

SEARCHING *The* SCRIPTURES

Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."—John 5:39.



"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."
—Acts 17:11

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CHRISTMAS

By Ferrell Jenkins, St. Louis, Missouri

"Christmas time" is almost here. Lights are already up in towns and signs indicating that December 25 is not far off are to be found almost everywhere. No doubt you have already bought a new doll for Sue and a bike for Johnny. It's the time of the year when people are singing, "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town". Many denominations are making announcements of their "Christmas program". Since Christmas is practiced as a "religious" holiday it is necessary that we make an investigation concerning this festive occasion.

In particular, two questions are in order: (1) Where did Christmas originate? and (2) Who authorized it? Since the term "Christmas" clearly indicates that there is some connection with Christ we ought to be able to turn to the historical books written by inspiration that tell the life of Christ and learn of this holiday. When we study Matthew and Luke, the only two gospels that record the birth of Jesus, we learn that no date (year, month, nor day) has been given for His birth. In order to determine the origin of Christmas we must turn to the appropriate place in the available encyclopedias and histories.

1. **Birth Year.** The Bible does not give the year of Christ's birth, and most people think that He was born at "zero" B.C., since B.C. means "before Christ". Actually Christ was born somewhere between 7 and 4 B.C. Henry Halley gives a good explanation of this in the following paragraph:

"When Christ was born time was reckoned in the Roman Empire from the founding of the city of Rome. When Christianity became the universal religion over what had been the Roman world, a monk named Dionysius Exiguus, at the request of the Emperor Justinian, made a calendar, 526 A.D. reckoning time from the Birth of Christ, to supersede the Roman calendar. Long after the Christian calendar had replaced the Roman calendar it was found that Dionysius had made a mistake in placing the birth of Christ in year 753 A.U.C. (From the founding of Rome). It should have been 749 or a year or two earlier. So the reason we say that Christ was born 4 B.C. is merely because the maker of the Christian calendar made a mistake of 4 or 5 years in coordinating it with the Roman Calendar which it replaced." (*Pocket Bible Handbook*, p. 436.)

2. **Birth Month and Day.** Albert Barnes, noted Presbyterian commentator, says with reference to the shepherds keeping their sheep in the field:

"The climate was mild, and, to keep their flocks from straying, they spent the night with them. It is also a fact that the Jews sent out their flocks into the mountainous and desert regions during the summer months, and took them up in the latter part of October or the first of November, when the

cold weather commenced. While away in these deserts and mountainous regions, it was proper that there should be some one to attend them to keep them from straying, and from the ravages of wolves and other wild beasts. It is probable from this that our Saviour was born before the 25th of December, or before what we call *Christmas*. At that time it is cold, and especially in the high and mountainous regions about Bethlehem. *But the exact time of His birth is unknown; there is no way to ascertain it.* (Emphasis mine—F.J.) By different learned men it has been fixed at each month in the year. Nor is it of consequence to *know* the time; if it were, God would have preserved the record of it. Matters of moment are clearly revealed; those which *He* regards as of no importance are concealed."

Collier's Encyclopedia concurs with Mr. Barnes when it says, "It is impossible to determine the exact date of the birth of Christ, either from the evidence of the gospels, or from any sound tradition." *The Catholic Encyclopedia* tells us that "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church." Three commonly accepted dates for the birth of Jesus are January 6, March 25, and December 25. The majority of people celebrate Christmas on December 25. One might ask the question, "Why was December 25 chosen as the birthday of Christ?"

Why December 25? Liberius, Bishop of Rome (it should be remembered that the Catholics consider him as one of their early popes), in 354 A.D. ordered that December 25 be adopted. The choice of this date was probably influenced by the fact that this was the day on which the Romans celebrated the Mithraic feast of the Sun-god. The Roman Saturnalia also came at this time. "The indications are that the Church in this way grasped the opportunity to turn the people away from a purely pagan observance of the winter solstice to a day of adoration of Christ the Lord. Both St. Cyprian and St. John Chrysostom allude to this thought in their writings". (*Collier's Encyclopedia*). *The Lincoln Library of Essential Information* states that, "December 25 was already a festive day for the sun god Mithra and appealed to the Christians as an appropriate date to commemorate the birth of Jesus, the "Light of the World". From these statements from reliable sources it is easy to see that *Christmas had its origin in a pre-Christian age among the pagans.* It was adopted into the so-called "Christian holidays" by the Roman Catholic Church.

Christmas did not originate by the authority of God. None of the apostles ever celebrated the birthday of Christ. Even the name "Christmas" is of Catholic origin. *Encyclopedia Americana* tells us, "The name is derived from the medieval *Christes Masse*, the Mass of Christ". The Catholics had a special "mass" (their corruption of the Lord's Supper) for Christ and so they called it "Christ-Mass". In time this was shortened to "Christmas".

The *Americana* further states: "The celebration was not observed in the first centuries of the Christian church, since the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons rather than their birth". The Bible teaches us that the death of Christ is the important thing and not the birth. We are taught to observe the three following memorials: (1) Baptism, a form of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:1-6), (2) The first day of the week, a memorial to Christ's resurrection, and (3) The Lord's Supper each first day of the week (Acts 20:7). This is a memorial of the death of Christ. Men have no right to set up other memorials for people to observe. It is a violation of the Law of God to do so. Sober thinking people who are striving to follow the teachings of Christ will not bow down to these Roman Catholic traditions.

3. What Does the Bible Say? Many are simply ignorant of the teaching of the Bible concerning the birth of Christ. It is a shame for parents to read fictitious stories to their children, and call them "Bible Stories". Parents, be sure the story is true to the Bible before you call it a "Bible Story". Matthew and Luke tell of different events connected with Christ's birth. The following chronology should prove helpful:

Birth of Jesus _____ _ Matt. 1:25; Lk. 2:1-7
 Visit of Shepherds (same night) _____ Lk. 2:8-20
 Jesus' circumcision (eight days old) . - _____ Lk. 2:21
 Jesus' presentation (at least 40 days after
 birth. Read Lev. 12:2-6) _____ Lk. 2:22-38
 Visit of Wise Men _____ Matt. 2:1-12
 Journey to Egypt ,, _____ Matt. 2:13-15
 Male Children killed ... _____ Matt. 2:16-18
 Return to Nazareth . _____ . Lk. 2:39; Matt. 2:19-23

Read the Bible account in that order. Remember that the wise men and the shepherds were not the same. The shepherds visited the child Jesus the night of His birth but the wise men traveled from the East (they did not travel by plane, but by plain) and did not arrive until, at least, after the presentation in the temple which was at least 40 days after the birth. The wise men found Jesus in a "house" (Matt. 2:11). *The Bible does not say how many wise men there were.* Three gifts do not indicate only three visitors. To conclude so, is just as silly as saying that there were only three guests at a party where a person received money, perfume, and cologne. There could have been two men or many.

4. Customs Connected with Christmas. "Most of the customs now associated with Christmas were not originally Christmas customs but rather were pre-Christian and non-Christian customs taken up by the Christian church". (*Americana*). The Roman Saturnalia, already mentioned, provided many of the merry-making customs of Christmas. "From the pagan accent on light it is not difficult to trace the rise of lights an open fires—from the bonfires of sun worship and their variant the yule log to the many customs centering around the candle and its legends to light the Christ child" (*Britannica*).

Christmas Tree. It is generally believed that the Christmas tree is of German origin. Boniface, an English missionary to Germany, is said to have "replaced the sacrifices to Odin's sacred oak by a fir tree adorned in tribute to the Christ child" (*Britannica*), in the 8th century.

Santa Claus. Santa Claus is a contraction for Saint Nicholas. "St. Nicholas was a real bishop, who lived in the fourth century and became the patron saint of children The children have adopted him as the gift-bringer" (*Book of Knowledge*) in some countries. There is some more Catholicism!

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Children in America sing songs in which they use both "Santa Claus" and "Saint Nicholas". Could a Christian teach his child to sing to a Catholic "saint"? Certainly not! (It is understood by this writer that some of these seasonal songs are good.) Space does not allow us to give a detailed discussion of these things, nor the origin of decorations, the use of mistletoe, holly, etc.

Shall We "Keep Christ In Christmas"?

It is impossible to keep Christ in Christ-Mass for He was never in it. The Catholic Church dreamed that up all by themselves without the help of Christ, and I might add, without His approval.

What about "X-Mas"? At the time of this writing a sign in our town reads "X means nothing. Christ in Christmas means everything. Many people seem to think it is irreverent to let X stand for Christ. I suppose it might be considered that way if one doesn't know that the "X" is not an English "X". The name of Christ in Greek could be transliterated *Christos*. The English "CH" is equivalent to the Greek "Chi" (X). Actually, when a knowing person writes "X" to stand for Christ he is simply abbreviating. It is no more irreverent to abbreviate "Christ" than it is unpatriotic to abbreviate "United States of America" with the usual U.S.A.

It is not wrong for families to get together and exchange gifts. The winter season is a time when people enjoy being with their loved ones. We are not opposed to this. We are not opposed to national holidays, such as July 4 and Thanksgiving. We are not opposed to families having a good dinner and many other things which might be called "folk customs" on December 25 (or any other day), but when a person tries to make such a day a "religious holiday" by claiming that Christ was born on that day, he errs. To observe Christmas 25 as a *Civil Holiday* is as innocent as observing July 4. But let's make sure we keep it that way, without adding "religion" to it. Christ never authorized such. *There will be no special services at the church of Christ in observance of this pagan and Catholic holiday.*

SEARCHING *The* SCRIPTURES

Dear Reader:

The publication of Searching The Scriptures is one of the major undertakings of our times, seeking to save the church of our Lord from digression. As a reader of this paper I know that you are aware of these great dangers. In place after place, the church today is more like the denominations than the church in Jerusalem. Institutionalism, worldliness and modernism fill the pulpits of liberal brethren who should be sound in the faith. The prophecy of Paul to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:3) is being fulfilled before our very eyes. Itching ears have found the preachers to tickle them and the blood-bought body bleeds at every pore. We need to do everything in our power to turn the tide if possible, and if not, to save as many as will listen to the truth.

Two years ago brother H. E. Phillips and I began the publication of Searching The Scriptures. By the close of this year about 125,000 copies of the paper will have gone out to every state in the union and to some foreign countries. This has been possible because brethren who cared were willing to help with this work. As we begin the third year we need your help.

Hundreds of brethren all over the brotherhood have said over and over that they intend to work for the paper. Somehow or other they never seem to find the time. The press of modern life threatens to crowd out the spiritual values every day and every hour. Yet, no matter how busy we may be it is not enough to say, "Be ye warmed and filled."¹¹

Where could you find a place where a few dollars would do more good than in not only subscribing for yourself, but in sending Searching The Scriptures to your friends?

Take just a moment and let us know that you are with us in this great effort. Fill in the enclosed form and enclose a list of names that others may read and study with you. Enclose your check in the envelop and become a "fellow-helper in spreading the truth."

Remember, the future of the paper rests with its readers. No matter how hard brother Phillips and I may try, in the last analysis it is up to you.

Gratefully yours,

James P. Miller

P.S. If your subscription will expire soon renew right now while the paper is in your hand. Your expiration date is on the paper with your name.

EVERY AGATHOS WORK

Thos. G. Butler, Lakeland, Fla.

"Every Good Work" is the title of a booklet of which D. Ellis Walker is the author. His copyright states that "no part of it may be reproduced in any way whatsoever except by written permission of the author." This restriction prohibits any one from quoting some of his illogical and unscriptural statements. However, I will attempt to state and answer his principal argument. The author labors exceedingly hard to show by the use of one adjective (Greek *agathos*) the church can not only contribute to schools and eleemosynary institutions, but they must, provided they meet *his standard* of what is good (*agathos*). Those who oppose this view can not perform a good work in operating a school or an orphanage home or worshipping God. This is his conclusion.

Let us take a good (*agathos*) look at the Greek adjective (*agathos*) which makes human institutions divine and scriptural so they may be supported by the church. "Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" by W. E. Vine from which brother Walker quotes defines the word, "*Agathos* describes that which, being good in its character or constitution, is beneficial in its effect; it is used (a) of things physical, e.g., a tree, Matt. 7:17; ground. Luke 8:8; (b) in a moral sense, frequently of persons and things." If the conclusions reached in the booklet, "Every Good Work" are true, then the following must be true. Are you willing to accept them? Growing a good (*agathos*) tree is a good (*agathos*) work; therefore, the church can engage in the pine growing industry. Some ground is good (*agathos*). Jesus said so. Hence the church can go into the farming business, tilling good (*agathos*) ground.

The colleges offer courses in instrumental music, swimming, sports and dramatics. Brother Walker contends teaching these courses is a good (*agathos*) work provided they are taught the Bible by Christians who do not oppose receiving money from the churches to teach these courses. Since learning to play a musical instrument is a good (*agathos*) work which either the individual or the church can do, he could not possibly object to the use of the instrument in the church which the church paid for the organist to learn how to play. Neither could he object to a church conducting swimming parties, football games, and stage shows since the church paid the college to teach the members how to swim, play football and become a star on the stage. Brethren, it is time to wake up for we are not drifting, we have drifted.

The truth of the matter is that the general Greek adjective (*agathos*) good and the noun, work, are relative words. When the noun, work, which the adjective (*agathos*) modifies is a work the New Testament commands and this work is done in the way the New Testament directs then and only then does this work become a good (*agathos*) work. Not one place is there even the remotest hint the church is authorized to turn over funds for the operation of any organization for any purpose at any time under any circumstances. Until this authority is found all the specious reasoning of brother Walker and others can not stand under the light of God's glorious word. Maran-Atha.

"WHERE SHOULD THE EMPHASIS BE PLACED"

Curtis E. Flatt, Florence, Ala.

Is one work more important than another where the church is charged? During the last decade it has been very apparent that among those with whom I have had to do, many think

the work of benevolence is the pre-eminent charge of all charges involved in the mission of the church. Nothing else favorably compares. In general, the same people are not so greatly concerned with edification and evangelism. Just nearly any little moral lesson or pleasing speech will suffice. It does not take a Solomon to see that many of the "big-name" preachers in the church today have just about quit using Bible quotations in their preaching. With a big portion of the people, such is all right for preaching is not the important thing anyway. It would suit many members of the church if the church in which they are members never did have another gospel meeting. It is easy to see that this is so. In many meetings nowadays, the Sunday morning audience is always the largest audience of the meeting. That shows the importance that many members attach to preaching the gospel. But the same people are often all up in the air if a large portion of the contribution is not spent for the work of benevolence. I know that many people think benevolence is the most important charge given to the church. But is this so? Where should the emphasis be placed?

In preaching the gospel, the church is the only organization charged with that work. Individual Christians are to preach as best they can, but the church is the only organization so charged. The same is true of edification. That means both of these are the primary responsibilities of the church. But the work of benevolence (feeding and clothing and caring for the physical needs of people) belongs primarily to the family and secondarily to the church. In the work of benevolence, the church is substituting for family responsibility, but it is not the only substitute. In I Timothy 5:4 we find that family kin is charged as a substitute. We find that individual Christians are charged with this also as a substitute. (I John 3:17, II 18; James 1:27) The church is also a substitute, but it is not to be charged until the other mentioned substitutes have failed. (I Timothy 5:16) Surely we can see that benevolence belongs to the family and secondarily to the church, and that the church does not bear the same relationship to the work of benevolence as it does to that of preaching and edifying. That should tell us where the emphasis ought to be placed!

BIBLICAL WORD STUDIES

By E. V. SRYGLEY, JR.

HAMARTANO, "I SIN"—NO. 12

Many readers of the Synoptic Gospels are astonished by the rarity of the words for "sin" in the vocabulary of Jesus. It has been estimated that the noun *hamartia*, the verb *hamartano*, the noun *hamartolos*, and the synonym *harmartema* occur 270 times in the New Testament. But as far as the recorded words of Jesus are concerned, the noun *harmartia* is used by Him only on 6 occasions and the verb *harmartano* only on 3 occasions. It is quite striking, therefore, that *hamartia*, the principal Greek noun for "sin", is very seldom placed on the lips of Jesus. Any attempt to explain this phenomenon would, in the mind of the author, be purely speculative. But Greeves supposes that Jesus deliberately avoided the frequent use of terms that had many varied meanings, some of which were a hindrance to an understanding of the true nature of sin. (Frederic Greeves, *The Meaning of Sin* London: The Epworth Press, 1956, pp. 102, 103.)

OPEN LETTER TO EDITORS

J. M. Pate, Florence, Ala.

To the Editor of "Searching the Scriptures",

Some months ago one whom I have had the pleasure of calling one of my good friends, and at the same time a brother in Christ, had my name entered on your subscription list to receive your publication. It has been coming ever since. This friend said there would be articles in it that I would enjoy because of their having been written by ones whom I know. I was glad to get the paper, but, honestly, there are so many articles that do not express the truth, as I learn the truth to be, that I have not enjoyed them. I refer to the articles regarding the taking care of those who need taking care of.

The Lord said so little in His recorded word about benevolence, and preachers have said so much—shall I say millions of words—that positions have seemingly been first taken and later abandoned. Such changes in position are necessary because there has been so much more said than the Bible teaches.

However, I found one of your articles upon which we are agreed. We can walk together on it because we are agreed. I refer to your editorial, "The Gospel Press Missionary Society." This editorial was published in your September, 1961, issue. Even though we are agreed upon it, it seems I can detect a condition of mind in you that should not be. That condition of mind seems to be one of bitterness, which is evident in the editors of nearly all "our" papers when they disagree with the opposition, and such condition should not be. Because of this I could joyfully see all the papers close their doors without publishing another issue. They keep all of us confused rather than edified. I read two papers whose editors do not seem to have such bitterness in their writings. Shame on the remainder of you!

I believe I can say that 99.44% of the trouble in the church comes from many of those who occupy the pulpits. They take the Lord's money as salary and use it to divide the body of Christ, thus keeping us in confusion rather than in unity. By teaching different things about benevolence, some are wrong. If the papers would close their doors and let each congregation simply study the Bible, we would be spared all this disunity. Your teaching in the editorial mentioned is superb. Nothing can be plainer. I cannot contribute to the *Gospel Press* because it very definitely violates Ephesians 3, verses 8 through 10, with emphasis on verse 10.

Somewhere about 1942 some preachers had brainstorms and began digressing by teaching things the Scripture does not teach, according to my understanding of Scripture. Until then, all Christians, as far as I know, were glad to have themselves and the congregations of which they were members, contribute to the homes for the needy, ordinarily called Orphan Homes. All accepted the fact that they constitute a good way of caring for the homeless. From then on trouble was an is in the church. This digression began to divide the body of Christ, and I am afraid the end is not yet, unless the big bombs destroy us all and thus put an end to it.

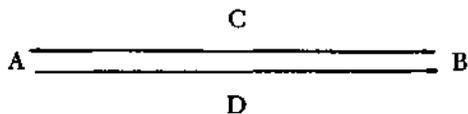
While agreeing with you perfectly on the editorial mentioned, I cannot agree at all with your teaching concerning caring for the needy because it is too limited. We are told in the Scripture to help certain ones, but we are not told how to do it. There are times when that help can be accomplished

by a word; at other times it must be done by actually furnishing them with some needed substances. You may have it as a church matter or as an individual matter, just as you please; but then HOW will the help be given? We find the teaching that we are to help in many places in the Bible. Let us examine a few of them. Look at Acts, Ch. 2, vs. 45; HOW did those who sold their possessions help others? Of course, by parting to them in some way convenient for them to do it. Then Acts, Ch. 11, vs. 29: HOW did the disciples help? Then Acts, Ch. 20, vs. 35: HOW did they, or by what means, did they support the weak? Then, Romans, Ch. 12, vs. 13: HOW did these Christians distribute to the necessity of the saints? Romans, Ch. 15, vs. 25-28: HOW did Paul go to Jerusalem? Then after he arrived, HOW did he perform the distributing of this contribution? First Corinthians, Ch. 16, vs. 1 and 2: HOW were the saints taken care of with this contribution? Then 2 Cor. Ch. 8 and 9 speak for themselves, I think. Galatians, Ch. 6, vs. 6: HOW should the ones taught communicate with the teacher? Galatians, Ch. 6, vs. 10: HOW will we do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith? Too, WHAT MEANS will be used in doing so? Then, First Thessalonians, Ch. 5, vs. 14: HOW shall we warn them that are unruly? HOW can we comfort the feeble-minded? HOW can we support the weak? First Timothy, Ch. 6, vs. 18: HOW should any rich Christian distribute? HOW should he communicate? Then, Hebrews, Ch. 13, vs. 16: HOW can one do good, and HOW can he communicate? Then we come to James, Ch. 1, vs 27, which is the principal bone of contention. If this is church action, HOW will the church perform it? If it is individual action, HOW will the individual perform it? Then, James, Ch. 2, vss. 14-16: Regardless of whether this is church action or individual action, HOW should the needed assistance be rendered? One of your people here says it is not a matter of "How" but of "Whom". Then, I raise the question of "How" will the "Whom" perform any of these duties? It is easily seen, then, that the question "How?" plays an exceedingly large part in all these matters. There can be no shade of a shadow of a doubt that some way must be found for the performance of these duties.

I am just as strong a believer as anyone in the all-sufficiency of the church to do all the Lord intended that it do. Furthermore, I am ready and do stand firm for the purity of the Lord's church (but it certainly seems that a few who have continuing brainstorms are trying hard to ruin that purity) and I know the church must find a way or ways to perform the duties the Lord has placed upon it. He did not give us specific instructions as to HOW we must do a lot of things. I know you people say it is not a matter of "HOW" but even after you deny it, it still remains there must be a "HOW". One who teaches what you teach about these things recently told me that the more he studies his Bible, the more he believes all our actions as Christians should be individual actions. That being true, we have no further need for the church.

When the time arrives for some one or ones to be taken care of, the all-sufficiency of the church must be called into action. Assume that a case is in hand. HOW will the church put its all-sufficiency to work to perform its duty? I think I have heard that you people say the private home is the place in which the church must put its all-sufficiency to work to perform this. duty. I do not know of any scripture to prove such, do you? I prefer to see them placed in an orphan home, but I do not know of any scripture to prove such, do you? The specific command has been shown in the scriptures given above. The use of either of the methods mentioned

hereafter in the performing of the duty is using the generics of the specific command. I should not legislate for God and say that either of these ways is the ONLY way. Of course, if the church can support one in a private home from its treasury, it can with just as much impunity and righteousness support one in the orphan home. Do you ask me why I make the last statement? Here is my answer. It is in two parts.



A to B represents a street. C represents a house erected by John for his and Mary's home, but they are not yet married. Therefore, before "C" can ever become their legal home, they must comply with certain requirements of the State. The Bible teaches that. Therefore, they go to the judge and purchase a marriage license. Then they procure the services of one whom the State recognizes as qualified to perform a legal marriage ceremony. The ceremony is performed. Now they are married in the eyes of both the Lord and of the State and can now occupy "C" as their legal home. They are now in position to make all rules and regulations that are to govern the operation of this home. They are the board of directors of this home. They are now in position to accept for housing and feeding any homeless ones whom the church in its capacity of caring for such care to place with John and Mary. This is a private legal home and the church can pay for the support of such ones, as it places with John and Mary, from its treasury. You agree to that. When one orphan has been left there to be taken care of, the home then becomes an orphan home to that extent. That is the answer to that part of the question.

Now, for the answer to the other part of that question:

Across the street from "C" there is another house, "D". Mr. X erected this house for the purpose of taking care of homeless ones. But he learned that before he can do that he, too, must comply with state law. In a case of this kind the state requires a corporation be set up which requires a board of directors to administer its affairs. Mr. X appears before the proper legal authority and complies with this law. All law is now complied with. This now becomes a legal home. The board of directors is the John and Mary of this home. This board of directors now makes all the rules and regulations governing the operation of this home. This home is now ready to begin its activities. Homeless are placed there by the church. The church has every right to place its wards there if it so desires. It can with full assurance support its wards here from its treasury BECAUSE THIS IS SIMPLY A HOME. It will violate no law of either God or man in so doing.

Both of these homes are simply used to perform the generics of the specific commands given in the scripture cited heretofore. It is more than I can understand why anyone cannot understand this.

Lastly, God gave Adam and Eve the specific command to multiply and replenish the earth. God knew they had understanding enough to apply the generics. Just so with the church. God has given us specific commands—see scriptures cited above—and He knows the vast majority of His people will have sufficient knowledge to apply the generics. This is so simple that it seems its simplicity makes it misunderstood. I wonder if too many highly educated preachers are not mixing too much of the wisdom of men into the wisdom of God?

Your teaching about the *Gospel Press* is so easily understood. Is not this other just as easily understood?

REPLY TO THE OPEN LETTER

H. E. Phillips

In keeping with our policy of fairness we have published the open letter to the editors by brother J. M. Pate as he requested. We would like to request that such letters and articles be shorter in length in keeping with the size of the paper. We are certainly in search for the truth, and if anyone has it, we want to know where to find it in the word of God. I am happy to know that brother Pate is in agreement with us on the principles involved in the *Gospel Press*. It is true that many preachers say many things that are not found in the word of God. They often take positions which are later abandoned, either because they learned that the first position was wrong or because of pressure elements. The changes are one thing and the reasons for the change quite another.

I am not aware of any bitterness on my part in opposing error. I wonder if such a conclusion was drawn from the plainness of the statements made. How can one tell whether it is bitterness or conviction? Jesus used strong terms in Matthew 23 in denouncing the religion of the scribes and Pharisees: "Ye fools and blind"—"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Was this said in bitterness? Then Stephen's statement: "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51). Paul's statement to the Corinthians: "Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in Iov3, and in the spirit of meekness?" (I Cor. 4:21). Was this said in bitterness? Brother Pate says he could joyfully see all the papers close because of bitterness evidenced—he mentioned only two papers who were not guilty and said, "Shame on the remainder of you!" Is this conviction or bitterness? I simply want to "speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Eph. 6:20).

It is true that most of the problems arise from preaching; however, I doubt that the percentage given by brother Pate is accurate. One reason much of the trouble comes from preaching is that most people take what preachers say without "searching the Scriptures to see whether these things are so" (Acts 17:11). Another reason is that many preachers sell themselves to preach what people want to hear rather than what God wants them to hear. When some preachers preach the truth, in season and out of season, and many will not endure sound doctrine, but "after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables," division will always result (II Tim. 4:2-4). When false brethren came into the church, Paul gave no place to them, "no, not for one hour" that the gospel might prevail (Gal. 2:4,5). Trouble will always result when error tries to replace truth (Matt. 10:34-36).

Since we agree on the sinful position of the *Gospel Press*, and "Nothing can be plainer", I want to use the same principle with the institutional benevolent societies. The *Gospel Press* claims to preach the gospel to the lost. No informed person will say that this is wrong; no one will say it is not the work of the church to preach the gospel. Then what is the problem? It is the unscriptural cooperation of churches through a human organization in doing the work of the church. But the promoters of the *Gospel Press* argue that it

is the work of the church to preach to the lost, and God did not tell us *how*, hence, the *Gospel Press* is a scriptural "how". The real question does not involve the exact action or procedure in getting the job done. It could be done by writing the truth, speaking publicly or individual instruction, or all three. This is not the issue! The issue is that churches contribute money from the Lord's day contribution to an organization which in turn must deal with the "method" or "how" of doing the preaching.

Now then apply this same principle to any benevolent society. The work of benevolence is required of the church, within the limits of the New Testament. This is not the issue. The issue is that a human society has been created to do the work of the church, and the church only supplies the funds. As in the case of the *Gospel Press*, the society selects the "how" and does the work. This is the unscriptural cooperation of churches in the field of benevolence just as the missionary society is the unscriptural cooperation of churches in the field of evangelism. The *work* is not the question; the *human organization* which takes the place of the church in the work IS the issue.

Several passages dealing with help for the needy are cited, but not one of them remotely suggests the creation of a human device through which the churches operate. The means (procedure in getting the work done) may be any scriptural action, but this is not the issue in which we are involved; it is the human society which must be concerned with the "methods" itself that is wrong.

How shall we warn the unruly? How can we comfort the feeble-minded and support the weak? Not by creating a Christian Control Board, a Church of Christ Feeble-minded Aid Society or a Christian Council for The Weak, and having churches contribute to these boards and allow them to operate for the churches.

So far as the action in supplying the needs to those persons mentioned in James 1:27 is concerned, absolutely no issue, so far as I know, is involved. Some have labored energetically to make that appear to be the issue, but it is not. One could buy the supplies needed and give them to the person in need; he could give the person the money and let him make his own provisions; he could take him or her into his own family and supply what is needed.

The all-sufficiency of the church does not need either a private home or an orphan home as institutions through which to do its own work. I know of no passage that teaches either. The efforts to establish an orphan institution by paralleling it to the natural home does not prove that the church should or could operate through human arrangements. The use of the word "home", whether the natural or a substitute, is used in two ways in the example given in the letter. Sometimes it means the organization and sometimes the housing and needed supplies. When the necessities are meant no organization is involved and the church can supply these necessities as well as any other institution. When the organization is meant, neither can be used through which the church is to operate. The government is a divinely given principle just as the natural home, but it would not follow that the church can operate through the government in doing its work.

The church may, in discharging its own responsibilities in the field of benevolence, buy any service needed from a proper source just as it would buy articles needed from a grocery, clothing store, or drug store. But there is a world of difference between buying drugs for a sick saint, orphan or widow, and contributing to a drug store by the church so that the drug store can do the work of supplying medical aid to the sick. In the same sense the same difference exists

between the church buying the room and board for a poor saint, orphan or widow, and contributing to a human society which in turn does the work of caring for these needy. That is what makes the principle involved an exact parallel to the *Gospel Press* and other missionary societies. There is a difference between the church supporting a preacher in preaching the gospel, and in supporting a society which in turn supports the preacher. Our problems are not about the work of evangelism and benevolence; it is about the human institutions which stand between the work itself and the church.

GIVING THE ANSWERS FOR OUR HOPE

Address questions to:
35 West Par Ave.
Orlando, Florida

I PETER 3:15

—Marshall E. Patton—

QUESTION: Recently we have heard a new interpretation of I Timothy 3:4, "... having his children in subjection ..." This is being applied to teach that an elder cannot serve after his children have married and have homes of their own. It is argued that they would then not be in subjection to their parents nor should they be. Can you give me something on this question?—J.F.

ANSWER:

"A bishop then must be . . . One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)" (I Tim. 3:2-5)

These verses show that the character qualification is ability to rule well. There are many who have the ability to rule who do not have ability to rule *well*. The phrase "having his children in subjection with all gravity" further identifies the character qualification and is God's test by which we determine whether or not one possesses the required qualification. Ruling well one's own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, shows clearly one's ability to "take care of the church of God."

There is a difference between character itself and conduct. Character involves attributes or qualities. Conduct involves action or manner of behavior. Conduct *reveals* character. God has prescribed both the character and conduct necessary for the appointment of elders. Every elder must first pass God's test in conduct. The desired character is thereby revealed and established. When this test has been passed, we may be assured that the individual has the required character qualification. While there may be other tests which from the human point of view reveal as much, nevertheless, they are not God's. Substituting our test for that which God prescribed does not meet the divine qualification. God's pattern must be followed in all things. (Col. 3:17; II Jno.9)

The question of our querist simply stated is this: When an elders' children marry and establish homes of their own, hence, are no longer under his rule, is he disqualified thereby? I answer, no. Not unless this act on the part of the children takes something away from his character or ability. Whatever else may rob the elder of or evidence the lack of some attribute of character, this experience on the part of his children *does not*. He has passed God's test; he possesses all the qualities of character and ability he ever had and remains unaffected in this respect by the marriage of his children.



THE LABORER AND HIS HIRE

When he sent out the seventy, the Lord stated that in the work of preaching the gospel the "laborer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7). Many years ago some brethren denied this and Brother James Beatty, who at one time was the Mayor of Toronto, Canada, wrote a rather large volume against paying, as he put it, "the pastor." All brethren however, are just about agreed today that it is true that the work of preaching needs to be supported and are willing to make some effort in that direction. The problem arises when brethren are not aware of the needs of the laborer, and hence not always ready with sufficient support. A preacher who works in gospel meetings altogether, for example, is entirely dependent upon them for support, while a preacher who receives a yearly salary from a local congregation might have all that he is paid in meetings as extra income. This makes us stop and think about the different positions in which we find our brethren.

The first group was almost nonexistent a few years ago. These are the men who are paid the year around whether they are at home or not. This is the same method that is used in so many of the school systems, etc. Their time away from the work may be limited, but this time away does not affect their salary. It is clear, therefore, that this group is not dependent on the pay they receive for meetings, or certainly not to the same extent as others.

The second classification are those who work for a local congregation in spreading the gospel but are not paid when they are away from the work. These men are dependent on the local church only when they are with it and are at the mercy of their brethren when they are away. Most of these preachers are finding out today that they are the losers when they leave their regular tasks to go for meetings, for the support is not as much as their regular salaries. This is especially true when their expenses incurred in going are not taken into account.

The third group are the ones who really suffer. They are the men who depend on meetings alone for a sufficient wage to live and support their families. One of the greatest preachers in the land told me not long ago that many times when he is preaching in meeting work the local preacher was paid more to listen than he was to preach. I am sure that the elders and members do not mean for this to happen. They do not stop and investigate the condition of each man.

There are preachers who are willing to sacrifice today as there were fifty years ago. If brethren are not able to pay the preacher, or not able to pay enough, there is nothing to be ashamed of and there are many who are ready and willing to answer these calls. This editorial is not a plea for higher salaries or more pay, but for a better distribution of the resources of the church. The greatest preachers of every age have been the men who spend all, or a great part of their time, preaching night after night in city and town. We cannot afford to be without them, and yet if they are to stay in this work they will have to be supported. The men who have no income other than that given to them as they go from place to place need to be supported in regard to their need

and expenses for they are entirely at the mercy of the brethren at large.

Elders need to take every man's case into consideration, so as not to let some brethren suffer while others are in different circumstances. Brethren need to have an understanding of the preacher's situation. I remember several years ago when the practice of paying the year round was new, the church at Benton, Kentucky, hired a young preacher with the understanding that he was to be paid "straight time." This meant one thing to the church and another to the young preacher. To him it meant he was to be paid regardless of his being there and to them it meant he was to be paid all of the time that he was there. To them that was "straight time". In the year that followed, he asked for more and more time off to hold meetings and they agreed. After he had arranged for several weeks or months of such meetings and was ready to leave he asked the treasurer for a check of several hundred dollars which would pay for the time he was away. Needless to say, there was trouble, all because brethren did not understand. Elders do not need to be afraid to ask and find the facts about every preacher they use in their work for the "laborer is worthy of his hire."

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Science and Truth

I Tim. 6:20-21

William D. Burgess

Is there one among us who would contend that a piece of glass, a bit of leather and a scrap of metal placed together; heated, shaken up or soaked in water long enough would accidentally result in a workable wrist watch? How many of you would contend that your automobile is a product of chance union of parts rather than a product of design and plan? We are conscious of the fact that these things come about as the results of plans and the wisdom of the designers. Is it reasonable to assume that the world was formed by accident and that life is a result of chance? "But," someone says, "probably some higher power directed these chance occurrences." This would be a claim against the wisdom and the power of God. It would indicate that God wanted something but did not know what He wanted, or that He could not produce or create the things desired. It would assume that God was not all-wise, but that He learned as He grew older and as His wisdom increased He learned to improve upon His creation, not by choice but by chance.

It is contended that these various possibilities are put forth as opinions as to the origin of the world and of life. Man is continually seeking the answers to questions and I would in no wise condemn this seeking of truth. I would defend, with all of my abilities, the right of man to investigate, to question and seek truth. I would defend the right of men to develop hypotheses as long as they are recognized and considered for what they are. I oppose opinions and theories only when they are taught as unquestionable facts, without evidence or logic. Every man has a right to his own opinion, but no man has a right to be wrong in his facts.

"I MARVEL"

P. J. Casebolt, Akron, Ohio

Brother Miller's excellent column by this same title has caused me to think of several things that can best be expressed by the words, "I marvel". The more I think about some of these things, the more I wonder, and the more perplexed I become. You too, will "stand amazed".

Even Jesus marveled at the faith of one (Matt. 8:10), and the unbelief of others, (Mark 6:6). Some things should not cause us to marvel. John said, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (I John 3:13). Some of us marvel when we should not, and do not when we should. Marvel with me at the following things.

I marvel, that some sit in darkness with the light on. Isaiah said that the salvation of Zion would go forth "as a lamp that burneth" (Isa. 62:1). Paul said that the minds of some had been blinded, "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Cor. 4:4). The gospel is the light. I know that the light is shining. I also know that many are still in darkness. I marvel that people will sit in in darkness with the light on. Don't you?

I marvel, that some are trying to reach heaven in the broad way. Jesus said, "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Mt. 7:14). The broad way leads to destruction (v 13). Yet,

the majority of people want to travel in the way that is popular, and follow the course of least resistance. This decision is their privilege. But, I marvel that they insist on travelling the broad way, and yet convince themselves that someday it will lead them to heaven. It is absurd. It is tragic. It causes us to wonder.

I marvel, that some will serve Satan, but expect to receive from the Lord the reward of the righteous. Paul asks, "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). Later he reached the conclusion that "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 23). We cannot work in Satan's vineyard now, and expect the Lord to hear our cry when we stand before him in judgment (Mt. 7:21-23). Our labor in the Lord is not in vain (I Cor. 15:58), but our labor as a servant of sin is. I marvel that people could think otherwise.

I marvel, that men will try to worship God with the doctrines of men. It would be more understandable, though not scriptural, if we were to worship MEN with the doctrines and commandments of men. It is understandable, and scriptural, to worship God and Christ according to the doctrine of Christ. But Jesus said, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mt. 15:9). God is not worshipped with men's hands (Acts 17:25). I marvel that men will try to do the impossible, and yet expect God to sanction their efforts.

I marvel, that some will let their lamps go out, with an abundant supply of oil available, and the bridegroom on his way. Such people are foolish, yet want to be recognized with the wise (Mt. 25:1-13). We are the children of light (I Thes. 5:5). We know the Bridegroom is coming. We have been told to watch, pray, and be ready. We have an ample supply of oil for our lamps. We are without excuse. I marvel, that so many who know better will be found unprepared.

I marvel, that we can condemn others, while being guilty of the same things. Paul says this is inexcusable (Rom. 2:1-3). We can be happy if we condemn not ourselves in that which we allow (Rom. 14:22). There are some good reasons why we should not be found in this dangerous position. We have the examples of the Israelites (I Cor. 10:11); the apostolic examples and teachings of the New Testament (Mt. 28:19,20); and the examples of more recent departures from God recorded in various histories.

We condemn the Israelites for their idolatry, and wonder at their hardened hearts (Acts 7:39,51). We hear Paul warning the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28-31), and are amazed to see their condition a generation or two later (Rev. 2:5). We condemn (or used to), the various innovations of Catholicism, Protestantism, and especially those of the "Christian Church" a century ago.

Now look at the moat in our own eyes. The church today is engaging in evangelistic, benevolent, and educational practices which we have condemned in others, but somehow think it is all right for us to do these same things, though under a different name. I marvel at this, and I marvel at those who cannot see it.

I marvel, that people insist on going to hell, when heaven is wide open. If heaven were only for the rich, I could understand why the poor would be lost. If there were no more room in heaven, it would be understandable why no more could get in. If the plan of salvation were so hard to understand that only the highly educated could comprehend it, I wouldn't wonder that the rest would be lost. But these things aren't true.

"Whosoever will may come" (Rev. 22:17). Those who are able to hear, believe what they hear, and obey from the heart, can be saved (Rom. 6:17; 10:9). Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). If we then continue in Christ's word, we can be saved (John 8:31; Acts 2:42). Heaven is wide open, Jesus invites us to come, but most of us insist on going to hell. I marvel.

GOSPEL PREACHING

Jesse M. Kelley, Tulsa, Okla.

Pure, simple, straight-forward and distinctive gospel preaching is that which will save the church from error and set her apart from every other religious institution on earth. Gospel preaching not only is the propagation of Bible truth, but it embraces the refutation of sin and error wherever it is found both in and out of the church. Thus gospel preaching is unlike denominational sermonizing and story-telling which appeals to the great majority of religiously inclined people. Time cannot change the nature of gospel preaching; it is based upon truth and truth does not change. The preaching of the apostles and others in the first and second centuries had as its foundation the truth revealed by the Holy Spirit; gospel preaching today will be no different than it was then; truth is its foundation. What were some of the distinctive characteristics of gospel preaching in the first century?

First, the inspired preachers of the Lord did not deal in generalizations. Sin, whether in the church or out, was pinpointed and condemned. Not only was the sin itself exposed, but the one guilty of it was made known and dealt with. The apostles and others were personal when it came to pointing out those guilty of sin. The fact that it may make one unpopular did not deter them. To the church at Corinth Paul said, "Ye are carnal and walk as men." He did not go across to the other side of the country somewhere and say some brethren over there were carnal; he was writing to Corinth and he told them THEY were carnal. This made Paul unpopular with some and it will make one unpopular today, but it is still gospel preaching. It is the idea of many today that sin and sinners must not be dealt with in such manner. Specific sins must not be named, and above all a preacher must not "deal in personalities." To do so would offend the sinner and the ungodly church member and they "wouldn't come back."

Second, the refutation of religious error was a characteristic of gospel preaching. Religious error and those guilty of propagating it were brought into sharp focus and the difference between truth and error could be clearly seen. Truth was set forth in opposition to error and the hearers were not left in doubt. Jesus was crucified by those who could not meet the arguments of truth, and Stephen was stoned to death by religious fanatics whose errors and traditions fell before the onslaught of truth. Every apostle save one was killed because they refuted religious error and heathenistic superstitions. But such is embraced in gospel preaching and Paul said, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel." In view of these facts, together with the admonition to "debate thy cause with thy neighbor" (Prov. 25:9), there are many in the church who draw back at the mentioning of religious error, and especially at the refutation of it. Many of us who have been preaching for 20 years or more, are told by some who never preached a sermon in their life, and who know little of the word of God, just what gospel preaching should be like. "Preach positive sermons" we are told, and "let error alone",

"you may offend someone and they won't attend our services any more."

There are multitudes in the church today who need to learn anew what this writer heard brother Foy E. Wallace, Jr. say in a sermon one time. He said, "The strength of the church is found in the TRUTH, and the DEFENSE OF IT." A greater truth was never uttered in modern times; and it is a truth that needs to be driven home again and again until it is on the tongue of every child of God. It is the disposition of tolerance and compromise that will ruin the church of the Lord. Error, whether it be infidelity, modernism, denominationalism, institutionalism, or any other ism must be met face to face with force and determination and put down if the church of the New Testament is to survive the age of modernism in which we live.

The church in many places today is no longer a distinctive religious body in its community. The reason for this is that it has yielded to the influences about it; instead of influencing the community where it exists it has been influenced by the temper and standards of the community. The desire to be popular and "accepted" has resulted in many places, in a type of preaching that is little different from that heard in the denominational churches. Falsehood is not necessarily espoused and propagated, but truth is not emphasized in opposition to error. Such preaching has resulted in an unhealthy attitude that could well destroy the church of the Lord. All this is evidenced in the fact that a "no trespassing" sign has been attached to religious error in many places, and gospel preaching that is distinctive is no longer desired nor tolerated in those pulpits.

When a gospel preacher and a church to which he preaches become popular and "accepted" in the locality where it is situated, it is overwhelming evidence that such church and its preacher are not preaching a full gospel. In all of the history of God's dealings with man the Lord's people have been in the minority and they have been unpopular. From the time Cain slew righteous Able until this present day this has been so. God has always been opposed to error and he has always demanded that his people oppose error. Thus, in every age they have been a "peculiar people" separated from the enemies of truth by their convictions and opposition to error and sin. The person, preacher, or church, that entertains the idea of upholding the gospel of Christ and at the same time being popular with the masses, is striving for the impossible.

Paul said, "For do I now persuade men, or God? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of God." (Gal. 1:10). Popularity and Christianity cannot dwell together. To please men is to displease God. The church is desperately in need of gospel preachers who desire not to be popular, but who will dedicate themselves wholly to the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ; men who will be true to their God-given heritage of preaching the gospel "in season, out of season." it will take gospel preaching — distinctive preaching to save the church. May we not shun to "declare the whole counsel of God."

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"... THEY REHEARSED ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE WITH THEM..."—Acts 14:27

A PROPHET WITH HONOR

Jas. P. Miller



The Lord said in the long ago that a prophet would not be without honor save in his own country. Brother M. T. Phemister has lived long enough that for the brethren and many of the people of Munroe County he has become an exception to the rule. This last summer while I was in a meeting with the church in Tompkinsville with Brother Ross Spears about 150 brethren gathered at the tree-shaded home of Brother "Tolly" to help him and his daughter Mary celebrate his 80th birthday. The story of his

life reads like a page from the grand old pioneers who now sleep the sleep of the blessed. Born in 1881, Brother Phemister was named after Tolbert Fanning and lived in Texas until he was 24 years old. He came back to Kentucky on a thirty-day ticket and now there are thirty churches in the county. Not all of them are the result of his work, but all of them have come under his influence. Brother Tolly estimates that he has baptized about 4000 people in the almost 60 years he has preached the gospel. Years ago he baptized 78 in a meeting at Cedar Grove and this is the "biggest" meeting he has ever had although it was no uncommon for him to immerse 30 or 40 in meeting after meeting.

The real story however is in the love and concern that the brethren in the county have shown to Brother Phemister in the later years of his life. At one time they bought him a car, and not long ago when he was faced with hospital bills from a long and serious illness, they supplied his every need. Our aged brother is no stranger to hardship. He drove a team of mules for three years for which he was paid a dollar a day. Walking and riding a horse to his appointments many times, the pay was just the thanks of the common people that came to hear him.

It is the wish of all the readers of SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES that know and love him that he may live long in the little home outside town and, as health will permit, fill appointments over the county. It was my privilege to hear him preach his first sermon on the radio while I was in the Tompkinsville meeting. This was on his 80th birthday and his comment was, "If I had known it was that easy I would have been doing more of it all these years." May God bless Brother Phemister and the Christians of Monroe County, Kentucky.

James P. Miller, Seminole, Tampa—The meeting with the Northside Church in Lakeland where Glen Sheumaker preaches was characterized by audiences twice the size of the membership. Brethren from Polk County and adjoining sections helped in a fine way. Tom Butler has preached in the county for many years and is loved by all who respect the authority of the scriptures. He preaches over WLAK

which is 1430 on the dial every day at noon. The time is 12:30 to 12:45. The date of the Lakeland meeting was November 26 - December 2. Joe Flemming works with the Sulphur Springs Church in Tampa and it was my pleasure to work with them in the week of December 5th. The work at Seminole continues to grow. Nine have been added since our last report. We have over 300 in the Bible School with regularity. When in Tampa worship with us at Rome Avenue and Wishart Blvd.

GOSPEL MEETING AT ST. CLOUD

There was a gospel meeting conducted at the church in St. Cloud, Florida (Florida Avenue and Ninth St.), December 3-9, with different speakers and subjects as follows: Monday—Hugh Davis, "Sowing Discord Among The Brethren"; Tuesday—Earl Fly, "The All-sufficiency of The Church"; Wednesday—Jack Hobby, "Give Us A King"; Thursday—Marshall Patton, "Speaking As The Oracles of God", (another speaker will take his place as Brother Patton will be in a meeting at Lake Wales, Florida); Friday—Tom Butler, "The Glorious Church and Its Purpose"; Saturday—Harold Dowdy, "All Things According to the Pattern."

From New Bern, N.C. J. O. Waiter reports one baptism during October . . . John Thurman of South End Church in Columbus, Georgia reports one baptism in October . . . Guy McDaniel reports three baptized during October . . . Robert Jackson had a very good meeting with McDaniel. . . Lewis Hussell of Knollwood Church in Dayton reports that two were baptized during September and one in October.

Frank Andrews, Floral City, Fla.—I preached in a good meeting in Crystal River, Fla. October 15-22. Two were baptized during this meeting. The crowds were large each night and the interest good. I am to move to Crystal River to labor with this congregation about the middle of January, 1962. It was my pleasure to be with this congregation some years ago as regular preacher. I am leaving the church in Floral City. Anyone interested in moving to Floral City may contact Cleve Spooner, Floral City, Florida.

H. E. Phillips, Tampa, Fla.—I concluded a good meeting with the Par Avenue church in Orlando, Florida, December 3, 1961. This is a sound church with good elders and deacons. Marshall Patton is the good preacher with this church. He is doing a good work in Orlando, having first labored with the Holden Heights church in that city before moving to Par Avenue about a year ago. The meeting at Par Avenue resulted in 10 responses: two baptized and eight restored. I have been invited to be with them again in 1963.

Alton Elliott, Trilby, Fla.—I have started work with the Trilacooche congregation. My address is now P. O. Box 458, Trilby, Florida. Brethren passing through are invited to worship with us.

Paul Ball, Grady, Ark.—I have moved to Grady, Ark., a town of approximately 600. The church is small with about 40 members, but it has a good opportunity to grow. It is a

sound congregation and desires the truth to be taught. Grady is located 25 miles south of Pine Bluff on Highway 65. When visiting in this area we invite you to worship with us.

Jimmy Tuten, Jr., Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.—The Northside Church in Ft. Lauderdale recently closed a series of services with **Marshall Patton** of Orlando doing the preaching. His lessons were explicit and forceful resulting in several confessions and identifications with the Northside Church. One was baptized the week after the meeting closed. With much admiration for his ability and appreciation for his work with us during this meeting, we recommend him to others for Gospel Meetings.

Several inquiries have come in lately regarding our facilities for our assemblies since leaving the rented store building on Sunrise Blvd. The church has purchased two dwellings next to each other. One of these is used as the preacher's house and the other has been converted and remodeled into a suitable place for worship. We need expansion badly and plan to add onto this as soon as funds can be raised. Our address is 912 N.W. 19th St. When in Ft. Lauderdale, worship with us.

WHAT BASIS FOR RELIGIOUS UNITY?

J. R. Snell, Louisville, Ky.

A new doctrine of liberalization is infecting many today, manifesting itself in the assertion that there are Christians in Babylon as well as in the Church. That within the sectarian bodies there are children of God. The Word of God indicts this idea as rank liberalism. It is a doctrine which denies the unity of the body and the subjection of the members to the head of that one body, Christ.

Reuel Lemmons, editor of *Firm Foundation*, has flirted with the idea that the only basis for religious unity and fellowship is baptism into Christ. Carl Ketcherside is on record as having advocated this idea in a meeting here within past months with the premillennial group and more extensively in his publication, *Mission Messenger*. That the idea has taken hold is evident from several sources. Quite recently, and for the first time I might add, I have been contacted by those of the premillennial persuasion. The object was to find my reaction to the idea. Needless to say any faithful Christian will oppose such.

These brethren, along with others, have lost sight, if they ever had it in view, of what constitutes fellowship. I John 1:5-7 clearly settles the matter, "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanseth us from all sin."

Fellowship with God and the faithful is dependent upon walking "in the light". In the light of God's Truth. A departure from the "light" severs the bonds of fellowship. One may have been in fellowship, but with leaving the truth, he is no longer in fellowship with God and ought not be with faithful brethren.

We are cleansed and kept cleansed by the blood of Christ only if we "walk in the light as He is in the light". Leave the light and the continual effectiveness of Christ's blood is forsaken and we are lost.

Just to be scripturally baptized is not enough to guarantee salvation. By baptism sins are remitted, we are added to the church, and enter into covenant relationship with God, thus

to bask in the hope of eternal life. That hope becomes reality only if we throughout life "walk in the light". Those who have been scripturally baptized but who have gone into the ways of men do not walk in the light. They have no fellowship with God, nor the faithful of God.

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, said the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." II Cor. 6:17-18.

A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

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A Christian need not be in doubt concerning his responsibility in service and work, with special reference to the questions of what and how much he is required to do. The Bible's teaching on this point is clear.

As I see it, two things create responsibility. The first is opportunity. Paul writes, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith" (Gal. 6:10). Compare James' words, "To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

The second is ability. Over and over in the letters of Rev. 2-3 Jesus says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." If we have the capacity to hear, God requires that we use it; if someone does not have ears, certainly he is not required to hear. What we are required to do depends upon the ability we possess.

Jesus said of the woman who anointed his head, "She hath done what she could" (Mark 14:8). We are required to do what we can. God does not expect us to do what we cannot do.

Peter writes, ". . . if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth . . ." (I Pet. 4:11). God knows what we can do because he gave us the ability we have to do it. He requires us to do what he knows we can do. Thus, as Albert Barnes wrote, "This is the limit of all obligation. No one is bound to go *beyond* his ability; every one is required to *come up* to it." God could not justly require of us what we cannot do. But never forget! All of us are responsible for doing all and everything that we can reasonably do. The limit of responsibility is clearly set.

What and how much can you do? Answer this; then do it. Do not be dishonest with yourself or you will go to hell.

BOOKLETS

- THE HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS**—James L. Denison explains in full why we do not observe Christmas with any religious significance ----- .25
- 1900 YEARS AGO**—A survey of the establishment of the church, its organization, worship and work by J. Harvey Dykes _____ -25
- A SHORT COURSE IN TEACHER TRAINING**—
Buford Holt gives ten lessons for teachers ____ .25
- UNSPOTTED FROM THE WORLD**—Charles A. Holt gives the facts and figures in a study of worldliness -25
- WHERE ARE THE DEAD?**—Maurice A. Meredith presents a study of this interesting question .25