

Magazine

Godly Families in the Local Church Who Get Involved Together

Chris Reeves

Where have all the godly families gone? They are disappearing rapidly. They are disappearing from society due to the high rate of divorce, “dead-beat” dads, child abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual), and juvenile delinquency. Godly families are also disappearing from local churches of Christ. I see more and more parents attending by themselves without one or more of the children. When you ask the parent where the child is, they offer up some flimsy excuse as to why they could not come. I see more and more disinterested teenagers staying at home or going out with their friends instead of attending a local gospel meeting. I see more and more grandparents bringing grandkids because one parent or both parents have left the church. I see more and more single parents and divorcees in the Lord’s church.

The faithful, family unit is slowly becoming a thing of the past. Today, families with their busy schedules find themselves living separate lives and doing less and less together. They have two or more jobs, two or more cars going in different directions, and various electronic gadgets laying around the house that occupy their attention (TVs, cell phones, DVD players, X-box games, computers, Internet, instant messaging, iPods, etc.). Rarely do families eat together, talk together, read the Bible together, worship

together, attend a gospel meeting together, visit together or do good works together.

Bible Families Who Got Involved Together

In Bible times there were godly families who stayed together and served God together. We certainly need families like this today! I think of those families in the days of

Nehemiah who worked together and worshiped together. There is a family mentioned in Nehemiah 3:12, Shallum and his daughters, who worked together in rebuilding a portion of the wall. Some parents today cannot (or will not) get their children to help them do the Lord’s work in the local church. The children are too into worldly activities to get involved. But this

does not have to be. There is room in the kingdom for family members to do their part. Families are also mentioned in Nehemiah 8:2-3 who came together to worship God and hear the reading of God’s word. These families stayed from early morning until midday, and were attentive at the same time. Can you imagine such a thing? Some families today do well just to sit together through a one or two hour service.

When we come to the New Testament, we find Bible

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In Essentials, Unity (2)

Mike Willis

The well-known maxim made popular in the restoration movement says, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, love." In this article, I would like to consider the truth expressed by "in essentials, unity."

This maxim recognizes that there are some fundamental beliefs about Christianity regarding which no compromise can be tolerated. Is this concept biblical? The answer is "yes." The Bible does teach that Christians must come to the unity of the faith in reference to those truths revealed in Scripture. Paul wrote,

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ (Eph. 4:1-7).

John said that those who do not bring the "doctrine of Christ" are not to be fellowshipped.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

The resurrection, for example, was a doctrine concerning which Paul could not tolerate doctrinal diversity. He marked as having departed from the faith those who taught that the resurrection is past already (2 Tim. 2:18-20). John could not tolerate those who denied that Christ came in the flesh (1 John 4:1-6).

These evidences confirm the conclusion that there are some things with reference to which one must have doctrinal conformity before there can be unity of the Spirit.

Unity-in-Doctrinal Diversity

The modern ecumenical movement teaches that doctrinal conformity is not essential for unity, that brethren can practice unity in diversity. In the early years of the ecumenical movement, authors distinguished "gospel"

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Troubled Over Death

Connie W. Adams

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:27-28). Death is a common experience of all, whether rich or poor, mighty or weak, famous or little known. Yet, many never think about it until they are faced with an incurable disease, or the death of a friend or family member. The very thought of it strikes terror to the hearts of many. Even those faithful to the Lord and who die in hope, want to put it off as long as possible.

Things We Need to Know

1. All living things die. Man has this in common with the animal creation. “For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast; for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all return to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?” (Eccl. 3:19-21). Both man and beast have breath. They both came from dust and shall return to dust. But the spirit of man ascends at death and that of the beast does not.

2. Death severs our participation in what continues in the earth. “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward: for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun” (Eccl. 9:5-6). This passage does not teach that we are unconscious in death, but simply that when death occurs, we have no more part in what takes place in the earth.

3. When the body returns to dust, the spirit returns to God. There is life after death, in a different realm and on another plane. “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7).

4. At best, life is short. James said, “For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (Jas. 4:14). A Psalmist said, “The days of our years are threescore and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Ps. 90:10).

5. While there is a natural aging process which changes everything from the strength of the hands and legs, voice, sight, color of the hair, and function of the teeth, there is also the potential for the untimely
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death, the unexpected and accidental. Consider Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 in that light. Some of us will live to old age and some will die younger and before the normal aging process is completed. That is just how it is.

False Views of Death are Harmful

1. “It was his time to die.” This is a common view. It is fatalistic and Calvinistic. This implies that God has a time clock set for everyone and when the time is up, that person dies. This ignores the fact that God made us with the power of choice and the choices we make affect what happens to us. When David was fleeing from the wrath of Saul, he thought about going to a place called Keilah. He entreated the Lord and asked if the men of Keilah would turn him over to Saul. The Lord’s reply was that they would do exactly that. So, David changed his plans and did not go there and they therefore did not deliver him into the hands of Saul. The point? Circumstances alter cases.

2. “It was Gods will.” This is small comfort to a parent whose child was killed by a drunk driver. That makes God the villain. I don’t pretend to understand why some things happen as they do, but we must be careful not to “charge God foolishly.”

3. “Why did God allow this to happen to me?” Sickness and disease are part of the process of dying. Death entered the world when sin did. This was in consequence of the Devil’s lie, Eve’s deception and Adam’s participation in it. Paul wrote, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Verse 17 shows that what we lost in Adam, by the grace of God we gain in Christ. “For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.”

Those who do not believe the word of God have no basis for understanding either life or death. If you want to blame someone for death, then blame the Devil. Blame Eve for listening to him and Adam for listening to her. Death is the penalty for sin. Had sin not occurred there would be no mortuaries, cemeteries, grave markers, or funeral processions. But it did occur and these are the natural outgrowths of it.

As the Lord warned King Hezekiah, “Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die and not live,” so would we all be well advised to keep our affairs in order, for we too shall die.

Lessons Learned at a Funeral

“It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made bet-

ter. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth” (Eccl. 7:2-4). I used to hear preachers read this at funerals and wondered what it meant. The Preacher is not condemning either feasting or laughter. He is showing what is “better,” that is, more useful and productive of good. He is telling us that there are more practical lessons to learn at a funeral than at a party. What can we learn?

1. The brevity of life and the certainty of death are clearly evident at a funeral. We are made to think of our own mortality. What will people say about me when I am stretched out in the same way? Will anyone care? What is eternity like? Am I ready? It is useful to ponder these issues which we are made to face at a funeral.

2. Funerals bring out the good in people. Those who come to shake your hand, embrace you and shed a tear; those who prepare and bring food or who help you attend to details; those who say comforting things, all testify that there is good in people. If that is not true, then we are wasting time to preach the gospel. We blame sin on the fact that, after all we are just human! And it is human to do wrong. “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). But it is also human to do right. Why do friends, family, brethren and neighbors stand by you at such a time? They are just being human!

3. Funerals help us with priorities. Jesus said, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). In that same context he spoke of a rich man who planned for everything except death. “This night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:20-21).

4. Funerals help us count our blessings. The next time you attend a funeral and some woman is burying her husband, and you still have yours, thank God for him and show him you love him. Or when you see someone grieving over a dead mother or father, while you yet have yours, then determine to call more often and go see them while you can. When you agonize with one who has lost a child, while yours are still with you, then double your effort to show your love to them and do your part to train them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

5. Funerals provide occasion to “weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15). “But I don’t know what to say.” Don’t worry about saying anything. Your handshake, your embrace, the expression of your face will say it all. Eloquently. Just be there. Don’t try to say something profound and please don’t try to explain what you don’t understand. Unless you have been there, don’t say “I know how you feel.” No you don’t. Even if you have been there, everyone hurts differently.

Will Sinners Be Reduced To Nonexistence?

John Isaac Edwards

Among “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” according to the Church Manual compiled by the General Conference Committee, Seventh-day Adventists believe: “That the finally impenitent, including Satan, the author of sin, will, by the fires of the last day, be reduced to a state of nonexistence, becoming as though they had not been, thus purging the universe of God of sin and sinners.”

If sinners will be reduced to a state of nonexistence:

1. The Lord Did Not Teach It. In his teaching concerning the judgment verdict, Jesus declared, “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). The Lord taught that the abode of the sinner, following the judgment, will be commensurate with the final abode of the righteous. “And these (cursed sinners) shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matt. 25:46).

2. Paul Did Not Know It. If the doctrine of annihilation be true, the Lord did not inform Paul of it and unto Paul did not the Holy Spirit reveal it, thus into all truth was he not guided (John 16:13), for, in all his writings, not a word is there said about it! Since the things written of Paul bear

the divine label of “scripture” (2 Pet. 3:15-16), and “All scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16-17), those who believe sinners will be reduced to nonexistence believe something that is not of God! To the contrary, Paul taught, “wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil” (Rom. 2:5-9). Let the proponents of nonexistence make sense out of nonsense by telling us how a soul can experience tribulation and anguish when it is as though it had not been!

3. The Hebrew Writer Did Not Pen It. The epistle to the Hebrews reads, “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God. . . . It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Let the advocates of nonexistence explain how annihilation is “sorer punishment” than death without mercy!

4. John Did Not See It. The Spirit, by vision unto John, revealed, “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10). Does that sound like a state of nonexistence to you?

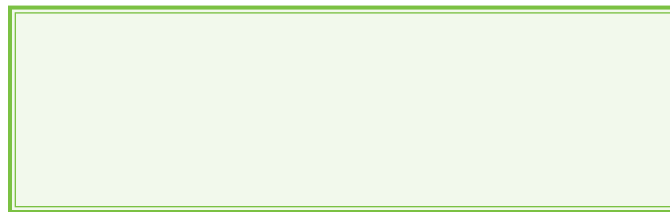
The Scriptures nowhere teach that sinners will be reduced to a state of nonexistence, but that they will suffer an unending state of conscious torment.

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Funerals get our attention far better than parties. That is why the wise man said the “house of mourning” is better than the “house of feasting” for “the living will lay it to his heart.”

(Next article will deal the Coping With Grief.)

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Sodom and Gomorrah . . . Out of the Ashes

Jesse Flowers

Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground (Gen. 19:24-25).

Long ago, in the days of Abraham, God overthrew these very wicked and corrupt cities. Their sin was “very grave” (Gen. 18:20) in the eyes of Jehovah. The perverse sin they were grossly guilty of was homosexuality (Gen. 19:4-11). A sin against nature itself that God repeatedly and forcefully condemned under both Covenants (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Two countries of the world have very recently taken the place of Sodom and Gomorrah of old. On June 28, Canada’s House of Commons passed legislation to legalize gay marriage. The bill grants same-sex couples the same legal rights as heterosexual couples. The bill is expected to pass the Senate with ease and become federal law by the end of July. Then on June 30, the Spanish Parliament legalized gay marriage. The bill that passed by a vote of 187 to 147, allows same-sex couples to adopt children and inherit each others’ property.

Brethren, these are scary times that we live in. I have great anxieties, as you do, for the direction our own country is headed in regard to the legalization of same-sex marriages. Although presently Massachusetts is the only state that allows gay marriages (Vermont and Connecticut have approved same-sex civil unions), many other states have lawmakers and determined citizens who are fighting tooth-and-nail to get laws passed elsewhere to legalize same-sex marriages. Unless there remains a majority that oppose this sinful union, how long will it be before the United States of America legalizes same-sex marriages nationwide? Maybe not in our lifetime, but what about our children and grandchildren? How terrifying that Sodoms and Gomorrahs are rising from the ashes all around us!

How true and relevant to our times are the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy. “But evil men and seducers shall *wax worse and worse*, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). Or as the apostle described those that walk in the ways of Satan, “who, being *past feeling*, have *given themselves* over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Eph. 4:19). How have countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Spain, and even our own country reached this point of depravity? In my opinion, it can be summed up in one word: *toleration*.

Webster defines tolerance as: “sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one’s own; the act of allowing something; the allowable deviation from a standard.” There has been a push decade after decade (that I have witnessed even in my own life) for people to become more tolerant to those around them with whom they differ. A person who is not tolerant of another is branded as being a bigot and evil, and soon becomes a social outcast.

Let me point out a few ways that our society has become very tolerant toward some sins that we use to be intolerant of.

1. Our society has become tolerant toward adulterers and fornicators by identifying them as simply “living together.”

2. Rather than condemning sexual immorality and teaching abstinence our young people are told to practice “safe-sex.”

3. Instead of warning about the serious danger of alcohol consumption, drinkers of wine and beer are told to just “drink responsibly” and if you have had one too many then make sure you have a “designated driver.”

Heaven's Choice or Hell's Work?

Bobby L. Graham

I recently received an email message that began in the following way:

Heaven's Choice—Just a Click Away

Bobby, The Lord has bigger plan for you than just sitting here reading this email. Like taking your match from heaven to dinner, or to a movie, or to the altar.

Looking For This Match From Heaven?

Let Where Christians Meet take care of that—just sign up and we will hook you up with hundreds of worthy Christian singles—Click to Find your Heavenly Match.

How excited I became when I realize the Lord had sent me a special message, tailored for my special circum-

stances! He even called my name. I did notice, however, that the Lord does not know how to spell “altar”; he made it “alter.” You just cannot imagine how special I felt that the Lord would take time out of his schedule to speak directly to me. It will be difficult to convince me that this message is not from God!

But wait a minute. Wait just a minute! Has not the Lord already said something about my circumstances in Romans 7? I recall reading that if a man/woman is married, that one is bound for life, loosed only in the event of the death of the spouse (Rom. 7:2). In fact, the Lord, who originated marriage and controls it by means of divine law, added in verse 3 that to be married to another while one's spouse lives

4. Rather than condemn nations and people who contract STDs because of their sexual promiscuity, let us show our concern and love for them by sending them millions of dollars to fight the AIDS epidemic.

5. Instead of debating our religious beliefs, we are told to be loving and tolerant of all religions regardless if what they teach is contrary to our beliefs. Let us have a “love-affair with Jesus.”

And then, when you consider what the public has been hearing about homosexuality, even from respected health care providers, it is no surprise that more and more people are becoming tolerant of same-sex marriages. Physicians are telling us that: it is “normal” if “you feel attracted to someone of the same gender.” And that, if you have such feelings, “it is not a bad thing, it is just the way you are.” It is another form of “sexual expression.” Parents are told that, if it bothers them that their child is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, then they need to deal with those “negative stereotypes” that they possess. Parents are encouraged to “accept” and “help” their child in dealing with this. “The

fact is, *you did not choose* to be gay, bisexual, or straight.” (All quotes come from an *American Academy of Pediatrics* brochure.)

This is the kind of message that society is being fed over and over in print, radio, TV, Internet, news media, children's books, educational institutions, medical fields, and even religion. With such coverage and support the homosexual agenda has had great success. Many more people have grown “tolerant” of same-sex marriages. That does not mean that they like it a lot or agree with it, but it does mean that they have “accepted it.” They no longer bother with voicing their opinion by speaking out against it. They learned, as countless others have, to just keep their opinions to themselves. Is it any wonder that Sodom and Gomorrah have risen from the smoke and ashes?!

Christian, “stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). The war is far from over. **Soldiers of Christ arise!**

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is to be guilty of adultery. In spite of what some brethren say, Paul here declared that it is possible for one to live in adultery, for his indictment relates to the practice of being married to another than one's spouse, necessarily involving "living in" that state. He called that one an adulteress/adulterer. Is not this section of the Scriptures just as relevant and applicable to me as to its original audience?

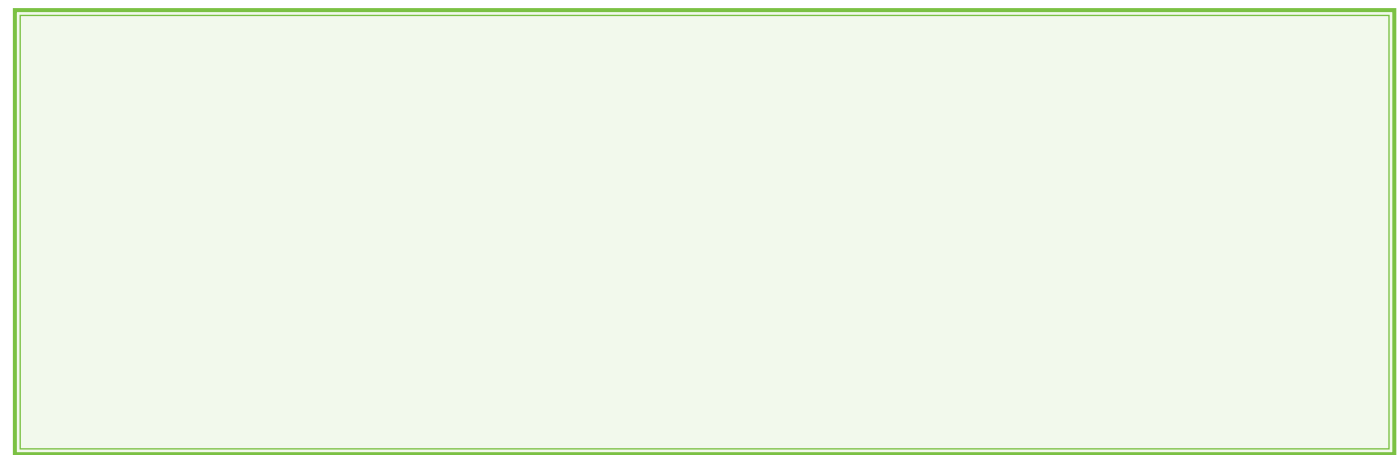
I then began to ponder this matter further. If the Lord originally spoke to my circumstances in Romans 7, why would he later send me a special message to encourage me to disregard his earlier message? After all, even to consider one of these "worthy Christian singles" mentioned in this message would be to ignore the Scriptures. Are they not God-breathed and useful to teach me, to reprove me, to correct me, and to train me in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17)? Why should I ignore that inspired message from God in favor of this more recent message which contradicts the earlier one? Has God really changed his mind? Are not the claims of God concerning the finality of the inspired Scriptures still true? He said that the faith (body of inspired teaching) was given once for all time, just as Jesus was once offered for all time (Jude 3; Heb. 9:28). I also thought about the passage in 2 Timothy 3 again; it says the inspired writings make one complete and equip him for every good work. If I can be complete with them, why do I need this later message from the Lord? It would seem that any later message/revelation would really ruin perfection, making it imperfect. After all, you don't need to change "perfection." This train of thought also reminded me of Proverbs 30:5-6. "Every word of God is pure; he is a shield to those that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." What God has said is enough, even so much so that anyone making an addition to his words (as this recent message adds to Romans 7), is judged to be a liar by the Lord. Do you really think that the person who sent me this message is a liar? Just think: I thought the Lord sent it. Now it appears that a liar sent it! "Liar" is what God called the person. I certainly did not say it without scriptural justification, nor did I say it in anger.

I know that God is no liar! It simply is not possible that God sent me this message. In the first place, he virtually said that he would send no other messages in the passages already noted and in others. In the second place, if he did send this later message, he was contradicting his earlier message by encouraging me to "two time" my wife. He wouldn't do that, would he? No, that settles it, brother. This later message is not from the Lord!

Think of it: what claimed to be from the Lord, because of its talking about "Heaven's Choice" of a "worthy Christian single" for me is actually a lie. This business of sending such messages is somewhat akin to the claims of those believing in "latter-day revelations," like the Mormons, the Adventists, and the evangelicals/Pentecostals, who claim the Lord speaks to them and reveals his will for them. They are just as misled as are those sending out such a message as I received. All such messages, attributed to the Lord and said to be from heaven, are really the work of hell. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:7-15. You will learn that Satan's work deceives people who do not love and believe the truth of God. People actually believe Satan's lie rather than God's truth. What is his truth, but the gospel of Jesus Christ (see v. 15)? Men sometimes call such the traditions of men, but the apostle Paul called it the traditions received from the apostles of Jesus Christ.

What will I do with this message that I received? I will discard it immediately! A lie does not deserve a place in yours mind or mine. Only divine truth deserves to be there. I would to God that all people would likewise dispose of all so-called latter-day revelations, because they are just as much a lie as anything else. In retrospect, that misspelled word—"alter"—is a dead giveaway. The only thing that this message does is alter the divine plan, but God tolerates no alterations. He is the perfect tailor. His plan fits all!

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Baptism in Second Century Writings

Kyle Pope

Denominationalists sometimes claim that baptism for remission of sins, as a requirement of salvation, is not a doctrine which has been taught in church history. While the Bible and not historical tradition is the authority for all doctrine, such claims reflect an ignorance of the true record of church history.* This fact is seen in statements made about baptism by writers from the second century.

Epistle of Barnabas. Speaks of the “baptism which bringeth forgiveness of sins” (11.1), going on to describe it saying, “We go down into the water laden with sins and filth, and rise up from it bearing fruit in the heart, resting our fear and hope on Jesus in the spirit” (Lightfoot 11.11).

Ignatius’ Epistle to Polycarp. Urges Polycarp, “Let your baptism abide with you as your shield; your faith as your helmet” (Lightfoot 62).

The Didache. States, “but concerning baptism, thus ye shall baptize. Having first recited all these things, baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit in living (running) water. But if thou hast not living water, then baptize in other water; and if thou art not able in cold, then in warm.” While the text goes on to make provision for pouring as a substitute for immersion, the importance of baptism is seen in the fact that it states, “but before the baptism let him that baptizeth and him that is baptized fast, and any others also who are able; and thou shalt order him that is baptized to fast a day or two before” (Lightfoot 7.1-4). It adds later, “Let no one eat or drink of the eucharistic thanksgiving, but they that have been baptized into the name of the Lord” (Lightfoot 9.5).

Second Clement. Asks the question, “. . . with what confidence shall we, if we keep not our baptism pure and undefiled, enter into the kingdom of God?” (Lightfoot 6.9).

Ignatius’ Epistle to the Smyrnaeans. Claims, “It is not lawful apart from the bishop either to baptize or to hold a love-feast” (Lightfoot 8.2).

Shepherd of Hermas. Describes a vision, much like the “Parable of the Sower.” It describes rocks falling near the water that cannot fall in. This is explained to refer to those, “. . . that hear the word, and would be baptized unto the name of the Lord. Then when they call to their remembrance the purity of the truth, they change their minds and go back again after their evil desires” (Lightfoot, Vision 3.7.3).

Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho. Contrasts the value of baptism with Jewish washings, claiming, “we have believed, and testify that very baptism which he announced is alone able to purify those who have repented; and this is the water of life. But the cisterns which you have dug for yourselves are broken and profitless to you. For what is the use of that baptism which cleanses the flesh and body alone? Baptize the soul from wrath and from covetousness, from envy, and from hatred; and, lo! the body is pure” (Cox 14.1-2). He writes further, “nor do we receive that useless baptism of cisterns, for it has nothing to do with this baptism of life” (Cox 19.2), and asks, “What need have I of that other baptism, who have been baptized with the Holy Ghost?” (Cox 291). Finally, he even claims, “we, who have approached God through Him, have received not carnal, but spiritual circumcision, which Enoch and those like him observed. And we have received it through baptism, since we were sinners, by God’s mercy; and all men may equally obtain it” (Cox 43.2).

* The term “church history” refers to the extant historical record of what people have taught and practiced from the time of the New Testament. Given that much of this record reflects movement away from Scripture, it more accurately might be called “church apostasy.” In this article I use the term accommodatively and do not intend to suggest that it reflects the doctrine or practice of the Lord’s church. Sadly, in many cases, the history of saints throughout the ages who have held faithfully to the doctrine of Christ has not been preserved by historians.

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Have You Been Converted?

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In heaven the saints will be worshipping God day and night. And if you cannot stand that for an hour down here, you would be squirming in heaven for sure. You would be out of place up there. Unless you have been converted to God, you would be out of place in heaven.

In Matthew 18:1, the disciples came to Jesus, asking, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” From this question it appears that the disciples, mistaken in their notion of the nature of the kingdom of heaven, were concerned at this time about their position in the kingdom, and thus ask the Lord which of them would be the greatest. In response, “Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except you be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:2-3). Jesus was telling the disciples that unless they turned from their erroneous view of the kingdom as a temporal, political kingdom, and their desire for positions of prominence and honor in that kingdom, that unless they turned from their pride and humbled themselves, they would not even enter into his kingdom, much less be great in it. In this reply, Jesus emphasized the necessity of their being “converted.” The term here rendered “converted,” according to B.F. Manire, “represents a word that is found eighteen times in the original,” but which is rendered “converted” only in this passage in the KJV. Manire states, “In all the other seventeen instances, it is rendered literally, turn or turn again.”

The Bible teaches that you must be converted in order to obtain forgiveness of your sins. The Bible says that all of us have sinned. You might not be guilty of all the sins that another

has done, but you are a sinner nonetheless. And the Bible teaches that I am a sinner. Paul wrote that we “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). We all have sinned against God, and our sins have come between us and God. Sin causes death—physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death. That means separation from God. It means hell and judgment.

The Bible also teaches that our soul is our greatest possession. In Matthew 16:26, Jesus observed, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” Your soul is the only possession you have that will continue eternally. And if you die in sin, your soul will be lost or condemned to the fires of hell for all eternity. Paul wrote that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23).

Now, because your soul is your greatest possession, and because you have sinned and come short of the glory of God, the salvation of your soul should be your greatest concern in this life. Now the greatest thing in life is to obtain the forgiveness of sin. We only have a few years here in this world. The Bible says that our lives are spent “as a tale that is told” (Ps. 90:9). The Bible says that our lives pass quicker than a weaver’s shuttle (Job 7:6). The Bible says that our lives are only a shadow (Job 8:9). The Bible says that our lives are like

a flower that blooms a short time and then fades away (1 Pet. 1:24). Our life passes quickly and is soon gone. God gives us a few days, a few months, a few years to find one thing—and that is forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the greatest thing in life. It is worth more than a million dollars. It is worth more than a business empire. It is worth more than a glamorous career. It is worth more than an education. It is worth more than anything. And God says that the only way that you can be forgiven of your sins and escape the judgment of hell is to be converted!

The Scriptures teach that unless you are converted, you cannot be accepted by God. You need to be converted in order to be accepted by God. God will not accept you as you are if you have not been converted. Suppose you went to heaven as you are without being converted. You don't enjoy attending a worship service or Bible study. Perhaps you rarely attend services of a local congregation of God's people. Or perhaps you attend, but only because it is a duty, or because it is something you have always done. It is a tradition, but you do not particularly like to go. You do not particularly like to be with God's people. You do not like to read the Bible. You do not like to worship God. Why, you would be miserable in heaven, because that is all they are going to do up there! In heaven the saints will be worshipping God day and night. And if you cannot stand that for an hour down here, you would be squirming in heaven for sure. You would be out of place up there. Unless you have been converted to God, you would be out of place in heaven.

Now you are a sinner. You have offended God. The Bible speaks of us as enemies of God (Rom. 5:10). We have broken the laws of God. We deserve judgment. If we die without ever being converted, we will receive judgment. We don't want judgment. We don't want justice from God. God would be just in consigning us all to

the fires of hell forever because we all have sinned, and the wages of sin is death (Ezek. 18:4, 20). We don't want God's justice; we want God's mercy.

I see God's mercy in Jesus Christ's death on the cross when he shed his blood for my sins. I see in his death the love of God, the mercy of God, and the grace of God extended toward me. When I am converted, when I turn to God in obedience to the gospel of Christ, my sins are all forgiven by the blood of Christ and in that moment I am said to be justified, just as if I had never sinned. I am justified in God's sight as though I had never committed a sin, so that even God forgets my sins (see Heb. 10:17). We all need to be converted in order to enter into heaven. Jesus said, "Except ye be converted, ye cannot enter into heaven."

The word "conversion" means to turn or change. Trees are converted into lumber, and lumber is converted into houses. Iron is converted into tools and machines. People are converted or changed into the likeness of Christ by hearing the gospel, believing, and obeying the will of God. Conversion is simply the change that takes place when you are going in one direction in your life, and then you turn and start in a totally different direction. That is the simple meaning of conversion. It means to turn around, to change.

Conversion is taught all the way through the Bible. The Lord said to the people of Judah, "Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the Lord hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever" (Jer. 25:5). Again, he said to the Hebrew captives in Babylon, "For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn *yourselves*, and live ye" (Ezek. 18:32). Once more, in Ezekiel 33:11, the Lord admonished his people, saying, "Say unto them, *As I live*, saith the Lord God, I have no

pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

The question I am asking you is: "Have you been converted?" The Bible teaches that you must be converted to enter heaven. The question I now ask is: "Have you been converted to Jesus Christ?" Conversion to Christ requires a three-fold change in the sinner.

First, true conversion demands a change of heart. Unbelievers cannot be saved unless they are converted to become believers (John 8:24; Mark 16:15-16). When an unbeliever considers all of the evidence of the gospel, he draws the conclusion that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God, the Savior of the world. He believes the gospel. By faith the sinner dies to the love and practice of sin and is changed from an unbeliever to a believer.

Yet, one is not converted by faith alone (Jas. 2:24; Acts 2:38; 17:30-31; Luke 13:1-5). The word "faith" means more than just believe. I hear a lot of people go around and say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). That's true, but most do not know what the word "believe" means. The word "believe" means more than just acquiring an intellectual faith. The Bible says the devil believes (see Jas. 2:19). The devil is the fundamentalist! He is orthodox! He believes in the Bible. Intellectually, he believes. But the devil has never been saved, and he is not going to heaven.

Now, involved in faith is not only head belief and heart belief, but it is your will. You must be willing to say, "I will obey Christ." Christ appeals to the will of men. There must be a real commitment to Christ. There must be a complete surrender to Christ. Have you done that? Jesus said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have

life” (John 5:40). Jesus didn’t say, “You couldn’t come.” He said, “Ye will not come.”

There are many of you who ought to come and give your life to Christ. But Jesus says, “Ye will not come.” You are not willing for your will to be surrendered to the will of Christ. Jesus said, “If ye are not willing to confess me before men, I will not confess you before my Father which is in heaven” (see Matt. 10:32, 33). Many, however, will not confess Christ. They put up a barrier. They will not submit their will to him. “If any man will come after me,” said Jesus, he must “deny himself, and take up the cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).

Second, true conversion demands a change of life. This is repentance (Luke 13:1-5; Acts 2:38; 2 Pet. 3:9). Faith in the sinner’s heart leads one to repent of his sins and to change his way of living. This is repentance. What does repentance mean? Repentance means to change your mind, to change your feelings, to change your purpose, to change your conduct. It is intellectual, it is emotional, it is volitional. It means that I look at my sins and I’m willing to say to God, “I am a sinner.”

Repentance involves sorrow for sin. We have too few tears over sin today. We have tears about everything else, but not very many tears over sin. The Bible says, “Godly sorrow worketh repentance” (2 Cor. 7:10). There is also a change of purpose involved in repentance. It means that I turn from sin. There must be willingness in the weakest heart to turn from sin. You must be willing. Then there must be a change of conduct. Old things must pass away, and behold, all things must become new (2 Cor. 5:17). Jesus said, “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20).

If I see a man who is going on living habitually in sin, I know that man has never been converted. He does not have a new nature. He may look like a Christian at times. But he has never been converted. You know, you can take a pig, give her a bubble bath, dress her up in a silk blouse, place a ribbon around her neck, put a little Chanel No. 5 on her, polish her hoofs and set her up in a chair in your living room. She no doubt now looks like a wonderful pig. You say, “Why, this hog is changed. This is a different pig.” But open the door, and see what happens. The nature of the pig has not been changed, and the pig will run straight to a mud puddle as soon as the opportunity presents itself. That is where he belongs. Until the sinner repents of his sinful life, he has not been converted.

But true conversion does not end at this point. *Conversion to Christ is consummated by a change of state or relationship to God.* This takes place when the penitent believer is baptized into Christ (Rom. 6:1-5; Gal. 3:26-27). Baptism “saves” (1 Pet. 3:21) because baptism puts one into Christ. That is where salvation is found (2 Tim. 2:10).

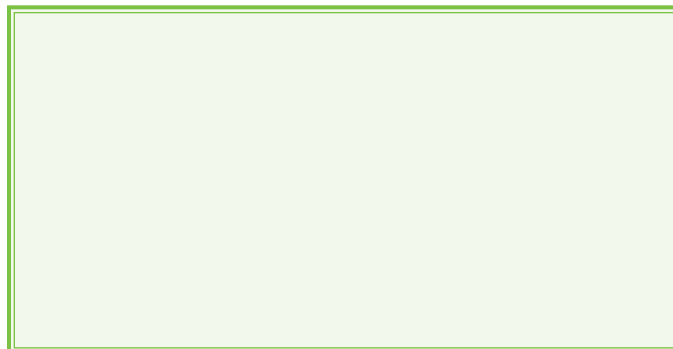
The believer is led to repent of his sins and confess his faith in Christ, but his sins are not forgiven until he is “in Christ.” And the Bible declares that one must be baptized to enter into Christ. So, one has not been truly converted to Christ until this three-fold change has been wrought in the sinner’s heart, life, and relationship to God.

The change of heart by faith, the change of life by repentance, and the change of relationship to God by being baptized into Christ brings about the needed changes for one to be acceptable to God and prepared for heaven.

Suppose you dropped dead right now, right where you are. If that were to happen, where would you go for eternity? Would you go to heaven? Are you sure? How many of us know that we will be alive tomorrow? Not one of us knows that! Notice James 4:14. James wrote, “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” Are you willing to gamble the next twenty-four hours, to gamble on the fact that you will live? I believe every person reading this article is counting on going to heaven. You are counting on being saved. You are counting on being received by God into heaven. Yet, some of you have not obeyed the basic requirements for entrance into the kingdom of Heaven. The Bible says there is going to be a place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. There will be a place of outer darkness (see Matt. 8:12; 13:42). There will be a place of judgment.

The moment you come to Christ by faith and repentance, the moment you put on Christ in baptism, God forgives all the past sins that you have committed. You become a partaker of the divine nature. Old things are passed away, all things are become new. Now God does not remove your problems. In fact, after you come to Christ you may face more problems. But in the midst of your problems there will be peace, grace, and strength. To come to Christ, you have to come by faith, repentance, confession and baptism into Christ, trusting in him and his death and resurrection for salvation. If you haven’t come to Christ, I am asking you to do it now, before it is too late. Have you been converted?

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Remember Your Creator

David

Steven F. Deaton

David's son, Solomon, said, "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Ecc. 12:1). No doubt, Solomon learned hard lessons and had many regrets for not listening to his father's dying-words of wisdom.

... be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn (1 Kings 2:2, 3).

David essentially said, "Remember your Creator." David's words are good for any young man or woman to hear and heed. David's example as a young man gives us the confidence that it can be done, even in the face of a "giant" enemy.

You will recall the account of David and Goliath. Refresh your memory by reading 1 Samuel 17, then consider the following.

David faced an enemy that was nine plus feet tall, wore chained armor of about 125 pounds, and had a spearhead of fifteen pounds on the end of a huge spear. No one denies that the enemy David confronted was a powerful giant. While you may not face a literal Goliath, you nevertheless must confront huge enemies. You may face a school bully, people who envy your accomplishments, or those who despise you because you are different. You don't curse, drink, or commit fornication. You go to church, dress modestly, and pray regularly. People will despise you for this (John 15:18-20).

To help you face difficult situations, remember young David. He was a shepherd boy, about seventeen years old,

sent on an errand by his father. His brother scolded him for asking about the giant's challenge and the rewards offered by the king. David protested and kept asking about the situation. When he went before the king, David's ability was doubted. Still, the shepherd boy did not waver in his resolve. Even if all others were afraid to face the giant, he was not.

As David prepared to face Goliath, he rejected the armor provided by Saul. It was too cumbersome and unfamiliar. He chose to fight with modest weapons, ones he knew

how to use; a sling and stones. When Goliath saw this young man, he mocked and threatened. Those of lesser backbone would have run at this point. Some may talk about taking a stand, but then back down when the time comes—not David. He told the Philistine exactly what he would do to him, including cut off his head, though David did not have a sword. You know the rest of the story; David won the fight, energized Israel, and received praise.



Why did David face Goliath? How did he confront such an intimidating enemy? He did it because he remembered his Creator. David did it for the Lord's honor (1 Sam. 17:45-47). He was offended by one who blasphemed God and had complete faith that God would carry him through.

What about you? When you face giant problems, intimidating situations, and overwhelming odds, remember your Creator. Though others may denounce you and doubt, the Lord will give you the strength to overcome. Trust in the simple truth of his word, not the fanciful doctrines of men (Eph. 6:10-17). When you do, you will be victorious, encourage other Christians, and please your Lord and Savior.

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Salvation By Grace

Norman E. Fultz

Being a Christian, as one understands it from the New Testament, is the same as coming into a saved relationship in Christ Jesus. While there are a number of things by which the New Testament says we are saved, our focus here is upon grace and its relation to our salvation. Grace may be understood as goodwill, friendly disposition, or favor of one toward another. When used of God toward man, it means favor undeserved. The observant reader will see in such passages as Romans 5:1-2, 6-8; Ephesians 2:4-5 and Titus 3:3-7 that man certainly did not deserve the great favor shown him by God in the sending of his Son as the propitiatory price for man's sin. Through God's gracious provision in Christ, vile and sinful mankind may be delivered from that against which the wrath of God is directed (cf. Rom. 1:18; Col. 3:6).

The Expanse of Grace. Paul tells us that God's grace and the gift by that grace is abundant (Rom. 5:15, 17). Whiteside comments, "... Paul assures us that the blessings through Christ abound much more than the curse through the trespass of Adam; they include deliverance from our own sins" as well as "the evils resulting from Adam's sin." When Paul, who "was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and an insolent man," referred to his own forgiveness, the Lord's grace became "exceedingly abundant" (1 Tim. 1:14). The Ephesians were assured that the forgiveness of sins, the redemption wrought through his blood, was "according to the riches of His grace which He has made to abound toward us" and "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:7-8; 2:7). A hymn we sing speaks of "Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt . . . Grace that will pardon and cleanse."

The Gifts of Grace. Jesus and his death for everyone is a gift of grace (Rom. 5:15; 1 Cor. 1:4; Heb. 2:9). And what a great gift is the gospel which Paul calls "the gospel of the grace of God" and "the word of His grace" (Acts 20:24,32). The gospel is the good news which unfolds the scheme of redemption in Christ (Eph. 1:7-11; 3:1-12).

Salvation by Grace. That salvation is by grace is a fact plainly declared in many passages. Peter spoke of his confidence that "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" both Jew and Gentile would be "saved in the same manner" (Acts 11:15). Paul said to the Romans that we "are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). And to the Ephesians he wrote, "For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Now consider this. Looking back to Romans 3:24-25, note that the justification by grace is accomplished through the redemption that is in Christ, our propitiation, and that redemption is through faith and in his blood. Similarly, in the Ephesian passage, salvation, the gift of God, is by grace through faith. Contrary to the understanding of many, salvation is the gift, not the faith that appropriates the benefits of grace. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). One is called into grace, which call is through the gospel (Gal. 1:6; 2 Thess. 2:13-14). Hearing the gospel, "the word of His grace," converts in New Testament days responded obediently to the apostolic message to "repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Their message was as Jesus had instructed when giving them the charge to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 6:15-16). Those whose faith so responds are then said to stand in grace (Rom. 5:2; 1 Pet. 5:12). Friend, we pleased with you to accept the salvation which God's grace provides.

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The Unfolding of God's Plan

Bob Waldron

“We have only one chance through life, so grab with all the gusto you have.”

Is that all there is? Am I, as a Christian, missing something valuable? There are some pleasures on this earth that I do not have. If this is all I have to hope for, then, as Paul said, “I am of all men most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:19).

No. There is another way to look at life under the sun. This is not even real “life.” This is merely a short trial period to see if I may have the privilege of living in heaven with God himself throughout eternity. Jesus has gone ahead to prepare mansions for those who pass the trial (John 14:1ff). Even if I should live ninety years or longer here, it is still only a span compared to the over-all scheme of things. “For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (Jas. 4:13-15).

Abraham had this view of life on earth. That is why he could leave his home and family and go to a land God would show him. He was looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:8-10).

That is why Moses could give up the honor of being called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He could see that the riches God offers the faithful as a reward are far greater than any brief pleasures sin can offer here on this globe (Heb. 11:24-26).

That is why Paul could rejoice in a Roman prison, facing death for his faith in Christ. He was human. He did not enjoy the pain of suffering, but he saw a crown laid up for him, making any present suffering seem but for a moment (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Even the happiest, most carefree person alive has some problems: pain, sickness, sorrow, fears, and such like. I, as a Christian, can share most earthly joys. There is a legitimate outlet for every physical desire I have. I, too, have problems because I am a human being. But instead of being the most miserable of all men, the Christian is the one to be envied.

The Christian can look for that real “life” where there will be *no problems*. Indeed, we have an anchor to our soul (Heb. 6:19). What Christian need worry about conditions here? What does it matter if things are dark here, if I have that hope that makes anything worth enduring for these short years in order to live for eternity with God?

But how can one have this hope? How did it all come about? The Bible tells us. The Bible is not a series of unconnected “once-upon-a-time” stories. It is the unfolding of the beautiful, eternal plan God made for the redemption of mankind.

God made man. Man is a reasoning being, made in the image of God. He has the ability to choose what he will be. As the Creator of man, God understands and has met every need of man. He designed man to be his happiest as a companion of God.

God offered man the chance for such a companionship on earth in the Garden of Eden, where God walked with man in the cool of the evening. But man gave up this privilege of his own free will by choosing to listen to the devil’s advice (Gen. 3).

God had prepared for man’s choice. He already had a plan for the redemption of man (Eph. 3:11). No longer could man share a companionship with God here, because sin separates man from God. So, God offered man a far greater blessing—the chance to live forever with God himself in heaven.

There are certain conditions man must meet, however. No man is forced to serve God, but the wonderful chance is offered to anyone, provided he will accept God’s terms.

What terms could God make? How could God determine who could have this life? He could justly condemn all mankind because all men have sinned, and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 3:23). But God loves man and would prefer that none perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Perhaps he could save all mankind no matter how wicked; but that will not work

because God can not tolerate wickedness (Isa. 59:1-2). Perhaps he could arbitrarily save some and condemn others—but God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34).

Therefore, God determined to pay the price for sin himself. In this way, God’s love for man could be shown by offering man the opportunity for salvation. At the same time, God’s justice could be satisfied by the price being paid for sin.

Man alone could not pay the price. Each person who has lived long enough to be responsible before God has sinned. Adam sinned in Eden. Noah was saved in the ark because he was righteous, but later he planted a vineyard and became drunk on the wine. Abraham is called the father of the faithful, but he lied on at least two occasions. David was a man after God’s own heart, but he committed adultery and murder. Each man would have to die for his own sins, thus ending continued companionship with God.

But how could God pay the price for man’s sin? Death is the price God set (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). But Deity as Deity cannot die. Therefore, God’s plan was to send Deity, the eternal Word, to the earth in human form as his Son. His Son would show man how the perfect human should be. Then, that Son, as Deity in human form, would die to pay the price for man’s sins.

Man did not realize the need for such a price when he was first driven from Eden. The entire Bible shows man how feeble his own efforts for self-salvation were. Mankind is left with only one conclusion: We are totally helpless without God.

We cannot answer the question of why God ever made man. Neither can we know why he loved man enough to offer him the chance to live in heaven. But we can look at the beautiful plan he unfolds in the Bible for us, and love him and obey him in return. What right do I have as puny man to object to his terms when he offers me such a reward?

The Story of Redemption

“In the beginning. . .” Come with me back to that point. There is no world, no universe, no physical life, no physical substance, no time. Eternity has no beginning, no end. What did exist? How did all we know come into being? What does it all mean?

There were three Beings in existence who are as everlasting as eternity itself: Jehovah, the Word, and the Holy Spirit. These separate Beings are yet one in purpose, in righteousness, and in deity. They comprise all that is Godhood.

At some point, we have no idea when, lesser heavenly beings were created. We read of innumerable hosts of an-

gels (Rev. 5:11), of seraphim (Isa. 6:2), of cherubim (Gen. 3:24), and of other heavenly creatures around the throne of God (Rev. 4). At some point some of these heavenly beings sinned (2 Pet. 2:4). Again, we do not know the reason. Such matters are the secret things that belong to God (Deut. 29:29). A place of punishment, terrible beyond our comprehension, was prepared for these wicked beings (Matt. 25:41). They were “delivered into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Pet. 2:4). These heavenly beings are more powerful than man, but they, as the created, are far less than God the Creator.

“In the beginning” God spoke the physical universe into existence. Then he began placing life on the earth. First came plant life; then fish, fowls, and land animals. The creation process was not yet complete, because there was not yet life that could understand or share a companionship with God. Thus man was created. “Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26). Man is like God because man can reason, and he has a soul within that will never cease to exist, an essence that is spiritual.

God placed Adam and Eve in a garden of beauty far greater than we can find today. The earth was new and unpolluted. Every desirable plant was there. There were no thorns or thistles; there was no pain or sorrow; there was no anxiety or fear. Adam and Eve had access to the Tree of Life so they need never die. Best of all, they had companionship with God himself (Gen. 3:8).

But God did not want a creature who was his companion simply because there was nothing else he could do. Then man would have been no more than a robot programmed to worship God, and incapable of anything else. So God gave man a commandment. Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

There was food in abundance, so hunger did not encourage the eating of the forbidden fruit. The Garden of Eden was so big four rivers ran through it, so there was no reason for the temptation to be constantly before their eyes. But mankind is weak. When the serpent tempted Eve, she was beguiled and ate of the forbidden fruit. She gave it to Adam and he ate also.

Now they knew shame, guilt, and fear. God gave each guilty party a curse. Pain, sorrow, problems, thorns, death, separation from the Tree of Life—and, worst of all, separation from the companionship of God.

Their sin was no surprise to God. He knew before creation that man would be weak and had prepared for man’s fall. God had already planned how man might be saved (Eph. 3:10-11). Adam and Eve gave up the opportunity for complete happiness on this earth. God began the long

process of unfolding his plan of how man could live forever with him, provided man accepted his terms.

Even with this curse, God gave the first glimmer of hope of a day when one of the seed of woman would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). Evil had triumphed on this day with Adam and Eve, but someday man would triumph through the one God would send to complete his plan.

God never for one moment forgot his purpose. Many, many years have passed since that day Adam sinned. The people who have lived cannot be counted. The Bible tells us about only a few of the vast multitude who have lived because those are the ones through whom he unfolded his plan.

Adam lived 930 years and had sons and daughters. The Bible tells a story about Cain and Abel, two of these sons. You remember how Cain became angry and killed his brother because Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God, and Cain's was not. Abel's death erased his name from further part in the unfolding of God's plan. God takes time in the last of Genesis 4 to tell briefly what happened to Cain—then his family is left.

Adam had another son, Seth. We are told nothing about him except that it is through his family that the story develops. About as many years pass during the first five chapters of Genesis as in all the rest of the Bible. God tells us practically nothing about this period because it is unimportant for his purpose to do so. The people typically lived 900 or more years. Among the ten generations named is a man named Enoch. He was righteous, and God highly blessed him by taking him to heaven without his dying.

As men spread over the earth, they practiced wickedness on every hand. Their thoughts were only evil continually. God decided to destroy mankind—except for faithful Noah and his family. Noah accepted God's grace and took the escape offered. He, his three sons, their wives, and two of each form of animal life survived in the ark.

Now we are back to one family, that of Noah's. But there are three sons, so no human historian could have known at this point which son to follow. But God guided the writer to follow the line through Shem, touching only briefly the descendants of Ham and Japheth. The writer deals with the nations which came through Ham and Japheth only as they touch Shem's descendants.

Many, many peoples came through Shem, but the divine record narrows the story still more. Years passed, and men no longer lived as long. Soon 200 or fewer years was a long life.

Some nine generations pass from Noah, and we come to a man named Terah living in Ur of the Chaldees. There

were three sons in this family also: Nahor, Abram, and Haran. Haran died while they were still in Ur, and the story follows his son Lot for a while because he traveled with Abram, the more important character.

God called Abram (or Abraham as his name became) and told him to leave his family and to go to a land he would be shown. Abraham obeyed and was led to the little land of Canaan. A three-fold promise was made to him: he was told his descendants would be made a great nation, that nation would inherit the land of Canaan, and, through his seed, all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen.12:1-7). The rest of the Bible is the story of the fulfilling of these three promises.

Notice that God had unfolded only a small part of his plan for man's redemption by this point in history. We know that one will come who will triumph over Satan (Gen. 3:15). We now know further that this one will come from the nation composed of the descendants of Abraham, and that all nations will be blessed by his coming (Gen. 12:2-3).

Abraham's wife was barren so she and Abraham tried to help God fulfill his promise by having a son through Hagar, the handmaiden. Ishmael was born. Abraham later had six other sons by Keturah, another handmaiden. They were blessed because they were sons of Abraham, but these were not the promised seed. Finally, through a miracle, Isaac was born when his father was 100 years old.

When Isaac became head of the family, God repeated the three-fold promise to Isaac: Land, Nation, and Spiritual. Through his seed all nations would be blessed (Gen. 26:2-4).

Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Even before their birth, God said that Jacob would be the greater. Esau's descendants became the nation of the Edomites. But it was to Jacob that the three-fold promise was repeated. He would receive the land; his descendants would form a great nation; and through his seed all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 28:13-14).

Space does not allow us to tell the details of Jacob's life. Suffice it to say that Jacob had twelve sons. He loved Joseph, next to the youngest, best, and showed his partiality. The other brothers were jealous and sold Joseph as a slave into Egypt. There he served as slave to Potiphar. He was lied about and was cast into prison. Time passed, and he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams and became ruler of all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. As he himself said, he was in Egypt to help save life during a severe, seven-year famine (Gen. 45:4-8). You remember how the brothers came, were tested, and finally learned Joseph's identity. Joseph had all his family brought to Egypt. There were 75 people in the family at this point—still far short of a nation.

As Jacob lay on his death bed, he called his sons and gave each a blessing. These sons would form the tribes which would make up the nation of Israel (Jacob was given the name Israel the night he wrestled with an angel). It was to Judah, his fourth son, that he gave a special prophecy. The scepter (the sign of rulership) would not depart from Judah's family until Shiloh—this special one—should come (Gen. 49:10).

Now God has unfolded this much of his plan: One will come to triumph over Satan. He will bless all families of the earth. He will come through the seed of Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob, and through Judah. He will reign. We know more than we did when Adam sinned, but we still understand very little about God's full purpose (see Gen. 3:15; 12:1-3; 26:2-4; 28:13-14; 49:10).

Genesis closes with Joseph's confident assurance to his brethren that the day would come when God would lead the people back to Canaan. Many years pass before the curtain rises again. Has God forgotten?

The scene looks dark as Exodus begins. By now there are perhaps three million people called Israelites, or Hebrews (later called Jews). A Pharaoh has arisen who does not know Joseph. He feared this vast group of people in his land, so he afflicted them by making them his slaves. They multiplied faster. He tried to destroy potential soldiers by ordering the death of all baby boys.

At this very time a baby boy was born. His mother hid him three months and then placed him in the bulrushes at the edge of the Nile. He was found by Pharaoh's daughter, who named him Moses. For forty years he was trained as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. His own mother was hired to care for him, so he grew from babyhood knowing the plight of his people.

At age forty, Moses decided to rescue his people, but God was not ready. Moses killed an Egyptian and had to flee for his life. The next forty years he worked as a shepherd in Midian. Then one day God appeared to Moses in a burning bush and gave him his commission to go back to Egypt to rescue the Israelites.

Again, space forbids any details. As you remember, Pharaoh refused to let the people go. God showed his might over the most powerful nation of the day by sending ten terrible plagues until the Egyptians were actually begging the Israelites to leave.

Instead of leading the people directly to the land of Canaan, God directed them southeastward to Mt. Sinai. There he made a covenant with them. He promised to be their God and to allow them to be his people if they would obey him and keep his commandments. The people wanted

God's blessings and were quick to agree to the covenant. God gave them a law that specified exactly how they were to live as his chosen people.

Until this time, God had spoken directly to the fathers of faithful families. That system (called the Patriarchal system) continued with all people except this special group assembled at Mt. Sinai. God was preparing a special people to be ready for the completion of his plan.

God showed his power and protection to his nation in every conceivable way. He fed them when they were hungry; he gave them water from stones. He fought their enemies and shielded them as a father shields his son (Hos. 11:1).

But the people did not keep their side of the covenant. Within six weeks of agreeing to obey God and keep his commandments, they made a golden calf to worship. They murmured when they were thirsty and complained over the manna God had given them for food. Even when they reached Canaan's border, they were too cowardly to go forward as God commanded. They sent twelve spies through the land. Ten brought back word that the task would be too difficult. Only Joshua and Caleb trusted the power of God. The people were forced to turn back to wander forty years in the wilderness, until every soldier above twenty years of age was dead except Joshua and Caleb.

Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers give the law of Moses in detail and tell the important events during these forty years. Even Moses disobeyed God on one occasion, and was not allowed to enter the land. God allowed him to view the land from the top of Mt. Nebo. There he died and was buried by the hand of God.

The book of Deuteronomy is a series of speeches that Moses gave on the plains of Moab just before his death. He was pleading with the people to be faithful when they entered the land, so that they might prosper and might remain in the land through all the generation to follow. God, through Moses, promised great blessings to the people if they would be faithful to him. On the other hand, he warned of punishments if they turned from him.

Both sides of the picture—blessings and cursings—are absolutely necessary in God's plan. God has always offered man great blessings for keeping his law and has set stated penalties for disobedience. Then he has left it to man to choose which he wants.

(This article will be concluded in the next issue of *Truth Magazine*.)

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Unwholesome Speech

Frank Himmel

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification, according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph. 4:29). Is there a more challenging command in all the New Testament? Those who desire to “abstain from every form of evil” surely must pay close attention to their speech.

In the paragraphs surrounding this one, Paul identifies a number of kinds of unwholesome words.

Lying words. “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another” (Eph. 4:25). Some maliciously lie to hurt others, such as Potiphar’s wife lying about Joseph (Gen. 39:14-17). But not all liars are so mean-spirited. People lie to make a name for themselves, to gain a financial advantage, to get out of trouble, to cover up other wrongs, or sometimes just to be sociable—“My, how nice you look,” all the while thinking. . . .

Regardless of the circumstance, God expects us to be truthful. No black lie/ white lie distinctions. No half-truths, those technically-not-a-lie statements that we know will convey a false impression. We may just need to say nothing. That is often a preferable course anyway.

Angry words. “Be angry, and yet do not sin . . .” (Eph. 4:26). Speaking from anger often results in saying things we ought not, either in subject matter or in the terminology we employ. Then, one angry person fuels another. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1). Remember, you can be far more persuasive when speaking under control. “By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone” (Prov. 25:15).

Unkind words. “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with malice. And be kind to one another . . .” (Eph. 4:31-32).

Increasing numbers are observing a tendency in our society toward greater incivility. Speech is cruder and gruffer, less polite and less respectful. This is a trend we can surely do without.

No one is too young or too old, too important or too wealthy, too busy or too flustered, but that he needs to exhibit common courtesy, treating people as people. *Please* and *thank you* are essential pre-kindergarten skills. *Ma’ams* and *sirs* may be old fashioned, but I like them, too.

Filthy words. “And there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks” (Eph. 5:4). There was a time when profanity was regarded as unacceptable speech. TV executives kept it off the air-waves, political leaders wouldn’t dream of using it publicly, and ordinary folks would apologize for their “indiscretions.” That day is no more. Vulgarity and explicit references are seen as ratings boosters by the media. Rappers compete to see who can be the most offensive. Comedians (and comediennes) live in the gutter. And your barber, your mechanic, or your waitress is as likely to curse in your presence as not. Even small children can curl your hair!

The commonality of such language makes it less shocking, but no less wrong. To the extent it increases the temptation to follow suit, we must be all the more careful. Avoiding “every form of evil” requires that we guard against all such language, including euphemistic terms which convey the same meaning.

Disgraceful words. “For it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret” (Eph. 5:12). Secret works of darkness? What is left in that category? If Jerry Springer hasn’t put in on the air, Howard Stern has. Rightly did Paul characterize such people as “enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame” (Phil. 3:18-19, NKJV). The apostle reminds us that some subjects

I Want To Sow Some Wild Oats

Donald P. Ames

Sometimes you hear young people say, as they get into their teen years, “I want to sow some wild oats. I want to just go out and have some fun.” No one is opposed to one having fun, but there is a fun that is enjoyable, and a fun that can have tragic consequences. It is the latter that we try to urge young people to stay away from. But, young people, if this is your attitude in life, I would like for you to just think with me for a few moments. If sowing wild oats is OK, why is it . . .

Opposed by your parents? Granted, parents are not perfect, and sometimes it seems like they are almost “in the way.” Sometimes they say “No” to things we don’t see any harm with, and we don’t agree with them at all. But still, the Bible says we are to obey our parents, and they have a charge from God to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Proverbs 22:15 tells us, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.” And Proverbs 13:1 adds, “A wise son heeds his fathers instruction. But a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.” Many of the problems in life they have had to learn the hard way, and their experience and wisdom does give them some advantage. They have seen consequences that youth has not yet even seen on the distant horizon. Maybe that is the reason God said to heed their advice, and not that children should do as suited them.

aren’t worth even mentioning, much less discussing and exploring. We need to close our eyes and ears as well as our mouths to such.

Long ago David prayed, “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3). “He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles” (Prov. 21:23).

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Opposed by the law of the land? Why is it that so many things youth want to do to “sow some wild oats” end up being things contrary to the law of the land? Why are there drug laws, no liquor sales until 18-21 years of age, etc.? Why are there laws against vandalism (mischievous fun?), speeding, drag racing, drinking and driving, etc.? Why are there fines for destruction of property, or music up too loud and out too late at night? Note what God’s word says in 1 Timothy 1:8-10: “But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, know this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.” And doesn’t Romans 13:3-4 say, “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise for the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.”

Sometimes youth will respond, “But it says it is OK when I am 18!” No, it doesn’t say that it is OK then, it merely says that you are now old enough that you— not your parents—are responsible for, and should be held accountable for your choice of actions. That does not mean that your choice is OK, otherwise there would not have been laws against it up to this point. Why has it been regarded as wrong up to this point?

Opposed by the rules for good health? Why is it nutritional experts and health experts don’t come out and endorse these activities? Why aren’t they held up as excellent ways to find good health? Do you read ads in health magazines saying “Smoking (or drinking liquor) is good for your health”? Does sex that results in syphilis, gonorrhea, or AIDS mean that it promotes good health? Does smoking that results in lung cancer, heart disease, lung problems,

etc. mean that it promotes good health? Do drugs that can fry the brain, cause addiction, and cause loss of self-control get their promotion as being good for your health? Romans 12:1-2 reminds us we are not to be conformed to the world (and its lusts), but we are to prove the better ways of the Lord, while 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 reminds us our body has been bought by the price of Jesus blood, and is now the temple of the Holy Spirit. God would have you enjoy life, not regret it or lose it. And have you ever seen any of these products or activities highly recommended in babies magazines as a “sure way to develop a happy and growing baby”?

Opposed by others trying to live godly? What is there about those things you may desire to do that they say is wrong for Christians to be doing? And why is it that you would prefer they did not know about it? Could it be that others than just your parents see these same truths about what is right and wrong and also what is contrary to “righteous” living? Pause and read 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, Ephesians 5:3-5, and Galatians 6:1. Now is it really “none of their business”? And, if you do these things, what will your influence be when you mature and try to teach others what is wrong with these things (1 Pet. 2:12). Do you really think they will listen, or use it as justification for their chance to do the same things?

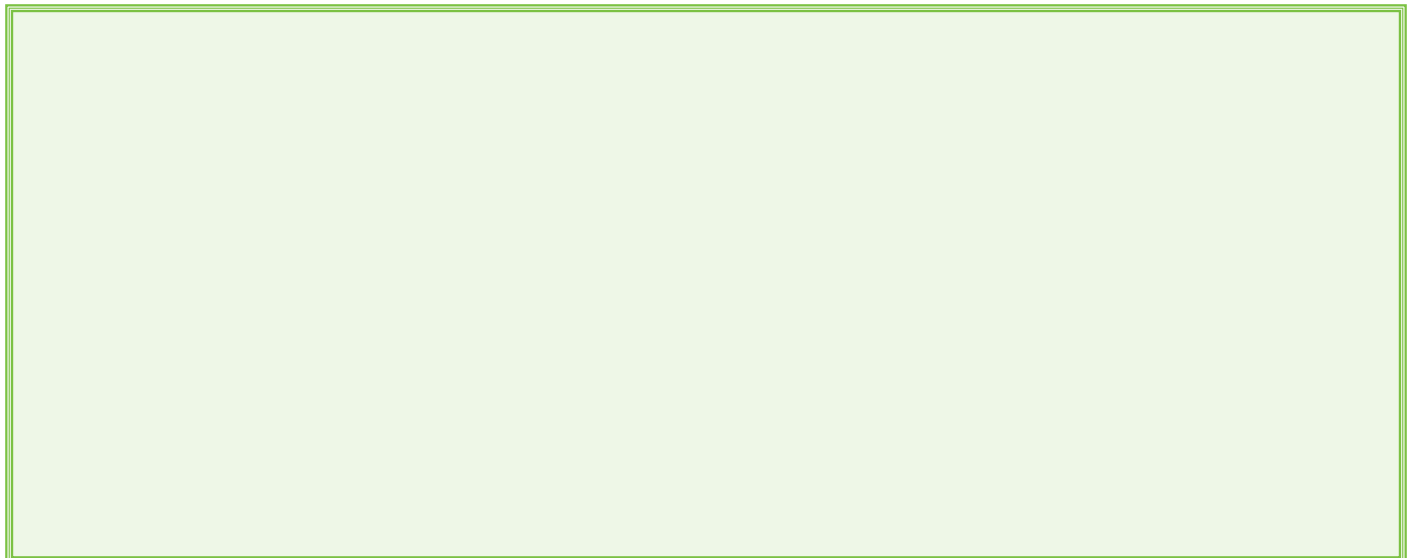
One must dread a perennial crop? “Wild oats” is a self-seeding crop that is bound to come back and haunt you down the road. Why is it something you dread someone might find out about or that you hope your spouse never hears about? Are you proud of it? Could it be something that will pop up later that might prevent you getting that desired office or position you want so badly? Could it come back to haunt you by re-occurring “flash backs”? (Don’t say that will not happen. I have talked to too many who

live in regret because of just such problems). Sometimes you hear “just this once,” and figure it will be forever behind you, but will it be? Sex “just this once,” and what if a baby is due ten months down the road? What does that do to finding the “right one” and to your future plans? Will it be thrown back up to you, “You did it with him, do you think you’re too good for me?” And what will you do with that baby from “just this one time”? Or the alcoholic who began with “just one to be socialable”?

Why is it opposed by the Bible? Could it be that God is wiser than man (Jer. 10:23)? Does he have a reason for defining “pure religion” in James 1:26-27? Why are those lists of sins, “and such like” (Gal. 5:21), to be found in the Bible? Does God see dangers we cannot, or would prefer not to believe exist? God is not opposed to our having fun, but says, “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth: Walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; But know for all these things, God will bring you into judgment” (Eccl. 11:9). God warns you, but will not force you; but He will hold you accountable!

Detrimental to your soul? Why does God warn you that you will be lost if you engage in such sins as found in Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:6, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10? If you were to die while “sowing your wild oats,” do you think your soul would be saved? Do you feel you will be a stronger Christian because you are engaged in those things? Do you think you will be an influence for the better or a good example (see Matt. 18:6-9)? And what did James mean in James 4:13-17? Could it have been a warning? Will doing those things show your maturity, trust, and that you are now grown-up?

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What Is Truly Precious To You?

Bart Campbell

Many of you are familiar with the parable that Jesus used to illustrate the value of the Kingdom of God, “The Pearl Of Great Price.” Jesus said: “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and *bought it*” (Matt. 13:45-46). We can readily see how Jesus is using this to illustrate how precious to us the kingdom of heaven ought to be. The merchant thought that the one pearl was more precious than his entire inventory. Do you regard the kingdom of heaven as that precious to you.

As I was contemplating the theme of this article, something happened in our family that dramatized this point. Our grandson was born at 1:00 a.m. on March 22. We had all looked forward to this event with great anticipation. But as soon as our grandson arrived, the nurse and doctor began to know that something was very wrong. Our grandson was not breathing right and in a short time our doctor determined that he must be flown by helicopter to a hospital 60 miles away which was better equipped to handle this emergency. Before the birth, we had all anticipated the costs that would be involved with a “normal” birth and we scrutinized what we could pay for and what we could not. But when Austin was born and the doctor determined the need for extra medical and supportive attention, the extra unanticipated expenses did not seem to matter. All that we cared about was Austin’s health and whatever was needed we wanted to be done, no matter what the costs. Austin was more valuable and precious than any other consideration.

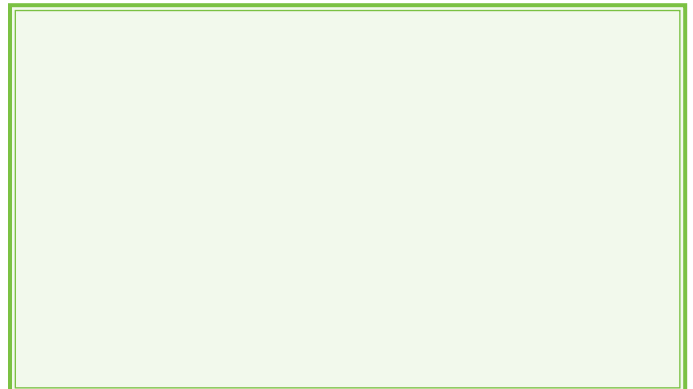
I am sure that any one of you who has ever been in similar circumstances, would recognize the priority that we placed on Austin’s life. As of now, Austin is fine and will make a complete recovery. But now that the emergency is over, as I think about this, how often do we put the importance and value on the kingdom of God as Jesus illustrated with the Pearl of Great Price. Do we fail to remember how precious certain things are that are of real value to God? Peter tells us of the “precious” blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). It is of great value because it paid the price for our sins, but do we appreciate the value of this? Peter also spoke of how Jesus is a “precious” corner stone to the

church (1 Pet. 2:4, 6). Many times people will criticize the church (or the people who make up the church) and forget that this is an institution that God planned which has his Son as the foundation. Peter also spoke of the “precious” and magnificent promises through which we can become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

But so often, we do not set the priority on the value of these things or some of the other things that are precious to God. We often place other things that are part of our earthly lives as more important in value to us than what is precious to God. How important is the kingdom of God to you today? Is it more important than any event that might appeal for your attention and presence on a Sunday? Is it more important than anything that might require your time rather than to attend a Bible class? Is it more important with your money than something that might keep you away from financially supporting the propagation of the gospel of Christ? How “precious” is the kingdom of heaven to you?

As I said earlier, Austin is fine and is expected to make a full recovery. The only lifelong disability that he will have, is the fact that he looks a great deal like me. But I can only hope that as he grows, I can communicate to him the supreme value of the kingdom of God and how much priority it has over anything or anyone in our life.

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“Families” continued from front page

families in the days of Paul who supported gospel preachers together. Luke tells us in Acts 21:4-6 that Christian men came together with their wives and children to pray with Paul and bid him farewell to Jerusalem. These families showed up together in order to encourage Paul and hold up the hands of a gospel preacher. I'm sure this meant much to Paul. All families today can be more sacrificial in getting out, leaving their comfortable surroundings and busy schedules, and doing something together to encourage gospel preachers and other brethren in their service to God. Later in Acts 21:8-9, Luke records that Paul stayed in the home of Philip the evangelist who had four virgin daughters who prophesied. We do not have the gift of prophecy today. But, how encouraging it would be to see more fathers whose daughters or sons are faithful Christians and who would open their homes and be more hospitable to brethren.

What Can Godly Families Do Together in the Local Church?

Godly families can worship God together (Heb. 13:15) and attend a church service together (Heb. 10:25). They can sing, pray and study the Bible together. They can prepare their Bible class lessons together (1 Tim. 4:13). Parents, make sure all of your children—who are old enough and able to—open their songbooks and sing out, open their Bibles and read along, take notes, and bow in prayer when it is time to do so. Like Abraham's family (Gen. 18:19), families today can make sure that each family member learns God's word. Like Cornelius' family (Acts 10:24), families today can assemble together to hear God's word proclaimed.

Families can contribute together to do the work of the local church (Eph. 4:16). They can volunteer together for work in and around the church building (Tit. 2:14; 3:1, 8, 14). They can come together to encourage brethren (1 Thess. 5:12-14). They can respond together to those who visit our assemblies (1 Cor. 14:23). They can be benevolent together toward needy saints (Acts 11:29). Parents, there is plenty to do in the Lord's kingdom. Do it together with the whole family! Pick one day a week and do one activity together in the Lord's work. Like Joshua's family (Josh. 24:15), families today can serve the Lord together.

Godly families can visit the needy together (Jas. 1:27). Parents, do you want your children to practice “pure and undefiled religion” also? If so, include them in your visitation. Take them with you. Teach them to help others and speak to others. Don't leave them at home in front of the TV, on the computer, or on the phone. It will do your children more good to get out and visit the needy. Families can offer hospitality together (Acts 2:46; Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9). Hospitality teaches kindness (Luke 10:33-37), and it

teaches sharing (Heb. 13:16). Parents, include your children in your hospitality. Tell them to do some things around the house to get ready for company, or go to the home of a shut-in together and serve them. They will grow up to be giving people, not selfish, self-centered people.

Families can do evangelism together (Acts 8:4). They can all sit in together on a home Bible study or host a Bible study together. They can pass out flyers together around the church building before a gospel meeting. They can work together to invite their neighbors to hear a lesson.

Finally, godly families can work together to qualify men for godly leadership and service. The Lord's church greatly needs elders and deacons today (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1). A part of the requirement for a godly elder and a deacon involves the family (1 Tim. 3:2, 4-5, 11-12; Tit. 1:6). Fathers, make becoming an elder or a deacon a goal in your life and work toward it. Bring your family together and talk with them about this important place in the local church, and then work together with your family to qualify yourself to fill this role. Read the verses above and see what you have to do with your family so that your family requirement is met. Then you will be on your way to being qualified for this great work.

One educational slogan that I hear often today is “No Child Left Behind.” We need to apply this slogan to the Lord's church. As a spouse and parent of four children, I want my wife and children to be a part of serving the Lord together with me. I don't want my spouse and children to be left behind. Do you? We can certainly have godly families in the local church who get involved together. But, you have to make it happen. If you really love your spouse (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33; Tit. 2:4), and you really love your children (Tit. 2:4), and you really love your Lord (Matt. 22:37), you will make it happen.

POSTSCRIPT: On the very day that the author composed this article, he witnessed what he had been writing about. That evening, during the Wednesday evening mid-week service of the local church, he noticed one of the members missing who was a father. His wife and children were present, but he was gone. He could have been there, but chose not to be. The sad thing is, the night before, the author saw this same family all together at the movies and spoke with them afterward. This father had taken his family together to the movies on Tuesday night, but wouldn't come together with them to worship the Lord on Wednesday night. Clearly, this father had his priorities in the wrong place. Brethren like this can and should do better before they lose their families.

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“**Unity**” continued from p. 2 from “doctrine.” They asserted that we must have doctrinal agreement on those things that are classified as “gospel,” but that we can have doctrinal diversity on those matters classified as “doctrine.” As the years passed, the number of things in the “gospel” category shrunk and those in the “doctrinal” category grew. Presently, one can hold membership in most main line Protestant denominations without believing that Jesus was born of a virgin, his body was raised from the dead, he performed miracles, or that one must have faith in Jesus in order to be saved. Some of the laity in Protestant denominationalism have been shocked by the ordination of practicing homosexuals. Long ago these denominations accepted into fellowship those who are practicing homosexuals. Ordaining homosexuals is just another case of unity in doctrinal (and moral) diversity. There is no difference in receiving a person who is a practicing homosexual and one who is a practicing adulterer—one who is in a marriage that does not have divine approval (see Matt. 19:9).

Among Protestants there has been a knee-jerk reaction to liberalism as a result of the ordination of homosexuals. Most Protestant churches have an element within them who believe that ordaining homosexuals is taking “unity-in-diversity” too far. These Protestants are calling for unity based on doctrinal conformity with reference to homosexuality. As a matter of fact, some are ready to divide from their churches over this issue.

Unless one is ready to accept the full package of relativism, in which case one accepts into his fellowship every person (including the atheist) regardless of what he believes and practices, he must accept that there are some matters of faith and practice that are so fundamental and essential that person cannot be included in their fellowship without conformity on that issue. These are “boundary” issues—issues that determine whether or not a person is one of the group. Where there are no boundary issues, the group merges into the society as a whole. For example, how would one distinguish a United Methodist from any other American?

What are those boundary issues? How are they defined? I believe that Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) explained scriptural teaching correctly. He wrote as a resolution. . .

That this society, formed for the sole purpose of promoting simple evangelical Christianity, shall, to the utmost of its power, countenance and support such ministers, and such only, as exhibit a manifest conformity to the original standard in conversation and doctrine, in zeal and diligence;—only such as reduce to practice that simple original form of Christianity, expressly exhibited upon the sacred page; without attempting to inculcate anything of human authority, of private opinion, or inventions of men, as having any place in the constitution, faith, or worship, of the Christian

church—or, any thing, as matter of Christian faith, or duty, for which can not be expressly produced a thus saith the Lord either in express terms, or by approved precedent (*Declaration and Address* 4).

Campbell was resolved to give up anything “received as matter of faith or practice, which is not expressly taught and enjoined in the word of God, either in express terms, or approved precedent” for the goal of returning to the “original constitutional unity of the christian church” (10-11).

Campbell did not see anything that is revealed by command, example, and necessary inference that was non-essential or unimportant. Campbell was not speaking of things divinely revealed as matters of indifference but of that mindset which trivializes as unimportant, legalistic, or nit-picking what God has revealed. He writes,

We dare neither assume, nor purpose, the trite indefinite distinction between essentials, and non-essentials, in matters of revealed truth and duty; firmly persuaded, that, whatever may be their comparative importance, simply considered, the high obligation of the Divine Authority revealing, or enjoining them, renders the belief, or performance of them, absolutely essential to us, in so far as we know them. And to be ignorant of any thing God has revealed, can neither be our duty, nor our privilege. We humble presume then, dear brethren, you can have no relevant objection to meet us upon this ground (11).

Consequently, Campbell and those Christians of his generation united on those things that are revealed by divine inspiration. They cast aside their creed books and united on the revealed word of God.

That meant radical change for many of them. They had to give up divisive denominations, creed books, infant baptism, administering baptism by sprinkling or pouring, inter-congregational organizations, religious titles, and a host of other things, so that they could simply unite on those things that are taught by command, example, and necessary inference.

I think that Campbell correctly assessed what is revealed in Scripture. We must have unity based on those things revealed by God. We believe that all must adhere to the seven ones of Ephesians 4:1-7—one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. Not everything required of Christians is included in this list, but it shows that anything that is required by God and revealed as a matter of faith is also a condition of fellowship.

We have no common cause with those who deny, question, or treat as irrelevant those things revealed in Scripture, whether those be statements of fact (creation, the universal flood, the fish swallowing Jonah, the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, the atonement, or his bodily

resurrection, etc.), religious practice (baptism for remission of sins, baptism is an immersion in water, weekly observance of the Lord's supper, etc.), or moral commandments (what Jesus taught about such things as abortion, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, stealing, etc.). We invite all those who desire to be governed by divine revelation to join hands with each other in promoting the common cause of Christ.

Having stated this, we recognize that the body of Christ is not limited to those who are perfect in practice and/or belief. So long as new people are being converted, there will always be those at every stage of spiritual growth within the body of Christ—from newborn babes to those who are spiritually mature. Our obligation is to work with these immature saints to bring them to spiritual maturity; we do not withhold our fellowship until they become perfect in belief and practice. Paul wrote about developing spiritual maturity saying, “. . . Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:13-16). The author of Hebrews exhorted those Christians to grow unto maturity, criticizing them for not having yet grown to that stage saying, “Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:11-14). There is a difference between receiving false teachers into one's fellowship (which is sinful) and working with immature Christians to lead them to maturity!

It is tragic that those who are agreed on all doctrinal aspects of divorce and remarriage may tend to draw lines of fellowship with each other because they disagree about a particular marriage case with particular circumstances relating to it. We have congregations in every major city which have received into their fellowship those whom others do not think ought to be received. One congregation has a problem created by one of their members whom they judge to be factional; this brother goes to another congregation in town and is received with open arms, even though the

other congregation thinks the man should not be received. The two congregations are agreed in doctrine that factionalism is a sin that requires the breaking of fellowship (Tit. 3:10-11). They are disagreed on whether or not a given brother is guilty of that sin and should be disfellowshipped. Nevertheless, the two congregations maintain a brotherly relationship with each other. However, a couple divorces and remarries. Two congregations in town are equally committed to Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage, but they reach a different judgment about whether or not that couple is guilty of adultery based on some personal judgment issues (do the papers say for fornication, who initiated the lawsuit, did the innocent party counter sue if the guilty party initiated the civil divorce proceedings, did the innocent party make a statement to the congregation that he was divorcing his mate for fornication before the judge issued the divorce, etc.). Why can these brethren not recognize that they are teaching the same truths but have a disagreement about whether or not a given couple is guilty of violating that commonly held truth, just as they do about the factional brother?

Conclusion

Christians are identified by their common faith (Jude 3). Christians believe the same thing about Jesus; they practice the same worship; they live by the same moral standard. Consequently, they can be distinguished from the world and from other religions by these boundary issues. In essentials, we can and must have unity.

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PREACHER NEEDED

Knoxville, Tennessee: The Chapman Highway church of Christ, located in Knoxville is seeking a full-time evangelist to work with the non-institutional congregation who can provide part of his own support. The congregation has two elders; one is Claude Keith (865-579-1141) and the other is Butler Roberts (865-789-9517). Pete Culpepper is available to answer any questions as well (865-235-5485; pete@felixculpepper.com). The previous evangelist, Roger Williams, resigned to start a new work in the Pigeon Forge area.

Potato Chips and Cotton Candy

Larry Ray Hafley

A brother in another state wrote of going to a meeting recently. Below are his comments on the lesson he heard:

I went to hear (John Doe) at (Podunk) last night. . . . He “talked” on marriage. The passages he used . . . were Psalm 15; Genesis 2; Song of Solomon 7; Matthew 19:6; Ephesians 5:25-26. None was discussed very definitively. . . . Of course, others there may have thought differently, but for the most part he just talked. Part of his lesson consisted of the reading of the wedding vows he uses to conduct a wedding and of what he says at the exchange of the rings. . . . The substance of his lesson . . . came more from the wording of the vows than from scripture.

As for the invitation, he said, we need to come to Christ in faith. That was it! The conditions for the alien sinner to meet were never given, nor any mention of what an erring child of God must do to regain his acceptable state before the Lord.

Additional Comments

Of course, anyone may, if he wishes, make harshly critical remarks of any sermon he hears. We do not justify such behavior.

However, I fear some preaching, weighed in the balances of God, may be found wanting and falling short of what the Lord would have it to be. Therefore, to this brother, I responded, “What you described in your letter is exactly what is wrong with much of today’s preaching. While it may not teach any overt, blatant error, it does not sustain any distinctive truth. Such preaching will neither build sound churches nor souls for eternity. Potato chips and cotton candy are food; they will not kill you, but they will not build up the body. The same is true with much of the pabulum that passes as preaching in many places.”

Let us remember the spiritual climate that envelopes and engulfs our world today—“evil men and seducers (are becoming) worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). Hence, in our preaching, let us be aware of the need to differentiate between the true and the false, between human religion and divine religion, between the counsels of men and the commandments of God, between the traditions of men and the appointments of heaven (Matt. 21:25; 28:20; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:2; Col. 2:8; 2 Thess. 2:15). We dare not assume that men today, not even those in the church, know the way of God which we may take for granted. Whether addressing morals or marriage, or Muslims or Mormons, let us give the sense and cause men to understand the will of God as expressed in word of truth (Neh. 8:8; Luke 24:25-27, 45).

Failure to tell the lost what they must do to be saved is a growing problem. *First*, men must learn of “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). *Second*, intensive efforts and exhortations must be made to men to “save (themselves)” from this crooked nation and perverse generation (Acts 2:40). *Third*, “with great force and power,” the lost must be told exactly what they must do to be saved by grace through faith (Acts 20:21; 22:16). The lost must see the contrast between the “easy believism” (faith only) of denominational religion on the one hand and the plain, certain terms of gospel obedience on the other (Acts 8:5, 12, 35-39).

But speak thou the things which befit the sound doctrine (Tit. 2:1).

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:2-4).

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