

**UPSIDE DOWN:
REACHING
THE WORLD**

**Twenty Seventh Annual
Truth In Love
Lectureship**

Jonathan Burns, Editor

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East Hill Church of Christ**

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Introduction

Man is the height of God's creation (Genesis 1-2). God gave man life, being, purpose, abilities, resources, opportunities, relationships, and tremendous blessings. We are blessed beyond our imagination due to the redemptive nature of God. Thus, the Christian can exist.

Christianity is not something that is lived in the four walls of a church building. Christianity is something that is lived from day to day within the lives of people. Our lives are not based in the world but are based in Christ Jesus. He is the reason that we may have hope (1 Corinthians 15:19; Hebrews 6:18).

This lectureship is based upon Acts 17:6 where the followers of Christ were told that they had turned the world upside down. As followers of God we must live in order to show that a life in Christ is possible and is different from our world. Our speech, actions, and intentions are not of this world, but point us to the world to come. We must find ways to be the people in our world to turn the world upside down and reach everyone.

This book would not be possible without the help from many people at East Hill: Linda Ball, Kelley Burns, Beth Cooper, Chris Stampfly, Suzanna Stampfly, Steffany Woodard, Heather Woodard, Mark Woodard, Johnny Jackson, and Cecilia Jackson. Without each of these amazing people I could not have put this book together and I am so thankful for their hard work.

Of course, without the willingness of our speakers to take the time to write a manuscript, there would be

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no need to thank anyone else. Each speaker had to, in addition to his regular responsibilities to the local church, and his family, find the time to do the research and writing necessary for this project. I am humbled and thankful for their dedication to the Lord's work.

To the reader, we hope that this book will help you in your service unto the Almighty God. We are thankful for you spending time with us in this book, reading and studying the Word of God. Remember, you must be the person who turns the world upside down.

~ Jonathan Burns

Dedication

This book would be incomplete if mentions were not made of some very important people who keep the East Hill Church going in many ways. East Hill has been blessed with some of the best people in this world and two of these people are **Chris Stampfly** and **Linda Ball**. Both of these ladies spend timeless hours at the East Hill building working on projects, proofing bulletins, cleaning, organizing, and working at a capacity that many could not comprehend.



Chris Stampfly, the secretary at East Hill, wears many hats. She is one of the many reasons that make being the minister at East Hill a pleasure. For almost twenty years, Chris has been the dedicated secretary for four different ministers. She is always ready to help in any way she can and seems to never tire of doing her job. Those of us who know her and who are acquainted with her work cannot praise her enough for her labors.

Dedication

Linda Ball, a dedicated member at East Hill, spends many days helping in the office and lending her ear to all of my questions. For the past two years, Linda has been a generous supporter of the work at East Hill.

This small effort to dedicate this edition of the book is inadequate to express our true love for these two great Christian Ladies. But, our Father in Heaven has the perfect reward and without doubt will say: "Well done, good and faithful servants!"

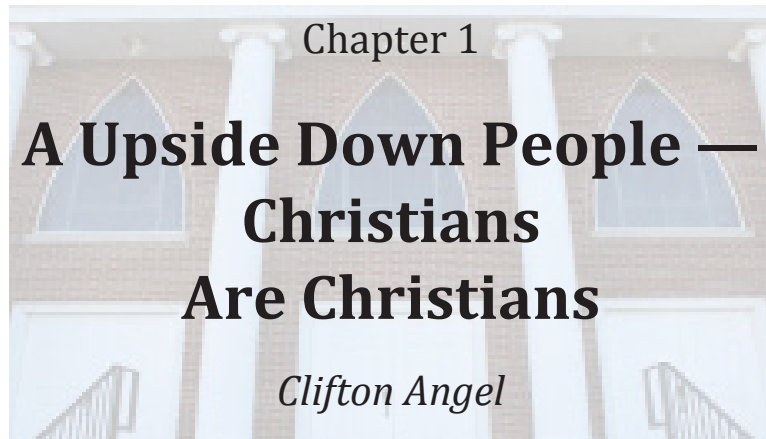
~ Jonathan Burns

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The first priority in this treatise is the expression of gratitude for the opportunity. Sincerest thanks to Jonathan, the elders, and every person who has had a hand in making the Truth in Love Lectureship a reliable resource for those seeking to follow the Redeemer.

Introduction

Paul and Silas, most likely leaving Luke and Timothy in Philippi, traveled 100 miles of Roman roads to the city of Thessalonica (Acts of Apostles, 109). They were able to work there for three weeks before being run out of town by Jews who refused to believe in Jesus.

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach

unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, **These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;** Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go (Acts 17:1–9; Emphasis mine, CA).

It needs to be understood that the claim that Christians had “turned the world upside down” was not meant to be a compliment. It was a false and exaggerated accusation that stemmed from an incorrect worldview. These jealous Jews went on to falsely accuse Paul and Silas of treason and national rebellion. H.A. Dobbs comments, “Jesus was not a rival to Caesar. He himself declared before Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world. But these God defamers brought again the discredited charge that Jesus and His followers were seeking to create a mundane empire” (Dobbs 182). The same false accusations were used in coercing Pilate to sentence Jesus to the death penalty of crucifixion. Although this charge was brought

against Jesus by the Jews, Pilate insisted multiple times that he found Jesus innocent of the charge. What was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back? Politics— Pilate was once again, and for the final time, seeking to release Jesus of the charges brought against Him, when, “the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend” (John 19:12).

Understanding the pejorative nature of the charge that Christians had “turned the world upside down,” it is acceptable to use the phrase for positive encouragement of Christians today, as long as the irony is comprehended. For example, citizens of Corinth who wielded worldly wisdom considered the preaching of the gospel as foolishness. Therefore, using irony, Paul wrote, “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). He used the world’s terminology with irony to exalt the work of God. Therefore, with irony, Christians can be encouraged to turn the world “upside down” again and always be “An Upside Down People” in the eyes of the world.

Upside Down In The Eyes Of The World

According to the standards of the world, it is justifiable to have hatred for another, “get what is rightfully yours,” and seek revenge, but God emphasizes sacrificial **love** (Gal. 5:22; Matt. 5:43–48). According to the world, it is reasonable to vent your anger and frustration, gripe and complain, and never be satisfied, but God emphasizes contented **joy** (Gal. 5:22; Phil. 4:4). According to the world, it is admissible to be stressed, anxious, overcome with worry, disgruntled, and even suicidal, but God emphasizes the **peace** that surpasses understanding (Gal. 5:22; Phil.

4:6–7). According to the world, when something does not go your way, is not just how you want it to be, or does not happen on your timetable, it is understandable, and even encouraged, to give up, move on, or just accept that “it wasn’t meant to be.” For this reason, numerous marriages are destroyed, many leave the church, and many of our brothers and sisters are “church hoppers.” However, God emphasizes **long-suffering**, which includes patience and endurance (Gal. 5:22). According to the world, others have to earn respect and do not deserve forgiveness, but God emphasizes **kindness**, which includes undeserved grace and mercy (Gal. 5:22; Eph. 4:32; Luke 6:35; see “easy” in Matt. 11:28–30, “gracious” in 1 Peter 2:3). According to the world, every person subjectively defines for himself what is “good,” but God emphasizes **goodness**, which is objective and defined by Him (Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9; 2 Thess. 1:11). The world says to doubt everything, trust no one, and follow your heart, but God emphasizes **faith** (Gal. 5:22). “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1), and “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The world says to have pride in yourself, your knowledge, and your accomplishments, boast of it to everyone, and never admit your faults, but God emphasizes **meekness**, which requires humility, strength, and courage (Gal. 5:23; Matt. 5:5). The world encourages sexual freedom, religious freedom, and the liberty to engage in any activity the heart desires or the peers pressure, but God emphasizes **temperance**—self-control (Gal. 5:23; 2 Peter 1:5–9).

Far too often, it is the case that Christians expect the world to automatically follow God’s standards without having been adequately taught the reasons they should

do so. Unfortunately, many of the same Christians resort to ungodly responses because of their anger, frustration, and amazement that the world does not think like them. Christians need never to forget that the world does not play by the rules. The world is not upright. The world is not moral. The world is not just. The world will hate anyone who stands in its way. Jesus said to His disciples, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Therefore, John's words need to be heeded: "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (1 John 3:13).

While the aforementioned worldly endeavors are sinful, there are some things in life which are not inherently sinful, yet the world exalts these things as the height of blessedness. The very same ideologies have crept into the church, so that many Christians also see these as the height of blessedness and make it priority in their lives to pursue them. One such thing is **money**. Money is a tool. There is nothing inherently sinful about money. Yet, many have the mindset that "money makes the world go 'round.'" Economically, the statement is true, but in actuality, it is God that makes the world "go 'round" (Job 26:7; Heb. 1:3). In fact, a person can have very little to no money and still experience supreme blessedness. Another misconception of chief blessedness is **happiness**. It truly is a blessing to experience the uplifted emotions involved in happiness; however, a person can still experience the height of blessedness while in the midst of sadness, grief, and trial. Another is **power**. Physical strength, municipal strength, reputable strength, and political strength: while they have their places and are not inherently evil, they also should not be a Christian's top priority. For a person can live

with the chiefest of blessings without having these. What about **food**? Is it not a blessing? It is. The United States of America is blessed with such an abundance of food that married couples are having to get marriage counseling just to decide where to eat. While it is obvious that the last statement is tongue-in-cheek, abundant access to food is not the height of blessedness. The list continues. Having **debtors, defense** resources, and physical **peace** are just a few other things that could be discussed. While none of these are inherently sinful, and often are considered blessings, they can also produce tremendous spiritual and physical burdens.

Christians—faithful followers of Christ—are “An Upside Down People” in the eyes of the world. They are “upside down” in the eyes of the world because they are “right side up” in the eyes of God.

Right Side Up In The Eyes Of God

How can one know how to be “right side up” in the eyes of God? The answer can be found only in diligent study of the entire Bible, particularly the New Testament. However, a great place to begin is with Jesus’ teachings. Of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount,” R.C. Foster wrote that it “is the greatest statement ever made on the general subject of religion and morals” (Foster 466). He continued, “It is at once profound and practical. It offers full and final discussion of some of the most elemental and persistent problems concerning our relation to God and to our fellow men” (Foster 466). Within the scope of this discourse, the entirety of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” will not be considered. However, attention will be given to a very important portion of it, as it pertains to Christian’s

reaching and changing the world. First, the “Beatitudes” will be considered. The word “beatitude” comes from Latin and French and means “supreme happiness” or “state of blessedness” (Harper).

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Matt. 5:1–12).

While the world teaches that supreme blessings are found in the pursuit of money, happiness, power, food, debtors, defenses, or physical peace, Jesus teaches that to be truly blessed is to be in **the church**, know **eternal comfort**, have a **spiritual inheritance**, be truly **content**, be **forgiven**, **see God**, be in **God's family**, and have a **home in heaven**.

As is evident from the words of Jesus, there are conditions to be met on the part of man if he expects to be “blessed” supremely. He must be **poor** in spirit. Poverty of spirit requires a humble heart. It is the opposite of the attitudes of the Pharisees and Scribes. They were lifted up in themselves (see Luke 18:9–14). One who is “poor in spirit” recognizes his destitution without God. He must **mourn**. Here, Jesus’ reference to mourning is not a sadness for any reason; rather, it is sorrow because of sin. “Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death (2 Cor. 7:10). He must be **meek**. Meekness is by no means weakness. Meekness is strength under control, and it is necessary for a man to make the changes that repentance requires. He must **hunger** and **thirst** for righteousness—knowing what is right, doing what is right, and being right in the sight of God. He must be **merciful**. If he expects to be forgiven, he himself must be forgiving (see Matt. 6:12, 14–15; 18:21–35). He must be **pure** in heart. “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies (Matt. 15:19; see also Prov. 4:23–27). He must be a **peacemaker**. Not only are Christians to seek to live peaceably with all men (see Rom. 12:17–19); it is also required of them that they seek to bring the lost to be at peace with God (see Matt. 28:18–20). Finally, he must accept **persecution** for righteousness’ sake. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

When people are “right side up” in the eyes of God, they will be “upside down” in the eyes of the world. In his book entitled, *So You Want To Be Happy?* Eric Owens writes, “The reason ‘Christianity’ is not growing as it once did is

this: There is no distinction between those who profess it and those who deny it” (Owens 9). “Lamentably, the world has converted the church and not the other way around” (Owens 8). Therefore, there is work to be done.

From The Inside Out Before The Eyes Of All

There are many Christians who hide their Christianity from the world. It is not that they necessarily become like the world, but that they become silent before the world. So, the next portion considered of Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” is that of His disciples being likened to salt and light.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house. Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:13–16, ASV).

Concerning Jesus’ salt metaphor, McGarvey and Pendleton wrote, “It is worthy of note that the salt of Palestine gathered from the marshes is not pure. Because of the foreign substances in it, it loses its savor and becomes insipid and useless, when exposed to the sun and air, or when permitted for any considerable time to come in contact with the ground; but pure salt does not lose its savor” (Fourfold 234). They went on to explain that Jesus was saying “that God’s people keep the world from

putrefaction and corruption” (Fourfold 234). No other group of people can accomplish such a task.

Concerning Jesus’ illustration of “a city set on a hill”, McGarvey and Pendleton wrote, “For air and for protection cities were frequently built upon hills” (Fourfold 234–235). “The church, reflecting the light of Christ, is of necessity a conspicuous body, so that neither its blemish nor its beauty can be concealed” (Fourfold 234). “Her constant aim should be to present as few as possible of the one, and as many as possible of the other” (Matthew and Mark 52).

Concerning Jesus’ illustration of a lamp in a house, it is the understanding of this author that the common house during that time would have been a one-room house constructed from clay, and during construction, a shelf would be purposefully molded to jut from one wall. This “shelf” would be “the stand.” It would be the only “stand” in the house, so that, typically, there was only one lamp on display in the room. It was the house’s only source for light.

Therefore, Jesus concludes, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). The word “so” means “in this manner.” It points back to the two illustrations Jesus has just given: a city built on a hill that cannot be hid and the lamp that is the only light source in the house. If Christians are not lighting the world, who will do it? Furthermore, good works that shine the Christian’s light are not for the glory of the Christian. McGarvey comments, “No ostentatious display of piety or righteousness is here enjoined, but the natural and unavoidable force of a good example, and the intended influence of our actions on the world” (Matthew and Mark 52).

Conclusion

Because Christians are “right side up” (or righteous) in the eyes of God, they are “upside down” in the eyes of the world. Therefore, it is the Christian’s obligation to shine from the “inside out” before the eyes of all, so that, some will be brought from the “outside in.” They will be changed. They will be saved. According to their former colleagues of the world, they will now become “An Upside Down People.” May every Christian have the same attitude and fortitude of that of Paul as he wrote to the Lord’s people in Rome,

I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:14–16).

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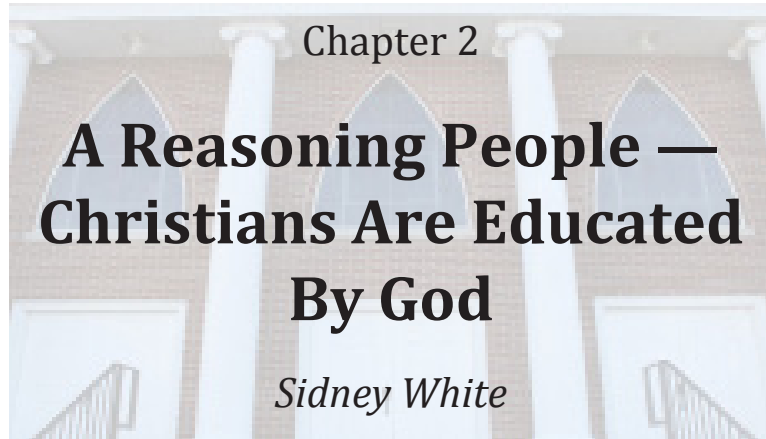
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Introduction

The basic concept to be presented in this lesson is that Christians receive an education from God's word. Through a study of the word of God, one is educated in those things of an eternal nature. Secular education is important because it prepares one for this present life. Biblical (spiritual) education is important because it prepares one for an eternity with God. Yet, there is far more emphasis on the secular than on the spiritual in most cases. As one studies the word of God, God is reasoning with that one relative to eternal matters. There are several passages that present the idea of reasoning.

Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your father (1 Sam. 12:7).

Samuel was speaking to Israel in the passage just cited. Then in a more familiar passage, Isaiah, speaking to Judah and Jerusalem (Isa. 1:18), we find the following words:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isa. 1:18).

Other passages tell us of Paul reasoning with the Jews when he came to Thessalonica (Acts 17:2). In Acts 24:25 we read of Paul, in a meeting with Felix and Drusilla, reasoned with them of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come. “Reasoning” involves thoughts and consideration. It carries the idea of pondering over a matter, to seek or examine together (Vines). It means one is thinking out to reach a conclusion.

There Has Always Been A Problem Of People Not Respecting God’s Word

A simple reading of Genesis 2 and 3 reveals this truth early in the history of mankind. God had created Adam and Eve, had placed them in the Garden of Eden, and had given them work to do, as well as a prohibition.

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die (Gen. 2:17).

But the early verses of chapter 3 reveal that Eve, being deceived, had more respect for the word of the serpent than the word of God.

In Genesis 4 we read the event of Cain killing his brother, Abel. He was angry because God had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. To help one better understand what is involved here, a reading of Hebrews 11:4 will help. Reading the phrase, “by faith Abel,” helps us realize that

Abel had respect to the word of God, thus God had respect unto Abel and to his offering. From these passages, it is not difficult to understand that Cain did not respect the word of God relative to his offering; thus, God did not have respect to Cain and his offering. Several Old Testament characters are mentioned in Hebrews 11, each preceded with the phrase by faith. These all had respect for the word of God.

In Genesis 11 we read of those of the generations of Noah who had come to a plain in the land of Shinar and chose to dwell there. Their intent was to build a city and a tower which top would reach to heaven. This was in violation of the command of God, as recorded in Genesis 9:1ff. God had said for them to multiply, and replenish the earth. But they decided to go no farther. God confounded their language, which at that point was one language. So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. They did not respect the word of God.

In 1 Samuel 15, one reads of King Saul being commanded to,

...go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

Saul did not do what he had been commanded to do. He blamed the people and he made excuse for using the best of the flocks for the purpose of sacrifice to God. Neither blame nor excuse-making was accepted by God.

1 Kings 12 reveals how Jeroboam, in leading the northern tribes of the divided kingdom, changed the

place of worship, the object of worship, arranged for a priesthood made up of people not approved by God, and he made many other changes in rebellion to the word of God. There was no respect for the word of God.

So many other instances could be cited showing that there has always been a problem of people not respecting the word of God. Nothing has really changed in that regard today.

Even With Reasoning, Some Did Not Respond

A reading of the prophets reveals God's effort to reason with His people to return.

Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. (Jer. 6:16).

“Come now, and let us reason together...” (Isa. 1:18).

Note some of the points made by Jeremiah relative to God's people.

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water (2:13).

Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number (2:32).

Pointing out that Judah did not learn from God's punishment of Israel, Jeremiah said,

And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also (3:7-8).

But as one continues to read, it is clearly stated that their punishment was their own fault.

Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee; this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart (4:18).

Jeremiah further emphasizes their lack of understanding as he states,

Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not (5:21).

He also shows their lack of respect for God by saying,

Fear ye not me? Saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea.... (5:22a).

They were also guilty of rebellion, a lack of submission. But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they have revolted and gone (5:23).

Along with all their other problems, they were also guilty of being ungrateful.

Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season: he

reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest (5:24).

And one thing that makes all this even worse, the prophets (some of them) and the priests were corrupt as well.

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end (5:31)?

And to make matters worse, they refused to listen to the word of God, rejecting the only cure for their condition.

To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot harken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it (6:10; see also 6:16b).

While we have noted numerous ones who rejected the word of God, we know that the word of God equally identifies many who did respect His word. Men of the Old Testament like Abel, Noah and Abraham could be cited. From the New Testament, men like the apostles, Timothy, Aquila and Priscilla and many others, especially of those mentioned by Paul as his co-labourers could be mentioned. For sake of space, we will not elaborate on those lives at this point.

Demands Of The Bible

While we look back at many of the past relative to respect, or lack thereof, for God and His word, what about people of today? Is it really any different today? When studying the word of God, it is very evident that it makes certain demands of us.

(1) It demands that it be read and studied. We have the example of the Bereans, who were said by Luke to be,

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

I often wonder how many people today are that diligent in the study of God's word. Would we be more educated, spiritually speaking, than we are? How can you let the "word of Christ dwell in you richly" without studying it? As Paul closes out the letter to the Colossians, he says that it is to be read in the church of the Laodiceans, and that the letter to the Laodiceans should be read among the Colossians (Col. 4:16). Then we have that famous passage, written by Paul to the young evangelist Timothy,

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

While the word "study" in this passage comes from a word meaning "to give diligence" or "exert oneself in a thing", "study" is very obvious when one considers the three things to be accomplished. How can one show himself approved unto God without know what God expects? That takes study! How can one be a workman that needs not be ashamed if he does not know what work God expects of him? That takes study! How can one rightly divide the truth without studying? While some want to make a big thing out of "study" really meaning "to give diligence", neither of the things to be accomplished as stated in the verse can be done without study!

(2) The word of God demands that it be believed.

How often have we talked with someone about their soul, quote some verses from the Bible, only to have them say, “I know that is what it says, but...”. We all have heard various denominational preachers quote the Bible, yet quote only the part that fits their false doctrine. It is evident they have studied, but do not believe certain things taught within the word of God.

For 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).

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 (Heb. 11:6).

And Paul tells us the source of faith by writing, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Where is the benefit of reading and studying the word of God if we do not believe what it says?

(3) The Bible, the word of God, demands that it be obeyed. All of us know people who can quote many verses in the Bible, will tell us I know what the Bible says, but will live their lives the way they want to rather than by God’s direction. Sounds a lot like Israel of old, doesn’t it? There are those who will tell us that there is nothing we have to do relative to our salvation. Yet, Jesus said,

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 (Matt. 7:21).

On another occasion Jesus raised the question, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say” (Luke 6:46)? Peter encourages the recipients of his first letter by referring to them as “obedient children” (1 Pet. 1:14), further reminding them that “ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1 Pet. 1:22). Further in that same letter, he raises some very sobering thoughts.

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear (1 Pet. 4:17-18)?

Obedience to the word of God is absolutely demanded by His word.

(4) The Bible demands that we reject all other teaching. It has been stated, and accurately so, any book that contains more than the Bible contains too much; and any book that contains less than the Bible contains too little; and any book that contains just what the Bible contains is not needed because we already have that. Many religious organizations have their own Bible (so called). Such books as the book of Mormons, the Confession of Faith, the Koran, and other such books must be rejected. We must also include in this list so many of the modern versions. Jesus said of those in His day, “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9). He also stated,

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that

I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day (John 12:48).

The Importance Of Bible Classes

Studying the word of God can and does take place in many different settings. Many do their studying in the privacy of their homes. Others combine home Bible studying with regular attendance to Bible classes provided by the elders of the church. Still others study by regular attendance at worship services, where the word of God is preached, by attending every opportunity to study, such as gospel meetings, special lectures, etc. All of the above are good and to be commended, but at this point I would like to express some thoughts about the importance of Bible classes, which are provided by the elders in an effort to feed the flock, as instructed by God. Any of the above mentioned settings can provide some of these same benefits, but when do we get enough study of the word of God? And when I speak of Bible classes, I am talking about classes where the Bible is taught, not so-called Bible classes that provide nothing but the opinions of men. What better way is there to further learn the direction God wants us to go? Remember, “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Since we live in a world of sin, the Bible classes give us extra ammunition to stay on the right course and better prepare us to successfully fight our battles with the devil. Every piece of armour mentioned in Ephesians 6:10ff is directly connected to the word of God. Bible classes will also provide us with sufficient information to answer false doctrine that comes our way on a regular basis. One of the demands of the word of God is to teach it to others. Bible classes are an

excellent source of instruction to this end. Just think about the benefit of Bible classes as we try to grow spiritually, as we deal with others on a daily basis, in family matters, and most importantly, helping prepare us for that eternal reward when this life is over.

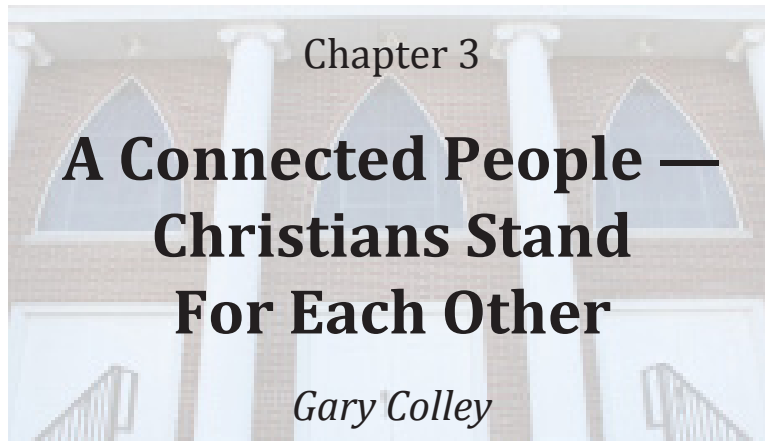
Why Would Anyone Not Want To Attend Every Opportunity To Study The Word Of God?

This would seem to be a very obvious question when all the benefits of Bible classes, sermons, lectures, and home Bible study are considered? (1) Perhaps some are afraid of what they might learn that would contradict their lifestyle. Those living according to the pleasures of the world, whether living in adultery, gambling, drinking, etc., do not usually want to hear what God thinks about those things. Others may be fearful that they will learn things that are contradictory to their religious beliefs, and have no intention of changing to please God. Still others may fear the responsibility that comes with knowledge. (2) Some do not study simply because of laziness. Study of the word of God, with a desire to learn the truth regardless of where it leads, is work. Again, read such passages as Acts 17:11 and 2 Timothy 2:15. The idea of daily diligence is certainly taught therein. This life is not the time for rest. That comes later (2 Thess. 1:7; Heb. 4:9, Rev. 14:13). (3) Some people are content where they are. They seem to have the idea that they know all they need to know about the Bible. Someone has said that we never graduate from Bible study til we meet the Author face to face. Such a wonderful thought! (4) Some contend that they just do not have the time to study their Bible. NEWS FLASH!!! Each of us has the same amount of time as every other person.

Some just do not budget their time wisely. Is it not true that we usually find time to do things that we really enjoy? (5) I have actually known some who had no confidence in their ability to study and know the word of God. I would simply suggest that things relative to our salvation area relatively simple. Yes, there are difficult passages in the Bible, but those with limited ability need to focus on the matters that have a bearing on our eternal destiny.

Conclusion

With the thoughts presented in this lesson, I believe we can all agree that Christians receive their education by studying the word of God. May each of us resolve that we will try to be more educated in God's word, better prepared to live a godly life here and prepared, by the grace of God, to be with Him eternally.



Introduction

The beautiful song entitled “We are part of the family” expresses well the thought of our title and present lesson. To be “A CONNECTED PEOPLE” we must walk or live together by the same rule (Amos 3:3), have the same hope of living in Heaven together after the resurrection and the judgment (Heb. 9:27). Christianity is a life to be lived, by the same principles, from day to day within the lives of all Christian people (Rom. 12:1-2). The inspired apostle Paul wrote:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ

divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name (1 Cor. 1:10-15).

He also wrote:

And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, (“not to go beyond the things which are written,” ASV) that no one of you be puffed up for one against another (1 Cor. 4:6).

He further commanded the church at Philippi, that we are to all walk or live by the same rule:

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample (Phil. 3:13-17).

These passages clearly show that we are A CONNECTED PEOPLE when we live in harmony with the Truth of the Gospel (Rom. 1:16-17; John 8:31-32). Jesus evidently was

very concerned that His disciples might not live in the proper unity with each other. He prayed,

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:17-21).

These Connected People

When a person has fellowship with God by obeying the Truth, and another person does the same, they are in fellowship with God and each other. The unity of the Spirit was enjoyed and possessed by the Ephesian disciples. In these units we are also to agree and to walk. These seven units, though not held by any denominations of our day, are of the Holy Spirit, and are given by Paul to the Ephesians as well as to all Christians. He wrote,

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 (Eph. 4:3-6).

These connected people are to join their hands and hearts not only in living the Christian life but also in preaching the Gospel to all the world (Mark 15:15-16; 2 Tim. 4:1-

4). We are to live above the maximums, opinions, and lust of the world. We are not to love the world, but rather to love and obey the Lord (1 John 2:15-17; Heb. 5:8-9). We are not to live in the “lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” but to live above these sins! Sin will separate us from the blessings of God and from the strength and encouragement we may give to each other (Cf. Heb. 10:23-25). America is in a state of moral decay! Never has there been a time when we as faithful Christians need to be connected! The Lord’s authority must be our guide. His authority is either absolute in our lives or it is obsolete! (Matt. 7:28-29; 28:18-19). He is either the Lord of all in our lives, or He is not the ruler at all in our lives (Acts 2:36; 1 Tim. 6:15). Jesus also teaches us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37). In this manner we are dedicated to the Cause of Christ or His church and live as A CONNECTED PEOPLE along with all the faithful Christians who are now in their graves (John 5:28-29). Thus, we understand our duty and also how the Lord came to seek and save all that were lost. The place to gain this connection is in the church of Christ (Luke 19:10). We are to be set apart from the world and be devoted to the service of righteousness (Rom. 6:16-18). Therefore for each Christian to love the Lord as we should, means that we are to keep His commandments in our lives and thereby be A CONNECTED PEOPLE (John 14:15; 15:1-6; 15:14). Jesus asked some pretenders who claimed to love Him, “And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I command you” (Luke 6:46).

We Are Not To Faint In Our Service

Christians are a “peculiar people” (1 Pet. 2:9), a

chosen generation to be lights and salt on the earth (Matt. 5:14-16). We are not to be “odd” but separated from the world to bring the world into fellowship with God and man (1 John 1:7). Because of the precious promises of our Lord, Christians dedicate themselves to “keep on keeping on” in the Lord’s service. The crown of life will be given to those who are “faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10). Paul suffered many things by the enemies of the Gospel of Christ, in the service of the Lord, many of which Christians today may never suffer. He said of his sufferings,

I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:21-28).

In the midst of all of these sufferings, which he endured

for the Cause of Christ, he never removed himself from living and preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ to the lost. He states,

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens (2 Cor. 4:16-18, 5:1).

And for the work which he accomplished, in fighting the good fight of faith, keeping faithfully the faith of the Gospel, and finishing his course on earth, he knew by faith that he would receive the “crown of righteousness” and so is the promise to all who would followed his example (2 Tim. 4:6-8). He wrote to Timothy,

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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, throughly
furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:12-17).

And in closing his letter to the Corinthians he wrote and charged them that they should, “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” (1 Cor. 15:58). And further in closing his letters to them, he also exhorted them to “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity (1 Cor. 16:13-14). These commands when faithfully kept will bring God’s approval in the last day, the day of Judgement.

Paul’s Further Journey

Paul continued to preach the same Gospel wherever he went. When he came to Thessalonica he went into the synagogue of the Jews as was his custom (Acts 17:1). Thessalonica was a large commercial city in Macedonia, which would be a rich field for the spread of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit had stated that the Gospel was to go to the Jew first (Rom. 1:16). The Jews hated Paul, as well as all Christians, and would often follow and persecute him from city to city. They considered him a traitor to their nation and to the Old Law of Moses. They would, in their jealousy, seek to turn his listeners away from hearing the Gospel. At Antioch the Gentiles received Paul and Barnabas gladly, though the Jews did not. The record states,

And the next sabbath day came almost the
whole city together to hear the word of God. But

when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:44-46).

The Jews would suborn wicked men to make false charges against the men of God, and set the city in turmoil which began a tumult of confusion. How sad to see the world's opposing conduct in actions directed by Satan. They made the charge against Paul and Silas, saying "**These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also**" (Acts 17:6). Actually this was in a sense a true charge! But, in reality they were trying to turn the world right side up! The charge was brought because Paul was preaching in the Jewish synagogues that Jesus was the Messiah whom they sought for, and raised from the dead. Even today the Jews will not read in their synagogue Isaiah 53, because it too clearly points to Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and the Saviour of the world! Here Paul's message converted some, but enraged others! Everywhere he went there seems to have been either a revival or a riot! But he did preach there for three Sabbaths before the opposers drove him away. When he was forced out of the city, he left Silas and Timothy in Thessalonica to supply the needs of this young, growing, energetic, loving congregation.

The False Charges

The charges against Paul were from wicked men

who were willing to be false witnesses, the type of men that are an abomination to the Lord (Prov. 6:16-19). But they, in one way, did accomplish their purposes as some do today. Their opposition did stop some from having the opportunity to hear and obey the Gospel! There are those in our day who oppose the Truth and want to keep others from hearing the Gospel also! When men are unable to answer the arguments presented to prove the Truth, they become exceedingly angry and try to destroy the messenger! Thus men did with our Lord, with Stephen, and with Paul and Barnabas, and continue to do with faithful preachers and Christians today. However the Christians light shines brighter than all the harm that the devil can do in this world! (Matt. 5:16). In the words of Winston Churchill, we should "Never, Never, Never give up!"

Every Christian is to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ, and be ready to fight the good fight of the faith (Jude 3; 1 Tim. 6:12, 15). We must stand fast against the enemy and refuse to give in to his demands and wrong ways (Cf. 1 Pet. 5:8). Thus our Lord did with Satan when He was tempted in Matthew 4:1-11! With each challenge to the Truth Jesus answered, "It is written." Christians should be able to do the same (2 Tim. 2:15). We are commanded to be ready to answer the gainsayer by sanctifying the Lord and His teaching in our hearts. We are to be ready to give a defense of our hope (1 Pet. 3:15). Though Satan may represent himself, and seek to transform himself into an apostle of Christ (one sent by Christ), he is not one! His works are rather those of a deceitful imposter! He has many who are willing to serve him in the religious world, who seek to transform themselves into ministers of righteousness,

but their destiny shall be in accordance to their works (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

God's Plan To Save

The church of Christ which was built with the teaching of Christ, purchased with His blood, and is the body of people He promised to save. Entrance into, and the church of Christ itself, is the plan given by God for the salvation of all the world (Matt. 16:18-19; 28:18-20; Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23; John 3:16-17). On the birthday of the church of Christ in Jerusalem there were thousands of souls added to it (Acts 2:41). These had known the tragic occurrences that had happened some 50 days previous when Jesus was crucified, and after three days they knew He was raised from the dead! In the forgiveness of their sins by repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38), they had every reason to rejoice and to be A CONNECTED PEOPLE! And thus we are not surprised to read Luke's account of how happy and connected they are described to be:

And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:44-47).

What a memorable and wonderful time was enjoyed by these saved ones when the peace and soundness in doctrine were paramount in the minds of all of these

members of the church! There had not come at this time the apostate Catholic Church, the beginning of which is so often times referred to in the Scriptures as the “falling away” (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-5). There were not any “denominations” at this time where diversity was praised and division was honored! Denominations did not appear in the world for another 1500 years after Jesus build His church on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem (Cf. Matt. 16:18; Acts 2). These type things are contrary to the desires and teaching of our Lord! They continue to be so today! (John 17:20-21). We need to be reminded that the only references to denominations in the Scriptures are those of condemnation! (Cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-15).

Conclusion

Some question how we can become the same “CONNECTED PEOPLE” today? We must remember God’s decree from the beginning that every seed produces after its kind (Gen. 1:11-12). The Lord says that “the seed of the kingdom is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). Hence, this should not be that hard to figure out. The same seed being planted today produces the same fruit or crop that it produced in the first Century, Christians only, and the only Christians, members by obedience of the church of Christ (Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). When we examine the early disciples train of thought and discipline, we learn that they all walked by the same teaching, that is, what is only found in the Word of God (1 Pet. 4:11). They did not write their own creed books, have their Catholic Catechism, nor did they seek to write something called a “latter revelation” that claimed to have been a book from the Holy Spirit! They had one head and that One was

A Connected People – Christians Stand For Each Other

Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4-6; Acts 2:42). Let us sing with new enthusiasm “Blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love!” Let us be indeed a “CONNECTED PEOPLE!”



Chapter 4

A Studying People — Christians Value God's Word

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Introduction

During the 1950's I heard Brother Gus Nichols say in a sermon that "The most damnable sin in America is Biblical ignorance." What would he say were he alive today? He died in the fall of 1975. The sainted Nichols knew that ignorance of the Bible is a taproot from which many other errors spring. During the 1950's America was not composed of Bible-studying, Bible-believing and Bible-practicing people. The dearth of Bible Study and Bible knowledge is more pronounced now than in the Nichols' era.

Some years ago I preached a sermon in a large northern city. Mention was made in that sermon of Paul's trip to Corinth about which we read in Acts 18 and other places as well. A man in the audience said this to me as he shook my hand at the back of the building, "I note that you spoke of Paul at Corinth in your lesson. Were you speaking of Corinth, Mississippi?" He was a transplanted Southerner to this northern city. He was serious with this

inquiry. He knew about the Mississippi town by this name but not about Corinth in Greece in the first century.

Of all books now available to humanity, the Bible should be the most familiar of all books to modern people. But for the most part, present day America is not a Bible studying, Bible believing, Bible practicing, and Bible-defending people. To an alarming degree, many who profess New Testament Christianity are not nearly as studious of God’s Divine Book as we all should be.

When Biblical Ignorance Prevails

Hosea’s peers were not a studying people by any means. He leveled this serious charge against them,

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge:
because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will
also reject thee, that there shall be no priest to
me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy
God, I will also forget thy children (Hos. 4:6).

Sadducees in Christ’s day erred greatly because they knew not “the Scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:29). It ceases to be a wonder then, why they are on the wrong side of truth in every mention of them in Holy Writ. They opposed John the Baptist, the Christ, and the apostles. Their final mention in the Bible is Acts 23:6-8 where they opposed Paul in his preaching of the resurrection.

Jerusalem stood to be destroyed by Rome in A. D 70 by Titus and his Roman army and yet its people knew not the time of their visitation (Luke 19:44). Jesus could have educated them about this coming destruction even as He did His own disciples in Matthew 24; Mark 13 and Luke 21 but they despised both Him and His teachings including

the Olivet Discourse. Matthew, Mark and Luke had written their books prior to Jerusalem's destruction. His disciples took seriously His solid and sound counsel, and it is commonly believed that not one Christian perished in this holocaust.

Some at Corinth rejected their own future resurrection due to a lack of knowledge which Paul deemed as shameful (1 Cor. 15:34).

Why Be A Studying People?

We exhibit our love by such. Israel's Sweet singer wrote, "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). Power-packed Psalms depicts the blessed man who abhors wrong and meditates day and night on God's Word (Psalm 1:1-3). What a wise and worthy way to introduce precious Psalms to us!

Truth makes us free as per Jesus' declaration in John 8:32. Proficiency in accumulating truth comes from diligence in its fascinating perusal. There are no short cuts in gaining Biblical knowledge.

Truth leads to salvation from sin. The apostle Peter expressed the matter excellently and eloquently when he penned,

Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Pet. 1:22).

Knowledge is the keynote of the book of 2 Peter. It is near the top of the list of Christian graces as virtue is to be added to faith and knowledge added to virtue (2 Pet. 1:5ff). Peter's final exhortation was for his auditors to "grow in

grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18).

In pursuing the rich redemption of our souls we must realize we are lost in sin and need to be rescued. Passages such as Luke 19:10; Romans 3:9 and 3:23 establish responsible humanity as such. We study to learn this fundamental.

We must be knowledgeable toward precious saving truth. We must hear the Word of God. This involves knowledgeable action on our part (Matt. 13:9). Very forcefully, Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 13:18, “Hear therefore the parable of the sower.” It is my seasoned judgment that Jesus issued no other commandment more frequently than the intense injunction to hear. In Mark 4:23-24 we note, “If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear...”. Luke states in this regard, “Take heed therefore how ye hear..” (Luke 8:18). Paul informs us in Romans 10 : 17, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” Early in his Pentecostal presentation in Acts 2 Peter charged his vast Jerusalem audience, “Hearken to my words” (Acts 2:14). In summary of what the Corinthians had done in their journey toward and into the Christ Luke penned how that “many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). We cannot be a studying people minus an eagerness to hear the gospel in all its fervent fulness.

We must be knowledgeable relative to the formation of faith or belief. Paul told the inquiring jailor in Philippi that he needed to “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31) This was in answer to the great question asked by the trembling

jailor, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). This was not a charge to possess what is so popular and pleasing among the denominational world today— “faith only.” James spells out what is basically wrong with “faith only” in James 2:24. In the famed sermon in the Upper Room in John 14-16 Jesus called upon the eleven apostles to have a fourfold faith or four bright and beautiful beliefs— (1) Belief in God; (2) Belief in Jesus Christ as God’s son; (3) Belief in the surety of Christ’s second advent; (4) Belief in the rich reality of heaven as a real place and attainable to those who believe and obey the truth. Unless we are a studying people, we will not have an intelligent concept of Biblical faith and what it entails. We would be in the same position as the formerly blind man, now able to see, in John 9:36 who asked, “Who is he Lord, that I might believe on him?”

We must be a studying people relative to the clarion call and command to repent. John and Jesus both taught its imperative importance in Matthew 3:2 and 4:17. Jesus tells us that it is either repent or perish (Luke 13:3, 5). Quite bluntly, it is either turn or burn in eternity. Jesus incorporated its essentiality in the giving of the Great Commission in Luke 24:47. Repentance and remission of sins are linked even as they are in Acts 2:38. Repentance, along with prayer and confession of sins, was impressed upon erring Simon of Samaria in Acts 8:22. James 5:16 and 1 John 1:9 also touch God’s second law of pardon for His erring children. Paul taught Athenian skeptics that God now commands all men to repent (Acts 17:30). Heaven’s door will not stand ajar to the impenitent.

We must be a studying people relative to the marvelous making of the Good confession. We must know

that in becoming Christians we do not confess that God for Christ’s sake has forgiven already our sins. Instead, we are to confess from a grateful heart that Jesus Christ is God’s Son. This must be a firm and fundamental belief. This is what the sincere eunuch in Acts 8 did at the bidding of Philip the evangelist. I am happy I preach from a Version, the KJV, that retains verse 37. It is not found in many of the modern versions. They have taken their infamous Jehoiakim penknives and cut it out (Jeremiah 36). This was the noble confession Peter made in Matthew 16:16 in the colorful regions of historic Caesarea Philippi. Mount Hermon, near where they were at this time, stood not nearly as tall in marvel and majesty as Peter’s courageous and comprehensive confession of Christ’s Deity and His being the Son of God, the Sovereign of the Universe. It is doubtful Peter ever spoke any words so worthy, so wonderful and so wise.

We must be a studying people relative to baptism or immersion. We cannot be ignorant of its fundamental facets and be right in submission thereto. As the lamented Keeble often said and so correctly, “There is water in the plan.” Jesus put water in the plan in John 3:5. We must know the right action-immersion or a burial—not sprinkling or pouring (Matt. 3:13-17; Romans 6:2-3; Col. 2:12). In a children’s class some years ago I asked the boys and girls why sprinkling and pouring would not do for baptism. A young child, perhaps 5 to 7 at the time, answered, “Brother Taylor, the power of God is not there!” That states it and settles the matter once for all. The brevity of his answer was beautiful to hear. We must know who is a possible candidate for baptism. It is not for babies or little children far from reaching a responsible realm.

It is for a hearing, believing, penitent and confessing person. We must know its purpose—for the remission of sins, to have sins washed away, to come into the saving relationship with The Timeless Trinity, to put on Christ and to become a member of His body, the church (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Matt. 28:19; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:2-4; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Christians Must Continue To Be A Studying People

We need to study and be aware of God's Second Law of Pardon for His erring children. This is what Peter taught the erring Simon of Samaria in Acts 8:22 and what James and John taught respectively in James 5:16 and 1 John 1:9. We must be a studying people relative to acceptable worship—singing, praying, teaching/preaching, communion and the contribution (Eph. 5:19; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20-34; 16:1-2). Each act herein depicted is inclusive of worshipping God (the right object), in spirit (the proper attitude) and in truth (the right way). This great and grand truth was taught the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in John 4:24. This is what early saints in Christ did in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42). Hebrews 10:25 stands as a militant reminder not to forsake the assembly. I have thought for years that Hebrews 10:25 is the most disobeyed of the entire Bible to the masses of our members. Proof of such can be seen in nearly every congregation between Sunday morning attendance and that of Sunday night, Wednesday night or week days of a gospel meeting. Several years ago I began a six-day gospel meeting with a large congregation in a southern city. I encouraged every member to be faithful in attendance for the next six days. Near the conclusion of the service one

of the elders encouraged the same. He spoke for all their eldership. As I listened to his most welcome exhortation I mused in mind touching how many of the membership would return for the remainder of the meeting. I had my answer Sunday evening when attendance dropped 50% and stayed about 40% Monday through Friday night.

We must be a studying people relative to living well the Christian life. Christ desires that we be salt of the earth and light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). Biblical ignorance does not fit here.

We are to supply in rich fashion the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance or self-control. Such an attractive addition will supply beauty and grace in any life. We must add or supply to faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity or love (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Counting faith they add a great octave to Christian living at its best. The late and lamented Marshall Keeble used to preach a great sermon he called, “Five Steps Into The Church And Seven Steps Into Heaven. He was happy to be a five stepper in conversion matters and a seven stepper in matters of sanctification.

In a most magnificent manner Paul summed up Christian living so succinctly,

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. Teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world (Tit. 2:11-12).

Here we have two powerful negatives followed by three

precious positives. The negatives include all sins—mental, vocal and in habits and deed. The positives likewise are comprehensive in nature. To live soberly is to live right with self. To live righteously is to live right with others. To live godly is to live right with God. Here we have an excellent threefold delineation of the Christian life—inward living, outward living and upward living. How noble and noteworthy!

We must be a studying people relative to the proper division of truth or handling it aright (2 Tim. 2:15, KJV and ASV). Included would be the three major dispensations—Patriarchal, Mosaic and Christian. There are the four major book divisions of the Old Testament—Books of Law, Books of history, Books of Poetry and Books of the Major and Minor Prophets. The book divisions of the New Testament would be the Gospel records—four accounts yet one Gospel, the Book of conversions, the apostolic epistles and Revelation with the lethal struggle with Rome and its Caesars especially Domitian. We need to be a studying people relative to the two major covenants of the Bible—the Mosaic and the Christian. We need to be cognizant of which one we are not under and the one to which we are amenable.

We must be a studying people to be effective in personal evangelism or teaching others the way of salvation. Biblical ignorance and successful personal work are not compatible. In this wonderful and worthy work we must have a good working knowledge of truth. It does not harm the personal work situation to say, “I do not know now the answer to your question but will work to find it for our next session.” Personal evangelism motivates us to be more diligent in our search for truth.

We must be a studying people in meeting error and the combatting of the same. It is my conviction that there is more religious error in our world than at any time in the whole of human history. I never cease to be amazed at the cropping up of so many errors on a regular basis.

By way of prophecy the coming Messiah would love righteousness and hate wickedness (Psa. 45:7). Hebrews 1:8-9 stress His fulfillment of this. He proved such throughout His ministry. On the banks of the Jordan just subsequent to His own immersion by John's hands he drew out the Sword of the Spirit and threw the scabbard away permanently. He met and demonished Satanic error in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. Truth was always safe and secure in His hands. Error was never safe in His presence. Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians all felt the sharp impact of His usage of the Sword of the Spirit. He never compromised truth and never left error alone but defeated it in every skirmish He had with it. He taught His disciples to be militant with truth. They were warriors who wielded the Sword of the Spirit with great success.

Paul was set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). Almost every place he went he battled the forces of Judaism or the fallacies of paganism. Paul knew and knew well that truth must be defended. Years ago I heard of a young preacher who declared that truth needs no defense. I thought at the time that unless growing maturity would awaken him on this matter that truth would suffer in his work among false teachers and teaching. Had truth needed no defense in the first century, there would have been no need for the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and what Paul wrote in Galatians 2:4-5.

John was that disciple Jesus loved and has been called

the apostle of love. Yet his magnanimous heart filled with love did not silence his tongue or stay his pen when it came to defending truth and combatting error on every hand. Look at his militant stand throughout the precious Book of Revelation. I sometimes preach a sermon on the errors refuted in the Book of Revelation. I have these listed in my commentary on Revelation, *“Studies In The Book Of Revelation.”*

We need to be a studying people to imitate great servants of the past. Moses was so familiar with truth that he was kept busy in counseling Israelites in the wilderness. Even when he had others to help him in such matters, they brought to Moses the more complex of their problems. Samuel and the prophets who followed him were able students of God’s Word. King David was a daily student of God’s Word. Ezra was diligent in his search of truth (Ezra 7:10). New Testament apostles and evangelists were all proficient with truth. Paul was a student till the very end of his life as we see in his final chapter—2 Timothy 4. Though inspired they still meditated daily on God’s Word. It was food and water for them.

In the past we have had men like Gus Nichols, Franklin Camp, Guy N. Woods, Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Curtis Cates, Garland Elkins, Roy Hearn, N. B. Hardeman and a host of others who majored in Bible Study and proclaimed it fervently and faithfully. They knew that they knew the truth. Not that first one ever voiced such blasphemous utterances as “Truth is relative, truth is unattainable or that we cannot be sure of anything.” Sadly, we have a new breed of preachers among us today who parrot such sentiments. Every one of them needs to be put out to pasture! They are not converted themselves and will

lead no one to the truth with such infidelic attitudes and actions.

CONCLUSION

I conclude this lesson with an Old Testament passage and one from the New Testament. Respectively, they read,

Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding...These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scripture daily, whether these things were so (Prov. 23:23; Acts 17:11).

There is no other acceptable alternate to our becoming a diligent student, a studying people, and remain such the remnant of our days on earth.



Chapter 5

A Standing People — Christians Know God's Word Is True

Billy Bland

Introduction

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, **These that have turned the**

world upside down are come hither also;
Whom Jason hath received: and these all do
contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that
there is another king, one Jesus (Acts 17:1-7)
(Emphasis mine BB).

The church of Christ in the first century was accused of turning the world upside down. If the world is wrong side up (morally and doctrinally), it needs to be turned upside down. The point of mentioning the above verse is to show the amazing impact Christians in the first century had on their world. They were on both the offense and defense in preaching the Word of God.

Just prior to Jesus’ ascension back into heaven, He gave the great commission. Matthew records,

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

Mark stated it this way,

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15-16).

The Christians in the first century took this commission very seriously. Even when some were stoned to death and/or otherwise persecuted, they did not quit teaching and preaching.

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them (Acts 8:1-5).

The Christians in the first century were a standing people. Many documents and books have recorded the tremendous persecution the Christians endured in the first three centuries after Christ. The Roman Empire was infamous for its persecution of the followers of Jesus Christ. The Roman Empire did lose its power, yet Christianity still goes forward to this very day. Daniel, a man who took a strong stand for God in the sixth century B.C., prophesied, "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan. 2:44). The kingdom of Christ was established during the days of the Roman kings, and did "break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

In the country of America, many members of the body of Christ have been a standing people. In the early days of the Restoration Movement, men stood on the polemic

platform defending New Testament Christianity against denominationalism and manmade creeds and doctrines. In the twentieth century, there were men, some of whom this writer was privileged to know, such as Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Gus Nichols, G. K. Wallace, Guy N. Woods, Roy J. Hearn, Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Garland Elkins, Curtis A. Cates, Robert R. Taylor, Jr and many others who stood for the truth either on the polemic platform in debate, or in their writings. Thankfully, even today in the twenty-first, there are those who are still standing. The Memphis School of Preaching Lectureship in 2014 hosted its annual lectureship with the theme, “Still Standing: But Not Standing Still.” The book of this Lectureship consists of forty-seven chapters dealing with the need of being a standing people who stand for God’s Word. Others, who are not Gospel preachers or public debaters, have stood for the truth in their everyday walks of life. Many face doctrinal and moral challenges on the jobs, in their families, etc., yet stand for the truth.

However, just because people in the past have stood for the truth, it is not a guarantee people in the future will be a standing people. It seems Satan (and the world), would like to intimidate Christians today so that they will simply “roll over and play dead.” They would like for us to become complacent with the truth and our need of standing for it. God reminds us of the need of earnestly contending for the faith. He inspired Jude to write,

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were

before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 1:3-4).

Jesus — Our Perfect Example Of Standing

From the very time Jesus was a baby there were those who wanted to stop Jesus (cf. Matt. 2:1-23). Jesus taught publically and privately. At times, there were large crowds which followed Him and then there were those that came for a one on one discussion. Jesus always stood for the truth in His teaching and preaching of God's Word. During Jesus' personal ministry, He informed His disciples He would be put to death, but would rise from the dead. Peter was disturbed by this statement and rebuked Jesus, Matthew records this event as follows,

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men (Matt. 16:21-23).

Jesus stood for the truth, even when He knew He would die for the message He was preaching.

Matthew records a day in which Jesus was constantly in debate with the Pharisees, then the Saducees, then the Pharisees and the Saducees together (Matt. 22:15-

40). They were trying to entangle Jesus in His talk. Jesus, however, stood and the enemies of the truth failed miserably. After they had tried their hand at entangling Jesus and were unable to accomplish their evil intent, Jesus turned the table on them and asked them a question.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions (Matt. 22:41-46).

Jesus stood firmly all the way through His arrest, persecution and death. He knew the truth about who He is and that the cause was right and would be triumphant. We today are extremely blessed because Jesus stood.

God Commands Christians To Stand

Christians must know we are in a war. This battle is not a physical battle, but spiritual in its nature. God says,

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore

take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (Eph. 6:10–18).

The armour we don is not for a parade, but for a battle. Note God say “**stand against the wiles of the devil**” (verse 11), “**withstand**” (verse 13), “**and having done all to stand,**” (verse 13), and “**stand therefore**” (verse 14). It is obvious God intends for us as Christians to “**stand.**”

Timothy was instructed to be a “good soldier of Jesus Christ.” Paul instructed Timothy,

Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier (2 Tim. 2:1–4).

Timothy was to war a good warfare —

This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare (1 Tim. 1:18).

Timothy was to stand strong.

The words “stand fast” come from the Greek word, “*steko*” and means “to stand firm, be constant, persevere” (Mounce). The Christians in Corinth were to “stand fast.” Paul wrote, “Watch ye, **stand fast in the faith**, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13, emp. added). Likewise to the Christians in Philippi, Paul stated,

Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye **stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel** (Phil. 1:27, emp. added).

Then again “Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, **so stand fast in the Lord**, my dearly beloved” (Phil. 4:1, emp. added). To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote “**Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle**” (2 Thess. 2:15, emp. added).

When Paul was facing trial unfortunately no man stood with him. He penned these sad words, “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge” (2 Tim. 4:16). However, He knew the Lord would and did stand by Him. He went on to write, “Notwithstanding **the Lord stood with me**, and strengthened me; that by

me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion" (2 Tim. 4:17). Jesus warned there would be persecution. Yet Christians must be a standing people even when persecuted.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matt 5:10-12).

Standing Requires Courage

God is aware of the temptation within mankind to be fearful. He instructed Israel,

When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt (Deut. 20:1).

God promised to be with His people. This should give us great courage. As Israel was about to cross over into the promised land of Canaan and face their enemies, Moses exhorted,

Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee (Deut. 31:6).

He next exhorts Joshua,

And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the Lord hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it (Deut. 31:7).

Likewise, after Moses death, the Lord exhorted Joshua to be strong and of good courage.

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest (Josh. 1:5-7).

And again, “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Josh.1:9).

Just as God promised to be with His people in the Old Testament period, He likewise has promised to be with us.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:

and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

This promise should motivate us to “teach all nations.” The Hebrews’ writer stated,

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:5-6).

In the parable of the talents, the one talent man stated he was “afraid” and did not use the talent committed to his trust. The Lord did not accept this excuse.

His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed. Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents” (Matt 25:26-28).

Neither will the Lord accept our excuse should we reason we were afraid.

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8).

It takes courage to be a standing people, but God has promised to be with us and we must have faith to keep on standing (cf. Eph. 6:10-18).

Go, Stand, Speak

Soon after the Apostles started carrying out the great commission of Jesus Christ, they were met with opposition. Luke records,

Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison (Acts 5:17-18).

The Lord did not allow the enemies to stop the progress in the spreading of His Gospel. If death and a tomb could not stop the Christ, prison bars would not hold His ambassadors.

But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life (Acts 5:19-20).

The commission remained the same – “teach” and “preach.”

“Go.” Christianity is a religion of going. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt 28:19). “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Our going into all the world and preaching the Gospel is not an option. The command is to teach and preach. This cannot be accomplished unless we “go.” On this occasion, the apostles were commanded to go to the temple and teach.

“Stand.” They were also commanded to “stand.” Once in the temple they were to stand and teach. At times the word stand can simply mean the position of one’s physical body. But it also can mean to “take a stand.”

“Speak.” The apostles had just been imprisoned for speaking (teaching) the Gospel. God sent an angel and freed them. Now they are to get right back to what they were doing that got them into trouble with the high priest and the Saducees. In fact, the Bible says they were “filled with indignation” at the work of the apostles.

“To The People.” God wants people to hear His Word. He wants all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9).

“All the Words of this Life.” God’s Word is to be preached in its completeness. No addition or subtraction is allowed (Rev. 22:18-19). The Words of God are words of this life. We sometimes sing the song, “Wonderful Words Of Life.”

The apostles promptly obeyed the voice of the angel.

And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought (Acts 5:21).

When those sent to fetch the apostles realized they were not in the prison, they reported back to the ones who sent them explaining the apostles were not in the prison.

Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison

are standing in the temple, and teaching the people (Acts 5:24–25).

The angel told the apostles to go, stand and speak. They were found in the temple standing in the temple and teaching the people. They did exactly as they were commanded. When questioned about their actions, they replied they ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). Finally they were beaten and commanded by the authorities not to speak in the name of Jesus and they were let go. But they continued to take a stand as commanded. Luke records,

And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ (Acts 5:41–42).

Conclusion

We are blessed that God’s people were (and are) a standing people. Jesus is our perfect example of standing in the teaching, preaching and defending the Word of God. Being a standing people requires conviction. One must believe in the cause of God for which he is standing. He must have courage to keep on standing in the face of opposition. “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13).

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Chapter 6

A Believed People — Christians Message Is Believed

Jimmy Clark

One of the great aspects of the people of God in the first century was that the world saw a distinctive difference in those converted to Jesus. Peter wrote,

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you (1 Pet. 4:3-4, KJV).

Holy living (cf. 1 Pet. 1:15-16) was and is a trademark of the people of God. If there is no marked difference between the lives of Christians and those of the world, how does the term “the called out” have any meaning? Peter specifically wrote of God’s people,

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him

who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

Therefore, the church by definition denotes a people different from those outside of Christ. The world saw that and believed that there had been a change. If one only had the life of the apostle Paul for an example, such would be clearly established. However, the New Testament is replete with examples. This lesson will explore areas where the world saw a people who truly believed the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

A Change In Conviction

Change must first take place in the mind and heart before it can ever be seen in the life. The book of Acts illustrates this change from Acts 2 to Acts 28. Fifty days before the Pentecost after the death and resurrection of Jesus these words were spoken by these same people, “Let him be crucified” (Matt. 27:23) and “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt. 27:25). When Peter preaches that they “by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23) the very one that God made “Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36), the words spoken by these people are changed into “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). After being told to repent and be baptized (cf. Acts 2:38), the text states, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). This pattern of a changed conviction among certain Jews about Jesus flows through the book of Acts.

A marked change in conviction is equally seen among the Gentiles. Paul himself stated of the Thessalonians,

For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9).

There are a host of examples in the book of Acts to show that the Gentiles no longer conformed to the world-view of pagan idolatry. The Galatian congregations left pagan thinking to be conformed to the gospel of Christ. Certain ones from Athens did have a change in conviction while the philosophers mocked concerning the resurrection of the dead (cf. Acts 17:32-34). Their conviction was identified like Paul stated of his own,

We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak (2 Cor. 4:13).

Why do people leave the religions of their upbringing to face the criticism of their family and friends? Why do certain people embrace the gospel of Christ knowing that the secular world from which they once strongly adhered to will consider them mentally disturbed? Those who have yet to see must examine all of the suffering of those who hold to the conviction of truth in spite of being in the minority in the world.

A Change In Character

Once genuine faith is fixed in the heart, building a life of faith reveals marked traits. Peter wrote,

And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; And to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; And to

godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

While some of those character traits would be admired by the world in that day, not all of them would be appreciated. This would be especially true of charity, especially charity toward one's own enemies (cf. Matt. 5:44). Humility and a forgiving spirit are marked character traits of a people who would turn the world upside down, not by carnal weaponry but by a compassionate will to seek the good of others. The character of Roman citizenry and the character of a child of God would be as different as Caesar is to Jesus Christ. Those who misunderstood the nature of the kingdom of God would consider God's people a threat to Rome. Such could not be further from the truth. Examples of such can be seen throughout the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul.

There are several examples in the New Testament to show the difference in character. Paul himself was a Roman citizen and falsely accused and abused for upholding the kingdom of God and the kingship of Jesus Christ. The unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica stated to the city officials,

These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus (Acts 17:6-7).

The truth is that the coming of the gospel into the city of Thessalonica made the city better with the conversion of several. Paul himself would write to the Roman brethren about civil government,

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the

powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same (Rom. 13:1-3).

Paul would later record that there were converts of Caesar's household. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household" (Phil. 4:22). This is a striking example of how the kingdom of God was a blessing to those close to civil government, not a curse. Paul would write to Titus about the character toward civil government and all of society.

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men (Titus 3:1-2).

One only needs to see how the gospel would affect the lives of Roman soldiers like Cornelius and the jailor at Philippi. The life of Christ would permeate the character of people's lives everywhere. Paul's words to the Ephesians show how marked a contrast there is in character, where he wrote,

Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ (Eph. 4:19-20).

The effects of the temple of Diana would have a major impact on unbelievers in the true God. The effects of the

gospel and the church would be like light in darkness.

A Change In Conduct

James wrote of a true saving faith,

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).

Saying what one believes and conducting one's life upon the basis of a working faith are two different things. One has to live life from some basis. That basis is founded upon what one truly believes. Hypocrisy ultimately is uncovered in the works.

There would be a conduct change religiously. One of the first changes that took place in conduct was a practice of faith under the apostles' teaching from the faith practiced under the law. One such great example is found in the words,

And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).

Here are priests that would have been strongly influenced by the scribes and Pharisees who no longer are following such religious practices. Paul, the former Pharisee, would say of his conversion,

But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed (Gal. 1:23).

Again,

For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me (Gal. 2:18-20).

The religious change of the Galatians (cf. Acts 14:6-23), the Corinthians (cf. Acts 18:8-11), the Ephesians (cf. Acts 19:18-19) and many others shows that their beliefs had changed and the communities would recognize it.

There would be a conduct change socially. It is striking how that when the brethren were threatened and taken before the magistrates as troublemakers, the brethren appealed to the rule of civil law and took the abuse of their accusers. Jason of Thessalonica suffered (cf. Acts 17:5-9). Sosthenes of Corinth also suffered (cf. Acts 18:17). Loving one's neighbor as oneself became the social axiom of all Christians. Suffering for righteousness' sake was to walk in the steps of the Lord (cf. 1 Pet. 2:21-23). Neighborhoods would be changed for the better as the world saw the righteous conduct of God's people.

There would be a conduct change domestically. Home life was deplorable in the days of the Roman Empire. The unscriptural practice about divorce by certain Jewish teaching (cf. Matt. 19:3, 7-12) would turn domestic life into an unstable and sinful environment. Sexual immorality was rampant (cf. Rom. 1:24-32; 13:13). Congregations and individuals would be warned to flee lusts that war against the soul (cf. 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 Cor. 5:9; 2 Tim. 2:22). The teaching concerning husbands, wives, and children

being obedient to their parents would greatly enhance the stability of domestic life.

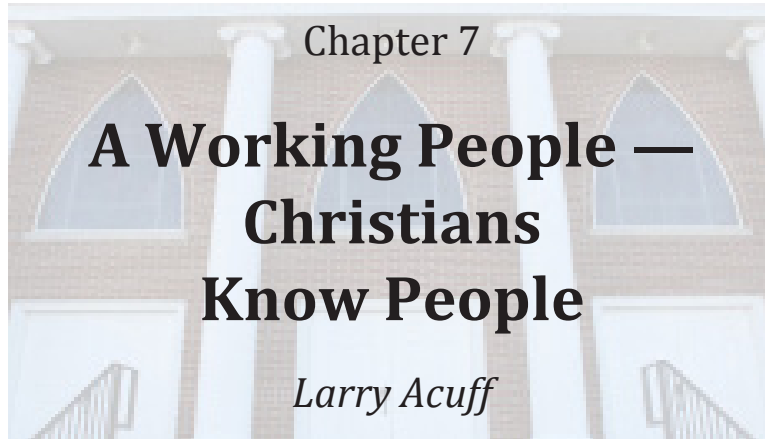
There would be a conduct change in the business environment. The work environment would greatly improve with the application of various instructions. Paul wrote,

Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as menpleasers: but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men (Col. 3:22-23).

Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven (Col. 4:1).

Extortion is greatly condemned (cf. 1 Cor. 6:10). Stealing is replaced with honest work to help support those in need (cf. Eph. 4:28). Being a good steward becomes the model of honorable business.

No aspect of life would be left untouched by the power of the rule of Christ in the heart. The world knew that something had happened inside the minds of these converts. They may not agree with the change or desire to obtain the “like precious faith” (2 Pet. 1:1) that they had, but they could not mistake the fact that a great change had come among them. The life of the church is to be so distinctive that light into a world of darkness is noticed (cf. Matt. 5:14) and the salt of the earth (cf. Matt. 5:13) is to be a pleasant respite from the distasteful and bitter dregs of sin. Being a believed people is not just to be a goal for the church toward those outside; it is to be powerful influence to draw others to the Lord and the gospel.



Let me express my appreciation to the eldership and Bro. Jonathan Burns for the invitation to be a part of this lectureship. It is indeed an honor and I thank you.

“UPSIDE-DOWN: REACHING THE WORLD” is the theme for this lectureship. In order to turn the world upside down we must preach the gospel (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). In order to do this we must come into contact with others. This lesson will deal with our working on our relationship with others so that we may influence them for righteousness.

The church is the body of Christ. The scriptures tell us, “But now are there many members, yet but one body” (1 Cor. 12:20). As the body must work to accomplish its purpose so; we as, Christians, must be a working people. A review of scripture will remind us of this.

I must work the works of him that sent me,
while it is day: the night cometh, when no man
can work (John 9:4).

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 (1 Cor. 15:58).

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest (John 4:35).

And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? (Luke 2:49).

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:25).

A working people, in regards to Christianity, implies that we have a purpose and that purpose is the salvation of souls. Ours as well as others. In looking at this there are ten verses in Galatians, six that will pin-point our relationship to the others. Paul wrote:

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden. Let him that is

taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 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. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:1-10).

There are seven areas this lesson will explore that will help us turn this world upside-down again. As a working people there are seven things we must work to accomplish.

I. We Must Work To Restore The Fallen

Notice the first verse says,

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted (Gal. 6:1).

The word brethren means “us.”

In our relationships we first must begin at home. We must work to restore the fallen. There are three things to notice about the fallen. One is their condition. If a man be overtaken. This reminds of the words of James when he wrote, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” (James 1:2). This seems to imply that they are ensnared by the devil. They are overtaken, they fall. The second thing we need to see is the command. We are to restore them. Thirdly, there is also a challenge and that

is, “restore such a one in the spirit of meekness” (Gal. 6:1). Our attitude is important in our efforts to restore a fallen brother, as well as, in our efforts to seek to teach one the gospel of Christ.

II. We Must Work To Relieve The Burden Of Others

In verse two of this passage the scriptures say, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” We must work on our relationship with others and in doing so we can build on this by endeavoring to help relieve the burden of others. Many have heard the statement, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” There is a lot of truth to that statement.

We need to be able to relieve the burden of despair. Folks sometime just give up. There is no hope for me. I’m at the end of my rope. We know there is hope in Christ. Paul’s words in Colossians give us hope, “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). We have hope beyond the grave (1 Cor. 15) and this gives us hope in this life. We can help to relieve that burden of despair.

In working on our relationship with others we can help to relieve the burden of discouragement. People become discouraged because of marital problems, financial reverses, health issues, and family difficulties. Here is a time when we can build a relationship with them. Our visits, prayers, words of encouragement. Someone whom you know is having a problem. Have you ever called or just dropped by their home and said, “I thought I would come by and pray with you.” They’re not Christians but you

are and the Bible tells us, "...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 1:16). Afterward that heart is going to be tender and more readily open to study.

Several years ago a faithful Christian lady moved to our area. She had been diagnosed with cancer and given approximately two years to live. She had a son who was challenged (don't know the technical name) but he required constant care. She had another son who was about eleven years old. Her husband at one time had been faithful but was not any longer. This good sister attended every service possible, brought the incapacitated son in his wheel chair every service along with the other son. She had good days and bad. The congregation took hold of this good sister, visited her regularly, for almost a year the ladies of the congregation prepared food for the family every week. In all of this her husband did not attend worship with her. After about three years she deceased. The congregation gave much attention to the family for the services, with food and a meal after the burial. After a few weeks her husband started attending, bringing the incapacitated child and eventually was restored and now is a tremendous asset to the congregation. How did this come about? "Bear ye one another's burdens." When folks are discouraged we can build a relationship with them.

In working on our relationship with others we can help to bear the burden of doubt. Many folks don't understand that their doubts stem from a lack of knowledge of the Bible and a life that is in sin. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). Isaiah put it like this,

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

Jesus gave us many examples in lifting the burden of others and developing a relationship with them. Examine his conversation with the woman at the well (John 4). Notice how our Lord brought this woman into the conversation, pointed out her sin, and declared to her that he was the Messiah (John 4:25). What about the woman taken in adultery (John 8) or the sinner that anointed him in Luke seven? Remember Zacchaeus? Here again is a tremendous example of Christ relieving a burden of sin and teaching this man that he can be saved.

We must work to restore the fallen and we must work to relieve the burden of others.

III. We Must Work To Respect Others

For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another (Gal. 6:3-4).

In working on our relationship with others we must never leave the impression of a “know it all.” Humility is essential in leading others to Christ. When Paul met with the elders of Ephesus he said,

Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews (Acts 20:19).

Our attitude toward others will determine our success in helping them to overcome sin.

Here is a description of attitude, “Ability is what you are capable of doing, motivation determines what you do and attitude determines how well you do it.” If we have an attitude of humility and love for souls, then we will learn to develop the right kind of relationship with others. Is that not what Paul taught when he wrote, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). By respecting others and having the attitude described in Romans,

For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith (Rom. 12:3).

Jesus taught us how to respect others when he said, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12).

In times past some were blunt and unkind in their efforts to try to save others. We should never compromise the truth (2 Tim. 4:1-4; John 8:32) but follow the instruction, “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15) and “Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Col. 4:6).

Finally, in working to respect others remember, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one

another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

In working on our relationship with others we must work to restore the fallen, we must work to relieve the burden of others and we must work to respect others.

IV. We Must Work To Reinforce Those Who Labor In The Field

"Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. 6:6). Take a look at the word "communicate." Several translations use the word "share" instead of "communicate." The following quote will shed light on this:

"Those who are taught are under obligations to help the teacher by sharing with him all good things. The necessity of helping those who teach is frequently taught in the Scriptures. Those earthly things men generally need are designated and are designated "goods" or "good things." (Luke 12:19; 16:25.) In all these, whether money, or food, or clothing, and such necessary things, the taught are to communicate with faithful teachers, share with them, and share with their reward. [This does not exclude spiritual fellowship. The true teacher counts this far more sacred, and has this interest far more at heart than the temporal. He labors for the unity and spiritual development of the church; he strives to secure the mutual sympathy and cooperation of the church in every good word and deed. He must have the sympathy of the whole body in the work or his joy will be little and the success scant indeed.

The teaching of the word of God is designed to awaken this sympathetic response, which takes expression in the rendering of whatever help the gifts and means of the taught and the needs for which occasion calls.”—*Gospel Advocate Commentaries*

We must reinforce those who labor in the field to bring others to Christ. First of all is the financial support. Several years ago Bro. Allen Bryan (deceased) was helping a brother raise funds to do mission work. There was an audience of about seven hundred people and Bro. Bryan called the missionary up to the pulpit and explained where the brother was going. Then he said, “Is there anyone in the audience who will go with this brother?” No one responded. Then Bro. Bryan said, “Either go across in person or come across in purse.” We may not be able to go into all the world but we can send others.

We need to work to reinforce those who are building relationships in our community. The theme of this lectureship is “UPSIDE-DOWN: REACHING THE WORLD.” It takes work to do that. So how can we reinforce those who labor in the field?

One, we can go ourselves. That encourages others. Jesus gave the Great Commission, “And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). My understanding of that passage is, “As you go...” As we are going about our daily task endeavor to teach others.

Second, we can volunteer to go with those who teach others. Some are more adept at teaching than others but it reinforces those who do the teaching to have someone with them to be support and encouragement.

Third, we can give words of encouragement and recognition to those who are practicing personal evangelism. Someone is teaching others, they do not desire any recognition, but it is certainly uplifting to have someone say, “I really appreciate what you are doing.”

We can work to restore the fallen, we can work to relieve the burden of others, we can work to respect others, and we can work to reinforce those who labor in the field.

V. We Can Work To Reap The Right Harvest

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 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 (Gal. 6:7-8).

In working on our relationship with others we must work to reap the right harvest which means we must sow the right seed. There are three seeds that must be sown.

We must sow the seed of study,

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ” (Eph. 3:4).

We must study ways in which we can develop a relationship with those in the world so that we may teach them (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19-20). There are many good methods for teaching others and all we need to do is find one of them and use it. I started using the Jule Miller Bible

Study series in 1962 and still use it today. It works, but there are other methods. It is not the method but it is what you do with it. Sow the seeds of study.

Sow the seeds of involvement. Don't be a couch potato. Get up! Several years ago, when the Madison church in Madison, TN was booming, one of their members taught a Bible class on Sunday. Following class one Sunday he asks one of the members if he would go with him on Monday night to visit other class members. The brother declined saying, "Well, I like to have family time on Monday night and said no." On Monday night the teacher visited his house and found him sprawled out on the couch. He said, "Get up!" I am going to see that you spend time with your family tonight. Sow the seeds of involvement.

Sow the seeds of discipline. It is easy not to do what needs to be done. We must discipline ourselves to work in our relationship with others.

VI. We Must Work To Rise Above The Weariness

"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). We work, we pray, we dedicate ourselves and then it seems we aren't accomplishing anything. Don't become weary. Never give up! The writer of Revelation said,

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them (Rev. 14:13).

They die in the Lord. They didn't give up. "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matt. 24:13).

The Apostle Paul said the young preacher Timothy,

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

VII. We Must Work To Rescue Our Fellowman

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Do good to all men. We must work to rescue our fellowman. How do you do that? Do good to them. This was the essence of Jesus statements when said, “I was hungry and you fed me...” (Matt. 25:31-46). John also addresses it in first John.

When folks are in need, they are more easily touched and it is at that time we, not only help their physical need, but also open the doors to their spiritual need as well.

Conclusion

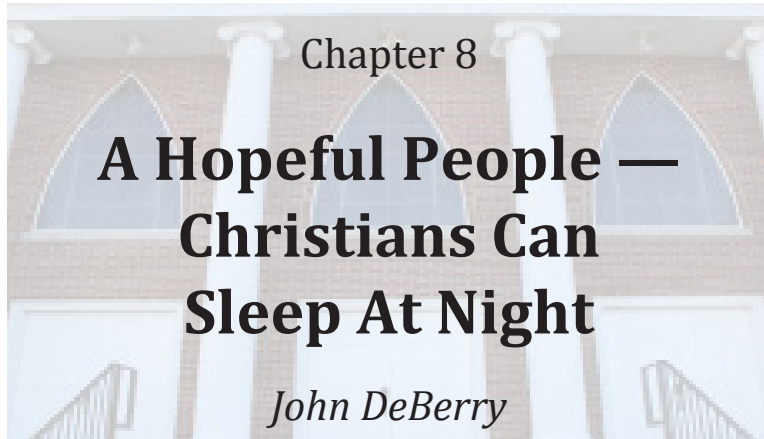
We must work to restore the fallen, we must work to relieve the burden of others, we must work to respect others, we must work to reinforce those who labor in the field, we must work to reap the right harvest, we must work to rise above weariness and we must work to rescue our fellowman.

This can be summed up by the words in Nehemiah, “So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind

to work” Neh. 4:6). We can build a wall of relationships by working.

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I was watching one of the local television news programs awhile back that detailed basically all of the awful things that had happened that day in the city. From the beginning news promo, until time for weather and sports, there was story after story of shootings, robberies, break-ins, assaults, and corruption. There was even a big story about a fight at one of the junior high schools. All in all, it was a very depressing analysis of the news that made me wonder, "What in the world is wrong with the world"? I am sure that most folks who were watching the 5:00 o'clock news cast were depressed, and alarmed by the sheer magnitude of bad events and bad actors. When a very frightened lady in one of these so-called bad or compromised neighborhoods was interviewed, the disgusted lady said, "I was too poor to move, and afraid to stay. I have just given up believing it would get better. I have just given up 'Hope.'" This lady is representative of many in some of our larger cities. In fact, many of our smaller cities and towns are becoming more dangerous. People have no hope in the law or law enforcement and

have even lost hope in society in general. How depressing! Due to the idea that everything is “out of order”, and that our lives are subservient to factors over which we have “**no control**,” we are **doomed**. Many will say they are just waiting on the apocalypse, zombies and all. There is no hope—everything is crumbling.

As Christians, we on the other hand are a **hopeful people** whose vantage point was never dependent on the fidelity and integrity of man but the faithfulness and the character of God. When we stand on the promises and word of God, **hope** is therefore a natural result of this trust and submission. Paul assures the brethren at Colossae that their faith would support them through the difficult times “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister” (Col. 1:23).

Paul, therefore urges the church even in the midst of awful persecution, to have hope in the truth. A hopeful people must be **persistent** in their hope or we succumb to the Devil.

A Hopeful People Are Prayerful People

When we consider the barrage of bad news that dominates the market place, it is comforting for us as Christians to know that “**God is in control**.” In a time when the Caesar’s power was absolute, and life and death was in their hands, Paul still teaches that God has authority;

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, For there is no power but of God, the powers that be ordained of God (Rom. 13:1).

In essence, as a child of God, I am never to believe that someone, other than God in heaven, is in control of my blessings or my destiny. We know that we have a Father in Heaven who has promised to be attentive to our prayers and petitions, “Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant,” (Neh. 1:6) and has assured us that He will never leave us or forsake us.

Daniel the prophet, was snatched from his homeland, placed in slavery after experiencing the destruction of his nation. All that he was by birth and citizenship of Israel was taken away at the edge of the sword. He and other young men were forced to live within a difficult environment, and endure **overwhelming** adversity. In spite of this, he never allowed bad news to define him or his faith. Though external circumstances seemed hopeless, Daniel’s hope was consistently and daily demonstrated by prayer. When we find ourselves heartbroken and distressed by current events, we should visit Daniel’s prayer to God for himself, his people, and his nation;

Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord’s sake, (Dan. 9:17) .

O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name (Dan. 9:19).

When the Hebrew brethren faced similar circumstances in the early days of the church they, like us, were called to maturity, and the example of their

forefathers who **endured** with patience (Heb. 6:15). The writer stressed that our “high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15), is the reason of our **hope**. He conquered sin for us, becoming our substitute for suffering for sins of all mankind.

For that reason we have the privilege to approach God in prayer, and have **hope** in these difficult days; “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

The apostle Paul was well aware of the difficulties of his brethren because of trials and persecution. He was also aware of the hope they had because of the grace and fidelity of God. He encouraged the church at Ephesus to maintain their hope and not quit;

According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory (Eph. 3:11-13).

Notice that Paul stated that Christians have “Access with confidence”. This is a wonderful description of our hope as God’s people. We can get to God and He can get to us. It is with that confidence that Paul **stressed** to the church at Rome that they were to **endure** and stand, because of the **Hope, Faith** and **Access** they have in Jesus.

For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God,

that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee (Heb. 5:1-5).

According to Paul, who had **suffered** more than most, our experience as Christians **strengthens our Hope**: Near the conclusion of his letter to Rome he exhorted them to brotherly love, avoiding evil, being fervent in spirit. Then to maintain the proper attitude as a Christian surrounded by “bad news” he taught that they should be; “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (Rom. 12:12-13).

The Hebrew brethren were being persecuted and had suffered much when the Hebrew writer commanded them to maintain hope, being the House of God.

And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Heb. 3:5-6).

According to Job, challenges and hard times are ever present in our lives...man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble (Job 14:1). However, God’s people are

taught to never allow these to diminish their hope. David declared in Psalm 46:1, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” When we are at the end of our strength and endurance, we must depend upon the omnipotence and infallibility of God. Paul was in constant misery and pain, most likely both physical and mental anguish plagued him. He had severe physical trauma from constant abuse and deprivation. Paul was also stressed and anxious because of the suffering and persecution of the church. Yet when he inquired of God for relief and removal of what Paul called, “His thorn in the flesh”, he was told; “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). Through it all Paul maintained his hope and trust in God. “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). Paul concluded that he would “rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

While those who do not know God, wallow in despair and hopelessness. God’s people have access to a hope and peace that removes fear, and replaces it with joy;

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience (Rom. 5:1-3).

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us to disappoint or confuse us, but puts us in a closer relationship with God; “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5).

We are hopeful because as Christians we understand that trials and tribulation do not remove God’s love and protection from us. The apostle Paul assured the church at Rome that we are never victims but always victors when we trust the law of God;

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us (Rom. 8:35-37).

Hope Brings Faith — Faith Brings Peace

There is a calm and confidence experienced by Christians that is void in the life of those who fail to seek and serve the Lord. The hopelessness that we spoke of earlier is a manifestation of trusting in man’s power as opposed to God’s power. When we take our troubles to the Lord, we **unload** those burdens, which disturb our peace and cause us to abandon our hope. It is only in Jesus that such peace and hope are secured, not by things on earth,

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not,

then do we with patience wait for it. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:24-26).

Our very faith according to the Hebrew writer is the acceptance as fact those things that we have not personally witnessed. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). Therefore faith brings substance (*hypothesis*), thus meaning, assurance and hope in God’s fidelity. Our **hope** is therefore fortified by the **evidence** (*elegchos*), as proof of God’s faithfulness. This removes the remorse, worry and anxiety which seem to plague so many believers. We accept God at His word, and then live hopeful, victorious lives. Paul told the brethren to avoid worry and fear, and don’t allow anything to steal your joy;

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

To find tranquility in this short and troubled life was to be obedient to God, have sensible desires, and never doubt God’s love or power.

We Are Hopeful Because Jesus Is Coming Back To Get Us

When Jesus informed Peter that he would deny his Lord, this was a painful and emotional moment for all the

disciples. Jesus would soon be tried, whipped, crucified, and buried in a borrowed tomb. Our Lord's heart was broken because He knew that much of His trouble would come from His inner circle, who had lost their hope and faith. Jesus knew that all of these men, with the exception of Judas, would recover and become soldiers, even martyrs, of the cross. Therefore the Lord's Words were meant to comfort, guide and maintain their hope in the difficult days ahead;

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know (John 14:1-4).

Because heaven is the home of eternal hope and eternal life, the Lord gave them **assurance** of the mercy and provisions of their Father in heaven;

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love (John 15:7-9).

When Paul confronted the lies being told to the church at Thessalonica and abroad, he taught them the truth. Paul knew that there were those who taught against the resurrection and life after death. That type of teaching would make suffering for Christ unreasonable. Imagine

the hope lost if we are done when we die. We may as well become an Epicurean and live for the moment. However Paul did not leave the church in darkness;

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit. But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing. But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others that have no

hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:1-18).

Paul said we were to have comfort, or hope from these words and not continue to grieve as those with no hope.

Conclusion

The next time you see yourself shivering and trembling in fear because of the affairs and dangers of this world, remember Paul's admonition to our brethren at Colosae;

Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful (Col. 3:12-15).

A Hopeful People – Christians Can Sleep At Night

If you allow God's peace to rule no one can disturb us; we will be a **hopeful people**.



Chapter 9

A Rising People — Christians Must Begin And Finish Works

Milton Stephens

“**R**ise Up, O Men of God!” is a song written over a hundred years ago by William P. Merrill (1867-1954) and William H. Walter (1825-1893). This song teaches several important things: 1. To rise above all else and serve the King of kings. 2. To rise up and be the people God would have His people to be in every generation. 3. To rise up and make the Church great. 4. Rise up and take the cross of Christ, follow in His steps as faithful children of God. The need for the faithful people of God to rise up is evident.

To rise above the average, ordinary, and the mundane is at the center of what Jesus taught his followers, recorded in Matthew chapters five, six and seven, in the Sermon on the Mount. He taught them how He lived and how He wanted them to live. Jesus taught them a different way of life—A way that was different from what they had known. Jesus taught them to go the extra mile, turn the other cheek, love their neighbor as self. He taught them not only to do what was required but to do more than the minimum; turning the world upside down by the way they lived. This

is the type of people Christians should strive to be.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: (1 Peter 2:9).

It makes a difference how a Christian lives. It makes a difference if Christians keep their promises, fulfill their commitments, starts and finishes works. There are several areas in which Christians need to rise up. Let's notice two of these areas.

I. Rise Up By Keeping Our Promises

Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity (1 Tim. 4:12).

In a letter to the young man Timothy, Paul pointed out that Timothy was to rise up and be an example in word and manner of life. Perhaps we remember when we were young our parents would remind us to be good because God could see what we were doing. We need to remember that simple but powerful teaching as adults.

I sometimes hear others say and have said myself, "Why can't people keep their word?" Why do people not do what they say they will do? People are often frustrated, hurt and sometimes get angry because someone they believed did not follow through on what they said. When someone says something, and does not come through, it can be a big disappointment. It may be the boss at work, a co-worker, a friend who might say he will do a certain thing

and not follow through, and it hurts our feelings, causes tension or makes us angry. It can cause us to think about changing jobs, or it can cause a friendship to be destroyed.

Families have been devastated because a member of the family did not keep his word. A husband or wife who does not keep his or her word can cause problems in a marriage. Parents who do not keep their word to their children, no matter how old they are, can cause great harm. Children who are not honest with their parents will suffer great consequences.

Most of us have been let down because someone did not keep his word. I try to do my best to keep my word, so I expect others to keep their word. People give many reasons why they do not follow through on what they say they will do. Sometimes life just gets in the way. Circumstances beyond their control can prevent people from doing what they promised or said they would do. We can also know when a person puts forth every effort to keep his word.

Recent statistics reveal some interesting results. 31% of people admit to lying on their resumes. 13% of patients admit to lying to their doctors. 32% admit to “stretching the truth” to their doctor. 40% admit to lying about following a doctor’s treatment plan. 30% admit to lying about their diet and exercise regimen. These are only a few examples.

The fact that we live in different times today is evident. In these times many people act as if it is okay to tell a lie—To say something with no intention of doing what they said they would do. It has come to a time when people may not expect others to be truthful and honest with them as they once did. What has changed? Does God

not care if we are truthful? Paul through inspiration said it was important when he wrote to the Christians at Ephesus:

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another (Eph. 4:25).

My grandfather owned a saw mill and cut timber for a living. My father began to work at a very young age cutting timber and working with mules and horses in the log woods. My father tells of how his daddy would negotiate a deal on a tract of timber and make a deal to cut the timber. The contract was not in writing, but the deal was made on the word of both parties and a handshake. In that day, sixty or seventy years ago, a man's word was his bond. God has always intended for a man's word to be his bond. "He that speaketh truth sheweth forth righteousness; but a false witness deceit" (Prov. 12:17).

We must realize that all of us must give an account on the Day of Judgment for every word we speak. Idle words, untruthful words, deceiving words, hateful words, etc. will be accounted for.

But I say unto you, That every idle word that man shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned (Matt. 12:36-37).

Christians can rise up and make a difference. If every member of the body of Christ would strive to the best of his ability to be what Jesus taught his followers to be and follow the teachings of the Bible in keeping his promises, it would make a difference.

II. Rise Up By Starting And Finishing Works And Fulfilling Our Commitments

A recent study revealed only about half of all college students actually graduate. Twenty-nine percent of employees show up late for work at least once a month. Six to seven percent of all appointments made at an Army Community Hospital in Georgia did not show up for the appointment. These are just a few examples of how commitments are not fulfilled.

When a person applies for a job, he is seeking a commitment by the company to which he applied for employment. He fills out the application, goes for the job interview and is successful in getting the position for which he applied. A commitment was made by the company to provide compensation for services provided by the employee, and the employee made a commitment to the company to perform the duties the particular job requires. The new employee who will not arrive on time for work, or frequently does not show up for work, or does not put forth an effort to do the job he was hired to do, is not fulfilling the commitment made to the employer that hired him.

If you talk to people who own businesses today, most of the time they will comment on how hard it is to find dependable employees. They often hire an employee, and he will not show up for work on time, he will miss work for no reason and without explanation, and he will conduct personal business on company time, and will not follow the company guidelines.

Fulfilling a commitment is critical to our influence and integrity. Making every effort to fulfill every commitment we make is a must for a Christian.

Several years ago a man who owned a large business made a bold statement. He said the best employees he had were Christians, members of the Lord's church. They were honest, dependable, trustworthy, and represented his company in a positive way. Christians rise up and make a positive difference wherever they are.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:16).

Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Titus 2:14).

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men (Rom. 12:17).

Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men (2 Cor. 8:21).

The history of the United States of America records many people who fulfilled a commitment. Those who came to this land in the beginning were committed to establishing a new country independent of England. They were committed to establishing a country where people were free from tyranny. The freedom we have in the United States today is a result of men and women who fulfilled a commitment.

Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his

servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs to go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come (Luke 14:16-20).

In Luke chapter fourteen, Jesus is dining at the table of the chief Pharisee who had invited him. After the first invitation had been extended and accepted, the second and final summons was given. The servant was to announce to those invited that the supper was ready, and they should come immediately to the supper.

Even though the guests had accepted the first invitation to the supper, when the servant announced the supper was ready, the guests began making excuses why they could not come. The first said: "I have bought a field" and must go out and see it. Land was very valuable, and he must go from home and look after the real estate he had purchased. The second said: "I have bought five yoke of oxen." This man was evidently a business man and those oxen would be important to his livelihood. The third said: "I have married a wife." This man did not say he had business interests to be concerned with; he offered a domestic reason.

The three classes of excuses are taken from the different phases of life. They are not "flimsy" excuses, ridiculous excuses, as some have tried to make them. They were the most important excuses that could be given. Even

though they might be important excuses, it was considered an insult to refuse to accept the invitation, after they had previously consented to come.

Each excuse the men gave could have been put off until after the supper. They could have attended to these things at another time. They could have attended the supper, and later attended to the business and social responsibilities.

So often, business, social responsibilities, and pleasure are offered as excuses for not keeping our commitment to the Lord. “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).

In these times the assembly of the church is forsaken so frequently for things that can wait until our commitment to the Lord is fulfilled. Flimsy excuses are offered as to why members are not more involved in the work of the church. “Finish what you start.” I have heard this statement, as long as I can remember. When I was about twelve years old, I started taking music lessons. I was learning to play the piano, and later the guitar. Practice is very important when you are learning to play any instrument. There would be times when I would want to do something other than practice music. I would make excuses, complain, and even want to quit taking lessons, because I would get tired of practicing. The one statement I always remember hearing when I would say something about quitting would be, “Finish what you start.” Now I have a better understanding of what it means to start and finish a work.

Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and

let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work (Neh. 2:17-18).

When the wall of Jerusalem was broken, Nehemiah would led in the good work of rebuilding the wall. Even though they would be laughed at and despised, Nehemiah told them something of great importance, "The God of heaven, he will prosper us," so they started rebuilding the Jerusalem wall. "So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days" (Neh. 6:15).

They started and finished the wall in fifty-two days. With God's help they completed the work. The commitment to finish what they started resulted in the completion of the wall of Jerusalem.

Jesus is the greatest example of starting and finishing a work. He was committed to doing what God sent Him to do.

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. (John 4:34).

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21).

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me (John 6:38).

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost (John 19:30).

Conclusion

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do (Acts 9:6).

And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized (Acts 9:18).

The start for Paul came while he was on the road to Damascus to bring men or women, who were followers of Christ, back to Jerusalem to face charges. As he traveled to Damascus there shined around him a light from heaven and he heard the voice of the Lord. When Paul asked Jesus what he would have him do, Jesus' instruction to him was to go into the city and he would be told what to do.

Ananias was sent by the Lord to tell Saul (Paul) what to do. After hearing the instructions, he was baptized. It was here that Paul started his life as a Christian. He was now among those whom he previously persecuted.

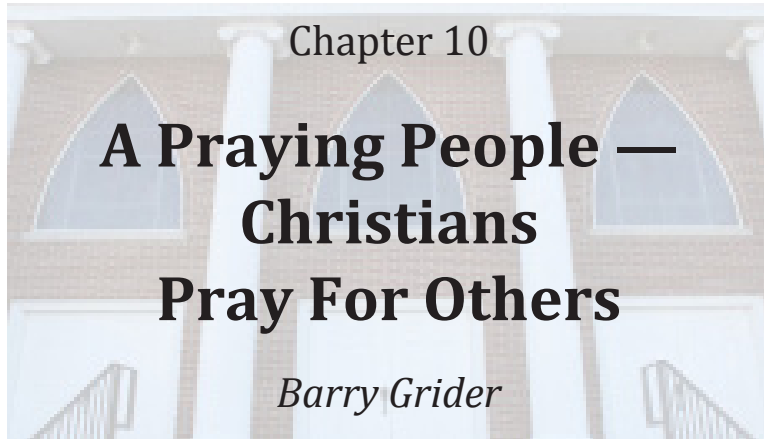
Paul would travel throughout the known world preaching the gospel of Christ. As an apostle of Christ he would face many challenges. Even though he would suffer great persecution he was committed to the cause of Christ and finished what he started.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept

the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

May Christians everywhere rise up—Rise up by keeping promises. Rise up by starting and finishing works and by fulfilling commitments. Christians can have a great impact on the world around them and be the example they should be. The influence of a faithful Christian is important in every age. It can turn the world upside down.

A Rising People – Christians Must Begin & Finish Works



President Donald Trump recently named former Georgia governor, Sonny Perdue, to be his Secretary of Agriculture in the new administration. Some of Perdue’s critics pointed out that he was unqualified for such a distinguished position because during his tenure as governor he called on the citizens of the state to pray to God for rain during a particular dry spell several summers ago. What a shame that in a nation that claims “In God we trust” as the national motto, a public servant would be criticized for urging citizens to pray. While we are not surprised that the faithless refuse to pray, every child of God should surely understand its necessity. It is sad to see a little child die. Sadder still is the child of God who refuses to grow in Christ and, hence, spiritually dies. That will indeed happen when Christians fail to pray. Did you know, dear reader, that prayerlessness is a sin? Samuel said to Israel, “Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you” (1 Sam. 12:23). How often are God’s children to pray? Paul says,

Continuing instant in prayer (Rom. 12:12).

Continue in prayer (Col. 4:2).

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).

Daniel prayed three times every day (Dan. 6:10). Jesus assumed His followers would pray for the text declares, “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). In the Sermon on the Mount, He did not say “if” you pray but, rather, “when” you pray (Matt. 6:7).

Does Prayer Really Accomplish Anything?

Paul obviously believed that prayer accomplished something very important for the child of God. He said,

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers (Rom. 1:9).

To the church at Ephesus, he wrote that he would “cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph. 1:16). Addressing the church in Thessalonica, he encouraged the brethren, by saying, “We give thanks to god always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers” (1 Thess. 1:3). A similar expression was sent to Philemon, when Paul wrote, “I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers” (Phile. 4).

Were Paul’s words empty and meaningless? Absolutely not! Paul wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. His was an active prayer life. The apostle knew for sure that God heard and answered prayer. While the Christian should fill his prayers with praise

and thanksgiving for God's creation, grace, mercy, love, guidance, etc., we also know that we have the right to petition our heavenly Father for help. Again, Paul writes,

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God (Phil. 4:6).

God desires to hear from us and wants us to recognize how dependent we are on Him. Peter agrees with Paul by saying, "Casting all your care upon him [God]; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). The writer of Hebrews declares God's care for us, "for he [God] hath said I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5).

Just as Jesus and His apostles believed in prayer, every Christian should believe in the power of prayer. Prayer is the pipeline to God's power. Notice the power of prayer in the following passage,

For we would not, brethren, have you to be ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf (2 Cor. 1:8-11).

Notice that God did something in answer to prayers that were being offered. Furthermore, Paul expressed his

confidence in God answering prayers when he wrote,

Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds (Col. 4:3).

He continues with regard to the Thessalonians,

For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith? (1 Thess. 3:9,10).

Paul saturated everything in his life with prayer. He continually asked for the Lord's favors and blessing? Would he do this if prayer could not accomplish anything?

Why Do Christians Struggle With Prayer?

Since God does answer prayer and if it is shown in Scripture that prayer can change things, and if it pays to pray, why do we often neglect this wonderful resource available to Christians? Do you feel as if your prayers are not heard? Perhaps sin in our lives prevents us from praying effective prayers. Christians do sin and we know that forgiveness is available. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We confess our sins when we pray. When Simon, the former sorcerer who became a Christian, sinned, Peter said, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22). However, a child of God who returns to a life of sin will find it impossible

to have a meaningful prayer life. Sin is the great separator between every human being and the God of heaven.

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1,2).

The writer of Proverbs warns, "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination" (Pro. 28:9). Peter exhorts,

For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil (1 Pet. 3:12).

Let not a child of God who engages in persistent sin think that his prayers will be heard when he fails to repent and change his way of living.

Sometimes our prayers may not be effective because we are praying for the wrong things. James wrote, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3). When God hears our prayers, because of his omniscience and omnipotence, he may be desirous of granting something better for us than that for which we are praying. Often I have prayed for something that I thought would be good but God answered differently. What He gave was always superior to whatever it was I asked. I love this passage. "Now unto him that is able to exceedingly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (Eph. 3:20). God desires to bless us far beyond what we can

comprehend, we just must trust Him and keep on praying.

At times our prayers may seem to go unanswered because God is testing or proving us. Now God does not tempt us to do evil (James 1:13), that is the Devil's job. The difference in testing and tempting is simple. God tests us to make us better. The Devil tempts us that he might destroy us. The beautiful story of the Canaanite woman is recorded in Matthew 15. This woman came begging the Lord for mercy. The disciples had no mercy for her and at first it appeared that Jesus did not either. "But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 24) and "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs" (v. 26). Her answer to the Lord is classic. "And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table" (v. 27). Jesus was proving the woman and she passed the test. The Lord commended her for her great faith. Just because we do not seem to be getting answers to our prayers, keep on praying. Enough prayers have already been answered to prove He will not forget us when we pray.

We can, of course, become impatient in our prayer lives. Again, James writes,

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into
divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying
of your faith worketh patience (James 1:2,3).

We can surely sympathize with the great man Moses after having gone to Egypt according to God's command so that he could deliver the children of Israel from bondage. The people were complaining because they believed deliverance was to come through Moses, and nothing appeared to be happening,

And Moses returned unto the Lord and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all (Exo. 5:22,23).

Hang on Moses. God will deliver in accordance with His own good timing. Some of us may not be persistent in our prayers and it is good to remember that Jesus said with regard to prayer – ‘do not faint’ (Luke 18:1).

Could it be that some have difficulty praying because of a misunderstanding of prayer. Prayer is not just getting our way. It is not a simple remedy to remove challenges and obstacles. Really prayer helps us put our challenges and obstacles in proper perspective. Perhaps, when prayers do not seem to be answered, the way you think a prayer should be answered you should ask God’s guidance to see what the Lord is trying to teach you.

Never forget that children of God are always to pray according to God’s will. Listen to John,

And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14,15).

When we know His will based upon His divine revelation, there is no need to ask God to change His will for our sakes, for such will not be done. No Christian should ever pray in direct contradiction of God’s will.

Often, however, we do not know what His will may be. When a family member is suffering a debilitating illness, still we are taught to pray in that person's best interest. Big decisions may be ours and we are not sure of the right answer, we still pray. We pray that God's will be done and that we will accept His will.

How Does God Answer Prayer?

During the first century while the church was in its infant stage, we know that God worked miraculously. For example, according to Acts 12, the church prayed continuously for the release of Peter from prison. God heard their prayers and miraculously brought Peter forth from his cell. However, while God may not work through the miraculous today, He has always worked through His providence. James writes,

Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit (James 5:17,18).

The narrative of this account is found in First Kings 18. Did God work a miracle? No. However, did God work? Yes. Did He answer the prayer? Absolutely! Something happened as a result of Elijah's prayer that would not have happened had he refused to pray.

We do not understand completely how God answers prayers but when we pray we are asking God through His providence to set in motion a series of events through the natural realm that will allow us to grow in wisdom, help

the sick to get well, provide comfort for those distressed, end wars and bring about peace, and so forth. When good things come to you and me we do not fail to give God the credit for:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (James 1:17).

Lord, Teach Us To Pray

The disciples of Jesus had the privilege of hearing the Lord preach but surprisingly never asked Him to teach them how to preach. However, they did ask Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). Would you not have loved to have heard Jesus pray? Some of His prayers are recorded in the Bible and so we can know some of the content of His prayers. Likewise, He taught His disciples several lessons on prayer through the use of parables. Jesus evidently had the habit of praying and we are not surprised that He would. "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). Something about Jesus prayers made a lasting impression upon His disciples. Jesus did not mock His students request, He taught them.

And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil (Luke 11:2-4).

In this the model prayer Jesus concentrates upon four areas that can help all of us in our prayer lives.

1) Prayer should focus upon the Sublime. “Our Father which art in heaven.” God is the object of our prayers. Prayer is the means God has given us to communicate with Him. Since God is in heaven and we are on earth (Eccl. 5:2), let us be in reverence as we come into His presence for “holy and reverend is his name” (Psa. 111:9). He does not require a special tone, or the use of special language, or a special posture, but He does expect us to be reverential. The heart that is filled with reverence is a heart that longs to draw closer to God. “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:8). As Moses drew near the burning bush on Mount Sinai, he was drawing closer to the presence of the Almighty. And the voice from the bush spoke, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground” (Exo. 3:5). Come into His presence with awe, wonder, and respect. The prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray was also an intimate prayer. “Our Father” means He is approachable. “Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him” (Psa. 103:13).

2) Prayer should focus on the Spiritual. “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.” We know through our study of the scriptures the kingdom or church has come. Surely if Jesus taught the disciples to pray that the kingdom come, He would expect us to pray on behalf of the kingdom now that it is a reality. Christians are the recipients of many kingdom blessings. That which is spiritual can only be propagated through the church whereby God is glorified (Eph. 3:21). Individually and collectively Christians ought to pray for the expansion of the kingdom of God. Do we

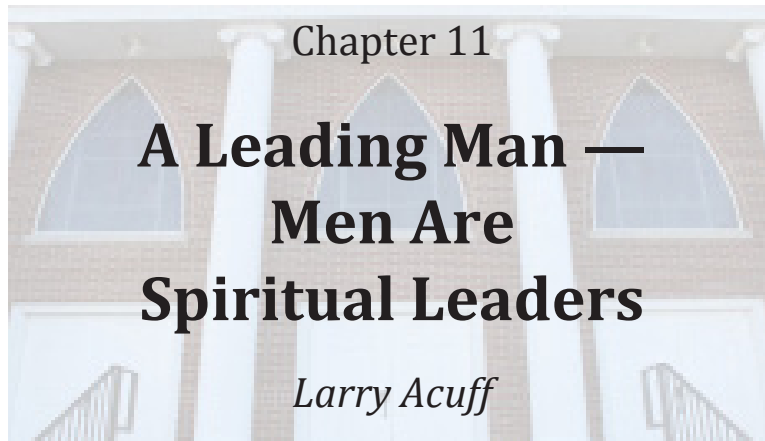
spend more time speaking to God about His kingdom or ourselves? Remember, Jesus said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).

3) Prayer should focus on Sustenance. “Give us day by day our daily bread.” When we pray for daily sustenance we are praying for food, clothing, and shelter. Those are the things needed to sustain our lives. To have such is to be blessed. “And having food and raiment, let us therewith be content” (1 Tim. 6:8).

4) Prayer should focus on one’s Sins. “And forgive us our sins.” Sin is so terrible. When we sin we engage in that which is unholy and therefore, offensive to God. The child of God restores and refreshes his soul as he repents and confesses his sins. This is done through prayer. So much better to avoid sin, but John reminds us, “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

Conclusion

Prayer is an integral part of the life of a Christian. When we think there is no answer to a problem we face, remember we can always pray. Furthermore, we dare not make decisions without praying. If something is big enough to discourage or frustrate you then its big enough for you to take to your Father in prayer. True we all have asked ourselves is God listening, does he really care, and where are the answers. The fact is He does listen, He does care, and He will answer. You see this writer has prayed enough prayers and has seen enough answers that he is going to keep on praying. I trust you will do so, as well.



Ezekiel wrote,
And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none (Eze. 22:30).

Isaiah reveals,

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me (Isa. 6:8).

Leading men! Hebrews chapter eleven gives us an array of leading men: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, and as verse thirty two says,

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets (Heb. 11:32).

When observing the leadership of Nehemiah, we see his sensitivity as he wept and prayed (Neh. 1:4). He was

able to delegate (Neh. 4:16) and one characteristic of great leadership is decisiveness (Neh. 2:20). Nehemiah was very disciplined as he was not moved by ridicule, by talk or fear. He was a leading man.

The life of the Apostle Paul was one of leadership. Much is written in the scriptures that highlights his leadership qualities. One excellent example of his leadership qualities is seen in Acts twenty seven when he was shipwrecked. Look at these leadership principles:

1. Paul expected the unexpected (Acts 27:9-12). He saw what others didn't see.
2. Paul was aware of God's plan and purpose (Acts 9:15-16).
3. He took control of the situation. He assumed leadership, took control and put together a plan (Acts 27:26).
4. He maintained a composed attitude (Acts 28:3-6).
5. He remembered who he was. They said he was a sinner and then a god but he knew who he was (Acts 28:3-6).
6. He didn't stop leading (Acts 28:8-11).

For this lesson, however, focus on the instruction given to Moses by his father-in-law, Jethro:

Hearken now unto my voice, I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee: Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: And thou shalt teach them

ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee (Exo. 18:19-22).

This lesson will be approached in two areas. One, in regards to leadership in the church; and two, in regards to leadership in the home. God needs leading men in the church and in the home.

I. A Leading Man Is A Man Of Prayer

Jethro said to Moses, "...Be thou for the people to Godward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God" (Exo. 18:19). God through his providence has the answers. All must be brought to him in prayer. The story is told many years ago of two ladies sewing patches on their husbands pants. One was telling about how her husband was always complaining and the other telling about her husband's encouraging attitude. The wife of the complainer was sewing patches on the bottom of his pants, the other sewing patches on the knee of the pants. One husband was sitting and one was praying. Leaders must be men of prayer.

Scriptures are clear on the effectiveness of prayer. We

see the command to pray in this admonition, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). We see the need to continue in prayer by these words, “Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer” (Rom. 12:12). Never give up praying. We also see the consequences of prayer by the words of James,

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16).

A study of prayers of the Bible reveals much for a praying leadership. Look, for example, at the church coming together in prayer for Peter. The scripture says, “Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5). Prayers are sometimes like a fired shotgun, scattered, “Lord bless the church and the world, in Jesus name, amen.” In Acts twelve the church came together to pray for Peter. They were focused! One eldership meets every Sunday morning for the purpose of praying for the membership. They will pray, by name, for specific members. They will write that name on a piece of paper that says, “This morning the elders prayed for you.” At the services they simply slip that piece of paper into the hands of that member. What effect do you think this has on that member?

We see the focus of prayer in Elijah, as revealed in the New Testament.

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months (James 5:17).

Our prayers must be in faith (Jam. 1:6; 5:15)! They must be focused (Acts 12:5)! They must be fervent (Jam. 5:16)! They must be frequent (Eph. 1:16).

A leading man leads his family in prayer. Paul admonished fathers, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Pardon the personal illustration—My family and I were visiting my parents. My Dad was still working at the time, and I had set up late reading and went to sleep on the couch. Dad got up for work and prepared his breakfast, not knowing that I was on the couch, I heard him pray aloud thanking God for his food. He could have eaten and said nothing, he could have prayed silently but it caught me by surprise that he prayed verbally and made a tremendous impression on me. Fathers set the example of prayer as the spiritual leader in the home.

A leading man is a man of prayer.

II. A Leading Man Is A Communicating Man

Jethro said to Moses, “And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws...” (Exo. 18:20). A leading man is a man who communicates his vision to others. People have to be taught, led, guided, which means the message must be gotten out.

A congregation will communicate with its eldership in different ways. They may do it verbally; which, by the way, is a great way to do it. Some in the congregation will speak up and voice their thoughts to the elders. This is a good way. If a member comes to an elder and says, “I would like to talk to you.” Listen up brother! Members will communicate by their contribution. If you notice your

contribution declining, you might want to find out why. Someone may be trying to tell you something. If you see your attendance declining, you might want to do a little examination.

A leading man lets others know what needs to be known. How do you do this? It is always good for one of the elders to stand before the congregation every Sunday. For example, at the end of the service, one of the elders can come forward and comment on the sermon, commend the brethren, remind them of things coming up. Yes, the announcer has already mentioned various activities but an elder stands before the church and communicates for the eldership.

Men are spiritual leaders in the congregation. Elders are spiritual leaders in the congregation. Here is a list of six ways to communicate with the congregation:

1. The elders/leaders go before the congregation to inform them.
2. Use the church bulletin or other means of communication such as “Calling Post” to convey information or solicit help.
3. Elders can meet regularly with the deacons to hear from them and listen to them.
4. Meet with the women of the congregation as a group.
5. Meet with the men of the congregation as a group.
6. Visiting in the homes of the members.

A leading man communicates with his family. A man may not be an elder or leader in the church but he is a leader in his home and must communicate with his family.

He is the head of his wife (Eph. 5:23) and children (Eph. 6:1-4) therefore must lead and guide them.

Moses gave instruction regarding this leadership when he wrote:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD:
And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all
thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all
thy might. 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. And thou shalt bind them for a sign
upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets
between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them
upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates
(Deut. 6:4-9).

How does a man communicate in the home? Verbally!
Men, tell your wife and children that you love them.
Remember the story of the fellow who got married and
after several years his wife complained that he never told
her he loved her. His response was, "I told you I loved you
the day we married and if I ever change my mind I will let
you know." That's not enough. Husbands love your wives
(Eph. 5:25).

How does a man communicate in the home? Example!
Action! Show it by your actions. Be a support to the wife (1
Pet. 3:7); train your children (Eph. 6:4). Spend time with
them.

How does a man communicate in the home? Attitude!
Someone defined attitude "As a thought that wiggles it

way out.” Paul wrote, “Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them” (Col. 3:19). Some translate the passage, “Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them” (Col. 3:19, ESV). The center reference also list Paul’s words,

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted,
forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s
sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:32).

A leading man is a communicator.

III. A Leading Man Has A Vision

Jethro said to Moses, “And thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do” (Exo. 18:20). Moses, “...Shew them the way wherein they must walk...” Vision! Solomon said, “Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he” (Pro. 29:18).

A leading man in the church must have a vision of what he wants the church to be. What goals need to be accomplished? Paul said,

Brethren, I count not myself to have
apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting
those things which are behind, and reaching
forth unto those things which are before, I press
toward the mark for the prize of the high calling
of God in Christ Jesus (Col. 3:13-14).

Eldershops need vision. Set high standards, set high goals.

Our brotherhood enjoys the blessings of Gospel Broadcasting Network, Polishing The Pulpit, Memphis

School of Preaching and many other great works because men have had vision. Many years ago, Bro. Ira North was a student at Abilene Christian College. He said, while a student there, "Someday I will preach for the largest church of Christ since Pentecost." At one time the Madison Church of Christ had over 5000 in Sunday morning attendance. The year he died they had reached a goal of over 8000. That came about because a man had vision. His vision reached souls. Jesus said,

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest (John 4:35).

Look! Lift up your eyes!

A leading man has vision for his family. What kind of family do you desire? Faithful? Dedicated? Mediocre? Do you see your family faithful to the word of God? Children are born. As you hold that newborn in your arms, what do you see twenty years from that time? "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

IV. A Leading Man Develops A Plan

Jethro said to Moses, "...Show them the way wherein they walk, and the work that they must do" (Exo. 18:20). A leading man has a plan for the church. It is very interesting that darted across our fruited plain are beautiful structures erected for the purpose of having a place in which our members may meet. Leaders can plan a multi-million dollar building structure, find a way to finance it, execute the plan to get it financed and built and then many of them

sit half full because we can't seem to devise a plan to fill them up.

Do we have a plan? How are going to reach our community? Do we know how many households live within a twenty five mile radius of our church building? Do we have a plan to reach them?

Many young people leave the church following graduation from high school. What are our plans to insure they remain faithful? What are we doing in our Bible School programs to prepare our children and youth? We must show the church the work they must do?

What about your family? Do we have plans for our family? Do we have plans for our children? In rearing our children, we need to have the end result in mind. Solomon said, "Train up a child...." What kind of training will we give our children?

Do we have a plan for the spiritual growth of our family? The scriptures teach us,

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

Also Peter declared, "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen" (2 Pet. 3:18). Earlier in second Peter he had admonished them to "add to your faith..." (2 Pet. 1:5). A leading man develops a plan to accomplish this.

V. A Leading Man Trains Leaders

Jethro said to Moses,

Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens (Exo. 18:21).

A leading man trains leaders. It is very sad to see a congregation that once was a vibrant growing congregation become impotent because of a lack of trained leaders. It is possible that circumstances can have an effect. However, what is being done to see that the congregation has future leaders?

Peter gives great instruction in his book when he wrote,

The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Notice the words: feed, oversight, willingly, ensamples. All indicate the opportunity to help to guide a younger man to be a leader. Four ideas:

1. Teach men how to teach.
2. Teach men how to oversee – “to see over.”
3. Teach men what willingly means.
4. Teach by example.

A leading man will train his children in how to handle situations. Fathers have gone away on a business trip and before leaving will say to the older children, “While I am gone you take care of your mother and look after the house.” Perhaps he has already shown them how to handle emergencies.

A leading man trains.

VI. A Leading Man Will Let Able Men Do Their Work

Jethro said to Moses,

And let them judge the people at all seasons:
and it shall be, that every great matter they
shall bring unto thee, but every small matter
they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself,
and they shall bear the burden with thee (Exo.
18:22).

Delegate! Delegate! Delegate! Leading men do not micro-manage. Get out of the way and let them do their job.

Many years ago I was having a conversation with a member of the board of a small Christian elementary school. He told me that the man whom they had appointed as Principal really couldn't do the job. The board member said, “He would call me about buying toilet paper.” Elders need to learn how to turn loose and let the deacon do the job. Give guidelines and move aside.

Fathers can give children responsibilities and then let them do them. Give them opportunities to do things that will give them experience.

Conclusion

The story is told of a fellow running down a dirt road and ran in front of an old country store where a man was sitting on the porch of the store in a rocking chair. The fellow stopped and ask the man in the rocking chair, "Did you see about thirty people go by here?" To which the man replied, "Yes, why?" The fellow responded, "I've got to catch up with them 'cause I'm their leader."

Don't fall behind as a leader.



Chapter 12

A Bright People — Christians Have A Rich History

Wayne Lankford

When the apostle John was “in the isle called Patmos” (Rev. 1:9)¹, he picked up the pen of inspiration and wrote a letter to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:4). He begins with a symbolic reference to these churches as “golden candlesticks” (Rev. 1:12), symbolic of lights used in the Old Testament Tabernacle.

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary states: “On the northern side of the Holy Place was the seven-branched golden lampstand, or candlestick, comprised of a pedestal, a shaft, and three branches extending to both sides of the shaft. This lampstand was made of a talent of fine gold.”²

Further, in reference to Jesus, John says, “His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (Rev. 1:16). Luke records the event of Jesus’ transfiguration stating, “The fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening” (Luke 9:29). As John prepares to lay down his pen for the final time, he quotes from Jesus: “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the

offspring of David, and the bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16). Christ and his church are identified with light. As the moon reflects the light of the sun, the church of Christ reflects the light of Christ. Jesus said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Therefore, the church of Christ is to emit from Christ a bright light. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). Paul wrote to the church at Philippi:

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15).

Israel’s Light Was Dim

God’s purpose for his people has always been for them to be a light in a world of darkness. In Acts 7, Stephen made his defense to the Jewish mob. He outlined the illustrious history of God’s people in the Old Testament, beginning with Abraham. He showed how the people rejected Moses, and described Israel as “the church in the wilderness.” Everett Ferguson states: “The Jewish usage of ekklesia is reflected by Luke in his reference in Stephen’s speech about Moses in the congregation [assembly] in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38)³.

Israel had been called out of Egypt, an idolatrous place of bondage, to Mt. Sinai where God gave his laws to his people through Moses. These laws, if followed, would bring light to pagan nations when Israel eventually would be led by Joshua into the land of Canaan (See Joshua 6). Israel (as a whole), did not become a bright light among

the nations as God desired. They chose to turn from God, the true light (1 John 1:5), to darkness of the world. Judges 21:25 gives a summary of the happenings during the time of the Judges. "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Eventually, Jacob's descendants (Israelites) became a divided people known as Israel (the Northern Kingdom,) under the leadership of Jeroboam, and Judah (the Southern Kingdom), under the leadership of Rehoboam (see 1 Kings Chapters 12-13). This continued until the fall of Israel to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. (see 2 Kings 16).

Later, Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 B.C. (see 2 Kings 24). The prophet Amos described their condition:

Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings
in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?
But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch
and Chiun your images, the star of your god,
which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I
cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus,
saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts
(Amos 5:25-27).

It would seem at this time in the history of God's people their light had faded into total darkness. Yet, the prophet Isaiah foretold that a remnant of God's people would return to Palestine (Isa. 10:20-22). Therefore, the light of God continued throughout this time period, although it was somewhat dim. Peter wrote regarding the Prophet's messages, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21). The

Psalmist wrote, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105). Light defeats darkness. Therefore, the prophet’s message was a light during times of darkness.

The Light Grows Brighter

To further give assurance of light that would come into the world, the apostle Peter writes:

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts (2 Pet. 1:16-20).

Peter, James, and John were privileged to see the transfiguration of Christ (see Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36). What they saw and heard (as witnesses) prepared them for later preaching the Gospel (Acts 1:8).

While some view Peter’s statement to mean the prophets writings were made more sure, Guy N Woods says,

The word of prophecy was made more sure and further confirmed by that which he had witnessed, and which he was in turn, passing

on to his readers. Being additional evidence, it would serve to strengthen, to corroborate, and to make more sure the faith already existing, which, in the final analysis, was based on the testimony of the Old Testament prophets. The testimony of these prophets was thus made more sure by that which Peter, James, and John had witnessed in the holy mount, and which Peter was then reciting.⁴

Following the words of Malachi, there were four hundred years of silence between the two Testaments. Suddenly there would appear another light to the world. The father of John the Baptist, Zacharias, prophesied about his son saying,

And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:76-79).

Matthew records,

In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight (Matt. 3:1-3).

Jesus said of John, “He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light” (John 5:35). John’s message was heard by many. However, when John began to expose their dark ways by the light, they scattered like roaches back to their comfort zone, i.e. the dark places.

The “Son” Light Shines Forth

When Jesus, the Son of God, began His ministry, the bright light from heaven appeared among men. Jesus came to be that “Bright Light” for all mankind. He said, “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (John 9:5). Unfortunately, many chose then (and today) to turn from the light.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (John 3:19-21).

Finally, the day dawns, and the day-star arises. On the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, the sunlight of the Gospel was first preached. Men learned what to do to have “remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). The church Jesus promised to build (Matt. 16:18), would now begin in its established state (Acts 2:47).

Later, a lame man would be healed. Peter and John would be questioned: “By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” (Acts 4:7). Peter responds,

...by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole (Acts 4:10).

Persecution begins with the apostles (see Acts 4:17-21; 5:17-29). After the apostles had been imprisoned, and once again stood before the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel stood before the council saying,

And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God (Acts 5:38-39).

Gamaliel gave good advice. Luke says, “And to him they agreed” (Acts 5:40). The apostles continue to teach “in the temple and in every house” (Acts 5:42).

Later,

And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles (Acts 8:1).

However, Luke records, “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). The “Bright Light” could not be extinguished.

Saul (Jewish name), later known as Paul (Roman name), is first introduced as one in darkness of religious error (Acts 8:1; 9:1-2). As he began his journey to Damascus intending to bring disciples back to Jerusalem to stand trial, he saw a great light, above the brightness

of the sun (see Acts 9:3; 22:6; 26:13). The great light he saw made him blind. Yet, as a blind man he also saw the light of truth. His religious practice up to this time had been against the true light of salvation. Being instructed by the Lord's disciple, Ananias, he was obedient to the Lord's plan of salvation (see Acts 9:6; 22:12-16). Having obeyed the Gospel of Christ, Paul would now become one of the Lord's, "Bright people," being added to the church as those at Pentecost (Acts 2:47).

Paul went on three journeys teaching the Gospel to a lost pagan world. The Lord had told Ananias, who at first was reluctant to communicate with Paul in Damascus,

Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me,
to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings,
and the children of Israel: For I will shew him
how great things he must suffer for my name's
sake (Acts 9:15-16).

Isaiah prophesied, "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isaiah 60:3).

Paul preached the Gospel wherever he went. Congregations of churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16) were established as men and women heard the good news of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, the Gospel of salvation (1 Cor. 15:1-4), made available to all men (Mark 16:15). These became the Lord's "Bright people," as they carried the light of Christ into the communities where they lived and worked. The converts (now disciples), saw the need to share the saving Gospel with others.

For example, Paul wrote to the Philippian church,

Do all things without murmurings and
disputings: That ye may be blameless and

harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world (Phil. 2:14-15).

The Lord's church was God's instrument in bringing through Christ a people who would send forth brightness in a dark world of sin. Daniel foretold,

And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever (Dan. 12:3).

Our Responsibility Today

The early Christian's responsibility to be a "Bright light" is our responsibility today. Jesus said to his disciples,

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

Light represents truth. The Lord's church unfurls the Banner of Truth by teaching and living the truth before our fellow man. Paul reminded the church at Corinth, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2).

To be the Lord's Bright people today, we must be like a city (of old), built on a hill, that is, for others to see the brightness of Christ living in us (Gal. 2:20). Our light

grows dim, or becomes extinguished, when we choose to follow the ways of the world. Paul says,

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12).

John warns,

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father; but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

Our objective as a Christian should be to glorify the Lord by our lives, so others in turn will glorify the Lord through the influence of the brightness of the Word living in our lives. We are not only to teach truth, but we must also live by that truth. It is often easier said than done. Our challenge is, be a Bright people, not only by what we say, but our actions in life are to correspond with what we say. Peter reminds us,

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light (1 Pet. 2:9).

John says,

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,

we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

To walk in the light is to follow the One who is light, Jesus, who said, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).

The early church became the Bright light of Jesus in a dark world. To the Ephesian church Paul wrote, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). To the church in Thessalonica he wrote, "Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thess. 5:5). One way the early Christians manifested their Bright light was the love they had for one another. The apostle John says, "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him" (1 John 2:10). Paul wrote:

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake (2 Cor. 4:3-5).

As John begins writing the Book of the Revelation of Christ, he begins with that true light for all men, Jesus. As he closes the letter to the seven churches, he reminds them of their future with these words,

And there shall be no night there; and they need

no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord
God giveth them light: and they shall reign for
ever and ever (Rev. 22:5).

May we always remember, we are the Lord's Bright light
today living in a world that is lost in darkness.

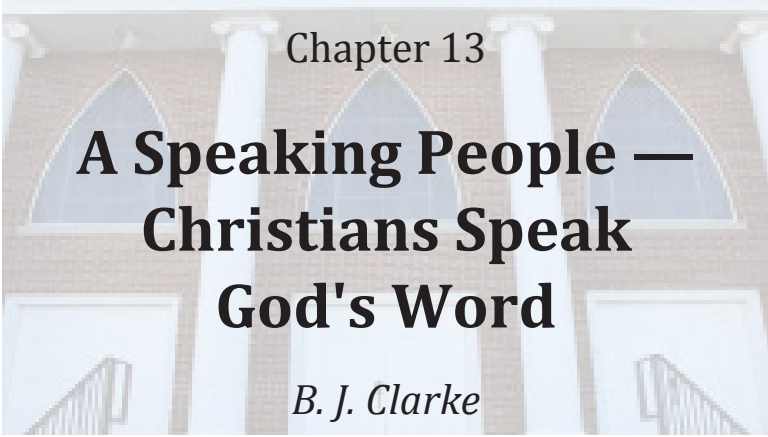
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Chapter 13

A Speaking People — Christians Speak God's Word

B. J. Clarke

Introduction

The wise man wrote, “there is a time to keep silence, and **a time to speak**” (emp. mine throughout, BJC, Eccl. 3:7). This message is not about God’s people being silent. Far too many of us have remained silent when we should have spoken! An investigation of the Holy Scriptures reveals that God has commissioned His people to be “a speaking people.” What does this require?

Seek And Speak

Christ said that He came “to seek and to save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). As His people, we should walk as He walked (1 John 2:6). Therefore, we must seek—but there can be no real seeking without speaking. Since all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and the wages of sin is the second death (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 20:14-15), someone must speak to sinners to assist them in passing “from death unto life” (John 5:24). By speaking forth the good news, we are preparing lost souls for “the resurrection of life” rather

than “the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29).

In short, our mission is summed up in the Greek word *euangelizo*, which means “to bring, or declare, good, or glad tidings, as in Acts 13:32; Romans 10:15; Hebrews 4:2.” Since the seed of the kingdom is the Word of God, we plant that Word when we speak it into the hearts of men and women (Luke 8:4-15). There is no true seeking unless we speak words to “preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), to “teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I [Jesus] have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Are We Socializing Or Speaking?

Unfortunately, many churches have eliminated speaking the gospel and have replaced it with the “social gospel,” i.e., the task of meeting man’s physical needs only. Although it is true that God expects for the local church to “remember the poor” (Gal. 2:10), benevolence, properly used, is a means to an end and not an end within itself. The “social gospel” mistakenly exalts the work of benevolence as the primary work of the church. However, the primary work of Jesus was not to eliminate poverty (Mark 14:7). The chief work of Jesus was to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10; 1 Tim. 1:15). His compassionate acts were designed to create receptive hearts to the gospel. People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care! What good is it to satisfy someone’s physical hunger and thirst if we fail to give them the “meat which endureth unto everlasting life” (John 6:27) and “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14)?

Some have turned the church into one big social

club. It is not the work of the local church to provide entertainment, recreation and social activities for the community. God never intended for the church to be a glorified "YMCA." Some have the misconception that our responsibility for speaking the gospel is confined to what is spoken during the worship services. While worship services are important, and should not be underestimated, it is not the case that the work of the church can be accomplished completely within the words that are spoken during the scheduled worship services.

A Survey Of Seekers And Speakers

The original recipients of the "great commission" were the apostles to whom Jesus spoke shortly before His ascension (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). However, it is clear that Jesus did not limit the charge to evangelize the world to the apostles because He told them to teach the ones they baptized to observe all things that He had commanded them (the apostles) to do. Hence, the apostles were to instruct the church to observe all things that Jesus had commanded them (the apostles) to do. One of the things Jesus told the apostles to do was to go and preach the gospel to every creature. Therefore, in order for the church to observe all things that Jesus commanded the apostles to do, the church must observe the command to speak forth His message to the entire world.

A study of the book of Acts reveals that the church was (and is) God's one and only missionary organization. The gathered church in Jerusalem (Acts 2-7) became the scattered church as the individual members of the church were, because of persecution, "all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the

apostles...therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:1, 4).

It is interesting to observe that it was not the apostles who were responsible for the evangelism of the regions of Judea and Samaria, nor was it exclusively a group of “full-time preachers.” Rather, this evangelistic effort was carried out by the individual members of the church which started in Jerusalem. Likewise, the Lord’s church today needs to get away from the idea that evangelism is something we hire the preacher to do.

The emphasis upon the individual responsibility of each member of the church to speak forth the message of the good news is captured in Paul’s teaching about church growth. Simply put, the church will grow when every part of the body does its share (Eph. 4:16). When preachers speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), and reprove, rebuke and exhort with all long suffering, (2 Tim. 4:2) the church will grow. When elders shepherd the flock properly under the direction of the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1-4), the church will grow. When deacons serve well, it will be well with them and the growth of the church (1 Tim. 3:13; Acts 6:1-7). When each member seeks to live like Christ, love like Christ, and tell the world about Christ, then the church will grow. This is God’s plan and it will not fail!

The secret to successful evangelism is really no secret; it is plainly revealed within the pages of God’s Word. You don’t have to travel to a soul-winning workshop to unlock the secret of church growth. You don’t have to travel to the bookstore to purchase the latest volume written to reveal “the mystery” of church growth. Just go to the bookcase, pull down your copy of the sacred writings, open it to the New Testament and start reading and imitating what you see.

First, read of the life and ministry of Jesus. Read of how Jesus preached peace and went about doing good (John 16:33; Acts 10:38). Read of how He demonstrated His love for the lost (Mark 10:21; John 15:13). Read of how He spoke the truth in love without ever compromising (Matt. 15:3-14).

In the second place, we are blessed to have the example of the first century churches as a model of seekers and speakers. How well did the first century church do in seeking and speaking? Consider the evidence in Scripture. The word was preached on Pentecost and about 3000 gladly received the word were baptized (Acts 2:14-41). In the days immediately following, the church continued to grow on a daily basis (Acts 2:47). In the weeks, months, and years which followed, the church continued to multiply and grow on a daily basis (Acts 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7; 8:12; 9:31, 42; 11:19-24; 12:24; 13:44-52; 16:5; 19:20). Paul affirmed that the gospel had gone “unto the ends of the world” (Rom. 10:18) and had been “preached to every creature which is under heaven”(Col. 1:23).

Whatever Happened To Seeking And Speaking?

How well are we doing in seeking the lost and speaking the truth? From 1945-1965, the churches of Christ were reported to be the fastest growing religious group in the United States. However, recent statistics reveal that we are not even among the top 10 list of religious groups who are growing the fastest. Are we turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6)? For that matter, are we even turning our local communities upside down?

Excuses are often heard in defense of why we are not growing today.

1. They had miracles in the 1st century. Such a statement displays a misunderstanding of the purpose of New Testament miracles (Mark 16:20; John 20:30-31; Heb. 2:3-4). Furthermore, miracles do not explain the rapid growth of the Lord’s church from 1945-1965, for they didn’t exist at that time. Also, although we do not have miracles today, we do have technology and mass media outlets available to us that were not even dreamed of in the 1st century.

2. We live in a world that is hostile to the gospel. Compare our world with that of the 1st century. Talk about a hostile world! Jesus was crucified for His religious teachings and His life (Matt. 27:22; John 1:10-11). Jesus warned His apostles that the world would hate them and that they would be killed by those who thought they were doing God a service (John 15:18-20; 16:2). How many of us can identify with the suffering Paul described in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28?

3. We’re growing spiritually and that’s what really counts. What is wrong with growing in number also? The early church grew both spiritually and numerically! Acts 16:5 describes a daily growth of the church almost 20 years after Pentecost. Whereas we should not emphasize numbers for the sake of numbers, we should place a value on each soul.

Why is there such a vast difference between the growth of the early church and that of the Lord’s church today? It all boils down to one component—**a commitment to seek and to speak.** The first century disciples were so committed to being a speaking people that they were willing to suffer physical persecution, and even death, for Him (Acts 5:28-42; 7:54-60; 2 Tim. 4:6-

8; Rev. 2:10). The problem with Christians today is that nobody wants to kill them anymore!

It should be noted that just speaking a good word is not enough. Too many today “profess that they know God, but in works they deny him being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Titus 1:16). They “talk the talk” but do not “walk the walk.” They call Jesus “Lord”, but they do not do the things that He says (Matt. 7:21-24; Luke 6:46). Many will not suffer verbal persecution, much less physical persecution, for the cause of Christ. Many refuse to sacrifice an evening of television, much less their very lives, to advance the cause of Christ! When we sow the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God (Luke 8:11), bountifully, we shall reap a bountiful harvest. Conversely, when we sow the Word sparingly, we shall reap sparingly.

The first century church spread the Word far and wide (1 Thess. 1:8), and that is why the church grew abundantly. Similarly, when the church of Christ grew so much from 1945-1965 it was because the members possessed an abundance of Bible knowledge and a commitment to sow it abundantly into the hearts of men. If we want the Lord’s church to grow today we must be more diligent in broadcasting the seed of the kingdom!

Four Motivations For Seeking And Speaking

Imagine the results that would be forthcoming if every Christian were to seek the lost and speak the truth. But how can we motivate every Christian to seek and to speak? Let us examine four things that ought to motivate us to do so.

1. The Mandate From Above. The decision to seek

and to speak is not optional for the child of God who desires to please his Father above. Quite simply, the first reason we ought to do so is because we have a commandment from Heaven admonishing us to do so. We have already alluded to the words of our Lord as found in the “Great Commission” texts (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). If we love the Lord we will keep His commandments (John 14:15), including the command to evangelize. Therefore, it is mandatory that we become fishers of men (Matt. 4:17-20). We must heed what Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

2. The Moan From Beneath. Who can forget the anguished moan of the lost rich man in Hades who cried for just a drop of water to cool his tongue and assuage his torment (Luke 16:24)? Moreover, who can forget his earnest plea that someone go and warn his five brothers “lest they also come into this place of torment” (Luke 16:28)? Brethren, we need to come to grips once again with what a terrible thing it is for a soul to be lost!

America was riveted to their television sets in October of 1987 as rescuers worked feverishly to save “Baby Jessica,” a one year old girl from Midland, Texas who found an abandoned well shaft in her aunt’s backyard, fell into the 8-inch hole, and plunged 22 feet down the pipe. As word spread of “baby Jessica’s” plight the residents of Midland literally stopped what they were doing to offer whatever assistance they could in the rescue operation, or to just stand by and offer moral support. Millions of Americans were riveted to their television sets as rescue crews and volunteer citizens joined hands to dig a shaft

parallel to the one that trapped Jessica. The rescue effort was hampered by a layer of super-hard rock. However, the rescuers were spurred on by the sound of the cry of baby Jessica which could be heard from beneath the surface. Her moan from beneath served as an encouragement to rally the troops to do whatever was necessary to save her. For 58 ½ long hours, they worked and worked. When paramedics finally covered a terrified Jessica with gobs of petroleum jelly and slid her out of the pipe into freedom, and the flood of bright television lights, an entire nation cheered in unison at her salvation.

Although we cannot rescue souls who have already died and gone to torment, we can be motivated by their anguished moans to work diligently to keep those who are still living on earth from going to that awful place. “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor. 5:11). Consequently, we need to unite together to save some, “snatching them out of the fire” (Jude 23, ASV).

3. The Macedonian Call From Without. After passing by Mysia and coming down to Troas a vision appeared to Paul in the night and “There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). Though the following statements may sound trite, they are, nonetheless, true. It is the whole duty of the whole church to get the whole gospel to the whole world. We must have an upward allegiance with an outward ministry. Untold millions are dying untold.

- The world’s population is expected to pass 6 billion by the end of 1998.

- It is estimated that 87% of the earth’s population has heard of Coca-Cola, whereas only 50% have heard the sweet name of Jesus.
- Only 1% of Asia’s total population has heard a gospel sermon.
- There are over 230 cities in Western Europe of over 100,000 people each that have not been touched by the precious saving message of the gospel.
- In New York there are over 17 million people. Less than ½ of 1% of these millions are members of the Lord’s church.

As one preacher put it, we must put the “go” back into the gospel! The thud of Christless feet heading for a devil’s hell should break our hearts! It is the work of the local church to seek the lost and to speak God’s saving truth unto them!

4. The Mercy From Within. Those of us who have received mercy from God ought to be moved by such emotions to reach out in compassion and mercy to the lost in our communities. When Benhadad was king of Syria a severe famine hit Samaria. In fact, the famine was so severe that mothers even resorted to eating their own children to stay alive (2 Kings 6:24-29).

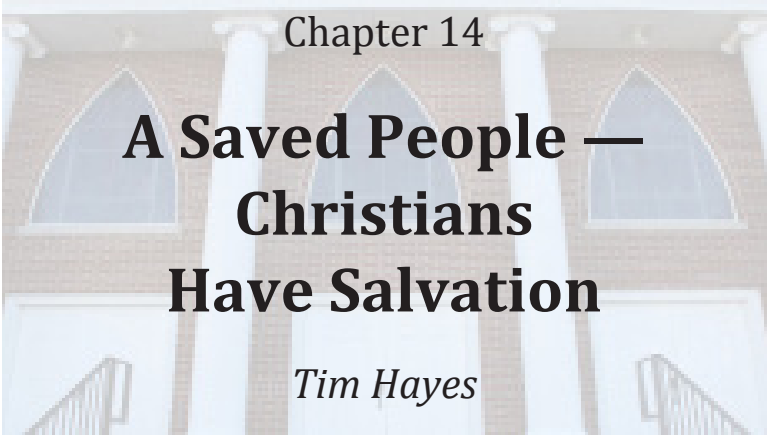
Among those affected by the famine were four lepers. They knew that they were going to die if they stayed where they were, and there certainly was not any food in the city. Therefore, they decided to risk surrendering themselves to the Syrians. After all, the worst thing that could happen was that the Syrians would kill them, and they were going to die anyway. On the other hand, perhaps the Syrians would have mercy upon them and let them live. Accordingly, they approached the camp of the Syrians only

to discover that it was abandoned. They did not realize that the Lord had scared the Syrians into fleeing the camp by manufacturing the noise of chariots, horses, and armies. However, in their haste to flee, the Syrians had left all of their belongings and food supply behind. The lepers walked into a veritable smorgasbord of blessings!

Amid partaking of their newfound treasure, the four lepers said to one another,

We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings,
and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the
morning light, some mischief will come upon
us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell
the king's household (2 Kings 7:9).

In short, the lepers decided they had to speak up to spread the glad tidings immediately lest they be punished in their delay. What a lesson for those of us who have found the treasure of salvation in Christ Jesus! This good news must be spoken immediately lest we be punished! Being recipients of the blessings of the love of Christ should compel us to spread love throughout our communities (2 Cor. 5:14-21). Indeed, the people of God must be a speaking people! If we don't, who will?



Chapter 14

A Saved People — Christians Have Salvation

Tim Hayes

Upon her rescue, Anna Spafford, sent her husband a telegram which began, “Saved alone, what shall I do?” Horatio and Anna Spafford had suffered the loss of their two-year-old son and now in a maritime tragedy lost their four daughters. Mr. Spafford had not traveled with the family and only his wife survived the sinking of the ship.

Soon after receiving the devastating news Horatio Spafford sailed to meet his wife in Europe. Crossing the North Atlantic, in a location close to where his daughters had been lost, Mr. Spafford penned these words:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded by helpless estate,
And has shed his own blood for my soul
(<http://ataugustine.com>).

Most can only imagine the myriad of emotions one would experience upon being saved from a terrible catastrophe. But, this most understand: shipwrecked individuals do not choose to remain in the water; trapped miners do not choose to remain entombed; those threatened by fire do not choose to stay in the inferno; all seek deliverance. The greatest deliverance availed to mankind is salvation from sin.

The topic discussed in this lesson is “A Saved People.” The topic implies: there are those who are saved and there are those who are lost.

Defined And Demonstrated

And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; 8 And I am come down to **deliver** them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Exo. 3:7-8; emp. TLH).

The word translated “deliver” is defined as: to snatch away (Strong’s). One of the greatest pictures painted by God is His deliverance of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Israel’s deliverance depicts man’s deliverance from sin. Israel could not free itself but was dependent on the grace and mercy of God. To further this parallel, the prophets of old used the term Egypt metaphorically when referencing a life of sin.

King David understood what it meant to deliver and to be delivered. He gave the following report:

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: 35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. 36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. 37 David said moreover, The LORD that **delivered** me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will **deliver** me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee (1 Sam. 17:34-37; emp.TLH).

David delivered the lamb from the lion: he set it free from certain death. He knew what God had done for him when facing the lion and bear thus, he knew what God would do when facing Goliath.

Peter wrote concerning what God did for Lot: "And **delivered** just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked" (2 Pet. 2:7; emp.TLH).

The Greek word translated "delivered" could have been translated "rescued." There was need for Lot to be rescued. There is no greater need of man than to be rescued from sin.

Notice the words of Jesus:

For the Son of man is come to **save** that which was lost (Matt. 18:11; emp.TLH).

He that believeth and is baptized shall be **saved**; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:16; emp.TLH).

And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to **save** that which was lost (Luke 19:9-10; emp.TLH).

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be **saved** (John 3:16; emp.TLH).

The word spoken by Jesus and emphasized in the previous passages is translated “save” but could also have been translated: deliver or protect; heal, preserve, do well, be (make) whole (Strong’s).

Designed

If you are a parent, you did not become a parent because you believed your children would be perfect. You desired to have someone for whom you could care and love and who in turn would reciprocate that love. God wants us to love Him. He knew that man would not be without sin: God knew the result of sin and God knew the remedy for sin.

God’s design for the defeat of sin was first shown in response to the transgression in the Garden of Eden.

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).

The sin in the Garden of Eden took place some 4,000 years before Jesus was born into the world. Some 2,500 years after Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, Moses, through inspiration penned the record. The great amount of years mentioned are only a spec of time in comparison to the timeless design of God for man's salvation. The design is timeless because the omniscient God is eternal.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: 4 According as he hath chosen us in him **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. 7 In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace (Eph. 1:3-7; emp.TLH).

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God 9 Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus **before the world began**, 10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8-10; emp.TLH).

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: 20 Who verily was foreordained **before the foundation of the world**, but was manifest in these last times for you (1 Pet. 1:18-20; emp.TLH).

Mankind is not held accountable by God for the sin of Adam, but mankind does suffer consequences because of the sin of Adam. The apostle Paul wrote of the death brought about by the transgression of the man Adam, but Paul also wrote of the deliverance from death unto life through the obedience of the man Jesus.

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: 13 (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. 15 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. 16 And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. 17 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) (Rom. 5:12-17).

Determination

The erroneous doctrine presented by John Calvin and propagated by much of the world would have one to believe that the death of Christ was unexpected by God. Those who accept the planks of Calvinism must also accept the idea that the rejection of Jesus was a surprise to God. Therefore, the all-knowing God did not know; the all-seeing God did not see; the all-powerful God was overpowered by man.

In the shadow of the cross, Peter proclaimed:

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: 23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: 24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it (Acts 2:22-24).

God has always known that the Word (John 1:1) would come to the world, taking on the form of man (Phil. 2:7), to be tempted as man: without sin (Heb. 4:15), to be offered on the cross as the perfect lamb of God (John 1:29).

The sacrifices made unto God, under the Patriarch law, could not remove sin; the sacrifices made unto God, under the law of Moses, could not remove sin; but, the

sacrifice of Jesus Christ made it possible for all sin to be forgiven (Heb. 10:1-18).

On the first Pentecost following the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, Peter reminded the Jews gathered before him of the words of King David. One-thousand years before Jesus was born into the world, David foretold of His death and resurrection (Psa. 16:10). Seven hundred and fifty years before the Son of God came to the world, Isaiah prophesied of His death (Isa. 53). Six hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Jeremiah wrote of the time in which iniquities would be forgiven and sins would be remembered no more (Jer. 31:34). Five hundred years before Mary gave birth to Jesus, Zechariah, inspired of God, wrote of the death of Jesus and salvation through His blood (Zec. 13).

The Father knew why the Son came to the world; the Spirit knew why the Son came to the world; the Son knew why He came to the world: to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). The only way salvation of man from sin is possible is by the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. 23 It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: 25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of

others; 26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: 28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:22-28).

Desired

Remember: God so loved the world; God loves us and desires us to love Him. God loves man so much that He desires man to live with Him forever. God, who cannot lie (Tit. 1:2), does not want anyone to suffer the pains of hell. Therefore, God made a way for man to be with Him eternally.

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: [and] not that he should return from his ways, and live (Eze. 18:23)?

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 (Eze. 33:11)?

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

Satan's desire is for man to be lost. Why? Because God's desire is for man to be saved. God created man a

free moral agent, giving man the choice. Man can choose to serve Satan in this life and be eternally with him in the place prepared for the Devil and his angels (Matt. 24:41). In making this choice man should understand: Satan does not like him; Satan does not love him; Satan hates and despises him, because man was made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). When addressing Israel, God explained man's choice in this manner:

For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. 12 It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? 13 Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? 14 But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. 15 See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; 16 In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. 17 But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; 18 I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. 19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set

before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: 20 That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:11-20).

Dedication

God's desire for man is for man to be saved, but God will not take man to Heaven against his will. Daniel determined early in his life to follow God; Daniel determined while in his homeland to follow God; Daniel determined before the trials of captivity came that he would follow God.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself (Dan. 1:8).

Timothy followed the example of Daniel in that he chose to follow God from an early age. Paul commended Timothy and exhorted him to remain diligent in his obedience to God.

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived. 14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned

them; 15 And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:12-15).

Paul also exhorted the brethren in Colosse:

And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: 23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister (Col. 1:21-23).

Declaration

Sadly, many who have obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ question their salvation. One thing that should help reassure man in his salvation is God's declaration of that salvation.

And hereby **we do know** that we know him, if we keep his commandments (1 John 2:3; emp. TLH).

I write unto you, little children, because **your sins are forgiven** you for his name's sake (1 John 2:12; emp.TLH).

And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, **we may have confidence**, and

not be ashamed before him at his coming (1 John 2:28; emp.TLH).

And hereby **we know that we are of the truth**, and shall assure our hearts before him (1 John 3:19; emp.TLH).

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby **we know that he abideth in us**, by the Spirit which he hath given us (1 John 3:24; emp.TLH).

These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; **that ye may know that ye have eternal life**, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13; emp.TLH).

And this is the **confidence that we have in him**, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 15 And if **we know** that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, **we know** that we have the petitions that we desired of him. 16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. 17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. 18 **We know** that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. 19 And **we know** that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. 20 And **we know** that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, **that we**

may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life (1 John 5:14-20).

God declares salvation of the faithful and demands declaration from those who are saved. Peter wrote that the child of God is to be ready to answer those who ask of the reason of hope enjoyed by the child of God (1 Pet. 3:15).

Do you think Lazarus knew that he had been raised from the dead (John 11:44)? According to the text in John 11, Jesus knew that Lazarus was dead, the sisters of Lazarus knew he was dead and the friends of Lazarus knew he was dead. Do you think Lazarus told anyone of the time wherein he died but was given life by Christ? Why then would the child of God be ashamed or afraid to tell that he had been dead but was made alive in Christ?

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Col. 2:13).

Conclusion

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

As children of God we have been redeemed from Satan; we have been healed from the sickness of sin; we

Tim Hayes

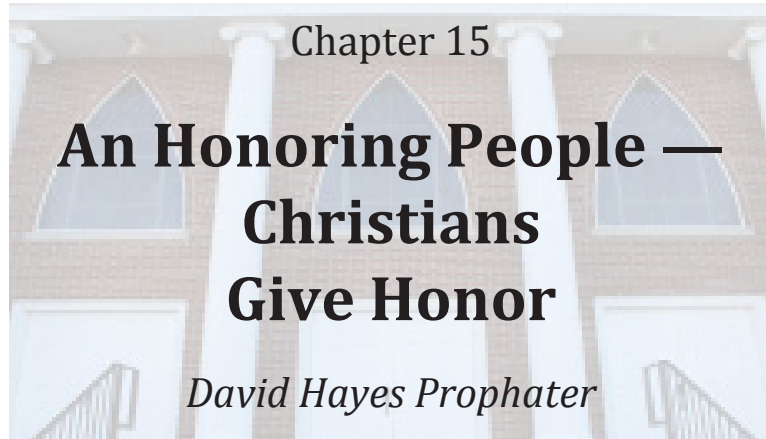
have been made alive from the death of transgression; we have been reunited from the separation from God and we have been saved from wandering lost into eternity. Let us thank God for the salvation we enjoy in Christ Jesus.

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A Saved People – Christians Have Salvation



At 1 Peter chapter 2, the inspired apostle instructs us to honor all men. Though not everyone may seem to be of honorable character, all humanity shares in common the fact that they are made in the image of God. Therefore, the Creator places great value upon mankind. So great is the value of: humanity in the eyes of God that there is no price Heaven would not pay to redeem man from sin and the consequences thereof. Because the Almighty regards man to be worth even the sacrifice of the Son of God, humanity should recognize his worth in terms of Divine appraisal, as well as project that worth upon his fellow man. This is precisely what Peter teaches us to do in verse 17 of the cited text. In addition to instructing us to honor all men, the apostle becomes more specific by directing us to love the brotherhood, fear God, and honor the king. This sequence of doctrine mirrors the Biblical description we are given of God and His interaction with the human race. For example, the third chapter of John's Gospel records one of the most loved and well known of all

passages of scripture. In verse 16, God's willingness to give His only begotten Son for the salvation of man is shown to be His expression of limitless love for the lost world. In Acts chapter 2, we are told in verse 47 that those who are resultantly saved are added to the church. The church is that brotherhood of children of God which Peter taught us to love. One cannot understand the fullness of the honoring of men nor of the love of the brotherhood without first understanding the fear of Jehovah Who ordained both of these things, and taught us how both are to be done.

One of the avenues of understanding through which we must pass is that of the significance of honoring the king. Even where no national monarch should reign, it is the concept of authority to which reference is here made. In Romans chapter 13, Paul the apostle pointed out that governmental authority is appointed of God, and resistance of that authority is resistance against the ordinance of God. If one has not learned respect for the lesser authority of man, he has hardly learned respect for the greater authority of God. With this, the sequence of doctrine and reason has come somewhat full circle. To understand how to render proper honor to God is to understand how to do the same unto our fellow man, and vice versa. The Savior Himself both verifies and expands upon this aspect of truth.

The First And Great Commandment

The 22nd chapter of Matthew's Gospel records the attempt of a lawyer of the Pharisees to tempt the Lord with a question. The lawyer asked the Savior which was the great commandment in the law. The issue of temptation regarding the question seems to be with the tendency of

certain Israelites to place greater importance on some aspects of Mosaic Law than upon others. Therefore, if the Savior had identified an issue of the Law's moral code as being the greatest of commandments, He may have offended those of His people who believed ceremonial provisions of the Law to be more important, and conversely. Hence, the strategy of the Pharisaical lawyers would have been to discredit the Lord with some segment of Israel, regardless of how He answered the question. However, the Savior's reply actually covered all aspects of law. The first and great commandment, Christ said, is to love the Lord God with all of one's heart, soul, and mind. Secondly, the Lord called upon man to love neighbor as self, declaring that it was upon these two commandments that hung all the law and the prophets. Within this truth is the secret of how and why the honoring of God requires the honoring of man. That secret is manifested in the analysis of the initial portion of the Law given by God through Moses upon ancient Sinai.

The Ten Commandments

As Jehovah began to deliver to Moses what many have referred to as The Decalogue, or, more commonly, the Ten Commandments, the first three of those ordinances dealt with the relationship of man to his God. These ordinances include the prohibition of having other gods before the true and living God, of the making and worshipping of graven images, and of the taking of the Lord's name in vain. If, as the Savior taught, one loved God with the fullness of every aspect of his being, the idea of supplanting God with an imaginary object of worship would never come to mind. If the heart, soul, and mind of a man were united

in affection for the Lord, no tangible product of human invention could replace Him. If anyone's existence was as wholly defined by love for God as the Savior taught, then none would utter even the Name of the Almighty Father in any context or thought of disrespect. To love the Lord God as His Son described is to fulfill all the Law pertaining to the relationship of mankind to his Creator. Because a man is hardly motivated by anything more than he is by his affections, it is by affection for God and Spiritual things that he finds the greatest inducement to godly and spiritual life.

The fourth of the commandments recalls man's relationship to himself, while still recalling man's relationship to his God. As the Savior reflected in Mark Chapter 2 upon the Mosaic obligation to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, He noted in verse 27 that the Sabbath was made for man's benefit, not man for the Sabbath. The meaning of the Lord's remark is not only understood by examining the context in which it is made, but also by examining what God said about the Sabbath when He ordained it. In Exodus chapter 20, God decreed beginning at verse 8 that ancient Israel was to observe the Sabbath on the seventh day of the week by doing no work upon that day. By this, we not only understand how the Sabbath benefited man physically by giving him rest, but we understand also how the Sabbath benefited man spiritually by reminding him that he is a part of God's six-day creative process, from which the Almighty rested on the seventh day. For an ancient Israelite to love God was to keep His commandments and, therefore, receive benefit in every way.

The next six of the commandments dealt with the

relationship of man to his fellow man. The violation of any of these constituted not only sin against God, but also sin against another individual. These statutes included the requirement to honor parents, and prohibitions against murder, adultery, theft, false witness against another, and coveting. Now, remember the Savior's doctrine that all the law and prophets hung primarily upon one's total love for God, and secondarily, upon his love for his fellow man. As an expression of his love for God, a man would, ideally, honor God's wishes upon any and all matters, and, as an expression of his love for his fellow man, would honor God's wishes regarding his relationship with his fellow man. To honor God must also include the honoring of other persons, for the honoring of all men is the honoring of God Who made all men in His image.

Following the last Passover Supper the Savior would observe with His disciples, the 14th Chapter of John's Gospel records the Lord's words in verse 15, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." There appears here a twofold meaning. First of all, one should keep the Lord's commandments if, and only if, those commandments are kept as an expression of one's love for his Lord. Any attempt to observe the Lord's commandments out of any other motivation than love for the Lord will still leave one guilty of breaking the first and great commandment of loving the Lord God with the whole of heart, soul, and mind. Therefore, it is fruitless to attempt the keeping of Divine law without love for the Law Giver. Secondly is perhaps the more readily and commonly understood meaning of the passage: the only way in which it is possible to demonstrate love for the Lord is by keeping His commandments. With this understanding, we once


again come full circle. This is because one of the Lord's commandments is to love neighbor as self. Therefore you cannot separate the love of man for fellow man and the love of man for God. 1 John chapter 4 verses 20 and 21 teaches us that one who loves God while failing to love his brother becomes a liar. The passage revisits the admonition that the same God Whom we must love is the God Who admonishes us to love one another. Once again, it is out of love that we ideally honor not only those ordinances directly pertinent to our relationship with God, but also out of love that we honor those ordinances directly pertinent to our relationship with our fellow man. When love fails in either case, sin is the result, and either God is offended, or both God and someone else is offended. In the midst of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus, in the 5th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, taught us, beginning at verse 23, that we should not make the attempt to worship God while knowing we have caused an offense, and that someone has a right to be offended because of our actions. Reconciliation with the offended party must occur before one's worship is accepted of God. In the 5th chapter of James, verse 16 teaches us that such a reconciliation is accomplished by the offender's confession of his fault to the one he has offended, and by mutual prayer for God's forgiveness of the matter. He restores and retains his righteousness who confesses his sins to the one against whom he has committed them, and who confesses the same to God, Who is offended in the event of all sin, whether or not it is committed against another person. Further, he retains his righteousness who forgives sin committed against him. In the 6th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, the Savior began in verse 14 to admonish us

that they are forgiven who will forgive, but they remain unforgiven who will not forgive.

Conclusion

When Peter gave us that fourfold doctrine in 1 Peter chapter 2, it is conceivable that the elements of verse 17 might have seemed to some to be irrelevant one to another. However, the lessons of honoring all men, loving the brotherhood, fearing God, and honoring the king are inseparable one from another. Whether one is the king or one of the brethren, he is one of all men we are called upon to honor. The fear of God requires that we honor these who, like us, are made in His image. To honor God is to honor them. To honor them is to honor God.

An Honoring People – Christians Give Honor



Chapter 16

A Returning People — Christians Spend Time Together

Brandon Grieves

Introduction

I consider it a great honor and privilege to be a part of the 2017 Truth in Love Lectureship at East Hill. I would like to thank brother Jonathan Burns and the brethren at East Hill for their gracious invitation to participate in such a wonderful occasion. Although it is certainly a great honor to preach the Word of God on any occasion and before any assembly of people, to have an opportunity to proclaim God’s Word at this place and before such a group is a most gracious gift for which I am thankful.

The assignment that has been given to me is “A Returning People—Christians Spend Time Together.” This is an excellent topic that we are blessed to consider. How often do we hear sermons on such topics as fellowship, relationships in the home, relationships within a congregation or between congregations, and a Christian’s relationship to the world? Is it preached enough? Like all other Biblical topics, there can never be enough preaching in general about spending time with Christians.

What is Christian Fellowship? To most people in the world, and even some members of the Lord's church, all they really know about fellowship is the monthly or quarterly "Fellowship Meal" at the church building or some other adequate facility. To them, fellowship has to do with eating fried chicken, ham, and/or banana pudding. While all these are extremely good, and while we need more times like these, this is far from all that God had in mind when he spoke of true Christian fellowship.

For the main ideas of this assignment, we are going to break down the last four words of the assignment that was given to me. For our first point, we will discuss the word, "Christians." Our focus will be on WITH WHOM we spend our time. For the second point, we will examine the word, "Spend." Our emphasis will be on HOW Christians spend time together. Finally, we will discuss the words, "Time Together," in which we will center our attention on WHEN and WHY Christians spend time together.

Christians — With Whom We Spend Time Together

Christians are those with whom we should spend our time. If this is so, we must identify those who are Christians. This is another Biblical subject which needs to be continually discussed in our pulpits, because there is much confusion in the world about who is a Christian. This confusion comes from man and not God. "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33). Honestly, there are no excuses for anyone around us to be unlearned of who are Christians. The access of God's Word in this country has never been easier to obtain. When the Word is acquired, it needs to be

our guide in all areas of life. We are so blessed to be able to open our Bibles and see what God wants us to know about any particular discussion. Peter said,

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: (2 Pet. 1:3).

Who are Christians?

First, Christians are those who are disciples of Christ. A disciple is a learner. Christianity is a taught religion. It is interesting to note that in the Old Testament, Jews were born into their religion and then taught about their religion. In the New Testament, one has to be taught the Words of Christ, then upon obedience, is born into Christianity. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be **born** [emphasis – BG] of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Jesus also said,

No man can come to me, except the Father which hath seen me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all **taught** [emphasis – BG] of God. Ever man therefore that hath heard, and hath **learned** [emphasis – BG] of the Father, cometh unto me (John 6:44,45).

The law and the prophets were designed to bring men to a knowledge of the Christ. This is done by teaching. All who correctly learn of the Father come to Jesus, and therefore, His teaching is influential and draws in others. Guy N. Woods said in this context,

Some, like these unbelieving Jews, are not drawn, because they do not will to do so; it has been well said that a magnet draws iron, but not all objects are drawn by magnets, because all are not iron (p. 130).

A disciple is a follower of Christ. Jesus left an example of life to be followed (1 Pet. 2:21). Sadly, those in the religious world who claim to be Christians have a different view. Many believe and teach that Christianity should adapt to the present time and culture. However, Paul told the Colossians,

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Col. 2:8).

Others believe and teach that Christianity should follow some or all of the laws included in the Law of Moses. Again, Paul addresses this to the brethren in Colossae saying that these things were nailed to His cross (Col. 2:14). The majority of this world believe that because they have strength in numbers; they can determine what is right or wrong. However, numbers do not determine success. Jesus warned,

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and **many** [emphasis – BG] there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few** [emphasis – BG] there be that find it (Matt. 7:13,14).

Jesus is very clear in His teaching saying those who find the narrow path are the ones who learn the Gospel and

are humble enough to follow Christ, which is the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21).

Second, Christians are those who are willing to suffer for doing right.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:15,16).

There are people who suffer because they live in a world full of physical illnesses and death. There are those who suffer because of consequences of the poor choices they made in life. Some are suffering because they are doing the will of God. Paul told Timothy that all who live godly lives shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). It is so easy to observe that Christians are criticized unfairly, called horrible names, or accused of hatred. Read social media or turn on the news and see how Christians are being accused of showing hate to the people living lives contrary to the Bible. There are so many examples about which we read regarding those who suffer for doing the right thing.

A Christian is willing to suffer for the Lord's sake. Early Christians were persecuted (Acts 8:1-4). Abel was murdered by his brother, Cain, for offering the sacrifice that was pleasing to God (Gen 4:4). John the Baptizer was thrown in prison and beheaded because he preached against Herod's adulteress marriage. Jesus said those who are persecuted for His sake are blessed and should rejoice because great is their reward which is in heaven (Matt. 5:10-12). Therefore, as Christians we should wear persecution from the world as a badge of honor.

With the world in such disarray concerning or regarding everything that Christians represent, it is highly recommended that Christians spend time together. Christianity is where all people of different backgrounds are equal. Paul told the Galatians,

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Gal. 3:26-29).

Spend — How Christians Spend Time Together

How should Christians spend time together? First, let us look at the word, "spend." It is so apparent that Christianity, our faith, comes at a cost. It begins with our Master, who paid the ultimate price, so man might be saved. He loved us and thought that mankind was worth saving. One soul is worth more than the entire world (Matt. 16:26). As His followers, we must understand that the church is bigger than ourselves, so we must become living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1).

God has graciously given us His Word in which we read about the greatest example of a mighty warrior for the cause, the apostle Paul. Most of the books in the New Testament were written through Paul by inspiration. Each of his epistles have similar characteristics. One distinction, which needs to be noted, is the way he greets the recipients. The attitude that Paul has for the brethren is one to be followed. Paul always expresses his love and

gratitude for the brethren and shows his desire to be with the brethren. Notice how Paul addressed the Romans,

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to **come unto you. For I long to see you**, [emphasis – BG] that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that **I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me** [emphasis – BG] (Rom. 1:8-12).

When spending time with other Christians, we should have the attitude of love and gratitude for one another. Even though Paul had not met many of the brethren at Rome, he expresses gratitude for them. This is a special benefit that Christians have with one another. There are many Christians that we may have not met, but we all have one thing in common: we are fellow citizens of God's kingdom, the church. When brethren of God's family meet for the first time, there is an automatic feeling of comfort with one another. Love and concern develops for one another. This is a reason for gratitude for all who are faithful.

When spending time with other Christians, we should have the same desire to be with one another. Paul said, "For I long to see you..." (v. 11). Paul wanted to see the saints in Rome for a long while, and prayed that it might be God's will for him to go to Rome.

After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome (Acts 19:21).

Paul wanted to impart unto the saints in Rome some spiritual gift so that they could be established. The church was established already, but an apostle needed to be present in order for a spiritual gift to be given.

As Christians desire to be with their Lord, so should they desire to be with one another. To fellowship with one another means to be in fellowship with God.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

As Christians, we should be grateful for one another. Our main goal is to get to heaven, so let us help each other get there!

Time Together — When And Why Christians Spend Time Together

When should Christians spend time together? Again, let us look at Paul when he was first converted to Christ recorded in Acts 9. Ananias found him praying and told him to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). Paul regained his strength: “then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And **straightway** [emphasis – BG] he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:19b-20). Paul **immediately** went to

the disciples after his conversion. It was to his benefit because his brethren in Christ saved his life from the Jews who wanted to kill him. When sinners are transformed from darkness into the light of the kingdom, they should immediately and always desire to be with the brethren in Christ.

The most obvious time when Christians spend time together is in worship. One of the most important times in the life of a growing church is the time spent together in worship to God. Worship is centered around Him. It is out of an appreciation for God that we look for ways to improve our time together in worship to make it the most meaningful, the most uplifting and the most pleasing to God that it can possibly be. This is easier to do when we are encouraged to do so. Believe it or not, every member of a congregation is very important! It is sad to know that many do not think so about themselves. Christians belong to a spiritual family. When it is time to assemble for worship or for Bible study and a member is missing, it is so discouraging. Think of times when relatives get together for holiday occasions and a member of the family is missing for any reason. Why is it that most people are more devastated during that occasion than when our spiritual family members are missing services? Jesus made it very clear that spiritual family (the kingdom) is to take priority.

While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who

is my mother? And who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matt. 12:46-50).

With this in mind, Christians ought to be aware of who is missing services. Encourage them to return to the Lord if they are able to come. Pray for those who are not able to come to worship.

Sadly, many believe that worship should be sufficient time to spend with other Christians. Fellowship is not limited to worship, nor is it limited to one's own congregation of which he is a member. Congregations are authorized to fellowship and cooperate with other congregations in the works of Christ. All local congregations may cooperate in giving, teaching the gospel, etc. Christians give to the Lord's Day contribution that we might support the work of the church. Occasionally, some congregations are in need of assistance of other congregations to rebuild from tragedies, evangelistic projects, support preachers, help the less fortunate, etc. This is not a new trend. Paul said, "For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem" (Rom. 15:26). Paul was taking up a collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem. The Macedonians wanted to have a part in service (2 Cor. 8:4). Paul had to encourage the Corinthians to contribute with the same attitude as the Macedonians. The Macedonians had little but gave much; the Corinthians had much but had given nothing. Recently, many congregations worked together to assist the local congregation in Gatlinburg after the wild fire

devastation in Gatlinburg, TN. The funds and care received for this congregation were under the oversight of the elders of that congregation. This is not just a privilege but also an obligation. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). This is an example of fellowship, cooperation in this great and important work!

One congregation may accomplish much, but many congregations working together can accomplish even more as long as it is within God’s blueprint. The church is for benevolence, helping others in need; edification, education or teaching of the saints; and, evangelism, winning souls for Christ. The church is at war with Satan and not with each other! For example, when a local congregation is hosting a gospel meeting or an event open to all Christians, support that meeting. This accomplishes many things. First, the members of that congregation are encouraged to see their building full of people. Second, the people sitting in the pews are being spiritually fed. It is a win-win situation. More importantly and above all, **GOD IS GETTING THE GLORY!**

Conclusion

When we are together on earth, it gives a tiny glimpse of what it will be like to be together in our heavenly reward. We have so many reasons as to why Christians should spend time together. Christians have fellowship in hope (Eph. 4:4). Children of God long for and cherish the thought that one day they can be in heaven (Col. 1:5). Together, Christians are the salt and light of the world (Matt. 5:13). We are to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2) and keep each other on the straight and narrow path (Matt. 7:13).

When Christians spend time together, big things for the cause of Christ are accomplished. Brother Dan Winkler made an astounding statement in one of his sermons. He said, “If God is on your side, you make your plans **BIG!**” We have to be constantly reminded that through us (the church of Christ), God does amazing things. Let’s get to work for our Lord!

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Chapter 17

A Standing Woman — Women Are Spiritual People

Celicia Grider

The phrase, “take a stand” has always been stated with the implication that an individual has a firm opinion about a subject or issue. When a person takes a stand, there is confidence, determination, and dedication involved. It is virtually impossible for that person to be pulled or swayed to the right or to the left of his belief. Such should be true of every Christian woman. It is important that our minds continually focus on what is good, honest, Christ-like and pure (Phil. 4:8). As those characteristics are implemented in our hearts and minds, the end result will be women standing for the cause of Christ. A Christian woman must cultivate her faith through study and prayer. This is also accomplished as our faith is exercised (Jam. 1:3). That established faith will be evident in every aspect of our lives. After obedience is rendered to our Lord, our lives are transformed into His image by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). This is done daily through various spiritual means such as becoming a Bible student and making good choices that reflect Christ living in us. Seeking God first and His righteousness is imperative

(Matt. 6:33). It is a challenging, yet very rewarding life, and the blessings here on earth will abound right into eternity.

Standing Solo

While living at home, it is a parent's goal to instruct and help develop within children the ability to "stand on their own two feet." This lesson is meant to establish confidence and stability so that they will be able to function on their own, separate and apart from parental guidance. It is inherent that parents do this physically speaking, but especially spiritually. It is vitally important that the woman who stands for Christ is capable of standing solo. A person's relationship with God is one that should have depth of knowledge along with love and appreciation of what Christ did on our behalf (John 3:16). Only when one meditates on His Word and has an understanding of the scriptures, coupled with an active prayer life and righteous living can one stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:11). As a child of God, Peter instructs us,

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (1 Pet. 3:15).

This "blessed assurance" will keep you confident, strong and able to share with others about the hope that belongs only to His child. Keep in mind, that once married to a Christian man, this relationship has the grand possibility of growing and seeing both the husband and the wife become stronger spiritually. The privilege is given to the woman who through her devotion and love stands by her husband. The relationship that God has given man

through the institution of marriage far exceeds any other relationship on earth. It is in this union that two become one (Gen. 2:24). The bond that is shared strengthens both the husband and wife through the years. As this bond grows and matures, children are invited into this union and what a blessing they are to the already established home. As the couple sees the need to properly instruct and nurture their children (Eph. 6:4), even as the father as the head of his home, the mother will most likely be the one training them during their formative years. This can be a daunting task some days. A mother is always multi-tasking. She is the queen of her home, the guardian of it throughout the day. This is the highest honor bestowed on Christian women. Serving her family is secondhand to the Christian woman. She is constantly thinking about the lessons she will teach her child in everything she does and how she can glorify God in the process. Teaching by example is critical. It will not always be done perfectly, but it can be done with the best intentions possible for her little ones. It is important that the Christian mother recognizes that her efforts with her children take precedence in her “reaching out to others.” Instructing our precious ones is a vital part of God’s instruction for the home to succeed spiritually and the value of such should not be underestimated or go unnoticed, especially by the godly mother.

Stay Busy

It has been said that idleness is the devil’s workshop. Paul warns against such,

And withal they learn to be idle, wandering
about from house to house; and not only idle,

but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not (1 Tim. 5:13).

When a Christian is idle, the devil strives to intercept her thoughts, actions, and intentions with false ones that are unprofitable in our work for the Lord. One should always turn to the scriptures for examples and direction. Among many busy women found in Holy Writ would be Dorcas, Priscilla, Eunice and Lois, Ruth, Esther, and countless others. The Virtuous woman is a wonderful example to imitate. She was a busy lady, a selfless woman, one who was spiritually and physically strong. If there was ever a proper female model to copy and strive to follow, it would be the woman of Proverbs 31. Many lessons are learned from the life of this incredible woman. There is no room for laziness (Prov. 6:6).

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also awhile it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens. She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff. She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the

needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothes with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

Consider the multiple characteristics of the Virtuous woman. Perhaps this list could be used as a personal checklist or inventory as we strive to be like unto God's ideal woman.

Trustworthiness	Faithfulness
Industrious	Good Management
Ambitious	Good Health
Financial Ability	Watchfulness
Skillful	Charitableness
Vision Foresight	Dignity
Resourcefulness	Compassion
Moral Courage	Fearless
Respectful	Inward Beauty

Please keep in mind that most individuals will not be able to check all of the above mentioned traits off every single day, but it would be a safe goal oriented list to attempt to obtain a good majority of these fine qualities as often as possible. It has been said in jest that a woman's work is never done. Well the Christian woman validates that statement when she seeks to serve her Lord with goodness and gladness in heart.

Show and Seek

Children often play a game called Hide and Seek. As Christian women, we must hide behind the cross and seek His righteousness (Gal. 6:14; Rom. 1:16-17). We must not hide our light under a bushel (Matt. 5:15). Likewise, with the Christian, the game of life we participate often in is show and seek. To show Christ living in our lives is just as important as seeking those who are lost in sin. This is a task that is easily conquered as women given interaction with others and observations often recognized by attentive Christian ladies. Whether a woman is an extrovert or introvert, there is always something that can be done for others. It is natural that most women are very capable multi-taskers. Therefore, a woman can show and seek out ways to introduce and influence others. The deeds we do on a daily basis are often seeds being planted along life's way. For in Hebrews, the writer states

For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do whew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That

ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:10-12).

The virtuous woman was capable of completing this task. In today’s modern world, these tasks would consist of extending hospitality to others, visiting or cooking meals for those who are sick, offering to aid in correspondence course work, taking care of specific special touches around the church building, preparing the Lord’s supper emblems, greeting visitors, etc. And ETC includes SO much more! Simple encouraging words through various means can uplift others and help them press on in their Christian walk. No matter the number of talents an individual possesses, there is ALWAYS a task to be done by a Christian for another human being! Christian ladies always seem to have that extra touch, that special something, that perfect eye for detail when it comes to the human heart. This sentiment is especially true among sisters in Christ. There is a beautiful bond that is sealed by various acts of kindness. Whether it is a kind word, a hug, a call of concern, a recognition of a job well done, an expression of appreciation, or any positive display of admiration and admonition...Christian women are good at helping others to press on and not give up! It is a beautiful gift!

Our thoughts play an important role in the life we live and the stand we take for Christ. Our outlook on life determines how hard we will work in His kingdom. When our thoughts are properly aligned with God’s Word, the acrostic of JOY is apparent in our lives. How Jesus lived on this earth shows us to put Others first and Yourself last (Matt. 7:12; Mark 9:35). When we think as Christ, we will have compassion for others (Mark 1:41). When

one has healthy thoughts, she will take care of herself (1 Cor. 3:16). When one has happy thoughts, she will concentrate on the wonderful blessings in her life (Eph. 1:3). When one has holy thoughts, she will focus on the things that are Christ-centered (Rom. 12:1). This world needs a lot of positive thinking. That begins with our attitude and influence. Never undervalue of little things, especially the affect they can have on others. This world needs more kindness, more giving, less complaining, and less judging. Going the extra mile is becoming a lost art. Consider the account of the Good Samaritan and do as Christ instructed when He stated, “Go and do thou likewise” (Luke 10:30-37). Through our Christian lives, there are countless opportunities to share the love of God with others. Christians should never underestimate the importance of the efforts offered or the affects genuine Christianity can have on others, no matter the situation. Recall our Lord’s words in Matthew 25,

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you,

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matt. 25:34-40).

In conclusion, the Christian woman is capable of standing alone, staying busy and seeking after those spiritual things that show Christ living in her. The necessities to make this possible would include and are not limited to an active prayer life, being a well rounded student of God's word, meditating on it often, having an eye and heart that is open to opportunities to teach others at any given time. The ability to influence others for Christ is phenomenal when we recognize our abilities, focus on others and share the good news with those we come in contact with on a daily basis. Do not ever be guilty of thinking there is nothing to do or devaluing your abilities. May we always be willing to stand up for Christ, stay busy showing others about Christ and seek ways to introduce others to Him and His never ending love, grace and mercy (2 John 1:3).

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All scriptures are from the King James Version.

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