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“A Tear for Mother”

P.J. Casebolt

“And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20). By a special act of creation, God created woman, mothers, and motherhood. I would like to wield the pen and strike a blow for motherhood at least one more time before the term becomes completely meaningless, or even extinct. Mothers are already an endangered species in our modern society, and if some continue to have their way with respect to abortion and the deterioration of family values, the extinction of motherhood may become more fact than fable.

All are agreed that many of our social and moral problems are a direct result of deterioration in the home. Yet, not enough are willing to do anything about the problem. According to the latest statistics, well over half of all mothers work outside the home. And, the time and emphasis spent on being a mother suffers accordingly. Again, if some feminists and like-minded “liberators” of womanhood and motherhood have their way, all mothers will be out of the home and the children left over from the effects of abortion will all be turned over to surrogate day-care centers which will be partially or completely supported by taxes. Even those of us who are trying to salvage the institution of motherhood will be forced to support those practices which are destroying the very thing we are striving to save.

If some feminists and like-minded “liberators” of womanhood and motherhood have their way, all mothers will be out of the home and the children left over from the effects of abortion will all be turned over to surrogate day-care centers which will be partially or completely supported by taxes.

As in most matters, there are exceptions to the general rule. We recognize situations which are affected by widowhood, shiftless fathers and husbands, childless couples, or even homes where the children are grown and gone. But the exception is supposed to *prove* the rule, not *become* the rule.

A lot of emphasis is being made on the matter of “pro-choice” and a woman’s right to fulfill her own ambitions. Should not at least equal

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Editorial

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Testifying in the Assembly

Mike Willis

In the September-October 1997 issue of *Wineskins* an article was published entitled “I Just Want To Testify” by Dan Dozier. The magazine *Wineskins* is published by those supportive of Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, and the Nashville *Jubilee*, if that helps you to identify its doctrinal stance. This article by Dozier tells us about the practice of “testifying” in worship assemblies.

The word “testify” is a Bible term. The word is translated from the various cognates of μάρτυς· μάρτυρ, μαρτυρέω, μαρτυρία, μαρτύριον, μαρτύρομαι. The basic meaning of the word group is conveyed by μάρτυς: “a witness (one who avers, or can aver, what he himself has seen or heard or knows by any other means)” (Thayer 392). The word is used throughout the New Testament to relate what the witnesses of Christ saw and heard from him. They could testify about his miracles, his words, his death, his resurrection because they had seen and heard the things that transpired. The words of the New Testament are the testimonies of eyewitnesses and the inspired words of men who recorded what they had seen and heard or had personally investigated.

However, the modern practice of testifying is something quite different. Men who lived nearly two thousand years after Christ are not qualified to give testimony about anything Christ did. They have never seen him nor heard him speak. Can you imagine a lawyer calling someone to give testimony about whether or not a man committed a crime, but the “witness” was on another continent and was not even born when the crime occurred? Such a lawyer would be laughed out of court.

Yet, the modern practice in many churches has “witnesses” “testifying” in churches about “what Christ has done for me.” These witnesses cannot testify about seeing Christ, for they have never seen him. They have never heard him speak one word. They have never touched him. Hence, all that they can testify about is their own subjective experience, whatever its nature may be.

Our brother became convinced that such testimony services were good in the church he attends, not because he found book, chapter, and verse to teach that it was good, but because of an experience his local church had. He tells how six teenagers and two adults related their experiences on a mission in poverty stricken regions of Mexico and Nassau. As they related

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Who Is to Blame?

Connie W. Adams

It is common these days to blame every sin, whether murder, theft, adultery, addiction, or whatever, on somebody or something other than the perpetrator of the offense. The offender was abused as a child, either by parents or others. Or, maybe society as a whole failed the felon. Maybe it was the influence of wild-eyed, radical, right-wing, religious extremists that caused the accused to go into a fast-food restaurant and shoot down fifteen people, or a student to shoot ten of his fellow-students in a prayer circle before the school day began. It was not long after the tragedy at Paducah, Kentucky before the press was speculating that the student arrested for killing three of his fellow-students and wounding seven more, was small for his age and had been picked on by others.

I suppose it is natural to try to figure out why people commit criminal and other sinful acts. But the notion that such behavior may be shifted away from the guilty to others, whatever they may have done, or not done, is faulty. It stands opposed to common sense and certainly to the teaching of Scripture.

Ezekiel 18 is instructive on this matter. The scene here is one of captivity. Ezekiel prophesied to those who had already entered Babylonian captivity. In the first four verses, Ezekiel brought up a common proverb among the people which was being pressed into service to explain why they had gone into this dreadful captivity. They said, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (v. 2). In verse 3 he said, "You shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel." Why was that? "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (v. 4). The Lord was teaching them not to blame their troubles on their fathers. It is true that parents have influence on their children and they will have to answer for how they use it. But if a child eats sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge because *he* ate sour grapes, not because of what his father did or did not do.

Good Fathers and Bad Sons

Ezekiel proceeds to describe a man who is "just" and who does what is "lawful and right" but who has a son who becomes a robber, a murderer, an idolater, and who does "abominations." Who is to blame? Look at it: "He has done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him" (vv. 5-12). Is a just father to blame for his son becoming a renegade? Absolutely not! He ate his own sour grapes.

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Bad Fathers and Good Sons

Then Ezekiel paints a different picture. This time he presents a man who is a rascal but who bears a son who turns away from the evil ways of his father (vv. 14-18). In verse 17 he plainly said, "he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live." Then in verse 20 he said "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." Each person bears responsibility for his own actions regardless of what others have done.

Modern Concepts and Sin

Many today are uncomfortable with the idea of sin. Sin has been softened and minimized. And if there is no sin, there is no sinner. But somebody or something is to blame. So, the search for the scapegoat begins. The wayward son in Luke 15 "came to himself" after he had spent his money and time in wild living. Reduced to dire circumstances, he resolved to go back home. When he got there he said to his father, "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (Luke 15:21). Isn't it interesting that he did not blame the government, the synagogue school, the community recreation project nor even his father. He did not say, "Well, if you had not been such an authoritarian father, so unfeeling and unreasonable, I never would have been tempted to leave home in the first place." I can guarantee you that is exactly what some of the social engineers of today would have said. *He* took his inheritance. *He* wasted it. *He* was profligate.

The common defense of the mass murderer is insanity. Are there mentally unbalanced people? To be sure. Are there terrible things sometimes done by those who are not rational. Without doubt. But every criminal act is not to be explained on that basis. There is such a thing as sin and those who commit them are sinners. There are those who

have the rationality to plot, scheme, build elaborate devices to carry out their intents. They are not crazy. They are sinful. They had choices to make and made the wrong ones.

The Principle of Personal Accountability

Both the strong brother and the weak one in Romans 14 are held accountable for their behavior toward the other. "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). Should we place a stumblingblock in another's way? No. The one doing so will have to answer for it. But it must also be said that each one of us is responsible for walking "circumspectly." We must all watch where we are going. It is like the man who gets a speeding ticket and defends himself on the ground that this driver in front of him was just poking along and finally in frustration he sped around him and exceeded the limit. The issue is "Who was driving your car?" The pokey driver or you? You may have been tempted by the circumstances, but who yielded to the temptation?

I have endured a lifetime of teasing because of my first name. So has my wife over hers. But you know, neither of us ever decided to go to school with guns and shoot down fellow-students because of it. What others may do may very well annoy us, frustrate us, but whatever we say or do is still a matter of personal choice and responsibility.

It is high time that people in this land stopped blaming everyone but themselves for their actions. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

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Morris Hafley

Outbreak

In the Ohio Valley there is a deadly virus. It has killed thousands already and more have been diagnosed with the virus. Small children and adults are dying horrible, lingering painful deaths. You may not have heard about it until this moment. The government is trying to keep it a secret. That's the reason you have not heard about it.

There is a doctor in the Valley that has the cure. He is the only one, but for some unknown reason he is not sharing the vaccine with any one. I suppose he is waiting for the highest bidder and/or he is the meanest, most heartless doctor of all time. Perhaps he wants to remain friends with "the higher ups." Government officials know this culprit and are saying that "he is an old man and *has done much good* in the field of medical research for many years."

People (those who have heard) are moving from the Valley and getting as far away as quickly as possible. It is a mass exodus such as I have never seen. They are running as fast as they can lest they contact this deadly virus, leaving behind all they have ever known, and selling their land for little or nothing just to escape. They have no concern for their jobs or their possessions. They are only concerned for their lives.

The government is warning all not to tell others, but as you can see I am not listening. I want you to know as quickly as possible. I would want you to tell me if the situation were reversed. The government says it will create a panic and the economy will be destroyed if the rest of the country knows about this.

Though the above is *not* true I am reminded of a virus that indeed has infected us all, the virus of sin (Rom. 3:23). It is a virus that kills (Rom. 6:33). I also know of a Physician who has the cure and is not hoarding it for the highest bidder (Mark 2:16-17; 16:15).

Do we want to hear of "outbreaks" of sin? Certainly not! After all it separates us from the one who loves us most (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Isa. 59:1-2). If it is a deadly disease it does not matter with whom it starts. We want to know ASAP! Why would we want to protect someone who could lead us to torment with a deadly doctrine (Matt.

15:13-14)? It, too, is a slow, lingering, painful death (Luke 16:19-31; Matt. 8:12; Rev. 20:14).

I want to go on record right now by saying if I teach a doctrine that is contrary to the Word expose me if I refuse to repent. Tell all who I am and what I am teaching just as God did in 1 Timothy 1:20 — "Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme." Warn all that my "word will eat as cloth a canker" and that I have "erred concerning the truth" (2 Tim. 2:17-18).

Refusing to repent I may in all honesty, as sweet as a little lamb, cry, "I've been misrepresented." Do not let that deter you from exposing me (John 3:20-21). Some think that before one may be labeled as a false teacher, he must have horns and fangs and be rude, crude and tattooed with a devil insignia.

Do not allow how long I have been preaching to stop you. Do not allow our longtime friendship to sway you. Do not allow my friends and what they may say or write about you to scare you. Paul, in all honesty, went about making "havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison" (Acts 8:3; 23:1). His sincerity did not make him right.

The Lord stopped him (Acts 9). Please! "SOMEBODY STOP ME" before the judgment!

Stop the virus of sin. Do not wait until it has a good head of steam before you try to stop it. It could steamroll right over you and any in its path. "But there were false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber" (2 Pet. 2:1-3, NASV).

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God's Plan of Salvation

Notice in John 3:16 that God “gave” his Son. God did not owe us a plan of salvation. He was not indebted to give us a plan of salvation. This plan of salvation was given as an unmerited favor by God to mankind while we were still dead in our sins.

How does a sinner obtain salvation? People have different ideas about God's plan of salvation. Overcoming these differences can be difficult at times, but it is not impossible. In fact, most of us are much closer to agreement than we realize.

For example, let's take Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Here is a simple point we all agree on. Regardless of what name you wear, whether Assembly of God, Baptist, Catholic, Church of Christ, Independent, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, or Presbyterian we all agree on this point.

Next, we all agree with Romans 6:23, “The wages of sin is death.” This teaching transcends all the boundaries of division.

How Does One Escape?

Next, let's consider how man can escape the condemnation of sin. What we want here is a Bible answer, not the opinions of men, but rather a clear book, chapter, and verse Bible answer.

The following verses provide just such an answer:

. . . having now been justified by His blood . . . (Rom. 5:9).

. . . having made peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20).

. . . and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

From these verses it is obvious

that the blood of Christ is our hope for escape from the wages of sin. Without Christ's blood we would be hopelessly lost.

I'm confident that most of us will agree up to this point. So, we now have three points of agreement.

- All have sinned.
- The wages of sin is death.
- Christ blood is our only hope of escape.

Man Did Nothing!

Let's move on to the fourth point. I am certain we will agree on it, also. The fourth point is that man did nothing to merit the sacrifice of Christ. Again we turn to the Bible for solid book, chapter, and verse answers.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . . (John 3:16).

. . . Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6).

. . . while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8).

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses. . . (Eph. 2:1).

Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive. . . (Eph. 2:5).

Notice in John 3:16 that God “gave” his Son. God did not owe us a plan of salvation. He was not indebted to give us a plan of salvation. This plan of salvation was given as an

unmerited favor by God to mankind while we were still dead in our sins.

Paul wrote, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). God eliminated all possible boasting from the plan of salvation. No man can boast that he has earned salvation.

We should now have four points of agreement.

- All have sinned.
- The wages of sin is death.
- Christ's blood is our only hope of escape.
- Not a single one of us deserves God's plan of salvation.

To emphasize the fourth point a little further, consider the fact that this plan of salvation was designed and offered before you were born. You certainly did nothing to merit a plan of salvation that was given nearly two thousand years before you were born. You can also rest assured that the people of Christ's day did not earn this plan. No one deserves salvation.

Saved By Grace Through Faith

In Ephesians 2:8 Paul introduced another element of salvation that we will agree on. Paul taught that we are saved by grace through faith. It is through the avenue of faith that we take hold of God's grace and gain the salvation that is in Christ's blood.

In Acts 15:9 we read, "...purifying their hearts by faith." We see again that it is through the avenue of faith that we reach the saving blood of Christ. It is not faith that washes away our sins, but rather it is through faith that we reach the saving blood of Christ.

In Hebrews 11:6 we read, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him." Faith is absolutely essential because it is the only avenue by which we can take hold of God's grace and

reach the blood of Christ.

No doubt we are still in agreement through these five points.

- All have sinned.
- The wages of sin is death.
- Christ's blood is our only hope of escape.
- Not a single one of us deserves God's plan of salvation.
- Without faith it is impossible to please God.

What Is Faith?

The next step is to identify and define saving faith. What is its character and its nature? How does a person exercise saving faith? The Bible speaks of two kinds of faith. James tells us about one of these in James 2, starting at verse 14.

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? (2:14).

Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (2:17).

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe and tremble (2:19).

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (2:20).

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? (2:21)

Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? (2:22).

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only (2:24).

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also (2:26).

Why is the faith of this passage

dead? Because it did not obey the truth. This dead faith recognized the facts and understood the truth but did not do the will of God.

James' message is simple: An inactive faith is a useless faith. Only the Devil would encourage such a faith.

We have an example of this dead faith in John 12:42-43. John writes, "Nevertheless, even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." These men had an inactive faith, a dead faith.

In Matthew 10:33 we read, "But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." The rulers mentioned in John 12 would not confess Christ even though they believed he was the Christ, therefore Christ will deny them before his Father.

Faith alone was not enough just as James had said. A faith that recognizes the truth but does not surrender to God's will is dead and does not lead to the saving blood of Jesus.

What Is Saving Faith?

Obviously we want the opposite of this dead faith. We want a faith that is alive, surrenders to God, and actively does his will. Various Bible passages reinforce this idea of saving faith.

In Matthew 7:21 Jesus taught, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." Later in Matthew 12:50 Jesus said, "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister."

The Hebrew writer wrote in Hebrews 5:9, "...He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."

In 2 Thessalonians 1:8 Paul taught that when Jesus returns he will take vengeance “on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We can see from these verses that the faith that leads to the blood of Christ is an active faith. It is a faith that *does* the will of God, making a personal surrender to whatever God may require.

We now have six points that we should agree on.

- All have sinned.
- The wages of sin is death.
- Christ’s blood is our only hope of escape.
- Not a single one of us deserves God’s plan of salvation.
- Without faith it is impossible to please God.
- Saving faith obediently surrenders to the will of God.

The Terms of Surrender

Next, let’s consider the terms of this surrender that leads to the blood of Christ. Once again we want a solid Bible book, chapter, and verse foundation, and once again the Bible provides such an answer.

In John 6:28 the people asked Jesus, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered in the next verse, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” To the modern mind “believe” might sound like an odd answer to their question. People today tend to view belief as something that is passive, but the religious minds of Jesus’ day knew that faith without works is dead.

In the Bible, saving faith and obedient surrender are so closely related that sometimes the ideas are interchangeable. This relationship between the two is obvious in the following verses.

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report? (Rom. 10:16). (Did you notice in this verse that the gospel is something to be obeyed?)

And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief (Heb. 3:18-19).

Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient. . . (1 Pet. 2:7).

Saving faith is a firm conviction, a personal surrender, and a conduct of life based on that surrender. This is the first term of surrender. This first term by its very nature includes all the other terms of surrender. In other words,

if a person truly exercises saving faith then all of the other terms naturally follow. If any of the other terms is rejected, then a personal surrender was not made.

Repentance as a Term of Surrender

So, what are the other things that the Bible connects to salvation? Once again we want solid book, chapter, and verse Bible answers to this question, and again the Bible gives us clear answers.

Several Scriptures connect repentance to salvation:

. . . unless you repent you will all likewise perish (Luke 13:5).

. . . God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life (Acts 11:18).

God . . . commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

So what is this repentance that God commands upon all men everywhere? Repentance is simply a change of mind that turns away from sin and unto God.

The fact that God requires us to turn from sin and unto him is just common sense. To expect God to save us without us turning to him would be absurd. It would also be contrary to the obedient surrender of saving faith. So, while we can talk about saving faith and repentance separately on paper, the two cannot be separated in practice.

Notice also that repentance is something that God granted us (Acts 11:18). If God had not chosen to accept our repentance as part of his plan of salvation then repentance would be worthless. Repentance is only valuable in coming to Jesus’ blood because God made it so.

We should now have seven points that we agree on.

- All have sinned.
- The wages of sin is death.
- Christ’s blood is our only hope of escape.
- Not a single one of us deserves God’s plan of salvation.
- Without faith it is impossible to please God.
- Saving faith obediently surrenders to the will of God.
- God commands all men everywhere to turn from sin and unto him.

Confession as a Term of Surrender

The Scriptures also show that confession is vitally connected to salvation.

Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven (Matt. 10:33).

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus . . . you will

be saved (Rom. 10:9).

... and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:10).

If we deny Him, He will also deny us (2 Tim. 2:12).

So, what is this confession that we must make as part of our surrender? It is a confession that Jesus is our Lord, a declaration of our acceptance of him as our Lord and Savior. We cannot be like the rulers mentioned earlier in John 12:42; we must openly confess that Jesus is the Christ.

If a person is not willing to make this confession, then that person has not obediently surrendered to the will of God. He has not turned from the way of sin unto the way of God.

We should now have eight points of agreement.

- All have sinned.
- The wages of sin is death.
- Christ's blood is our only hope of escape.
- Not a single one of us deserves God's plan of salvation.
- Without faith it is impossible to please God.
- Saving faith obediently surrenders to the will of God.
- God commands all men everywhere to turn from sin and unto him.
- If we deny Jesus, he will also deny us.

Most likely we are in agreement up to this point. We might have some technical differences, but hopefully those will be minor.

Baptism as a Term of Surrender

Now we come to the biggest hurdle of all: baptism. As always we want a solid book, chapter, and verse answer. Once again, the Bible is surprisingly clear.

He who believes and is baptized will be saved. . . (Mark 16:16).

But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him (Luke 7:30).

... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

Repent, and lest every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . . (Acts 2:38).

Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins. . . (Acts 22:16).

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead . . . even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal. 3:27).

There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism . . . (1 Pet. 3:21).

Baptism does not merit salvation any more than faith does. It is rather absurd that anyone would think that the simple act of baptism could merit eternal life. Baptism is simply one of the terms of surrender that God designated. If a person truly surrenders to the will of God, then he will submit to God's will in baptism. If he refuses to be baptized then he has not surrendered to the will of God (Luke 7:30).

Baptism and Grace

After surrendering to God in baptism a person should not think that he has done anything to earn the saving blood of Christ. Salvation is by God's grace when one surrenders according to the terms God set.

Naaman the leper illustrates the point. God offered to cure Naaman of his leprosy upon seven dippings in the river Jordan. Dipping in the river Jordan worked for Naaman only because God's grace made it work. God chose to impart the gift of healing to Naaman by means of dipping in the river (2 Kings 5:1-19).

Likewise God has chosen to impart the healing blood of Jesus by means of baptism. It is not the baptism itself that washes away sins, but rather the blood of Christ. God has arranged his plan of salvation so that the blood of Christ is applied when a sinner surrenders to the point of baptism. Thus, the man dead in his sins is buried in baptism and a new man is resurrected from the grave of baptism by God's grace.

Noah is another good illustration. Genesis 6:8 tells us that Noah found grace in the eyes of God. Does this mean that Noah had no part in saving his family from the flood? Of course not. Noah and his sons put in many long hours building the ark. Yet, all the work and efforts of Noah and his family were successful only because God's grace was with them. If God's grace had not been with them then their work would have been in vain, and they too would have died in the flood.

Likewise, our baptism would have no benefit if God's grace was not with us in baptism. Baptism leads to the saving blood of Jesus only because God's grace makes it that way. If God's grace was removed then baptism would be absolutely worthless.

The Bible teaches that a person must believe, repent, confess, and be baptized unto the remission of sins. When a person has thus surrendered to God then that person's sins are washed away by the blood of Christ.

continued bottom of next page

Does the Church Save?

One of the most widely held beliefs of our day is the teaching that a man is saved by faith alone. Nearly all of the denominational creeds have the idea imbedded in their articles, either clearly stated as in the Methodist Discipline, or else clearly implied. It is taught that man is saved miraculously, the very instant he believes in Christ, and that this belief is wrought in his heart by the action of the Holy Spirit. Man, in this view, is wholly passive and unable to do anything at all to bring about his salvation. It is all the work of the Holy Spirit. Neither the man's obedience, nor the commands of Christ are taken into consideration. It is purely a miracle.

This is surely one of the most damnable of all false doctrines which curse the land this day. It does more to produce indifference in the hearts of the people toward the church, and to diminish respect for the church, than anything I know. It leads men to deny the essentiality of the church altogether. So strong a grip has the doctrine secured on the hearts of men that it is a very common experience to hear devoted religious people say, "Oh, the church is not important," "The church does not save," "One can go to heaven just as well without being a member of the church as he can in the church," etc. Now if by the word "church" such people mean some denominational institution, then surely no Bible student anywhere would argue with them. On the contrary, every informed person will agree fully with the idea that

membership in a denomination (any denomination) is not essential to salvation.

But no person who has reached the age of accountability, and has transgressed God's law either by omission or commission, will ever reach heaven without being a member of the church which is revealed in the Bible. I call your attention to the fact that Jesus Christ is the "Savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23). It is Christ who saves; Christ who is the Savior; and not the church. "The church" does not save; the church is the thing saved! "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the Savior of the body." What does Christ save? He saved *the body*. But what is "the body"? It is the church (Col. 1:18, 24; Eph. 1:22, 23). Christ is the head of the church — his body. And it is this body which is saved by Christ.

The conclusion is clear from this that if one does not belong to the church, he does not belong to that of which Christ is the Savior. It was the church which was purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28); and it is "to the church" that the saved are added (Acts 2:47). There are no saved out of the church; there can be none. For everyone who is "saved" is "added" to the church by the same one who saves him — God.

The church was purchased by the blood of Christ. Un-

Obedient surrender does not merit salvation. A person cannot point to his surrender and say that he has earned or bought salvation. God, in his wonderful grace, has simply allowed that if a person will surrender to him, he will cleanse that person by the blood of Christ, but we must first come to him on his terms.

Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my father in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Have you surrendered to God's will?

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less we are willing to say that Christ was swindled when he bought the church, we must recognize that the value of the church is equal to the value of the blood of Christ. If the church is not valuable, then Christ was cheated when he purchased it with his own blood.

The church is a “blood-bought” institution. If one is to be saved by the blood of Christ, one must be a part of the church, his spiritual body, which was purchased by that blood. If one is a sinner, at enmity with God, then salvation and peace and reconciliation are to be had *only* in the church, the blood-purchased possession of Jesus Christ. “For he is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace, and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby” (Eph. 2:14-16).

Where are people reconciled to God? In the one body, the church. Where is peace found? In the one body, the church. The Bible says that the body is the church, and that peace and reconciliation are to be had in the body, and not out of it. Talk about being “saved by the blood of Christ!” My friend, if you are ever saved by the blood of Christ, it will be because you have come into that body where you are reconciled to God by the cross of Christ. The blood which was shed for our redemption can save us only in the church. There is no other way.

Does the church save? Of course not! It is Christ who

saves! But what does he save? He saves the body, the church. God exercised great power when he raised Jesus Christ from the dead and “made him to sit at his right hand in heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:20-23). So the church is the fullness of Christ. It was not some human institution, or some man-made denomination which he purchased with his blood; it was “the church.” It is over this body that he reigns as head; it is here that the fullness of God dwells. It is here and here only that salvation is promised to the penitent sinner.

We are pleading with people to become members of the New Testament church. We are pleading that men and women in our day do exactly what they did in the days of the apostles. These people then heard the gospel, believed it, repented of their sins, and were buried through baptism for the remission of sins. And when that happened God added them to the church. Here they were reconciled to God, washed and made clean by the blood of Christ; they were then heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. They were *in* the church — the saved of God.

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Dealing With the Effects of Premarital Sex

A careful look at what happens when young people choose to ignore the moral guidelines that have been given to us by our Creator for our protection and for our ultimate good.

This is an important subject — especially today. Young people (and older folks, too) are bombarded with the world’s (Satan’s) standards of morality, or immorality. The values and moral standards which were endorsed by most Americans in years past are now ridiculed and/or ignored by many. Teaching on sexual purity before and after marriage is no longer held before young people as a law of God nor even an ideal goal to strive for. So-called sexual freedom is flaunted as the norm among teen agers and adults and often those are ridiculed who expect and encourage young people to remain virgins until marriage. God’s law is plain: “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body; but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18).

God, our Creator, knows our needs and what is best for us, his creation. He is not a cosmic killjoy. Behind each negative Bible command are two positive principles. One is to *protect* us, the other is to *provide* for us. God has “good” planned for us and does not want us to do something that will bring pain to us and to others. To illustrate this, consider an owner’s manual that comes with an automobile. I may want to change the oil once a year. That takes less time, and would seem to cost less. But the Owner’s Manual says to change the oil every 5,000 miles. Now, if I have good sense, I understand that the manufacturer knows

better how to care for it than I do. Following their advice will save me much grief and expense. And we have also come with an Owner’s Manual — the Bible. It may seem good to enjoy the pleasure of sex before marriage, but the “Owner’s Manual” disagrees. So, whose judgment should we consider — ours or God’s? God’s motivation in dealing with us is love. “God is love” (1 John 4:16). He is the author of love, and he knows all about it. God is not anti-sex. He created sex and said it was good, but he gave rules with it. Rules in any realm are to protect us and give us freedom to enjoy the activity we are engaging in, whether it be sports or whatever. Can you imagine a ball game without rules, where everyone does just what he wants to do? We have one basic rule from God with reference to sexual activity. That is, “Wait until marriage.”

Look at God’s design and plan for our happiness. When we have faith in a powerful and all wise God, we obey without always understanding the reason behind the command. But in this area of sexual conduct, God has provided evidence that his way is best in words and principles taught throughout the Bible.

Consider four areas of life that will be greatly affected by our choices of sexual behavior. Look first at the effects of unchastity, so that we can know how to deal with these conse-

quences. There are physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational effects of an immoral lifestyle.

Physical Effects

We saw in 1 Corinthians 6:18 that sex before marriage is a sin against the body. Sinning against the body means losing respect for your body, as well as the body of the one you are involved with. Once respect is lost, it becomes easier to indulge in promiscuous sex. Losing respect then leads to a warped view of love and centers the definition of love around the physical. The emotional needs which God created are not met in casual sex but in the loving commitment of a mate. Only in marriage is it possible for sexual relationships to reaffirm the dignity and uniqueness of each sex partner. Sex combined with love in marriage makes us want to give to our mate — not take. Waiting as God commands gives peace of mind which affects our physical health. We don't experience the stress of worrying about unwanted pregnancies, or sexually transmitted diseases that could kill or cripple us or our children. Now, of course, the "safe sex" campaign across our country fools many into a false peace of mind. Birth control methods are sometimes unreliable, and the high rate of failure for condoms is not understood among many teens. At best, among those who are sexually active, one in six condoms will fail, and at worst one in three. That's the same or worse odds as in Russian Roulette, which is a pretty stupid game. And of course the pill offers no protection whatsoever against STDs.

Fifty years ago, teens were warned about two STDs (called "venereal diseases" then): syphilis and gonorrhea. What has our newfound sexual freedom brought? There are now over 50 STDs, and AIDS is not the only one that kills. And others can cripple and/or make life miserable. (Herpes is not a picnic.) Some cause birth defects that pass a parent's foolish decision on to an innocent child. Furthermore, that sperm that causes pregnancy can

get through a tiny tear or pinhole in a condom. But the virus that causes AIDS is up to 300 to 400 times smaller than the sperm. So what does that same tear or hole look like to the AIDS virus? It looks like a train tunnel! Dr. Koop, former U.S. Surgeon General, doubts that there will ever be an AIDS cure. It is a virus, and we have never cured any virus, not even the common cold. And do you know about cervical cancer, a disease that is proven to be more prevalent among sexually active teenage girls?

Spiritual

God blesses purity. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). "Watch your heart with all diligence, for from it spring the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). "We are to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil" (Rom. 16:19). "Abstain from sexual immorality . . . God has called us for purity" (1 Thess. 4:3-5, 7). Clearly God's word forbids any type of sex outside of marriage. There are spiritual consequences any time we disobey God. "God will judge fornicators and adulterers" (Heb. 13:4). Sexual sins brought destruction to Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. Many Bible characters committed sexual sins and were judged by God. Great trouble and grief came to Lot and his daughters, to Shechem, Reuben, Judah and Tamar, Samson and David. Judgment from God may be immediate as in the death of David's son or come in future consequences we will face.

Medical science may eliminate or lessen some consequences of my sin, but it cannot remove my accountability before God. Sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2; Hos. 5:6). It causes us to be a bad influence on others, both Christians and non-Christians. Sexual purity is a way to show respect for others and to confirm their dignity as human beings. It is impossible to show someone the love of God while engaging in immorality with that person. When we maintain sexual purity, we can be channels of God's

love and can accurately represent him to others.

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, and "against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:23). Waiting for something builds excitement, as in waiting for a birthday. Sex is something we wait our whole life for until we finally partake of it. A godly character results from patience and perseverance. When we wait for sex till the proper time and place, our character is developed and self-esteem is built. We develop self-control which is required to live a godly life. Waiting builds trust, and God's plan is for marriage to be built on a basic trust factor. Sexual involvement almost always wipes out trust in a relationship. In surveys conducted, it is found that "sexual intimacy produces more broken relationships than strengthened ones."

Emotional

God's plan gives *protection from being put on a performance basis*. When put on a performance basis with another person, one is accepted only if he acts or does something the way the other person wants. They are respected not for *who they are*, but for *what they do*. Their value and dignity is lost. A boy says, "I love you *if* you will have sex with me" or "*because* you are pretty, "rather than "I love you." That is *conditional* love, and is worthless for building a committed relationship. Without the committed bonds of marriage, sex is inherently a selfish act done for personal satisfaction or gain. We must continue to please for the relationship to continue and that leaves one in a constant state of insecurity. God protects us from being put on a performance basis by reserving sex for the commitment of marriage. Are you aware of the various studies that show that sexual satisfaction is much greater in marriage than in uncommitted relationships? Why is it this way? Could it be that God knew what he was doing when he created us, and ordained the marriage relationship as the place for fulfillment?

The emotional baggage that often comes with premarital sex includes *sexual dysfunctions in marriage*. Many end up in counseling or therapy to deal with problems related to “teenage” sex. Studies have shown that premarital sex also increases the rate of cheating after marriage. Teens don’t know that when they are young, but God knew it when he gave the rules in his “Owner’s Manual.”

Guilt is another consequence of violating God’s standard of chastity until marriage. This has long term effects on future relationships in marriage, and may haunt and affect a person longer than any other consequence. To have the sex act linked with guilt in one’s emotions because of premarital activity, causes the joy intended by God for husband and wife to be robbed and clouded. For example, a couple I know has been married over 50 years, and sex has never had any meaning for her. Premarital sex did its damage. Guilt is an awareness of having transgressed a standard of right and wrong. Or it may be just a lingering *doubt* of thinking that some act was wrong.

Our society is plagued by those two kinds of guilt. The first is a moral guilt, which Christians are subject to, which tells us specifically when we have stepped outside God’s boundaries of conduct. It is a conscious awareness of specific transgressions. The other kind of guilt might be called a floating sense of guilt. One psychologist says, “It is indeed amazing that in a fundamentally irreligious culture as ours, the sense of guilt should be so widespread and deep-rooted as it is.” This floating guilt he spoke of comes from a society that says there is no absolute right and wrong. Rather than producing freedom as many claim they are seeking, such are in a constant turmoil. “Are these things I’m doing right or wrong?” These people have no standard, therefore no direction in their lives and are constantly adrift. Yes, they are free — as free as a ship at sea without a rudder. Christians have the Bible which gives direction and guidance to lives and tells of God’s character. (Illustration: A farmer was asked which was better — raising cattle on open grazing land, in a pasture, or in a corral. His reply was, “Well, on open grazing land they are always subject to attack from wild animals or they could wander off and be lost. In a corral they are safe, but somebody has to take care of them. In a fenced pasture, the cattle have everything they need. They are protected, yet have the freedom to graze.”)



The Bible defines our pasture. God has placed intelligent boundaries around us to keep us “home” and to keep away those who would prey on us, yet within those boundaries we have freedom to make choices. Deep down, young people want boundaries. We have seen those who had no rules, no curfews, who could make all their own decisions, but who *wanted* some guidance.

God has set marriage as the proper place for sex. We are protected within this boundary. Husbands and wives don’t have to be concerned with catching diseases; they are unselfish and open in expressing their sexual needs to one another. They can plan for the family they want and when children come, they are counted as blessings from God, not reminders of a grave mistake. Again, God protects us from shame and guilt, and gives us joy in the sexual union of marriage.

Misleading feelings is another emotional effect of fornication. This often comes from confusion between sex and love. Sex outside of marriage turns the relationship upside down and mixes emotions to the point of misinterpreting feelings. When we mix sex and love, we confuse the concepts of giving and taking. Personal selfish reasons cause premarital sex to *take*, but sometimes the taking may be confused as giving. A girl gives in to have the security the boy provides, or maybe the popularity achieved in being “his” girlfriend. Many times young people are misled by these emotions and think they really are in love.” The sex is so powerful that it creates a strong emotional bond often when there is little in common and little basis for a lasting

relationship. Those mixed up feelings are destructive in a dating relationship and can have tragic consequences if the relationship progresses to marriage. God’s plan protects us from the devastating effects those confused emotions bring. Sex does not constitute love. As Christians, we are to develop *agape* love, the kind God has for us that gives with no expectation of getting something in return. The 1 Corinthians 13 model of love does not describe emotional feelings, but rather acts of the will. Love is primarily an act of the will, but has tremendous emotional overtones because it has to do with how we relate to people. Our actions of love are tied to our emotions because relationships naturally have emotional bonds. Likewise sex has a powerful emotional aspect because God meant for it to be a joining of soul and mind as well as a physical union. That

involves the moral conscience which can inflict pain after the physical pleasure is gone, unless the two have become one in marriage. Marital sex is a model of God's provision to draw us closer to one another and to him.

The hardship of breaking off the relationship is another consequence. The pain that comes when one breaks up with a sexual partner is often an emotionally terrible tearing apart. *Even* when a couple realizes that fornication is sinful, they may try to find ways to justify the relationship because of the emotional bond formed between them. Sex forms a bond that exists when the rest of the relationship is bad. We see evidence of that when a girl stays with a partner who physically abuses her, and who often treats her like dirt.

Then there is the effect of *psychological and emotional distress* that comes. Premarital sex has a serious adverse effect on the self image of the partners. Rather than joy, an emotionally crippling guilt seems to be the companion of permissive sex. Sex is such a definite experience that a part of each of us remains forever a part of the other. The effects of this "casual investment" on the mind and emotions is far reaching. Humiliation and a poor self image come to many after sleeping with a person who never calls back or breaks off the relationship. "Let marriage be held in honor . . . and let the bed be undefiled" (Heb. 13:14). One partner accepts sex as love and directs his or her love toward the other. But anger and rejection come when love is not returned. Resentment and bitterness often come toward the other person, as well as blaming that one for causing you to violate your standards.

We have shared our very bodies and souls with another and when we don't find meaning in the relationship we feel that we have been stripped of our dignity and self worth. One reason God gives his loving commands is so our dignity will be preserved. That dignity is the sense of nobility, worthiness and honor God puts in everyone. That is a concept *unique to* human beings and makes us more than animals. The Bible spells out in numerous passages the inherent dignity and value in each person. That dignity and value come because we are handmade by God in his image — God's spiritual and moral image (Gen. 1:27). If young people can understand that and realize that they are valuable to their parents and to God, it can help them in overcoming the false assumptions of evolution that we are mere animals and, therefore, must behave like animals

Some try to justify sexual experience before marriage as profitable to see if the two are compatible, but studies show a *greater incidence of divorce* among couples who are sexually active before marriage. Often these first experiences are not pleasurable and leave greater emotional scars that must be dealt with in marriage. Emotional damage almost always comes as a result of fornication and adultery. There

has been a great increase in teenage suicide in recent years as sexual promiscuity has increased, along with increased pregnancy, abortion and STDs. Certainly this unrestrained lifestyle is one factor of the high suicide rate.

Unequal levels of commitment is an effect that is nearly always present in premarital sex and can bring emotional devastation. Especially for girls and women, the sex act has a psychologically binding effect. Sex increases the feeling of closeness to the partner. When this is not shared, one partner is always vulnerable to rejection. "What if I don't please him any longer?" If the boy is not as committed, the girl may feel she is merely being used by the guy to fulfill his physical lust. God's design for marriage brings protection against emotional suffering and builds self esteem as we realize we are unique creatures made in the image of our Creator. The sexual bonding as he created it in marriage is for our good. A young person who uses self control to say "no" to sex outside of marriage is building discipline and security into future relationships, because *waiting* gives your mind and body time to mature. If we do not learn to develop self-control *before* marriage, it makes it easier for a lack of self-control to lead to extra-marital affairs after marriage. Various studies have confirmed this fact.

Consider the sad case of a 31-year-old woman I talked to whose life is filled with guilt. She began having sex at age 19. She has admitted to having sex with five different men. She has never been married, but would like very much to be married. When I asked her why she began having sex, she said it was to create a bond, hoping that she would be able to hold on to her boyfriend. I asked her, "Did it work?" "No," she admitted. "Then why do you think it's going to work now?" She didn't have an answer. I repeated to her the old adage, "Why should he buy the cow when he gets the milk free?"

God teaches that our body is the dwelling place of God, described in 1 Corinthians 6 as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Sexual immorality disgraces God's temple.

Relational

There are relational reasons to wait for sex until marriage. For one thing, sex hinders *communication*. Sex is often the easy way out to those who have never learned to communicate intimately apart from the physical. Efforts to really get to know the person and their likes and dislikes are often hindered when sexual activity starts. Sex becomes the focus, and other aspects of the relationship have no chance to develop. And a relationship based solely on sex is in trouble, for you can spend only so much time in bed. When we delay physical involvement till its proper time, we allow the relationship to grow and mature. Friendship lays the foundation for love to blossom. By obeying God's plan to wait for sex, a couple can discover other ways to communicate that will do much in building a healthy relationship.

There is the involuntary *comparison of sex partners*. This is very harmful to both partners as they deal with mental flashbacks of earlier sexual encounters. These can be frustrating, disturbing and destructive to a couple who later desire to experience God's plan for true intimacy and love in their marriage. Minds are like computers, as all information is stored there. Intimate sexual encounters which involve senses of sight, sound and touch are not easily erased. Memories are called to mind by association. Something from within us (thoughts, feelings, actions) or from without (through our five senses) *remind us* of something similar from the past. If these earlier experiences involve hurt, pain, mistrust, exploitation, or guilt, then permanent scars are left which carry over into marriage. This is one reason rape and incest are so devastating in people's lives. The most important sex organ God gave us is the mind. When two people learn about sex together for the first time within marriage, they are creating vivid and unforgettable memories. These are positive memories that bind two people together in a loving, trusting union without any interferences from the past.

There are *damaged family relationships* as a result of sex before marriage. Often premarital sex is justified "because we are getting married anyway." But studies have shown that there are twice as many broken engagements among those couples and those are the ones more likely to be divorced or separated or to engage in adultery. One of the things God protects is the trust and assurance of fidelity that a proper sexual union brings.

There are *children* who come as a result of fornication and adultery. "Safe sex" is very often not safe as a prevention of pregnancy. Then a child is born without the proper foundation for nurturing that should be there. The exploding violence among teens has a direct relationship to children born out of wedlock and raised by a single parent. What God intended as a blessing of man and woman's love brings shame, embarrassment, and trouble.

Damaged relationships with parents also come as a result of unlawful sexual behavior. Godly, loving parents can forgive (and must do so), but they will experience hurt and pain for the young people who have strayed from the boundaries God has established

Last, there is often disappointment and regret at *lost virginity*. When we lose something we *know* is valuable, we feel regret. I do not know how many young people have told me, "I wish I had waited." God's way to protect us from that is to reserve sex for marriage. There is no chance of heartache later when our first sexual experience is with the person we will spend our lives with. When we wait until the wedding night, we have a most *special gift* that

A relationship based solely on sex is in trouble, for you can spend only so much time in bed. When we delay physical involvement till its proper time, we allow the relationship to grow and mature. Friendship lays the foundation for love to blossom. By obeying God's plan to wait for sex, a couple can discover other ways to communicate that will do much in building a healthy relationship.

has been reserved for our chosen lifelong companion. We establish a bond of trust and love that has no equal. God's design to limit sex to marriage protects us from hurting each other and provides the proper setting in which to express love through sex.

The story is told of a 15-year-old boy who looked and looked for a special girl for the true love of his life. He finally settled on a beautiful ring, and gave it to her as a token of his love. And as usually happens at that age, in a few months there was another "true love." Again he looked and looked, but could find nothing more beautiful than the same ring he had given before. As you might suspect, the same thing happened a few more times during his teen years. And then at 22 he did find his genuine true love. He looked and looked and looked to find a special gift for her on their wedding day. But all he could find was the same ring, which by now had lost its special significance. I think you get the point. There is no gift as special and sacred as the giving of one's body. But if we give it again and again before giving it to our marriage companions it will have lost its sacred meaning.

Now, we have seen some of the effects of unchastity and great emotional consequences that come with this sin. But as with all sin, God's forgiveness is freely given as we repent. We know in his eyes there are no big and little sins, and we know his love and power is great to help us overcome and deal with whatever consequences may come.

We know these things intellectually, but often the problem is we're not able to forgive self. We may feel we are "damaged goods," and can never be worthy to make a good husband or wife, or we may be married and still experiencing some of the guilt and emotional scars that come from unlawful sex either before or after marriage. We may feel cheap, used, unworthy of God's forgiveness and love.

But we must not limit God's power to forgive and the cleansing effects of Jesus' death on the cross. His blood was poured out for all sinners — those who crucified him as well as us. God's forgiveness never ends. We can come to him at any time for any reason and he promises to cleanse and make us whole again as we bring our lives into conformity with his will.

Dealing With This Sin

Four things are necessary in dealing with this and every sin.

1. *Admit that we have sinned and repent* as Jesus commanded in Luke 13:3. Repentance is a change of direction or course of action in our lives. God gives us strength to leave old ways behind and start on new paths. Our part is repentance; God's part is forgiveness.

2. *We must accept God's forgiveness.* He is willing and able and has promised to forgive. God always keeps his promises. When we accept his forgiveness, we accept his grace and Jesus' death as sufficient payment for our sins. If we reject God's forgiveness, we reject his grace and consider ourselves beyond forgiveness. We say God is not almighty and that he is unable to cope with the magnitude of what we have done. But God forgives and doesn't keep a score-card. "God is *faithful* to forgive and *cleanse* us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). For those who have never been baptized into Christ, this forgiveness comes upon the confession of our faith in Christ, and our immersion in water (baptism). The Scriptures clearly teach this in Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-5, etc. If this has already been done, and one has fallen into sin, a confession of sin and a determination to turn from it will cause God to hear our prayer for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

3. *When God forgives us, we must forgive self.* If you were the only person alive, Christ would have died for *you alone*. Do you really believe that? If you were the only person alive and you sinned, as Adam and Eve did, God would provide a Redeemer for you, just as he promised Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:15). If Christ could love you that much and be willing to forgive you, then surely you can learn to forgive yourself.

In living as a Christian, we fail from time to time. Yet every day God is waiting to forgive us. Accepting the fact that we sin doesn't mean we should wallow in unworthiness. God wants to lift us up and set us free from guilt. Only in that assurance can we again be useful in his service. Jesus' death on the cross is the good news of forgiveness to those who crucified him as well as to us who crucify him anew every time we sin. Christ didn't come to save the righteous, but to save sinners (Mark 2: 17; Luke 19:10). He isn't interested in our *proving to* him how good we are. His message is forgiveness. He wipes the record clean.

Spiritually we are a virgin again in God's eyes so we must see self as now clean, not tarnished.

4. *We must show fruits of repentance (Matt. 3:8).* If we are repenting, we are turning, changing in actions and thoughts. If we are single, it may mean breaking off a relationship, staying away from certain temptation. If we are married, we may have some of the same temptations to deal with, but we may just need to develop and exercise self control, to "think on right things," not old sins of the past (Phil. 4:8; Rom. 12:1-2).

Next, don't let Satan deceive you into believing, "Well, I blew it, so how can I help others?" Instead, we can use our time and influence to help other young people avoid sexual sins. You can tell them of the bad consequences that come better than one who has not fallen in that area. God can use a forgiven sinner, as we all are, to help accomplish his will in the lives of others.

Lastly, God can give us help in remolding our lives by reshaping our mind from within. He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). He has given us his truth (John 8:32). He has given us the power of his Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:20). He has given us his people (Gal. 6:1, 2).

(This material has come from our own observations in dealing with thousands of young people through the years, as well as from material prepared by Josh McDowell, Patsy Dawson and others. David Tant is an evangelist working with the Roswell Church of Christ, 11670 King Road, Roswell, GA.)

Income Tax Guide for Ministers and Religious Workers

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Vessels of Honor

We all have many choices to make in life. Most are trivial and a few are significant. When we wake up in the morning we may puzzle over which breakfast cereal to have, or whether to have cereal at all. A lady considers which color lipstick to wear today, which dress to put on, and which type of shoes is best for today, heels or flats. Tomorrow we probably won't even remember how the decision turned out. Many such inconsequential things are thought through and decided by us on a daily basis. We hardly recall the result from one day to the next.

Occasionally, however, we must decide about important things. So many have been the trifling issues in our lives, that if we are not careful, we may tend to treat them as trifling also and not give them the care and attention which such vital matters deserve. The determination to become a Christian is an issue of such consequence that most of us give it much thought and reflection before making the commitment.

This decision puts us into the "house of God" of which Paul speaks in 1 Timothy 3:15. But how much thought have we given to whether we shall be a vessel of honor or of dishonor in that house? In the second epistle to Timothy, Paul considers this question in Timothy's case. For, Timothy, you see, was making daily decisions which determined which type of vessel he would prove to be in God's house:

Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some unto honor, and some unto dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, meet for the master's use, prepared unto every good work (2 Tim. 2:20-21).



The Lord's house is a great house, not a small one. It is composed of people of all types and descriptions. And, like a grand mansion which has special fine china bowls in which to serve the most dignified guests, so is God's house. Yet that same great mansion has also a lowly bowl for feeding the dogs,

and a container for holding the trash. The point which Paul is making is that we may choose what type of vessel we are to be in the Lord's house, whether unto honor or dishonor. And, just because we have decided to be inside the house does not mean that we have also decided to be a vessel of honor. The two are not necessarily the same.

Who, then, is that person who is a vessel unto honor in the Master's house? Here are the apostle's thoughts on the subject:

The Man Who Purges Himself Of Sin

"If a man therefore purge himself of these . . ." writes the apostle. "Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness," he had said earlier (v. 19). And later in the chapter he said, "But flee youthful lusts . . ." (v. 22), and, "But foolish and ignorant questionings refuse . . ." (v. 23). His point is that you do not put the trash in the fine china. If there is trash in it, then it is not a vessel of honor. Nor do we feed the dog in a sterling silver vessel. If the dog is fed out of it, then it is not a vessel of honor. How it is used and what is put into it determines if it is a receptacle of esteem or of contempt. But Paul does not stop there.

We need to see ourselves in that light. If our lives are filled with the practice of sin, then we are vessels of shame. If, on the other hand, our lives are purified from these shameful things, we may be suited for service in the Master's house.

The Man Who Is Sanctified

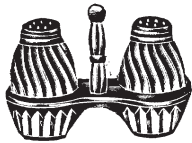
The idea of sanctification, mentioned in this context and elsewhere by the apostle Paul, is no great mystery. The notion is actually rather simple, though the word is intimidating to some of us on account of the eccentric, and even sometimes bizarre, interpretations which have been forced upon it by theologians. All it means is that something or someone is "separated," "set apart" or "set aside" for special uses. Most Bible dictionaries and lexicons define it as "to separate from the world and consecrate to God. To sanctify anything is to declare that it belongs to God." That pretty much says it all. In the Old Testament

such items as the tent of meeting (Exod. 29:44), the holy altar (Exod. 29:36), the offerings placed upon it (Exod. 29:27), the Sabbath day (Neh. 13:19-22), and the whole nation of Israel (Exod. 19:5, 6) were sanctified by God for his special uses.

The root from which the word “sanctify” comes is the same as that from which the word “saint” is also derived. We are “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in every place” (1 Cor. 1:2). Do we see ourselves as living to please ourselves or to please the one who “sanctified” us?

The Man Who Is Meet For The Master’s Use

The NIV renders this line as “useful to the Master.” A person who loves God wants not merely to be identified with him, but to be useful to him, helpful in his purposes and his work. Each of us has talents which may be beneficial to the cause of Christ, but whether they will be “useful” or not is another question. A hoe or shovel which has a broken handle is not very useful in the garden. A rake with many loose tines will not serve it’s purpose well in raking the yard. Likewise, a Christian whose life is not in proper order cannot be “useful to the Master.” This will ever be a matter of priorities. “Christ has no hands but our hands to do his work today, he has no feet but our feet to lead men in his way . . .” When we recognize that we, in the church, are the Lord’s only workers today, it becomes the more important that we live up to our responsibility to be “useful to the Master”!



The Man Who Is Prepared Unto Every Good Work

The vessel which can serve a useful purpose in the service of the Master is the one which is ready to hand. A container which is hidden in the deep recesses of a closet or a cabinet will not be of much value. Neither will the one which is still enclosed in the fancy box it came in, stored safely in the attic. The vessel of honor, the Master’s “favorite” is the one which is ready for use when work needs doing.



Every cook has her favorite pots and pans, often well used, and sometimes dented and scratched in the process. They may not look like something the TV chefs would use, but she would not part with them at any price. A new frying pan or kettle would have to be “seasoned” and that might take several weeks or even months. The old one is ready for work. It needs no preparation because preparation is already over. As God’s people we go through a similar process. We are at first clumsy and of little use in

Stand!

(Ephesians 6:10-18)

Where have all God’s soldiers gone,
When they should be standing strong
Against the wiles of the devil;
When they wish some wouldn’t meddle?

Where have all God’s soldiers gone —
Ones that dared to stand alone?
With nothing but His word they stood,
Faithfully doing all they could:

Men like Noah, Abraham, Elijah,
Daniel, Gideon, and Josiah.
And what about Stephen and the apostle Paul?
Against God’s foes, they stood tall!

But many men won’t stand today
(The way they stood in yesterdays)
Against the sins of those they know;
And by neglect, the sin will grow.

If you haven’t entered in the fight,
You stand on the side which opposes right.
Have you, my friend, considered the cost
Of being a soldier of His cross?

So, “Quit ye like men,”
Be courageous, and then
The sin among us will He cure,
And our Lord’s church will be kept pure.

Cara Belknap



the Lord’s kingdom. Over time, though, we become more and more useful if we have weathered the preparation stages as we should. This is where we need to be heading, so that we may be “vessels unto honor” in the service of our God. Once prepared, we need to remain at the ready, prepared for every opportunity to do good.

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John's Three Black Lies

J.W. Roberts, in his small commentary on the first epistle of John (124), quotes Stott as referring to the three lies which John discusses as “three black lies” of this epistle — thus the title of this article.

The “moral” black lie — 1 John 1:6. “If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth.” This is parallel to 2:4, “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” So, if we claim to have fellowship with God, but walk in darkness, John says we lie.

Since the Scripture is God's word (2 Tim. 3:16), this means that it is God calling such a person a liar. Now, if I called you a liar, it would not make you one; but, if God calls you a liar, you are it! God makes no mistakes.

“Walk” is a way of life and without reference to time; while “darkness” (sin) is one way of life — moral or spiritual darkness. John says, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (v. 5); so, there is no sin with God “at all.” The darkness of verse 6 is the same as the darkness of verse 5; and the light of verse 7 is the same as the light in verse 5. This suggests that only the sinless can have fellowship with God. This thought may seem to be contradictory to verses 8 and 10, which affirm our sinfulness. Not so!

John goes on to show how this sinfulness can be changed: It is changed by the blood of Christ (v. 7), but only on the condition that we confess our sins (v. 9). Christ is the propitiation for our sins (2:2), and he is our advocate with the Father (2:1); but, it still remains that in order to have fellowship with God, we must rid ourselves of our sins, since there is no darkness at all with the Father. When this is done, the door of fellowship with God is left ajar.

Now, if you claim to have fellowship with God and have not done the necessary things to remove your sins, John says you lie. “. . . all liars shall have their part in the lake with burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death” (Rev.21:8).

The doctrinal black lie — 1 John 2:22. “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ . . .” Keep in mind that this would be God calling such an one a liar. John has already said, “no lie is of the truth” (v. 21). Since God's word is the truth (John 17:17), this amounts to a denial of God's word. Further, this amounts to a denial of his divine Sonship (5:20), and, a denial of the Father — God himself.

The Gnostics believed that Jesus existed, but they denied that certain divine attributes were his. Matthew 1:23 argues that Jesus was “God with us.” If Jesus was God, he had to possess the attributes of God; otherwise he could not be “God with us.” In Mark 1:22, it is said that Jesus taught them “as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.” The scribes taught with delegated authority and that from their own priestly officials, and they taught their traditions, opinions, and the Rabbinical teachings. On the other hand, Jesus taught with inherent authority, and he taught the words of his Father (John 12:49). Being all-wise, he could cut through the traditions and teachings of men, and say, “This is it!” His word was law and there was no appeal from it (Ps. 119:89).

So, in both matter and manner Jesus proved himself to be the divine Son of God, the promised Messiah. If I make him any less than this, I make myself a liar. Again, “. . . all liars have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.”

The ethical (social) black lie — 1 John 4:20. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar . . .” So, if I claim to love God and hate a brother, I simply am not telling the truth — I am a liar. For the third time, keep in mind that this would be God calling such a liar.

In verse 19 we read, “We love him, because he first loved us.” This, of course, is in reference to God's love for us; and, who could deny this factual statement. However, this is not true when it comes to loving our brother. We love our brother whether or not he loves us.

In John 13:34-35, Jesus gave the whole world the right

The All-Sufficiency of the Church

As revealed on the pages of the New Testament, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ is all-sufficient. It is excellent or complete beyond all practical or theoretical improvement. It is positively suited to the spiritual needs of mankind. It is entirely without flaw, defect or shortcoming. In short, God's pattern for the church is an expression of perfection. Indeed, when it comes to spiritual things, God has given us all sufficiency in all things (2 Cor. 9:8). In writing to the Colossians, the apostle Paul made repeated reference to the concept of perfection: His aim was to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col. 1:28). This was no idle daydream, because in Christ Jesus we realize fully God's purpose for mankind (Col. 2:9-10). Those who are faithful to the divine pattern can stand perfect and complete in all the will of God (Col. 4:12).

A Perfect Standard

God has given the church an all-sufficient and perfect standard. By following the inspired Scriptures, the man of God can be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). James said the blessings of heaven are reserved for the one who "looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it" (Jas. 1:25). Peter alluded to the all-sufficiency of God's word when he said that God "has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3).

to judge whether or not we are his disciples, by the love we have one for another. Since love always does what is best for its object, our love sometimes appears to be cruel (see 2 Thess. 3:6). Man's love goes upward to God, outward to our fellows, and downward to our enemies.

"And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:21). Thus, we are commanded to love one another; and, if I fail to do so, and at the same time claim to love God, John says that I am a liar. And, once again, "all liars have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone."

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There is no need for any addition, subtraction or alteration to the word of God. Latter-day revelations like those claimed by Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, Ellen G. White, or the *Watchtower Society*, are unauthorized and unnecessary. The revealed faith has been once delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

A Perfect Work

God has given the church an all-sufficient and perfect work. It is ideally suited to fulfill the work of evangelism, edification, and benevolence. The first two responsibilities are affirmed in Matthew's account of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Brethren should be built up in the most holy faith (Jude 20-21). The church should also come to the aid of needy saints (Acts 2:44-45).

There is no need for any addition, subtraction, or alteration to God's pattern for the work of the church. Let us not become side-tracked with a substitute mission. Why should we forsake the high and holy task of seeking the lost for the inane trivialities of the social gospel? When tempted to misdirect our energy and squander our strength, let us remember Nehemiah's words to Sanballat: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down" (Neh. 6:1-3).

A Perfect Worship

God has given the church an all-sufficient and perfect worship. Since worship is directed towards God, he has the right to dictate the kind of worship that he desires. The Psalmist said, "Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Ps. 29:2). Jesus said that true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). The book of Acts records that the early church engaged in the following acts of worship: Lord's supper, giving, singing, prayer, and preaching (Acts 2:42).

There is no need for any addition, subtraction or alteration to God's pattern for the worship of the church. As the author and object of true worship, God has the right to dictate the form of acceptable worship. Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men renders our worship null and void (Matt. 15:8-9).

A Perfect Organization

God has given the church an all-sufficient and perfect organization. Each congregation is independent and autonomous, answerable directly to Christ, the head of the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Elders are to be appointed in each local church (Acts 14:23), where they are to shepherd the flock that is among them (1 Pet. 5:1-2). This arrangement is ideally designed for the upbuilding of the body (Eph. 4:11-16).

There is no need for any addition, subtraction, or alteration to God's pattern for the organization of the church. The manifold wisdom of God is reflected in the simple order of the New Testament church (Eph. 3:10-11). Religious hierarchies and human institutions are, therefore, both unscriptural and unnecessary. Let us not allow para-church organizations to supplant the church in its God-given role.

A Perfect Appeal

God has given the church an all-sufficient and perfect appeal. We have the ideal means of appealing to the lost. Jesus simply stated, "And you shall know the truth, and the

truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Man is drawn to God through hearing and learning the word of God (John 6:44-45).

There is no need for any addition, subtraction, or alteration to the appeal that is offered to sinners. Jesus recognized that many followed him only because they ate of the loaves and were filled (John 6:22-27). A carnal appeal cannot bring men to God. Only the truth is sufficient for such a task.

Conclusion

The church is all-sufficient. It enjoys a perfect standard. It has been given a perfect work. It engages in a perfect expression of worship. Its organization cannot be improved upon. It offers a perfect appeal to a lost and dying world. Yet, these consummate qualities are often unappreciated. Only those who have been transformed by the saving gospel can truly understand that God's will is good, acceptable, and perfect (Rom. 12:1-2). Hopefully, as we draw closer to God, we will develop a deeper appreciation for God's simple, yet sublime, pattern for the church.

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Decency Unconstitutional

Larry Ray Hafley

On November 5, 1996, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that a 1990 law linking standards of decency to federal arts funding was unconstitutional. The earlier law had been passed when a furor arose over federal funding of erotic, homosexual "art." Now, it has been decided that the government's funding of the arts "must be viewpoint neutral," said Judge James Browning.

In other words, the most vile, disgusting depictions of sexual acts and of private, body parts may be protected and funded as works of art, regardless of what message the pictures present.

Remember, this is the same legal system that forbids voluntary prayer in schools and makes it a crime to post a copy of the Ten Commandments in school buildings. While being protected from prayer predators and Ten Commandment hangers, it is comforting to live in a country where it is still constitutional to slaughter unborn babies and pay taxes to support erotic, homosexual art! Are we fortunate, or what?!

Imagine the poor people all over this world who do not have the freedoms that we take for granted. They cannot kill the unborn child; they are not allowed to pay their hard earned money to display homosexual pornography at government expense; their children are forced to view copies of the Ten Commandments, or other incendiary moral codes, in the hallways of their local schools. But, thank the good (censored), we do not have to put up with such things. On the one hand, many in our government consider the execution of murderers an immoral act, while on the other, they clamor for the rights of a serial, suicide doctor.

Six-year olds who kiss their class mates are suspended for sexual harassment. Bibles cannot be passed out in schools, but condoms are available from the school nurse. Religious displays cannot be placed on government property, but government may fund "homoerotic images." Under no circumstances must one disturb the egg of the unborn eagle or cut down a tree inhabited by a spotted owl, but if your wife is inconveniently pregnant, you may kill the unwanted baby. You may gather outside a penal institu-

Roger Hillis

An Open Letter to Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, Mike Cope, et al.

I may not be very bright, but I don't understand why you don't just leave the churches of Christ. You no longer believe most of the things that make the Lord's church distinctive, so why do you stick around and, under the guise of unity, try to convince others to stop believing those things?

For instance, if you really think that it is all right to worship with instrumental music, why not just go to the Christian church? They already have it; they have no problem with it and you have no problem with it, but those of us who still believe in the silence of the Scriptures do have a problem with its use. So why don't you go where they believe what you do?

When it comes to the subject of baptism, why not go to any of the mainstream denominations? Rubel has said that salvation is wholly of grace and that man does not contribute one whit to his salvation. Max has taught that salvation is received in prayer and that one should then be baptized because he is already saved. Lots of religious groups teach this. Here, you would have a wide selection of choices. However, this would probably eliminate most conservative Christian churches because they still believe in baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Perhaps this means you would feel more comfortable with the Baptists, for example.

And, if you so despise what the phrase "the church of Christ" represents, why do you still insist on using that name religiously? Why don't you change the name of the congregations where you preach? Let me suggest some logical alternatives.

tion and pray for the government to do away with capital punishment, but you must not assemble on the sidewalk in front of an abortion clinic and pray and petition for the life of an unborn baby.

Sadly, a country that has lost its moral and spiritual compass will one day ban articles like this, calling them indecent and unconstitutional. It is just a matter of time (Rom. 1:18-32; 2 Tim. 3:1-13).

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My personal favorite would be for you to call yourselves "not a church of Christ." Surely that would make a statement about how wrong you think you have been in the past and it would clearly separate you from those mistakes and from those of us who still want to use that descriptive phrase (Rom. 16:16).

If you don't like that, how about "The Unity Church"? This would emphasize your willingness to compromise almost anything so everyone can pretend to be united biblically.

Perhaps you would prefer "The No Pattern Church." After all, this is the basis for your new views. You have concluded that the New Testament is not a pattern for the church, but simply a love letter from God. (If you are really lucky, maybe Pat Boone might even let you call yourselves the "Love Letters in the Sand" church.) Maybe you would like "The New Wineskins Church" or "The Church of the Second Incarnation" or "The Core Gospel Church." See how easy this would be! Surely you are all smart enough to put your heads together and think of a new name that wouldn't embarrass you like the one you use now.

Can't you see that your desire for "unity" is being more and more divisive? If you do not believe what the Lord's church has stood for these many years, why continue to proselyte her members (Matt. 23:15)? There are plenty of other groups that believe and practice what you now believe and teach. Why not go to one of them?

If you don't want to do that, why not just officially separate yourselves from the churches of Christ that you are so ashamed of and give yourselves a new name? That would help others not to confuse you with the legalists and Pharisees you believe the rest of us to be.

Don't go away mad, but it seems that you really could do the Lord's church a big favor by just going away. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (1 John 2:19).

Or maybe you could just repent of teaching false doctrine and return to the Lord.

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“Mother” continued from front page

rights be accorded those women who choose to remain in the home and make motherhood their number one priority in life? These latter are fast becoming the minority, and are beginning to be regarded as second-class women. I believe that we should take the time in our speech, and space in our writing, to commend every woman who wants to devote all of her time to being a woman, a wife, and a mother.

The Bible is filled with examples of “mothers of Israel” who emulate and exonerate the institution of motherhood. One mother’s love for her child was so strong that she was willing to let an impostor have her child rather than see the child put to death (1 Kings 3:26, 27). But, another mother encouraged her daughter to dance before a king and to have John the Baptist’s head cut off (Matt. 14:3-11).

We have all seen children creating havoc in stores, church buildings, and other public places while their mothers were either nowhere to be seen or were totally oblivious to the actions or safety of their own offspring. News headlines and police blotters are filled with accounts of child neglect, and even abuse and murder. But I noticed something last summer that reaffirmed my faith in mothers and motherhood.

Several mothers were together while their offspring played nearby. It was difficult to tell which offspring belonged to which mother, but all of the mothers seemed to be keeping an eye out for the little ones. If a problem seemed to be developing, one of the mothers would go check it out. If some bully began to mistreat his or her playmates, a mother would discipline the rebel. On one occasion, the father intervened in a squabble, and sent one of the big bullies sailing with its tail tucked between its legs. I mean, literally. You see, I live in the country, and a herd of cows and calves graze, feed, sleep, and play in the field by our house. And as J.D. Tant used to say, “Before God,” these cows acted more like mothers than do some mothers of the human race. I noticed that some mothers saw to it that their calves were fed and cared for even before the mother’s own personal ambitions were satisfied. My heart took hope. If all else fails, maybe we can turn to the beasts of the field and the fowl of the air for some basic lessons in motherhood. Once we learn the basics, we can begin reading our Bibles instead of reading after psychologists intoxicated with human wisdom, and listen to the Lord instead of some self-styled liberator who only wants to bring the women and children of our country into bondage of the flesh.

I wrote the following poem in 1988 when I was in a meeting at Monticello, Florida. The sister in whose home we were staying received a telephone message one day that her mother had died. I noticed tears in her eyes when she hung up the phone. I can’t stop tears for mothers, but maybe I can help fellow pilgrims see through them more clearly.

A Tear for Mother

There are, it seems, so many kinds of tears
Those born of pain, of sadness, and tears of joy as well;
Some kind will follow us all through our years
But we’ll grow wiser since that first, lone teardrop fell.

We have a different feeling in our heart
For father, sister, brother, children, loved ones all;
It’s there when first we meet and when we part,
Renewed by mem’ries, songs, by pictures on the wall.

For mothers, too, we have a special love
Because the love they give is special, diff’rent still;
It’s gentle like the call of mourning dove,
And melancholy like the woodland whip-poor-will.

So, mothers, be a mother while you may,
For no one else can fill your place, Be so dear;
And when it comes your time to go away,
Somewhere there’ll drop for you a special tear.

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“Testifying” continued from page 2

their touching experiences of washing a child, feeding the hungry, and clothing those who were ill-clad, our brother said he changed his mind about testimonies in worship. Scripture did not change his mind, but experience did.

As a matter of fact, our brother belittles those who want to find Scripture for such testimony services before they practice them. He wrote,

Most Churches of Christ have not practiced personal testimonies. One reason has to do with the view held by many that the New Testament is a blueprint for every practice in worship. This view holds that there is a clear pattern of worship in the New Testament, and it is to be replicated exactly in every age. It doesn’t seem to matter that the New Testament does not give a standard order of what worship was to be for any church. The reasoning goes like this: If a worship practice was present in the primitive church, that act of worship merits repetition today. If the New Testament is silent on certain activities, they had best be left out of our worship today. If you follow the reasoning, the conclusion is that we should not do “testimonies” because we have no specific, unquestionable illustrations of such being done in an assembly of worship in the New Testament.

At least this view takes Scripture very seriously, and that

should be applauded. However, to use the New Testament as a detailed description of worship that outlines every form and sequence of the service is a mistake. . . . How one congregation orders its worship making use of those various elements, is up to each congregation. That is why Christian worship services look different in different cultures, and yet each one may be thoroughly acceptable and honoring to God (*Wineskins* 3:5, 31).

Obviously, this person has rejected the “blueprint” of the New Testament as the answer to whether or not one should have testimonies in worship. Having rejected the Bible as a “blueprint,” what use is there to quote the Bible to such a person? If one found a direct statement that said, “Thou shalt not have testimonials in worship,” he could set that aside as a legalistic interpretation of the Bible, binding cultural items of worship on people of another culture, or just reply, “I know that is what the apostle thought, but I do not agree with him.”

If there is no fixed pattern for worship, there can be no unscriptural worship. Paul said, “. . . for where no law is, there is no transgression” (Rom. 4:15). Consequently, any kind of worship is just as scriptural as any other. The group that brings in a rock “Christian” band, does not partake of the Lord’s supper (or partakes of it using light bread and water), who prays in Mary’s name, who teaches tithing, and preaches from the *Book of Mormon* is just as scriptural as the church in Jerusalem that “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42), according to this logic. Without a divinely revealed pattern, there is no unscriptural worship.

What Is Wrong With Testifying?

The thing that is wrong with testifying is that it makes faith rest on uninspired words rather than inspired words. Brother Dozier shows that is true from his own article. He related an incident in which his daughter Amy had “testified” to a Japanese friend and concluded, “Yasuyo was interested in the teaching about God, but what touched her heart most were the personal testimonies my daughter and others shared with her. . . .The message of Christ is of primary importance, but it very well may be Amy’s personal testimony that someday helps lead Yasuyo to Jesus Christ.” Note that Amy’s personal testimony would carry more weight than the divinely revealed message of first century eyewitnesses!

Our faith does not rest on the fallible testimony of people such as Amy, but it rests upon the divinely revealed word of God. Paul wrote, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The personal testimony of Amy or anyone else cannot produce saving faith! Our faith rests on the miracles that Jesus performed in the presence of eyewitnesses. John wrote, “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples,

which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:30-31).

The Muslim who visits poverty stricken regions of Mexico and Nassau can produce the same kind of testimony as the children in his local church. Does their washing a filthy baby, clothing the ill-clad, and feeding the hungry prove that Muhammad is a prophet? If not, how can our children doing the same prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? A person giving his personal, subjective testimony about some religious “encounter” proves absolutely nothing about Jesus!

This issue focuses attention on the heart of what is wrong with some preaching among us. Gifted speakers are able to relate some emotionally moving human interest story that will move one to tears, relate another story that causes one to break out in laughter, and wrap up his “sermon” with a third story that makes one feel warm inside. However, such stories do not and cannot built faith. Faith comes by hearing the word of God. Churches that are fed a steady diet of preaching that has little or no Bible content are filled with men who, at the very best, have a weak faith!

Conclusion

We do not need to change our public assemblies to have “testifying.” We already have all the testimony we need to create and build faith — that is the inspired words of the first century witnesses. What can the words of a person born 2000 years later prove about what occurred in the first century? Rather, let us preach the testimony of the witnesses. One who will not hear the witnesses of the Bible is not of Christ. John wrote, “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6).

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Benevolence Needed

Brother Jerry Sayre, preacher of the South Marion church, Marion, Indiana, is in need of your prayers and financial help. On October 9 a cancerous lesion on the base of his tongue was discovered. On October 24 major surgery was done, the lower lip and jaw cut in half, the tongue split, the cancer excised, and 350 stitches used to close these wounds. He was in the hospital for six days and preached again on November 16.

Forty treatments of twice daily radiation were begun November 17. A feeding tube was inserted in case he could not swallow. He had a violent reaction to medicine the doctors used to relax him for this insertion. He had five seizures, and in ICU that night he had a heart attack. The tube was removed as it did not work. Radiation began again on December 22.

Medical bills total about \$155,000, as of Dec. 31. They have no medical insurance except the "Caring and Sharing" plan with brethren. As of this date "Caring and Sharing" has not paid anything. The South Marion church and its elders continue to stand with brother Sayre, continuing his wages, helping in many other ways, doing the preaching, and allowing him to preach periodically when he feels like doing so.

Brother Sayre is a faithful man and preacher. If congregations and individuals could help them at this time, it would be greatly appreciated. The address is: Jerry and Martha Sayre, 420 W. Harreld Road, Marion, IN 46952. The phone number is (765) 662-7457. All funds will be acknowledged and accounted for, and donors notified. Please remember the Sayres in your prayers. — **Bill Cavender, 3311 Yorkshire Ct., Murfreesboro, TN 37130 (615-890-7198).**

Preachers Needed

Morrilton, Arkansas: A full-time gospel preacher is needed for this congregation that averages 35-40 in attendance. Interested parties must be able to secure some support. Inquiries may be directed to Westside Church of Christ, 1218 W. Childress St., Morrilton, AR 72110, Email, wsexton @IPA.net.

Tompkinsville, Kentucky: The Cyclone church of Christ is looking for a full-time preacher. Attendance averages about 50-60 attending at the Sunday morning services; the church has about 40 members. The congregation is able to supply

approximately \$350 per week toward a preacher's support and the rest of one's support must be attained from other places. The church prefers an experienced or retired man to work with them. Contact James Page at 502-487-6814 or John Jones at 502-427-4266.

Pampa, Texas: The Westside church of Christ, 1612 W. Kentucky, Pampa, Texas 79065 is looking for a preacher with the work beginning June 1, 1998. If interested, please contact the church at the above address or call 806-665-2572 or 806-665-4981.

Orlando, Florida: Effective September 1, 1998 Wayne Sullivan will be retiring from full-time work. The Azalea Park church of Christ is looking for a preacher who would be available to begin work in September 1998. The church is self-supporting. If interested, please contact the Azalea Park Church of Christ, 6800 Lake Underhill Rd., Orlando, FL 32822, or call 407-277-1057 or 407-277-7931.

Field Reports



Mark Garner, 525 Elm Ave., Circleville, OH 43113: The church that meets at South Blomfield has been working to establish a congregation in this area of northern Pickaway County. We currently do not have our own building and are meeting in the town Municipal Building. South Bloomfield is strategically located about 15 miles south of Columbus which is rapidly growing. This area has been in need of a faithful congregation and we believe this community can benefit greatly by our presence. Right now we are a small congregation and have as immediate aims to increase faithful membership to the point where we have adequate faithful men to ordain elders. We are working to establish our presence in this area through advertisements, letters to area churches, and door to door. Our door to door work is currently underway in the South Bloomfield municipality. The goal of this work is to visit every home in the community (pop. about 800). In addition, we fellowship with the congregation meeting in Mexico and would like to periodically submit field reports from brother Rogelio Reynoso and the saints' work there.

If you are visiting the South Bloomfield or Columbus area, please come and visit. We meet at 5023 S. Union St. (Municipal Building).

Jim McDonald, P.O. Box 155032, Lufkin, Texas 75915-5032, 409-637-0229: Sunday, September 28, brought to a conclusion my work with the Austin Street church in Marshall, Texas. Tim and Kathy Stringer are now living in Marshall and working with the congregation there.

I left November 7 for my eighth trip to the Philippines, returning on December 8. In 1998 I will leave in late March for the Philippines preaching in April and into May. For the past five years I have become more interested in the work of our Lord in that nation and because that work has become so demanding of my time, I have determined to cease preaching on a full-time basis for a congregation bringing to an end 46 years of "local work" in eight different congregations in Texas and Arkansas. I will not likely spend more than two months each year in the Philippines, but I will be busy writing and printing tracts for the brethren, having the tracts translated into three of their dialects, as well as giving more time to further the work there in whatever way I can.

My wife, Betty, and I are living permanently in Lufkin, Texas where we will worship with the Loop 287 congregation. During the time I am not in the Philippines, I will be available for appointment preaching and meetings as time and health permits. I also will be happy to give a personal report to interested congregations on the progress of the churches in the Philippines.

Michael J. Davis, Rt. 15, Box 1154, Bedford, IN 47421: Several months have passed since we first proclaimed our desire of preaching a multiplicity of gospel meetings. It seems appropriate to inform you of our present status as we thank God for his abundance care and keeping. Six opportunities have afforded us since August to preach meetings. From these efforts, others have been requested and scheduled. We have only two meetings scheduled for 1998. Good interest and fine attendance have been seen in each of these meetings. One precious soul was baptized during an effort in Ohio.

Many have asked us to preach when not engaged in meetings. Stone Belt Center (the parent company of three workshops for the mentally disabled) hired me to drive their supply/delivery truck. No less than 40 hours of work and benefits are enjoyed. The income, though not extravagant, is adequate. The greatest agreed benefit is quite astounding! With at least three months prior notice, they permit me the time to preach meetings and return to this job. It is an arrangement for which we daily thank God.

Additionally, the brethren meeting at 825 West Second St. in Bloomington, Indiana recently asked us to teach their Wednesday night adult class and preach the second, third, and fifth Sundays of each month. A weekly bulletin, radio work and personal work are also enjoyed aspects of this

labor. We have agreed to help them through June 1998 with the promise to evaluate their needs and ours at that time. During this arrangement, they are free to seek a full-time man as it is not our intent to return to located work. The first Sunday of each month, we are helping the small congregation in Casey, Illinois. The fourth Sunday we work with the brethren at Yale, Illinois.

Please keep us and this work in your prayers. God has proven his care of us and we pray to faithfully continue our service for him in this manner. We would delight in hearing from you and the Lord's work where you worship.

New Building

Batesville, Arkansas: The Gap Road church of Christ which meets at Gap Road and East Harrison Street in Batesville, Arkansas is moving ¼ mile east of its present location on East Harrison Street. We are moving into a new building by the end of 1997. Our name will be changed to the Quail Valley church of Christ. Our address will remain P.O. Box 2751, Batesville, AR 72503. Our actual location will be 4104 E. Harrison Street. The Gap Road church began in the early 1960s in large part by the efforts of James Bruce. James and his wife, Maxine, were killed in an automobile accident between Batesville and Heber Springs, Arkansas earlier this year.

Preacher Available

Erik Shaffer, 5037 Wilkins Ave., Oakdale, CA: I am a single young man looking for the opportunity to preach the gospel of truth. This past summer I was involved in a part-time preacher training program with John Trokey at the congregation in Oakdale, California. I found the experience very enlightening and realize that there is a lot more to learn. I have dedicated my life to becoming a preacher. I am ready to take on any responsibility. If interested, please contact me at 209-847-5197 or Email wfc7986@aol.com. My resume and letters of recommendation can be sent upon request.

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