Sword AND Staff

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

"Are You Committed to the Lord?"

• "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).



By JAMES E. GIBBONS—1535 W. Fairfield Drive Mount Airy, NC 27030 USA

IHE WORD "commit" is used in several different ways with different shades of meaning, even in the Bible. Among them, is the idea of doing something. This can be seen in one of the Ten Commandments, which said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). Another idea in the word is to devote eneself to doing something, or the binding of oneself by a promise or a pledge to do something (then sticking with it). Psalms 37:5 reads, "Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." In marriage we see an extended use of the word. Marriage is a commitment of a man and a woman to one another for a lifetime. They have formally entered into this agreement. With commitment, different words like devotion, loyalty and involvement come to mind.

In this day when people commit many things, in view of one meaning of the word, but at the same time there is a diminishing number of lasting commitments, we ask you a very personal and pointed question. As a professing Christian, "Are you committed to the Lord?"

INITIAL COMMITMENT

The Lord Jesus Christ said many things about being his disciple. Being a real Christian involves more than most people think. Before entering into this relationship, there must be that initial resolve and commitment (and it must be total). It involves counting the cost. Otherwise being religious may only turn out to be a feeble exercise in futility.

Luke 14:26-33

Listen to what the Lord said in Luke 14:26-33. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it...So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Read and ponder the in-between Scripture above).

"Hate" in this context is a Hebrew expression meaning to love less, not to hate in the bad sense. Matthew 10:37, coming at it from the positive angle, makes this evident, "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." We are to love Christ more than anyone or anything else, even more than the love of self. It must be supreme, if we would be his disciples. Figuratively, we must take up our cross and (Continued on Page 4)

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-THANK YOU-

Proverbially **SPEAKING...**

WE are blessed to be a blessing—Are you a blessing?

It takes a "real man" to say that he is less than the man he ought to be and then do something about it.

The good pleasure of God's will is that "whosoever will" may be saved.

We live the Christian life, not to make us Christians, but because we are Christians.

Christian living and sound doctrine go together like a horse and a carriage.

The Christian race is not run in competition with others, but on the basis of whether you finish it or not.

When a person yields himself to Christ, stubbornness becomes a virtue in steadfastness.

Some forms of prayer will cease in eternity, but praise and thanksgiving will go on forever and ever.

In marriage the little things are the big things.

God keeps His covenant (Daniel 9:4) and keeps those who keep His covenant (His Word) (Revelation 3:10).

People who get things done are the people who do them.



"A LITTLE LEAVEN LEAVENETH THE WHOLE LUMP"

HERE ARE statements found in 1 Corinthians 5:6 and Galatians 5:9 that are identical. "A little leaven leaventh the whole lump." Evidently this was a familiar proverb in circulation in the first century, and Paul makes good use of the saying in each of the situations where he applies it. The Lord, likewise, had used this mode of speech in warning his disciples about false teachers. Let us notice their applications and find lessons for us today.

Sin in the Church

The church at Corinth was a Gentile church beset by sin. It seems they had been converted from raw heathenism, and it was easy for them to fall back into their old unrestrained way of living. The epistle of 1 Corinthians highlights many of their sins. Sexual immorality stands out among these sins, and one case in particular startled the apostle Paul—and especially how the church was reacting to it (or rather, not reacting). Read the 5th chapter. It seems that a man was living incestuously with his stepmother. Not only were they in such an unthinkable relationship, in church circles they were unabashedly appearing together. No one was calling their hand, as the church was too preoccupied with other fleshly matters ("puffed up"). It was in such a context that the apostle Paul asked the prodding question, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" Actually this was only one of the more obnoxious cases among many (1 Corinthians 5:1; 2 Corinthians 12:21). Obviously the church was taking a very tolerant view toward all of this. It was not being dealt with. And furthermore, like the writer James said, "For where envying and strife is [like at Corinth], there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16).

Erroneous Teaching in the Church

The other reference having to do with the proverbial statement involved the churches in Galatia. These churches likewise were Gentile churches. Their situation was a little different from the Corinthians. They were beset by Judaizers, teachers who were trying to take them back under the Law of Moses. We find the Galatians looking to the law for justification, circumcision being introduced and Jewish days being observed. Read this epistle. Unwisely, these erroneous teachers had been given an audience to vent their erroneous views. By going back under the Law for justification, and not looking to Christ, they were putting themselves back under condemnation (for no one could ever be saved by law, Romans 3:23; Galatians 3:10; Romans 8:1). Consequently, Paul said, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4). He

probingly continues with a question and a statement, "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?...A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (5:7,9).

In leaven we get the picture of something small, like yeast or such an agent in dough, gradually, but surely, spreading and, undetected or unobstructed, with time permeating the whole. This is how the apostle Paul looked upon the sin problem in the church at Corinth and the false teaching in the churches of Galatia. Even small irregularities, unchecked, in time will manifest themselves in full-blown apostasy. If we tolerate wrong, and learn to live with compromise, the next step is to accept it. With the floodgates open, the tidal waves can't help but come in. Once the devil gets into a church it is hard to get him out.

The Leaven of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians

Jesus made use of this figure of leaven in warning his disciples about the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians. He urged them to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matthew 16:6). At another place he added the Herodians to this list of those to be careful about (Mark 8:15; 3:6; 12:13). In Matthew 16:12, when his disciples pondered what Jesus meant by leaven, he told them that he was talking about "the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." At another time Jesus said, "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1). A person's doctrine, or belief, is manifest in the way that he lives. The 23rd chapter of Matthew tells us about the hypocritical "righteousness" of the scribes and Pharisees. And its leavening impact could be seen in their converts. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" said Jesus, "For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (23:15). Unbelief and the worldly political slant in a religious context characterized the leaven of the Sadducees and Herodians. Such subtle outworking of ill is manifest in religious circles and at every turn in society (whether in ancient times or today).

Instructions to Purge

The apostle Paul, having asked the prodding question, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" with thoughts of the unleavened bread of the Passover in mind, gives instructions to the Corinthians about dealing with the sin problem in the church. "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacri-

ficed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Initially this involved repentance and them getting back on track with Christ (2 Corinthians 7:8-11). In purging out glaring cases of old leaven, disfellowship was to be practiced (Read 1 Corinthians chapter 5 and 2 Corinthians 2:6-9). And Paul gives expanded thought in 1 Corinthians 15:33 that is applicable to the situation at hand, "Be not deceived: evil communications [companionships] corrupt good manners [morals]" (Read the context). Of the false teachers among the Galatian churches, Paul said, "I would they were even cut off which trouble you" (Galatians 5:12).

As we pointed out, the Lord Jesus had warned His disciples to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." In Matthew 15:14, He further had said, "Let them alone; they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14). Although Jesus reached out to and ate with regular sinners, he had little patience with apostates guised as religious leaders. He had some especially strong things to say to them and about them. And others should always remember, "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

EDITORIAL

Byways

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GIVING CONSIDERED WORSHIP

T IS this writer's conviction that giving should be looked upon as an act of worship, and especially in connection with the assembly. It should be thought of more in spiritual terms. It is not just a matter of raising money.

The church was established on the Jewish Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, which fell upon the first day of the week. With 3000 being converted and added to their number, we are told, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The different things listed in this verse are associated with worship. Fellowship is listed along with the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread and prayers (all distinct features of worship). In Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 10:16, the breaking of bread means the Lord's supper. Prayer is the essence of worship.

Here (Acts 2:42) "fellowship" refers to their giving. Among the definitions of this word (koinonía), Thayer says, "a gift jointly contributed, a collection,

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a contribution." We can find this word used in this way in Romans 15:26, 2 Corinthians 9:13, Philippians 1:5 and Hebrews 13:16. Paul thanked God for the Philippians, and for their "fellowship in the gospel from the first day until" then. They had consistently contributed to his support from the beginning. He also mentions this in Philippians 4:15. Then in Philippians 4:18, he says, "I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus [their messenger the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God." By saying this, he puts their giving in the category of worship that has taken place. The writer of Hebrews talks about the "sacrifice of praise...the fruit of our lips," and then he says, "But to do good and to communicate [fellowship, koinonía] forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:15,16). This is the language of worship. Scripturally, giving can be looked upon as an act of worship.

We meet upon the first day of the week to worship. We observe the Lord's supper, like the early church did (Acts 20:7). We reflect upon the supreme sacrifice that took place to accomplish our salvation. With introspective self-examination, we ponder upon this. God gave—He gave His only begotten son (John 3:16). Then, after this moving experience, how fitting that we in turn respond to Him by giving. 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" (2 Corinthians 8:5). Paul instructed the Corinthians, "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God has prospered him..." (1 Corinthians 16:2). Fittingly, we do this and appropriately it should be looked upon as worship.

However, it is disturbing to us that many in modern church circles don't look upon giving from such a spiritual perspective. With some it is a matter of raising money for their inflated, and sometimes self-indulgent, church projects. Any way that they can get their hands on the money is fine with them. In other cases, perhaps, because stingy people will not turn their money loose, outside sources and schemes are resorted to, actually to get someone else to pay the church bills. In times gone by Ladies' Aid Societies filled this void with their projects. Sometime ago in a financial appeal from a religious endeavor, evidently thinking it would enhance their cause, we saw a listing of several dozen ways and means suggested to raise money. Then recently, on the Inter-

net, we came across this new scheme of how to get people separated from their money without the painful process of giving. As they were appealing to churches, and the clientele of church members, it said, "Better Than Bake Sales!" It was a package deal where members would pay for their vacation, and the home church would get a sizeable kickback from it. And the ad pictured a girl in her bikini, along with some others, at the beach.

There is something amiss somewhere. The dignity and concept of worship has been lost. When we truly imbue the grace of God, it makes us want to respond in kind. Freely we have received and freely we should give. A liberal heart is evidence of a changed heart. As we pointed out, Paul praised the Thessalonians who had first really given themselves to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:5), and then even out of their poverty, they were liberal. They are a model for us. With such a heart, giving indeed is worship. It is a joy. May God be praised!

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follow him. Luke 9:23 makes it more emphatic, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." There must be self-denial, something little known today, and



the added thought of taking up our cross daily. This is all involved in true discipleship.

Counting the Cost

Then our Lord further stated in Luke 14, like a person putting up a building, that person first must wisely sit down and count the cost. It is true that there is nothing we can do to earn salvation. Salvation is all in the context of grace. The word "redemption," repeatedly used in the New Testament, implies that something has been paid. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:20, "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." We know what that price was (John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:18,19). But from our perspective, does counting the cost involve sitting down, figuring out how much we owe God for salvation and then taking steps to pay Him? No. This would be impossible (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Paul says, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (Romans 4:4). Notice Ephesians 2:5-9. No, "counting the cost" involves commitment, not to pay the Lord, but to follow Him. The price has already been paid. It involves forsaking "all," otherwise we cannot be His disciples.

(For additional thought on this in the language of parables, consider Matthew 13:44-46).

Twofold Meaning of Disciple

The word "disciple" actually has a twofold meaning. Basically, it means a learner, and then, secondly, it means a follower. We are learners who have unconditionally committed ourselves to be followers of Christ. As we learn, we learn to follow. The Great Commission in Matthew plainly makes this evident. Carefully consider and ponder Matthew 28:18-20. In making disciples, there is that initial learning, and then the follow-up, the learners being taught to "observe all things." When a person comes to Christ, he doesn't understand or know it all. But he has committed himself, as a disciple, to keep on learning and to unconditionally follow that which he learns. It is a commitment that is to be carried out throughout life. Too many times people are in traditional ruts and have long ago stopped being learners and are no longer open to follow new truth that is there to be learned.

Crucified, But Alive

The figure of taking up our cross is carried a step further in Galatians 2:20. Here Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Not only was Christ crucified, and not only are we to take up our cross and follow Him, we are to be crucified on this cross. Sinful self must be put to death. When we repent and are baptized into Christ, we do this and arise to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-5). Then, as Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, this becomes a reality. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature [creation]: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." Yes, Christ "died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:15). This life lived for Christ is highlighted in Romans 12:1 with the admonition to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Yes, true commitment to the Lord involves having the Lord embodied in our lives. We, unselfishly, are to be living sacrifices. Our testimony should be that of Paul in Galatians 2:20. Can we in truth say these words?

The Totality of It "All"

Let us further look into the totality of what is involved, as believers, in our commitment to the Lord. Interestingly, a scribe questioned Jesus about the

"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."

greatest commandment. He, unhesitatingly, replied, "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord: And 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; this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:28-31). The fact that God is one is highlighted. Their devotion was not to be divided among many lesser deities (which were nonexistent). God being one, they were commanded to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." We serve the same God today, and the only way that we can acceptably respond to Him is with our all.

This is likewise further made emphatic in the Sermon on the Mount. Here the Lord stated in no uncertain terms, "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). Then He summed all of it up by saying, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (6:33). Yes, the Lord must be Lord of all in our lives; otherwise He is not Lord at all in our lives. If the Lord is not first in our lives, He is not in our lives. We may not be perfect, but this must be our mindset in really being committed to the Lord.

"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

The word "all" repeatedly appears in the New Testament. Colossians 3:17 plainly states, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do *all* in the name of the Lord Jesus..." The apostle Peter "encompassingly" admonishes, "Wherefore laying aside

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(Continued from Previous Page) 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). Likewise Paul admonished the Ephesians, "I... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation [calling]

wherewith ye are called, With *all* lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love..." (Ephesians 4:1,2). Next, 1 Corinthians 10:31 reads, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do *all* to the glory of God." We could further add to this list of Scriptures, but these should plainly and sufficiently illustrate that commitment to the Lord demands our "all."

"With Purpose of Heart"

In view of all of this, we can only say that with fixed purpose we enter into commitment to the Lord. There is nothing vague or indefinite about it. We know where we stand. The church at Jerusalem, when they heard that many had become Christians at Antioch, sent Barnabas to encourage these new converts and get them off to a good start. Acts 11:23 reads, "Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." Their lives now being filled with meaning and purpose, being a Christian was the driving impetus in being alive. This Scripture brings to mind what was said about Daniel. In Babylonian captivity, Daniel and the other Hebrew children were selected as choice young men to serve the king. They were set aside in preparation for this and were to eat the king's meat and drink his wine. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine he drank..." (Daniel 1:8). It takes strong convictions to hold up under circumstances like this. There can be no question mark about where a person stands. Such purpose of heart is involved in being a real Christian and being committed to the Lord.

"Not as One that Beateth the Air"

Paul uses the Grecian games to illustrate the necessary commitment in living the Christian life. He speaks of running a race and boxing in 1 Corinthians 9. This was done with much preparation, deliberation and purpose. He continues in what he has to say, "And every man that striveth for the mastery [competes for the prize] is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as

uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). Discipline, and conditioning, leading up to the games was rigorous, and being "temperate in all things" was required. In running a person would gauge himself to win. Likewise, his boxing was not just so much dancing around and throwing meaningless punches into the air ("as one that beateth the air"). Each stroke landed as a decisive blow. Everything had purpose and was calculated to get the job done. Paul emphasized this figure further in Philippians 3:13 and 14, "But this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And this singular resolve and unfettered effort should be evident in our being committed to the Lord (in being a real Christian). Of necessity, purpose of heart is behind it all.

LIFELONG COMMITMENT

The first part of this article has been about commitment, leading up to what we have to say now. It is a lifelong commitment to the Lord. Unless this is clearly defined in our minds, trouble will be in store for us. We will not be as likely to persevere.

Not a Sprint



The race that we have been talking about is not a sprint. It is not a sudden dash and it's over. It is a cross-country race usually spread over many miles and years. Consequently, may we take the admonition of Hebrews 12:1 and 2 to heart, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." The Scripture we noticed in Philippians 3:13 and 14 fits in well here. Our minds should be psy-

chologically geared and our pace wisely gauged for the long pull. Patience is a must.

Paul's Testimony

The apostle Paul, near the finishing line of this race (and with other figures of the Grecian games in mind), could write, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Paul, in his commitment, had patiently and faithfully endured. He never took his eyes off the prize of the high calling in Christ. Let us have the same mindset.

Newborn Babes, Growth, Maturity

Another figure lets us know that there is more than the initial commitment involved. The apostle Peter said, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). Becoming a Christian is just the beginning. With birth, there looms before a person a life to be lived. This figure of a birth is not completely parallel to the reality of our situation because as a Christian we personally are involved from the beginning as to how our lives are to be lived. We commit ourselves to the Lord and this commitment is an ongoing thing throughout life. It is a commitment to attain unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). That is constantly our goal. We ever reach onward and upward. We go from being a "babe" to maturity.

The Lifelong Commitment Laid Out for Us (2 Peter 1:3-11)

For your own personal study, the scenario of this lifelong commitment that will end in heaven is excellently laid out for us in 2 Peter 1:3-11. It reads, "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ve might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance [self-control]; and to temperance [self-control] patience [perseverance]; and to patience [perseverance] godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [love]. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Thoughts in Conclusion

As we draw this article on being committed to the Lord to a conclusion, consider these thoughts. If you "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind," you won't have any problem coming to all of the services of the church all of the time, if at all possible. You won't even have to think about whether you will attend or not. This was taken care of when you were baptized (Acts 2:41,42; Heb.10:22,25). Commitment comes with genuine conversion. And being committed to the Lord helps simplify life when facing temptation, too. There are certain predetermined bounds that we dare not pass over. Consequently, right and wrong are more distinctly defined. Even that which is questionable becomes a "no, no." We "abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22). We want to please our Lord in all things and do all things for his glory. Never do we want to hear Him proddingly ask, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say" (Luke 6:46). We with resolve press on in the paths of righteousness. How much more wonderful to hear the Lord say in that day, "Well done, good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:21,23).

Yes, it takes real commitment to be a real disciple of Christ, but it is the most inspiring and rewarding experience possible. In becoming a Christian, we died to sin and buried the old man of sin in baptism. How wonderful now for each of us to heed the admonition of Paul, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection [mind] on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:1-4).

Therefore, we ask again, in the light of all of these truths, "Are you committed to the Lord?"

The more you are committed to the Lord the less inclined you will be to commit sin.

Those "Catfish" Make the Difference

In the Northeastern United States codfish are a big commercial business. Note the following facts: There is a market for eastern cod all over, especially in sections farthest removed from the northeast coastline. But the public demand posed a problem to the shippers. At first they froze the cod, then shipped them elsewhere, but the freeze took away much of the flavor. So they experimented with shipping them alive, in tanks of seawater, but that proved even worse. Not only was it more expensive, the cod still lost its flavor and, in addition, became soft and mushy. The texture was seriously affected.

Finally, some creative person solved the problem in a most innovative manner. The codfish were placed in the tank of water along with their natural enemy—the catfish. From the time the cod left the East Coast until it arrived at its westernmost destination, those ornery catfish chased the cod all over the tank. There was no loss of flavor nor was the texture affected. If anything, it was better than before.

Each one of us is in a tank of particular and inescapable circumstances. It is painful enough to stay in the tank. But in addition to our situation, there are God-appointed "catfish" to bring sufficient tension that keeps us alive, alert, fresh and growing. It's all part of God's project to shape our character so we will be more like his Son. Understand why the catfish are in your tank. Understand they are part of God's method of producing character in your life and mine.—Selected

Twelve Givers of the Bible

The Willing Giver, Abraham, who offered his only son (Genesis 22:1-19).

The Big Little Giver, the widow, who in giving two mites, gave all she had (Mark 12:42-44).

The Stingy Giver, Saul, who wanted to offer the spoils of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:17-23).

The Sacrificial Giver, David, who refused to give that which cost him nothing (2 Samuel 24:24).

The Covetous Givers, Ananias and Sapphira, who held back part pretending they were giving all (Acts 5:1-10).

The Consecrated Givers, the Macedonians, who first gave themselves to the Lord (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

The Life Givers, Peter and John, who had neither silver nor gold, but gave life (Acts 3:1-5).

The Voluntary Giver, Zaccheus, who gave half of his goods to feed the poor without being asked (Luke 19:1-9).

The Reward Givers, those who gave to be seen of men; they had their only reward now (Matthew 6:2).

The Unpretentious Giver, the Samaritan, who made no show (Luke 10:25-37).

The Perfumed Givers, the Philippians, whose gifts were "an odor of sweet smell" (Philippians 4:17-18).

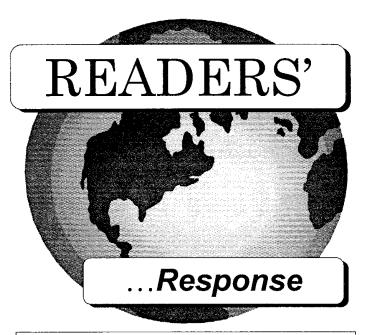
The Greatest Giver, God, who gave His only Son for you and me (John 3:16).—Selected

BIBLE QUESTIONS

(Random Questions Over the Bible)

- What happened to Jacob when he wrestled with an angel on his return trip to Canaan that would physically remind him of this experience the rest of his life?
- What is the literal meaning of the term "Pharaoh," the title used in referring to Egyptian kings?
- 3. What did Joseph do when he was brought out of the dungeon before he appeared before Pharaoh to hear his dream?
- 4. Although the city of Jerusalem was being besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, and the prospects of captivity were imminent, why was Jeremiah commanded by the LORD to buy a field?
- 5. How long was the city of Jerusalem besieged before it fell to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians?
- 6. In what book of the Old Testament is the prophet continually addressed as "son of man"?
- 7. What prophet in Babylonian captivity was taken by the Spirit in a vision back to see the situation of those remaining in Jerusalem?
- 8. Of whom in derision did God say, "Thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite"?
- 9. Unlike the rest of the Old Testament that was originally written in Hebrew, what part of what book is written in the Chaldean (Aramaic) language?
- 10. Belshazzar was the son (or descendant) of what great Babylonian king?
- 11. What prophet prophecied and foretold the number of years the Jews would be in Babylonian captivity?
- 12. What ancient maritime city was called the "mart of nations" and its merchants "princes"?
- 13. Who were the parents of John the Baptist?
- 14. What were the only two miracles of Jesus that could be looked upon in a sense as being destructive?
- 15. Where are the only two places the word "church" is found in the four gospel accounts?
- 16. Which one of the twelve disciples had a name that meant twin, although there is no indication that he was a twin?
- 17. Where was the blind man Bartimeus healed by Jesus, and what did he do after he was healed?
- 18. How would Peter and John know where to go to prepare the feast of the Passover for Jesus and the disciples?
- 19. In which chapter of the New Testament is the term "brethren" (brothers) found more times than anywhere else in the New Testament?
- 20. What does the word "Abba" mean?

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



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.

NORTH CAROLINA:

- "Please remove me from your mailing list..."
- "Great book! Thanks for publishing it." [NOBODY LEFT BEHIND]
- "I continue to look forward to receiving THE SWORD AND STAFF. I find it loyal to the Word. I appreciate your stand in doctrine and practice."
- "Enclosed find a check...Please send me a copy of NOBODY LEFT BEHIND by David Vaughn Elliott. Use the other to keep THE SWORD AND STAFF coming. Keep up the good work." (E-mail)
- "Please send me six more copies of NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. I was absolutely thrilled with it and want to share with some friends...May God bless you for the good work that you do."

TENNESSEE:

- "Tve been waiting for this book. It will be good to receive it."
- "...Your recent editorial [Byways] a couple of issues ago on 'Strange Doctrine' would make a good tract. Any plans along these lines? I wish you would reprint 'The Letter That Was Never Answered.' Also, thanks for THE SWORD AND STAFF—very good material. May the Lord bless your work."

VIRGINIA:

- "Great book! Thank you."
- "Please remove this name from your mailing list."
- "Would you send me a copy of the book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND? Enclosed is a check. Keep up the great work."
- "Here is a little gift to help with the paper. Hope all of your family is doing well...Words cannot express how much I appreciate you and the great work you do for

the Lord. These words truly come from my heart."

■ "Thank you so much for sending me the bound volumes of THE SWORD AND STAFF. I am glad I got all of them. As a young Christian I need good Biblical writings, and THE SWORD AND STAFF is sound Biblical teaching. I know you are only a vessel and servant used by God, but as it says in the Proverbs, Let the young listen to the wise and increase their knowledge. My prayers are with you and your ministry."

PENNSYLVANIA:

- "Please send 2 copies of David Vaughn Elliott's book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND: INSIGHT INTO END-TIME' PROPHECIES. Also 2 copies of POEMS OF THE SOUL AND PROVERBS...Thank you."
- "Keep up your great work. I'm sure the Lord continues to bless you. Enclosed is my request for NOBODY LEFT BEHIND and a 93-94 bound volume [of THE SWORD AND STAFF] and...donation for your work."

OHIO

- 'I would like to receive the book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. Keep up the good work."
- "I would like to order 3 copies of the NOBODY LEFT BEHIND book by David Vaughn Elliott...

"Thanks for making this much needed informative book available to us."

- "Please send me a copy of David Vaughn Elliott's book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND: INSIGHT INTO END-TIME" PROPHECIES. Sorry to be so long in sending a contribution. We really enjoy THE SWORD AND STAFF. Thank you"
- "You give so much in your publications. It fits all ages. I write quotable messages and send them to shut-ins. Thanks so much.

"I would like to be renewed on the mailing list. I would like bound volumes 2001-2002...I would like NOBODY LEFT BEHIND...Enclosed is a check...Use the remainder as a contribution. We all need the truth. Thanks."

■ "Please send me one copy of NOBODY LEFT BE-HIND and then please keep the balance of my donation for your work with THE SWORD AND STAFF.

"THE SWORD AND STAFF is an important source of information for my ministry and I thank you for that. The world really needs for you to continue this powerful work for the kingdom of God. Keep up the good work."

■ "Thank you for all the hard work that goes into putting THE SWORD AND STAFF together. We enjoy each and every issue.

"Please send us a copy of David Vaughn Elliott's book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND and also one copy of POEMS OF THE SOUL AND PROVERBS.

"We hope and pray the enclosed contribution will help to ease the financial crunch you've been experiencing.

"May God continue to bless your efforts."

INDIANA:

■ "We thank the Lord for your ministry. Thank you for THE SWORD AND STAFF."

(Continued on Next Page)

READERS'...Response

(Continued from Previous Page)

■ "Please send me a copy of NOBODY LEFT BE-HIND..."

"I am thankful that some are still 'continuing in the apostles' doctrine.' So many are abandoning the truth in order to 'get along' with all denominations. We must not offend' seems to be their battle cry."

ILLINOIS:

- "I enjoy THE SWORD AND STAFF very much. I am also interested in getting the book by David Vaughn Elliott NOBODY LEFT BEHIND...Thanks."
- "Send me your book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND: IN-SIGHT INTO END-TIME' PROPHECIES. Also find \$ for SWORD AND STAFF productions. Great material and true to the Bible! Thanks!"
- 'Thank you for your publication. It's a breath of fresh air to read the Biblical truths in THE SWORD AND STAFF.

"Enclosed find my check for the following bound volumes [all of them]...

"May God bless you and the work you do for Him!"

MISSOURI:

■ "Thank you for your faithfulness in continuing to send THE SWORD AND STAFF. We save every copy and read them many times..."

ARKANSAS:

■ "I really appreciate THE SWORD AND STAFF publication...Enclosed check is a donation; [part] for NO-BODY LEFT BEHIND."

MISSISSIPPI:

■ "A brother in Christ gave me a copy of THE SWORD AND STAFF. I must say that I enjoyed reading it, and have benefited from the content as any gospel paper that I receive. I had never heard about the publication until the past Lord's day, and I commend you heartily for your soundness and dedication to the truth. We need many more just like you and those who assist you with the paper..."

LOUISIANA:

■ "Thanks for THE SWORD AND STAFF. It's great and so easy to read and understand. I wish all my family and others would read it. May God continue to bless you."

TEXAS:

- "Enclosed is a check...for Bro. Elliott's book NOBODY LEFT BEHIND and...for THE SWORD AND STAFF. I really enjoy the paper. Thank you very much."
- "I enjoyed your Editorial Comments in your last issue of THE SWORD AND STAFF. Also thank you for sending me issues for the jail ministry.

"Please send me a copy of NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. I have been studying prophecy for three years (on the side) so to speak. What rapture? What seven years? The man of sin is the papal system. Jesus comes one time,

very loudly...

"Enclosed is a donation check for the book..."

- "Thank you for the book NOBODY LEFT BE-HIND. It is a very good book. It sure puts prophecy in perspective, and it was well written. Thanks to brother Elliott for a great book. Please pass this information on to him. Take Care, and keep up the good work."
- "Can you believe that I received the recent SWORD AND STAFF just yesterday, and have read it from cover to cover? That is only the first reading, as I will begin again. Perhaps I was longing for strong, Spirit filled messages and it seemed that this SWORD AND STAFF

NON-TECHNICAL AND TECHNICAL DISTINCTIONS IN WORDS

EVIDENTLY one reader has misunderstood what we were trying to get across in the last issue of this paper in our little chart on "DIAKO-NOS (diakovos) = 'Deacon' " (involving distinctions made of non-technical and technical use of words). He said, "The idea of 'technical' and 'nontechnical' is man's invention, not God's." Then he seemed to want to apply diakonos generically, and leave it there, and ignore and disregard the function of a deacon per se. But that there is the non-technical and technical use of words seems self-evident. In the non-technical distinction we see a word in its basic meaning, as diakonos simply means servant or minister. In a word's technical usage we see it used in a more specialized way, in this case as we said, referring to an "office" (or distinct function in the church, set aside by the Holy Spirit). The non-technical meaning of servant has not been lost in its technical usage, but narrowed down to service in more of a special sense. All are servants of God, but Scripture like Philippians 1:1 makes "deacons" distinct from the rank and file "membership" of the church.

This is not hard to understand. To illustrate, the non-technical and technical aspects can easily be seen in the use of the word "elder." The word "elder" in its non-technical, basic meaning simply means older, an older person. In its technical, more specialized usage it has reference to an "office" in the church. By "office" we mean work, not a position of inaction. The apostle Paul said that "if a man desire" such an "office," "he desireth a good work" (1 Timothy 3:1). Elders are pastors and overseers of a local church, according to the New Testament. The basic meaning of older is not lost in them being called elders of the church, as they are not to be novices (1 Timothy 3:1-7), but older men of experience and Christian maturity.

This is very plain, isn't it?—J.E.G.

covered many needed subjects. (They all do)...

"Thank you for your godly wisdom and for 'telling it like it is.' Strong preaching doesn't seem to be the order of the day, these days. I'm thankful there are some of you left who feed us with truth...

"May God richly bless you for many years to come."

OKLAHOMA:

■ "I enjoy THE SWORD AND STAFF very much. Please add me to your mailing list and send me the 93-94 bound volumes..."

NEBRASKA:

■ "Please take my address off your mailing list..."

MONTANA:

■ "We're sending...to help in publishing costs and continue to value your paper...Thanks."

IDAHO:

■ "Please send me a copy of NOBODY LEFT BEHIND. Enclosed is a contribution...Thank you for making this available to us. We will use this in our church library."

UTAH:

■ "Thank you so much for your writing."

"I was LDS (Mormon) for 50 years, then seven years ago I found Christ, and now I have found what I believe to be the truth, the truth which has always been in His Word, but from which I have been blinded by what you call the popular theories...I was holding to an erroneous view of the prophecy of Daniel chapter seven, and now He is showing me more truth every day. Today I found your site, and I do not even know your affiliations, but I recognize the truth of the 70 week prophecy of Daniel chapter nine. I will now continue to see what else I can learn from you. All that I read will be held against The Word for evaluation. Let God be true and every man a liar.

"Thanks so much and praise Him."

CALIFORNIA:

■ "Thank you for this God blessed publication, THE SWORD AND STAFF. I am so thankful for your 'true to the Bible' articles. They have been a spiritual blessing to me and I pass them on to others to bless them..."

OREGON:

■ "I fell upon your site while looking for information on 'God's Chosen People.' Please send me a complimentary copy of THE SWORD AND STAFF." (E-mail)

UNITED STATES:

- "My wife and I just happened across your Bible quiz site and love it. We have been going over the questions like a family board game all morning! God bless your efforts." (E-mail)
- "I appreciate your sending the copy of THE SWORD AND STAFF. I especially thank you for the article on DIAKONOS. I think you are right on target on the subject; also, I am becoming persuaded that professionalism is robbing the church of its potential. It is too bad that our most talented and able preachers are not

evangelists instead of professional pulpiteers and hand-holders. Makes one wonder why elders must be 'apt to teach'...

"Thanks for the paper; keep up the good work..." (E-mail)

MEXICO:

- "I'm very thankful for the paper received. I share it with people in great need and the Lord gives fruit to His glory through the written Word." (E-mail, translated)
- "...I would like to receive samples of your publication in Spanish. I have been reading it for 4 years and I believe it is among the best publications of Bible studies. I believe your ministry is important to enlarge the kingdom of God. I have preached it and recommended it to brothers..." (E-mail, translated)
- "With these lines, I want to show my appreciation for having LA ESPADA EL CAYADO given to me through brother...who comes to this place of confinement to bring us the Word of God. I want to continue receiving it...and to continue learning more about the gospel of Jesus. Thank you ahead of time for the attention given." (translated)

ARGENTINA:

■ "The one who is writing you is...to tell you I have received your appreciated magazine and it is a blessing to be able to read it. I would like to see if you would be able to send me some copies as a donation. I would be happy if you could help us with a donation of Bible studies, books and tracts in Spanish since our church is low on economic resources and we are not in a position to buy any materials..." (E-mail, translated)

GHANA:

■ "Help me through your publication to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus more and more so that I don't fall from God's grace. I am no more [getting THE SWORD AND STAFF]...For past four years I have missed most of the important lessons and also I received my lessons very, very late. Help me!

"Thank you! God richly bless you."

AUSTRALIA:

■ "Take name off mailing list."

"All of That into Your Bag?"

PREPARING FOR a long trip, a traveler said to his friend: "I am just about packed. I only have to put in a guidebook, a lamp, a mirror, a microscope, a telescope, a volume of fine poetry, a few biographies, a package of old letters, a book of songs, a sword, a hammer and a set of books I have been studying."

"But," the friend replied, "you can't get all that into your bag."

"Oh, yes," replied the traveler, "it doesn't take much room." He placed his Bible in the corner of the suitcase and closed the lid.—via Rafael Moreno

Learning Lessons From a Flock of Geese

As EACH GOOSE flaps its wings, it creates an "uplift" for the birds that follow. By flying in a "V" formation, the whole flock adds 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew alone. (People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier because they are traveling on the thrust of each other).

When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it. (If we have as much sense as a goose, we stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others).

When the lead bird tires, it rotates back into the formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird immediately in front of it. (It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks and sharing leadership. As with the geese, people are interdependent on each others skills, capabilities, and unique arrangements of gifts, talents, or resources).

The geese flying in formation honk to encourage those up front to keep up their speed, as well as the others (We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups where there is encouragement, the production is much greater. The power of encouragement to stand by one's heart or core values and to encourage the heart and core values of others is the quality of honking we seek).

When a goose gets sick, wounded, or shot down, two geese drop out of formation and follow it down to help and protect it. They stay with it until it dies or is able to fly again. Then, they launch out with another formation or catch up with the flock. (If we have as much sense as geese, we will stand by each other in difficult times as well as when we're strong).—Selected

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

SAAC was not the "father of the faithful" as was his father Abraham. He was not the exciting "Supplanter" that his son Jacob was. He never did anything spectacular, yet the Bible refers to our God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Abraham was a giant—we can understand the "God of Abraham." Jacob had qualities from which heroes are made—it is easy to understand the "God of Jacob."

But, the "God of Isaac"? What did Isaac ever do? He was born, he got married, he tended his flocks, he dug wells, and he died. Not very interesting? Yet, here he is listed right along with Abraham and Jacob as one of God's great men.

And herein is the great truth. How many of us are "Abrahams"? How many of us are "Jacobs"? Most of us are "Isaacs." What did Isaac do?

Actually, he did just what God wanted him to do. He was an obedient son, a faithful husband, and a good provider. No scandal is associated with his name. He was a good man from the cradle to the grave. God needed Isaac just as the church today could not do without its Isaacs.

There are some "Abrahams" and "Jacobs" in the church. Thank God for them! But thank God for our "Isaacs." They may never do anything spectacular, but when the preacher stands to preach, there they are in their place and giving their support. When the teacher gets up to teach, there they are.

Isaac did what he could and his name will be forever immortalized in the words: "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Our God loves and appreciates the Isaacs as well as the Abrahams and Jacobs.—Author Unknown

What Is a "Prayer Wheel"?

THE ANSWER we gave to a question received by e-mail, "What is a 'prayer wheel'," was kicked back for some reason (incorrect e-mail address or a spam blocker regarded our e-mail as spam because of material we had pasted in). The question involved use of the expression, "don't break the prayer wheel," in making prayer requests. The correspondent wondered about the meaning of "prayer wheel" and whether such a phrase should be used.

The New World Dictionary says, "prayer wheel a revolving drum with written prayers, used by Tibetan Buddhists, like a rosary, in counting prayers."

And the online *Britannica Encyclopedia* tells us this: "Tibetan Buddhists use a device known as a prayer wheel to evoke good fortune and spirituality. The handheld prayer wheel consists of a hollow wood or metal cylinder, often beautifully embossed, which revolves on a handle, or axis. It contains the written prayer or mantra *Om mani padme hung* (O Lotus jewel, amen!) inscribed on strips of paper, fabric, or parchment."

Yes, we agree with our correspondent. The use of the expression "prayer wheel" in a Christian context is highly inappropriate, even wrong. We have never read anything about a prayer wheel in the Bible.

Getting "Hyped Up" About the Things of God

T IS a shame that some churches can't get all excited about the truths of God's Word and think they must adapt denominational programs to get people hyped up about God's work (and thereby expose themselves to false teaching and expedite apostasy in the ranks of the supposed church). Programs from false teachers may produce passing hype but not the everyday permanency that comes from consistently and daily following God's Word.



CHRISTIAN is as Christian does.

It takes real Christianity to work in the workaday world.

The church is not a public forum, but it is "the pillar and ground [stay] of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15).

If you are afraid that you will rock the boat, you won't get much rowing done.

A person cannot willfully make a practice of sin and be right with God (1 John 5:18; Hebrews 10:26), but at the same time, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Sound doctrine without sound living is like a "sounding brass, or a tinkling symbol."

There is a saying, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," but Paul writing to the Christians in Rome said, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2).

Denominationalism institutionalizes division and implies that God is a diverse and contradictory Being.

Too many preachers upon finding it is a hard job to change the world change their message to accommodate the world (and unconverted "church members" who are actually a part of the world).

Personally, I don't have a TV, not because I am so righteous, but for the opposite reason.

What some call contending for the faith is really being contentious about the faith (it's more like sectarian wrangling and a work of the flesh).

I have never seen any RVs in a funeral procession, nor a funeral coach pulling a fishing boat.

Many, whose hearts have been warmed by the gospel, get on fire for God only to experience burnout when they are unable to pass this fire on to others.

True worship is not determined by how much sound and noise is made.

Churches' growing in number is of no significance unless there is the corresponding growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

The god of this world is worshipped in the form of that which is seen.

If you live too "high on the hog," you will probably end up eating fatback (or even worse that, be like the prodigal son—Luke 15:12-16).

Masons don't make good building blocks to go into the Lord's church (Ephesians 2:20-22).

The relationship of the wife to the husband, according to the New Testament, is one of submission, not subjugation.

New Christians, given time to grow but not taught, only grow older and more worldly.

If you are truly conservative in your religious convictions, it should make you liberal in your giving (for this is what is taught in the Scriptures).

Some who think they have everything nailed down seem to have thrown the hammer away before the job was finished.

A faithless faith is seen when "religious" people do not believe and accept what the Bible says about baptism (Romans 10:17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:1-6; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21).

To be angry at nothing but sin is the surest way not to sin while being angry.

We can glibly talk about a "Restoration Movement" all we want to, but the New Testament church has not been restored when organizations besides the church are called into being to do the work of the church.

If you find life boring, you probably are boring to others also.

God wants us to clean up our act, not act like (pretend) we are clean.

If you look back, you will fall behind.

The Value of a Smile

ASMILE is nature's best antidote for discouragement. It brings rest to the weary, sunshine to those who are sad, and hope to those who are hopeless and defeated.

A smile is so valuable that it can't be bought, begged, borrowed, or taken away against your will. You have to be willing to give a smile away before it can do anyone else any good.

So if someone is too tired or grumpy to flash you a smile, let him have one of yours anyway. Nobody needs a smile as much as the person who has none to give.—*Mt. Enterprise Bulletin*

Be Strong!

Be strong!

We are not here to play, to dream, to drift; We have hard work to do, and loads to lift; Shun not the struggle — face it; 'tis God's gift.

Be strong!

Say not, "The days are evil. Who's to blame?"
And fold the hands and acquiesce — oh shame!
Stand up, speak out, and bravely, in God's name.

Be strong!

It matters not how deep intrenched the wrong, How hard the battle goes, the day how long; Faint not — fight on! Tomorrow comes the song.

 $-Maltbie\ Davenport\ Babcock$

Bad Situations and Sins, But...

T IS interesting to notice Paul's use of the word "but" in his writings, or equivalent expressions. His practice got this writer's attention recently in studying the epistle of Ephesians. He uses such words to highlight the opposite. He may be talking about an undesirable situation or circumstance, about sin, or even something else. By using the word "but" he switches over to stressing the opposite. When he comes down heavy on the bad, he usually tells us of the good that should replace it. He doesn't leave the displaced situation to be void or a vacuum. In getting rid of the evil, it is to be replaced with that which is good.

One illustration of a situation that is reversed is seen in Ephesians 2:1-10. Paul lays out the very undesirable state of the Ephesians as they were lost in sin, then the "but" enters the picture. "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us... For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." "But God" makes all the difference in the world and the world to come.

To further illustrate in the following references in Ephesians, notice the positive good that is to supplant and replace the bad, or how the bad is to be dealt with.

"Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Ephesians 4:28).

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And [but] be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:31.32).

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Ephesians 5:11).

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Many other such references can be found in this epistle. This should tell us something. It is not enough to condemn the evil or be against the wrong. Positive action should be taken to fill the vacuum with good.—J.E.G.



The Danger in Exalting Men

If you exalt men upon a pedestal, even preachers, you unwisely put them in a position where you will see they only have feet of clay; and even though you may polish their sepulchers, within are only dead men's bones waiting for the resurrection and Judgment Day.

Providence

NE of the precious passages filled with promise is "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, ASV). This passage has much to say about God and His providence. The compound Latin word for providence is "to see beforehand." God was able to ultimately accomplish the effect needful for realization of His purpose from the foundation of the world (Colossians 1:8-23). God has worked in the events of history to providentially accomplish all to His glory (Ephesians 1:6).

Where natural laws are suspended, the miracles of God are extraordinary, but when God uses natural laws in providence we see His majesty. The welfare of the human family falls within providence (Matthew 6:26; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). In special cases He manifested welfare through individuals preserving Israel by employing a Persian king to do His bidding. Esther and Mordecai did not know for sure her role in history until it was completed (Esther 4:14).

"...We know"—Christians unassumingly, quietly, never boastful or proud, have confidence in God's loving care. Hardships in life do not imply that God does not care (2 Corinthians 11:22-33; 2 Timothy 4:1-6). God always pursues His plan, which is beyond our limited (finite) abilities to know or explain. In spite of hardships we must be able to say, "I know him whom I have believed" (2 Timothy 1:12). God is working in Christians' lives because the Bible tells us so, even when all ways and means are not understood. Experiential explanations are an "icy road" fraught with problems. The subjective nature of "feelings" will lead to more problems than solutions. Confidence is vested in the objective "thus saith the Lord."

"...All things work" is never to include an unlimited scope of human affairs. "All" is frequently used as synecdoche (i.e. where the whole is manifested for the parts and visa versa). "All" [many times cannot be pressed for a literal translation (Matthew 3:5; Luke 7:29,30). When we are called "spiritual man" who judges all things, it cannot be literal (1 Corinthians 2:5). We do not have supernatural powers to judge all things. All things are limited to the context. In this context we are suffering. The diversity of such sufferings is not to be compared to the glory awaiting the saint. The child of God must exercise patience in trials. Intercessions are part of His help (Romans 8:27,39; 1 Timothy 2:1-5). The argument for providence is that God did not hold back the greatest gift of all to provide for us "all things" (Romans 8:31-39). Nothing present or future can frustrate God's plan as long as one remains faithfully obedient (Romans 1:1-5; 16:1; 1 Timothy 2:1,2). God does not cause afflictions, but rather uses them in His plan for man's good, nor does He generate ill. One should not interpret everything that happens as an instance of providence. The work of providence is exciting and potential, but not mechanical in its process nor an automatic cause and effect.

"...Work together" is a verb that demonstrates an active, orchestrated, ongoing work of God. Indicated is a harmonious conclusion worthy of God.

"...For good" allows God to bring about beneficial results. The Christian must ultimately have a good ending to his life because at every step of the way, he is in the hands of God who is carrying on His divine processes to His glory. While it is not necessary to contend that God orchestrates each instance of adversity to bring out good, the Scriptures indicate that ultimately God's purpose will be accomplished even in persecution. We are confident that this passage prompts the Christian to have a positive attitude towards the adversities in life. They should view them as milestones not millstones on the road to eternity.

Examples of good befalling the faithful are: In Joseph's life the overcoming of jealous brothers, accusations by Potiphar's wife, and numerous other events could have overwhelmed him. He was positive that what others intended as evil God meant to use for good as on the day his brothers appeared before him after his father's death (Genesis 50:20). David dealt with a headstrong king Saul and many adversities within his own house. God was able to use them. Similar examples abound everywhere in the Bible.

Love God, be called according to His purpose and thank Him for His providence.—Don Hatch

Answers to:

BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Genesis 32:24-32; 2. Great house; 3. Genesis 41:14; 4. Jeremiah chapter 32; 5. Jeremiah 39:1-2; 52:4-6; 6. Ezekiel 2:1,3,6,8...(This expression is found 94 times in the book of Ezekiel); 7. Ezekiel 8:3-18; 8. Ezekiel 16:3,44-45; 9. Daniel 2:4b through chapter 7; 10. Daniel 5:1-2,11,18,22; 11. Daniel 9:2; 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 Jeremiah 25:8-14 (29:10); 12. Isaiah 23:1-3,8; 13. Luke 1:5-13; 14. Matthew 8:28-34; 21:17-20; 15. Matthew 16:18; 18:17; 16. John 20:24 (11:16; 21:2); 17. Mark 10:46-52; 18. Luke 22:7-13; 19. In Acts 15 "brethren" is found 11 times (Acts 15:1,3,7,13,22,23,32,33,36,40); 20. Aramaic for father, Romans 8:15.

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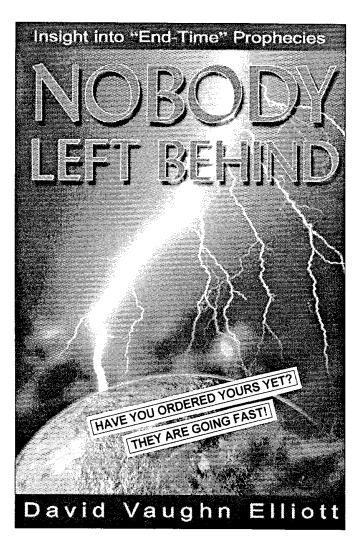
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