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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST IS DIFFERENT

Bill Dillon

The church of Christ is a distinctive religious group in purpose, organization, name, worship and message. Its purpose is not to serve as a man pleasing, ear tickling, rubber stamp for Satan. Neither is the purpose of the church to "snap, crackle and pop," people into heaven by entertainment, outings and amusement activities. The church should strive to make men holy; for only in holiness can true happiness be found. The church is a simple body of "called-out" souls who are endeavoring to reproduce the New Testament church in the twentieth century. Consequently, members of that body welcome all sincere souls who from the depths of their hearts reach out to serve and worship the true and living God.

The organization of the church of Christ is likewise unique being overseen by elders (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1) who are charged with the care and feeding of the flock (Acts 20:28). The preacher (subject to the elders) is left free to devote his time to study, to preaching the word, reproving, rebuking and exhorting (2 Timothy 4:1,2). Because of the autonomous nature of the church, no time is consumed in the writing of bureaucratic reports. No money contributed locally finds itself being sent to the convention treasury. The church of the New Testament, guided by the words of inspired men, managed to evangelize the world (Colossians 1:23) without any organization larger than the local congregation.

The term "church of Christ" (Romans 16:16) brings honor to the One who loved the church enough to die for it (Acts 20:28). It is sheer presumption to wear human designations supplanting the Lord's name (1 Corinthians 1:10-17; Colossians 3:17). Seekers of God would do well to honor the Lord and not Luther, John the Baptist, Alexander Campbell, or any other mortal. Shall Christ be robbed

of the recognition rightfully due to him? Those who say they believe that the name makes no difference should be most easily persuaded to drop their humanly oriented titles; if it truly makes no difference, they are relieved of any resistance to the change.

The worship of the church of Christ is different also because of an emphasis on the spirituality of singing and praying. Worship is in song with the human heart as the divinely appointed instrument (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Additionally, there are no ready made prayers to read, as men of the congregation call upon God, directing the minds of all in heart-felt implorings to the heavenly throne.

The Lord's Supper is also served each Lord's Day in keeping with the Scriptural example set forth in Acts 20:7 where, "the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread..." In most communities the church of Christ is the only religious group you can go to each Sunday and expect to see Christians in regular observance of the feast divine.

The message of the Lord's church is as simple as "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:15,16); as loving as, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37); as broad as "all that are afar off" (Acts 2:39); and as important as, "seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33). Because the world has a tendency to undervalue the word of God, not just any religious message will do—the church must preach the word (Acts 8:4). The books of 1 and 2 Timothy are saturated with warnings about departing from the gospel message (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:14-16; 4:1-7; 6:3-5; 6:20,21; 2 Timothy 2:1-3; 2:14-26; 3:1-16; 4:1-8, etc.). As the wonderful, saving word of the gospel can be resisted, neglected and perverted by man (2 Timothy 3:8; Hebrews 2:3; Galatians 1:7-9), it can also be accepted, believed, and obeyed by man to his satisfaction here and happiness hereafter.

Even a casual examination of the church of Christ tells of distinctiveness in matters of purpose, organization, name, worship and message. We encourage no one to come to us but plead rather that men and women go with us back beyond the beginnings of denominational groups, back beyond the early departures foretold by Paul (Acts 20:29,30) and finally stop at Jerusalem and reproduce the church today as it was twenty centuries ago. Let all voices speak their desire to enter into the church the way Peter described in Acts 2:38, "repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..." and then to "continue steadfastly in the Apostle doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." (Acts 2:42). May it be said of us, as them of old time, that "all that believed were together" (Acts 2:44). Reader, investigate the church of Christ; it is different.

“The Crucified Man”

Grady Miller

Death by crucifixion was, according to Titus Flavius Josephus, “the most wretched of deaths.” If we knew nothing of this ancient torture and execution other than the details found in the Bible, that would be sufficient to document death on the cross as a cruel, humiliating and sadistic act of capital punishment.

In the Roman world for hundreds of years before the time of Jesus of Nazareth and continuing until the Emperor Constantine, three hundred years after Jesus, there were tens of thousands of public crucifixions throughout the Empire. Two petty criminals crucified along with Jesus outside the walls of Jerusalem was not a rare occurrence. The Romans crucified 6,000 followers of the slave-rebel Spartacus along the Appian Way in 71 B.C.

Contrary to popular belief, crucifixion was not a Roman invention. The Assyrians, Phoenicians and Persians first practiced crucifixion. The Greeks and Romans adopted this cruelty from their eastern neighbors. Alexander the Great crucified 2,000 survivors of his siege at Tyre. The message was plain to all who opposed him that he would show no mercy to those who refused to surrender.

Even the Jews sometimes resorted to the terror of crucifixion. The Hasmonean ruler Alexander Jannaeus crucified eight hundred Pharisees in 88 B.C. The Talmud records that Simeon ben Shetah hung eighty or so witches in Ashkelon in the century before Jesus was born.

Still, it might be argued the Romans perfected the art of crucifixion. At first only slaves were hung on a cross, but by the time of Jesus enemy soldiers, slaves, rebels, violent criminals and others were punished by public crucifixion. The passion narratives in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John agree with the descriptions of crucifixion given by ancient historians in every particular.

While there may have been one hundred thousand or more crucifixions in the time of Jesus, there was no archaeological evidence of that grisly practice until 1968. With the Israeli capture of Jerusalem in the Six Day War, new excavations were begun throughout the land of Israel. New housing and construction work in Jerusalem uncovered ancient sites almost daily.

A crew from the Ministry of Housing broke through several ancient burial chambers in an area north of Jerusalem called *Giv'at ha-Mivtar*. In those tombs there was pottery, skeletons and thirteen ornate, inscribed stone *ossuaries* or “bone boxes.” Poor people were buried in shallow graves dug into the ground. People of

means could afford tombs dug into the limestone rock. The bodies were laid on rock benches to decompose. The bones were then gathered and placed in the ossuary.

The tomb excavated by Vassilios Tzaferis was the burial place for a well-to-do family that lived in the time of Jesus. Two generations were buried here. Seventeen family members could be identified from the skeletal remains. At least one of the men worked on the Temple that was rebuilt by Herod the Great.

The grave gives us a depressing insight into the times that Jesus lived. Five of the seventeen family members died before the age of seven. Only two of the seventeen lived to the age of fifty. One child died of starvation. One woman had been clubbed in the head.

And one man — Yehohanan, son of Hagakol — had been crucified.

The young man, estimated to be about 5 feet, 6 inches and between 24–28 years old, had a spike or nail driven into his right heel bone. Bits of olive wood still remain between the bone and the head of the 4½ inch nail, with the tip of the nail twisted after it exits the bone. The best analysis suggests the nail was driven through a small wooden block, into the foot of the condemned man, and then into the pole of the cross where it bent when it hit a knot in the wood. Because removing the bent nail was so difficult, Yehohanan was buried with the nail left in his foot.

The evidence of the “crucified man” reveals that the familiar works of art depicting Jesus on the Cross may not be historically accurate. Yehohanan did not have his hands or arms nailed to the cross. Jesus did (Luke 24:39–40; John 20:24–29). But the nail through Yehohanan’s foot, penetrating not from the front but the side, and with the spike not long enough to pierce both feet, must mean that each foot was fastened on the side of the upright wooden stake of the cross.

Equipped For Service

Larry Miles

2 Timothy 2:15 reads as follows: **“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”**

Our Heavenly Father, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit have promised to equip us for service for them. Just as God will not force you to believe in Him and

obey the Gospel, the same rings true when spiritual growth is concerned. He will not force you to **“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”** (2nd Peter 3:18) But, if we are willing and desire to grow in the Christian life, He is there with the resources we need to equip ourselves to be **“lights shining in a dark world.”** (Mathew 5:13-16)

The main reason that He has called us out of darkness into the light of the Gospel is so that we may praise Him for it and help others find their way out of that spiritual darkness and into the Church of the Lord. (I Peter 2:9; Col. 1:12-14)

We are blessed to have in our possession a **“love letter”** from God. It is the inspired inerrant Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Just as Joshua, was instructed in [Joshua 1:6-9](#), we must make an effort to read the Word of God on a regular basis and observe (obey) what we find therein. In addition, we must study it and mediate upon it so that we can help others learn more of the Word.

We have a **“a most holy faith,”** (Jude 20) and a **“faith** (the entire sum of Scripture) **that was once for all delivered to the saints.** (Jude 3)

There are many other resources that the Lord has given to us. We think of the avenue of prayer. We can speak directly with the Creator of the Universe, not having to go through any human being, but through the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has richly blessed us with **“every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”** (Eph. 1:3)

He has given us fellow Christians to encourage us in the faith. This is to be a mutual experience. All of us are at different stages on our personal walk for the Master.

Just as the Roman Empire equipped their soldiers for earthly battles, God has provided the resources that we need for the Christian life. In Eph. 6:10-18 we have the account of **“taking up the whole armor of God.”**

So, if you are willing to and desire to take your spiritual life to another level, one beyond just a new believer, our gracious and loving God has provided the exact resources you need to equip yourself for a lifetime of service to the one who died for you. We hope and pray that you will avail yourselves of these resources and live **“an abundant life”** in the Lord. By doing so, you will impact not only you own life in the Lord, but will help and encourage others. We all need to be involved in reaching the lost and strengthening the saved. Let’s join together in this journey!

Why Do I Preach?

Ron Thomas

I recently read an article from "Times" online; this article featured the rural churches losing their preachers and the struggle the churches are having with this. The article was a good read and it really spoke to the truth of the situation in many rural areas. I preach in a rural area. The rural area where my family serves is in a town of about 5,000 in population, and the county being about 15,000. It is a great area, and the church supports us very well. As I was reading the article, I took special note of this remark: "And for the first time in American history, the majority of seminarians don't come from rural areas. Shannon Jung, a rural-church expert in Kansas City, Mo., says of young pastors, 'A town without a Starbucks scares them.' Wolpert recalls a professor's warning to a promising seminarian to shun a rural call: 'Don't go. You're too creative for that.'"

There is much in that quote that demands some additional thinking and remarks; however, it was the remark "You're too creative for that" that struck me as odd. Is it now the creativity of the young preacher that is important? Creativity is important, I think, but is it so important that rural churches don't need the benefit of those who are creative? I use the word "creative" not in the sense of progressive ideology, but with the idea of stimulating new ideas and ways about how to benefit the people served. Well, after reading that, I stopped and asked myself why do I preach? I have always had an answer, and I surely won't change my answer in asking this question in this article, but I would like to offer some reflection on this.

Some years ago I was watching a television program that was in syndication. On this particular program was a town preacher gone drunk. In his despair over the inclinations of people that drove him to drinking, he took note of two men who seemed to be different than most others. They seemed to be men who stood up to those who insisted on doing wrong; they seemed to be men who helped those less fortunate, and this gave the now drunk preacher hope that he had earlier lost. In the course of the program he saw the same young men in an event that took him back to his despair (a gunfight). After he saw what an unfortunate circumstance transpired he felt compelled to say something to those young men. It went something like this: "I used to be an esteemed person in the community; now I am a drunk. I drink because I look at people and see they have no moral compass. I started losing confidence in people and my ability to make a difference. I saw the two of you and I started to change my view, and then you go and do this!" The young men replied to him, "The reason there are people like you is because there are people like us." I have never forgotten that. In the Hollywood production

(during the 1960's) a truth was told.

Why do I preach? There are an untold number of people in our individual communities (not to mention the world) who long to have the purity of God's word taught to them. They desire, in the strongest way, to know and do that which is right. However, they live in a confusing world and some of the choices they make are adding to that confusion. They are confused and don't really know to whom they can turn, or even why they should. To illustrate this confusion a recent survey revealed that 21% of the atheists respondents said they believe in God!

1) I preach because I understand that Jesus loved me (and all others) enough to die for me. This basic understanding is the foundation to why I preach. As I look at my life I see one who simply can't measure up to the standard of righteousness Jesus exemplified. Who of us can? Since none of us can, His message is all the more important to get out.

2) I preach because it was the Lord's mercy shown toward me that allowed me to understand what I have never understood before. I want to help another understand the same thing I do. Exactly what is it that I want others to understand? I want them to understand that no matter the height of the wall of separation that people feel exists between them and the Lord, the Lord has "scaled" it and brought it down.

3) I preach because I understand that two contrary views cannot both be correct; at least one is wrong (if not both). When you believe something to be the truth, should you not take that truth and try to convince others the same? I think we should, and I do. Peter said that he could not but say those things that he saw and heard (Acts 4:20). Paul said that he understood well the "terror of the Lord," thus he sought to persuade men that there is good reason to listen to the message of righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:11).

4) I preach because I want to challenge the thinking of the local preachers, and allow myself to be challenged. There is an old saying that expresses itself like this: "We don't have the corner on the truth." If that is so, and I do not dispute it, then I want to learn from another. This includes learning from my brothers in Christ, and even from those outside the Lord's body. I am of the conviction that people don't believe error because they know it to be error! I preach because people are

confused religiously, and they don't want to be.

Perhaps it would be good for each us, who are identified as preachers, to ask and answer why it is that we preach? Those who are not preachers, ask yourself why it is that you feel compelled to speak to others? It can make a difference.

"AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM UTTERANCE"

Ernest S. Underwood

In our last article we pointed out that Jesus promised the apostles that after His departure back to the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. We noted the coming of the Holy Spirit on these apostles on the Day of Pentecost of Acts 2. When the Spirit came, the apostles began to speak with other tongues "as the Spirit gave them utterance. Then we noted that on that day the apostle Peter preached Christ unto the people. When the people cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter, under the power of the Holy Spirit answered, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." In order to have remission of sins today man must obey this same command given by the Holy Spirit. Let us notice more "utterances" of the apostles.

Jesus had promised to build His church. In Matt. 16:18 He promised, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." This church would also be called His kingdom. (See Col. 1:13). To Peter He gave the privilege of being the first to use the keys of that kingdom, those keys being the terms of entrance into it. This he did, with the other apostles, on the day of Pentecost as recorded in the second chapter of Acts. These apostles being guided by the Holy Spirit went forth preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus had commissioned them to go and "preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15). As already stated, Jesus had promised them that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth. Also, He promised them that the Spirit would bring to their remembrance all things that He had taught them in the time of His personal ministry here on earth.

Paul, who was chosen by the Lord to be one of His apostles after He had ascended back to the Father, (See Acts 9:4-16), gave many inspired "utterances" concerning the church/kingdom. In Eph. 1:22-23 he wrote about Christ and the

church, "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." In this same epistle he wrote that "there is one body." (4:4). Thus in these passages one learns that the body is the church, and that there is only one body. This is in complete harmony with Jesus' statement, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." (emphasis added). In Acts 20:28 Paul exhorts the elders of the church at Ephesus to "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." Note again the singularity of the terms flock and church.

This same apostle wrote to Timothy giving instruction of how "you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Tim. 3:15 - emphasis added). To the Colossians Paul wrote, reminding them that they had been "conveyed into the kingdom" as they received the forgiveness of sins." (Col. 1:13-14 - emphasis added). Luke recorded the fact that those who obeyed the Holy Spirit's command through Peter, to "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins," and thus saved, were being added daily to the church by the Lord.

Now some questions: With the explicit truth of these passages as uttered by the Holy Spirit through these inspired men about the oneness and singularity of the church/kingdom, how say so many today that there are many churches and that one should choose the one which is most pleasing him? Where is it recorded by the men inspired by the Holy Spirit, that there is more than one body, church, kingdom, or house of God? Where is it recorded that men have the right to choose one of the man-made denominations which are founded and built on the false doctrines of men, rather than accept the one church that Jesus built. Should not all men be interested in obeying from the heart the God-given gospel and let the Lord add them to the ONE church for which His Son gave his life to purchase with His blood?

To Seek, To Search, To Find

Tim Hester

Seeking, searching, and finding are all words which mean the same and which we hear many times a day. It is not uncommon to turn on the news today and hear them talking about someone or something for which people are looking. Many down through the ages have spent many billions of dollars and time in seeking,

searching, and finding. As we look at the Bible we can see that these words also describe that which Christ has done and that which we as man today should be doing.

First, Christ came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). When man was overcome by temptation in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1-6) he then sinned, and his iniquities separated him from the God of heaven (Isa. 59:2). This separation which occurred was the death which God had promised would come if man was not obedient unto him there in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:17). Since man died in the garden he needed that which would give him life once again. There was only one way that man could receive this life with abundance and that was through the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (John 10:10). The blood of bulls and goats could not take away man's sins (Heb. 10:4). It took an even greater sacrifice; the shedding of the blood of the Son of God (Heb. 10:12; 7:27; 9:26; Matt. 20:28). God so loved the world that he sent his Son to be that perfect sacrifice so that man can have everlasting life (John 3:15, 16). It is only through and in him that life can be found (John 3:15, 16; Rom. 6:23; II Tim. 1:1); he is life (Col. 3:3, 4) and we must come unto Him to receive that life (John 6:33-35). Yet there are many who will not receive the life that is offered because they will refuse to come unto Him (John 5:40).

Second, we find that man needs to search the scriptures (John 5:39). It is through the scriptures that man is told about this life which comes through Christ (John 5:39). Philip, when he joined himself to the chariot began at the same scripture and taught the Eunuch concerning Jesus (Acts 8:35). On the day of Pentecost, Peter and the other apostles used the scriptures to teach the multitude concerning the Christ which they had crucified (Acts 2:15-28). The apostle Paul tells Timothy that in order to be approved unto God one must take the time to study the scriptures (II Tim. 2:15). We also find that the Bereans were called noble because they searched the scriptures daily (Acts 17:11).

Third, we need to seek to do the will of God just as Christ sought to do the will of the Father which sent him (John 5:30). He took on the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7) and became obedient in all things including death (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8). We today also need to be obedient unto God in all things. We can not pick and choose that which we want to do but instead we must be willing to do all the will of the Father in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21). After Saul sought to do his own will and not the will of God Samuel compares this rebellion against God's will as the sin of witchcraft (I Sam. 15:23).

Fourth, we must seek and set our affections upon those things which are above (Col. 3:1). Our minds must be on all that is good and heavenly (Phil. 4:8). Christ tells us lay up our treasure in heaven where the things of this earth will not eat

away at it and destroy it (Matt. 6:20). He then goes on and tells that where our treasure is, there will be our hearts also (Matt. 6:21). It is out of the good treasure of our hearts that good things come (Matt. 12:35).

Fifth, we are to be found watching (Luke 12:37). We do not know when the Lord is going to return (Matt. 24:42, 43; 25:13) so we should be always prepared for that day to come. On that day we are all going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10) and give answer for all that we have done whether it be good or bad (II Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:31, ff). Those who are prepared will hear "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matt. 25:21). Those who are unprepared though will hear "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:" (Matt. 25:41).

Sixth, we need to find our brother. When the first disciples found the Messiah they ran to find others so that they could learn of the Savior's coming also (John 1:41-45). When the church was scattered abroad they went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). The responsibility of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ into all the world rests upon the shoulders of Christians (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16).

What are you seeking, searching, or finding today? Is it those things which will prepare you for the coming of Christ? Is it that which will help others to be prepared for Christ's coming? Are you looking in the right place? The story has been told of a man who was searching the sidewalk and street diligently one night. A friend of his walks up and asked him what he is doing. The man replies that he dropped his ring and he was trying to find it. So the friend begins to help search and after sometime of not finding the ring he looks at the man and asks him if he is sure that this was the area where he dropped it. The man replied no that he actually dropped it on the next block but that there is not any street lights down there to see. Too many today are not looking in the right place for peace and salvation which can only come through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Too many are searching through the darkness of the world and not in true light which shineth through the darkness (John 1:4, 5).

When Love Isn't Really Love

Travis Main

There are a great number of religious bodies today which advertise themselves as loving bodies of believers. This is fantastic and the way Christ's Church should be identified. In fact, Jesus told his disciples the following in John 13:35: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another". The Bible has much to say about love. A scan of I Corinthians 13 lists a great number of

attributes of love including patience, kindness, a lack of arrogance, proper behavior, and a desire for others betterment. God is love (I John 4:8). Jesus is the image of his father (John 14:7). Jesus Body is the Church (Colossians 1:24). Consequently, to know the Church is to know true love.

When is love not really love? Consider the mother who loves her son so much she cannot discipline him. A lot of these children seem to be found at the grocery store. Little Johnnie wants this, wants that, wants the other. "Yes, Yes, Yes", mother gives in every time except one. "No". What is the reaction of little loved Johnnie? Plug the ears. Johnnie throws himself on the floor and starts screaming. Mom starts pleading and negotiating to get him to stop. "No" becomes "Yes", all supposedly in the name of love. How about the mom and dad who buy their children booze so they won't go out and drive drunk. Is that true love? Perhaps true love is when mom and dad let their teenager go out alone with the opposite sex, hormones racing. A large amount of folks have no problem with this. How many of these young people experience the hands and lips of another person all over them and won't end up marrying that person? How would they like these moments videotaped and shown to their future spouse? Even worse, how many of these arrangements end up with unplanned pregnancies or worse yet abortions? Purity lost from the first touch, dreams shattered, potential murder, all because they were loved so much they weren't chaperoned and potentially embarrassed by the presence of mom or dad. True love? How loving is it to offer the child the choice of whether or not to attend Church? Certainly with infinite teenage knowledge, the teenagers know what is best for their life. True Love or not?

Many churches today advertise themselves as a non-judgmental church. The Church will accept anyone regardless of their behaviors because they are loved. Homosexual? No problem. Pedophile? No problem. Lying to the government about your birth certificate? No problem. Cheating on your taxes? No problem. Whatever sin you are in, it's alright, because you are loved. There is no question God loves all men as should the Church (Romans 8:35-39). However, God also commands all men everywhere to repent of their sins (Acts 17:30). When sinners don't repent God doesn't leave them, they leave God (Isaiah 59:1-2). Scripture establishes that Christians should not be a stumbling block for sin by enabling it (I Corinthians 8:10-13). Christians are not to fellowship with sin (James 4:4, I Corinthians 15:33). If Christians do not tell others of their sin so they can repent and be forgiven in Christ, then they too are guilty of sin (James 4:17). The Church is told to break fellowship with those who will not give up their sin (Romans 16:17, Ephesians 5:11). Is ignoring the commands of God true love (I John 5:2)? This is what must be done if many modern religious bodies are listened to today.

In I Corinthians 5, the Corinthian Church is faced with an individual who is having a sexual relationship with his father's wife. This is clearly a case of adultery

and a sin (Matthew 5:27-28, Galatians 5:19-21). Yet, the Church cared about these people. Maybe they had a number of relatives in the Church. Maybe the Church members had known these folks their whole lives. So out of love, they chose not to say or do anything about the sin that was occurring. What wonderful Christians they felt they were! Here an awful sin was occurring in their midst. It certainly had to be embarrassing and awful to someone (perhaps the father?). Yet, because there was so much love, the sin just kept on going with no objection. What a great example for the youth of the Church! How mighty these Corinthian Christians were!

Paul doesn't seem to take the view that ignoring the sin was acceptable. In fact, he chastises the church for their arrogance about how great their love was. He establishes love does not ignore sin. He exhorts the Corinthians turn the sinner over to Satan as he would. In other words, turn the sinner out to the world and the lusts therein. They were to get rid of the wickedness. Gasp! What a harsh cruel thing. Feelings could get hurt. Hopefully, shame would result in such a situation as well (Jeremiah 6:15). It is far better to have shame instead of spiritual destruction (Matthew 10:28). Proper shame brings about Godly sorrow and repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). The inspired Paul wrote the God breathed words of I Corinthians 13 concerning love. He also wrote the God breathed words of I Corinthians 5. What he saw happening in Corinth was not love, but sinfulness.

Sometimes men operate from their own state of logic. They base their decisions on their own wisdom. However, "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; the weakness of God is stronger than men". Enabling a drug addict is not love. Enabling a sinner is not love. Giving a gun to a suicidal person is not love. Encouraging sin by a sinner is not love. True love has the other person's best interests at heart. The calling of God is to purity and eternal life (Matthew 5:8). Consider the advertising of a loving Church. Does it call for adherence to the commands of God and express a concern for the soul of the individual? Is a loving attitude expressed with an offer of help to escape the sins of the world? This is true love. If the call is for the individual simply to stay as they are, then that is when love really isn't love.

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

A "Legend In His Own Mind"

Mike Riley

In the character of Naaman, we see a man who was truly a "legend in his own mind." Many are misunderstanding and rejecting God's Word today because they desire to please self instead of pleasing God (2 Kings 5:11-12).

The Attitude Of Naaman

Let's note some other possible reasons why Naaman was a "legend in his own mind." From the beginning of this story in 2 Kings 5:1, we see at least two possible reasons that could have played a factor resulting in the arrogant attitude of Naaman:

(1) He was a "great" and "honorable" man in the eyes of the Syrian king (Ben-hadad – 2 Kings 5:1; cf. 2 Kings 6:24).

(2) He was a "mighty man in valor" (2 Kings 5:1). It is possible that Naaman simply thought of himself as "great" and "mighty." As a result, he would have displayed an attitude of self-importance resulting in his arrogant disposition.

After the prophet (Elisha) sent a messenger to Naaman giving him God's instructions on the process of getting rid of his leprosy, Naaman thought his ideas were better than God's instructions (2 Kings 5:10-12). He should have been thankful and satisfied with the promise of being made clean of his leprosy. Instead, "Naaman became furious" (2 Kings 5:11) because he didn't get "his way" or "I thought").

An Attitude Of Selfish Pride

In the religious world we live in today, many folks become angry when God's word doesn't match up with their wants. "Their thoughts" take precedence over "God's thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). We desperately need to dispense with that kind of selfish pride and be more concerned with what God thinks than what we think (Romans 11:33-36).

An Attitude Of Unthankfulness

We also see a attitude of unthankfulness in the character of Naaman. Did he appreciate or offer any expression of thanks to the young Hebrew slave for telling her mistress (Naaman's wife) about a prophet (Elisha) who could ask God to cleanse him of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:2-3)? (Note: After the cleansing of his leprosy, Naaman did finally humble himself and expressed his thankfulness to Elisha, the prophet – 2 Kings 5:10,15).

Paul's Exhortation

In Romans 12:3, Paul exhorts each of the brethren at Rome, "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..." Every Christian should work at having a character of humility, because there is a great tendency within many of us to think too highly of ourselves, i.e. our intellect, abilities, etc.

Remember that God stands against such puffed up attitudes (1 Peter 5:5).

Paul's exhortation to us is to think of ourselves wisely and accurately, making a sane and well-balanced evaluation of our abilities – not an insane, unbalanced judgment.

Conclusion

Are we sometimes like Naaman, thinking that we are a "legend in our own mind?" If we think we are, perhaps we need to "humble ourselves" before God and ask His forgiveness that we might become better servants of His (2 Chronicles 7:14; James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).

FLOWERS FOR THE LIVING

Guy F. Hester

On the occasion of the funeral of a loved one or friend we customarily place flowers around the coffin and over the grave site with them after they are buried. This is all well and good and is appreciated by the family members, but the deceased knows nothing about it. How much better it would have been if we had given them the flowers while they lived.

Closed eyes cannot see the pretty flowers,

Cold hands cannot hold them you know,

Breath that is stilled cannot gather the sweet breezes that from them blow.

Death is a sleep beyond dreaming,

Its children of earth doth endow,

So give your flowers to the living,

Give them the flowers now.

Someday you'll stand by a coffin,

And stroke a cold lifeless brow,

Don't waste these precious moments,

But give them the flowers now.

Each day that we live, we have the opportunity of bestowing flowers upon someone in need. The apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." This admonition would cover a broad range of services we might render. There is always a brother or a neighbor who needs encouragement. And, giving encouragement to one who is disheartened is just as much our Christian duty as reproving the disorderly. We read in 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." Just before Paul wrote these words, he had written how that we should edify and encourage one another as fellow-members of the body of Christ. Notice verses 11-13, "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake. And be at peace among yourselves."

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we were as quick to edify and commend as we are to criticize and condemn? Why should we wait until someone dies to express how we felt about them? To use an old but very beautiful expression, "Let us give them our roses while they live!" This would apply to all those who have meant something to our lives. Mother and Dad, if we are fortunate enough to have them still living. Elders in the church. Former teachers and preachers. Or, perhaps, other friends who have helped us to take courage and make the right choices in life. If we will stop and think, each of us is indebted to so very many. Don't wait until they die, express appreciation while they are still living! The Bible says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3). If there is anything that will "make my blood boil," it is to hear children speak in a disrespectful manner to their parents, especially their mothers, who went right into the jaws of death to bring them into this world. Someday, young people, you will stand by the coffin and remember when it is too late to say, "I'm sorry." When parents are old and unable to do for themselves and the children, whom they have sacrificed so much to raise, stand by and do little or nothing, will one day have occasion to regret it, perhaps eternally. Over the years I have noticed that, as a rule, the ones who take it the hardest at the funeral of a mother or father are the ones who have paid them the least attention in life.

Husbands and wives, the time will come when one of you will stand by the lifeless form of the other and speak kind and loving words that their ears will not

hear. But you can speak those words now! Why wait when they are hungering now to hear you say, "I love you!" Husbands, how long has it been since you told your wife how pretty she is? "Flowers from the garden will wilt and fade but the flowers of kindness she'll carry to the grave." Paul said, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). Again, "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them" (Colossians 3:19). Wives, a bouquet of kindness will go a long way in getting your husbands to give you the attention that you want and deserve.

We are living in a frustration-ridden, problem-laden world. There are opportunities on every hand to reach out and extend a helping hand or to show sincere interest in those struggling under a heavy load. One of the greatest gifts you will ever be able to give in this life is understanding or "moral support" to one who may be carrying a heavy load or struggling with some difficult problem.

These, then, are just a few of the multitude of opportunities that come our way daily to give flowers to the living. May they serve to remind us of the importance of making the most of the opportunities which come our way every day that we might truly "redeem the time" and use each day as fully as possible to God's glory.

Close Enough!

David Sproule

How often does the philosophy "close enough" impact your daily life? You pull into a parking space and you're a little further to the right than you should be—close enough! You cut a piece of wood and it's one-eighth of an inch off—close enough! You call your child by the wrong name but it's still somebody in the family—close enough!

How do you suppose that philosophy works with God? Pick up your Bible and pick a Bible teaching. Is "close enough" good enough with God?

In order to become a Christian, God says that one must hear the gospel message (Rom. 10:13-17), believe the gospel (John 20:30-31), repent of his sins (Acts 17:30), confess his faith in the Son of God (Rom. 10:9-10) and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Suppose someone looks at this, having already (in their minds) believed, repented and confessed, and he says, "Close enough!" Is it really close enough for God?

In order to win souls to Christ, God says that one must "let his light shine" (Matt. 5:16), be mindful of the works that others see in him (Matt. 5:16), put the

church first in his life (Matt. 6:33), exhort others to worship God (Matt. 4:10; Heb. 10:25), demonstrate his faith by his works (Jas. 2:18), be holy in all his conduct (1 Pet. 1:15) and preach the gospel message to those who are lost in sin (Mark 16:15). Suppose someone looks at this, scared to death or embarrassed at the idea of actually teaching the gospel, and he says, "I've lived a good example before others. They can see Jesus living in me. That's close enough!" Is it really close enough for God?

In order to go to heaven, God says that one must go through Christ (John 14:6), obey His will (Matt. 7:21), make his call and election sure by growing diligently (2 Pet. 1:5-11), and faithfully serve Him for life (Rev. 2:10). Suppose someone, on the day of judgment, looks at this, having never been convinced that they could actually lose their salvation once they had been baptized, and says, "Well, I was close enough." Is it really close enough for God?

The philosophy "close enough" may work in some of the inconsequential situations we face in life (parking, woodwork, horseshoes, etc.). However, following the "close enough" philosophy can cost you your soul.

In Numbers 13, the Israelites came to the border of the Promised Land (couldn't get any closer), but they failed to enter the land of rest. "Close enough" was not good enough with God. Read chapters 3-4 in the book of Hebrews. May God help us to not come short of our rest (Heb. 4:1; 12:15)!

"Interesting Inquiries"

John T. Polk II

Question: "Are the modern-day Jews still God's chosen people?"

Answer: No, and here's why. To claim that they are is a denial of the New Testament. For example, the Apostle Paul said by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is

over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed" (Romans 9:1-8 NKJV).

Clearly, Paul was declaring that: (1) this thought was approved by the Holy Spirit; (2) he was discussing physical Israelites' purpose in God's plan; (3) he claimed he was, by birth and background, one of them; (4) but that physical lineage to or through Abraham is not honored by God any longer! Everything God intended to use the Israelites for was on a "limited" basis, and God is the one who limited it!

(1) The same Holy Spirit of God that inspired the record of physical nation of Israel in the making, was now guiding Paul in recording that that physical nation no longer was acceptable to God as His "chosen people." The same Holy Spirit that wrote Scripture that designating Israel as God's "chosen people," explained that God did not choose Israel because they were:

- a. more numerous than other nations (Deuteronomy 7:6-9);
- b. special on their own, but because their "fathers" were (Deuteronomy 10:15);
- c. possessed of righteousness (Deuteronomy 9:1-5);
- d. but because they were a stubborn and rebellious people who could be used by God to accomplish His purposes (Deuteronomy 9:6-24; Deuteronomy 31: 22-29). God was right, for till this day, they stubbornly reject God's refusal of them.

(2) To make them a physical nation, Israel was given:

- a. Protected Lineage/genealogy until "the seed" promised to Abraham came:
 1. So said God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:16-18;
 2. But the final goal was in Jesus Christ Galatians 3:15-16.
 3. It denies Jesus as the Christ if not, 1 John 2:22.
- b. Preserved Law through Moses until Jesus died on the cross.
 1. So said Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18-22;
 2. So said Jesus Christ after His resurrection in Luke 24:44-47;

3. So said the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:13-19.
 4. It denies Jesus Christ's priesthood if otherwise, Hebrews 7:11-22
- c. Promised Land was given as promised until Jesus came. "So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The LORD gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass" (Joshua 21:43-45).
1. Because of their unfaithfulness, God removed Israel (and then Judah) from that land for 70 years (2 Chronicles 36:11-21), but they returned and rebuilt Jerusalem, the Temple, and their land, according to God's prophets (Ezekiel 9:9; Jeremiah 25:8-14; Jeremiah 29:8-14; 2 Chronicles 36:11-23; Jeremiah 30:3-4; Ezra 1-4; Nehemiah 1:1-11).
 2. So said Moses and other prophets in Deuteronomy 4:26-40; Jeremiah 25:1-14; Ezekiel 36:16-38;
 3. So said Jesus Christ in John 4:19-26;
 4. Paul taught there were no land boundaries in Christ, 1 Corinthians 1:1-2.
- (3) Paul claimed he was once, by birth and background, one of them, Romans 9:1-5; Romans 11:1; 2 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:4-5.
- (4) but that physical lineage to or through Abraham is not honored by God any longer!
- a. Not birth, but re-birth makes children of God, John 3:3-5; Galatians 3:23-4:7;
 - b. Circumcision of the heart, not flesh, Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:15; Colossians 2:9-12;
 - c. Spiritual family of God, Luke 8:19-21; Galatians 4:21-31; Ephesians 2:14-22.

Sadly, there are many who claim to follow Jesus Christ while believing that the physical Jews today are still God's chosen people who should be in their

"promised land," but those very beliefs are ignoring all the New Testament says about Jesus Christ and His kingdom, and act as if Jesus the Christ had never come! We must obey Jesus Christ and not Moses, for, as Paul said: "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain" (Galatians 2:21). Paul's conclusion completely denies all who claim that the Jews today are still God's chosen people, for he said, "those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed" (Romans 9:8). Now read Romans 1:16-17 again.

Maintaining Our Spiritual Fire

Kevin Cauley

Sometime back I saw a video on the news of a man stepping outside with a boiling pot of water, tossing the water into the air and its instantaneously changing into snow. He was near the top of Mount Washington in New Hampshire and it was thirty-five degrees below zero. My first reaction was, "Hey, that's kind of cool." Then I thought, "Wow, that's really cold." And finally, "That guy's crazy going outside in that kind of weather." Consider that water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit; water freezes at 32 degrees Fahrenheit. That's so cold that the water cooled down 180+ degrees in less than a second. The water froze because of a failure to maintain the fire. What can we do to maintain our spiritual fire?

Lesson #1: Much energy was needed to warm the water; but very little was needed to cool it. In order to boil water one must have a significant energy source. It takes 398 BTUs to change frozen water to boiling water. Energy is required! To the contrary, however, to cool water down takes practically no energy at all. A flick of the wrist and the boiling water was frozen. This reminds me of Paul's words to the church in Ephesus to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). Paul also said to the Galatians (5:6) that what avails is faith working (the Greek word ENERGEIO – energy!) through love. Even spiritually speaking, energy/effort/work is required in order to stay warm; but what is required to freeze? Just do nothing. Work, that is, the input of energy, is important to maintaining our spiritual fire.

Lesson #2: Together the water was warm; separated, it became cold. Those trillions of water molecules in that boiling pot stayed warm so long as they were in close proximity to each other; they kept warm off each other's heat. However, once they dispersed they quickly cooled not having the company of their "brethren" to keep them warm. Ecclesiastes 4:11 says, "Again, if two lie together, then they have

heat: but how can one be warm alone?" The story is told of the preacher who visits the un-attending member and, without a word, while sitting in front of the fireplace, merely pulls a coal out of the fire to watch it slowly die. Yet, putting it back in, the coal warms to a soft red glow again. We need to exhort one another daily and not forsake our assembling together! (Hebrews 3:13, 10:25) Togetherness is important to maintaining our spiritual fire.

Lesson #3: Someone "stirred" the pot. That water didn't become snow without someone agitating the pot! If the pot had been left on the fire it would have stayed warm, but it was moved, stirred, agitated. This resulted in the decrease of heat and the increase of cold. Agitation in the church often has the same results. Paul told the church at Philippi, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings" (Philippians 2:14). He said in Colossians 3:13 "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man has a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Instead of murmuring and quarrelling we need to practice forgiveness to keep ourselves warm and lively. Forgiveness is important to maintaining our spiritual fire.

We all know what it means when a body has "assumed room temperature." Warmth equals life. Cold equals death. Let us do all to avoid assuming room temperature and do everything in our power to maintain our spiritual fire!

"The Fishmonger And Us"

Grady Miller

This story is filed under the "oldy-but-a-goody" category. Maybe you've heard it. Maybe you haven't.

It seems a fishmonger worked hard, built up a thriving business and was able to send his son to college. The young man returned home an "expert" on marketing, advertising, business promotion and management, ready to lead the family business into the 21st century. He took a good look at the big sign over his father's shop on the wharf — *WE SELL FRESH Fish HERE.*

"Dad," he said, "that old sign needs to be updated. Don't you think our emphasis needs to be on the customer? 'We sell' puts the focus on us and sends the wrong signal. A new age needs a new, updated approach. Let's change our sign to *FRESH FISH SOLD HERE.*"

A few weeks went by and the son approached the father again. "You know," he said, "I've been thinking about that sign. We can do better. '*Fresh Fish Sold Here.*' Well, where else? By streamlining our message we give added punch to what's important and eliminate what isn't necessary. I think our new sign ought to say *FRESH FISH SOLD.*"

Well, a few more weeks went by. Business was no worse, but sales weren't up, either. And so the son said, "Dad, it's that sign again. '*FRESH FISH SOLD.*' Why, everyone knows we aren't giving the fishing away. Folks come to the fish market to buy. I think there's room for improvement. Here's the wording for our new sign — *FRESH FISH.*"

Again, a little while went by and, for some reason, sales had fallen off. The boy couldn't understand why his new, up-to-date ideas and modernization of the family business wasn't paying big dividends. So once again he turned his attention to that sign. "Dad, you know we've been pretty shortsighted in our advertising. Why are we telling folks we sell fresh fish? Why put even a question in the minds of our customers about the quality of our merchandise? I think 'fresh' is altogether unnecessary and superfluous. I tell you what. Our new sign ought to say who we are and what we do — *FISH!*"

So once again the old sign came down again and a new sign went up. And the family business? The fishmonger once sold fish by the boatload. But now he sold only to his old customers. "What are we doing wrong?" he asked his son. "Well, Dad, I still think it's that sign. In fact, I don't think we even need a sign. Why, anyone walking down the dock can smell, can't they? They know there's fish for sale here!"

So the once successful family fish business dwindled down to nothing and the fishmonger went bankrupt.

What's the lesson here?

The church of our Lord is a great deal like the fishmonger's enterprise. We have educated a generation of "church growth experts" and I don't know if we will survive them.

The old fishmonger knew enough about his business to build it, manage it and promote it. No, his ads were not the most clever and most attractive. He probably didn't even have a web site! But he told people what he had to offer. They knew where he was and what he was. It was only when he listened to his expert son that his business dried up and wasted away.

The Lord's church has the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. That's our "product." That's God's power to save (Romans 1:16). That's the drawing power,

the changing power, the cleansing power (John 6:44-45; 15:3). The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God! (Ephesians 6:17). That's our pricking power (Acts 2:37), our cutting and slashing power (Hebrews 4:12).

"But," we are told, "people don't want to hear that! The day of the old-fashioned gospel meeting has come and gone. We need a new approach, a new angle. Besides, even our own members won't attend and support an evangelistic meeting."

Just like the fishmonger, we've listened to the experts and lost our focus. Our message. Our distinctive plea. Or, if we haven't lost it, we've been convinced by the "experts" to soft-pedal the gospel. To cover it up. To sneak up on people by telling them something else, and then spring the gospel on them. "Friendship evangelism" is fine. Let's just not make it up-front, overt, plain-spoken.

Come to think of it, why can't we be "evangelistic" without being, you know, evangelistic?

Look at us. We have financial seminars to teach people how to get out of debt or deal with stress in their life. We have marriage and parenting workshops that appeal to young moms and dads. We have seminars on Islam, Christian evidences, grief and co-dependency issues. We sponsor special series of lessons on evolution and dinosaurs, church leadership, patriotism and being good neighbors. We camp out. We eat. We exercise together and lose weight. We sing. We counsel. We care. We share. We help.

We try our best to address those "felt needs." We've been told that when we do, then — and only then — we position ourselves to convert a precious soul with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How's that working out for us?

But, oh! Let's keep on doing what we've been doing. The next great strategy to reach people through a side door or, even better, the back door just might turn things around for us!

I'll pull your leg if you pull mine.

“Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure.”

Ronald Bryant

This statement is an essential part of the instructions Paul gave to Titus. Paul wrote, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you” (Titus 1:5). Central in the appointing of elders was the responsibility they faced in “holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). This was fundamental to the stability of the local church, and to the protecting of the cause of Christ. It rested upon one sobering fact, and it is here addressed by Paul. He states the reason for His instructions, namely, “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain” (Titus 1:10-11). Paul continued in giving warning and counsel, speaking of those who would contradict the gospel, “giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth” (Titus 1:14). Following that warning, Paul declared, “Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure” (Titus 1:15).

There is reason to marvel at the simple, yet wonderful, title God chose to bestow upon the good and decent, the faithful and true. He speaks of them as “the pure,” and declares of them – “unto the pure all things are pure.” Notwithstanding the fact that the servants of God are not yet free from faults and failings, God bestows upon them this title: “The Pure.” This is their designation even now, and in and through Christ, in eternity they are to be perfectly so.

While this phrase has a proverbial cast, it is not possible, nor is it needful, to prove that it was used as a proverb. The point of its use is established in the context. In Paul’s letter to Titus, “the pure” are contrasted with certain ones who contradicted the truth of God. In this instance, they contradicted the gospel of Christ by exalting Jewish fables and the commandments of men. “Jewish fables” were rigid rules and regulations concerning foods and ritual purifications and ritual ceremonies. In effect Paul affirmed, “Food does not make one pure or impure. If one is unbelieving and defiled, no food or ritual ordinance, no matter how sincerely practiced, can make one pure.” His point: Purity does not come via such distinctions. Human distinctions of food, festivals, ceremonies, rituals, or days are not of God, nor can they make one pure – in any sense. While such distinctions were in large measure a part of the Jewish religion, they are not in any fashion a part of the Christian faith. The servants of God are not to be subject to such

ordinances, nor participate in such activities; instead they are to be controlled by that which God has ordained in Christ.

However, it remains that the expression, "the pure in heart," is attractive and highly suggestive. It suggests that every command of God; every event that occurs by Divine providence, may serve to promote holiness in one who is pure in heart. One pure in heart can see a godly benefit, a sanctifying tendency. He can regard in the events of life as divine privilege, and can derive from all that is commanded by God, and all that occurs as he yields to God, as a means of drawing closer to God. Conversely, a defiled mind will observe the same actions – the same obligations and privileges – and yet turn them to an evil course or purpose – the means, or the occasion, of adding to its own depravity. The contrast is obvious -- the pure in heart lay hold of the events of life as a means of increasing confidence in God, and as means of increasing devotion and loyalty, as a means of being one with God in holiness; yet, the defiled see the same things, the same duties and privileges, and choose to use them to increase self-centeredness and self-righteousness.

"But unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure." Those, who look to religion to give them advantage; to exalt self rather than to honor God, literally view everything—even the things supplied by God, from the perspective of personal taste, preference, desire, and personal advantage. No matter what ordinances of religion they observe; what distinctions they may make, all are but occasions to add to their self-centeredness. The "holy things" they practice, only serve to foster in them that which moves them further away from God. The defiled use even the mercies of God to indulge and promote their agenda and desires. Because they are defiled in heart, no biblical truth or directive, no blessing from God, draws them closer to or humbles them before God. They are so full of self they have no room for God!

The indictment could hardly be stronger, "but even their mind and conscience is defiled." Paul did not, was not alluding to some external defilement; a thing which these dreaded, but spoke of a defilement which extended to their inner man – "their mind and conscience." Evidently, even when the defiled do what is right, they are made the worse, for they do it for the wrong reason. Every action on their part tends to corrupt them, for their mind and their conscience are defiled. When the fountain is poisoned, the stream formed by it cannot but be poisoned!

Paul continued, "They profess that they know God. But in works they deny Him." He is categorical in speaking of those who are religious -- who are engaged in religious activities, but literally deny God. They are religious, they claim to know God, but there is a contradiction between what they claim and what their works manifest. Their works can be classified as works of disobedience. Furthermore,

disobedience is a denial and a rejection of God. It is readily apparent that being religious, claiming to know God, does not remove the fact of disobedience. Paul goes further stating that these deny and reject God to the point of "Being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work." The original words indicate that these were devoid of judgment, they were such in conduct and character that even the good works they did could not be approved. Paul states the nature of their true character and conduct. In doing this he was not engaging in a personal attack upon "nice-but-misunderstood people." He simply described the true character and conduct, of those who were religious but were not righteous!

Paul made no allowances for those who contradict truth (1:9). He did not suggest tolerance or counsel compromise. He identified them, and directed that those who serve as overseers in the local congregations must be able to exhort and convict those who contradict (1:9). Writing by inspiration, Paul decreed that those who subvert faith, teaching things they ought not, must be stopped – emphatically declaring that their "mouths must be stopped" (1:11). The subverting of truth, the advancing of false doctrine, is not a personal matter, which can be dealt with on a personal basis, but is a matter of eternal consequence. Godly elders serve God, and they are charged by the Chief Shepherd, to be guardians of the truth and of eternal souls. They have a God-given responsibility, not only to teach and uphold truth but to oppose not only error, but those who "contradict truth."

What happens if those who contradict truth -- who subvert faith - who teach things contrary to the will of Christ – are not stopped? The answer, although neither appealing nor readily admitted, even though it can be demonstrated in actual cases, is this – THEY END UP LEADING!

Clearly, those who contradict truth and subvert faith are not to be placed in leadership. But, if they are not stopped, if they are permitted to have their way, they will be! If not actually appointed, they will become de facto leaders! If not stopped they will build a following! If not stopped they will lead a faction. It is not uncommon to find some, viewed as, if not actually introduced as, "the leaders of the opposition." (Such is to be lamented, but more than lamentation is needed!)

It is easy to connect the dots: First, the defiled—those who are religious but not righteous--have an agenda; they work to undermine the truth and those who uphold it; secondly, they want a following and they work to become "the leaders." Finally, they have no qualms about leading a rebellion! What are those who are elders in the local church to do when they confront such? First, they dare not ignore the fact that there are those who profess knowledge of God, who in their actions deny him; second, they dare not be tolerant of those who set aside truth and are disobedient to the commands of God. Thirdly, they who watch for souls must realize they are dealing with deceivers; men that are prideful, self-righteous,

and factious! Most deceivers are super-nice, but they are defiled! They do exist! The defiled migrated from Crete long ago! They want to be free to sow discord, (lovingly of course), and they work to be respected above the will of God. They want to teach and lead the people of God, away from God, to spoil them and make them over in their own likeness.

In some places the defilers have been "left alone," because they were popular, famous, or well-connected etc. In turn, they have led others to rebel against the will of God, and have done great harm to the body of Christ, even leading whole congregations into apostasy. In some places they have been permitted to do so with the blessing and endorsement of those charged with the work of watching for souls, and with stopping the mouth of those who subvert truth.

When will those who are ordained to lead, to uphold the will of God, and the souls of men, come to understand what is at stake? When will we, the members of the body of Christ, come to understand that we are called of God to honor and uphold the will of God – our only guide? When will we all truly value right relationship with God, above all else?

Not Any Saint Conveys Arrogant Rudeness (N.A.S.C.A.R.)

John T. Polk II

When Family Baptist Church Pastor Joe Nelms gave the pre-race invocation before the Nationwide NASCAR Race at the Nashville Speedway Saturday, July 23, 2011, he followed the example of the "Ricky Bobby" character (played by Will Ferrell) in the movie Talledega Nights, rather than Jesus Christ.

His prayer in bold type, along with my remarks in the brackets, is as follows:

"Heavenly father, we thank you tonight for all your blessings."

[So far, so good! However, the rest of the prayer indicates these opening words may show the hypocrisy Jesus quoted Isaiah as decrying: "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men'" (Matthew 15:7-9). An opening line of a prayer is not sufficient if the rest of the prayer is not according to God's will (1 John 5:14-15)!]

“You said ‘in all things give thanks.’ So we want to thank you tonight for these mighty machines that you’ve brought before us. Thank you for the Dodges and the Toyotas. Thank you for the Fords and most of all thank you for Roush and Yates partnering to give us the power we see before us tonight. Thank you for GM Performance Technology and the R07 engines. Thank you for Sonoco racing fuel and Goodyear tires that bring performance and power to the track.” [In the Bible, the prayers of the godly saints are filled with praise for God’s achievements, more than the work of humans. Rather than a list of God’s virtues and deeds, Nelms seems to be reading from the decals of a car or a speedway wall! Does Nelms think that every activity has been put together by God? Would Nelms have thanked God for the wickedness of men before the Flood in Noah’s day (Genesis 6:5)? Or rebellious Nimrod building cities (Genesis 10:8-14)? Or the construction of the city and tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)? Is it not in Nelms to recognize that there may be some activities put together for the glory of men and not God? When Jesus described a Pharisee’s prayer, it was filled with the Pharisee’s works, not humility before God (Luke 18:9-14). All of God’s works are “righteous,” but not all of man’s works are (Jeremiah 22:13-19).]

“Lord I want to thank you for my smokin’ hot wife tonight, Lisa. My two children, Eli and Emma, or as we like to call them – the little E’s.”

[This is almost verbatim from “Ricky Bobby” and not Jesus! Jesus’ description of the marriage relationship is to respect the “one flesh” a male and female become, not to tout that carnality in front of others (Matthew 19:4-6)! Even when the Apostle Paul is describing the “heated passion” to be expressed in marriage, it is with the respect of the husband’s and wife’s “affection” for each other (1 Corinthians 7:3-6). Nelms’ reference to his wife calls attention of the wrong kind to her, if she is a godly woman (1 Peter 3:1-6).]

“Lord I pray you’ll bless the drivers as usual tonight. May they put on a performance worthy of this great track.”

[“As usual?” Does this mean the “usual” number of accidents? Deaths? Disappointments? What is Nelms attributing to God? In a prayer such as this one has been, this becomes an “off-handed” serving of the ball into God’s court to “take it from here.” Nothing Nelms has prayed previously turns this event over to God, why now when it is to begin?]

“in Jesus’ name, Boogity boogity boogity. Amen.”

[And here, Nelms’ gives tribute to Darrell Waltrip and “Ricky Bobby” rather than learning from Jesus, who taught His disciples to end prayer with acknowledgement of God’s authority: “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen" (Matthew 6:13), and not an appeal to human excitement. Some may think the last words of the National Anthem are "Play ball!" Nelms has taught people that the last words of a prayer are "Start Your Engines!" It is in context for Darrell Waltrip to say "boogity, boogity, boogity" as a race announcer, but not a proper attitude to convey in closing a prayer to Almighty God!]

Afterwards, Nelms was interviewed on Sirius Satellite Radio's "Tradin' Paint," and reportedly said:

"I wanted to get somebody's attention, so that's been our desire every time we've been up there, to try to make an impact on the fans and give them something they'll remember, and maybe they'll go home on a Friday night or a Saturday night and say, 'Maybe I ought to get up and go to church in the morning.'"

[Nelms' stated goal is to "get somebody's attention" and "to try to make an impact on the fans," but unfortunately for him, that's the definition of "hypocrisy" as given by Jesus Christ: "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward" (Matthew 6:5). Joe "Ricky Bobby" Nelms' prayer went no further than the Nashville Speedway that Saturday night, and if he got the fan's attention he sought, he has received his reward! Prayers done for "effect" on an audience and/or prayers of repetition are "vain" and meaningless acts of worship (Matthew 6:5-8). No one who attends church because of such a profane prayer will be attending for the purpose of glorifying God, but of being entertained by men! Worship is for offering "spiritual sacrifices" (1 Peter 2:4-5) pleasing to God, not for the excitement and satisfaction of men (1 Thessalonians 2:1-6).]

If Joe Nelms represents the disrespectful level to which one must stoop to be a Baptist, or a Pastor of a worldly church, or popular with NASCAR fans, then I will have no part of any of it! I have decided to stand with Moses in the place of the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-6) or Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:39-46; Hebrews 5:7-9), and deeply respect every moment I approach God in prayer. Who else is on the Lord's side?

Let's Be A Holy People!

Larry Miles

If someone were to say to you, "are you a holy person; are you a saint? How would you answer them? Would you say, "no, I am neither." Or would you say, "I sure am!" Would one of the answers right? Or would both be wrong or would the right answer be a combination of the two?

The answer we give depends on how much we understand how the Bible uses these terms. If we take the definitions of the world we are holy or a saint. But if we use scriptural definitions then we qualify on both counts. But we must note that neither description is true if we try to fulfill their requirements on our own merit.

The Word of God says, "be holy for I am Holy." The only way that Christians can be holy is that Christ imputed His righteousness to us. We can be "holy" if we seek to be "conformed to the image of the Son of God." We can be "holy" if we live for him and obey and keep His Word and show forth the love of the Lord in our lives and help others find their way out of the "kingdom of darkness" and help them find the marvelous light of the Gospel (1 Peter 2:9).

The question was "are you a saint?". We are not in the way many in the world and many in some realms of Christendom view that word. According to the Bible "saints" are living Christians, in fact, all Christians are "saints" in the scriptural application of the word.

The word simply means ones who are sanctified, ones that are called out. Christians have been called out of serving Satan and now are "in Christ."

Paul refers to Christians as saints both in Eph 1:1 and in Phil 1:1. So, all Christians are saints. Now if we live up to the word that is another question. We must put our faith into action. Jesus said, "if you love Me you will keep my commandments." Are you doing that, my fellow believer? Are you living daily for Him who died for you? If so, praise the Lord! Continue to build yourselves up in the most holy faith, living your life for Jesus, knowing that you can impact a lost world with the Gospel and help strengthen the saved by your ministry and work for our Lord.

If you are not seeking daily to "grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus," then you need to repent of your sin of not following Jesus completely. Our Lord has promised is His people if they will look to Him for guidance He will give it. He will equip you for service.

He will give you the resources you need to live holy lives. We are saints, let's live up to what that word means biblically and "let our light shine for Him" so that we may bring "glory to our Heavenly Father." (Matthew 5:14-16)

A WISE WOMAN - 1 Samuel 25

Ron Thomas

The story of David, Nabal, and Abigail is a story about wrath ready to explode. David, before he was king, was a young man with a large entourage. Alongside him were 600 men of war; how many there might have been with him not connected to this warrior class is unknown. It is likely that people became attracted to David on account of 1) the worthiness of his character, 2) the circumstances in their individual lives, and 3) the disenchantment associated with King Saul. Add to this another reason: it was known that David was God's next appointed king, God having rejected Saul and his family.

We are told, in the beginning of 1 Samuel 25, that the great prophet Samuel had died. Here was a person that was of great influence to David, and by reason of age, he had passed on to his reward. Now, to whom can David turn in his present stressful circumstances? Fleeing from King Saul was no easy task, and considering how large David's party was, fleeing became even harder. David's men had no opportunity to go to their respective homes; no doubt, if the king got word of all who were in David's influence, that home would have been staked out and an arrest forthcoming. Since each one in David's entourage had no real place to call his home (because he was fleeing the king), how could he get provisions for himself and those with him? A stressful situation to be sure! The situation was difficult, but when David came upon the wealthy Nabal he sought relief.

Nabal's Insult

Nabal was a wealthy man, one who could have easily provided for David and his men. However, instead of providing for David's need, Nabal decides to give insult (25:9-12). When David presented himself (through his men) to Nabal, having given proper protection to that which belonged to him ("free of charge," 25:7-8, 14-15, 21), the reply of Nabal to David could only be interpreted as an insult. On this festive occasion Nabal chose only to be of a festive spirit to a limited degree. The

limitation he placed on himself was that he would show nothing but contempt to those who requested from him any relief. In fact, Jewish theology attributes to Nabal these words, "David's arrogance is based on two drops of oil with which Samuel anointed. Now, where is Samuel and where are his drops of oil!" (ArtScroll, p. 163).

David's Intention

David's reaction was strong to this insulting reply from Nabal. He told his men to prepare for battle and not being timid a forceful response of vengeance was planned. Consider the nature of David's vengeful spirit: it was Nabal who insulted, but it would be the males of that household who were going to die!

Abigail's Interception

Though Nabal was not considered a man of good judgment, he did have a wife that was just the opposite of him. She is identified as a woman of beauty and understanding (wise, prudent, discerning). After having learned of the desperate situation that Nabal placed his household in, Abigail (his wife) acted quickly in order to stave off certain destruction. She gathers the necessary "grocery" items, being overly generous in the portions, and seeks to intercept David's implementation of his own plan. One plan is now pitted against another. She prepares to meet David. She scales the mountain, under the cover of the rocks and whatever trees there may have been, she suddenly comes upon David. The young men with the food provisions met him first, with her following up from behind (the separation between her and those who went before her is not told unto us). A woman of quick actions was expecting to meet David; he was not expecting to meet her; she was unarmed, he was fully armed; she was attempting to thwart his anger; he was preparing the execution his anger.

Abigail dismounts and quickly appeals to David's anger. She knows David will be the next king (25:28-31), and her appeal to him is along this line of how insignificant this "snub" will be in comparison with all that the Lord will give him in his new position. In addition, she quickly accepts the blame for not intercepting David's men when they initially came to the homestead (25:24-25). She knew she needed to act because she also knew the character of her husband (25:25).

Knowing how vulnerable she and her associates were in this action, she attributes this event of her interception to the Lord's providence.

How could David not be impressed? He was ready for slaughter, now he is met by a woman with provisions. Prepared as he was to execute vengeance, he is now he is met by a discerning female. She drops down before him, and he begins to give way to her. In fact, he attributes her action to the providence of the Lord (25:26, 32). He receives her and sends her away in peace (25:33). Because of the actions of one many lives were spared – and Nabal never knew it!

The Lord's Intervention

David was intercepted by Abigail, but now she had to return to her home and let this be known to her husband. She decided to choose an appropriate time to speak to him about it (25:36-37). If it were not for Abigail, by morning Nabal and the males of his household would have been destroyed. Morning comes; Abigail tells Nabal, and his heart becomes stone (alternative readings: his heart failed him, he had a heart attack, suffered a stroke, or was paralyzed). The irony of this is that the day that David planned to strike was the day the Lord struck. What David planned to do, when he gave way to Abigail, the Lord took the initiative and accomplished. Ten days later he was dead, and all the males of his house were spared. David, hearing the news, recognizes two things: First, recalling what he said to Abigail, it was the Lord who sent her to meet him. Second, David was on the verge of doing wrong, but it was her counsel that stopped him (25:39, 33).

Lessons to Learn from Abigail

She took the initiative, for there was no time for a "council" to convene and debate what the response ought to be.

A woman of great privilege knew to bow before one who was fleeing from King Saul. She was willing to receive the blame for what she did not see. She did not accept the normal replies: "I did not know!" and "No one told me!" for a lot of good that would have done her and others when the tragedy was done to those who were innocent. She viewed herself as God's servant in this circumstance.

She knew that taking the long-term view rather than the short-term view was the solution to a circumstance that cried out for a quick response.

She learned something about David, also. She learned that the new king over Israel was amenable (teachable), humble, genuinely interested in doing what was right.

One of our greatest failings in life is associated with the idea of pride. David had it, but Abigail was able to help him lay it aside. We need women like her!

"JUST AS IT WAS TOLD ME." (Acts 27:25)

Ernest Underwood

When the apostle Paul stood before Festus at Caesarea to be judged concerning the charges brought against him by the Jews at Jerusalem, Festus asked him if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and be judged there. Paul stated his refusal, then stated that he was before the court of Festus who represented Rome and would, therefore, refuse to go to Jerusalem. It was at this point that he appealed to Caesar.

The twenty-sixth chapter of the book of Acts relates the preaching of Paul to Agrippa. Chapter twenty-seven begins the account of his journey to Rome as a prisoner. The journey was to be a perilous one. Those of us who have experienced many days aboard ship in extremely stormy weather can well appreciate Luke's description of this journey. One can almost feel the surge of the waves as they beat against the ship. We can visualize some not as accustomed to sea travel as others getting sea-sick. So fierce was the storm that Luke records that "all hope that we would be saved was finally given up." (Acts 27:20.) It is in this context that the apostle Paul makes this most marvelous statement which we have used as the title of this article. He reminds those on the ship that they ought to have listened to him when he advised them not to set sail when they did. He then tells them, "And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' Therefore take heart,

men, for I believe God that it will be **just as it was told me.**"(Acts 27:22-25 - emphasis added, eu).

I believe that we find here in this statement the real difference in mankind today. There are those who truly believe in God, thus they also believe that He is true and always means what He says. There are others who lay a claim to faith in Him, but by their works they deny Him. Let us illustrate:

In His word God gives man the divine pattern of how one is saved from past sins. He states that one must hear the gospel. Jesus told the apostles to go and preach the gospel. (Mk. 16:15). After hearing the gospel one is told that he must believe or have faith. (John 8:24; Heb. 11:6). Repentance is commanded of all who wish to be forgiven of sins. Paul stated that in past times God had overlooked, "but now commands all men everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30; see also Luke 13:3, 5 and 2 Pet. 3:9). Jesus told his disciples that men must confess Him before men if they expect Him to confess them before the Father. (Matt. 10:32-33.) Paul stated in Rom. 10:9-10 that this confession must be from the heart and with the mouth. When those on the Day of Pentecost who had listened to, and were convicted by the preaching of the apostle Peter, asked him and the other apostles what they must do. Peter, being instructed by the Holy Spirit, told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. (Act 2:38). In spite of these plain commands there are those in the denominations who do not believe it will be **just as it has been told to us.** They put their faith and their soul's destiny in the hands of the many false teachers who prefer to do things their way rather than God's way.

God has plainly and emphatically stated that His word must not be tampered with either by adding to it, subtracting from it, or in any way changing it. (Gal. 1:8-9; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 22: 18-19.) Yet what denominational preacher is there that does not brazenly teach the doctrines of men rather than just what God has stated in His word? About such Jesus said, "And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. . . ." "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch." (Matt. 15:9, 13-14).

God has told us that He has only one church. In Eph. 4:4 Paul stated, "There is one body." In that same book, and in the first chapter, this same apostle stated, "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." (Eph. 1:22-23). Yet, there are those in the denominations, and even in the church of the Lord who do not believe that it is **just as it has been told to us.**

We could continue by noting that God has spoken precisely about the worship He will accept; about His law on marriage-divorce-and remarriage; about partaking of the works of the flesh; and about adding the fruit of the Spirit to our lives. Are we listening to His word? Whether we are or not, we will surely meet that word at the judgment. (See John 12:48). On that day it will be **just as it has been told us.**

Sadsack, Meslack, and Tobedwego

Tim Hester

In response to the thought question posted on Facebook, "If Christ had John writing a letter (Rev. 2 & 3) to your congregation today what would it say?" The answer was given, "He might bring up Sadsack, Meslack and Tobedwego." But, who is Sadsack, Meslack, and Tobedwego which Christ might would right about?

Sadsack – We all know Sadsack, we see him at work, at school, at the ball park, and sad but true we even see him in the pew at church. He is the one who is never happy, always grumbling and complaining about nearly everything and everyone. His concerns is not that of God, nor His church, neither is he concerned with others. His only true concern and motivation in life is with himself (Jude 1:16). He has either forgotten, or else never come to the realization that Christianity means putting God then others first in our lives (Matt. 6:33; Matt. 22:37; I John 4:20; I John 5:2; Phill. 2:4; Rom. 15:2).

Sadsack's discontent and complaining does not just affect himself, but the church as a whole. His actions and words sows discord and divides the church instead of helping to knit it together as one body (Eph. 4:1- 16; Prov. 6:19; I Cor. 1:10; John 17:21). In so doing he is sinning against God and is in grave danger of perishing in the judgment (Phil. 2:14-15; I Peter 4:9; I Cor. 10:10). Before it is to late Sadsack needs to learn with a gracious heart and a spirit of peace to be happy in the Lord, and to regard others better than himself, (Phill. 4:1-4; I Tim. 2:10; Rom. 14:19; Eph. 4:31-32).

Meslack – He is another person we see around wherever we go, especially in the church. He is the person who is comfortable in the way things are. He has no zeal nor drive to effect change in himself, nor in anyone or anything around him. He just wishes to not be disturbed in his relaxed state no wanting to do anymore than that

which he HAS to do. He is the type which Christ described as being lukewarm, neither cold nor hot (Rev. 3:15-16).

Through his lackadaisical attitude Meslack is hindering the body of Christ by not doing his part as a member of the body (I Cor. 12:18,ff). He needs prodding or provoking to do the good works at which all members of Christ body should be daily employed. (Heb. 10:24; Heb. 13:21; James 1:25). Meslack needs to realize that Christ knows our works, or lack of work, today, just as he knew the works of all the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 2 & 3). Instead of being at ease he needs to be busy daily in the vineyard of the Lord (Luke 12:19-20; Luke 10:2).

Tobedwego – We do not see Tobedwego as regularly as we do Sadsack and Meslack. Why? Because instead of being with other Christians he is somewhere else sleeping. Not sleeping physically but instead sleeping spiritually. Like Meslack he also is comfortable but unlike Meslack he has become so comfortable that he has fallen asleep. In his slumber he is unaware of the spiritual danger that awaits his soul and the souls of those around him.

It is now the time for Tobedwego to awake from his slumber (Rom. 13:11-12 Eph. 5:14; I Cor. 15:34). If he does not awake now he may not have another opportunity to prepare and make his life pleasing unto God (Rom. 13:11; II Cor. 6:2; James 4:14; I Peter 4:17). Today Tobedwego has an opportunity to change from the unprofitable slumberer to a profitable servant of God (Philm 1:11; II Tim. 4:11).

We all will one day stand before the judgment seat of Christ. If we stand there as Sadsack, Meslack, or Tobedwego we will hear those words, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:" (Matt. 25:41). But, it is not too late, today, for us to hear the words of Christ and repent. As Christ wrote unto the church at Ephesus, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. ... He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." (Rev. 2: 5 & 7)