

Our purpose is to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” and to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

OLD PATHS ADVOCATE

“To continue speaking the truth in love,” “endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace,” “keeping the ordinance as delivered.”

“Thus saith the Lord, ‘stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the Old Paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest of your souls.’ (Jer. 6:16) “And they that be of Thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Paths to Dwell in.” (Isa. 58:12).

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NO. 7

BROKEN CISTERNS

BY *BILLY D. DICKINSON*

When NASA sends a probe into outer space to try to determine if there is life on another planet, do you know what they search for? No, it's not little green creatures! Instead, they look for indications of water, one of the most essential elements to life itself, and that's why the language of Jer. 2:13 shows the utter foolishness of rejecting God. “For my people have committed two evils,” the weeping prophet declared in the long ago, “they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” Notice that we are involved in “two evils” when we turn away from God, showing the seriousness of the mistake made, for not only have we forsaken Him who is the source of all that is life-giving, but we have also turned to other things as a substitute for God. Yet, those other things always prove to be nothing more than “broken cisterns” that can hold no water!

A cistern was an artificial reservoir dug in the earth or hewn in the rock for the collection and storage of water. Due to the long dry season and relatively few natural springs, cisterns were very important in the land of Israel. However, the problem was that the heating in the days and the cooling at nights caused the plastered rocks to continually expand and contract, resulting in leaks. Wouldn't it be foolish for a man to work tirelessly on a cistern, hacking it out under the parched sun to collect stagnant rain water, while near his property there is a bubbling spring that never runs dry? Jeremiah said that this is what God's people did in the long ago-- they turned away from God (“the fountain of living waters”) and looked elsewhere for something to quench their spiritual thirst.

Please notice that God referred to them as “cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” In other words, they never had the ability to hold water because they were broken from the day they were built! This is always true of the cisterns of our own making-- self made attempts and schemes designed to find spiritual

fulfillment apart from the Lord and His will. Surely there is a parallel here to be drawn between those ancient times and our 21st Century because people are actually pursuing the same kind of things today. Let's notice a few examples of “broken cisterns” that people are still attempting to drink from ...

MATERIALISM

Idolatry was rampant among God's people in Jeremiah's day: “The priests said not, Where is the Lord? And they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit” (Jer. 2:8). Again: “Hath a nation changed their gods, which are no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit” (Jer. 2:11). By turning their backs on Jehovah, their truest friend and greatest benefactor, they gave themselves to a system that could give them nothing in return. That's why the picture of a broken cistern fit their circumstance perfectly, being a vivid illustration of how idolatry “doth not profit” (a fact stated twice in the above passages), and it should have brought them to their senses.

However, someone might be wondering what this has to do with us today. After all, no one reading this article would ever bow down before a graven image, would they? While presumably that is true, it is an undeniable fact that idolatry is alive and on public display right here in America! Do you find that to be a shocking statement? If so, consider how Paul in Col. 3:5, while listing a number of sins, wrote about “covetousness, which is idolatry.” In other words, when we place too much importance upon material possessions, leading us to have an inordinate “desire to have more” and are “greedy of gain” (See Vine), that is a form of idolatry. Why? Because the love, devotion and allegiance that belongs only to God has been crowded out of our hearts and given to something else. That, dear reader, is nothing less than idolatry!

A materialistic attitude is a “broken cistern” because

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Editorial

SEEING THE END FROM THE BEGINNING

By DON L. KING

When the apostle Paul spoke of the Lord’s church as being “glorious,” (Ephesians 5:27) it is obvious he saw the church differently than many do today. Of course, he saw and spoke of the church by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but what a difference we see today. In modern times the church is viewed by many as non-essential. I recall a college professor years ago telling his class that it was fine for children to be taken to church. He said it might help to broaden their minds; but for adults who are educated and are willing to stand on their own, church is unnecessary. To me that was a shocking statement for a professor to make. However, many think the idea of an all-knowing, all-seeing, and eternal God is only profitable for those who are unable to think for themselves and have need of a crutch. Apparently, this foolish idea has so permeated the thinking of the human family today that few see any real harm in changing things about the Lord’s church.

This well may explain why the worship has undergone wholesale change from one end to the other. This could be a major factor in digressive tendencies we see today. Even among those who have resisted changing the actual worship, other matters have seen change from the Bible way. In some cases, folks hardly notice that women cut their hair, dress immodestly (sometimes even at church services) and both men and women are involved in other forms of worldliness. Brethren appear to take the services of the church so lightly that almost any sport or recreation furnishes ample reason or excuse to miss evening services. What is the problem brethren, when we see a large number Lord’s Day morning and perhaps half that many Lord’s Day evening? The answer is probably pretty involved but one thing is certain: we don’t see the church as “glorious.” Lexicons tell us the word “glorious” means “splendid, noble, gorgeous, honorable,” etc. Thayer also mentions that it includes “free of sin.” Not many things around us are free of sin, but the church was intended to be free of sin. However, the blundering of foolish men trying to improve the church, brings about changes never intended by Divine wisdom.

Paul said Christ would have the church be glorious. (Ephesians 5:27) We are the church! If the church is to be glorious, we are going to have to be glorious in the sense that we make a real effort to live free of sin. The

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QUERIST COLUMN

By CLINT DEFRANCE

What did Jesus mean when he said that John the Baptist was the greatest man ever born, but the least in the Kingdom are greater than him?

Response: The statement under consideration comes from Matthew 11.11: "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

In Matthew's account, Jesus makes John's greatness superior to all born of women, however, in Luke's record we are told specifically what Jesus meant: "For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist..." (Luke 7.28). What was the greatness of John as a prophet that exceeded all others before him? Not moral greatness, or goodness. No doubt John was a very good man - but he was surely no better in his lifestyle than Daniel, or Noah, or Job. Not greatness as a miracle worker, for John worked no miracles (John 10.41). Not greatness in bold preaching, for although John was very bold, so were many before him. The greatness of John that exceeded all other prophets was the privilege of his prophetic office.

It was John's position to prepare the way for the coming of Messiah (Luke 1.13-17). 1 Peter 1.10-12 says, "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-things which angels desire to look into."

The above passage from 1 Peter answers the question. All the ancient prophets hoped to see the Christ and the salvation he brought, but only John was honored to say: "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3.2) and

"Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me'" (John 1.29-30). Yet John, although he saw and identified the Messiah, and although he perceived the reign of God on the near horizon, did not experience its blessings in this life.

In Matthew 11.12 Jesus clearly stated that the Kingdom had not and would not be opened during the lifetime of John. The Kingdom of God on earth, which is the benefits and blessings of Jesus' reign in the Church, was established or inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost, after the death and resurrection of Jesus. John died before these events. So, although John had the greatest privilege of any prophet - to identify the Messiah and witness the fulfillment of God's promises - yet the least in the Kingdom - the most underprivileged church member - enjoys a greater blessing and privilege than John because he or she may experience on earth the fullest, immediate joys and wonders of the remission of sins and the perfect rule of King Jesus in our lives.



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THE LORD'S DAY, OR THE SABBATH?

By MELVIN BLALOCK

In previous articles we have been writing concerning the differences in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. We have shown by the scriptures that the old has been replaced by the new. We read in Paul's writing to the Hebrew Christians, "In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away," Heb 8:13. It seems apparent that some do not want to take Paul at his word for they want to hold on to certain elements of the Old Covenant. Some insist that the Sabbath day must continue to be observed. The Sabbath was a rigid requirement under the old covenant. It was one of the Ten Commandments. We read the following from the book of Exodus: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work...." EX 20:8-10. The Sabbath was a day of rest and to violate it was to incur the penalty of death. It was a covenant with the house of Israel. "Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant," EX 31:15-16. Please note that this was a covenant with the children of Israel to be kept throughout their generations. This covenant was not made with anyone, other than Israel. "And Moses called all Israel, and said to them: 'Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your hearing today, that you may learn them and be careful to observe them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive.....'" Deut. 5:1-4. This covenant, including the Sabbath, was made with the nation of Israel. To violate these commandments, including the Sabbath resulted in the death penalty.

In the New Testament we read Paul's writing to the Corinthians regarding this matter. He referred to these commandments as the "ministry of death." The Apostle wrote, "God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious?"

For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious," 2 Cor. 3:5-11. What was passing away? The answer is the Old Covenant, which included the Sabbath observance. In another New Testament passage he shows that the Sabbath requirement ended at the cross. Paul wrote the Colossians, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Col 2:14-17. Paul's reference to the "handwriting of ordinances" refers to the Ten Commandments, which were written by the finger of God on two tablets of stone. No one has the right to require Sabbath keeping today, for God does not require it. This requirement ended at the cross.

The Christian regards the Lord's Day as the only day of religious significance. It is the Lord's Day because Jesus arose from the dead on that day, the first day of the week, Mk. 16:1-2; 9. The Disciples observe the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, Acts 20:7, which is the Lord's Day. The Christians give of their prosperity on the first day of the week as they are commanded, 1 Cor. 16:1-2. It was on that day that the beloved Apostle John received the Revelation, Rev. 1:10. The Sabbath was the seventh day, and not the first day of the week. Some denominationalists call the Lord's Day the Christian's Sabbath. It is not the Sabbath, nor are we required under the New Covenant to keep the Sabbath. To my knowledge those who profess to keep the Sabbath do not inflict the death penalty for those of their number who fail to keep it. God's people are not in bondage to the Law of Moses, but live under the perfect law of liberty, James 1:25. The Law ended at the cross and hence the Sabbath has been abrogated.

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the deep longings in a man's heart cannot be satisfied by mere physical things. Jesus made that clear in the following warning: "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). If you think that the sum total of your life (its importance and worth) is defined by the abundance of

“things” you own, you have been deceived and need to redirect your priorities. Indeed, when “making a living” becomes what “living” is all about, we are placing too much emphasis upon material things.

D.L. Moody, a denominational preacher of years gone by, once appeared before a congregation carrying a big, heavy sack. As he walked back and forth on the platform, he asked the audience: “How many of you here tonight think that I can preach while holding this sack?” No one believed that he could. Finally, he dropped the sack to the floor and began to take things out of it-- shirts, pants, shoes, lamps, books, etc. “All of these items are legitimate things,” he assured the congregation, “There is nothing sinful about these things I had in my sack.” But then, as he reminded them that they said he could not preach while toting those items, he drove the point home: “So it is with some of you. The very thing that is hindering you from serving the Lord are ... THINGS!” Yes, materialism is a “broken cistern” that robs us of contentment in this life (Ecc. 5: 10) and is not conducive to laying up for ourselves “treasures in heaven.” Remember: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6: 20- 21).

HUMAN WISDOM

As we have already noticed, the priests in Jeremiah’s day had turned away from the law of God and the prophets began to prophesy by Baal (Jer. 2:8). Also, we learn from Jer. 2:36 that they were counting on the Egyptians (and their alliance with them) for comfort and deliverance, but they were assured that “the Lord hath rejected thy confidences, and thou shalt not prosper in them” (verse 37). Here’s the lesson we need to take from this: When we turn away from Divine revelation and place our trust in men (as our source for wisdom and guidance), we are looking to a “broken cistern” that can hold no water! Dearly beloved, we have a choice to make-- Will we choose to forsake God (by neglecting our devotion and obedience to His word) or will we choose to be true disciples of Christ by continuing in His teaching (John 8:31)? Instead of drinking from “broken cisterns” (by listening to the doctrines and traditions of men), let’s drink from the fountain of living water of the living Christ. “The words that I speak unto you,” Jesus promised, “they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

Remember the earlier illustration in this article that showed how foolish it would be for a man to choose a cistern over a natural spring? If that would be foolish, what does it say about a man who knowingly (and admittedly) chooses the traditions of men over the pure word of God? Why would a person do such a thing? The

heavenly source of Holy Scripture should always be preferred over a human source: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3: 16-17).

SELF

“O generation, see ye the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? A land of darkness? Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?” (Jer. 2:31) As they determined to be the “masters” of their own lives, think of the arrogance and self-centeredness reflected in their attitude. If that doesn’t describe what a “broken cistern” is, I don’t know what would! Likewise, when we fail to humble ourselves before God, seeking to go our own way and doing our own thing, that’s the very attitude we are manifesting.

Instead of digging our own cisterns, let’s look to God (who is the fountain of living waters): We don’t have all the answers in and of ourselves; we can’t save ourselves apart from Jesus Christ; we need to recognize how dependent we are on God. As Jeremiah himself declared, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). When we look to and rely solely on “self,” trying to make it on our own, that is like trying to drink from a “broken cistern” that can hold no water.

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church can never be glorious if the members are sinful and worldly, casually dabbling in sinful activities. We had better wake up. In Colossians 1:21,22 Paul spoke of church members who are “...holy and unreprouvable in His sight.” Obviously, Heaven has a view to church members living pure lives.

God sees the end from the beginning. Peter said: “According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” Allow me to provide just one example of how carefully God created the church. He obviously saw from the beginning the way the Lord’s Supper was to be observed. Notice carefully: In the book of Exodus we read of God’s desire that Israel be allowed to leave Egypt, where they were enslaved by the Egyptians and go into the wilderness to worship. We all recall the many mind changes of Pharaoh. However, the end of the story was that he would not allow them to go. A number of

plagues were sent upon Egypt by God in order to show His mighty power. The last one was the death angel who would pass over the camp. God instructed that a lamb be killed and its blood painted upon the door posts of every house in Israel. Those who took shelter within the houses marked with blood would be passed over and spared; but all others would see the death of the first born, both of humans and animals, by the next morning. God gave instructions as to the manner in which the lamb was to be killed. (See Exodus 12) They were to catch the blood of the lamb in a “bason,” (a single container, Exodus 12:22) and from that single bason within every house, painted the blood on the door posts of the house.

Notice a few points: The Lamb was a type (shadow) of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7). The “house” was a type or shadow of the church. (Exodus 12:3; 1 Timothy 3:15) There Paul pointedly uses the term “house” to refer to the church of the living god. Every house of Israel was to have its own lamb which was a type of shadow, of Christ. This shows us that the Lord intended for every congregation to have their own table set for the Lord’s supper. In 1 Corinthians 10:16 Paul wrote by inspiration: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” The argument is sometimes made that Paul was in a different place than Corinth when he wrote the Corinthians, so how could he have meant for each congregation to use one loaf and one cup? The answer is simple, “we” the assembled in every location bless the cup (singular) and break the bread (singular). Knowing this, is it any surprise that God decreed that the blood of the lamb in every house (shadow of the church) of Israel have a single “bason,” (one container) in which to collect the blood of the lamb which was a shadow of His only son who would be sacrificed on the cross many years later? It all fits, does it not? Every congregation is to have one loaf and one cup. God saw the end from the beginning!

Think on these things. —DLK

RETURNING THANKS

By IRVIN BARNES

Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. (2nd Cor. 4:14-15)

When I was a child, I remember family gatherings at my Grandpa Barnes’ house. The high point of such visits was when we all sat down at a large table to enjoy a meal. Once we were all seated, everyone became quiet and Grandpa would call one of the men folks by name and ask them, to “go ahead and return thanks.”

I don’t remember hearing this expression again until I ate with an older couple in the church here. Before we ate, I was invited to “turn thanks.” This incident served to remind me of the expression that Grandpa used so many years ago. I decided to search the New Testament to see if I could find a passage that carried the idea of “returning thanks.” The passage quoted above provided the evidence I was looking for.

First, Paul reminded the Corinthians of how that the power which raised up Christ would also raise the Corinthians in the last day. In similar language, to the Ephesians, Paul wrote, “What is the exceeding greatness to us-ward who believe, according to his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead---” (Eph.1:19-20). Paul had already reminded the Ephesians of how God has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ,” Eph. 1:3. In 1 Cor 4:15, Paul tells the Corinthians how that “all things are for your sakes.” Paul’s reference to the hope of the resurrection was only one of the many great and wonderful blessings that God has bestowed upon his children as a result of his marvelous grace.

Next, Paul declares, that the abundant grace coming from the Father in heaven could, in fact, be returned back to God. He goes on to explain how this abundant grace would make its way back to the Father. He states: “the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many REDOUND to the glory of God.”

Strong’s says redound means to superabound, be in excess, having enough and to spare. While many other dictionary definitions could be given for the word redound, one writer summarized the matter, as “the thanksgiving of many surging back to God in an overflowing measure.”

One of the main ideas of 2 Cor.4:15, is to show how God sheds forth his grace to his children, then they, through the thanksgiving of many, send his grace surging back to God in an overflowing measure. It is then, a wonderful thing to “return thanks” at any time, but, especially before eating our food. 1 Tim. 4:4-5, “For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving of them

which believe and know the truth. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” irvinbarns@aol.com

MAKE YOUR CALLING AND ELECTION SURE

By AARON STUDDARD

Perhaps you have heard of someone who “missed his or her calling” or maybe felt “called” into a particular career path. While certain personality traits may predisposition a person for success at a career, to be “called” suggests divine origin. If this be the case, one who chooses another career, or changes jobs might do so in disobedience. It seems that many use these phrases to substantiate a personal decision. Paul says in I Cor. I :26 “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.” Paul often referenced his calling as an apostle of Jesus Christ, but do you think he felt “called” into tentmaking as a means to make a living? Being called into a secular profession for the purpose of making money is foreign to the scriptures. While many flippantly throw these words around today, calling and election are terms used to describe very serious spiritual matters in God’s Word:

In the New Testament, the word calling refers to an invitation, or summons, and it is always used “having origin, nature, and destiny which are Heavenly, especially with reference to God’s invitation to man to accept the benefits of salvation” (Vine’s, 87). Paul told Timothy, “[God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began”(2 Tim. 1:9). This holy calling is not based upon previous good deeds, but rather something God determined to do before the world began. Paul told the Thessalonians “God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” The call, or invitation, is something that we must understand, believe, and then obey. We must realize the gravity and magnitude of the Lord’s calling into the Kingdom before we can make our calling and election sure.

This calling is not some irresistible force we cannot ignore, as the parable of the Wedding Feast makes clear. The King sent servants to call those who were invited, but they would not come. Some made light of it; another went to his farm, and another to his business. Some “slew” the servants who were inviting them. Eventually, the invitation was extended to any who would come. After the commencement of the feast,

there was one in attendance who had refused to put on the wedding garment. Tragically, he was bound and cast out. Remember the summary our Lord pronounced in Matthew 22:14: “For many are called, but few are chosen.” One can be invited to the wedding, enter with the wedding guests, and then be culled from the feast for not having met the criteria of the King. How important it is that we make our calling and election SURE!

A fundamental component of a democratic government is the process by which men and women assume positions of leadership. It is a high honor to be elected into one of these positions, but our society has degraded the dignity of elected officials to some degree. Because of the defamation of character and mud-slinging campaigns, men often cast their votes based upon a very shallow understanding of the political issues and they often do so with more spite than conviction. Men have lost respect for what it implies to be elected, and thus many have lost the true meaning of the word election.

The Bible uses election several times to refer to the people of God who will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Peter says, “give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”(2 Peter 1:10) The ominous implication is that after one has been “called” into service of the Kingdom, there is a very real possibility that they can fall by failing to grow spiritually in the Christian characteristics that Peter outlines in this chapter.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father, knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God”(1 Thess. 1:2). Paul indicates that he KNOWS his Thessalonian brethren’s election by 3 key indicators.

Distinction is made in the scriptures between meritorious work and “works of faith”. An activity taken in response to a command of God is MORE than a meritorious deed; it is an expression of faith. James tells us that faith without works is dead (James 2:20). James continues, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” Faith, then, is more than passive recognition of a divine thought or principle; Faith is demonstrated in purposeful actions of obedience. Consider the “heroes of faith” found in Hebrews 11. All of these took action, some of which are inconceivable to us, because of their unwavering faith in God. Paul wrote, “[the mystery of the gospel

in Jesus Christ] is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Romans 16:26). Because the Thessalonians had been busy in OBEDIENT works of faith, they provided evidence of their election of God!

Paul also mentions that the Thessalonians demonstrated their “labor of love.” Love expresses itself in generosity and self-sacrifice, regardless of the merit of the recipient or the cost to the exhibitor. Love leads us to do good for others without any feeling of superiority or resentment. Do we labor in the Kingdom today because we love men’s souls and want to lead them back to the Father, or do we labor because we are compelled? Hebrews 6:9 says, “we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

The third praiseworthy attribute for which Paul commended the brethren in Thessalonica was their “patience of hope.” Many misunderstand patience as acquiescence to a bad situation. Scriptural patience is NOT a passive resignation to whatever our lot may be, but rather an active effort to make the best out of a bad situation. It can be described as steadfastness in times of trouble and faithful perseverance when facing the harshness of the realities of life. Patience is scripturally fastened to HOPE. Hebrews 6:19 says that “hope is an anchor of the soul.” Hope is comprised of two very important elements: (1) expectation and (2) desire which converge in the promise of the Lord’s return and ALL that will accompany that grand event. Because we KNOW the Lord is coming back and WE DESIRE to be with Him, we patiently endure the pain, trouble, and sorrow of this life with the HOPE of His return. “Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh”(James 5 :8).

Many have mistaken ideas of calling and election: Scriptural election is not some type of Heavenly roster upon which we have no influence to be added or removed. Nowhere in the Bible is the doctrine found that God has predetermined a definite number of souls to enter eternal life and the remainder to eternal damnation. God’s ELECTION has always involved 2 Things: (1) God’s revelation of His commands and His Will (2) Man’s willingness to respond in obedience. The Thessalonians had been “called” by the gospel and responded with the change of purpose that made their “election” SURE. God determined that those who would conform to His son’s image would be saved. He

invites through the gospel and some accept the call. He justifies them through faith in Jesus Christ, and will elect them to inherit eternal life. (Romans 8:28-30).

Heb. 9:15 And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Let us diligently seek to make our calling and election sure.

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CONTENDING FOR THE CAUSE

pt 1 of 3

BY MICHAEL BOLTON

As Christians in our modern age, we are privileged to live and work in a time of unprecedented ease and comfort in the USA, Some of our brethren in other parts of the world struggle with things that often we cannot comprehend, But whether living in comfort or poverty, we - as members of the body of Christ - have certain duties in which we must engage. In the process of these duties, we must remember that we are in a warfare that is spiritual in nature, not consisting of flesh and blood. To help us on our way in carrying out those responsibilities, we have the apostle Paul’s admonition found in 1 Timothy 6:11-12: But thou, a man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. (KJV)

In this Epistle, Paul is writing to Timothy as his official representative to all the churches in Asia, He is teaching Timothy and us that there are some things to flee, some things to follow, and some things to fight for, This article addresses the concept of fleeing, Paul gives personal advice to Timothy, but he also gives general admonition to the Christian. He emphasizes what should be considered “great gain” and warns of the danger of following after and depending on the riches of this world.

In this chapter, Paul speaks to three groups of people and divides them into two categories each as he gives the counsel:

1. Slaves - slaves with both believing and unbelieving masters - vs 1-2

2. Teachers - false teachers with improper motives and wrong sources of authority, and sound teachers with proper motives and divine authority as a basis of truth. - vs 3-16

3. Wealthy - those who desire wealth and those who have wealth and its responsibilities. - vs17-19

In our text, Paul states there are some things for these groups to flee. In vs 11, he specifies that we as individual Christians are to run away from some things. One should understand that when Paul speaks to "O man of God" he is not giving a title to Timothy but rather designating him as an individual who follows God, This same designation can be given to individual Christians today.

A quick scan of the Word of God will reveal many things the man of God should flee, The word translated "flee" in most of our English Bibles is to "run away, shun, or escape." It is a kind of verb that indicates that Timothy is to make fleeing these things a habit - a regular practice. In other words, Timothy (and we like him) are to "ever flee these things" as if they are a pestilence or a poisonous snake, We must continue to flee and do nothing but flee because the margin of distance cannot be too great.

Some of the things the man of God should flee include "sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18), "idolatry" (1 Corinthians 10:14), and "youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22). Indeed, one could find many things listed in the Word of God to flee; nevertheless, one will find numerous accounts of habits to flee in 1 Timothy alone.

1 Timothy 6:4: he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions (ESV). This person is one in whom pride has finished its dreadful work. This is the person who has rejected sound doctrine, as Paul admonishes in 1 Timothy 6:3: if anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness (NKJV). Paul says this person is proud or puffed up, has an over-high opinion of himself, and/or is blind with pride and conceited. He also uses words indicating pompous and ignorant. This is some strong language, but one should fasten his seatbelt - Paul is just warming up!

Paul goes on to say that this person is identified as one who is sick and described as doting, This individual is diseased in his mind, obsessed with questionings and word-battles. In other words, this individual has

a morbid appetite for speculations and controversies, Next appear to be the central or key verses in the chapter. In vs 11-12 (referenced above), Paul instructs Timothy to "flee" this attitude!

It is very easy to become bogged down in controversy of one sort or another, but Paul is counseling to stay away from such controversies. It stands to reason, therefore, that we should not seek to be that kind of person. Too often we want to wear "our side" or "our opinion" like a badge of honor. The Holy Spirit says to stay away! Remember: the word "flee" means "to put as much distance between us and this attitude as possible."

We are constantly (and properly) looking to Jesus as our model. When we study His life, we see him constantly involved in controversy, and sometimes, in our contention for the faith, we are as well, But too often we tend to seek out the argument, and we become proud of our ability to "hold our own" in debate. Let us remember that we are not Jesus! Although he never looked for controversy nor did He ever compromise truth. Our response to opposition, to compromise, to heresy must always be "What does the word of God say?" We must "speak where the Bible speaks," and then we need to be quiet. We must hold fast the pattern of sound words.

This controversy, argument, and debate seeking develops some characteristics in men that are not acceptable in God's eyes, Paul does not leave us in the dark; he lists them very clearly:

1. Envy - This is discontent with another person's superiority or advantage. This characteristic seeks to deprive another of what he has, Envy is always evil. See Matthew 27:18, Romans 1:28-32, & Galatians 5:9, We should remember and understand that this characteristic is that of a depraved or debased mind, and it is always associated with other things which are evil. While society may not frown on envy, God always does.

2. Strife - This is an expression of hatred demonstrated by quarrelling, contention and arguing. It is translated as "debate" in Romans 1:29, "contention" in 1 Corinthians 1:11, and "variance" in Galatians 5:20, This (as we see in 1 Corinthians 1) almost destroyed the congregation in Corinth. One wishes the Lord's church had learned her lesson from Corinth, Too many strong and noble congregations have been ruined by strife. Too many evangelistic efforts have been stopped cold by strife.

3. Blasphemies - This is the kind of speech that "injures another's good name." Other words used are "reviling" or "railings." The concept that a member of the body of Christ would do this to another member of the body of Christ is shameful.

4. Evil Suspicions - What a list the apostle gives us!! This is that which thinks and feeds on wicked and malicious innuendo. The mind of such a person is diseased and exists in the state of corruption and disintegration. These people feed on lies and gossip that destroy anyone's character. Jesus met this kind of mind and confronted it in John 8:45 & 5:43.

5. Incessant wrangling - This is protracted and wearying discussions. Paul is speaking of perpetual contention, constant friction, and mutual irritation. The KJV has it as "perverse disputing",

6. Love of money - Paul lists these in 1 Timothy 6:5-6: useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself 6 Now godliness with contentment is great gain.

We should understand that these men were completely bereft of truth. This is not a situation where a brother was trying to do better, grow, or put these sins away; instead, this is descriptive of a man who has completely embraced this behavior. It should not be believed that this was the result of an unavailable truth; however, they had once known the truth and had defected from it. Mr. W.E. Vine says that we should learn from this passage that "the corrupting of the mind, and the loss of truth is cause and effect to each other,"

It should be noted, carefully, that while warning Timothy of the "love of money", he is not teaching that having money is evil, nor is he teaching that working to make money is evil. He is teaching that giving oneself over to monetary gain opens the door to all sorts of temptation. This is what he means when he speaks of being "pierced through with many sorrows." This is a marked difference to the man who is "rich unto God, and good works."

Our Departed

COX - Cox, Willa R. "LaRue" was born March 2, 1927 and died April 28, 2019. She is survived by one son and daughter-in-law, Lyndon and Lynette Cox; one daughter and son-in-law, Pam and Billy Wilson; one brother Leon Fancher; and one sister, Zoe Hill. She is also survived by nine grandchildren and spouses, ten great grandchildren, numerous nephews and nieces, and of course a host of friends and brethren in Christ. Preceding her in death was her husband Lloyd who was the love of her life. They both were long time members of the Fossil Creek Church of Christ where Lloyd served as an Elder for many years. I asked the family to write down memories of LaRue and as Pam

told me, "She left us lots of material!" LaRue was first and foremost a Christian woman, a model mother and grandmother, and, she always had an optimistic spirit. All of the grandchildren wrote about how she made everyone laugh, even when she didn't necessarily mean to. She loved her family dearly and they loved her in return. She loved the church, and she and Lloyd were always at Gospel Meetings in the area as long as they were able. I stayed in their home and it was a joy to listen to them tell stories about their life together, and their love for the church was self-evident. The beautiful congregational singing was led by two of her grandsons and another grandson read the obituary and offered some heartfelt thoughts about his grandmother. I was wonderfully honored to be asked to give the eulogy and offer words of comfort and assurance from God's word. — Jerry Dickinson

Field Reports

Don L. King, 1147 Sherry Way, Livermore, CA 94550, old_paths@juno.com, June 8. The home church is at peace and working to save souls. We look forward to Michael Bolton being with us soon for a short meeting. We also look forward to seeing you at the 4th of July meeting soon. God bless the faithful.

Paul O. Nichols, 14211 Rosehill, Overland Park, KS 66221, pon.wjn.ks@juno.com. Our winter is almost past, and now we are enjoying the change. We have had an abundance of snow, an unusual amount of rain, with tornado and flood warnings in large areas of the state. But we have survived. We had an excellent meeting with Bro. Jimmy Cating in March, and we now look forward to Bro. Bill Fergersen who is scheduled for the meeting at Stony Point, June 16-23. In our latest meetings we have been having excellent attendance and cooperation from other congregations, and we look for the same in the upcoming meeting. We recently enjoyed the privilege of hearing and visiting with Bro. Juan Rodriguez of San Antonio, TX in the meeting at Mill Creek. I have known him for many years, having met him, his father and brother, Elias, at Sulphur, OK at the camp meeting. Due to the devastating rain storms in Malawi, Africa the brethren in southern Malawi have suffered loss of houses, loss of food crops, and the death of one of our faithful preachers. The Stony Point congregation has sent several thousand dollars to aid them in their suffering, but much more is needed. If other congregations are willing to contribute much needed aid, we would be able to furnish that information. Please remember in prayer our faithful brethren in their suffering.

Wayne Fussell, 6126 Land O' Trees, Shreveport, LA 71119, wfussell1@comcast.net. My meeting in Texarkana (Eylah Congregation) was well-attended every service. Jerry Dickinson has done a good work there for the past 13 years. We in Shreveport are thankful we have been able to support him. My meeting at the Denton County congregation in Lewisville, TX was thrilling. Folks from all over the country came in great numbers to support their Memorial Day meeting. It "put the preach" in this old preacher. It was a pleasure to stay with Jonathan Edwards and his sweet family during the meeting. Jonathan has done a great work with this church. I enjoyed being with Brett Hickey, whose TV program we help sponsor, and so many other preachers I will not try to name. Preachers are always an encouragement when they attend. My next meeting is at Red Oak, TX July 17-21. God bless this wonderful brotherhood that I have been part of for 69 blessed years!

Roger Rivera, Philippines. Dear bro Don, It is pleasure to communicate with you again Brother. I hope you are fine and your whole family. May God bless you all. Last April 14 we have one baptism in Burgos, this is a fruit of our radio program. And two baptism today, June 12 at Abaca Bangui. My radio program is gaining popularity among the listeners. I am receiving questions to be answered in the program and I am looking forward that I can visit those who are continuously sending questions. My program now costs 2,500 pesos per month. It is aired 3 times a week at 30 minutes per airing. The work in my place is doing well. Bible studies and personal visitation is being done on a regular basis every week. This resulted to stronger Church as they are edified by the word of God. Despite of my busy schedule at home congregation, it was also a privilege to be with brother Dario Estavillo in all the places where he requested to visit and to preach the Gospel. Like me he is also very busy, we were in sta. Marcela Apayao last April 30, Roxas Isabela on May 4 and in Tanglagan Apayao on May 7&8 these areas are far from each other that it took 8-10 hours of travel. For my health I continue for my medication. My doctor advised me to continue my medication. I have to do it even though it means a big expenses. Brother, please continue to support the work and please do not forget to mention us in your prayers.

Conrado Libertino, Philippines. Dear Brother King, Greeting you and your love ones in the name of our Jesus Christ. Last April 16 .. 19 I and my wife attended our Annual Study and Fellowship held at Gabut Norte, Ilocos Norte. It was successful and attendance was very good. After the Study we stayed in Mallig, Isabela. Two Sunday mornings I attended and preached

at Roxas congregation and three Sunday afternoons at Villa Corazon congregation. I was also requested to solemnize wedding ceremony and preached a funeral service at Roxas congregation. April 30- we're back to Dipolog City and arrived safely. May 12&13- I and my wife visited San Francisco Church of Christ, San Francisco, Lilooy, Zamboanga del Norte. This month of April and May, we have 11 baptisms in Mindanao. June 5-6 we conducted Preacher Study and Church Leadership Training at Lalawan, Dicayas, Dipolog City. Attended by our preachers of Western Mindanao and Visayas. We organized this program to prepare our preachers and congregations for the future of the Lord's Work. One of our subject was music and song leading. Our next schedule will be on August 7-8, 2019 at Palayan Church of Christ, Palayan, Aloran, Misamis Occidental, then on October 23-24, 2019 at Mabog Church of Christ, Mabog, Bislig City, Surigao del Sur. We hope and pray that this program will continue to help the needs of the congregation. God bless.

Greg Gay, 3816 Tambos Trl, Edmond, OK, 73034, 916-804-3787, papagreg@aol.com, June 10, 2019. Since last report we have made the move to Edmond, OK and are slowly getting settled in a home across the street from Justin and Lori Owen, our son-in-law and daughter. Having four grandkids close enough to walk over to visit is a great treat! I am very thankful we were able to spend time in Ada with my sister, Vicky Holt, before she passed away on April 26. She was amazing and brave in her battle with cancer. Thank you to all who kept her in their prayers the last couple of years. The congregation at Ada went above and beyond in their giving of themselves to her care. Area preaching appointments since moving here have included Ada, Edmond, Moore, Norman, and Piedmont. We have also heard Frank Brancato at Ada & Jimmy Cating at Whispering Pines in gospel meetings. I had a meeting at Glendale, AZ the end of May. I enjoyed the hospitality of Art Lynch who works unceasingly with the congregation. We had some visitors from the area plus brethren from Apache Junction, including Bob Orear. It was good to see him again. Our new home congregation is Piedmont, OK, a growing area in the Northwest Oklahoma City metropolitan area. We are honored to be welcomed by the congregation and look forward to assisting in the work as needed. They have worked hard to have a new building in recent years and, more importantly, have earnestly and consistently contended for the faith in their years of existence. Note our new address: 3816 Tambos Trl, Edmond, OK, 73034. Other contact information remains the same: 916-804-3787, papagreg@aol.com.

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WALKS THROUGH THE BIBLE...

I LIKE TO GO TO CHURCH!

By JERRY DICKINSON

“When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changer’s money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, ‘Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!’ Then His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for your house has eaten Me up.” (John 2:15-17)

This remarkable incident took place at the beginning of the Lord’s ministry. He had only recently chosen His apostles and they were just beginning to understand his mission and teaching. Up until this point no doubt He had been humble, gentle, and somewhat restrained. Suddenly, and dramatically, they see another side to Jesus. He enters with them into the temple precincts and He is horrified at the fact that the temple is a veritable marketplace for making money. In righteous indignation He makes a whip out of some cord and begins flipping over tables. The money goes flying and clanging on the pavement. Then, He drives out the animals they are selling to the worshippers. Sheep and oxen are running past frightened onlookers as their keepers try to corral their runaway animals. Finally, and most shockingly, He drives them all out, and then exclaims, “You have made My Father’s house a house of merchandise!”

Can you imagine the chaos and shock of the moment? The disciples are shocked and dismayed, no doubt. They have never seen Jesus act this way. Why is He so upset? What is wrong with Him? But then, John tells us, they remember the scripture that declares, “The zeal for your house has eaten Me up.” That was believed to be a prophecy that would be fulfilled by the Messiah when he came. He is the Messiah, they must have thought. He is consumed with a righteous zeal for God’s house. He is on fire for His Father and His Father’s house!

It is strikingly remarkable that one of the qualities that pointed out Jesus as the Messiah was His zeal and fervor for the house of God. Of course, under the Mosaic dispensation the temple was God’s house, but today the church which Jesus established and purchased with His own precious blood is the Lord’s house. Paul declares that the house of God today is the church, the pillar and ground of the truth. (I Timothy 3:15) If we are truly disciples of Jesus then we have the same fervor and zeal for the church which our Lord had. I am concerned about so many today who have little love and concern for the church. One way this is manifest is in church attendance and especially in attendance at gospel meetings. When anything and everything comes before our attendance at the worship services of the church there is a problem. The problem is a heart problem! We need to capture the heart of Jesus. His zeal needs to capture us!

Several years ago I held a meeting in Mississippi not far from where Lynwood Smith lived. Even though Lynwood was having some medical problems he was at the meeting every night. I could tell he was not feeling well but I appreciated his zeal and determination to be at services every night. Toward the end of the meeting I saw him in town and he told me he had a late doctor’s appointment but he still intended to be at services that night. I told him that I would understand if he couldn’t make it with such a late appointment, and I knew he didn’t feel that well anyway. All of a sudden he fairly shouted at the top of his voice, “I like to go to church!” I do not remember how I responded; in fact I may not have responded I was so taken aback. He was at services that night! I got to thinking about his outburst later and I realized I had offended him. I didn’t mean to of course, but in his mind I was suggesting it was alright to miss church and that upset him. “I like to go to church!” was his emotional response.

Lynwood was eaten up and consumed with a zeal for the Lord’s house. Jesus was too! He was angry at the way His Father’s house was being abused and despised. Does it bother us when folks denigrate the church? Are we upset when brethren absent themselves from worship services for the most trivial reasons? Let us emulate the gentleness, humility, and compassion of our Lord, but let us also strive to emulate His fire and fervor for righteousness. Let us love the church ardently as He did, even dying to purchase the church. May others look at us and say what they said of our Savior, “He is eaten up with a zeal for the Lord’s house!”