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Bulletin Articles

There's Just One Way to Fix Sin -- Repent!

Man, ingenious creature that he is (and with all the "help" he gets from Satan, Revelation 12:9), can dream up sundry ways supposed to mollify sin's sting, while neglecting the absolute requirement for forgiveness--repentance (Luke 13:5). Such imaginary correction of man's all-time worst problem consoles the perpetrator and eases the sharp prick of his pained conscience while leaving him in the firm grip of sin's guiltiness. Like the popular denominational doctrine of salvation by faith only, the forgiveness of sin without repentance may be very full of something one can call comfort, but the comfort is short-lived and superficial. Consider some of the many ways men incorrectly surmise sin's damning consequences to be averted.

**"Minor Sin", Common Sin, or Passionate Sin Coupled with Subsequent Improved Behavior.* Some will claim that sin, theirs or another's, needs no repentance because an action was just a minor matter in human affairs. So a brother blew up and uttered words of hatred to his brother, everybody loses his temper on occasion. So he did declare things contrary to fear of God and respect of man, he's probably sorry for it, and it was just an outburst of an exceptionally emotional moment; anyway, he now acts friendly toward the one he offended. Why make waves over that which is past? Doesn't the Bible say something about leaving well enough alone? Or, what about the passage that says, "Let sleeping dogs lie"?

All the foregoing sounds good to lots of folks, but is so much "baloney"; it doesn't change the fact that sin must be corrected Biblically (Matthew 5:22; 22:37-39; Colossians 3:16). Such correction either includes repentance (a change of the will produced by godly sorrow, II Corinthians 7:10), or it is not forgiven. Such repentance will manifest itself in confessing (acknowledging) the wrong to the person(s) involved (Acts 8:22; I John 1:9; James 5:16). So-called minor sins and common sins are still sins, and though they may have lesser consequences in some ways, they are spiritually deadly, and no amount of improved behavior will dispense with the indispensable prerequisite for forgiveness--repentance.

Sins of ignorance. Working with the same sin situation just discussed, what if the person sinning doesn't know that he has sinned? Will not his ignorance of the sin dispense with his need to repent? Nay, verily! Were this so, those who crucified the Lord were without a need to repent of their heartless murder of the innocent Lamb of God, for the Lord Himself said, *"they know not what they do"* (Luke 23:34). Yet, those who crucified the Lord were specifically told by inspired voices of their guilt and their need to repent of their atrocity (Acts 2:23, 36, 38).

Undoubtedly many sins are committed by those who do not know that they are sinning, and some such sins are committed by Christians. The faithful live with an ongoing penitent attitude which recognizes their failure to walk precisely in the obedient steps of their Master and which prods them to study persistently with self examination in order to discover any overlooked sin. Additionally, such Christians are prompt to repent and confess their known sins and their sins of ignorance which are subsequently brought to their attention (Acts 8:18-24; I John 1:9; James 1:22; 5:16). No, the sin of ignorance is not excusable without repentance. Such actions are by their very label identified as sin, and sin, all sin, is conduct for which men must repent if they are to be forgiven by God (Acts 17:30; Luke 13:3).

**Forgotten sins.* Some, apparently desperate in their vain effort to wrongly right a wrong, will claim

that an individual doesn't need to repent of a sin that he has forgotten about having committed. My, my, to what lengths men will go trying to justify themselves or others! Do such men think at all? Do they not realize that we live our lives before Him Who forgets nothing!? God's omniscience retains a flawlessly accurate awareness of all that can be known, past, present and future; obviously, this includes knowledge of sins that men forget having committed and knowledge of whether or not they have repented and made the necessary corrections for such sins. If God remembers the sin, and if God remembers that the sin has not been corrected by repentance, that sin is still on the sinner's account and subject to ultimate payment of sin's wages --spiritual death (Romans 6:23; 14:12).

Man is obligated to have utmost regard for God's Will (Ecclesiastes 12:13). God's attitude about sin will prevail no matter how we are able to satisfy ourselves with some alternative; therefore God's attitude concerning sin and its correction should always be respected and adopted as God's Book instructs (II Timothy 3:16-17). No one should treat sin and sinners only as seems right, or only as they find easiest, or only as they calculate is likely to cause the fewest ripples in the church's feelings. The elders of the church, in particular, are duty-bound to treat sin as taught by the Bible. To do otherwise cripples the elders' example and will lead them and the flock that follows them to ultimate destruction (Hebrews 13:17).

Bob Berard, Spring, TX

Rallying the Troops

Anyone interested in military history has often noticed the key role the morale of the fighting men plays in the outcome of a battle. Especially in modern warfare, with all the powerful weaponry and sophisticated technology, it's hard to believe that the attitudes of the soldiers could play any significant role. After all, what could one's inner well being have to do with such a struggle? Nevertheless, history records numerous cases where a more powerful army was defeated by a motivated and energized force. The greater morale won the day.

Human beings can be very logical and clear-minded creatures at times. We all like to think that's the general condition. Yet, how many times do we wake up in the morning, and it just doesn't feel like "my kind of day". No aches and pains to speak of. No catastrophe looming ahead. No real,

tangible problem exists, but still it just doesn't seem right. Such attitudes not only affect individuals, they can affect a group or even a nation. Have you ever heard of the Consumer Confidence Index? It's a measure, supposedly, of people's confidence in the economy. Whether or not there's any reason for low confidence or not, if people perceive something negatively, that negativity will have an overall effect.

Can this affect the church and our spiritual condition? Jesus described His ministry once this way: *"He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised"* (Luke 4:18). The words "brokenhearted", "captive", "blind" and "bruised" refer to those overwhelmed by sin. Sin can be devastating, not only in how it affects us outwardly, but in how it deprives us of hope. Jesus' call to the sinners of the world follows the basic pattern of *"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (Matthew 11:28).

One who goes into battle with the hope and expectation of victory will fight more valiantly than one who expects defeat. The same applies to our view of a new day, or the rest of our lives. Jesus overcame the world, and through Him victory can likewise be ours. We can have peace through Him in a world that offers none (cf. John 6:33).

Let Jesus and the hope we have in Him be the rallying cry of the faithful. May we have hope in the battles and challenges of life. - Dennis L. Curd

Beyond This Life

"For is we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (I Thessalonians 4:14). There is a beautiful song that we sing entitled "Beyond the Sunset". The song depicts what is beyond this life. Every family must expect sooner or later to have a vacant spot in their lives, made so by death. The gospel of Christ prepares us for this inevitable event. It transforms a seeming tragedy into a triumph.

Death is hard to understand. It is somewhat like the ocean, it is too large to be seen across. As we stand on the beach and strain our eyes, we cannot see land on the other side. Men used to fear the sea until Columbus returned from sailing across it. Since that day, all fear and superstition about the ocean are gone. It is the same with death for the Christian. Jesus crossed the ocean of death and came back. Those who are Christians will, like everyone else, taste a physical death unless the Lord returns first. The difference is that the Christian has a hope for something better beyond the sunset of death.

Life is like a day. The morning is like youth, full of ambition and strength. Then comes the noon which is like the middle years of many responsibilities. The afternoon sees the children leave home, life's tasks completed, bodily strength exhausted. At night we lie down upon our bed, tired and weary. How good it feels to us, and we fall asleep in sweet rest. We seem not to worry, because we feel assured there will be another day. The same will be our rest at the end of life's long day when, tired and worn, we lie down for the last time. We are at peace for we, as Christians, know there will be an eternal reward when we awake in that glorious land of all good things, "beyond the sunset, oh, blissful morning". Let us thank God that as Christians we are able to face the future unafraid.

-- Gene Stilwell

God Will Overlook It... Just This Once

Many Christians attempt to justify sin, particularly that of forsaking the assembly, by using the excuse listed above. When they have a family event, a decoration or company in for the weekend, they forsake the assembly or stay at home to entertain, thinking to themselves, "God understands; He will overlook it just this once." Maybe a Christian has an opportunity to engage in what might become a once-in-a-lifetime recreational event (concert, ball game, a trip of some sort, etc.). Rather than seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33), he or she rationalizes the situation, "God understands how much I want to do this. He won't mind if I miss Bible study or worship just this once." Is this the attitude one should have toward Him Who gave His Son to die for our sins?

Jesus made perfectly clear what is to be our attitude toward Him and the Father. *"He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth so or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not up his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me"* (Matthew 10:37, 38). When Christians forsake the assembly, they set aside the cross they promised to bear when they obeyed the gospel. They also follow their own desires in spite of knowing what the Lord would have them do. God will not be relegated to second place in the life of the Christian (or anyone else, for that matter)! Any Christian thinking otherwise is in for a rude awakening at the day of reckoning and judgment. Don't fool yourself, there will be hell to pay on the part of those who act in such a manner.

In addition, some Christians believe it is perfectly acceptable to forsake the assembly so long as they assemble somewhere. While it may be at some time necessary to assemble privately due to the lack of a local congregation or due to unforeseen circumstances, some Christians assemble with denominational groups on Sunday morning and believe they have satisfied the command to assemble. Note what Hebrews 10:25 say: *"Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is...."* The assembling together is to take place with fellow Christians. Denominational bodies do not "fit the bill". I have seen some Christians assemble with unauthorized religious bodies on Sunday morning and then return to their home congregation on Sunday evening and partake of the Lord's Supper. This practice is unacceptable. If one may forsake gathering with the saints and with the Lord to assemble with denominational bodies once, one may do it every week.

The following is a test to see how the "just this once" excuse measures up against the plumbline of the truth (Amos 7:8). Check all that apply.

- God overlooked Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit just that one time (Genesis 3:1-24).
- God overlooked the Israelites' creating and worshipping the golden calf just that one time (Exodus 32:19-35).
- God overlooked Nadab and Abihu's use of unauthorized fire in the worship just that one time (Leviticus 10:1-3).
- God overlooked Uzzah when he touched the ark of the covenant because he had such a good reason, and he did it only once (II Samuel 6:6, 7)
- If we sprinkle water on a person's head and call it baptism, God will overlook it just this once (Romans 6:3-5; Colossians 2:11, 12).
- If we bring in a piano or an organ for the services, God will overlook it just this once (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
- If I cheat on my spouse and refuse to repent, God will overlook it just this once--and my spouse should, too. (By the way, forsaking the assembly is the equivalent to spiritual adultery.)

The above unerringly proves the fallacy of the God-will-overlook-my-sin-this-once theory. We are commanded to take up our cross daily and follow after Jesus (Luke 9:23). Remember the closing words of the song, "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"... "My cross I'll carry 'til I see Jesus, no turning back, I'll follow Him."

Todd Clippard

If you **know** the truth but **do not live** the truth, the truth is worthless to you.

We ARE Our Brother's Keeper!

Back at the dawn of man's existence, Cain asked, "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" (Genesis 4:9). The reply of the centuries has been an absolute: "Yes, Cain -- and all others -- you are your brother's keeper. Because you are your brother's brother."

Imagine a family with several children. One child doesn't come home from school one day. How would the family react? Would they hold tight to the remaining children and talk about how glad they were to still have them? No! They would immediately begin an intense search until they found the lost child.

God is equally concerned when even one of His children strays from the family. He doesn't want to lose any! He paid too high a price for each soul. But God makes His search for wandering sheep through His people. He

expects you and me to be concerned in this search and involved in it.

So it is your responsibility--not only to stay on the programs, to stay in faithful touch with Jesus Christ-- but also to work with Him in reclaiming and reaching and encouraging others in the way of Christ. WE ARE OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER. So, we need to pray for one another, encourage one another and set the right example before each other. We should ask God to help us have a loving concern, not only for those living the Christian life, but also in encouraging others to do so.

via South Florida Avenue "Messenger", 10/3/00

Faith in God

Faith in God is more than conviction that He exists. It is belief that He is active in my life.

I have never heard His voice verbally as did Moses, but God speaks to me more plainly and completely through the written message of His Word than he spoke to Moses. I now know and understand many things Moses never understood.

God has never delivered me from the mouths of lions as He did Daniel, but daily He delivers me from temptations that are far more fierce than the most savage beast.

God has never drowned my enemies as He did Pharoah in the Red Sea, but error and workers of wickedness are overwhelmed in the truth I preach.

I have never seen God's hand write on a wall as did the Babylonian king, but His hand paints every flower and molds every cloud with such splendor that I know surely that I am weighed in the balances and found wanting.

He has never told me to leave all my relatives and go dwell in tents in a drought-stricken land as Abraham did, but God has asked me to leave my home and go to lands stricken with sin and error to carry His message of love.

He has never promised me possession of lands as far as my eye could see in all directions, nor has He said He would increase my seed as the stars of heaven, but He has promised me an eternal home at His own right hand in a city with the street of gold; and those I have converted to Him through the preaching of the gospel will yield fruits of righteousness forever.

I count all the wonderful things He has done for all the great men of the past, and I find that He does all things for me and more through redemption and salvation in Christ His Son and my Redeemer. Yes, God is living and active today in more ways than I can ever conceive or think.

-- Otis Gatewood

Do You Know Your Bible?

Paul wrote unto Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). This injunction is still proper for each one of us today. We need not only to read, but to study the Bible. If we will only take time to read and study it, the Bible will help us wonderfully in our lives.

By studying God's Word we will find light to guide us a little farther down the path of right. The Psalmist said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). The darkness of sorrow, despair, sickness and sin can be driven away by the light of the love of God, through His Word.

By studying God's Word we shall have our hearts cleansed. "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15:3). Our motives will be changed, our outlooks will be different and our attitudes toward others will be altered. Purity, then, will be filled with goodness.

By studying God's Word we shall gain in faith. "So then faith cometh by hearing,

and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). The greater our faith, the greater our service and dedication will be. "But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). We certainly should be striving to grow in our faith, seeking to increase it daily.

By studying God's Word we may learn things which we did not know before. We may learn how lightly we have taken serious commands. We may come to see how we have been living in transgression of God's will. We may learn to rejoice in the suffering which some- times comes while serving Him. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16-17).

By studying God's Word we may be strengthened so as to better overcome the tempter. "I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him tht is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong and the word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the wicked one" (I John 2:14). How better than by God's own instructions could one be able to resist Satan successfully?

By studying God's Word we may gain heavenly life. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit ,and they are life" (John 6:63). We must all answer individually; so, much will depend upon how we have studied and infused into our lives what we have learned from that study.

These are by no means the only benefits of studying the Bible, but are they not enough? Why not decide now to STUDY your Bible daily and see how much it will improve your life. Why not see what God says about what He expects from you? When judgment comes, we will be judged by the Word (John 12:48). The only way for us to know

what we must be do to be pre- pared is not take someone's word for those things pertaining to our salvation, but to be as the noble Bereans and "search the scriptures daily, whether these things be so" (Acts 17:11).
-- Oran Rhodes

Neglecting Salvation

In Hebrews 2:1-4 we find a strong warning not to "neglect salvation". Salvation should be the goal of all men. This means doing all that is required of man so as to inherit eternal life. Verse three asks, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" This question follows, "For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward" (V.2). Men neglect salvation because they neglect the Word of God (Matthew 7:21-27). This is the root of man's problem. Men neglect salvation due to:

The deceitful nature of sin (Hebrews 3:12; Genesis 3:1-6).

The idea that we have plenty of time (James 4:13).

Some look for a convenient time (Acts 24:25; 26:27).

Some are burdened with the affairs of this world rather than with the affairs of living for God (Luke 14:16; Matthew 6:33).

Some feel that God will make exception in their case (Acts 10:34). Our soul's salvation depends upon how we live. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (I Corinthians 15:58) author unknown/edited

Let Us Surrender

Let us consider again what God expects of man for salvation. We must **surrender to Christ**.

- We must **surrender** our **ears** in **hearing**: "*Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17).
- We must **surrender** our **intellect** in **believing**: "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...*" (Mark 16:15-16).
- We must **surrender** our **will** in **repentance**: "*Repent and be baptized every one of you...*" (Acts 2:38). We must **surrender** our **lips** in **confessing**: "*Because if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*" (Romans 10:9).
- We must **surrender** our **lives** in **baptism**, dying as it were to the old way of life, being raised to walk in a newness of life (Romans 6:4; Acts 2:38; Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 2:12; I Peter 3:21).
- Jesus said that it is necessary that a man be "born again". Above we see the outline for that new birth. Our fleshly birth gives us an earthly inheritance; our spiritual birth assures us a heavenly inheritance! Have you made surrender to Christ?

-unknown via Greenville c/C "Messenger"

Read Your Bible

It takes about 52 hours to read privately the Old Testament and about 18 hours to read the New. If we read one hour and 20 minutes a week (12 minutes a day), we can read the whole Bible in a year. "*Blessed is he that readeth... and keep those things which are written*

therein..." (Revelation 1:3).

Why Don't You Try?

A few weeks ago I was visiting with a preacher friend of mine. Our conversation turned to other preachers and the attributes they possessed that we would also like to possess. My friend began to mention how one of his favorite preachers memorized the book of John while preaching a series on the same book. This preacher could now quote the entire gospel of John. I spoke of a good preacher friend of mine and mentioned how he could quote passages from just about anywhere in the Bible; he could quote from the Pentateuch, from the prophets, he could even quote passages from the Chronicles, and nobody does that!!!

Who are these men, and where did they come from? How could they have such a great memory? As he and I raved on about how we wished we could do the same thing, my son Race joined in the conversation. Race is nine years old, and I believe what he had to say made a great deal of sense. He plopped up in my lap and said, "Why don't you try?" "What?" I said. "Have you ever tried, Dad? You'll never know unless you try." I felt somewhat flushed in front of my friend and especially my son. I have taught him almost from his birth that anything worth having is worth working for. I have told him over and over again that, if you want to be good at something, you must practice. And yet I wasn't following my own advice. Oh yes, I wanted the great knowledge, but without the hard labor. I wanted to quote the Bible, but without spending the time to memorize it.

The story is told of a preacher who had great oratory ability and a phenomenal ability to quote just about any scripture in the Bible. After preaching one Sunday, a brother approached him and said, "Wow, I would give half my life to be able to quote scripture like that." To which the preacher responded, "It would take just that."

Friends, isn't this really a picture of the church today? So many times we speak of wanting the church to grow, but it just seems to be fading away. Why don't you try to change that? The great commission is still a command, and the gospel is still *"the power of God unto salvation"* (Romans 1:16). For some reason we expect the church to grow on its own without so much as our lifting a finger.

Another area where so many fall short is in the area of teaching. In a congregation of around 400 members, one wouldn't think there would be a shortage of good Bible class teachers. And yet there is! It is sad that those involved in finding teachers for each quarter struggle in doing so. So many will respond, "I can't teach" or "I've never done it before." Why don't you try? By not teaching, you'll never know the great joy that can come from training young, precious souls. By not teaching, you can never fully appreciate those teachers that studied long hours to train you or your children.

Friends, the list could go on and on, but these examples are sufficient for the thrust of this

article. If you want to accomplish something for the Lord, whether it be teaching, memorization, evangelism, benevolence, etc., and it is something you have never done before, WHY DON'T YOU TRY? I would rather have the Lord find me trying than sitting idly by saying, "I can't". By the way, I am starting on the memory work this week.

Sean Hochdorf via the Southaven "Searcher"

RIGHT RELIGIOUSLY

Most people are what they are religiously because of human, rather than divine, reasons; for earthly, rather than heavenly, reasons; as a result of human opinions, rather than what God's Word says. Many are members of particular religious groups for a number of incorrect reasons: their parents were, it is a popular church, they like the people, they married into it, it is the closest building around, etc. Such reasons are worthless in God's sight; they are not the proper reasons for those who wish to be guided by a *"Thus saith the Lord"*. There is such a thing as vain religion (James 1:26; Matthew 15:9). We can waste our time involved in a religious group without God's sanction. *"Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it"* (Psalm 127:1).

What should be the reason one is a member of a religious group? Because it is right! Because it is according to God's revealed Word! Paul thus stated, *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him"* (Colossians 3:17). Is it arrogant to think we can be right religiously? Is it presumption to think we can be right? Jesus explained, *"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself"* (John 7:17). Later He affirmed, *"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32). Why is it unpopular to think we must have Bible authority for all we do in

religion; to make sure the New Testament is consulted before we do anything religiously or morally? Is it erroneous to think we can be members of the same church that existed in the first century? I am so humbly convinced and assured by God through His Word that we can do so. Souls are at stake (Ephesians 2:16; 5:23).

Some things just do not matter. Whether I left the cap off the toothpaste this morning is just not that important. I may have left my garage door open this morning. Yes, I may get some things stolen. But even though there are some things of value, it wouldn't be the end of the world if they were stolen. What if I left the stove on? That becomes a little more important. But we have fire insurance. Can I be this *unconcerned* when it comes to religion? NO! Why? My soul hangs in the balance! Jesus told us:

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:21-23).

Paul let us know the seriousness when he stated:

"... when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Yes, there are some things I cannot know (Deuteronomy 29:29; Romans 11:33). There are some things which have not been revealed (2 Corinthians 12:1-4, 7-10; John 20:30-31; 21:25). And yes, there are some things that are admittedly difficult to understand, but not necessarily impossible (2 Peter 3:16).

However, there are some things we must know! There are truths and words we must know and understand (John 8:32; Acts 11:14; John 12:48). Since we can know and understand divine truth (John 8:32; Ephesians 3:3-5; 5:17), we must get to the business of diligently searching out what God has to say in His Word! Since we can expect to see the Bible alike (1 Corinthians 1:10; Amos 3:3; Ephesians 4:1-6; 2 Peter 3:15; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:1), then God expects us to be Christians just like those of the first century. He expects us to be members of the same church they were. He has given a pattern by which to follow. That pattern is the Bible! We can be religiously right!

I appeal to your love of God and for that which is right--do not be satisfied with following what some man says. Reject it, and believe the Word of God, which is able to make you wise unto salvation and which *"is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

Tracy Dugger

REMEMBER

In Hebrews 13 there are a number of exhortations to faithfulness in daily living. One area is that Christians are encouraged to show **sympathy**. *"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body"* (V.3). Our reverence must reach **upward** to God, and our sympathy must reach **outward** to those about us.

Sympathy involves the principle of faithfulness. God is faithful never to leave us nor forsake us in times of difficulty. *"Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with*

such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:5-6). The Almighty is touched with our hurts, and we should be touched with the hurts of others. Sympathy is not feeling FOR someone, it is feeling WITH him. As Christians we should be a source of strength to others because (1) our life may one day be filled with similar burdens, and (2) as the body of Christ the sorrows of others should touch us. Sympathy is when the grief of another literally becomes my grief.

Sympathy involves the principle of forethought. What do we observe when we see suffering

humanity? What are our thoughts toward those burdened with sorrow? Sympathy was prompted in the heart of the Son of God because of compassion. *"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd"* (Matthew 9:36). He literally felt their feelings. He saw people as weary, scattered sheep. His sympathy led Him to action. Our sympathy must also lead us to action. The service of sympathy will not be a service free of cost. Compassion and sympathy bring us to the very heart of God.

Sympathy involves the principle of fellowship. If you have sympathy, you must enter not just into the feelings of others, but into their life. One who shows sympathy must become one with those who are hurting. *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep"* (Romans 12:15). Sympathy to another is to bear part of his sorrow. Some of the tears for his sorrow must be on our cheeks. If you want to be a person who practices sympathy, consider how you would feel in the place of the other. You must allow it to become your trouble. You must feel for that person. Christians sorrow because it becomes a common loss, affecting you just like the other. The sorrow of one becomes the sorrow of the other. Sympathy is a great source of strength for our lives and a great source of

influence in the lives of others. We must let God fill our hearts with sympathy and our eyes with the tears of compassion. -- Gene Stilwell

When Do You Study Your Bible?

When do you study your Bible? It is sad when some among us don't know why we believe what we believe, or worse, don't know what we believe. Too many so-called Christians rely on the "faith of their fathers" and do not really have their own faith. Why? The reason is obvious: *"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"* (Romans 10:17). And unless we, individually, spend some time in the BOOK, we will never develop our own faith.

Many of our young people are lost to the world because, when confronted with temptation and the pleasures of the world, they do not have a faith that is based on personal knowledge. Study your Bible every day. Search for God's answers to life's problems. Grow in your faith as you feed on God's Word. It is then that we can share that conviction with others. *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee"* (Psalm 119:11).

author unknown

The Lord of Your Mind

Through spiritual reading we have some say over what enters into our minds. Each day our society bombards us with a myriad of images and sounds... each image or word demanding our attention in all sorts of sizes and colors and with all sorts of gestures and noises. The words yell and scream at us: "Eat me, drink me, buy me, hire me, look at me, talk with me, sleep with me!" Whether we ask for it or not is not the question; we simply cannot go far without being engulfed by words and images forcibly intruding themselves into our minds.

But do we really want our minds to become the garbage can of the world? Do we want our minds to be filled with things that confuse us, excite us, depress us, repulse us or attract us whether we think it is good for us or not? Do we want to let others decide what enters into our minds and determines our thoughts and feelings? Clearly, we do not, but it requires real discipline to let God and not the world be the Lord of our mind.

- Henri J.M. Nouwen

The Gifts of Morning

Give thought this morning to the bounty of His good all around you--want. No limiting power over one's plans or desires is descriptive of having no form. A more down-to-earth

illustration would be pouring concrete "without forms". Of course, we all know what would happen in such a case. It would be free, but what good would it be?

Is freedom, however, like concrete? If it is allowed to be absolutely free, is it better or worse? What about freedom of expression? Sexual freedom? Freedom without limits, without form? Our country today, as well as much of the "civilized" world has been, and is, pushing at every limit of personal freedom. Anything that looks like a limit is challenged and, in many cases, toppled. Cultural, legal or religious restraints are seen as restrictive to one's personal freedom. They, therefore, become the enemy of one's self-fulfillment.

Yet, like concrete without form, so are the lives of those seeking meaning outside of limitation. Modern people are so confused and desperate. It's no wonder the headlines every day read the way they do. Everyone wants to be free and have meaning, and yet they consistently seek to destroy everything that can give it to them. As Christians we must help a lost and sad world to find its lost form. Then and only then, can it be truly free. -- Dennis L. Curd

What If?

It is healthy for both our physical and spiritual well-being to practice "possibility thinking". The questions "what if" suggests a strong possibility or likelihood that something could become a reality, striking either fear or joy in our hearts. We need to consider the possibilities:

What if I am still outside the fellowship of God as a non-Christian and never obey the gospel of Christ? What will happen to me if I die in this condition (II Thessalonians 1:8-9)?

What if I profess to be a Christian and do not consider being faithful a very important thing in my life? What will happen to me (Revelation 1:10; I Corinthians 10:12; Matthew 7:21-27)?

What if my children see me doing things that are wrong and un-Christlike, yet I tell them to do that which is right? Will they grow up to become strong Christians (Ephesians 6:4)?

What if the elders of the congregation where I am a member begin to practice the discipline that Christ requires (II Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15)? Would I have to change my attitude and actions lest I myself become a and susceptible to the devil's temptations (Hebrews 10:23-26)? Could this neglect be dangerous and possibly fatal?

What if I continue not to be concerned about others' spiritual welfare and try not to teach them the gospel of Christ (Mark 16:15-16)? Will Christ count me as a faithful, fruitful servant, or will I be rejected on the day of judgment?

What if I were arrested on the charge of being a Christian? Would there be enough evidence to convict me?

What if I need to change and do not? What then (James 4:17)? Let us prayerfully consider these matters.

-- Daniel P. Phillips

How to Listen to a Sermon

Do not be a criticizing listener. The minister makes mistakes as well as you; if he were perfect, he would not be here.

Do not be a sermon fitter, trying to fit the sermon to someone else. If the sermon does not fit you, let your neighbor fit it to himself.

Do not be a sermon taster. The sermon is not intended to be pleasing to your aesthetic nature or your hobbies, but to leave you a better person.

Listen with a mind prepared by prayer and expectation. Listen with humble mind. Let the searching light of the gospel reveal the need in your heart.

Listen with open mind. You may disagree with the sermon, but remember, one of the functions of a true sermon is to disturb your complacency.

Listen with a prayerful attitude. A sermon conceived in prayer, meeting with sympathetic, humble, cooperative minds will be used as seeds sown upon soil watered by the Spirit, springing up into life many-fold.

An Ancient Voice

He was not a Noah, Abraham or Moses. He was not nearly as well known as Isaiah or Jeremiah; but Azariah, the son of Obed, had the Spirit of God resting upon him, and expected to be heard.

He was so bold that he went out to speak to Asa the king and to the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. He demanded that all pay attention to what he was getting ready to say. Azariah's message was clean and plain:

*"The LORD is with you, while ye be with him;
and if ye seek him, he will be found of you;
but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you."*

II Chronicles 15:2

Colin Sedgwick says, "Do not these two sentences sum up the essence of all religion? The destiny of men and women - slaves as well as kings - is to know God, to love Him, and to be loved by Him. To do this is to find life and meaning. God's desire is to be our friend and companion. He wants nothing more than to be found by us."

Ancient Israel could do many wonderful things when God was with them. They could depart from slavery in Egypt and cross the Red Sea on dry ground. They could overcome nations and defeat giants.

But when they forsook God, God forsook them. They should have learned this important lesson when the twelve spies went into Canaan. Scared to death, the ten spies convinced the people to despise God. They refused to go into Canaan. Only when they heard they were going to die in the wilderness did they say, *"Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned"* (Numbers 14:40). Moses warned them that it was too late. He said, *"...because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you."* And sure enough, the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and defeated them and pursued them.

God is not to be trifled with. He commands our submission and obedience, and to refuse is to court disaster. Saying "No" to God means a nonlife, a journey into meaninglessness and sorrow. Awake, Azariah, and speak to our generation! Your sermon is one we all need to hear. -- John Gipson

The Sin of Omission

In my studies of the book of James I came across an important point for Christians to consider. Verse 17 states: *"to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* We know and can read about sins of commission, but sometimes we forget that there are also sins of omission. We tend to think that we are good simply because we are not bad. In Matthew 21:19 we read of the barren fig tree that received a curse from Jesus.

Was the tree evil? Was it poisonous? Did it do harm to man? No, it simply did not produce fruit.

Further, in Matthew 25:42-43 we read of things that some did not do, and the Lord held them responsible. *"I was hungry, and you fed me not. I was a stranger, and you took not in Naked, and you clothed me not. Sick and in prison, and you visited me not."* In Verses 45-46 we see that, because of the things they did not do, they were cast into everlasting darkness.

A couple of good questions to ask ourselves about the one-talent man of Matthew 25:14-30 are: Was he doing things that were wrong? Or, was he not doing what he should have? We can see that, because he was unprofitable, he was cast into outer darkness (V.30). We would be wise to heed the words of James again in Chapter One, Verses 22-25 and not only hear the Word, but be doers of it also. We will be blessed in our deed.

-Tom Loftis

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."
-- Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Ten Rainy-Day Suggestions for Children

Parents of young children often forget that daily religious impressions, even if brief, are probably much more effective in character building than just two one-hour Bible classes. The following suggestions for daily activities are offered, not as a substitute for weekly class attendance and participation, but as a supplement for parents who often "lack ideas" for things to do to spark children's interests. They may be especially helpful on "rainy days"!

- Read the Bible aloud to and with your children as much as possible! Then have the child repeat the story in his own words. Bible story books can also be helpful.
- Cut out pictures of animals from magazines that lend themselves to Bible illustrations. Ask your child to tell you what they remind him of.
- Ask your child to think of a Bible story that deals with each number from one to ten (e.g., one God, two mites, three days Jonah was in the fish, four days Lazarus was dead, five talents, six cubits was Goliath's height, seven days of creation, eight souls saved in the ark, nine ungrateful healed lepers and ten commandments).
- Tell a story but leave it unfinished. Ask the child to relate how he thinks it ended -- or should have ended -- and then apply Bible lessons (e.g., "On my way to the store I saw two little boys in their front yard. One had a toy. The other tried to grab it. They began to scuffle, and then I passed too far to see them. I wonder what happened....").
- Let your child write a 30-second radio or TV spot about a movie based on the life of Daniel (or another Bible character). [He'll probably do better than the "pros"!]
- Let your child write a "check" for some mission work and then discuss: How much? To whom? Why choose this work? Results expected?
- Let your child think of five Bible characters whose names begin with the first letter of the current month (June: Jesus, John, Jonah, Jeremiah and Jephthah).
- Give your child a letter of the alphabet (say, "M") and ask him to name a Bible character whose

name begins with the letters immediately preceding and following that letter ("L" and "N"). Repeat for other letters.

- Let the child find a passage in the Bible using the word "sun" or "snow" by learning to use the concordance. Then discuss the passage. Use other words as appropriate for your season.
- Let the child look through a column of names in the telephone book until he finds a Bible name. Then look up and review facts about that Bible story.

Some of these can be varied and also can be used by teachers as pre-class or post-class activities. A key to maintaining student interest is variety and appeal to the imagination. Remember, the "poorest way to teach is the same way." -- Jack Wilhelm

Church Attendance - A Barometer

(We use this as a follow-up to Eddy's lesson on 6/10/01)

A barometer is an instrument to determine the pressure of the atmosphere. It is useful in predicting possible weather changes. There are spiritual barometers to determine the fluctuation of one's spiritual condition. For example, when one begins to slip away from a proper relationship with Christ and His family, a couple of indicators often occur: (1) He will fail to give cheerfully and liberally and (2) he will stop attending fellowship gatherings.

Church attendance is a barometer of where we are spiritually. Of course, one may attend every service and still be far away from the Father. The hypocritical scribes and Pharisees attended the services at the synagogue (Matthew 6 & 23). The self-righteous Pharisee in Jesus'

parable about pride did not have the problem of non-attendance (Luke 18). Someone has correctly stated that sitting in a church building does not make one a Christian any more than sitting in the garage makes one an automobile.

Several have allowed their faithfulness in attendance to slide during the past few months. I doubt that simple article in a church bulletin will have profound influence; however, please do consider these remarks.

What would Jesus want you to do about attending services? He taught we should attend, and He role-modeled attendance in His own life. Luke records the following fact about the Savior: *"And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read"* (Luke 4:16). Note especially the phrase, "as His custom was". It was the custom of Jesus to attend services each Sabbath. Why would Jesus, the Son of God, go to worship at the appointed time? Evidently He knew the value of worship.

Attending worship is an example to others. Which neighbor do you believe to be more committed to God, one who is seen each Sunday driving to the golf course or the river, or the one who is seen driving to worship? I have a neighbor who never misses Sunday morning, evening or Wednesday

night. She does not worship as I understand the Bible to teach, but the depth of her commitment to the Lord is greater than many of my brethren who attend only when it is convenient, when the weather is right, when there is no major ball game, when the fish are not biting, when I go to bed early Saturday night.

How would one be the "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13) Sunday morning and evening? How would one be the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:16) Sunday morning and evening? How sincere do your neighbors believe you to be about your commitment to Christ?

Think of the message we are sending our children. Actions, especially where young people are concerned, speak much more loudly than words. Do you want your children to love the Lord's church? Do you want your children to consider the church of Christ important? If so, it is imperative that you role model this interest and concern before them.

Worship is for our benefit. Attendance does not help God. One does not make God better by worshipping Him. Worship is for our benefit. God knew that sometimes the singing would be off-key, too slow or new songs. God knew that sometimes the prayers would be too long, inaudible or repetitious. God knew that the sermons would sometimes be boring, off target or ineffective. However, God still wants the Christian to attend the assembly (Hebrews 10:25). May we urge you to attend every service! No Christian can deliberately choose to absent himself from the worship any time without committing sin.

Jerry Jenkins via Dalraida c/C

On Fire for Jesus

God has never had anything good to say about "bench warming"

Christians. To the brethren in Laodicea Jesus said, "*Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth*" (Revelation 3:16). James said that we should be "*doers of the word, and not hearers only*" (James 1:22).

Week after week God challenges us to adapt our lives to become more like Christ. He asks us to give more in the collection, He wants us to be there at every service, He begs us to study the Bible more frequently, and He desperately tries to motivate us to be more involved in the church.

How do we respond? Are we eager to change? Do we see transformation of our characters day by day? Let us strive to overcome all differences and be motivated by the love we have for our Father in heaven to work for His cause; not lukewarm, but on fire for Jesus and His cause.

-- Jeremy Sproft

The Right Heart

Sometimes we sing a song called "Is Thy Heart Right with God?" If it is, how can we tell? And if it isn't, how do we know?

Christ said, "*If you love me, keep my commandments*" (John 14:15). Is that a right heart, when we keep all the rules, dot our 'T's' and cross all our 't's'? NO! Christ condemned the Pharisees for that kind of thinking. So, what is a right heart? The rich young ruler knew (Luke 10:27). Peter knew (I Peter 1:22). Simon the sorcerer knew what it was not (Acts 8:21); but it took Christ to really spell it out for us.

"...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:37-40).

That's it. Everything else hangs on these two commandments. If we practice them, we won't have any doubts or fears; no questions about whether our heart is right. "Is Thy Heart Right with God?" You bet.

Every one of us needs a heart transplant. Without one, life expectancy (eternal life) is zero. Our old, dying heart must be replaced with the right heart -- replaced with the living heart of Christ.

Attitude Determines Attitude

I woke up early today, excited over all I get to do before the clock strikes midnight. I have responsibilities to fulfill today. My job is to choose what kind of day I will have today.

Today I can complain because the weather is rainy, or I can be thankful that the grass and flowers are getting watered for free.

Today I can feel sad that I don't have more money, or I can be glad that my finances encourage me to plan my purchases wisely and guide me away from waste.

Today I can grumble about my health, or I can rejoice that I am alive.

Today I can lament over all my parents didn't give me when I was growing up, or I can feel grateful they enabled me to be born.

Today I can complain because I have to go to work, or I can shout for joy because I have a job to do.

Today I can complain because I have to go to school or eagerly open my mind and fill it with rich tid-bits of knowledge.

Today I can murmur dejectedly because I have to do housework, or I can feel honored because the Lord has provided me shelter for my mind, body and soul.

Today stretches ahead of me, waiting to be shaped. And here I am, the sculptor who gets to do the shaping! What today will be is up to ME. I get to choose what kind of day I will have!

Have a great day - unless you have other plans.

author unknown

"This is the day that the LORD hath made;

I will rejoice and be glad in (Psalm 118:24).

Be Not Deceived

Each of us must face the consequences of our actions. God gives us the freedom to make choices; but, He certainly does not approve of every decision we make. One who thinks he can live however he wants to live, and God is somehow obligated to him, is truly deceiving himself: "... for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

In the natural world we reap what we sow: "*And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so*" (Genesis 1:11). So it is in the spiritual realm: "*For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting*" (Galatians 6:8). That is not our opinion, that is what the God of heaven, the Judge of all, says about it. He who lives by the lust of the flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21); but, he who lives by the Spirit's teaching, the gospel of Christ, shall inherit life eternal (John 5:29).

The choice is ours. We can either live with Christ, which means living by His Will, or we can live against His Will and without Him: "*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad*" (Matthew 12:30). However, let us not deceive ourselves. Where we will spend eternity will be determined by our decision to either sow to the Spirit or to the flesh. May God help us all to heed His warning: "*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*" (Galatians 6:7).

How To Develop a Positive Christian Attitude

We are either the masters or victims of our attitudes. It is a matter of personal choice. Who we are today is the result of the choices we made yesterday. Tomorrow we will become what we choose today. To change means to choose to change.

Stop trying to change the other person and, with God's help, change yourself.

Nothing is more important than your attitude with the exception of having the Lord Jesus as your Savior. Your attitude will make or break you; heal or hurt you; bring happiness or misery, success or failure. Here's how you can change your attitude.

1. No matter what happens, look for good, and you will find it. Read Matthew 7:1-5. **2. Be an ambassador of good works to every person you meet.**

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of (Proverbs 25:11).

Be like the man who greeted every day with the words, "This is exactly the kind of day I wanted."

3. By an act of the will fill your mind with what is positive.

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true... honest... just... pure... lovely... of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these (Philippians 4:8).

4. Never surrender to negative emotions (Ephesians 4:31-32).

A good way to fight weeds is to plant thick, healthy grass.

5. Practice the principle of replacement.

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21).

6. Bar the suggestive and immoral from your mind.

"...[B]e transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2).

7. See the good in others (John 1:47).

Practice the "as if" principle. If you wish to possess a quality or emotion, act as if you already had it.

8. Determine to take an attitude of love and good will toward others (Philippians 2:1-4).

Change your attitude toward people, and their attitude will change toward you.

9. Express appreciation and warm feelings to others (Philippians 1:19-20).

One of the most healing therapies in the world is to give oneself in friendship and service to another person.

10. Practice positive prayer (Mark 11:24).

Pray, believing. Jesus Christ is the great attitude transformer.

"And be renewed in the spirit of your mind (Ephesians 4:23).

James Draper (edited)

Mama's Church

Most people are what they are religiously because of the influence of their parents. We have grown up with the philosophy, "if it's good enough for them, it's good enough for me." Such may be good or bad. If your parents were converted to the truth, you are probably walking in the truth yourself. But, suppose your folks were never taught the truth and were following traditions themselves. Where does that leave your soul? The majority of parents do not intentionally lead their children wrong, but what if they don't know all they should know?

Faith built upon the convictions of someone else is risky business at best! Biblical faith is "*the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*" (Hebrews 11:1). Biblical faith comes from the Word of God (Romans 10:17). God's Word is enlightening (Psalm 119:105) and furnishes us with all spiritual guidance (II Timothy 3:16-17). Because of the authority of God's Word, such will judge us in the day of judgment (John 12:48).

Inherited faith is non-personal and weak. A faith developed from an honest study of God's Word is personal and strong. My parents' faith loses its force when they are buried. Faith in God's Word grows more forceful at the graveside of each loved one.

If your parents are deceased, your response to the truth will not affect their eternal destiny one way or another. But, if your parents are still living, your obedience to the truth may not only save your soul, but your influence may save their souls, too! Read Matthew 10:37-38 one more time, and do what you need to do.

“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.”

Jim Roberts, McKenzie, TN (edited)

The Voice of the Bible on “Faith”

The Author of faith: Christ, not men. “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

The instrument of faith: The Word of God, not the creeds of men. “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17; cf. John 20:30, 31).

The receptacle of faith: The spiritual heart, not the fleshly. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9, 10).

The order of saving faith: Before, not after repentance and baptism. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Hebrews 11:6; see Acts 2:36-38).

The companions of saving faith: Repentance, confession, baptism into Christ—in becoming a Christian; virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love—in being a Christian (Acts 2:16-41; II Peter 1:5-7).

The boundary of faith: The Scriptures, not the tastes and temperaments of men. “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” (II John 9; see Romans 10:17).

The object of faith: “Christ the Lord”, not the systems of men. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,

and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

The proof of faith: *Works of obedience, not mere mental assent. “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18).*

The trial of faith: Not gloomy despair, but “more precious than gold” (I Peter 1:7).

The end of faith: Salvation of the soul, not speculation or presumption. “Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (I Peter 1:9).

Some “don’ts” of faith: Don’t pray for faith—when you should be praying in faith (James 1:6). Don’t expect “faith only” to save you—when it takes both faith and obedience to save you (James 2:24). Don’t turn from the faith and be lost—but keep the faith and receive the crown. *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (II Timothy 4:7,8).*

By A.C. Williams

WHEN COMING TO WORSHIP

When we come together to worship God, there are some things that we should bring along, and there are some things that we should leave at home.

We should bring along (John 4:24):

A cheerful disposition. Worship will be joyful. A pleasant smile. Others will be encouraged.

An open mind, ready to learn. The preacher’s efforts will be more successful.

An honest heart. We can worship with a clear conscience.

An humble and contrite spirit. Worship will be more acceptable to God.

A rested body. Tired bodies often cause one to drop off to sleep. One does not worship while asleep.

We should leave at home (I Corinthians 11:24-29):

All home and business problems and worries.

The plans for the week.

Thoughts and plans about the vacation.

All envy, malice, ill will and insincerity.

author unknown

Right or Wrong?

When faced with this question, the following inquiries will be helpful:

Am I commanded not to do it? James 4:17

Am I commanded to do it? Ecclesiastes 12:13

Can I do it for God's glory? I Corinthians 10:31

Can I do it in the name of the Lord? Colossians 3:17

Would Jesus do it? I Peter 2:21

Can I do it and be an example of a believer? I Timothy 4:12

Will it cause someone to stumble? I Corinthians 8:9

Would I encourage those I love to do it? Proverbs 22:16

Would I want to be doing it when Jesus comes? Matthew 16:27

Is there any doubt in my mind about doing it? Romans 14:23

via "Meadowlark Message", Ft. Collins, CO

The Prom

It is very appropriate at this time of the year to warn against the sowing of fleshly oats. Too many young Christians have made the choice to take part in the dance known as "The Prom". While the young people get caught up in the glamour of such, parents pray that this bit of sowing to the flesh will not sprout. Yet, it is a physical and spiritual law that whatever a person sows, that he or she will reap (Galatians 6:7)

Dancing is "bumping and grinding" or as folks used to say, "bucking and jiving" (see World Book Dictionary under "jive"). The prom is the rubbing of warm bodies against each other. Boys use the dance as foreplay. Girls use it to tease. Fathers know what this physical contact "sport" does to the libido of the boys. Mamas wring their hands and pray.

Dancing is lasciviousness, and the Holy Spirit said such is the work of the flesh (Galatians 5:19). Of the Greek word from which it is derived, *aselgeia*. H. J. Thayer says among other things, "wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females" (p. 79). The Holy Spirit warned that those who practice such "*shall not inherit the kingdom of God*" (Galatians 5:21).

Let me urge parents, teachers and other faithful Christians across the land to plan alternative programs and dinners to the "passion pits" known as "The Prom". Remind yourselves and your charge that you want them to be chaste (innocent, pure) when the time comes for them to marry. AIDS, genital herpes and other STDs stalk the earth waiting for just a one-night stand to destroy the whole life of your beloved son or daughter; and too many times, "The Prom" night is that night.

Jim E. Waldron
"Bulletin Briefs"

Three Timeless Questions

During one of his lectures at the Freed-Hardeman Lectureship in 1998, George Bailey made reference to that famous preacher of yesteryear, Gus Nichols. Whenever Brother Nichols was asked to do counseling of any sort (Biblical, marital, financial, etc.) he always began by asking three questions. He insisted that, if the answer to any one of the three questions was "No", then there would be no reason to continue the counseling session. As I considered these three questions, I realized that they are good questions for all of us to answer every day of our lives.

Do you really want to do what is right? In every aspect of your life, do you really want to do what is right? What is your standard and goal as a spouse? As a parent? As a child? As a boss? As an employee? As a neighbor? As a citizen? "*Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates*" (II Corinthians 13:7).

Are you ready for the Bible to tell you what is right? Of course we recognize that the Bible is the standard for what is right. It is imperative that we turn to the Holy Scripture for the proper instructions. Our behavior in every part of our lives must be based on Biblical

guidance. One is reminded of David's attitude reflected in Psalm 119:128: *"Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way."*

Are you willing to do what the Bible says right now? Good counsel does no good if it is not heeded. Procrastination will damage any worthwhile endeavor. For example, marriages grow weaker by the minute if good principles of strength are ignored or delayed. The Bible plainly states that it is a sin to know to do good and not do it (James 4:17). Procrastination is especially deadly when it comes to spiritual matters. *"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"* (II Corinthians 6:2).

David South

Prescription for a Better Life

All should be interested in that "better life". Christianity affects life not only in the eternity to come, but also in the present. *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

When God gave Adam and Eve the power of choice (Genesis 3:1-6), He gave man man's greatest power! Surely, the gift of being able to choose the way we wish to be is one of the greatest gifts our Creator could have given. The following prescription can help you have a better life. I hope you will "choose" the best possible life here--and hereafter!

Step One: "Do and teach" God's commandments. To be great in the kingdom one must both *do* and *teach* the commandments of our God (Matthew 5:19). To become a Christian you must hear the Word of God (Romans 10:17); believe in Christ (John 8:24); repent of sins (Luke 13:3); confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10) and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4). After obeying the first principles of the gospel you should "go about doing good" (Acts 10:38). There is no doubt that, if we trust the Lord, obey His Word, work hard and do our best, things will work out! *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31).

Step Two: Walk at least two miles every day. This will help you "prosper and be in health" (3 John 2). As you walk, thank God for everything you see to be thankful for (I Thessalonians 5:18). Thank God for feet to walk, air to breath, houses to live in, friends, family, life and the church. God put you on earth. Be happy and accomplish worthy things for Him. This "thankful walk" will help you be strong in body and mind!

Step Three: Each day find someone who is hurting and help them. People hurt because of poverty (Matthew 26:11), because of death (Hebrews 9:27) and because of divorce (Matthew 5:32). People hurt for many reasons, and you can help! Remember, it is impossible to do good for others without gaining a great benefit yourself (Acts 20:35).

Step Four: Commit to memory large portions of Scripture. Begin with the Gospel of John. John was written to show us Jesus, God's Son (John 20:30-31). "The height of a man's success is deter-

mined by the depth of his belief.” The blessed man delights in the law of the Lord and meditates on it day and night (Psalm 1:1-2). Memorizing large portions of scripture is not easy, but don’t get into the habit of trying to get something for nothing. This is truly the prescription for a better life! Charles Box

One Can Understand If He So Desires!

Most religious groups today teach that one is saved **before** he is baptized. Some proclaim baptism is purely an optional matter, while others insist the person who has been saved will desire to be baptized at a later date. Both positions are false.

Folks today scream loud and long that the Bible will always be understood in different ways by different people. This type of mindset leads to one quickly saying, “That is **your** interpretation, and this is **my** interpretation!” The truth of the matter is that we all have the obligation and responsibility to interpret the Bible correctly. It should go without saying that there cannot be two, five, ten or one hundred correct interpretations of a given scripture.

Does God want us to understand the Scriptures? Absolutely! The Lord said, “*and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (John 8:32). What is truth? John 17:17 states that God’s Word “*is truth*”. God’s Word is the Scriptures (the Holy Bible).

I have long been convinced that people really do need help to misunderstand the Word of God. Such help comes in various forms. Many people are prejudiced and biased as they follow the traditions of their parents or grandparents. Others listen only to what their preacher or Bible class teacher says about the Bible. Some simply go by their feelings, and as their feelings change, their convictions change. In none of these instances do the people follow the example of the noble Bereans. The Bible commends these people by saying, “*Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, examining the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so*” (Acts 17:11).

Let us come back to the subject of baptism and consider these words written by an unknown author. His words are as follows:

An elderly lady and her friend in whom she felt a deep interest were discussing Bible teachings. Among the questions asked and answered were these:

Friend: “What do you think Ananias meant when he said, ‘Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins’?”

Lady: “Well, I don’t think water will wash away sins.”

Friend: “That doesn’t answer the question. What did Ananias mean?”

Lady: “Do you believe that water washes away sins?”

Friend: “You still haven’t answered my question. However, if you will answer three questions for me,

I will answer your question.”

Lady; “I will answer your questions the best I can.”

Friend: “Here is the first question. Did God make Adam holy?”

Lady: “Of course He did.”

Friend: “After Adam ate the forbidden fruit, did he have any holiness left?”

Lady: “Of course he didn’t, he was a sinner.”

Friend: “Am I to understand you to say that fruit washes away holiness? I could as readily believe that water washes away sin as to believe that fruit washes away holiness.”

Lady: “It wasn’t the fruit that took away holiness, it was the disobedience.”

Friend: “True indeed. Now, if disobedience can wash away holiness, may not obedience, through the blood of Christ, wash away sins?”

The good lady smiled and did not desire an answer to her question, for she well knew that **baptism was obedience to a divine command**, and that we have not obeyed until we have performed the act of obedience.

There are many examples that can be used to help people understand Biblical truths. Of course, there is one requirement people must have good and honest hearts and desire to understand.

The example above is “un-get-overable” and “un-getaroundable”. Bible truths can all be understood alike, and false teaching will always be exposed by Bible light. Thank God we all can understand the Scriptures if we so desire! May we desire to obey God and go to heaven!

Marvin L. Weir, Rowlett, TX

It’s Just Not There

We were encouraged to turn to Revelation 21 and think of heaven. I’m so glad I did. It helped me want to go there all the more.

As our teacher continued his instruction I happened to find a little word used repeatedly to describe this wonderful place. In heaven there will be:

- NO death. – God will “*wipe away every tear from their eyes: and death shall be no more*” (Revelation 21:4).

- NO temple. – “*I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty, and the Lamb, are the temple thereof*” (Revelation 21:22).

- NO sun or moon. – “*And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon. . . for the glory of God did lighten it*” (Revelation 21:23).

- NO fear. – That’s right, “*the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there is no night there)*” (Revelation 21:25; cf. 22:5).

- NO unclean soul. – [*A*]nd *there shall no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie*” (Revelation 21:27).

- NO curse. – There will be “*a river of water of life, bright as crystal*” and it will be straddled by “*the tree of life.*” But in addition to that, “*there shall be no curse any more: and the throne of God and the Lamb shall be therein*” (Revelation 21:1-3).

I want to go to heaven most of all because God will be there. But I also want to go because of the things that won’t be there. Don’t you?

Dan Winkler

SOMEWHERE. . .

A mother is trying to make up her mind to let a surgeon perform an operation on her only child that may cost his life.

A father whose son didn’t come home last night is walking through a door marked “City Morgue”.

A wife whose marriage has “gone on the rocks” is on a street corner flirting with a man she knows will destroy her fidelity.

A husband is sitting in his bedroom toying with a pistol while his wife is shrieking at him from the bottom of the stairs to come down and explain his recent whereabouts.

A young woman is being wheeled into the delivery room from which she knows that mother or child, not mother and child, will be wheeled out.

A tired doctor is shaking his head and saying “terminal cancer”.

A mother is wondering how she is going to tell her son that she knows he is the criminal the police are looking for.

And – a contented Christian is lying in his comfortable bed, yawning and deciding against going to work this fine Sunday morning because, after all, he doesn’t really have anything to be thankful for!

“*Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name*” (Psalm 100:4).

He Took My Place

Imagine yourself standing before the judge waiting to be sentenced. Everything that could be said has been said. There was no defense, you were guilty. There is no excuse, you committed the crime. All that is left is for the judge to sentence you.

You and your lawyer have been over and over the possibilities of sentencing. The law is very explicit – death. There are no pleadings, there are no options, there is no way out. You are guilty, you stand condemned, and all that is left is for the judge to sentence you to the death penalty. The Bible puts it like this: *“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”* and *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

As we stand before the judge, we see the hopelessness of our situation. All of our options have run out, all hope is gone. We feel alone. We feel abandoned. We fully understand how the writer of the Roman letter felt when he said, *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”* (7:24). You and I, as we stand before God condemned for our sins, can do nothing about our sins. We are wretched, we are helpless. Without some type of intervention we will eternally stand condemned for the sins we have committed.

But praise be to God, there is an answer. The Roman correspondent answers his own dilemma. He says, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death”* (8, 12).

As we stand awaiting judgment, the Judge’s own Son comes and says, “Whatever it is I will take the punishment for this person.” And to our great benefit, He does for all those who will love Him and obey the gospel message.

Now I feel better, I breathe easier. I am no longer concerned for those sins I have committed. In my obedience, the Judge’s Son has taken my punishment. What a relief! What a joy! What a blessing! May we always stand in awe and reverence at the blessings we have from the Father and His Son. May we never forget that *“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16).
Gordon Gentry

When Do You Study Your Bible?

When do you study your Bible? It is sad when some among us don’t know why we believe, or worse, don’t know what we believe. Too many so-called Christians rely on the “faith of their fathers” and do not really have their own faith. Why? The reason is obvious: *“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17). Unless we, individually, spend some time in the Book, we will never develop our own faith.

Many of our young people are lost to the world because, when confronted with temptation and the pleasures of the world, they do not have a faith that is based on personal knowledge. Study your Bible every day. Search for God’s answers to life’s problems. Grow in your faith as you feed on God’s Word. It is then that you can share that conviction with others.

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11).

WHY ADULTS SHOULD ATTEND BIBLE CLASS

1. It helps you put God's kingdom first (Matthew 6:33).
 2. It helps you gain knowledge about God (Colossians 1:9).
 3. It helps you possess the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5).
 4. It helps you to influence others for good (Matthew 5:16).
 5. It helps others influence you for good (Hebrews 3:13).
 6. It provides fellowship with other Christians (I John 1:7).
 7. It strengthens your faith in Jesus as Lord (Colossians 1:9-12).
 8. It provides nutrition (food) for your soul (Hebrews 5:12-14).
 9. It helps you to obey God's command to know His will (Ephesians 5:15-17).
 10. It helps you to be God's servant/workman (Ephesians 2:10).
 11. It helps you to be a better guide to your family (Ephesians 6:4; Titus 2:3-5).
 12. It helps you to be ready to give an answer to every one who asks a reason for your faith (I Peter 3:15).
 13. It helps you to be approved of God (II Timothy 2:15).
 14. It helps you to prepare for the judgment (John 12:48).
- "The Messenger", Pauls Valley, OK, edit

Which One Are You?

Two people went to the worship service. One arrived before the services began and took a seat. The heart of this person was filled with spiritual meditations and prayer. About this time, the other one was just leaving his home. The first was standing and singing, "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow", while the other, just arriving, stood out in the foyer chatting with other latecomers. During prayer one listened attentively while every word reached and thrilled his heart. The other looked around to see who was there and what each was wearing. One followed the sermon with Bible in hand and made a few notes for study at home. The other whispered to his neighbor, heard the preacher say something he did not like and then dozed off for the rest of the sermon. During the Lord's Supper, while he partook of the emblems, one reflectively considered the great love of God to permit Christ to die on the cross. The other carelessly took a pinch of the loaf and a sip of the cup, planning a fishing trip all the while.

Yes, two people came to the services – one came to worship the God of heaven and to exalt His precious Son – the other only came to the building!! Which one of the above represents you? You are one of the two people mentioned above. Which one do you think will be acceptable to God and will be blessed for attending the worship services?

Via State Street c/C, Bristol, VA

How to Respond to the Lord's Invitation

Ever wonder about our custom of "singing that invitation song" and what it really means? It is another time in our worship when hearts respond to God. As we study and learn from time to time, the Word and Spirit of God will convict us to declare publicly our needs and decisions. The ministry of Jesus often called out to His listeners to "come" or "follow" after they had learned the Way (Matthew 4, 11; Luke 9). Later as Peter preached in Acts 2, Ananias to Paul in Acts 22 and others, listeners were exhorted to respond. With those examples in mind, we continue that Bible example and custom.

Sadly, numbers of churches of Christ are following denominational trends, calling the invitation too confrontational and eliminating it. How sad! God's invitation from His Son should be open at all times and offered each time we come for exhortation.

If you are a baptized believer and a member of His church, we urge you to respond and tell our elders and family you want to serve with us.

If you are an adult or teen and not yet baptized into Christ, you can respond publicly or privately and obey His will.

If you need to confess sins that caused others to stumble and also seek strength, please come.

It's not our invitation. It's His.

(author unknown)

Fact and Fiction about Christmas - 12/24/00

It is a **fact** that Jesus was virgin-born (Matthew 1:18-25). Most of those who consider this untrue on scientific grounds believe that all life, plant and animal, come from one cell of unknown origin, smaller than that bit of life miraculously placed by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary. But we herald the divine birth of Jesus.

It is **fiction** that Jesus was born on December 25. The first mention of the birthday of Jesus was 354 A.D. In our celebration of faith, God instructs us to honor only day, and that is the first day of the week (Acts 20:7) and warns us in Galatians 4:10 not to follow false gods and "*observe days, and months, and times, and years.*" To celebrate December 25 as the birthday of Christ or to use ornaments and decorations that silently declare it is wrong for New Testament Christians. Be aware that the Romans long ago had a feast on December 25 to honor a pagan sun god. Roman Catholics then set aside a "mass" day later called "Christ-mass" or Christmas, and through the years much folklore was added. St. Nicholas is noted in Catholic history as a wealthy bishop in Asia Minor who long ago became famous for giving gifts. Thus the creation of St. Claus or Santa Claus.

It is **fact** that the followers of Jesus should claim any and every opportunity to voice their faith and belief in the holy Son of God. We can share the joy of giving and the goodness of this time of year with family and friends. Let's just be sure we don't become a stumbling block through social and religious compromises (Romans 13).

Share the joy of Christ each Sunday. It is the only day God and His Word call for us to celebrate for Him.

Gary Montgomery

Could you use some ideas for New Year's resolutions?

Consider the following:

Ambitions of the Righteous

I will praise the Lord (Psalm 89:1)
I will love to go worship (Psalm 122:1; 27:4; Hebrews 10:25).
I will love my brothers and sisters in Christ with an un-feigned love (Romans 12:10; II Thessalonians 3:13).
I will study my Bible and be ready to give an answer to every man that asks for the reason of the hope within me (II Timothy 3:15; I Peter 3:15).
I will gladly bring my offerings to the Lord without grudging or stinginess (II Corinthians 9:7).
I will use kind words (Proverbs 15:1; I Corinthians 13:7).
I will pray more often (Mark 14:38; Luke 18:1).
I will come out of my shell and send some cards or perhaps prepare a dish to carry to the sick and lonely (Matthew 25:36).
I will buffet my body (I Corinthians 9:27).
I will confess my faults and conquer them (James 5:17).
I will develop whatever talents I have (Matthew 25:25-28).
I will ask the elders for a job and do it well, becoming a laborer together with them (Matthew 20:1-16).

Bible study is not drudgery: it is a life-changing experience. Whether it's leather bound with onion-leaf paper or RAM or ROM, do whatever you have to do in order to get into God's Word. *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path"* (Psalm 119:105).

LET'S GIVE THE YEAR 2001 TO CHRIST!

Progress comes when people dare to dream big dreams then work hard to carry out those dreams. Twelve men faced the whole world with the greatest challenge the world has ever known. *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature..."* (Mark 16:15), 16). Within one generation this had been done.

Ordinary Christians, not the apostles, not the preachers, not super-Christians, "... *went everywhere preaching the word*" (Acts 8:4). The God of heaven has commissioned us to demonstrate the same love to others that He has for us (I John 3:16).

Let us rekindle the fires of love and dedication that once moved us to begin our journey to eternity. Let us determine that our lives be lived for others, for His kingdom and for the truth, and not for self. How can we give this New Year to Christ? Here are some ways:

1. Determine to be at every worship service.
2. Set aside some time each day to pray and read the Bible.
3. Pray for, and invite a lost person to study the Bible.
4. Give, as God has prospered you, and give sacrificially.
5. Develop an attitude of faith in God's help and presence.
6. Support and encourage those who try to live right.
7. Let the joy of salvation and hope radiate from your life.
8. Look for opportunities to serve.
9. Get rid of your ego and feelings of self-importance.
10. Include God in on all your plans and decisions.

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Jesse Fonville

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