the auditorium. Sometimes, however, the cry room becomes a lounge for mothers of young children. Instead of returning to the assembly, they will stay and visit with each other. This becomes a distraction and discouragement to mothers who wish to make legitimate use of the cry room.

Children need to be taught how to behave during worship services. They may not understand the seriousness of what is happening, but they can learn to respect it by being still and quiet nonetheless. Not all children are alike. Some will sit in the pew and keep quiet, others won’t. They need to be taught to do so. Sometimes this will require taking the child out and administering some discipline, and we had better do it. To borrow a phrase from brother Connie Adams, we need to “Take them out. Wear them out. And bring them right back in.” It may take some time, but we need to be consistent and get the job done. The brethren won’t mind, as long as they see us (I say “us” because my wife and I have one who is still learning) putting forth the effort to teach our children to behave. A child who refuses to respect the assemblies will always be a distraction to those around him.

PARTICIPATION

Worship is not a spectator sport. I sometimes hear men in the pulpit refer to those assembled as the audience. I know this is not done intentionally, but that word conjures up an idea that we need to get as far away from as possible. God is the audience when we assemble to worship, and we are not. We are to join in the singing, follow the thoughts of the man leading the prayer, give of our means, remember the body and blood of the Lord, and listen while the gospel is being preached. It is impossible to reverence God in our worship if we are not worshipping.

CONCLUSION

Remember, there is an unacceptable way to serve God. As our Creator, God has every right to require us to worship him. His word not only tells us what specific acts define our worship, but how we are to perform them — “with reverence and godly fear.”

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The Conscience

Mark Mayberry

What is the conscience? Thomas defines the Greek word *suneidēsis* as from *suneidon* (to see together, hence to comprehend), meaning, “consciousness, specifically, conscience” (4893).

BDAG say it means “(1) awareness of information about something, consciousness; (2) the inward faculty of distinguishing right and wrong, moral consciousness, conscience; (3) attentiveness to obligation, conscientiousness.”

Strong says it signifies “(1) the consciousness of anything; (2) the soul as distinguishing between what is morally good and bad, prompting to do the former and shun the latter, commending one, condemning the other” (4893).

Louw & Nida suggest two different meanings: (1) to be aware of information about something; (2) the psychological faculty which can distinguish between right and wrong.

THE CONSCIENCE IS CONNECTED WITH BEHAVIOR

When the Gentiles do by nature the things of the Law, they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them (Rom. 2:14-16). Christians must be subject to civil government, not only from fear of punishment, but also for conscience’ sake (Rom. 13:3-5).

The goal of inspired instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Tim. 1:3-7). Timothy was admonished to “fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience” (1 Tim. 1:18-20). Servants must be submissive, even unto unreasonable masters.

God deems it especially winsome that, for conscience’ sake, a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly (1 Pet. 2:18-20). Those who suffer for the cause of Christ should not fear intimidation, but must grow in knowledge, and keep a good conscience in the thing in which they are slandered (1 Pet. 3:14-16).

THE CONSCIENCE IS CONNECTED WITH KNOWLEDGE

Conscience is connected with knowledge. Regarding the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that idols are vanity and there is no God but One. However, not all men have this knowledge, and, thus, their conscience is defiled by eating such meat (1 Cor. 8:4-13). Christians enjoy the liberty of knowledge, but must also be mindful of their example to weak brethren and unbelievers (1 Cor. 10:23-30).

The conscience of others is described in other passages. By the manifestation of truth, Paul sought to commend himself “to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:1-2). Again, declaring the integrity of his ministry, the apostle said, “I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences” (2 Cor. 5:10-12).

A GOOD CONSCIENCE

Paul said, “I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day” (Acts 23:1). Unfortunately, prior to his conversion, Paul did not have a proper understanding of the Christian Way.

As a faithful servant of Christ Jesus, he tried always to maintain a blameless conscience both before God and before men (Acts 24:14-16). This was reflected in Paul’s disposition toward his fellow countrymen (Rom. 9:1-4). It is seen in his dealings with the disciples at Corinth (2 Cor. 1:12-14). It was manifest in his relationship with Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3-4).

The principle applies to Christians in general. Deacons must hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (1 Tim. 3:8-9). The author of Hebrews said, “Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things” (Heb. 13:18-19).

AN EVIL CONSCIENCE

Those who fall away from the faith and follow after the doctrine of demons inevitably become seared in conscience

The Destruction Caused by Divorce

George Parsley

In a world where emphasis is placed on “me, me, me,” it is no wonder that divorce is so prevalent. In a marriage union divorce is the manifestation of selfishness. It means one party puts his desires and wants before all others, including his spouse and children. Although the selfish one may be content in his new life of adultery and sin, destruction and hurt are the fallout to the ones left behind. Let’s notice what this does to the family.

1. Divorce puts asunder. Jesus says, “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matt. 19:6). To put asunder is to divide or separate. The marriage union is joined by God and no one can separate, divide, or dissolve this union but God himself. When a spouse decides to run with his selfish desires, he is dividing and separating his family but he is not released by God from his marriage

vows and duties. He is destroying his family, thus inflicting great harm and pain on his mate! He commits a great sin against his mate and also against God!

2. Divorce destroys love. Paul writes, “Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband” (Eph. 5:33). Marriage is a sign of love between a man and a woman. Divorce could only mean that there is hate where God commanded love. Husbands and wives both are told to love and cherish one another. Paul uses the example of Christ and the church as a husband and wife relationship. He gave his life for the church and spouses should be willing to do the same for one another. Divorce destroys that love. Love itself is not destroyed; it is only channeled in another direction. The person who rejects his mate has a love for Satan and sin.

(1 Tim. 4:1-3). Describing the Judaizing teacher who bound circumcision upon Gentile converts, Paul said, “both their mind and their conscience are defiled” (Tit. 1:15-16).

CLEANSING THE CONSCIENCE

Sacrifices under the Mosaic Law were not able to make the worshiper perfect in conscience (Heb. 9:8-10). Animal sacrifices had to be repeated yearly and in those sacrifices there is an annual reminder of sin (Heb. 10:1-3). In contrast, the blood of Christ is able to effectively cleanse man’s conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:13-14). Baptism is the means by which such cleansing is accomplished (Heb. 10:19-22; 1 Pet. 3:20-21).

CONCLUSION

Can you, like Paul, say, “I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men”? Do you recognize the Bible as the word of God? Have you rendered obedience to the gospel of Christ? Are

you living in harmony with that inspired standard (2 Tim. 3:13-17; 2 Pet. 1:2-3)?

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If You Can't Convert, Join Them!

Bobby K. Thompson

All my life, I have heard the expression, "If you can't beat them, join them." I have no idea where the expression originated, but it has certainly been around for a long while. Most of the time, it would appear those uttering the words are using them in a humorous manner. However, such is not always the case. It becomes a decision of life by many individuals. As you know from the title, we have changed the expression to read "convert" rather than "beat." It was not a typographical error, as we are often prone to make, but just a little different slant on the expression. Believe it or not, there are members of the body of Christ who have been faithful through the years and have faithfully opposed false teaching who are now endorsing what they once opposed. They have worked diligently in times past in trying to convert others to Christ, but now accept what they once condemned as unscriptural practices. They evidently have adopted the view, "If you can't convert them, join them." This is extremely disheartening, but how else can you account for the turn about in their actions? There are reasons and explanations that possibly account for such actions. We think of one or so.

Some children of God let themselves become weary in well doing. We read of a football coach who gave as his explanation for leaving the coaching profession that he was simply "burnt out." It just could be that this is what has happened to individuals who once contended for the faith. They have let themselves become weary of well doing or

"burnt out." In more than one place, the Scriptures warn that such can happen. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9), and again, "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing" (2 Thess. 3:13). Other versions speak of not losing heart rather than not being weary in well doing. If this can not happen to Christians, there would be no value in the warning that these Scriptures present. I recently spoke with a faithful gospel preacher regarding a brother who through the years stood faithful against all false teaching. He has now become engrossed with the unity-in-diversity concept. We both found it hard to believe that this brother would endorse such teaching. We both felt that this one has just become tired of fighting for the truth and now has joined in malignant unity those that he couldn't convert. We need to keep studying, praying, working, and keeping our eyes on the Lord that this will not happen to us.

There are those who are strongly affected by numbers. They see liberal churches "bursting at the seams" and they think of the much smaller numbers in churches striving for the faith. Though they have taught that truth is more important than numbers, they nevertheless let themselves become affected by numbers. They couldn't convert the liberals and now fellowship those they once opposed. Wonder what Noah might say to such individuals? He was a preacher of righteousness and only eight souls were saved in the ark when the floodwaters came (Gen. 7:23).

3. Divorce makes widows and orphans. James writes, "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" (Jas. 1:27). When a parent leaves his family, he is in a sense making them orphans. They no longer have him in the home for the care, guidance, and leadership needed. God made woman not just for a help meet to Adam, but both men and woman have special talents and qualities to offer the children. Both parents are needed in God's design for the family! Divorce destroys children and the innocent party. It leaves them bewildered, confused, and feeling at fault. A death would be much better, in the sense that there is finality. In divorce there is no finality; the children will always feel rejected and at fault.

Before getting married, remember the magnitude of responsibility you are assuming. Marriage is no longer about you alone but also about a spouse and children. If you are not willing to put self last and family first, you have no business getting married. It is no longer about what you want but what is best for your spouse and children. Those who are married, remember the commitment you made to your spouse. You promised them before God that you would love them until death, not until divorce.

If your marriage is not what it should be and you are having doubts, repent and pray for God's guidance now without delay. Divorce destroys the family and true love of the family, and makes orphans of your children.

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It is evident that he did not convert those in the world, but neither did he join them. Paul stated: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase" (1 Cor. 3:5). We need to always remember that the increase comes from the Lord. Let us keep on striving to convert, but whether we are successful or not, never let us turn from the faith in joining unscriptural practices.

We have already used the phrase, "unity-in-diversity" in this article. It involves fellowshiping those who practice and teach things which we do not view as right, yet for peace and harmony, we accept such. Isn't this concept fostered by the spirit that if we can't convert or change them, we should therefore just join them in condemning nothing and accepting most everything? Brethren are perverting Romans 14 to help them fellowship and join those whom they feel they cannot convert. God does not expect any of us to convert everyone with whom we might differ. Jesus did not do so and neither did the apostles or disciples of the Lord. Though we are not expected to convert everyone, we

are to keep trying and always contending for the truth. God expects us to stand for the truth and have convictions that will stand. Faithful men of God are those who stand for the truth "and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).

There are brethren and churches that are losing heart in preaching the simple gospel of Christ. They are actually apologizing for the truth being preached. If there is any conviction in them, it is manifested in condemning faithful servants of God for preaching the truth. Many of these brethren and churches have in years past displayed faithfulness to the plea of truth, but now it is different. They find it more convenient to join what they feel they cannot convert. This is a disgrace to Christ and true righteousness. May God help us all to keep on doing right regardless what others might do!

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ous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2-3). He described these enemies of Christ saying, "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

False teachers among us are still a threat to the Lord's church. There are those who believe and preach that one can be saved without baptism, instrumental music in worship is not sinful, women should be allowed to serve as elders, deacons, and preachers, Genesis 1 should be interpreted in view of the Big Bang theory, one can divorce for any reason and remarry before becoming a Christian and stay with the one to whom he is married at the time of his baptism, and numerous other errors. The effect of these false doctrines is to move the Lord's church away from its solid grounding in New Testament teaching into the mainstream of Protestant denominationalism. Such men destroy churches, without regard to their motive.

Those who are like Diotrephes. The Apostle John confronted Diotrephes in his third epistle saying, "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating

against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God" (3 John 9-11). There are churches all over America which have been torn apart by Diotrephes-like men. These men are determined to rule any congregation of which they are a member.

There is no "doctrinal" issue too insignificant to divide over. They may take the position that the church cannot have anyone in its membership with any mistaken beliefs, that those who serve the communion to those who miss on Sunday morning are sinful, that the innocent party in a divorce for fornication does not have the right of remarriage unless she initiates the civil action at the court house (or at least counter sues), that anyone who participates in a divorce for any cause other than fornication is sinful (regardless of how abusively the person treats the spouse and children), and a thousand other similar issues. Such men are ready to press their opinions to the point of overthrowing elderships, firing preachers or cutting off their support, and dividing churches, resulting in division among their families as well. Like Diotrephes they refuse to receive those whom God accepts and condemn others who do receive those same men. They leave behind them a series of divided churches.

But brethren are too reluctant to address these men for the divisive brethren that they are. They are deceived by their sweet disposition. Paul warned, "Now I beseech you,

brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:17-18). Their “good words and fair speeches” create the impression of sincerity and sweet disposition. But when one crosses these brethren, they will attack his character, misrepresent what he believes, and otherwise undermine the influence of the one with whom they disagree. They build a faction within the local church to support their position until finally they have driven off a sizeable element of brethren who tire of the conflict they stir. Such men destroy churches.

Those who act like Jezebel. John spoke of the Jezebel-like woman in the church at Thyatira saying, “Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works” (Rev. 2:20-23). This teacher was a threat to the moral purity of those in the church at Thyatira.

There are similar Jezebel-like characters today who question what the Bible teaches on such subjects as social drinking, dancing, immodest dress (such as going to public places dressed in modern swim attire), etc. Whenever the preacher addresses any of these subjects, members like this criticize the preacher for binding where God does not bind. “Didn’t Jesus drink ‘wine’ at the wedding feast?” “No one can legislate a specific hem line.” “Some dancing is lascivious, but not all dancing is wrong (for example, a bride dancing with her husband or father is not wrong; some modern dances are not lasciviousness).” The result is that the preaching about these moral issues is undermined, the weak are encouraged to do what they want to do without regard to what the preacher says, and sin is committed. The net effect is a generation of young people who are worldly minded and eventually lost to the world.

Those who are apathetic to the Lord. John also spoke of the danger that indifference has to the existence of God’s churches. He spoke to the church at Ephesus saying, “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Rev. 2:4-5). Leaving one’s first love had nothing to do with doctrinal impurity

(Rev. 2:6-7). Rather it had to do with the level of their commitment to Christ.

Writing to the church at Laodicea, John added, “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:15-19).

Members who do not make enough effort to support the various works that the church decides to do undermine the ability of the church to accomplish its work. And, where is this not happening? In holding meetings around the country, I notice that it is rare to see a church that has as many on any given night of their meeting as they have on Sunday morning, even though there are visitors from area congregations present at the services. That means that a sizable element of the church does not attend gospel meetings. The same is true about Sunday evening services and mid-week services. Until these half-committed brethren understand that their conduct is destroying the ability of the church to do its work, there is not likely to be any change.

CONCLUSION

We profess with our lips that we love the Lord and his church. Can we truly love the Lord’s kingdom while practicing such things as are mentioned above? Can we truly love the Lord’s kingdom when we sit back and do not oppose those who are destroying it – whether through false teaching, Diotrephes-like conduct, Jezebel-like conduct, or indifference?

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Lunch Break			
Ladies Classes			
10:00 - 10:50	How To Deal With a Husband Addicted to Pornography: Betty Wolfgang	Teaching Children to Respect Authority: Sherilyn Mayberry	Creating Peace At Home Violet McDaniel
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