

The Sword AND Staff

“Preach the Word” (II Timothy 4:2) • “Feed the Flock” (I Peter 5:2)

Perfecting OUR LOVE

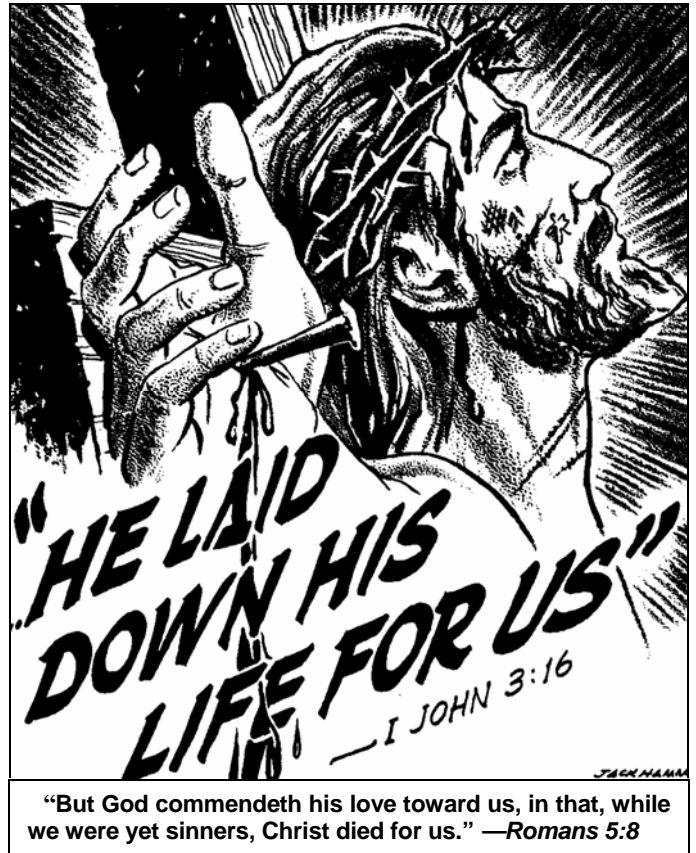
By JAMES E. GIBBONS—1535 W. Fairfield Drive
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BECOMING a Christian is an unparalleled experience of love, as the repentant sinner through God’s mercy and grace is brought into the kingdom of God’s love (Colossians 1:13). That great and familiar section of Scripture, John 3:16, declares this compelling love of God. The last part of Revelation 1:5, speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, says, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.” And 1 John 4:19, emphasizing our responding love, asserts, “We love him, because he first loved us.” Romans 5:5 tells us that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost [Spirit] which is given unto us.” Then, summarizing the accomplishment and outworking of this grand, conversion experience, 1 Peter 1:22-23 states, “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: Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (These are parallel words to what Peter had preached on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:38). Yes, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren...” (1 John 3:14).

The Priority of Love

But in spite of this great experience, we cannot expect the new Christian to know all that love entails. He has encountered a radical change. Time is needed for him to fully grasp (or at least to more fully grasp) what has taken place and through the power of God to augment it. In 1

NO GREATER LOVE (JOHN 15:12,13)



Thessalonians 3, faith, love and holiness are repeatedly highlighted and enjoined as important elements that these new converts were to “increase and abound in.” (Read the whole chapter). And even though the church had been at Philippi for several years, the apostle Paul still felt it appropriate when writing to them to say, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more...” (Philippians 1:9,10). Yes, this priority is ever before us that we move on unto perfection (maturity) in all areas of our life as a Christian, and especially in love, since love itself “is the bond of perfectness” (Colossians 3:14, KJV). In another translation (RSV), Colossians 3:14 is even more

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—THANK YOU—

Proverbially *SPEAKING...*

PUT God first and you won't be last.

Trust and obey and you will find yourself on the way to that land of endless day.

It's hard to stumble when you are down on your knees.

The only time "faith only" is mentioned in the Bible is to say that we are justified "not by faith only" (James 2:24).

We take the moral high ground when we seek those things that are above.

Nothing works like work, coupled with prayer, when it comes to getting the Lord's work done.

By being deferred or denied, hope will be either enhanced or extinguished.

Truth must be in love (Ephesians 4:15), and love must be in truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10).

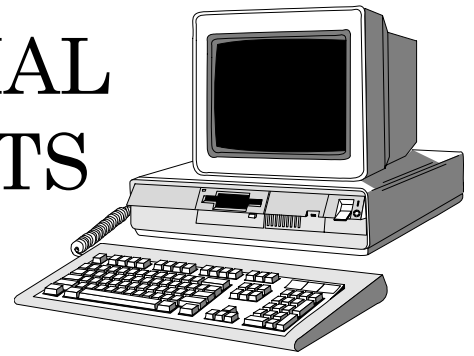
People respond better to warm truths than to cold facts.

If you read your Bible and pray every day, when the church meets, it will be hard to keep you away.

If you are not afraid of work, you have no reason to fear poverty.

If you doubt, don't... (Romans 14:23).

EDITORIAL COMMENTS



"TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS"

INTERESTINGLY, there are three songs attributed to Moses in the Bible (Exodus 15:1-9; Deuteronomy 32:1-43; Psalms 90). Not only was Moses the great emancipator (by the hand of God) in the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, he was a man of letters (Acts 7:22). The Pentateuch attests to this. He was the great lawgiver. He was a poet. Of course, his natural abilities were enhanced by the inspiration of God. We wish to "zero in" on the 90th Psalm for our lesson here.

Indeed, Psalms 90 is a great psalm. Here we see the frailty of man in contrast with the great and infinite God of eternity. Moses was made very much aware of all of this, drawing from his unparalleled experience with God and the things that happened with the children of Israel in their wilderness journey (forty years of it!).

God is presented in very expressive language. "LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." Antedating man, He is the great I AM; the eternal, self-existent One, living in the present tense of the eternal day—"from everlasting to everlasting." As he had said to Moses from the burning bush, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob..." (Exodus 3:6,14). Each successive generation had found refuge in Him as they briefly appeared on the scene to make their exit, but God goes on forever. Time was and is of no consequence to Him. Moses, almost gropingly, searches for words to describe this, as he thinks in human terms, "For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night."

In sharp and magnified contrast, the frailty of man is next laid out before us. Although God is always there available as a "dwelling place" for man in every generation, man is pictured as the object of God's wrath and judgment. His sinfulness and deeds prompts this. No doubt, Moses' experience with the Israelites in the wilderness, and their constant rebellion against God, was in the back of his mind. He writes, "Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as a sleep: in the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten [70 years]; and if by reason of strength they be four

score years [80 years], yet is their strength [their span or boast but] labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away..." And with this somber realization of the frailty of man and the brevity of time, Moses is moved to say, "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

As we go into a new year, humanly speaking, it is a good time to take time to think about time. The exhortation of Moses is very fitting. How we need to "apply our hearts to wisdom." The longer we live, the more we are made to realize the shortness of time. There is so much that needs to be done and so much that we want to get done before we leave here. Jesus, our Savior and model, was very conscious of time. He declared, "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). As the end of his life was nearing he prayed in that great high priestly prayer in John 17:4, where he said, "I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." Now it was only left for him to experience the cross itself, where he would cry out, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

If you are not a Christian, now is the most acceptable time for you to accept the Lord (2 Corinthians 6:2; 2 Peter 3:9). And if you are a Christian, Paul's admonition in Ephesians 5:15 and 16 needs to be taken to heart, "See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Likewise, he presses the issue of time home to Christians in Romans 13:11-14, when he says that it is "high time to awake out of sleep" and get down to business serving the Lord. Quit dillydallying around with sin. The Great Commission is hemmed in by time, "unto the end of the world [age]" (Matthew 28:18-20). The world is lost in sin. The Great Commission needs to be carried out. Is the job getting done? Time is running out. The time is coming when "there should be time no longer" (Revelation 10:6). The judgment day is coming.

Any way that you look at it, time is short. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Remember. To "kill time" is to murder opportunities. Life is serious. □

"Restoration Movement" or the Lord's Church, Which?

PERSONALLY, this writer gets somewhat weary and a little perturbed with people talking about a "Restoration Movement" and being "members," that's what they say, "of the Restoration Movement." Although we sincerely appreciate any and all truth

that anyone has brought to light, and are totally committed to the concept of "restoration," the New Testament knows nothing of this mode of reference. It speaks of the Lord's church and being members of His body, the church (not members of a movement). If things aren't right in the church, which simply are local autonomous entities, each local church individually needs to be set in order. Then we need to move on as the Lord's body, not to stay suspended as a "Movement" that seems to move no further than being that among many religious movements (even if it could be thought of in those terms today). To think in terms of "us" and "our people" in connection with a movement, or faction, is to have a denominational mindset (in this writer's opinion). Our identity should be by the Scriptures. Let's just be the Lord's church, and that alone, and move on out for Him. □

Perfecting OUR LOVE

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explicitly rendered, "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." As love is more and more perfected in a Christian's life, it more effectively accelerates and brings about completeness and perfection in all other areas of his life.

The Meaning of Love

If love is so important, and we are admonished to perfect it, it would be good for us to know what love means in the original language of the Scriptures. In the New Testament we find two words for love, *agapao* and *phileo* (both verbs). *Agapao* becomes a noun in the well-known word, *AGAPÉ*. On the other hand, we find no noun for *phileo* love (interestingly, noun spin-offs are seen in words translated "friend" and "kiss"). *Agapao* (*AGAPÉ*) love involves the intellect and the will; it involves esteem and purpose; it involves choice. It can be commanded. However, *phileo* love is the love of natural inclination; it is instinctive; it is the love of emotion. It is spontaneous, involuntary. For the most part, it just happens. Of the two words, *AGAPÉ* (verb, *agapao*) is the primary word used in talking about a Christian's love (whether for God or for another Christian).

The meaning of a word can be more clearly seen in noticing its antonym. Therefore, what is the word, or words, opposite in meaning to love? There are two words that come to mind, hate and selfishness, which are antithetical to love. Hate is a hostile negative feeling that is directed outwardly toward others. Selfishness is likewise negative, but it is contained and experienced more in an inward sense (a person

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is all wrapped up in himself). Both are the opposite of love. True love is unselfish and reaches out to others with the utmost consideration and kindness.

The Object of Our Love

Although our love as a Christian is one, it is projected in two facets, the love for God and the love for fellow Christians (and others). These two categories are evident, even under the Old Testament, when the lawyer questioned Jesus, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Then we read, "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:36-40). These two categories of our love are also made plain in 1 John 4:20 and 21 where it says, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him. That he who loveth God love his brother also." So, in looking into "perfecting our love," we will approach it from these two angles, the love of God and the love of man. Many times we will find they overlap and are considered together.

I. PERFECTING OUR LOVE FOR GOD

The "All" Aspect of Loving God

An effort to comprehend God's love and what is commanded will help us realize the need of perfecting our love. God is Almighty. He is all knowing, and the inspired writer plainly said, "God is love" (1 John 4:8,16). It was this infinite Being who said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:30). And the apostle Paul would seem to expand upon this imperative injunction in Ephesians 3:17-19, when he prays for the Ephesian Christians "that ye being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height [of this love]: And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." As we surrender our "all" in love to God, whose attributes are all prefixed with "all," we will be filled with all His fullness. Paradoxically, we are commanded to "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." That being the case, this love is best known through experience.

Our love is perfected in focusing on the "all" aspect of loving God. Other loves that clash or that are competitive with God will either be eliminated or, if not sinful, will fall into the background. Notice these relevant Scriptures.

- "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" (1 John 2:15,16).
- "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).
- "For the love of money is the root of all [kinds of] evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things..." (1 Timothy 6:10,11).
- "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God...Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).
- "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37).
- "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12).
- "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world..." (2 Timothy 4:10).
- "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works..." (Revelation 2:4,5).

Let us take the lessons to be learned from these Scriptures to heart.

"Keep My Commandments"

The apostle John in his first epistle makes a defining statement about perfecting our love for God. It reads, "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (1 John 2:5). This echoes what Jesus said more than once earlier in John's gospel account. In John 14:15, the Lord says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." And further on in this chapter, John 14:23, Jesus says, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." He continues, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings..." John 15:10 reads, "If ye keep my com-

mandments, ye shall abide in my love...” Now going back to the epistle of 1st John, chapter 5 verse 3, we find sort of a summary statement, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous [burdensome].” Yes, God’s love is perfected in us when we keep His commandments. In fact, the apostle Paul really ties it all together when he says, “Now the end [goal] of the commandment [itself] is charity [love] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Timothy 1:5). Let us eagerly seek to know and do what God commands.



“His Love is Perfected in Us”

A very choice section of Scripture is also found in 1 John chapter 4 about perfecting our love for God. Let us highlight some of the verses here. “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us...And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in the world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him. That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:12,16-21). He goes on to say that those who believe on Christ are

born of God, “and every one that loveth him that begat [God] loveth him also that is begotten of him [other Christians]” (1 John 5:1).

Two things stand out here in reference to God’s love being perfected in us. Perfect love casts out fear, and our love for God is perfected when we love one another.

“Perfect Love Casteth Out Fear”

Paul tells us, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15); notice Hebrews 2:13-15 also. Yet this same Paul more than once ties fear in with being a Christian. This is seen in 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 5:21, and Philippians 2:12 (and other Scriptures). But John said that “perfect love” casts out fear. How are we to understand this? Evidently they are talking about two different kinds of fear. Perhaps John is talking about an enslaving kind of fear (“spirit of bondage”) like felt by slaves of which Paul spoke, and not the kind of fear we would now experience as God’s children. Our fear now would be more like a child who has a deeply engrained respect for his father, not wanting to displease him in any way (not the fear of a slave in bondage). Fear has punishment, as John said, but now as children of God, living in His grace and surrendered to His will, perfect love casts out this kind of fear. Having been forgiven, we have this blessed assurance from God, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more” (Hebrews 10:17).

Love God, Love One Another

But the overall thrust of the Scripture in 1st John chapter 4 is that our love for God is perfected by loving one another. Notice again 4:12, “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.” Notice 4:20 and 21, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” And 5:1 tells us that “every one that loveth him that begat [God] loveth him also that is begotten of him [other Christians].” So, perfecting our love for God involves perfecting our love for one another. Remember Jesus said, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). We need to work on this.

Another Great Lesson

Another great lesson in loving the Lord is to be found in a case involving Simon Peter. It merges well with the thought that our love for God is perfected in

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loving one another. This happened after the resurrection of Christ. This was in Galilee. Some of the disciples had gone back to fishing. They had caught nothing all night. Jesus, his identity not known to them at this point, had called from the shore and told them where to cast their net to catch fish. After their amazing catch, and coming to shore, Jesus asks them to eat with him. They now recognize him. Then we read the following in John 21:15-17.

“Feed My Sheep”

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus said unto him, Feed my sheep.”



This conversation is highly interesting. But we don't get the full force of it in our English translations. When Jesus is questioning Peter about loving him, and Peter is answering, Jesus is using one word for love and Peter is using another. Jesus is using the higher word for love, *agapao*. Peter is responding with the lower word for love, *phileo*. The word Jesus uses is the more elevated word, implying intelligence and esteem, with corresponding purpose. Peter's word simply means that he liked Jesus and had affection for him (no intelligence or higher purpose being implied). (See “The Meaning of Love” earlier in this article). Three times “lovest thou me” is asked. The first two times the *agapao* word is used by Jesus. But the last time this is asked, Jesus drops down to the word Peter has been using, *phileo*. Peter had not responded with the higher word used by the Lord, and now Jesus comes down to Peter's level of talking. Do you even like me, Peter? That seems to be what the Lord is saying. This really got next to

Peter. And the three times Peter was questioned is parallel to his denying the Lord three times (Luke 22:34,54-62). The first question had been, “Lovest thou me more than these [the other disciples, Mark 14:29,30]?” Peter couldn't help but get the point. He is now ready to be fully restored.

Actually Two Lessons

Actually two lessons on perfecting our love for God stand out here. By Peter doing what the Lord said, the love of God would be perfected in him, as pointed out earlier (1 John 2:5). Jesus had said before his crucifixion, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The Lord now repeatedly pointed him to taking care of his sheep, a labor of love, showing love for the Lord in loving and caring for others. “Lovest thou me?” Then, feed my sheep. First he says, “Feed my lambs.” Next he says, “Feed my sheep.” Loving the Lord, it was to be shown in tending all of the Lord's flock, taking care of his sheep and leading them in the right direction. As an apostle of Christ, Peter perfected his love in doing this. Let us likewise perfect our love for the Lord in obedience and in loving one another.

I. PERFECTING OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

With all of this being said, it brings us naturally now to our second consideration, “perfecting our love for one another.” The element of love was the strong, compelling and motivating factor in our conversion to Christ. It is so great that it is spontaneously reciprocated in our relation to God, and without effort, it overflows in our relationship to others. This “first love” is not to wane (Revelation 2:4,5), but in it we are admonished to abound more and more. It is to be perfected and channeled in the right direction.

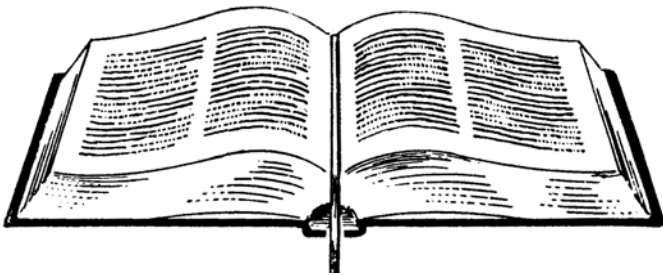
Love Abounding in Knowledge and Discernment

Philippians 1:9-11 is an excellent section of Scripture that ties in well with our subject. It reads, “And this I pray, that your love may abound [overflow] yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment [discernment]; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” It is Paul's prayer that their love would abound, being channeled in knowledge and discernment. This harmonizes well with the definition of *agapé*, the love of esteem and purpose that has already been examined earlier in this article. Such love of necessity would involve intelligence and would have to be properly informed to be exercised in the most befitting way. It's not just a “feeling.” The emphasis in the word is not emotion, but intelligent devotion.

No Contradiction

These words are not in contradiction with what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 8:1, where he said, “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity [love] edifieth [builds up]...” (Read the whole chapter). Here he is dealing with brethren having a superior and condescending attitude toward other Christians. These brethren saw nothing wrong with eating meat bought in the market place that had originally been sacrificed to idols. But others had scruples against doing this. Certainly and correctly, those who saw nothing sinful about the meat were “in the know.” There was no reality in idols. Meat is simply meat. However, knowledge by itself was not enough. Their knowledge was not encased in love; otherwise, they would have shown respect to the tender sensitivities of the weak brother. The problem here is knowledge without love, not knowledge and love opposing one another. Knowledge without love does not build up; rather it has a tendency to puff up. But with genuine love, the love of intelligence and purpose, it would also take into consideration the feelings of others to the end that they would be edified.

Love, Not Compromise



But if we would perfect our love, following Paul's prayer and injunction in Philippians, we will seek to learn all that we can about love and the teachings of the Bible so that we in, discernment, “may approve things that are excellent.” That way our love can be channeled and expressed in the right way. The modern mind and mentality is so fuzzy that it can't grasp this truth. The compromising person who does not raise his voice is thought to be the epitome of love. If we believe that Christ is the only way of salvation (Acts 4:12), we are labeled as intolerant and unloving. However, in the light of John 3:16, is there much love involved if Christ died to save a world lost in sin, that he in truth is the only way of salvation, and then we won't tell others about it? But Paul says that the “love of Christ constrains us” to speak up. To be against sin, we are called unloving. But there is no love in trying to justify a person in his sin that will eventually send him to hell (whether it be homosexual practices or any other sin). It is not love that would overlook false and erroneous doctrine and leave people in the error of their way to face God that way. It is compromise.

Let us perfect our love for God and man by being informed and channeling it in the right direction. *Agapé* love is not a blind love, although it is optimistic (1 Corinthians 13:6,7). It does not gullibly go along with that which is wrong. May we with discernment abound in love, unselfishly reaching out to others. May we see the right thing to do.

Love Perfected in Deeds

That brings us to our next consideration. Love that is real will be expressed. Like faith, it is perfected in deeds. Thoughts presented by James and John involving faith and love are almost parallel. Of faith and works, James wrote, “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead being alone” (James 2:15-17). He goes on to say that by works faith is “made perfect” (2:22). Of love and works (or deeds), John wrote, “But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him [has no pity or compassion], how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17,18). John 3:16 tells us that “For God so loved the world that he gave...” According to the apostle Paul, the “proof” of the love of the Gentile churches was seen in the offerings that had been taken up for the suffering Christians back in Palestine (2 Corinthians 8:24). So, love that is genuine will manifest itself in generosity. Freely we have received and freely we will give. Love is not stingy.

(But Paul takes this a step further as he waves a caution flag in front of us in that great chapter on love, “And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [love], it profiteth me nothing,” 1 Corinthians 13:3. It all must come from within as it is expressed outwardly, or it is meaningless).

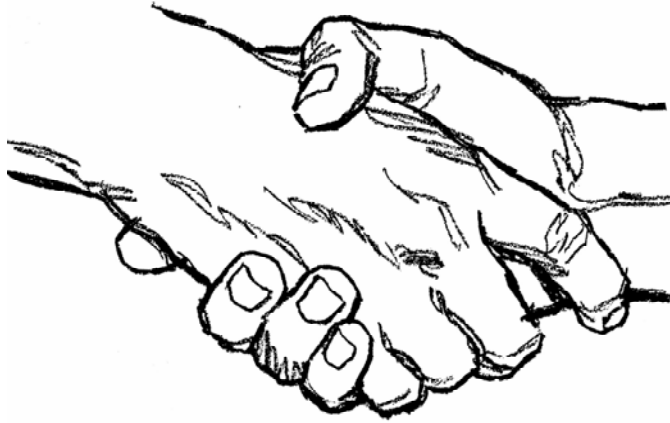
Love and Forgiveness

The following admonition to the Ephesian Christians has to do with love. Paul begins with the negative prohibitions and ends with love. If we really wish to perfect our love, we will take these words to heart. Listen: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us...” (Ephesians 4:31-5:2). The harsh

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Perfecting OUR LOVE

(Continued from Previous Page)



dealings we have with one another are to be replaced by kindness and forgiveness as we walk in love. Peter likewise admonishes newborn Christians, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:1,2). John said, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:14,15). There is no place for grudges, malice, ill will and bitterness in our lives. We are to emulate God and the Lord Jesus Christ in our love and forgiveness.

Perfecting Love By Practicing Impartiality

It was Paul's desire that the Christians in Colosse be "knit together in love" (Colossians 2:2). The fabric of love, and unity, is rent asunder when partiality is practiced in a church. Read James 2:1-12. Here James deals with the unseemly display of partiality that was being shown toward the rich and the shoddy way in which the poor were being treated in the assembly. He went on to say, "If ye fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." Paul solemnly instructed Timothy, "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" (1 Timothy 5:21). No doubt all of us know the story of Joseph and his coat of many colors, the coat that had been given to him by his father Jacob (Genesis

37). Jacob's mother likewise had showed partiality to Jacob (Genesis 27), and this practice seems to have run in the family. Consequently, the fabric of love was disrupted and the family went from one crisis to another. This happens many times today in the church, too. Preachers and unthinking Christians need to be careful that they do not show preferential treatment to one above another. As we noticed, James pointedly tells us that this is sin. Let us perfect our love by not being a respecter of persons. This is a "must."

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BIBLE QUESTIONS

(Random Questions Over the Bible)

1. What was the number of men who came out of Egypt in the exodus, not counting the others?
2. What are two reasons why God didn't have all of the Canaanites driven out of the promised land with the conquest of Canaan by the Israelites?
3. What mountain in the Bible is called "the mount of God"?
4. The word "passover" in its Old Testament usage could refer to what three different things?
5. Where was the tabernacle situated as a place of worship when Israel came into the promised land?
6. How long did David and Solomon reign as kings?
7. When Job's friends visited him during his affliction, how long was it before they said anything?
8. What two men in the Bible cursed the day in which they were born?
9. In what book of the Bible is the following quotation found? "Love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave."
10. What heathen king did God call "my servant," and of what other heathen king did He say, "He is my shepherd"?
11. What Jewish prophet was commanded to go to Nineveh with God's message of judgment, but chose to go elsewhere?
12. Where were the Philistines from before settling in Palestine?
13. Which is the only gospel writer to tell that the conception of Jesus took place before Mary was married?
14. Which of the apostles were the sons of Zebedee?
15. Of what people (ethnic group) was the one leper out of the ten who had been cleansed that returned and thanked the Lord?
16. Where was the apostle Paul when he was first called Paul instead of Saul in the New Testament?
17. Where are two different places in Paul's writings that the quotation "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" is found, and how was he applying this saying each time?
18. Where is the only place Job is mentioned in the New Testament Scriptures?
19. What are the names of the seven churches in Asia to which the book of Revelation was written?
20. What is the last word in the Bible?

(NOTE: Answers found elsewhere in this issue of the paper)

READERS'

...Response

APOLOGY: Please accept our humble apology for slowness in getting correspondence answered. "We" have no staff of secretaries, etc. to handle such, and this is done by the "editor" as time allows. Be it known that you are sincerely appreciated. □

FLORIDA:

■ "Please mail me a copy of *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*, balance of check to *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. Your articles are superb."

■ "Thank you so much for shipping the books, *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*, to us so fast. We are going to use them in our Ladies Bible Class like a book club, read and discuss the Scriptures.

"May God continue to bless you and your wife's work for Him. Hope one day to meet you in the flesh but a joy to meet you in heaven."

GEORGIA:

■ "This is excellent material [*NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*! A great and needed book! Thanks!"

ALABAMA:

■ "Please send me a complimentary copy of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*." (Web Page response, E-mail)

SOUTH CAROLINA:

■ "For years I have been refreshed by *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. You appear to have no axe to grind and don't come across as condemning brethren who may be drifting. Instead, you simply offer a refreshing sound word to encourage all who will seek to be encouraged with Scripture applied in a relevant way. Thank you for using the gift God has given you for His glory. Keep up the good work..." (E-mail)

■ "For the last few years your publication has been a treasured source of information and guidance that one cannot put a price on. Regretfully, I have received these from my father without giving any thought to the fact that I was not contributing one penny to a ministry that I believe is preaching the truth. After reading the editorial 'Giving Considered Worship,' I decided I

would much rather give the money God has blessed me with to a ministry that holds true to Scripture than to a denomination that strays from that truth in order to please men.

"Please accept this gift and if you would, put me on the mailing list of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. I would also like a copy of *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND* by David Elliot and the bound volumes of *THE SWORD AND STAFF 2001-2002*.

"I thank God for teachers of the Word such as you that I am no longer bound by the denominational teachings and doctrines of men."

NORTH CAROLINA:

■ "Thank you for the work you're doing for God. Thank you for your 'outspokenness' and truthfulness."

■ "I am most grateful for your ability to distribute such a valuable book as *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*. What a treasure it is..."

■ "Thanks for forwarding the book to me. I appreciate the promptness. Thank you for *THE SWORD AND STAFF* as well. I really enjoy it and pray for your continued success with the paper."

■ "Recently I discovered your web site, 'The Sword and Staff.' What a pleasant surprise it was to have great, sound Bible study material at the click of a mouse. I, too, am deeply concerned about the direction the church seems to be taking these days. Please continue your stand for the truth..." (Web page response, E-mail)

■ "First let me commend you for standing on the Word of truth. Your publication is excellent. It is rare to see people anymore that will stand for the truths found in the Bible as you do. I am so impressed with your publication that I would like for you to send me all the bound volumes of *THE SWORD AND STAFF*, 1987-2002. Also I would like a copy of the book *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*. Enclosed is a check...that should cover the cost plus some left over as my donation. May God bless you in this wonderful ministry."

VIRGINIA:

■ "Thanks for all the great work you are doing. Keep up the great job."

■ "Please send me the book *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*...Thank you and God bless. *THE SWORD AND STAFF* I so enjoy—thank you for that also!"

■ "Please send a copy of *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*. Accept my donation to continue the good work that you do. I always enjoy getting *THE SWORD AND STAFF* and look forward to your next publication."

■ "Thank you so much for *THE SWORD AND STAFF*! May God bless you in getting the Word of Christ out. Please send two copies of *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*. Enclosed check. Your love for God is so real."

■ "I haven't sent you any money for quite a while to help with your printing and mailing. So here is a bit to help. I would like 2 books, *NOBODY LEFT BEHIND*...Praise God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy

(Continued on Next Page)

READERS'...Response

(Continued from Previous Page)

Spirit for men like you. Also the people who help you, where you live."

■ *"Your SWORD AND STAFF publication is excellent. I have to tell you that your reply to the e-mail you received questioning your views on baptism was one of the best explanations I've ever heard (volume 40, page 10). I look forward to every issue you send. Thanks so much for spreading the pure word."*

KENTUCKY:

■ *"Please send me a copy of NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. I have enclosed a donation. Keep up the good work."*

PENNSYLVANIA:

■ *"Please mail 4 [more] NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. Excellent book..."*

■ *"Your publication uses God's Word for its base. Keep up the good work."*

■ *"I look forward to your newsletters. You write the truth, and oh how I wish wrong so rampant in our society would very soon start to cease. It is heartbreaking to see the malls filled to capacity on Sundays, instead of these shoppers filling the church for worship to thank God, praying always in our Lord's name, for all the blessings we have had all week long. I pray your SWORD AND STAFF does reach more than thousands to be read and truly encourage each one to get themselves into reading the Bible—then God's plan of salvation for each one of us. Thank you for being God's servant...As you told us it would be, brother Elliott's book is great!"*

OHIO:

■ *"Please send me an additional copy of NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. My future son-in-law liked the book so well that I gave him my copy..."*

■ *"I enjoy reading your articles in THE SWORD AND STAFF. Keep up the good work."*

"I would like to order the book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. I would like to have 5 copies..."

"Thank you again for writing articles that will help us to grow in the Lord. Keep it up..."

■ *"Enclosed is a check for the book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND—it's a great book! The balance is for THE SWORD AND STAFF. It is a wonderful paper!—so true to the Scriptures. I prayed to be enlightened on the book of Revelation. I found my answer in NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. It's a great book! Thanks to you and David V. Elliott."*

■ *"I appreciate so very much your sound paper THE SWORD AND STAFF over the years. I have used many thoughts and articles in my lesson preparations over the years."*

"At this time, I am enclosing an order list to pass on to two young brothers who seek to become gospel preachers."

I believe your works will help them through the Scriptures, as they have done for me..."

MICHIGAN:

■ *"I'd like to know your thoughts on Acts 20:7. I've been told in the original Greek that the first day of the week really says the Sabbath. Also do you think it matters when we take it? Some use Acts 2:46 [to say otherwise]." (E-mail)*

Answer: Yes, the word "Sabbath" is found in the Greek New Testament in Acts 20:7, but it means the first day of the week in relation to the Sabbath, counting toward the Sabbath, as the Sabbath was used as a point of reference in calculating and expressing time (being the seventh and last day of the week). That was their way of expressing themselves back then. Scholars are agreed on this, as we can see in the way they have consistently translated it "first day of the week." This mode of expression is also found and used in John 20:19 and 1 Corinthians 16:2, among other places.

Acts 2:46, as it speaks of going from house to house, I believe is talking about a regular meal, as they did "eat their meat [food] with gladness and singleness of heart" (not the Lord's supper).

The first day of the week is when they partook of the Lord's supper (Acts 20:7) and by partaking of it on this day, we know that we are following Scriptural precedent. Also, church history bears out the practice of observing the Lord's supper on the first day of every week. Why should we speculate and theorize about any other time? —**Editor** □

INDIANA:

■ *"More than ever the truth needs to be proclaimed. Your efforts are greatly appreciated. God has richly blessed America, and we as a nation need to repent and honor the Lord God. I fear that the United States as we know it, will not exist in another 15 or 20 years. My prayer is that the Christian influence may reclaim America."*

"I'd appreciate a copy of INSIGHT INTO 'END-TIME' PROPHECIES [NOBODY LEFT BEHIND]."

ILLINOIS:

■ *"I hope this helps some in your great work. We read THE SWORD AND STAFF as soon as we get it. God bless you in your work."*

■ *"I am enclosing a check...Please send 2 copies of NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. Thank you for making this important work available."*

■ *"Enclosed is a check for the book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. Thank you. God bless your ministry and THE SWORD AND STAFF paper and the strong articles."*

MISSOURI:

■ *“Please send me NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. Enjoy your paper very much.”*

TEXAS:

■ *“The book was exactly what has been needed! People who know the TRUTH and have the ability to put it in book form should do so. The shelves are crammed with false teaching and people see and buy it, not knowing how dangerous and misleading it is. Praise God for all of you who are ‘informing the public.’*

“May you be in health and live long lives in order to win souls

“God bless you.”

NEW MEXICO:

■ *“Your publication is a blessing to me. I found many wonderful things in the issue that I received a few days ago...The entire newsletter is very good and I have a few more things to read before I finish.*

“Enclosed is my check...Please send me a copy of NOBODY LEFT BEHIND and use the remainder as a donation for your excellent publication.”

OKLAHOMA:

■ *“I want to order the 1985-86 bound volumes of THE SWORD AND STAFF.*

“I enjoy reading THE SWORD AND STAFF very much. Keep up the good work.

“I would like to be put on your mailing list.”

“THE CHURCHES OF MACEDONIA”

It has been pointed out, saying that we incorrectly referred to the Thessalonians in 2 Corinthians 8:5 in the last issue of *The Sword and Staff* under “Editorial Byways.” We wrote, “Out of the liberality and abundance of our hearts, we give. The Thessalonian Christians, even in their poverty, did this, ‘as they first gave their own selves to the Lord.’” [Page 4 (52)] Yes, 2 Corinthians 8:1 tells us that Paul is talking about “the churches of Macedonia.” And from the record in the books of Acts we find there were three churches in Macedonia, one at Philippi, one in Thessalonica and one in Berea (Acts 16 and 17). Therefore, technically we were not wrong in saying the Thessalonians gave out of their poverty, although the situation would have been better represented if we had said “the churches of Macedonia.” There was more than one church in Macedonia, and it says, “the churches of Macedonia.” Thanks for being alert. —*Editor* □

NEBRASKA:

■ *“I would like to purchase another copy of NOBODY LEFT BEHIND for our church library. I found it to be an excellent book—one I’ve wished someone would write for years. Thanks for making it available.”*

WYOMING:

■ *“Thank you so much for such a great publication. We really enjoy it.*

“Please send us a copy of the book, NOBODY LEFT BEHIND...”

MONTANA:

■ *“We’re sending...to help in publishing costs and continue to value your paper...Thanks.”*

SOUTH DAKOTA:

■ *“Thank you for sending THE SWORD AND STAFF. We really enjoy it. Please send NOBODY LEFT BEHIND...”*

CALIFORNIA:

■ *“Enjoy your paper so much.”*

■ *“Thank you for your steadfast, true to the Word, efforts in putting out THE SWORD AND STAFF for these many years.*

“I would like a copy of the NOBODY LEFT BEHIND book of brother Elliott.”

■ *“Enclosed find check...I would like to order the book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND plus use the rest for my subscription to THE SWORD AND STAFF and the rest as you see need.*

“Enjoy your very informative paper with many good articles to use during church services.”

OREGON:

■ *“Enclosed is a donation to help with the expenses of getting out THE SWORD AND STAFF. Keep up the good work. We enjoy your publication very much.”*

CANADA:

■ *“This is to let you know that I have been reading material on your web site and find it to be very good. This is truly great! I wish we had more of your kind to expound the truth as it is. Keep it up and God bless you.” (Web page response, E-mail)*

THE BAHAMAS:

■ *“Thanks for sending me the last available bound volume. I shall surely put it to good use. I know that it will enrich my Wednesday Evening Adult Bible Class and my Sunday evening preaching. Thank you again. May God bless your effort.” (Web page response, E-mail)*

NIGERIA:

■ *“Thank you for being God’s man even when others are still contemplating on the truth.” (Web page response, E-mail)* □

Friend of Mine

God placed the flowers at our feet;
The stars up in the blue—
And then that life be more complete,
He gave us friends like you.

Perfecting OUR LOVE

(Continued from Page 8)

Perfect as Your Father in Heaven is Perfect

Matthew 5:43-48 is all about love. Here we see the scope and inclusiveness of how our love should be that would even take in our enemies and those who would spitefully use us. Personally we may not like them, but we are to love them with the love of esteem and respect as beings made in God's image. They are potential recipients of God's mercy and grace. It is good to read this entire section to understand what is being said and especially in understanding the last verse. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which spitefully use you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute [greet] your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." John 3:16 has already told us that God loves the world. That includes sinners (Romans 5:6-8). God is no respecter of persons in His inclusive love. Neither should we be either. We are instructed by our Lord to be perfect as our Father in heaven is in this matter.

Love, Which Passes Knowledge

And yet in the light of other Scripture, we are made to realize there are human limitations to our fulfilling a command for love absolutely in the absolute sense. It would be necessary to have perfect knowledge about all that is entailed in God's love and to have perfect knowledge, omniscience, in understanding every human situation. Only God has such knowledge. Even the apostle Paul admonishes us to "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19). He admits it exceeds our understanding. He even says, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15). We are committed to this love that really is beyond ultimate understanding. We bask in it and make every effort to emulate it (and in the matter at hand in Matthew 5:48, but we have our limitations). Yes, "God is love," and who knows everything about God?

But with the apostle Paul, after his writing about the great gospel truths in the first part of Romans, we are made to exclaim, "O the depth of the riches

both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Romans 11:33-36). And we can only respond, as the next verse enjoins, "therefore" that by the "mercies of God" we present our bodies a living sacrifice. Then being transformed by the continual renewing of our minds, "prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1,2). And then, as a finite being, continue to respond humbly to the Infinite with our all. Amen. □

(Note: Sometime ago we started a series on "Going on unto Perfection." The subject of faith was developed at length. This article on love is a follow-up, a part of that series. Holiness will be dealt with at a later time.—*Editor*) □



Making Use of Time

TIME gives a sinner a chance to repent or to fill up the full measure of his guilt. Time gives the righteous person a period to exercise his faith, develop patience and persevere.

What are you doing with your time? Let us not squander that which can never be retrieved. □

How Luther Studied the Bible

MARTIN LUTHER reportedly said, "I study my Bible as I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest might fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf. I search the Bible as a whole like shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb—study book after book. Then I shake every branch, giving attention to the chapters. Then I shake every twig, or a careful study of the paragraphs and sentences and words and their meanings."



WRONG tolerated is wrong soon embraced.

The person who uses you, given time, will not hesitate to abuse you.

A preacher should be an embodiment of what he preaches; otherwise, he will nullify everything that he has to say.

The law of gravity may seem to be intolerant, but it is still the law of gravity.

Our words should be like well-driven nails that fasten everything down securely (no lies, no deception, no misrepresentation, and no flattery).

Sometimes a few feathers need to be ruffled before we can become airborne and fly.

It is hard to appeal on a rational basis to those who hold an irrational doctrine, for that is not the way they look at things.

The private parts of a person's body are for private purposes, not for public exposure.

The only thing worse than being young and foolish is being old and foolish (the lessons of life have not been learned through the years).

Flesh left to itself, almost as if by default, will go to the lowest common denominator.

In times passed, many looked upon natural calamities and disasters as the judgment of God; in modern times, many would look upon such happenings as evidence that there is no God.

If some people had to "put their money where their mouth is," they would probably go broke.

The same reasoning process that prompts people to ask the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" should make them likewise ask, "Why do good things happen to bad people?"

To some, you are self-righteous if you believe something more strongly than they do.

Don't let the "ghost" of the old man of sin who was buried in baptism come back to haunt you; live the resurrected life.

People who wear their feelings on their sleeves need to be careful how they dress.

Churches preoccupied with play programs (gymnasiums, ball teams, etc.) are really playing church because that is not what the church is all about.

When it comes to taking a stand, we have found that most people had rather be sitting down.

We hear much talk about contemporary worship and traditional worship, but what we should really be talking about is Scriptural worship.

The person who can't get along with others is a person who really can't get along with himself.

If we are spiritually clothed with Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 13:14), we will be careful to be appropriately clothed physically (1 Timothy 2:9,10; 1 Peter 3:1-4; Revelation 3:18).

When you hit rock bottom, you are in a good position to seriously consider building upon the Rock.

All people should be respected, not always because they are respectable, but because they are made in the image and likeness of God.

Elders are to "rule" more by example than otherwise (1 Peter 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:7,17).

The church that has a large number when they get together to eat food, but are few in number when they meet for prayer and Bible study, has a deep spiritual problem.

If you don't count the cost (Luke 14:26-33), you may shortchange yourself for all eternity.

It is easy to see how a generation "brought up" on "rock and roll" could have a perverted taste for church "music" in that direction.

Stubbornness sanctified by the Holy Spirit becomes steadfastness.

It has been said that silence is golden, but then again, sometimes it is downright yellow.

If you look back, you may run out of the road. □

"At the Mercy of Any Scoundrel"

THE 18th century British physician John Hunter, who was a pioneer in the field of surgery and served as surgeon to King George III, suffered from angina. Discovering that his attacks were often brought on by anger, Hunter lamented, "My life is at the mercy of any scoundrel who chooses to put me in a passion." These words proved prophetic, for at a meeting on the board of St. George's Hospital in London, Hunter got into a heated argument with other board members, walked out, and dropped dead in the next room.—**Selected** □

Jesus and [Dale] Carnegie

By Dennis Conner

THE MORE I understand about Jesus, the more I see that he really didn't know much about growing churches. He apparently had little grasp of marketing principles and philosophy and had this way of making membership in his group sound quite unappealing and even demanding. To prove my point, let me cite two examples.

First, there's the account in Mark 10:17-22 of the wealthy young man who came to Jesus and knelt before him (good start!) with the important question, "Teacher, what do I need to do to have eternal life?" That's the right question! "Keep the law," Jesus said. "Done that since I was a kid," young man says.

Jesus has a perfect opportunity in front of him. This guy is rich and he has moral respectability going for him. Not only that, Jesus didn't even have to go looking for him; the guy came looking for Jesus. Is this too good or what? Churches would kill (well, not literally) to have a guy like this as a member. He's the ideal candidate for church membership. Might even make a good elder some day! What happens next, though, is simply bad marketing.

"There is something you still need to take care of," Jesus said. "I want you to sell everything—the Mercedes, your 4,000 square foot house, your boat, stocks, even your golf clubs—and give it all to the poor. Then you can come follow me." At those words the young man did what anybody in their right mind would have done; he walked away.

You see, Jesus made the mistake here of asking too much. If you want to grow a church, you've got to make it appealing to people. You focus on what you can offer them, not on taking what they have. People have got to feel comfortable, but Jesus clearly stepped over the comfort threshold by telling this guy to sell everything and give it to the poor. The young man's face fell to his ankles. I know Jesus was an idealist, but you've got to be reasonable about what you ask of church members. If you ask too much, expect too much, you'll run people off. They will visit once and never come back! In fact, that's exactly what happened in this case.

The young man went away, grieved, because the demands were simply too unreasonable. Can you blame him? If Jesus had only asked for, say, 30%, everyone would have come off looking good. The young man would have felt good about his generosity and Jesus would have had a new follower, and the church budget would have gotten a boost. Forget that. Jesus was asking too much. Not even the IRS asks for everything. Now, had he just lowered his standards a bit the guy likely would have stuck around.

TV (*to Be* Carnally Minded) or Not TV (*to Be* Spiritually Minded), That is the Question

UNQUESTIONABLY, a constant diet of television profusely feeds the carnal mind. Subsequently, as Christians, we should be seriously aware that "to be carnally minded is death: but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6). Therefore, the admonition in Philippians 4:8 should be taken to heart, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest [noble], whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise [anything praiseworthy], think on these things." And with the Psalmist let us pray, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer" (Psalms 19:14), as we remember, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).—*J.E.G.* □

What happens next is truly astounding. The young man walks away and Jesus does...nothing! Can you believe it? Jesus just let him go! How many shots do you get at potential church members like that? How can you grow a church like that?

The next example is found in Luke 9:57-62 when three prospective church members approach Jesus. The first guy says, "I'll follow you anywhere!" Now, that's what you're looking for, church members who will do anything without even being asked! This guy is obviously a go-getter. He'll volunteer for any kind of ministry and do anything that needs to be done. Then, Jesus does it again. Listen to what he said:

"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." What's up with that? What kind of welcome speech was that? Man, talk about a turn off. Here comes a guy just eager to join up, obviously full of enthusiasm, and Jesus promptly rains on his parade!

The second guy is spoken to by Jesus first, "Follow me." Maybe this guy wasn't quite as outgoing as the first one, but he was respectful of his family. He just wanted to bury his father first. He wasn't exactly asking for the world, if you know what I mean. Just wanted to bury his dad. "Let the dead take care of the dead," says Jesus. That's about as sensitive as a rock! He obviously never heard of Dale Carnegie. A couple of classes about how to win friends and influence people wouldn't have hurt.

The third guy also comes to Jesus. “I’m yours, Lord. Jesus let me get things in order and say good-bye to my family first.” Obviously a good family man; the kind of man you want in your congregation. But again, true to form, Jesus throws up another hoop to jump through, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

See what I mean? Jesus was just too blunt, too demanding, and didn’t understand that if you want people to sign on to a church you focus on what the church can do for them, not what they can do for the church. And you can’t be so demanding! After all, people have their own lives to live. You’ve got to be sensitive to that kind of stuff or people aren’t going to stick around very long.

The thing about Jesus from these stories is that he consistently expected people to come into his kingdom on his terms, not their own. He expected them to have their priorities clearly in focus and would brook nothing less than undivided loyalty. Would be followers would have to be willing to deal with anything (whether it be wealth or ego) that vied for space with Jesus in their hearts. And if anyone couldn’t deal with that, the loss was theirs.

Nope. Jesus didn’t know much about growing a church, but he knew everything about building a kingdom.—*Selected* □



Two Prayers

Last night my little boy
 Confessed to me
 Some childish wrong;
 And kneeling at my knee
 He prayed with tears—
 “Dear God, make me a man
 Like Daddy—wise and strong;
 I know you can.”

Then while he slept
 I knelt beside his bed,
 Confessed my sins,
 And prayed with low-bowed head.
 “O God, make me a child
 Like my child here—
 Pure and guileless, trusting Thee
 With faith sincere.”

—*Andrew Gillies*

Evolution

*“Once I was a tadpole beginning to begin,
 Then I was a frog with my tail tucked in.
 Then I was a monkey swinging in a tree,
 But now I am a professor with a PhD!”*

How to Work a Puzzle (and Solve World Problems)

THERE IS a story told about a preacher who was trying to prepare his sermon one Saturday morning. It was a rainy day, and his young son cooped up in the house was very restless and bored, having nothing to do. He kept interrupting his father. Seeing he was not getting anywhere with his study, in desperation the father picked up an old magazine, thumbed through it until he came to a page with a bright, colored map of the world. He hastily tore the page from the magazine, tore it into small pieces, and threw it all over the floor. Thinking he had solved his problem with his restless son, he challenged him to pick up the pieces and place them back together. In the meantime, he could get some studying done (he thought). But to his amazement, in a few short minutes the boy had the map neatly back in place, as he was interrupted again. “How did you get that done so fast?” the father asked. “Oh,” said the little boy, “it wasn’t hard. On the backside of the map was a picture of a man. I figured if I got the man right, the world would be right.” And deeper insights into what he had just said captured his father’s imagination. He said, “And you have just helped me with my sermon for tomorrow. If a man is right, his world will be right.”—*Selected* □

Answers to:

BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Exodus 12:37; Numbers 1:46; 2. (1) Exodus 23:29,30 (Deuteronomy 7:22); (2) Judges 20:20-23 (3:1-4); 3. Exodus 24:12,13; 1 Kings 19:8; 4. (1) The feast (Leviticus 23:5; Luke 22:1); (2) The animal (Luke 22:7); (3) The week of unleavened bread (Ezekiel 45:21); 5. Joshua 18:1; 19:51; 1 Samuel 1:3; Jeremiah 7:12); 6. (1) David (1 Chronicles 29:26,27); Solomon (2 Chronicles 9:30); 7. Job 2:11-13; 8. Job 3:1,2; Jeremiah 20:14-18; 9. The Song of Solomon 8:6; 10. Jeremiah 25:9; 43:10; Isaiah 44:28; 11. Jonah; 12. Amos 9:7; Jeremiah 47:4; 13. Matthew; 14. Matthew 4:21; 10:2; 15. Luke 17:11-19; 16. Acts 13:4-12; 17. (1) 1 Corinthians 5:6 (immorality in the church); (2) Galatians 5:9 (false teaching in the church); 18. James 5:11; 19. Revelation 1:11; 20. Revelation 22:21. □

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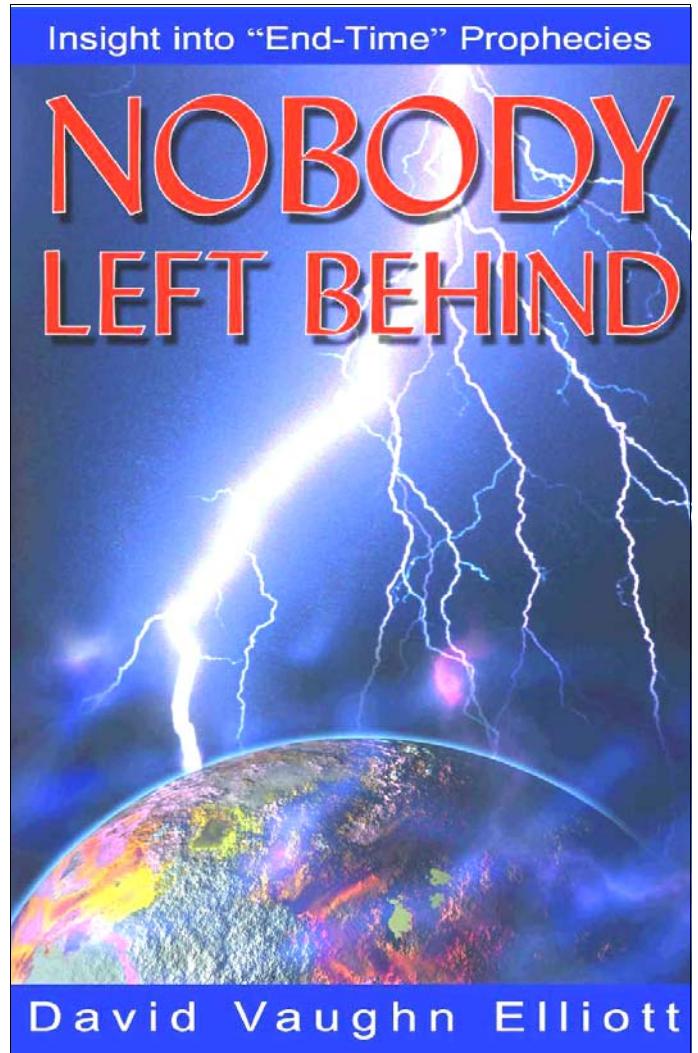
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