

Wisdom & Power

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On The Cover: This is a picture from Steve and Jill Taylor on their cruise in the Caribbean. This is a place to spend some time.

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We hope each issue gives you something to think about, laugh over, pray on, and pass around.

Readers are urged to submit articles for publication. We can't guarantee that they will be used, however.

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First Words

How does the way we look at life affect our attitude about events? I've often used a sporting event to illustrate this. Two baseball teams in one ball park, 40,000 fans, the final out, and part of the fans are disappointed, while the other part are elated. What makes the difference between being disappointed and elated? The view you take on the whole situation (my team lost, or my team won). The same is true of life here and now. Your point of view will affect how you respond to events, that in this world.

I'm going back to the baseball illustration. Every team in Major League Baseball promotes itself as the best and worthy. In the local market people are 'pressed' to be fans, come to the game, and be a supporter.

One ball game I attended, I sat in front of a man who was a fan of the visiting team. One out of thousands. Yet the many fans for the home team could not influence his choice of who he was cheering for (the visitors won by the way). It was amazing. He was vocal when everyone around him was silent. One voice in a multitude. He was not ashamed to declare who was his team.

This man's determination not to give in to the pressure of a stadium full of people reminds me of Romans 12:2 *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."*

The world will pressure us to conform to its way of thinking. It will try to get us to think that its champions are worthy of praise. It will try to get us to follow its fashions, trends, or to get us to think that its standards of right and wrong are proper. Don't believe it.

The world view believers have is not determined by this present evil age, but by our Heavenly Father, and what He says is proper. To get this we need to be transformed. Not physically now, but a change of how we think. How we process data that confronts us daily. We need to process this as God processes it. Doing so will give us a new world view. One that looks forward to the Kingdom of God instead of any world power to bring about the 'good life'.

Going back to Romans 12:2, if this change in thinking does not happen, then we cannot say (or prove) that God's will (desires) are good. We won't be able to say that we accept God's will for us in any

tough situation. We can't say that God's will is the best (perfect) for us. If our world view is not determined by our Heavenly Father, then it is determined by something inferior. Actually we are cheering for the losing team.

It is always better to have someone who will speak for you when you are entering a new arena. That what the world says. And as far as the world goes, it is a good idea to have all your homework done, your ducks in a row, your tees crossed, etc. The better you look, the higher your prospects are of being hired. You have to make yourself desirable.

This plays well into the world's mind set. "We want only the brightest and best!" Well for the one who is Supreme above all, this isn't the way He thinks. You can try hard to achieve, cover your tracks, or present the best side, but that doesn't impress God. His world view is different.

Isaiah 57:15 gives some wonderful insight for us who are not so well endowed that we can rely upon our good looks, intelligence, or connections. *"For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones."*

Whoa, the one who is High and Lofty will live with those who know they can't bring anything to the table. Isn't that humbling? I often think of those who try to impress God with someone in their family. Like "My daddy was bishop," or "My folks built this here church building," or "I've got family in some high places in this organization." Like that's going to impress God. This is the view of the present evil age.

What impresses God is that you have a broken heart. You know that there is no one that will give you a pass. All you have to offer is a broken heart in a humble attitude that God will revive.

That news is better than knowing that you have a rich uncle. If we humble ourselves before God, He will lift us up. The world needs connections, God says, "be connected to Me".

Read On

Chuck Jones

The Critical Christian

by Corey J. McLaughlin

Our society, is tossed to and fro in an ocean of mass media, flickering images and constant news coverage about every event in life. In such an information-overloaded society, our ability to assess and evaluate the sheer quantity of knowledge that passes by our minds every day is dampened. It is not unlike a popular kids' game found in most arcades across America. The player is given a foam hammer and told to smash whatever comes out of the holes (usually ground hogs, clowns, etc.). The player scores points by hitting as many of the ground hogs that pop up, but only if they're hit before they duck back down again. The game tests reflexes and hand/eye coordination. Christians are faced with a far greater challenge. Our spiritual reflexes and our heart/mind coordination must constantly react to (and be on the alert for) all kinds of tainted and corrupted philosophies of the world; and we must do this daily. It is as though we are given just such a foam hammer but our playing territory is the size of Texas.

I found myself ever-so-subtly taken in during the elections of 2004. Commercials, radio announcements and posters bombarded my psyche with the idea, "It doesn't matter who you vote for; just vote!" I found myself repeating the phrase numerous times and to numerous people

without more than a thought. Think about the consequences of such an idea! Voting, rather than faithfulness to God in all areas of our life, becomes the ideal. Equally damaging is the wedge that is driven between voting and morality. Are we really going to say that it doesn't matter if one candidate wants to legalize prostitution and the other is firmly against it — all that matters is that we vote one way or the other? Are we to proclaim that a pro-life stance is not really any more important or less important than a pro-choice stance — all that matters is that we vote? Of course it matters! We do not vote as the world does, but as redeemed Christians with a biblical ethic. It is not good enough to "just get out there and vote;" we must vote according to God-given principles and a God-given law (whenever applicable). How easily and simply I was deceived and what consequences those deceptions bring!

How many parents have been told, "Brothers and sisters always fight, there's just no stopping it"? Consequently, many parents do not teach their children proper respect and love for each other because they can't get them (or, rather, they fail to make them) get along with each other. I know parents who would rather drive two separate cars than place siblings together in the back seat. Such people are trapped by an

assumption that is wrong. Respecting our parents is a biblical mandate — as much so as not murdering, raping or committing adultery, or (on the positive side) loving God. It should not be assumed that kids cannot get along; they can, but when parents make such assumptions it becomes nearly impossible to do so.

In addition to this, consider that for many Christian families, "fibbing" has replaced "lying." We now say, "Our daughter is really stubborn" rather than saying, "Our daughter is rebellious." More than that, sinful behavior is readily accepted under the guise, "Well, that's just how he is. He will probably grow out of it." Kids do not "grow out" of selfishness, lying, rebellion, anger, etc. These are sinful behaviors and must be handled with compassion and biblical principles.

Subtle deceit abounds, and the examples could go on forever. For instance, 80 % of Americans — and a good portion of Christians — believe that the Bible includes the statement, "God helps those who help themselves." If Christians paused to put this luggage through their biblical X-ray machine, such a blatant contradiction of biblical teaching would never make it onto their worldview plane in the first place (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:3-8).

We must recognize that we have

become a landfill into which the world throws its waste. We are polluted by non-Christian (or, more accurately, anti-Christian) worldviews and assumptions every day. We willingly suck on the exhaust pipe of the world and inhale its toxic fumes. The only antidote to subtle worldly erosion is to baptize our minds in Christ — and to do so daily. We must turn to God and to a biblical worldview that filters our outside world.

My sister is a witch; that is, she practices the religion of Wicca. But she is also the poster child for postmodernism. When I explained the gospel to her (and her need for a Savior), her only response was, “Well, that’s your truth, not mine. What’s true for you is not what’s true for me. There are many paths up the mountain; all religions ultimately lead to the same destination.” A doctrinal dissertation could be written on all of the assumptions embedded in such a statement, but for now it is good enough to recognize how my sister has been pulled into a worldview that attacks everything the holy, just and righteous God of the Bible stands for. “Truth” is no longer recognized to be objective and absolute but is thought to be personal and relative. We cannot know the Truth (so it is said), for there is no Truth (capital “T”) but only “truths” (plural). How offensive, then, is our Lord, who declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, emphasis added)!

Looking outside at the world and examining what the world has dumped into us is not enough. We ourselves suffer from a debilitating disease that infiltrates every fiber of our being; that disease is sin. As Jesus proclaimed, “Out of the heart

wickedness arises” (Matthew 15:19). We must also turn to God and to a biblical worldview that filters our inside world.

*“...we
must constantly
re-evaluate ourselves
to insure that we
remain faithful to
God.*”

Christians are called to think and evaluate. God charges the priests in the Old Testament that they should, “Teach my people the difference between the holy and the profane and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean” (Ezekiel 44:23). The priests of the Old Testament are not the pastors of today but the believers of today (1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6). We share the same calling to discern right from wrong, good from bad, holy from profane and clean from unclean. We are called not to believe every spirit but to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). We are charged that no one take us captive “through hollow and deceptive philosophy” (Colossians 2:8). The things of the world are hollow and deceptive philosophies, and we must constantly re-evaluate ourselves to insure that we remain faithful to God. How many of us would go days without a shower or without brushing our teeth? How many would go months without doing some form of housecleaning? Yet we pay little attention to our spiritual health and only a little more to our spiritual cleanliness. Our minds — as well as our heart, our soul and our strength — belong

to God and are to be dedicated to him (Mark 12:30-31). In order for us to remain faithful to God, it is incumbent upon us to become critical thinkers who set their treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:21), rather than upon the earth, and who fix their thoughts upon Christ and things above (Hebrews 3:1; 1 Peter 1:13).

Steps to becoming a critical thinker

1. Be aware. We cannot filter what we cannot see (physically, conceptually, etc.). Spiritual awareness is developed through daily reading of the Scriptures, daily prayer, daily meditation upon God and a commitment to a body of believers who preach the pure gospel (this means Sunday service as well as small groups and other fellowship opportunities). If you know what the truth looks like, you can better identify falsehood.

2. Be thoughtful. To quote the old adage — “Think before you speak!” Think about what it is you’re saying. Ask questions of yourself. Where did you hear it from? Is it accurate? Is it biblically correct? Is there anything wrong with such a notion? But it is more than that; you must think about thinking. You must examine those things that are not explicit but assumed and hidden. This is difficult and takes practice. We must place our entire self under God’s scrutiny. In Paul’s words, “Present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1-2).

3. Beware. Sin is a snare; a trap;

a lure that baits and hooks us until we are finally captured and plucked from our spiritual environment like a fish from its watery home.

The idol of entertainment looms large in our modern era. It is a multi-billion-dollar-a-year business and it shows little sign of slowing down. It incites in us a desire to “relax” and “have fun” because we “deserve” such luxuries. The Christian American home is nine parts entertainment to one part God (if that). Why is it so difficult to sit through a 30-minute sermon? Why can’t we just pray for one hour? Why do we live undisciplined lives that constantly waver when it comes to reading God’s word and applying it in our lives? The answer is simple: it’s not entertaining. This is how we have been conditioned; this is how we have grown up. For many children now, the TV has all but replaced family interaction and, indeed, the mother and the father. We must realize that when we limit the control entertainment has over us (radio, TV, movies, going out with friends, etc.), we will begin to find our joy in God more fully. Prayer will become — excuse the use of the term — “entertaining” and Bible reading will be fun. But as long as spiritual disciplines continue to compete with non-stop media action, the former will become dull and the latter will continue to distract us from the things above.

The idol of materialism is propagated through entertainment. We must be careful, for flyers, magazines, commercials, radio broadcasts and even a simple walk through the mall may very well stir our soul so that we desire worldly riches and worldly things. As long as this desire manifests itself and is not combated, we will be held back from worshiping Christ and seeing

ourselves through his eyes (Matthew 6:24). The term itself hides in wolves’ clothing and is much less offensive than the biblical term “lust.” For that is what materialism amounts to — unhealthy cravings and desires for an object that is not God.

The idol of self blankets America like the night sky. Few seem concerned about esteeming God; the great majority desire, rather, to focus on self-esteem. Destroying a human embryo is justified under the banner of “self right” or “self choice” with little if any regard for the choice of the fetus or the right of a conceived child. The words of a once popular song reflect American interest: “it’s my prerogative.” Under the barrage of media, co-workers, friends and family, we are continually told about those things we “deserve.” How rejected and excluded would the prophet Christ be today if he walked the streets of an American city proposing that true fulfillment comes when we place others first and seek to serve their needs before our own (John 13:5-14)?

4. Be Berean. The Apostle Paul came to Berea preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. As you would suspect, some did accept the message of Jesus Christ. But notice how they accepted: “They received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:10). Notice that they “examined the Scriptures” daily. Were the Bereans chastised for holding the great apostle accountable? Were they scolded for validating Paul’s words with Scripture? No; rather, the opposite, they were called “noble-minded.” Follow the reasoning: if the apostle Paul had someone validate his

words according to Scripture — and no one in this day and age is greater than the apostle Paul — then the logical conclusion is that we must validate everyone with God’s word. No one is too educated or too intelligent or too holy; no one is above being accountable to God’s righteous word; not the pastor, not a Bible scholar, not faithful Grandma. Do not fear checking the Scriptures before accepting any view. It is, after all, the “noble-minded” thing to do.

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Mysteries of the Kingdom

What about Now?

Part One
by Mark Clarke

The vast majority of references to the Kingdom of God in the Bible are referring to a literal, future kingdom to be established on earth. This is what was foretold by all the Prophets of Israel, and when Jesus proclaimed, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!” he had in mind that future reality. All of his listeners, who were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, understood what he meant by that phrase, so there was not much background explanation needed. They knew of the prophecies concerning a cataclysmic change in the world’s systems, at which time the dead would be raised, and the present evil age would be brought to an end. They knew of the coming of the Messiah who would rule the earth on God’s behalf and establish a perfect, righteous kingdom.

In contrast, many Christians think that God’s rule in their hearts now is the primary meaning of the term “Kingdom of God.” They often quote Luke 17:21, where Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you.” This is an unfortunately poor translation in the King James Version. The words for “within you” can also be translated “among you” or “in your midst” and are rendered as such in several other English versions of the Bible. In this passage Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees who were constantly

against everything he was doing, and whom he called children of the Devil. If he meant to say “the Kingdom is within you,” he would certainly not have said it to the Pharisees. He was actually referring to the fact that manifestations of the Kingdom were among them for all to see. He couldn’t have been suddenly changing the definition of the Kingdom, as it would contradict the many Scriptures that clearly present the Kingdom as a literal, future one – including the verses immediately following this passage. In that context, he describes the coming of the Son of Man in his day with obvious eschatological (relating to end-times) terms.

However, there are a few other verses which refer to the Kingdom of God in a way that seems to say that it is currently present in some way. When Christ cast out a demon in Matthew 12:28 (also in Luke 11:20), he declared that if a demon is cast out, “The Kingdom of God is come upon you.” Jesus instructed his disciples to heal the sick and say to them, “The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (Luke 10:9-11). Paul wrote in Romans 14:17 that “the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” He wrote in I Corinthians 4:20 that “the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.” In

Colossians 1:13 he wrote that God “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” How could these things be, if the Kingdom is *only* in the future?

One factor that helps us to understand is that the word “kingdom” can refer to the rulership and authority of the king, as well as the realm over which he reigns. God’s reign is seen in a limited way in this day and age, while in the future He will reign over all the earth. This does not change the fact that the primary meaning of “Kingdom of God” in the Bible is a literal future Kingdom on earth, however. What is referred to in those verses is a “foretaste” of the Kingdom which can be experienced now. Hebrews 6:4-5 refers to those who have “tasted of the heavenly gift...and the powers of the age to come.” The blessings of the Age to Come can be tasted, to an extent, in the midst of this present evil age. To understand how, we must consider the words of our Lord.

Jesus often spoke in parables, with the result that those who really wanted to understand would seek out the answer, while those who didn’t care would miss the point. In Luke 8:10, he told his disciples, “*Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that*

seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.” Many of the parables about the kingdom involved the image of a seed being planted and growing. The sower and the seed (in Matthew 13, Mark 4, and Luke 8) described the four kinds of ground on which the seeds fell. The seed, we are told, is “the Word” (Mark 4:14), or “the Word of God” (Luke 8:11), but not just “the Bible” in general; it is specifically “the Word of the Kingdom” (Matthew 13:19). This parable is the foundation of all the others, for Jesus said, “Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?” (Mark 4:13).

In other parables, Jesus described the nature of the Kingdom of God as being hidden, and growing in a way that is not seen for the most part. He compares it with wheat and tares, showing that it will continue to grow in the midst of this evil age, until the time of the harvest. He compares it with a mustard seed, and with leaven.

Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, *“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. ‘Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather up the*

tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.

He presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.

He spoke another parable to them, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.” All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world” (Matthew 13:24-35).

These parables present a slightly different view of the Kingdom than what is presented in the Old Testament prophecies. Yet Jesus confirmed the prophecies at other points. He did not deny that it would come with a cataclysmic event that would end this present evil age and usher in God’s judgment, and the resurrection of the faithful. He did not deny that the evil systems of this world would be overthrown and that he would rule the world from the throne of God in Jerusalem. Hebrews 2:8 says that God has put all things in subjection under his feet, but adds that “...now we see not yet all things put under him.” Because we don’t yet see it, some have doubted that he is truly God’s Messiah. But a day is coming when every eye shall see him and everyone shall recognize his authority. In the meantime, however, it is a hidden reality.

Christ’s presentation of the mysteries of the Kingdom did not involve a redefining of the Kingdom, but rather an added understanding of an interim period before the inauguration of the Age to Come. The parable of the nobleman going to a far country and returning (Luke 19) illustrates this concept clearly. Many of his other parables described the hidden nature of the Kingdom during that period of time, but did not teach that the literal understanding of the kingdom was to be replaced by this hidden “spiritual” kingdom.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid again; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:44-50).

The Hebrew Prophets described a coming Kingdom that would conquer and dominate the world. Yet Jesus spoke of it being hidden, and he spoke of the possibility of men rejecting it. The Kingdom at this time is in a seemingly small and insignificant form, a form that had not been foreseen. The power of the future Kingdom has intruded in the midst of this day and age, but the

future Kingdom in all its glory and world-changing power will still come to pass literally, just as the harvest comes at the end and separates the wheat from the tares. At that time there will be no resisting it, and it will completely overcome worldly systems.

Another factor that was a mystery was the necessity of the suffering and death of the king. There were prophecies of a suffering servant (for example, Isaiah 53) as well as those of the coming Messiah to judge and to rule. But many did not know how to reconcile the two images. Some even thought they were two different people. Part of the reason many Jews rejected Jesus' claim to be the Messiah was that instead of setting up the promised kingdom, he was crucified and died. Jesus preached for some time before he mentioned his suffering and death, and when he began to speak of it, his disciples did not understand. It was not until after his resurrection that he taught them why it was necessary for him to die. In the Book of Acts, the disciples preached concerning the Kingdom of God *and* the name of Jesus (Acts 8:12; 28:31). They emphasized that the same Jesus who was crucified is also Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). But even then the full understanding of what his death accomplished was not spelled out in detail until Paul wrote about it in his epistles.

Another of the mysteries of the kingdom which Paul wrote about is described in Ephesians: that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs and of the same body as Israel, and partake of the promises made to Israel. The mystery that Paul speaks of in Ephesians is not a new gospel that replaces the promises of God made to Israel, but rather the revelation that all people, Jew and

Gentile alike, may partake of those promises. Paul had written about it before "in few words" (Ephesians 3:3), but elaborates more fully about it in Ephesians. God promised an inheritance first to Abraham, and later to the nation of Israel, and that is the basis of the Kingdom of God. The same promises have now been offered to Gentiles as well. Ephesians chapter 1 mentions "inheritance" three times (verses 11, 14, and 18). Chapter 2 speaks of how the Gentiles were once aliens, and "strangers from the covenants of promise." But now they are brought together with the Jews, with no more separation.

The mystery of the Gentiles being fellow heirs and of the same body with the Jews was just one of a number of mysteries which added to, but did not replace, the understanding of the Kingdom of God that the Jews had at that time. Jesus spoke of the "mysteries" (plural) of the Kingdom, and Paul described the ministers of Christ as "stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Corinthians 4:1). In addition to proclaiming that the Kingdom foretold by the Prophets was at hand and that he was the promised Messiah, Jesus taught about some aspects of the Kingdom that were not previously understood. Among them were the necessity of the suffering and death of the Messiah, the fact that there would be an intervening period of time before Christ took up his throne, the seed form of the kingdom during that time, and the fact that not only Jews but "all nations" (Matthew 28:19-20) would have the opportunity to hear the Gospel and be saved. Paul added further details about the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ, and how Jews and Gentiles could be members of that Body and joint heirs. He also added more

details about what Christ's death and resurrection had accomplished, and how we were no longer under the Old Covenant. But it was all within the context of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God.

So rather than immediately setting up his Kingdom, Jesus suffered and died as the payment for sins so that we could gain entrance to that Kingdom. In addition, he began the "seed" phase of the Kingdom during which its influence would be experienced in a limited way, but would not yet dominate the world. During this time all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, can be part of the Body of Christ, and taste of the Kingdom, in addition to having the hope of fully experiencing it when it comes to pass at the end of this age. God is waiting patiently before He pours out His final judgment, so that as many people as possible have a chance to receive His gift of grace (II Peter 3:9). The Church represents the Kingdom to the world, and we are called ambassadors of Christ. God's rule in our hearts is a temporary reality, until such time as His Son begins to rule literally on earth. We are here to provide advance proclamation of the coming Kingdom, as well as demonstrating God's nature to the world. This includes the good news of what blessings are in store for those who believe, as well as a warning of judgment for those who don't. That is what the current Church period is all about. But it must always be understood within the context of the overall message about God's coming Kingdom.

You can find Mark's website, at www.godskingdomfirst.net

Thoughts From 2 & 3 John and Jude

by Pastor Steve Taylor

I once shared a message from 2 John, entitled, "A Letter To A Lady & Her Kids." John addresses us, the church, as "the chosen lady" and each individual member as "her children". So, we are the "lady and her kids".

I love these letters from the Apostle John - the Gospel of John, and 1,2 and 3 John. The last letters he is writing as an elderly man so he has a great deal of accumulated wisdom and experience to share from. He was the closest of "the inner circle" to Jesus so he knew Jesus personally better than anyone on earth. He is also the only Apostle not to die a martyr's death. Legend has it that they attempted to boil him in oil but he was miraculously spared (that's only a legend so we can't verify it to be true). He was banished to an obscure island called Patmos and there he had an amazing vision from the Lord. It's recorded for us today as the Book of Revelation.

Now, it is a good thing to sit down and give our undivided attention to a wise elderly man. The wisdom and experience of years gives the elderly a vantage point that is desperately needed by those younger. So, as we sit down to listen to this wise elderly man, what does he have to say?

"I was very glad to find some of

your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father." (2 John 4)

Elderly people are known to repeat themselves: "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth." (3 John 4)

John's great joy, as an elderly man, was to hear reports of those who were "walking in the truth."

There is a vast difference between KNOWING the truth and WALKING in it. Knowing the truth qualifies you to be a wise philosopher. Walking in the truth qualifies you as an authentic disciple of Jesus. Knowing the truth is an important first step, but we don't truly KNOW the truth until we walk in it.

My wife and I are planning a Caribbean cruise for an upcoming anniversary. We've been learning the details of our itinerary, the ship, directions to the port, etc. All of that information is important to our plans but none of it will be at all helpful if we don't actually pack our bags, load them in the car, and leave for the ship's port on a particular date. It's all information that is designed to factor in to our taking action; namely, taking the trip.

The trip to the Kingdom of God is no different. I think some people imagine that on resurrection day

they will stand before the Lord and be given an informational quiz about the Bible. A passing grade grants you entrance while a failing grade ... well, you get the idea. And yet nowhere in the Bible do we get the idea that a premium is placed on what we know alone, but rather what we do with what we know. You see, truth is designed to transform.

Elderly John was deeply concerned about knowing and walking in the truth. He was deeply disturbed about those who were distorting the truth about Jesus, as we noted yesterday (1 John 4:2,3). The same concern is voiced in 2 John 7-11. John knew that for truth to transform it had to be "the real" truth!

Our Lord's great joy is the same as John's - His followers; His children, walking in the truth. The challenge is to make sure that what we really know is "the truth", and that we put it in to action in our lives. May today be a great day of "walking".

Did you ever start out to write someone a letter and then change your whole purpose in writing? I know I have. In fact, I've often started to write something for these

daily devotionals and then felt led to change and go an entirely different direction. Sometimes there is something urgent that takes precedent over our original purpose.

Such as it was when a man named Jude sat down to write a short letter to a band of believers:

"while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." (Jude 3)

Jude's purpose changed from reminding and encouraging believers of their common salvation to appealing to them to defend it. Apparently some crisis became evident that necessitated this change. The faith was under attack and it was time to man the battle stations!

I can't help but believe that we live in similar times. The Christian faith is under greater attack now than I have ever seen before. I recently spent some time in a large chain bookstore and was browsing the religious book section. I was struck by the number of books that condemned the Christian faith; books with captions that state such things as, "why you need to know that everything you've ever believed about the Christian faith is wrong".

It's a reasonable question to ask: How do I "contend earnestly for the faith" in these times when the faith is under intense attack? First of all, don't give up an inch of ground in the territory of established truth. Despite the attacks, the Bible is still the "God-breathed" word of God. God

is still the Creator God; Jesus is still His sinless created Son; the Kingdom of God is still going to be established on earth when Jesus returns.

Don't give in to despair and unbelief. It's easy to become discouraged and lose faith when the faith is under attack. Knowing what was ahead, Jesus asked the question, "when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Belief in the original message will be rare as this age draws to a close, but there will be unprecedented opportunities for those who hold true to it. Daniel of the Old Testament spoke cryptically of this in Daniel 11:33 - "Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many". The faithful people of God ("those who have insight") will assist many in understanding God's truth before this age ends and gives way to the coming Kingdom of God.

We live in an age when the very foundation of our beliefs are under attack. It is urgent that we truly know what we believe ... that we defend it ... that we draw close to others who also hold to the faith ... that we live a winsome and genuine lifestyle. And there's one other thing: keep looking for the return of Jesus, because He said there would be times such as these before He would come back. 🍷

The Wooden Bowl

Submitted by Jim Jannereth

Most people know that Matthew 7:12 says, whatever you want people to do to you, that's what you do to them. Here is a story that brings this out very well.

A frail old man went to live with his son, daughter-in-law, and four-year old grandson. The old man's hands trembled, his eyesight was blurred, and his step faltered. The family ate together at the table.

But the elderly grandfather's shaky hands and failing sight made eating difficult. Peas rolled off his spoon onto the floor. When he grasped the glass, milk spilled on the tablecloth.

The son and daughter-in-law became irritated. "We must do something about father," said the son. "I've had enough of his spilled milk, noisy eating, and food on the floor."

So the husband and wife set a small table in the corner. There, Grandfather ate alone while the rest of the family enjoyed dinner. Since Grandfather had broken a dish or two, his food was served in a wooden bowl!

When the family glanced in Grandfather's direction, sometimes he had a tear in his eye as he sat alone. Still, the only words the couple had for him were sharp admonitions when he dropped a fork or spilled food.

The four-year-old watched it all in silence. One evening before supper, the father noticed his son playing with wood scraps on the floor. He asked the child sweetly, "What are you making?"

Just as sweetly, the boy responded, "Oh, I am making a little bowl for you and Mama to eat your food in when I grow up."

The words so struck the parents so that they were speechless. Then tears formed in their eyes. Though no word was spoken, both knew what must be done.

That evening the husband took Grandfather's hand and gently led him back to the family table. For the remainder of his days he ate every meal with the family. And for some reason, neither husband nor wife seemed to care any longer when a fork was dropped, milk spilled, or the tablecloth soiled. 🍷

And So The Atheist

by Chuck Jones

As I listened to the radio, some days ago, I was confronted by a book that had a difficult name. This book was written by Christopher Eric Hitchens, an atheist, and bears the title God Is Not Great. How Religion Spoils Everything. When I heard the title, I was compelled to listen to the interview.

As I think about what this man has written (and others before him) about the nasty side of religion, I have to agree that there indeed is a nasty, perhaps even evil, side to religion. From this point, I wonder how much Mr. Hitchens would agree with Jesus. Remember that Jesus didn't have too much good to say about the religious establishment of his time. In fact they were the ones that wanted Jesus dead! I for one don't think that Jesus was interested in "religion" as much as he was about how people lived in response to something bigger than they are, namely Jehovah.

My initial thought is that Mr. Hitchens is really arguing toward the same point, but doesn't want to acknowledge the same end. His arguments are not really compelling, except to those who agree with him. Here is some of what he has written:

We do not believe in heaven or hell, yet no statistic will ever find that without these blandishments and threats we commit more crimes of greed or violence than the faithful. (In fact, if a proper statistical inquiry could ever be made, I am sure the evidence would be the other way.) In the established

religious community there is not great difference between them and the world. That would make most anyone a skeptic. Those who follow Jesus will be different. Here is where we can find the real difference between someone who claims to be religious and someone who is following Christ.

We speculate that it is at least possible that, once people accepted the fact of their short and struggling lives, they might behave better toward each other and not worse. We believe with certainty that an ethical life can be lived without religion. I can agree with the last half of this; a person can live a good righteous (ethical) life without religion. Here, I mean the system of moral codes that religious leaders must force upon others out of a need of control. Living as Jesus did is not religious, because 'religious' has taken on the meaning of 'self-righteous'.

The first half of that statement I can't agree with. When flesh driven people realize that time and resources are short, selfishness comes to the foreground. It becomes a "get what you can get while the gett'en is good" mentality (just look at any war). Scarcity and hunger don't make people better without a good reason, or hope, beyond the current situation.

Another point that can be raised is a rather harsh reality concerning religious leaders: *And we know for a fact that the corollary holds true—that religion has caused innumerable people not just to conduct themselves no better than*

others, but to award themselves permission to behave in ways that would make a brothel-keeper or an ethnic cleanser raise an eyebrow. This is indeed true. There is no doubt about this statement. However, it is also true that Jesus never gave permission, commission or command to act in this way. What Mr Hitchens has said can be leveled at 'religions' but not at Jesus. In fact, he may not be far from the kingdom of God. He relates that he dislikes some of the same things God dislikes.

Sacrifices and ceremonies are abhorrent to us, as are relics and the worship of any images or objects (even including objects in the form of one of man's most useful innovations: the bound book).

Here is what God said to His people because they thought evil was good and good evil, *"I hate, I despise your feast days, And I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, Nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, For I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, And righteousness like a mighty stream"* (Amos 5:21-24). So I would think that Mr. Hitchens is on the same page as God is on with this.

He continues, *I would not prohibit it [faith] even if I thought I could. Very generous of me, you may say. But will the religious grant me the same indulgence? I ask because there is a real and serious difference between me and my religious friends, and the real and serious friends are sufficiently honest to admit it. I would be quite content to go to their children's bar mitzvah, to marvel at their Gothic*

Letters

cathedrals, to "respect" their belief that the Koran was dictated, though exclusively in Arabic, to an illiterate merchant, or to interest myself in Wicca and Hindu and Jain consolations. And as it happens, I will continue to do this without insisting on the polite reciprocal condition — which is that they in turn leave me alone. But this, religion is ultimately incapable of doing. As I write these words, and as you read them, people of faith are in their different ways planning your and my destruction, and the destruction of all the hard-won human attainments that I have touched upon.

To this lengthy quote I will say that we should be learning how not to be condemning by being welcoming, engaging, and understanding. It does not harm one if they try to understand someone who has different beliefs. Understanding is not agreement, but in understanding there may be less of a disagreement and certainly far less antagonism.

We can grant the atheist the same indulgence of tolerance. We are here to shine as lights, not bludgeon as clubs. We don't need to force people to believe as we do. That's what religious people feel a need to do. The arguments, debates, fights, and wars of the past that can be attributed to religious people were meant for one thing, control. That isn't what Jesus is about. We, too, can follow his example and point the way, but we can't force people to take the narrow road.

Those who don't want any part of what God has in store don't need to be forced into accepting it. They should however be given the opportunity to make an informed decision. That, any reasonable person would agree with. 🍷

Hi Chuck,

Just wanted to let you know how much we enjoy getting Wisdom & Power and all the interesting articles in it. Especially enjoyed Angie Moore's articles and her new book as she is a sister to our daughter-in-law Teresa.

We are sending you a donation to help with postage, especially since it went up again. Also, we get the magazines you send for the Pleasant Hill church of God and take them up to church for others to enjoy.

Thanks so much
In Christian Love
David and Pegge Stine

Editors note: We have the conclusion of Angela's efforts of the essay contest in this issue. I'm glad we're in ministry together too.

Dear Chuck,

I want to tell you I really enjoy reading the magazine, "Wisdom & Power" every time I get it. The problem is I don't always get it. You have my old address. Please change my address. I would like to continue receiving the magazine.

By the way, Our Minnesota Conference had Jamie Engelbert speak and spend time with us. Everyone really enjoyed getting to know him. He told me that you are trying to get something started in the San Diego area. I really hopes it works out. You will be in our prayers for this.

Change my address,
Robert Bormes

We are members of the former Harlingen TX Church of God. We enjoy the Wisdom & Power. We don't have a church here anymore. We want to keep getting your book and also your new book Possessing The Promises, enclosed (donation) and our new mailing address. We sold our home of 37 years and moved into a retirement center.

Thanks
Dean Williams

Editors note: I'm always glad when change of addresses are sent in. That helps to insure that delivery is not interrupted, and it helps hold down mailing costs. When you move let us know.

Dear Chuck,

I would like to order and put on the mailing list my granddaughter and her husband who is in the Air Force. I am sending a donation to help with expenses.

Thank you,
William Cramer

Dear Wisdom & Power,

Mr. Partain asks, cleverly, if anyone "ever saw" the devil. Has anyone "seen" God?

This smacks of the clever question of the Scribes and Pharisees. Remember the Jewish hierarchy? In John's Gospel they are children of their father, "the devil".

Sincerely,
Brian J. Atra, PhD

Concerning Eternal Torment

by Norman J. McLeod

Editors note: This article was written in the 1950's. The exact date wasn't known. This article was submitted by the authors son, Duncan.

Christianity is a religion of love. So closely associated with love is God, that the Apostle John went so far as to say, "God is love." (1 John 4:8) In the same discussion he says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear." (1 John 4:18).

In spite of that fact, a major part of nominal Christians are kept within the folds of the church by fear of the eternal torment that awaits them in a region that they and their teachers call hell. Since Christianity is a religion of love and not of fear, let us note that the doctrine of eternal torment is not found in the Bible, but has been read into it by people who had a purpose to gain by keeping people in fear and ignorance.

Our purpose is to examine some of the Bible texts that are used to teach a false concept of eternal torment.

The Apostle Peter said that many people think the Lord is so slow about returning that he is not coming at all. But, he goes on to say that Christ will come. When he comes, that the "heavens shall pass

away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works therein shall be burned up," (2 Pet. 3:10).

If the heavens are going to pass away, what about those people who have, according to popular teaching, gone to heaven? Further, Peter says that we should desire the coming of that day "of God"; wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat!" If that were to be taken literally, we would be strange people indeed who desired such a thing, but if we examine the text more carefully and relate it to other scriptures, we see he's talking about the turmoil that the world shall be in when Jesus comes. The social-political order which we know is going to pass away with a great noise of war and strife. "Nevertheless we, according to his promise look for a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness," (2 Pet.3:13). A new social and political order is going to be brought in by Christ's coming.

Malachi speaking of the same time says, "For, behold, the days cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it

shall leave them neither root nor branch." (Mal. 4:1).

Several things about this text show that eternal torment is not meant: If stubble is put into a hot oven, it will be burned up very quickly. There certainly is nothing eternal about that. Even if we assume he is talking about a literal fire, it certainly does not teach eternal torment.

Jesus was speaking about his second coming to his disciples and he gave the picture of the same kind of thing. He said that all nations are going to be gathered before him, and that he is going to divide the good from the bad just as a shepherd does the sheep from the goats. He is going to say to those on his left, those who have not done his will, "Depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41) Notice that the time is the same in each one of the scriptures when the Lord returns. Notice that fire is the instrument mentioned in each one. But none of these texts say that the wicked are going to burn throughout eternity. ☹

Why Philemon?

Brian J. Atra, Ph.D.

Philemon, twenty-five verses in length, is the most brief of Paul's letters and one of the shortest books in the entire Bible. Sadly, it is often neglected. For the great Pauline masterpieces, seminary students are usually directed to Romans or perhaps 1 and 2 Corinthians. Martin Luther loved Galatians. Ephesians and Colossians instruct the reader on the nature of Christ and his headship of the Church. 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus provide practical administrative guidelines. 1 and 2 Thessalonians offer eschatology, the latter tinged with apocalyptic. Philippians resonates with joy.

Together, all of these dwarf tiny Philemon. Philemon's entirety is about the length of one of the chapters of the better known epistles. And Philemon generally lacks a famous quotation, like, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," or, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me," or, "We walk by faith, not by sight."

Philemon displays neither the heat and fire of Galatians, nor the systematic presentation of Romans, nor the Pauline autobiography of 2 Corinthians or Philippians. It is highly personal, but, except for Paul, the letter deals with folks we know almost nothing about. But these folks were known by God. That is a lesson in itself. Even the begats are not without merit.

Yet, two other things should be kept in mind. First, God gave us Philemon. Even those scholars who are skeptical about works like 2 Thessalonians or 2 Timothy or even Ephesians are nearly unanimous in attributing Philemon to Paul, God's apostle. That brings us to the second point: Philemon made the canon. It was accepted into the New Testament when other books, like the Gospel of Peter and the Gospel

of Thomas, were rejected. God gave us Philemon and then superintended its canonical inclusion. So we may ask, "Why Philemon?"

What is Philemon about? What is its appeal? What is its enduring value? How does it add to the bigger picture of the New Testament? And how does it do so in so few words?

Actually, Philemon is the picture-perfect epistle of soteriology. Soteriology is the study of, and the doctrines pertaining to, salvation. Salvation is multi-faceted. Philemon is replete with pictures, examples, and statements concerning aspects of salvation. As the preacher looks to preach on salvation, he would do well to consider this marvelous book. As the teacher seeks illustrations of salvation in action, Philemon should again be consulted. And neither person would have to read very long!

Briefly, here is the story: Onesimus is a runaway slave, a fugitive. He belonged to a master, Philemon. Having defrauded that master, Onesimus escaped to Rome. Why not? Rome was big, the imperial capital, a city where anonymity might be maintained. But God sees what man does not, and He finds Onesimus, in jail with the Apostle Paul!

Philemon, the master, had been converted through Paul's ministry. So Paul intervenes, interceding on behalf of Onesimus, writing to Philemon and asking that Onesimus be set free, not to live as some

wayward sinner but restored, as a useful assistant in Paul's ministry. How ironic, of course, that the Greek name Onesimus means "useful." In sin, without God's grace, Onesimus was anything but useful. Bathed in divine forgiveness, he is useful for the sake of the Gospel.

Put yourself in Philemon's position for a moment. You receive a letter from the Apostle to the Gentiles. Paul says he has met up with the imprisoned Onesimus. Yes! Oh, the inescapable judgment of God! But there is more. God's grace is greater, deeper.. And Paul himself, the apostle under whom you found Christ, is appealing for the release of Onesimus to assist in apostolic ministry.

Let's put the story into an even sharper focus. This letter is among Paul's prison epistles, likely originating from the very early 60s. By this time Paul had served the Risen Christ for a quarter of a century. He had preached, and taught, and written several epistles. He had also been beaten, stoned, left for dead, and deprived of the basic needs of life. This same Paul is now yet again jailed.

Salvation, broadly speaking, is the joining together of a Holy God with sinful beings. It is no small task, especially when one contrasts God's perfection with humankind's evil. Perhaps a single stanza from the hymn "At Calvary" said it best: "Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan. Oh, the grace that brought it down to man. Oh, the mighty gulf

than God did span. At Calvary." God, through Christ, spanned that incalculable gulf.

Salvation has many aspects: justice, debt, grace, mercy, substitution, forgiveness, reconciliation, regeneration, restoration, dedication, service, deliverance, and much more. Read Philemon. Then, re-read Philemon, with pen in hand and note pad nearby. As you make your way through the brief epistle, note verses where these aspects of salvation are displayed. You will find them all and perhaps several more. Keep reading Philemon.

In the height of various evangelical scandals of the late 1980s, a seminary professor was asked sincerely: "Why does God use sinful people?" His response was, "Because it's the only kind He has." So it was with Onesimus: thief, runaway, fugitive from law and God.

What do we learn from this? Love the runaway, the fugitive. God may just have a very special purpose for his life. Moses was one. Jonah was another. Who might be next?

And were we not all fugitives, every one turning aside to his own way? Is there an element of "Onesimus" in each of us? God can find us. Is there an "Onesimus" in our own lives, a person, or any other means of advancing the Gospel, that we can dedicate to God, that we can share with a fellow laborer? While writing, I now feel a bit like Paul. I know you will do even more than asked!

Did Philemon honor Paul's request? The canonization of the epistle suggests he did. Why Philemon? God knows we need its lessons, its truth. So, read Philemon. And live it. ☺

A Little Humor

After the dedication of his baby brother in church, Jason sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car.

His father asked him three times what was wrong.

Finally, the boy replied, "That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I want to stay with you guys."

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

During training exercises, the lieutenant who was driving down a muddy back road encountered another car stuck in the mud with a red-faced colonel at the wheel "Your jeep stuck, sir?" asked the lieutenant as he pulled alongside. "Nope," replied the colonel, coming over and handing him the keys, "yours is."

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

Having just moved into his new office, a pompous, new colonel was sitting at his desk when an airman knocked on the door. Conscious of his new position, the colonel quickly picked up the phone, told the airman to enter, then said into the phone, "Yes, General, I'll be seeing him this afternoon and I'll pass along your message. In the meantime, thank you for your good wishes, sir." Feeling as though he had sufficiently impressed the young enlisted man, he asked, "What do you want?"

"Nothing important, sir," the airman replied, "I'm just here to hook up your telephone."

Officer: "Soldier, do you have change for a dollar?"

Soldier: "Sure, buddy."

Officer: "That's no way to address an officer! Now let's try it again!"

"Soldier, Do you have change for a dollar?"

Soldier: "No, SIR!"

☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

Results of damage testing

It seems the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has a unique device for testing the strength of windshields on airplanes. The device is a gun that launches a dead chicken at a plane's windshield at approximately the speed the plane flies.

The theory is that if the windshield doesn't crack from the carcass impact, it'll survive a real collision with a bird during flight. It seems the British were very interested in this and wanted to test a windshield on a brand new, speedy locomotive they're developing.

They borrowed the FAA's chicken launcher, loaded the chicken and fired. The ballistic chicken shattered the windshield, went through the engineer's chair, broke an instrument panel and embedded itself in the back wall of the engine cab. The British were stunned and asked the FAA to recheck the test to see if everything was done correctly.

The FAA reviewed the test thoroughly and had one recommendation: "Use a thawed chicken."

Well Done Good and Faithful Servant

by Pastor Dave Hixon

How we long to hear those words... The parable of the talents is probably one of the best known parables that Jesus uttered. The parable in Matthew 25 speaks of servants that were given talents (a talent was worth more than a thousand dollars) by their master. As we read through the parable, we see the first servant who was given five talents immediately went out and “put his talents to work” and gained five more. The second servant was given two talents and gained two more. The third was afraid and buried his talent in the ground for safe keeping.

There are many truths to be gleaned from this short parable in Matthew. There are several points that Jesus is trying to make that should hit us square between the eyes. What was Jesus trying to tell us with this parable? What point was he trying to make? Let’s look closer at this parable and apply it to our own lives.

These “talents” could represent many things to us. We could say a “talent” could mean the gifts that God has given us, or better yet, entrusted us with. Every one of you who reads these words has a “talent”. I know many of you would say, “But I don’t really have a talent. I am just a normal person. There are many that do things better than I do.” Have you ever said that?

Well God has given each of you a talent to use to the best of your ability to glorify Him. You don’t have to be a great speaker! You don’t have to play the piano like Beethoven! God has given you talents. Are you maybe a good listener? Use that gift to glorify God! Are you perhaps a good cook? Use it to glorify God! God’s gifts aren’t necessarily great in the world’s eyes, but they are great to Him. Maybe you have the gift of a simple carpenter? Use what He has given you.

What if we looked at the parable this way. A “talent” was something VERY precious, more precious than money. What if the “talent” was understanding the truth of God’s word? How are we doing with that? Are we like the two wise servants who multiplied the talent? Are we helping many more to see the truth of God’s word? Or are we the “wicked, lazy servant” that buried his talent in the ground? Isn’t that what we do when we hide or not share God’s truth? We bury it in the sand. Are we out sharing the Gospel of the Kingdom with anyone and everyone? Or are we too afraid?

You see it is much easier to just bury it in the ground, but we need to read the rest of the parable to see the full understanding. In verse 28 we finish the parable, “*Take the talent from him and give it to the*

one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” He is called a worthless servant. Spreading God’s truths is hard work. But if we are just willing to get up and go about His business, He will richly bless us.

People, we have been blessed more than all men. We have been given the keys to the Kingdom of God. How grateful should we be? How much love should we show and share? But you know there is something about a key.... YOU still have to turn it to make it work. If we will just put forth the effort and not bury our “talent” in the ground, then when Christ returns in all His glory, we can indeed hear those words we long to hear, “Well done good and faithful servant, come and share in your master’s happiness”.

Remember if your talent is buried, it may be time to get the shovel and dig it up and put it to use. Before it is too late. 🍷

Essay Contest Winners

“What The Kingdom Means To Me”

As many may be aware of Angela Hays Moore initiated an essay contest last fall. Here are the winning essays from each category that were received.

As you read them, you may be inspired to enter next year’s contest. Angela said: “Our whole intent and purpose in hosting such a contest, was to bring awareness to our churches, across the United States and parts of Canada, back to the Kingdom of God! We wanted to see adults and children alike, renew their passion and excitement in studying their bibles and discussing and learning more about our hope in the return of Jesus Christ to the earth, to establish His Father's Kingdom!

“Let us not grow weary in teaching our young ones and youth about the Kingdom of God! I, personally believe, it is never too early to start to impart these beautiful, Scriptural truths to our little ones. It is our duty and responsibility to do so!

Congratulate the winners with us as we thank them for their participation in this contest and a job well done! May we all be ready with an answer to explain to others what the Kingdom of God means to us! A wonderful exercise for one and all!

“May we all be ready with an

answer to explain to others what the Kingdom of God means to US! A wonderful exercise for one and all!”

Caleb Brown, age 6 ½, going into the 1st grade in the fall, 2007 from Timberland COG, South Bend, IN!

I would like the kingdom when it comes because it is fun and I love God and Jesus. And I like the Bible and I like the angels.

Sabrina Brown, age 8 1/2 going into the 3rd grade in the fall, 2007 from Timberland COG, South Bend, IN!

I know that in the kingdom the angels are going to blow the trumpet so that everyone who is dead comes alive again. I can’t wait because the person who you loved very much will come alive. And then you would be so happy.

My favorite thing about the kingdom is that there will be no more crying, no one will get hurt, and there will be beautiful flowers and the people won’t be mad or bad anymore. There will be no bad guys. No one will die again. Everyone will be happy. We won’t

need food.

Jesus died on the cross for our sins so that we can stay in the kingdom forever. The most happy thing about the kingdom is that Jesus can come down and we get to see him.

Joint entry by **Cayce Ballard**, 7th grade, and **Calle Walters**, 6th grade, from the Guthrie Grove Church in Pelzer, SC.

What the Kingdom of God means to us!

We’ve learned about the kingdom of God since we were little girls from our Sunday School classes, our families, our friends, and our youth group. We learned a lot at Summer camp when we studied the book of Revelation and the description of the Holy City. It means a lot to us and to all of our family. When we are in the kingdom of God, every person can lay down with the lions and no one would ever get hurt. It also means that the people who we love and are deceased are going to be with us again. We can talk to all the people that wrote the Bible. (We would like to ask Moses if Ramses was the Pharaoh that he had to deal with when he left Egypt.) It’s going to

be awesome to walk on the street of gold with God and Jesus as our light in the New Jerusalem.

Revelation has always been our favorite book. It teaches what is going to happen before and during the kingdom. It also teaches us to prepare for Jesus' coming like a thief in the middle of the night. We can't wait to see him coming down from heaven! We can't wait to see God's wonderful face and look at the face of Jesus! This is why we Love the Kingdom of God! This is what the Kingdom of God means to us.

Nelda Harper, adult category, from the Happywoods Church of God in Hammond, LA

What the Kingdom of God Means to Me

What does the Kingdom of God mean to me? Let me begin to tell you by sharing the story of my spiritual journey.

I was born and lived my early years east of Hammond, Louisiana. The First Christian Church in Hammond ran a bus in the countryside to pick up children and adults to bring them to church services. I began going when I was about four years old and I loved it. I must admit that part of it was having somewhere to go. My daddy who never attended church used to hug me and call me his "Sunday School girl" and I enjoyed pleasing him.

When I was about 8 years old, we moved to the Happywoods community. That is where the real Christian walk for me began. I attribute the Sunday School teachings, the Youth Berean classes and Church services for giving me the foundation of my spiritual

growth. Many of the folks who nurtured and inspired me are long deceased, but their memories live in my heart. The pastors I vividly remember for various reasons are Jim Mattison, Timothy Pearson (who baptized me when I was eleven), Harry Goekler and Vernis Wolfe. I recall my very first Sunday School teacher, Esther Bottolfs as being such a kind, patient and lovely lady who taught me the Bible stories. Warren landry taught me in the next level of my schooling and impressed upon me the importance of tithing and worship. Eva Bottolfs taught Berean and Sunday School classes and I learned about the doctrines of the Church of God and the Kingdom of God. There are also those who were not my teachers, but influenced my life in some manner. Those who immediately come to mind are Ellen Anthon, Anna Mae Bollin, Mable Bottolfs, and Etta Bankston. I have now been a member of the Church of God for approximately 59 years.

I love the life that God has given me and awakening to a new day is a blessing and joy for me. My Type A personality inspires me to arise and take advantage of the time allotted. *This is the day that the Lord hath made, rejoice and be glad in it.* However, a zest for life does not make one immune to the pains and heartaches of this mortal life. I sometimes grieve the loss of loved ones and friends, suffer illnesses and emotional stresses, if not for personal reasons, in sharing the ills and heartaches of those around me. But, a firm foundation and relationship with the Heavenly Father gives me the strength to endure whatever this life brings. But there's more.....

The Kingdom of God means everything about my now and

everything about my future. First of all, it is a gift to me. Jesus Christ paid the price when He gave his life so that I may be forgiven my sins and have the opportunity for eternal life in the Kingdom of God. It means the second coming of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His Kingdom and a new heaven and a new earth. Second, it means hope. There is hope of something so much greater and better than this life that I cannot begin to imagine. The treasures I have now are meaningless and temporary. The treasures of the Kingdom of God are forever. There will be no more sorrow, no more deaths, no more sicknesses, no more starving and dying, helpless children. No more wars, only love and peace will prevail.

I once dreamed of the Kingdom and what seemed outstanding in the dream was the wonderful climate. It was not cold and it was not warm, it was an amazing crisp, perfect feeling. Why I would dream of the climate, I do not know. But just knowing what the Scriptures tell me about the coming Kingdom is enough to satisfy. I do not know if I'll be alive to witness Christ's return or will rise from the grave, but it doesn't matter. Just so I will be chosen to enter the Kingdom of God. Come, Lord Jesus. 🍀



Cascade Bible Fellowship

Bible Study

Ephesians 5:1- 33

by William Wachtel

5:1. "Imitators. "Act the way God acts--showing love, mercy, and forgiveness. Children are supposed to follow the example of their parents. In this case, God is the Parent whose example is to be followed and emulated.

Verse 2. Now Christ is added for our further example. His life and death, his sacrifice of himself, provide the most amazing example of love that could be imagined! He asks us to "take up the cross daily"--i. e. ,live sacrificially for the benefit of others.

Verses 3-7. "God's holy people. "The sins detailed in this paragraph are diametrically opposed to the conduct God expects of His saints. For those sins His wrath is about to fall on disobedient humankind. In another letter Paul describes such people as belonging to the night and the darkness, while God's people are "sons of the light and . . . of the day" (1 Thess. 5:4,5). God's sons are not appointed "to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 9).

Verses 8,9. Paul uses the same theme of darkness versus light here. John's Gospel and first epistle make the same contrast.

Verse 10. "Find out what pleases

the Lord. "We can learn what pleases Him by examining the Scriptures and by communing with Him in prayer. Paul's words here imply that we are to go on to do what we discover to be pleasing to God!

Verses 11-14. The television, motion pictures, and other media today delight in mentioning, describing in detail, and even picturing the wicked and immoral things that go on--formerly "behind closed doors"--but now often out in the open and without shame! Christians need to make every effort to avoid seeing and hearing these shameless reports and descriptions, if we would keep our minds and hearts pure.

"Wake up, O sleeper. "It is thought that these lines represent an early Christian hymn. The call is being made to those who are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1), that they may wake up to their condition, repent, and rise to walk a new life with Christ (Rom. 6:1-4).

Verse 15. "Be very careful. "The Christian walk requires carefulness, not negligence or thoughtlessness. Spirituality does not come automatically or unsought. We must plan to grow spiritually and take definite steps to carry out the plan.

Otherwise, little or nothing will happen to bring us into greater conformity with the image of Christ! We will just drift along, as most professing Christians do, showing in our lives little difference from the way people of the world live. God wants us to be wise, "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16). This godly wisdom is not the same as the "wisdom of the world" (1 Cor. 1:20,21).

Verse 16. "Making the most of every opportunity. "Each of us has the same amount of time--24 hours a day. We can decide just how we will use that time. Most of us waste a lot of it! Some of the time spent simply in amusing ourselves can better be spent in studying Scripture, praying, witnessing to or helping others, and various positive activities!"The days are evil. "Scripture speaks of this "present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). In contrast to the "age to come" (Mark 10:30), the present age is evil indeed! We need to do everything possible to bring good out of evil.

Verse 17. "Understand what the Lord's will is. "Romans 12:1,2 provides a helpful formula for learning how to test and approve what God's will is. Knowing the Scriptures can make us "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. 3:14-16) and

give us vital information for discerning what God's will is in the various circumstances of our life, as well as providing direction in how to carry out His will in our own personal experience.

Verse 18. "Be filled with the Spirit. "When the disciples were filled with the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, some accused them of being drunk, with "too much wine" (Acts 2:13). This suggests that the experience of the Spirit produces excitement and enthusiasm (in a good sense), in comparison--yet contrast--to the erratic enthusiasm of drunkenness. Certainly, the action of the Spirit--"the functional presence of God" (Anthony Buzzard)--does not render a person to be listless, apathetic, or indifferent. The examples given in Scripture indicate just the opposite effect!

Verses 19,20. The joy of music has always been a part of Christianity. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22), and those who walk in the Spirit find themselves enjoying and producing the music of God. Too much involvement with the music of the world, however, suggests that one is not living consistently in the realm of the Spirit of God. The rhythms of worldly music, as well as the words that often accompany it, are designed to stimulate carnality rather than spirituality.

"Always giving thanks. . . for everything. "Even in the Philippian prison, Paul and Silas found themselves praising God at midnight!(Acts 16:22-25)Some Christians have learned to turn tragedy into triumph through their steadfast faith in God, believing that He will bring good out of evil, light out of darkness (Rom. 8:28).

Verse 21. "Submit to one another. "There is a sense in which every Christian needs to be in submission to other Christians. This principle should help us understand better the following section about wives and husbands, which some use (abuse) to insist upon a total submission of wives to their husbands in every circumstance, without any corresponding submission of husbands to their wives in certain circumstances. It is significant that verse 21 immediately precedes the controversial section about wifely submission!

Verses 22-33. Submission, for Christians, means either obedience or acceptance of penalty for refusing to render obedience (see the writer's paper on "The Christian in Relation to His Government"). If a husband demands that his wife go against her conscience as a Christian, he is usurping authority that belongs to Christ, and his wife is not obliged to obey him in that case. A loving husband will not make such demands, and he is just as much under command to love his wife, as she is to submit to him! This implies that a delicate balance is required within the relationship of Christian husbands and wives. A male dictatorship is out of order! The wise husband will give his wife every consideration before making decisions or demands that may not please her. For her part, the Christian wife will seek always to show her husband due respect, with a willingness to weigh carefully the reasons why he thinks he needs to make such decisions or demands.

"As Christ loved the church. "This is the example Paul sets before the Christian husband. It is a picture of total unselfishness, as the measure for a Christian husband in his

dealings with his wife. A husband needs to ask himself whether any decision or demand he may make arises from any selfishness on his part, or is arbitrary in any way.

"Washing with water. "Likely a reference to baptism, which symbolizes spiritual cleansing and renewal (Rom. 6:1-4; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21).

"A profound mystery. "As always, the Greek word *mysterion* means a "secret," now revealed, not something "mysterious. "The secret now in view is that the husband-wife relationship is paralleled by the relationship between Christ and the church. The church as such was not revealed to the Old Testament prophets, but the one-flesh relationship between husband and wife had been revealed long ago. Now Paul shows the profound parallel between these two relationships. ❖

Being Disciples

by Chuck Jones

I was considering the idea of disciples. What comes to mind when you think of that word? Does it bring an idea of a religious fanatic? Is it a title we use only in reference to "the twelve?"

Fortunately the title "disciple" hasn't gone the way of "Christian." What I mean is that Christian is applied freely to a lot of people, and activities. A person can claim to be a Christian without much scrutiny. In many respects, Christian has become mediocre. However when it comes to the term disciple, more is expected.

I think the title disciple has fallen out of use (except for the

denomination that uses it in its name), because of the implications. Disciple is like the word saint in this respect. Many people I've talked with, who consider themselves Christians, wouldn't use "saint" to describe themselves. Christian has become such an ambiguous term, which it has lost much of its power.

One of the implications of a disciple is that a disciple is learning from someone. We are fashioning our lives after our teacher or master. If church goers aren't engaged in this, it's no wonder they want to avoid the guilt that is associated with the title. That guilt could have a negative effect on their self-esteem.

Jesus considered the title of disciple descriptive of anyone who followed him. He took this relationship very seriously. In many passages he gave clear teaching on the cost of being a disciple, and warned that if this cost was not paid, we couldn't be his disciples. That's serious.

How do we get back to discipleship? If we have lost our way, how do we get back on track? This, I think, demands repentance. Turning from what we have accepted as the way Christians should function (as the world tells us), to the way disciples live (as Jesus told us).

When discipleship is maintained there will be a real change in one's life. First there will be a change in one's world view. This is how we understand things to be. This comes about through Scripture study and prayer. We put ourselves in God's hands and allow His word to direct us. We then accept all that God says is right and wrong.

Second there will be a new lifestyle produced. A life that is rich in good works, acting as a peace

maker, and making disciples. How would things change in your life? What new activities would you engage in?

Last, there would be a new expectation. The glories hope we have in Jesus would replace the withering hopes of this world. A Joy of the glory that will be revealed in us would sustain us in difficult situations.

These three changes would produce a devotion and commitment that would help us follow Jesus anywhere. We would be ready to do his bidding. People around us would see the light of life in us. We would have, as Jesus said, a well of life flowing up in us. This isn't mediocre, it's powerful. ☺

Having a Desire to Depart And to Be with Christ

by Jim Mattison

"I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better"
Philippians 1:23

In this passage Paul says he is hampered or concerned between two things—whether he was going to live or die. Harpers Analytical Greek lexicon explains this feeling as: "to be in a state of mental constriction, to be hard pressed by urgency of circumstances." Jesus had this same feeling: "I have a baptism to be baptized with (dying for men's sins); and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke 12:50).

Paul was not sure if he was going to live, or die. He considered this. Whichever happened, he

wanted it to glorify Christ. He wanted Christ to be "magnified" in his body, "whether it be by life, or by death" (verse 20).

If he lived, his teaching would be valuable for the Christians at Philippi. It would bring forth "fruit." If he died as a martyr for Christ, his death would strengthen and encourage weaker Christians to take a bold stand for Christ. He mentioned this idea in verses 13 and 14.

His conclusion was that he "had confidence" that he would "abide and continue" with them "to help you forward and to add joy to your faith" (NEB).

Paul's real choice was a THIRD solution, as the Emphatic Diaglott brings out: "I have an earnest desire for the returning, and being with Christ, since it is very much to be preferred." Better than living or dying would be Christ coming, and his being with Him! ☺

One Liners

Puritanism: The haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy.

I don't suffer from insanity. I enjoy every minute of it.

Okay, who put a "stop payment" on my reality check?

We have enough youth, how about a fountain of SMART.

Give me ambiguity or give me something else.

Ever stop to think, and forget to start again?

I started out with nothing & still have most of it left.

Stress is when you wake up screaming & you realize you haven't fallen asleep yet.

I just got lost in thought. It was unfamiliar territory. ☺

God's Good News

by Paul Derho

In the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1 verse 14, we read that Jesus came to Galilee preaching the gospel of God, or as some versions put it "God's Good News". While many people today do not see Jesus as a preacher of the gospel, but rather that the gospel is about Jesus, Mark informs us that at the onset of Jesus' public ministry he was preaching or heralding the gospel. Perhaps the reason that most people do not see Jesus as a preacher of the gospel is because they understand the gospel to only be about the death and resurrection of Jesus and the consequent forgiveness of sins. And yet, Jesus said right at the start of his public ministry "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me because He has anointed me to preach the gospel... (Luke 4:18)."

Mark does not leave us in verse 14 wondering about the meaning of the gospel, i.e. the good news. He informs us in verse 15 of the content of Jesus' gospel preaching by quoting him as saying, "... the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel". That is a good outline of Jesus' preaching. Jesus was proclaiming that the kingdom of God is approaching or drawing near, and that's good news. It was also a call to repent, (to change your mind, your thinking, attitude and behavior) by believing what he was preaching about the coming of God's kingdom and

receiving it as Good News.

We read in Hebrews 1:1 that "God, who spoke in times past... in the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us in His son..." The message that God has spoken to us in His son, in these last days, is the gospel that Jesus preached, that of the approaching kingdom of God.

Contained in the gospel message of the coming kingdom is the promise of life in that coming age. Jesus, as quoted in Luke 18:30, put it in these terms. "*There is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children for the sake of the kingdom of God* (cp. Mark 10:29, for my sake and the gospel's), *who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life.*" The life of the age to come that is promised for believing and obedience to the Gospel is a life without the prospect of death. Now that really is good news. That should be enough to bring anyone, conscious of the aging process at work in them that is taking them to the inevitable end of death, to take Jesus seriously when he says we ought to pray, "Thy Kingdom come".

In the Hebrew Scriptures, which Jesus and his contemporaries were familiar with, and had access to, (commonly called the Old Testament) God is referred to by many titles. El Elyon is Hebrew for

"Most High God". El Shaddai is "Almighty God". Both of these titles or names refer to "YHWH" (often pronounced Yahweh), which is the proper name of God and is translated as LORD in many versions of the Bible.

When Jesus spoke of his coming in power and glory, which is a reference to his coming to sit on the throne of David as King in the kingdom of God, he said that he was coming "in the name of the LORD" (Matt.23: 39, quoting Ps. 118:26). Indeed, the Jewish people were expecting their Messiah to come in the name of YHWH (see Luke 19:38).

The Apostle Paul writes concerning Jesus, "God has given (favorably granted, bestowed upon, conferred upon) him a name above all names." When he returns, Jesus shall reign as king in Jerusalem, "the city of the Great King," in the coming kingdom of God, in the name, authority and power of the LORD (YHWH). This is definitely good news, as we are promised by God, through the Hebrew prophets, a good and righteous government when the Messiah (the Christ, see John 1:41) takes up the reigns of power and establishes peace on earth. ☺