

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 in 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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TRUE BELIEVERS

By BILLY D. DICKINSON

Are you a “believer” in Jesus Christ? Some might find that a provocative question, even one that offends them because of the implications involved. I’m sure that most people would give this immediate response: “Yes, of course, I am a believer!” However, when inspiration in the New Testament refers to believers, it is talking about more than just giving mental assent to certain facts about Jesus. Indeed, a true believer is like those described in Heb. 10:39, “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” In other words, it is to be a faithful child of God.

PARALLEL PASSAGES

Notice what Acts 5:14 affirms: “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” Who were added to the Lord? **Believers!** This should remind us of another statement found in Acts 2:47, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” The American Standard Version renders it this way: “And the Lord added to them day by day those that were **saved**.” It is a recognized axiom that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other. In one passage we are told that believers were added to the Lord, while in the other passage it is said that the saved were added to the church. This leads to the inescapable conclusion that to be added to the Lord is to be added to the church, which is His body (Col. 1:18). Also, when the Bible talks about “believers” and the “saved,” it is referring to the same group of individuals.

Bear in mind that it is clearly shown in Acts 2 that the saved were those who obeyed the conditions of salvation under the terms of Christ’s gospel: “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost... Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:38; 41). The word of God has a wonderful way of tying things together for us! It is obvious that a “believer” (as used in the sense of a saved follower of Christ) refers to an obedient child of God. Please notice the following passages for further

proof: “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance” (1 Pet. 1:14). “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of **the believers**, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12).

We need to understand that to wear the title of “believer” carries with it a great responsibility - it demands a specific pattern of conduct that all believers are to emulate. That within itself shows that to be a true believer involves more than just “faith only.” After all James wrote that “the devils also believe, and tremble” (Jas. 2:19), but demons are not “believers” in the sense that God’s children are!

A SYNONYM FOR FAITHFULNESS

In the Scriptures, the idea of “believing” is often used as a synonym for faithfulness or obedience. We all know what it means to be “faithful,” but have you ever considered how this word connects the idea of obedience and fidelity together? This is seen, for example, in the qualifications of an elder: “If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having **faithful children** not accused of riot or unruly” (Tit. 1:6). The expression, “faithful children,” means that they are children who believe- i.e., they are Christians. The whole idea of the eldership is that one proves himself a capable leader in the church by having the ability to lead his children to Christ. [Vincent says: “Better, *believing children*; or, as Rev., *children that believe*”- *Word Studies Of The New Testament*, P. 333] The point I want you to see is that to be “faithful” is equivalent in the Scriptures to believing, or to being a Christian!

ONLY TWO CATEGORIES

There is a sense in which all men and women fall into one of **two classes** - believers or unbelievers. This is a distinction that is made over and over again in the Scriptures. If you will read 1 Cor. 6:1-6, you will find that Paul writes about the unjust, the world, and the unbelievers (on the one hand), as opposed to the saints, the church, and brethren (on the other hand). Can’t you see that you fall into one of those two categories? That means that if you are not a member of the Lord’s church, you are numbered with the unbelievers! Also, in 1 Tim. 5:16, Paul is discussing the obligation of Christians to support members of their own family: “If any man or woman **that believeth** have widows, let

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Editorial

CAMPBELLITE CHURCH?

By DON L. KING

Recently, some supposedly well-meaning person sent us some writings of a man associated with the Baptist denomination in which this subject is the topic. According to this Baptist, we who are members of the church of Christ owe our beginning to Alexander Campbell and his father, Thomas Campbell. Of course, those of us who have been around a while have heard this before and know better. However, let us look at this subject briefly.

As we read the Scriptures, we notice that wherever the apostles and evangelists traveled during Bible days, they established churches. These were not denominations, mind you, (denominations came about many hundreds of years later) because they were alike. The converts obeyed the same gospel and believed the exact same doctrine. As a result, they all worshiped alike! When Phillip preached in Samaria, did he establish a church in his name? Of course not, he preached the same doctrine as all the others who were telling the gospel story. Those churches were churches of Christ. They belonged to Jesus and had believed the doctrine Jesus came to the world to teach. When Peter preached in Caesarea, did he establish a denomination or a church in his own name? No, because he also preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and those who heard his preaching believed the very same doctrine that Phillip and many others were also teaching. Every one of those newly established congregations were churches of Christ because they were following the gospel of Christ in the same way. They were all worshipping the same way. There was a wonderful similarity between them all. They apparently were not striving to be "different" but were intent upon following the same teaching and therefore were all the same in name, doctrine and worship. The point of all of this is that wherever the pure seed of the kingdom is planted in any age and place, it will unerringly produce Christians who believe and worship alike. When the Bible is taught in purity and simplicity, it cannot produce a denomination by accident. Rather, the results will predictably be the same in every instance. No one plants wheat and gets corn by accident. Seed always brings forth after its own kind. Everyone accepts that as truth.

Wherever the gospel is preached, in any age or place, and people hear and obey, they will all be members of the same church. The reason this is so is that a particular type of seed will always produce the same crop no matter where one plants, who plants, or how often it is planted. This must be one reason the apostle Paul wrote as he did in 1 Corinthians 3:3-7. "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you

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THE QUERIST COLUMN

By RONNY F. WADE

Question: Can a Christian be a Mason?

Answer: In order to correctly answer the above question, we must first determine what Masonry is, and what being a Mason would embrace. According to established and accepted Masonic writers, Freemasonry is a religion. Albert Pike in his work *Morals and Dogma*, page 196 writes "The religious faith thus taught by Masonry is indispensable to the attainments of the great ends of life." On page 213 he says "Every Masonic Lodge is a temple of religion; and its teachings are instruction in religion." Again "This is the true religion revealed to the ancient patriarchs; which Masonry has taught for many centuries, and which it will continue to teach as long as time endures" Page 214. Dr. Mackey in his 2 volume work *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* says on page 792 "Freemasonry is a religious institution... it is of indispensable obligation that a Lodge, a Chapter, or any other Masonic Body, should be both opened and closed with prayer." Those who deny that Freemasonry is a religion, deny what is plainly taught by the Lodge. We will now notice some of the major tenets of this religious body: (1) The Masonic view of the bible is explained by Dr. Mackey on page 133 of his *Encyclopedia of Masonry* as follows: "The Bible is used among Freemasons as a symbol of the will of God, however it may be expressed. Therefore, whatever to any people express that will, (i.e. God's will) may be used as a substitute for the Bible in a Masonic Lodge. Thus, in a Lodge consisting entirely of Jews, the Old Testament alone may be placed upon the alter, and Turkish Freemasons may use the Koran. Whether it be the Gospel to the Christian, the Pentateuch to the Israelite, the Koran to the Mussulman, or the Vedas to the Brahman, it everywhere Masonically conveys the same idea, that of the symbolism of the Divine Will revealed to man." Since to the Mason the Bible is only "the symbol of the word of God" the Koran will express the will of God just as well as the Bible. Dr. Mackey further states on page 579 "If Freemasonry were simply a Christian institution, the Jew and the Moslem, the Brahman and the Buddhist could not conscientiously partake of its illumination; but its universality is its boast." (2) As further proof that Masonry is a religion, notice its offer of salvation: "Let him who toils complain not, nor feel humiliated! Let him look up, and see his fellow-workmen there in God's Eternity; they alone surviving there." (*Kentucky Monitor*, page 152 and *Tennessee Craftsman*, page 198). Notice further "The Covering of a Lodge is not less than the clouded canopy or starry-decked heaven, where all good Masons hope at last to arrive." (*Kentucky Monitor*,

page 41) If salvation may be had in Masonry, then the Bible and the church of our Lord would not be necessary. (3) Masonry also teaches that Jesus Christ is not divine. "Divine or human, inspired or only a reforming Essene, it must be agreed that His teachings are far nobler, far purer, far less allayed with error and imperfections, far less of the earth earthly, than those of Socrates, Plato, Seneca, or Mahomet, or any of the great moralists and reformers of the world." (Albert Pike in *Morals and Dogma*, page 719) (4) Masonry teaches that it is greater than the Lord's church. "No institution was ever established on nobler principles, nor were ever more excellent rules and mixims laid down than are inculcated in the several Masonic Lectures" (*Tennessee Craftsman*, page 34 and *Kentucky Monitor*, pages 53-54). (5) Masonry practices baptism. In the 26th degree of Masonry, Albert Pike says, "Qu. What are the symbols of the purification necessary to make us perfect Masons? Ans. Lavation with pure water, or baptism; because to cleanse the body is emblematical of purifying the soul; and because it conduces to the bodily health, and virtue is the health of the soul, as sin and vice are its malady and sickness..." (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 538-539). (6) Masonry observes a fraternal supper. In the 26th degree "Qu. What is to us the chief symbol of man's ultimate redemption and regeneration? Ans. The fraternal supper, of bread which nourishes and of wine which refreshes and exhilarates, symbolical of the time to come, when all mankind shall be one great harmonious brotherhood... To our Jewish Brethren this supper is symbolical of the Passover; to the Christian Mason of that eaten by Christ and His Disciple, when, celebrating the Passover" (*Morals and Dogma*, pages 539-540). Much more could be written and documented, however, we deem what has been written thus far to be sufficient in exposing the beliefs and teachings of Freemasonry. How anyone could claim, in view of this evidence, that a Christian could be an active member of the Masonic Lodge is beyond my ability to comprehend. (Send all questions to Ronny F. Wade 2254 E. Raynell St. Springfield, MO 65804 or clockronny@aol.com)

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THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL AND “THE TOMB OF JESUS”

PART 1

By GEORGE BATTEY

On March 4, 2007 the Discovery Channel aired a controversial program entitled, “*The Lost Tomb of Jesus.*” Supposedly archaeologists have discovered Jesus’ tomb and inside the tomb, the very bones of Jesus Himself. If the Discovery Channel is to be believed, Jesus did not resurrect at all. He simply died and was buried in a family grave as any ordinary man. Some critics of this program speculate whether the airing of this broadcast, five weeks before Easter, might be an atheistic effort to preempt the significance of the Easter holiday.

The relevance of the entire Christian faith hinges on the truthfulness of the resurrection of Jesus. The apostle Paul framed the argument like this:

“But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up - if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!” (1 Cor 15:13-17).

These conclusions are drawn because, if Jesus did not resurrect, He was simply an ordinary man. Ordinary men cannot save others from sin. Dead men cannot save others from anything.

WHAT HAPPENED?

What has happened? What have archeologists discovered in Israel to make some think the bones of Jesus have been found? In 1980 a tomb was discovered accidentally when two boys were playing on a construction site in a suburb of Jerusalem. Ten limestone boxes (ossuaries) dating to the first century were discovered in the tomb. Six inscriptions were discovered with names similar to Jesus Christ’s family and His disciples. The names were as follows: Jesua - son of Joseph, Mary, Mariamene e Mara, Matthew, Jofa, Juda, son of Jesua. Producer James Cameron (*The Titanic*) and Jewish director Simcha Jacobovici say the name Mariamene e Mara is actually the name “Mary Magdalene.”

DNA tests were performed from the ossuary labeled “Jesus” and “Mariamene e Mara” and the two people were not physically related. Cameron and Jacobovici conclude the only reason a man and woman who were not related would be buried together is if they were married to each other. They conclude, then, that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and together they had a son named Judah whose ossuary is also buried in this tomb.

Cameron and Jacobovici hired a statistician named Andrey Feuerverger to calculate the probability that this is the tomb of Jesus Christ. According to this statistician, the approximate population of Jerusalem in the first century was approximately 50,000. If all these were assembled

together and given the following five instructions, here is what would happen: (a) “Everyone whose name is Jesus please stand up,” 2,796 would stand; (b) “Would all those whose father is also named Joseph remain standing,” 351 would be left; (c) “All those who also had a mother named Mary remain standing,” 173 would be left; (d) “All those who had a brother named Jose remain standing,” only 23 would be left; (e) “How many had a brother named James?”, only 1 would be left. Supposedly, then, the probability that this is the tomb of Jesus is calculated to be 1 in 600.

What should Christians think about all of this? Many people are impressed with this program on the Discovery Channel. The Discovery Channel has a good reputation and comes across as authoritative and desirous of truth. DNA testing was done. Americans are impressed with scientific testing. Statistical calculations were done. Americans are impressed with mathematical statistics. Cameron and Jacobovici are telling the world everyone has been deceived by an incredible “cover-up” all these years. Americans have been deceived before and are determined not to let it happen again. For all these reasons many people will be influenced to believe the tomb of Jesus and His bones have actually been discovered. They will believe Jesus never did resurrect from the dead. Jesus was a good man (supposedly) and He taught us many good things (supposedly), but the conclusion will be: He was not the Son of God; He was just a good man.

IF JESUS DID NOT RESURRECT

Here is where people need to think critically. If Jesus did not resurrect from the dead, then He is not a “good” man. **If He did not resurrect, He was a LIAR.** He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up ... He was speaking of the temple of His body.” (Jn 2:19-21). “Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.” (Mt 16:21). Jesus said, “The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.” (Mt 17:22-23). The Jews correctly said to Pilate, “We remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.” (Mt 27:63-64). Observe the words “deceiver” and “deception.” If Jesus did not resurrect like He said He would, He was a liar - a false prophet. False prophets are not “good” men. They deceive people.

Someone who would lie about who they are is not a “good” man. They cannot be trusted in anything they say. Lying about one’s identity is one of the worst deceptions that can be perpetrated upon others. Jesus was going around telling people: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn 14:6); “You will die in your sins; for if you do not believe

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SEED VAULT

By BARNEY OWENS

On a remote Arctic island, not far from the North Pole, Norway is about to start construction on a "doomsday vault" to safeguard a uniquely valuable resource—seed samples of nearly every food crop on Earth—from a global catastrophe such as massive crop disease, biological contamination, or nuclear war.

The standard Svalbard International Seed Vault, due to go into operation by late 2008, is intended to hold in cold storage as many as 3 million seeds to combat the loss of biological diversity, to reduce vulnerability of agricultural production to climate change, and to secure future food production capability. The Norwegian government is paying the \$3 million construction cost, and there are plans for governments, foundations, and seed companies to fund a \$260 million endowment to sustain the facility in perpetuity.

While there are other seed collections, this facility is seen as a bank of last resort, the backup for the whole world. It will be carved into a mountainside, kept cold by the natural permafrost, and secured with fences, blastproof doors, air locks, and motion detectors. "The presence of polar bears, which prowl the area," say organizers, "may be seen by some as providing an additional layer of security." (U.S. News & World Report, Feb. 19, 2007, page 17, article "Building the Fort Knox of Seeds").

Reading over this article there is within it some clear spiritual lessons. Jesus often used object lessons to that end. One does not have to be a Master Teacher as Jesus to be able to follow in the **Footprints of Jesus** in using this manner to study for one's own benefit or to lend aid to assist others in understanding certain truths. Principles are often accepted in the world yet are denied when applied in the spiritual realm. I wish to point out a few things from the above article, then make some applications to spiritual truths.

Seed Produces After Its Kind

The government of Norway recognizes the fact that "seed produces after its kind." Should a holocaust occur destroying seed necessary to produce crops then seed could be retrieved from this vault, planted, and the earth again could be able to sustain life. The seed kept will produce more seed exactly like itself.

Jesus according to Luke 8:11 said, "the seed is the word of God." That means the word of God can be preached and the preaching will produce from the seed sown like unto itself. Peter wrote *"But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."* (I Pet. 1:25). The sowing of the seed is accomplished when the Gospel is preached. The Gospel is "the death of Christ for our sins, His burial, and His resurrection from the dead" (I Cor. 15:1-4). It was Peter that stood with the eleven and preached the Gospel in its fullness for the first time at the first Pentecost after Jesus resurrected from the grave (Read

Acts chapter 2). He informed those assembled that Jesus was rejected and crucified by their own wicked hands, yet without their knowledge this was foreknown by God, who raised up Jesus to sit on the throne of David. Indeed the very one they crucified was made by God both Lord and Christ. This cut those Jews to the heart making them burst out in exclamation of guilt asking, "what shall we do?" Peter realizing that they now believed the Gospel, which he preached told them to "repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins." Well, they were not hesitant to heed his words as some 3,000 of them were baptized immediately. These were added to the 12 as followers of Christ (Acts 2:41). Then the writer informs us, *"Praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* (Verse 47). The ASV is helpful rendering the last phrase *"And the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved."*

Do not miss the point presented by the writer. From the day of Pentecost forward, each person saved on any day, was added to the church—the church established by the Apostles' preaching the Gospel—the word—which is the seed. Therefore, whenever and wherever the seed is sown (the Gospel is preached) the result is the **seed produces after its kind**. It is imperative that we sow the same seed today and when we do, the obedient to the Gospel will be added to the church—they will be Christians.

Seed Will Not Produce Until Sown

The seed kept in the vault is capable of reproducing; else, there is no need to store it safely. However, it will not produce in the vault. It will be necessary to take the seed from the vault and properly plant it in order to harvest a crop.

As we have seen, the Gospel is the word of God—the seed. The Gospel has the ability to save the world. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."* Yet, that power of God is of no benefit until and unless it is properly sown. Jesus commanded the Apostles, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mk. 16:15). If we would follow the Lord, we must follow the Apostles, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."* (I Cor 11:1). As disciples of the Lord, we must sow the seed so it can produce. The Gospel lying dormant avails nothing.

The Seed Must Be Sown In The Proper Environment

When the decision is made to remove the seed from the vault, should it be immediately sown on that *"remote Arctic island not far from the North Pole,"* it would not produce. The seed although containing the power to produce will be as though no life is within it. Or, if the seed should be taken to a desert country and planted where it might "come up," but lacking the proper environment it would die. Therefore, as we all know it must be planted where it can grow and produce.

The fault would not be the seed. The fault would be in the soil in which the seed was planted. Some wisdom must be exercised when sowing seed. The difference in a successful farmer or gardener is often in the discharge of this principle.

Jesus expressed the truthfulness of this on numerous occasions. Once He said, "*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*" (Mt. 7:6). While all Christians should be zealous in sowing the seed, we must use wisdom as to when, where, and unto whom we sow the seed. Carelessness has caused many to repudiate the Gospel, when a little wisdom would do good and by bringing no damage to the seed.

In Luke chapter eight, Jesus taught a parable about the seed, where planted, and the results produced because of the soil. Please read Verses 4-15. Some seed fell by *the wayside* (a place where men continually walk, hardening the soil. The seed could not penetrate the soil (heart) therefore the heart did not receive the seed--there was no faith. The seed was good but no production. Some fell on soil that had a stratum of *rock* immediately under it. The seed penetrated, there was belief in the word, but since the root could not pierce the rock to obtain moisture, when temptation came the plant died without production. The seed was good and was not at fault for the lack of production. Other seed fell among *thorns* where it was able to go into the soil, but beside it were other (non-productive) plants, which squeezed it out allowing no productivity. The fault was not in the seed for failing to reap a crop. The remaining seed fell into good ground (the honest heart) and in this proper environment, it was productive. The proper soil made it possible for the seed to be productive.

As disciples of Christ our responsibility is to properly sow the seed, yet, we have no power to determine the capability of the soil to receive the seed and produce fruit. "*Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*" (Mk. 16:15-16). When one hears the Gospel, believes it and obeys he is saved. The power of salvation is in the Gospel--the seed, however, personal responsibility is necessary. When one hears the Gospel, does not believe, and consequently will not obey he will be condemned. The power to be saved is in the Gospel--the seed, yet it must be personally received in each heart if it is productive.

The Seed Must Be Protected

The government of Norway has taken certain measures to assure the purity of the seed will be maintained as the seed will be "*kept cold by natural permafrost and secured with fences, blast proof doors, air locks, and motion detectors.*" "*The presence of polar bears which prowl the area,*" say organizers, "*may be seen by some as providing an additional layer of security.*"

Christians are to exercise care to maintain the purity of the Gospel when preached.

BELOVED, WHEN I GAVE ALL DILIGENCE TO WRITE UNTO YOU OF THE COMMON SALVATION, IT WAS NEEDFUL FOR ME TO WRITE UNTO YOU, AND EXHORT YOU THAT YE SHOULD EARNESTLY CONTEND FOR THE FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE DELIVERED UNTO THE SAINTS. (Jude 1:3)

"The faith, which was once delivered," refers to the body of truth given by the Apostles operating by the authority of Christ (II Cor. 5:18-21). This body of truth (the last will and testament of Christ, the word, the Gospel) was vouchsafed to the *saints*. Christians are the *saints* of God (Rom. 1:7). It is the obligation of we Christians to "*earnestly contend*" for the faith.

Timothy was charged to preach the "word" because there are those who seek to turn the ears of some against the Gospel of Christ to their own destruction and the destruction of those who hear them, read II Timothy 4:1-4. Is there a lesser charge given to Christians today? Titus was told, "*speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.*" (Tit. 2:1). The word "sound" is a medical term referring to the work of the physician who restores the body, which has been damaged, to proper form. For example, when a bone is broken, it is to be set properly and it will once again become sound. The world is broken by sin, there is but one thing that can restore it to God--the preaching of the Gospel--sound doctrine.

Concern For The Lesser--Concern For The Greater

It is important that we are concerned about the seed, which we sow to sustain our physical life. In this country, the government has established various agencies to determine whether the seed that produces our food is pure. The farmer securing the seed, which he plants, wants assurance that it is certified seed.

Can we be less concerned about the seed sown in the hearts of men? Should it not be certified--capable of producing a Christian? Anything less is totally unacceptable.

BUT I CERTIFY YOU, BRETHREN, THAT THE GOSPEL WHICH WAS PREACHED OF ME IS NOT AFTER MAN. FOR I NEITHER RECEIVED IT OF MAN, NEITHER WAS I TAUGHT IT, BUT BY THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST. (Gal. 1:11&12)

The Gospel that Paul preached was "certified." He preached it by "revelation." Unbelievably many people accept something less than what has been revealed by God choosing Church Disciplines, Church Manuals, prayer Books, Catechisms, etc. These do not--can not make a Christian. For instance, if one follows the Methodist Discipline he will be a Methodist, if one follows the Book of Mormon he will be a Mormon. If one follows the Gospel of Jesus Christ, he will be a Christian. Our prayer is that all of you reading this will lay aside the "seed books" of the religions of men and follow the Book revealed by God.

TRUE BELIEVERS

continued from page one

them relieve them and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed” Again, this shows that to be a Christian is equivalent to one “that believeth.” Look at 1 Tim. 6:2 and see how the expression, “believing masters,” is synonymous with the term “brethren” those who are “faithful and beloved.”

“BELIEVING” OBEDIENCE TO THE GOSPEL

This is seen in Acts 19, where Paul asked of certain disciples at Ephesus: “Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye **believed**?” (Verse 2) They replied that they didn’t know anything about the Holy Spirit, so Paul asked them another question: “Unto what then were ye **baptized**?” (Verse 3) Why did Paul immediately bring up the subject of baptism? First, if they had been scripturally baptized, Paul knew that they would have known something about the Holy Spirit. After all, under the gospel people are immersed “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19- ASV). Second, this shows that Paul connected one’s conversion with the act of baptism because that is the step that puts one into Christ (Gal. 3:26-27). That’s why, after they were properly instructed, they were immersed “in the name of the Lord Jesus”(Verse 5).

In the day of judgment, I want to be numbered with the believers! Don’t you? Paul informs us in 2 Thess. 1:7-10 that when Jesus comes again, he will take “vengeance on them that know not God, and that **obey not the gospel** of our Lord Jesus Christ.” However, at that time He will also “be glorified in his saints” and will “be admired in all that **believe**.” - 2850 N. Oakland, Springfield, MO 65803, bddickinson@juno.com

CAMPBELLITE CHURCH

continued from page two

*envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. **So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.*** (Emphasis mine DLK) Paul taught that the man who planted the church as well as those who later came and watered, or nurtured, what the first one planted are nothing special. Certainly, the church should never be in their name. Here is a passage to keep all of us down where we need to be! When people obey the pure gospel of Christ and assemble themselves on the first day of the week in obedience to Christ, partake of the Lord’s Supper as the Bible directs, sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs of praise to His name, pray and give of their means as the Scripture directs, you see there the church of Christ. No matter who went there and planted the church or nurtured what another had planted, the

church belongs to Christ assuming they preached the gospel in purity. The point is that the identity of the fellow who planted the seed has absolutely nothing to do with the crop that will soon be ready for harvest. If Don L. King plants corn, when it comes up it is still called corn, it does not suddenly bear my name as a different kind of plant just because I planted it! It is strange then that when Alexander Campbell preached the same gospel of Christ as the apostles did in Bible times, those who obeyed were sarcastically called “Campbellites” rather than “Christians” as they were first called in Acts 11:26!

Because of his tremendous ability, Alexander Campbell became one of the most recognized leaders of the Restoration. He apparently preached the gospel with such tremendous power that untold hundreds, even thousands, accepted the truth. History records that audiences commonly listened in rapt attention for two hours and more as he spoke of the Scriptures. The denominations then prominent, to conceal their shame at the loss of so many from their organizations began to call the church the “Campbellite Church” and the gospel he and others preached “Campbellism.” However, those who ridiculed (it is always easy to ridicule is it not?) Barton W. Stone, John Smith, Walter Scott, Alexander Campbell, Rice Haggard, Jacob Creath, and many others, were never able to show that what those men preached was not what the apostles taught, that the name Christian was not the name the early disciples wore, that the requirements for salvation were not the same requirements found in the New Testament, and the worship for which they contended was not the worship of the church found in the New Testament. In other words, those men did not establish a new denomination at all. They were simply part of a successful effort to begin a restoration of primitive Christianity by a direct appeal to the Bible. When all was said and done one is able to see the very same organization as was established on the day of Pentecost. If it was the same organization is it not correct to call it the church of Christ? Well, of course it is. It could be called nothing else if the truth is admitted.

For many years, I have used the following illustration to help explain how the Lord’s church was restored. Suppose over the next several hundred years, the game of baseball is lost to view. No one plays the game and no one even has knowledge of the game. However, in excavating an old city, someone comes on a rulebook for baseball. They decide to see what kind of game it is. Following the rulebook carefully, a field is prepared, bases placed at the correct places, a pitcher’s mound constructed, ball, and bat located, and the game begun. What kind of game is it? Why, it is baseball! The fact that no one has played the game for hundreds of years has nothing to do with what the game is at all. Why is it baseball? Because, the old time book was followed to the letter. Every thing is just as the old time book directed. Who would insist it was a different game? No

one would be so foolish. However, pride gets in the way in matters of religion and ridicule is often the tactic used in an effort to deny the truth.

The application is simple. The church of our Lord was planted in AD 33. Its head, Jesus Christ, controlled it. After He left this world, the twelve apostles were given inspiration from Him and according to that inspiration congregations were established throughout the then known world. The churches were guided by the apostles' doctrine, which was eventually set forth in the written New Testament. Over the years, the church fell away from the original teaching. However, the New Testament was handed down from generation to generation and a study of it eventually brought about a desire to restore the church to her original purity in work and worship. The Restorers, some of whom we mentioned above, began to practice the Bible way. They began to do things in Bible ways and call things by Bible names. They met for worship on the prescribed first day of the week, and their worship was exactly as the Bible prescribed all along. Was this a new church? Of course, it was not! It was the ancient church restored to her original purity and grandeur. The church was once again a glorious church following the ancient Scriptures. Thank God, it is still here and we can all be members of it together.

Let us vigorously resist any, and all, efforts to change the church from what we read in the Bible. It should never be cause for excitement when some foolish and misguided person desires to change things to make it more exciting or spiritual. Such talk is foolish and vain. Nothing is as exciting as the knowledge that we are worshipping just as the ancient Christians did in the first century! That is truly exciting and thrilling. Think on these things. DLK

THE DISCOVERY CHANNEL AND "THE TOMB OF JESUS" PART 1

continued from page four

that I am He, you will die in your sins" (Jn 8:24). If Jesus was a false prophet and lying about who He was, then He is evil beyond description.

There is a third possibility, however. **If Jesus was (a) not evil (b) nor the Son of God, then He was deceived Himself; He was a LUNATIC.** In other words, many people do not want to admit Jesus was right, but neither do they want to say He was evil. Their only other option is: He was simply mistaken about who He was. Consider carefully: If Jesus was a "good" man who taught good things we should think about, but He was simply mistaken about who He was, then He was insane. Anyone going around telling people: "You have to believe in Me to be saved ..." (Jn 8:24), "I was with the Father before the creation of the world ..." (Jn 17:5), and "I am eternal ..." (Jn 8:58) is an insane person if these things are not true.

Yet, this also presents a problem: If Jesus was merely a lunatic, why did the Jewish leaders feel threatened by Jesus? Why did they have Him crucified if He was insane?

Very often Jesus would silence the Jewish leaders in front of everyone. No one could answer His questions. "No one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore" (Mt 22:46); "after that no one dared question Him" (Mk 14:34); "Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why have you not brought Him?" The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" (Jn 7:45-46). This is all very difficult to explain if Jesus was merely insane. Insane people do not silence prominent leaders. Insane people do not make prominent leaders feel threatened enough to justify crucifixion. The leaders might feel sorry for the insane. They might try to help the insane. They do not torture the insane in public till he dies on a cross.

Here, then, are the possible options: Jesus was either: the Son of God, a liar, or a lunatic. There is no other possibility. He intended there be no other possibility. Men have to decide who Jesus was. If He lied about who He was, and He knew He was lying, He is an evil person. If He lied about who He was, and He did not know He was lying, He was insane and should be pitied, but not worshipped as the Son of God. But if He did not lie and He was not insane, then He told the truth: He is the Son of God and no one can be saved without believing in Him and obeying what He said.

NOTE: An audio CD of this material is available for \$2 to cover postage and handling. Orders may be sent to: George Battey, 17 Woodlawn Ave., Hampton, GA 30228

Crucified

*See the face of my Lord
As His eyes closed in death
And He breathed His last breath.*

*As His Spirit was set free.
In our mind's eye, we can see
Our Savior dying on that tree.*

*See the blood run from His side,
As the Blessed Savior died
Giving His life for all mankind.*

*When the sun even refused to shine.
And the rocks were rent.
When the earth began to shake.
And those Saints from their
Long sleep did wake.*

*It was as though the earth protested,
At the awful thing just done.
As some of its people
Crucified God's only Son.*

Announcements

CAN YOU HELP?

The Church of Christ in Beaumont Texas has been gradually decreasing in size over the last several years. Some have quit; others have moved away, and within the last year two elderly members have died. The congregation now consists of only two members. Other congregations in the region have joined forces to help them, but this cannot go on indefinitely. The distance is too great. We would like to encourage any family who may be contemplating a move to consider this area. If your family would consider relocating to Southeast Texas, and would like to be instrumental in the Lord's work, we would be happy to assist you by supplying information. Please contact: Greg Shores, greg.shores@sbcglobal.net, (281) 213-9240

4TH OF JULY MEETING, LEBANON, MO

The dates for the meeting are June 27 - July 3. On June 27 and 28 there are only night services planned and the location will be at Lebanon church building. On Friday, June 29, the meeting will move to the Cowan Civic Center and there will be both A.M. and P.M. services. Phillip Prince and Richard Bunner will conduct the meeting for the Lebanon congregation.

SANGER AND CLOVIS, CALIFORNIA CONGREGATIONS ARE MERGING

The congregations at Sanger and Clovis have decided to merge and we will no longer be meeting at the Sanger building. As of May 6, 2007 we will be one congregation and will be meeting at the Clovis building at 368 West Santa Ana, Clovis, California. Meeting times will be Sunday morning 10:30 A.M., Sunday afternoon 2:00 P.M., and Wednesday at 7:00 P.M. Justin Owen will continue on working for the church now at Clovis. We look forward to growth of the church as the result of this merger and ask the prayers of the brethren. - *Don Rowland*

Our Departed

SMITH - Clara Mae Smith was born June 17, 1925 and departed this life at her home in the evening of March 28, 2007. Clara was a long time member of the Lord's church. For many years she and her husband Kenneth lived in the Springfield, MO area. At the time of her death she was a faithful member of the Mission Hills congregation. Clara was diagnosed with Cancer just a few months prior to her passing. She was a woman of strong convictions that she demonstrated in her every day life. She was preceded in death by her parents and her husband Kenneth. She is survived by one daughter and two sons. The memorial service was conducted from the Rivermont Chapel here

in Springfield. The writer conducted the service with the able help of her grandson Austin McConnell and Clovis T. Cook. - *Ronny F. Wade*

LAMKINS - Douglas Wayne Lamkins, son of Clyde and Maxine Lamkins was born May 15, 1942 and departed this life March 23, 2007 at his home near Phillipsburg, MO. Wayne was a member of the church most of his life, being raised in a Christian home. At the time of his death he attended services at the congregation in Niangua, MO. He is survived by his wife of forty-five years Donna Kay one daughter and one son, a brother and his mother also several grandchildren and numerous relatives and friends. Wayne was a quiet sort of a fellow, easy to know and love. He will be greatly missed by both his family and the church. This writer and Brother Ron Alexander conducted the memorial service. - *Ronny F. Wade*

TURNER - Edith Ann (Richardson) Turner was born January 8, 1922 to Clyde and Grace Richardson and departed this life on April 7, 2007 after an extended illness of several months. She was married to Henry Turner for almost sixty-eight years. Edith had been a member of the church since 1956. She and Henry attended the Lee's Summit congregation until they retired from the farm and moved to Springfield where they both attended worship at Mission Hills. She was a hard-working help-meet to Henry thru the years and loved working with children. She is survived by her husband, one daughter and two sons, one sister and several grandchildren, great grandchildren nieces and nephews. She will be greatly missed in the home circle and church. This writer conducted the memorial service from the Greenlawn North funeral chapel where a crowd of family and friends gathered to pay their respects to her memory. - *Ronny F. Wade*

McCLURE - We are left to mourn the passing of sister Rekel McClure. A native of Rockcastle county KY and member of the Blue Springs congregation, she faithfully served the community, the church, and her family over her 82 year lifetime. She was married to Zade McClure on January 13, 1947. She leaves behind her loving husband of 60 years, five children, many grandchildren and great-grandchildren, a host of friends, loved ones, and brothers and sisters in Christ. Rekel died on March 16, 2007 in the hospital in Mt. Vernon, KY. She was laid to rest on March 20th in the McKinney Cemetery, a short distance from the Blue Springs church building. We anticipate our reunion when the Lord comes to claim his own. Brother Irvin Barnes, having known Zade and Rekel for more than 40 years, traveled from MO. to be with the family and to comfort them and the church at this time of our loss. It was my honor to join him in remembering the life of our beloved sister. She will be deeply missed. - *Doug Hawkins*



Bonds of Matrimony

WATSON – WELLMAN

Tyler Watson and Hannah Wellman were united in holy matrimony March 17, 2007, in a beautiful ceremony before a large crowd of family and friends in Springdale, Arkansas. Hannah is the daughter of Dale and Terri Wellman of Rogers, Arkansas, and Tyler is the son of Johnny and Lola Watson of Ada, Oklahoma. Hannah and Tyler are devout Christians and we are thrilled that this new family is part of our congregation in Ada. They honored me by asking me to officiate the ceremony. It is our prayer that God will bless them richly and help them to keep the sacred vows they have made to love, honor, and cherish each other for the rest of their lives.
- Carl M. Johnson

Field Reports

Bennie T. Cryer, 4635 Larkin Rd., Live Oak, CA, 95953, E-mail: benniebtcryer@aol.com. We left home March 11 after preaching at both services in Yuba City. Since then I have preached in Arlington, TX, Knoxville, GA where we had an enjoyable stay with Wayne and Lisa Wildes. From there we went to Tennessee where I preached twice at Chapel Grove, and twice at the Springer Rd. congregation in Lawrenceburg. While there we attended a young people's meeting at Chapel Grove conducted by Clint DeFrance. Many young men spoke at this meeting. It was encouraging to see their interest in spiritual things. The meeting spoke well of the future of the church in that area. From there we came to Missouri and met Joe and Joann Norton and spent a couple of days with them. He was on his way to Cable Ridge, Mo for a gospel meeting there. April 1 we started an eight day meeting with the church in Neosho, Mo. We stayed in the home of Roger and Sue Owens and their hospitality could not have been better. Good crowds attended this meeting and the sister congregations provided a good part of the crowds and we thank them all for that. Several gospel preachers attended this meeting including our dear friend and fellow laborer in Malawi in the 1960's, Roy Lee Criswell. Stan Elmore, Billy Dickinson, Bill Ferguson, Nelson Nichols, Miles King, Roger Owens, John Anderson, Jim Franklin, and Clint DeFrance. We are looking forward to returning to our work with the Oliveburst, CA congregation. We have been away from there for just about a month now. May God bless all of you.

Joe Hisle, 18975 CR 1580, Ada, OK 74820 - Best Regards to the brethren everywhere. It is that time of the year again when gospel meetings are going on all over the brotherhood. I am happy to report that my schedule is well underway. I want to extend a special thanks to all of you for your prayers, cards, emails and phone calls

during the time that Darlene and I were having our health problems. We could not have done it with out God's blessings and your encouragment. I have already worked in meetings at Shreveport, LA and Dardenelle, AR. It was my great pleasure to be able make my home with Bro. Billy Woods and his family while at Shreveport. Their hospitality was all anyone could ask for. While at Shreveport I also enjoyed time with Bro. Wayne Fussell. At Dardenelle I was privileged to enjoy the great hospitality of Bro. and Sis. Morris Reynolds. Presently I am in a meeting at Washington, OK. I have a long history at Washington and it is always my pleasure to be associated with these brethren. Following is my schedule for the rest of this year: April 29-May 6, Springfield, MO (North side); May 20-27, Houston, MO; June 3-10, White Bluff, TN; July 8-15, Pearlhaven, MS; July 22-29, McGregor, TX; Aug. 3-5 Ratliff City, OK; Aug. 8-12, Council Hill, OK; Oct. 6-14, LaGrange, GA; Oct. 21-28, Springfield, MO (Mission Hills). I request your prayers. May God bless you all.

VIRGILIO D. DANA O SR., 94-371 Ikepono St., Waipahu, HI 96797, April 7, 2007 - Greetings in the precious name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We are glad to inform faithful brethren everywhere that the Lord's work here continues to be at peace. We are blessed, and are grateful, to have visitors, brethren from different states in the U.S. mainland, who worshipped with us during the past several Sundays. Bro. Eric Stone has recently arrived from his two weeks vacation in San Angelo, TX, where Sis. Tara, his wife, and their children, now reside. Though we, the Church membership, are small in number, and majority are elderly Filipinos, we are trying hard to survive, doing and sharing whatever we could for the Lord's work here. Recently, Sis. Janet Maldovi, arrived here in Hawaii, and now lives, with her husband in Ewa Beach. She came from Gabut Norte, Badoc, Ilocos Norte, Phils., and was a member of the faithful Church there. She and her husband, who is not yet a member of the Church, started to attend our worship service, during Sundays. We are praying that she will be able to request her employer to give her permanent day-off during Sundays. Another visitor, who is a resident of Waipahu, has been attending worship services for the past months. We are exerting efforts to do follow up works with them. I also continue to work with our radio program. We urge you to please, mention us, particularly the Lord's work here, in your prayers. God bless.

Brett Hickey, P.O. Box 68, Mountain Home, AR, (870) 435-2505, brett-louisehickey@juno.com April 10 - It has been too long since I last reported. Our most recent travels took us to Bakersfield, CA, Chapel Grove, TN, Mountain Home, AR, Lawrenceburg, TN, White Bluff, TN, Bandy, KY and Hoyte, TX. It was great to see how well Frank Brancato and the Planz Rd. congregation were working and growing together. I always enjoy being with the Chapel Grove brethren, preachers Daniel and Fisher and my good friends, Bernice Burns and Lillian Rhodes. The

brethren at White Bluff and Springer Road will be sorely missed. Not only have they faithfully supported all of our gospel meetings (as has Chapel Grove) in Nashville, but they have gone out of their way to encourage my humble attempts of spreading the gospel. The Bandy congregation continues to be rock-solid in large part to their steady and mature leadership. We always look forward to our gospel meeting at Hoyte. Everyone in the nearby city of Cameron always knows about Hoyte's meetings, but this year the response matched the brethren's efforts with twenty-five outsiders coming and two submitting to baptism. The Hoyte congregation continues to allow me to preach weekly over the radio in Cameron and publishes Alton Baker's weekly article in the newspaper. Our upcoming meetings: Mt. Home, AR May 23-27; Ceres, CA June 3-10; Earlytown, AL July 15-22. We will miss so many dear ones in Nashville after working with the Brookside congregation for four years. We will cherish many bright moments as we grow spiritually along with the congregation. We are overjoyed to be going back to the Ozarks in June. Mountain Home is where we began working with the church on a full-time basis thirteen years ago. We expect the congregation's unity, humility and energy to provide a fertile environment for the gospel seed. (Note: Thank you for all the prayers, cards, etc., during my father's heart surgery and recovery. Your expressions of love have been very meaningful.)

Don L. King, 1147 Sherry Way, Livermore, CA 94550, April 10, e-mail old_paths@juno.com - Since last report we have enjoyed hearing Alan Bonifay at Fremont and preaching twice at Yuba City and once at Stockton, as well as at home. We hope to see and hear Carl Johnson while he is at Lodi soon. Our next meeting is to be at Dothan, AL May 6-13 and we hope to see many of you there. Interest in the Philippine work is high and cooperation good. We thank all who are a part of the work by directly supporting preachers over there, etc. It is indeed a great work and shows no indication of slowing down. Preachers, we hope to hear from you this month with field reports and articles. Pray for us in the work.

Douglas T. Hawkins, 409 Worthington Pl., Richmond, KY 40475, 606-271-0529, douglast69@bellsouth.net, April 11, 2007 - We are beginning our schedule of meetings for 2007. I just closed our first meeting of the year with the church at Chestnut Ridge, KY. We have seen remarkable progress and growth within this congregation over the last ten years due to the influence of Ova Baker and Dale McNew. We pray for their continued progress. I am currently on my way to Jamesville MO., and am looking forward to being with Brother Billy Dickinson. Our next meetings will be in Chicago IL. May 11-13, Galey OK. May 20-27, Hartwell AR. June 6-10. If you are in the area, please come to be with us. Also brethren, we need your financial help to build a church building here in Lexington, KY. This contribution will be a worthwhile investment in the Lord's work. Feel free to contact me or Bro. Michael Conley at 859-623-0976 for specific details. We pray for

your success in the work of the Lord all throughout the year.

Carl M. Johnson, 1400 Northcrest Dr., Ada, OK 74820, carlmj@cableone.net April 10 - Phyllis and I just got home from a meeting with the Longwood, Florida congregation. We stayed with Dennis and Deneice Bumbalough and we enjoyed it immensely. Dennis is an excellent Bible student, a highly respected teacher in his home congregation, and a well-known preacher of the gospel in some areas of the country. Prior to the Longwood effort I conducted meetings in McGregor, Texas and Piedmont, Alabama. At McGregor I stayed with long-time friends Ronnie and Sandi Wallace. I profited from getting to be with Wayne McKamie during the meeting. The congregation has a wonderful group of young people who are a genuine asset to the church. During the meeting at Piedmont I made my home with Terry and Angie Studdard. They are like extended-family members to us. We were assisted by visiting preachers Rick Martin, Don Snow, and Larry Thompson during the effort. We had a profitable week of services in spite of the fact that some sort of 36-hour virus struck virtually every person in the church before the week was over, including yours-truly. Each of the meetings was advertised extensively and we had outside visitors at each one. I am scheduled to begin a meeting this weekend at Lodi, California. From there I go to The Odom, near Dora, Missouri; Council Hill, Oklahoma; and the Memorial Day Meeting at Mineral Wells, Texas. We continue to solicit your prayers.

Michael S. Conley, 836 Aster Ct. Richmond, Ky. 40475 (859) 623-0976 msconley0517@aol.com March 27, 2007- Three and a half years ago the Bandy Ky. Congregation sent me to work as an evangelist in Lexington, Ky. Many great blessings have availed themselves in the course of this time, but for the sake of space I will give a detail of the past few months. Currently, I am driving to Louisville to study with two families. One of these families have been worshipping with us for over a year and have obeyed the gospel. I have been engaged in studies with several of the brethren during the week to help build their knowledge in the Scriptures. Brandon Stephens held our fall meeting and we baptized three souls into Christ. Brandon always does an outstanding job. Bruce Roebuck held us a meeting March 18-25 and I am pleased to say that we had visitors from the community every night but two. Many of the area congregations came several nights to support the meeting. Bruce did a wonderful job and preached needed sermons. The congregation at Lexington has been meeting in an office space for nine years. We are overjoyed to announce that we have a contract on an acre of land a few minutes from the city. Doug Hawkins and family have begun to worship with us in December and it is nice to have them as part of our family. It is also a joy to have another man on the teaching schedule, although he is limited due to his scheduled meetings across the brotherhood. Please pray for our spiritual growth and number. God Bless.

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THE BACK PAGE...

JUST SAY NO

BY CARL M. JOHNSON

Minnesota's Keith Ellison recently became the first Muslim elected to Congress and he quickly caused a firestorm of controversy when he vowed that he was going to use the Muslim Koran to place his hand on while taking the oath of office instead of the Bible.

Conservative Jewish columnist Dennis Prager reacted angrily, "America is interested in only one book, the Bible. If you are incapable of taking an oath on that book, don't serve in Congress." Prager's column has sparked a brouhaha on talk radio, the Internet, and in newspapers across the country. The congressman's office has been inundated with angry e-mails.

The controversy renews the question of how we should view the practice of oath-taking. For many years our brethren have been joined by the Quakers and the Anabaptists in refusing to take oaths entirely. One of the reasons many of our young men have registered through the years with the Selective Service as conscientious objectors is because we cannot in good conscience take the oath required by the military. Those who have refused to take oaths have oftentimes been accused of defying the law and undermining democracy. The irony of it all is that we balk at taking oaths because of our interpretation of the very book most officeholders swear on.

There are different kinds of vows and oaths found in Scripture, but many passages suggest they are all dangerous. The most extreme example is the case of Jephthah, who in exchange for a military victory, swore to sacrifice the first thing that walked out his door, and it turned out to be his daughter (Judges 11). Both he and his only child knew there was no alternative. "If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge," God has commanded, "he shall not break his word" (Num. 30:2).

The scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' day adopted rules in an apparent effort to protect themselves from rash promises. Oaths "by the temple," for example, were not binding and were viewed by the Jews sort of like children today would view telling a lie with their fingers crossed behind their backs. Oaths that were more specific ("the gold of the temple") or oaths that actually invoked the name of God were believed to be binding (Mt. 23:16ff). Jesus condemns such game-playing and issues a far more expansive rule. He says in the Sermon on the Mount that we should not take an oath at all, but we should let what we say be simply "yes" or "no" (Mt. 5:33-37). This statement of Jesus echoes the Law of Moses, "If you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin" (Deut. 23:22). James adds, "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation" (5:12).

Irenaeus, Tertullian, and other early church leaders consider the commands of Jesus and James to be a ban on all oaths, while Augustine concludes that Jesus and James were using hyperbole to condemn the abuse of oaths. After all, Augustine argues, Paul appeals to God on several occasions in what are considered oaths (Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8). Furthermore, God swears by Himself since there is no greater (Heb. 6:13), and Jesus does not resist being put under oath by Caiaphas (Mt. 26:63-64). Augustine concludes, therefore, that it is acceptable to make civil oaths as long as they do not abuse or profane the name of God.

J.W. McGarvey summarizes "that judicial oaths, and oaths taken in the name of God on occasions of solemn religious importance (such as marriage vows), are not included in this prohibition" (**Commentary on Matthew and Mark** 57). Guy N. Woods adds that the oaths being condemned by Jesus and James are the "flippant, frivolous and profane" uses of God's name, and not sincere judicial oaths (**James** 288-294).

After all the controversy over Ellison's announcement that he was going to take his oath of office while holding his hand on the Koran, it came as a surprise to me to learn that he did not use the Koran after all, and the other members of Congress did not use the Bible. Members of the House of Representatives take their oath of office in unison without the use of holy books of any kind. The photos of members of Congress with their hands on the Bible are actually reenactments. The whole brouhaha was much ado about nothing.

The rest of us can parse Scripture daily to codify hard-and-fast rules for the kind of oaths that are permissible and the kind that are not. When all is said and done, however, we are still confronted by the spirit of Jesus' words. He says that we must be more concerned with becoming a community of truth-tellers than a community of oath-makers. After all, "a great number of oaths is no proof of credibility, but rather of a man's not deserving to be believed" (**Philo** 568). carlmj@cableone.net