

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. 4

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

By WAYNE FUSSELL

On January 20th of this year, I preached a sermon by the title above. In my audience was my closest friend, Billy Walden. He had been my friend for 60 years. We were together in the beginning of his Christian life. We have been together in times of joy and sorrow through all those years. In that sermon, I stressed that life is brief - just a vapor, a puff of smoke, that soon vanishes away. Little did we know that this would be the last sermon he would hear me preach. Early the next morning, he had a massive heart attack, lost consciousness, and never regained it. He passed away the following Friday. Since that time, I have thought often about the question James raised 2000 years ago: “whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away” (James 4:14). Life is so brief, so uncertain. We should live it to the fullest in the service of the Master.

What about you? What is your life? To some, it is a drag, something to be endured. To others it is a big pleasure trip. Their motto is, “Live it up, you only go around once!” Some have a fatalistic view of life - what will be, will be. Others live in a dream world until one day they wake up in the real world. To some, life is so bad that they only want to end it. All such views of life are foreign to the life James would wish for us. He would point us to the greatest life a person can possibly live with the greatest possibilities, possessions, and position. He would point us to the life “in Christ” where one enjoys “all spiritual blessings”. Jesus called it an abundant life. He declared, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). That’s the life I want, don’t you?

John wrote about this abundant life in 1 John 1:4: “And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.” The things that are written in God’s word are designed to bring us fullness of joy - abundant living.

When we internalize those principles and apply them in our living we find that joy. Peter called it a joy which is “unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). It is impossible to express in intelligible language the wonderful joy found in Christian living. What is your life? Is it filled with that joy? It can be.

The apostle Peter wrote about life and how to live it to the fullest. He quoted from the Psalmist: For “He who would love life and see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.” (1 Peter 3:10-11) Do you love life? Sure you do? Do you want to live it to the fullest? Then follow the directions of these inspired men - live for the Lord.

Far too many people are living their lives purely on the natural plane rather than on the spiritual. The ultimate life is the one lived on the highest spiritual plane. The natural life is doomed to death. Every day we are reminded of that fact. We try to ignore it and think that it only happens to others, but one day it will happen to us. David declared “... there is but a step between me and death” (1 Samuel 20:3) Just a step! Just a heart-beat away! Job says that “man is of few days” and that death is “appointed for all living” (Job 14:1; 30:23). There is an appointment that all of us must meet - “it is appointed for men to die” (Hebrews 9:27). I think that even Methuselah who lived 969 years would say that life is brief - especially in comparison to eternal life. I have lived 84 years on this earth, but it seems only yesterday I was a “boy preacher”, as my beloved Brother Gay used to call us, starting out on this journey of proclaiming God’s word. Life is too brief for us to miss eternal life!

So, what is life? Life is a divine gift. The Bible says that God made man in His own image and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 1:26; 2:7). Since God is the giver of

continued on page 6

CONTENTS

Vol. XCI No. 4



ADVOCATE

What is Your Life? 1
 Editorial 2
 Querist Column 3
 The Two Covenants..... 4
 Identifying the New Testament Church..... 4
 In Memory of Brother Barney Owens 5
 How to Understand the Bible For Yourself..... 8
 Our Departed..... 8
 Field Reports 10
 WALKS THROUGH THE BIBLE..... 12

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Editorial

BUILDING UP THE CHURCH

By JOHNNY ELMORE

I feel certain that everyone who claims membership in the Lord’s church profits spiritually when the church has a strong presence in the community, That makes me wonder why it is that every member does not put forth every effort to see that the church is built up. I realize that every member cannot preach, teach, or support financially as they would like, but I truly believe that they could do much better in supporting every constituted meeting of the church. Frankly, I am embarrassed to have gospel meetings when interested friends come from other congregations to support a gospel meeting and drive a good distance to be present and see only eight or ten of our members!

How do we build up the church so that we can have good gospel meetings, edifying worship, good spiritual singing, and prayers that reach the throne of God? Various remedies have been proposed. Some denominations have engaged professional “pastors” This was evidently thought to be a solution over a hundred years ago, In those days, it was addressed by T. W. Caskey, an old-time pioneer preacher. He said, “If I have studied the Bible to any profit, it teaches us to rely upon the gospel as ‘the power of God unto salvation.’”

Mr. Caskey continues: “Pastoral visiting and clerical clap-trap may popularize a church and fill it with the irreligious and worldly-minded, but such things will neither convert sinners nor add to the spirituality of the worship. ‘God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.’ If you can convert sinners and build up churches by humoring spiritual weaklings and flattering simpering sentimentalists, in pastoral visiting, without preaching the gospel, you may as well throw away the Bible, get a fashionable preacher and rent hell out for a calf pasture. People who attend the meetings of the saints from the love of the pastor, and who neglect religious duties unless they are coddled by the pastor have neither faith nor piety and their pretended worship is but a hollow mockery which will militate against the piety of any church and prove a stench in the nostrils of our God. Without faith it is impossible to please God.”

Caskey cites Hebrews 11 and the sacrifices of those early saints to show that “true faith today is the same

continued on page 7

QUERIST COLUMN

By CLINT DEFRANCE

Question: The meaning of Matthew 5:24-25.

Answer: The text under consideration reads: “Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny” (Matthew 5:24-25). In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus contrasts the Old Testament provision for retributive justice designed into the Law of Moses (through the principle of *lex talionis*, or “an eye for an eye) and the nature of His Kingdom, in which peace and friendship is to be treasured above all earthly possessions and personal honors. This parabolic expression shows when a person holds on to a grudge for fear of having to suffer some loss or being defrauded, he harms himself more than his opponent. Jesus says that the Christian way is to suffer the loss and gain your brother - he is worth more than any earthly possession. The man who obstinately persists in getting his way, even to the sacrifice of peace, will pay more than he ever imagined when he faces the judgment of God.

Question: Do Christians go immediately to Heaven when they die?

Answer: In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), Jesus affirms that when a righteous person dies, the angels escort his or her soul to a place of peace. In the parable, Jesus calls this place “Abraham’s bosom.” That name simply pictures the righteous at rest, reclining with their “fathers” - the saints who have died in the past. Jesus told the thief on the cross that when the two of them died they would be together in “paradise” (Luke 23:43), which appears to be a name for a spiritual realm identical with or connected to heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). Peter says that even now, the righteous dead have not yet ascended into heaven (Acts 2:29, 31, and 34 [See also 1 Corinthians 15:55]), but rather their flesh lies in corruption and their souls are in Hades (the unseen realm), albeit in a blessed compartment of that realm. Paul calls this condition being “present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). While there is not a clear statement on this matter, the confluence of scriptural testimony leads us to the following conclusion: when the righteous die, their souls rest in a blissful waiting place in the Hadean realm where all the former saints enjoy the peace of God

through Jesus Christ. In the resurrection, the souls of the righteous will be reunited with their bodies, which will be brought out of the graves and transformed into a glorious, immortal, and incorruptible state. Only then will the righteous enter the final stage of redemption - everlasting, perfect communion with God in heaven.

Question: Is there a separate judgment for Christians and non-Christians?

Answer: No scripture indicates that there will be a separate judgment for Christians and non-Christians. In fact, many scriptures plainly state the contrary. In all of these passages, note that some are rewarded and others are punished - some enter Heaven and others are cast into Hell: “For we must all appear before the Judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5-10). “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were Judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:11-15). “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:31-32).

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THE TWO COVENANTS

By MELVIN BLALOCK

In previous articles we have shown that we are not subject to the Old Testament. While we appreciate the immense value of the Old Testament in pointing us to Jesus, that covenant has ceased. The Bible reveals that the Law of Moses ended with Christ. The scriptures show that the Law of Moses was temporary. We read in the Epistle to the Galatians, "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith but after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster," Gal 3:21-25. The law came to an end when Jesus died on the cross. The Law of Moses had been given exclusively to the Israelites, but the gospel is for all nations, Matt. 28:18-20. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father," Eph. 2:13-18. The Law was a wall of separation between the Jew and the Gentile. It was abolished at the cross. The previous covenant was made with the nation of 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. 5:1-3. Again we read from Exodus, "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel: So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant,

the Ten Commandments," Ex. 34:27-28. This covenant came to an end at the cross. Paul wrote to the Hebrews, "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. Many religious errors are practiced today because some fail to realize that we are not bound to the covenant which was made with the nation of Israel. — OPA

IDENTIFYING THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

By PAUL O. NICHOLS

In the world today there are thousands of religious organizations. This is confusing to poor lost souls who do not have a knowledge of the scriptures, and who depend on what religious leaders tell them. Many of the leaders in the religious world are ignorant of the Scriptures themselves. However, the Bible is clear enough that we can know the truth. Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). But when people do not read and study the scriptures, and only depend on preachers to tell them what to believe, they can be led to believe anything. The apostle Paul said, "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). There are a lot of lying preachers who are taking advantage of the ignorance of their followers to gain for themselves wealth in the millions.

In Matt. 16:18 Jesus promised, "I will build my church." He did not even hint that He would build more than one. And when He promised that He would build the church, He referred to it as His church, that is the Church of Christ.

There are counterfeit churches which have sprung up all over the world, teaching all kinds of false doctrines. And when people don't read and study the word of God which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and depend on religious leaders to tell them what to believe, they can be and are led into all kinds of religious error. And Jesus promises that at the end of time when He comes to judge the world by that which is written, there will be poor lost souls who depended on false teachers who led them to believe and practice religious error. In Matt. 7:21-23 Jesus points out that many will be lost because they practiced religious error instead of the Truth. Listen to His warning, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew

you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” How sad! “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Pas. 127:1).

Now we will notice some Bible facts to help identify the church which Jesus built. First, we see that the Lord kept His promise. In Acts chapter 2, we are told that the apostles waited in Jerusalem, as Jesus had commanded, and on the first day of the Pentecost celebration in Jerusalem the apostles received the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. On that day they preached the Gospel of Christ and about three thousand precious souls responded in obedience and became members of the Church of Christ. The record says, “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:38). The beginning date of the church which Jesus promised to build was A. D. 33. Any church which had its beginning before or after the day of Pentecost in the year A.D. 33 is a counterfeit. It is not the true church of our Lord.

The place of beginning of the Lord’s church was Jerusalem. If a religious organization had its beginning in any other geographic location, it is not the Lord’s. He does not claim it.

Before Jesus went back to Glory He prayed to God that all of His followers would be united. He did not want any division to exist. In His prayer He said, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:20,21). The apostle Paul later taught us to all speak the same thing. “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1: 10). He also wrote the Ephesians and said, “Endeavoring to keep the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:2-6).

When our Lord comes back to judge the world, He is going to recognize and save those who are faithful members of His church. The Bible says, “Husbands love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify it and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having

spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25,26).

IN MEMORY OF BROTHER BARNEY OWENS

By IRVIN BARNES

Barney and I started preaching 57 years ago. We both traveled with Bro. Miles King in meetings in KY., MO., AR., Indiana and OK. Miles arranged Sunday appointments for us so we could gain experience and get acquainted with the brotherhood. The first full meeting that either of us attempted to hold was a 2 weeks meeting through 3 Sundays at Witt Springs, Ark., in August of 1962. We preached night about. In addition to our time with Bro. Miles, Barney had studied briefly with Bro. Edwin Morris. I received a lot of encouragement from Bro. Ronny Wade. I had acquired some speaking ability, that I learned in speech and debate in high school. Barney demonstrated very little natural speaking ability. I owned a Cruden’s Concordance my father gave me, and a new Bible I had purchased for the meeting. Barney had worked in a store in Cincinnati the previous winter, to earn the money to buy some new suits, shirts, ties and shoes, but more importantly, he had purchased a car trunk full of Bible study books. I knew nothing about Vine’s, Thayer’s or Strong’s. I had never seen a set of commentaries. I did what I could to help Barney with speech and delivery. Barney taught me how to use some of the books he had with him. We went to the church building in the mornings and studied the Bible using Barney’s books. After lunch we went back to the building and preached our sermons to one another. One night I woke up about 2 a.m. and found Barney with a lamp in the middle of the living room floor with a ring of Bible study books around him; buried up, so to speak, in Bible study. This habit of Bible study was a huge factor in making Barney the preacher that he became.

In public debate Barney was absolutely formidable. I moderated for him in a debate with a Baptist preacher in Cincinnati. The older, more experienced Baptist debater, was a complete failure. The Baptist affirmed that an alien sinner was saved at the point of faith without water baptism. The first night Barney wrote 2 statements on the board. He wrote, “Peter says baptism doth also now save us.(1st Pet. 3 :21)” Beneath Peter’s statement Barney wrote, Mr. Anderson, says, “Baptism does not save us.” He handed Mr. Anderson an eraser and challenged him, “Mr. Anderson, please erase the incorrect, unscriptural statement.” Barney reminded his respondent of these 2 statements every time he got

up. Barney asked over and over, "Shall we believe Peter or Mr. Anderson." The old gentleman acted as if the statements were not on the board, until his last speech, and then changed Peter's statement to "Baptism figuratively saves."

Barney moderated for me in 2 debates, he kept two Bibles in hand. As I would read from one, he would have the next passage located, and marked with a slip of paper. When I finished the proof text, I would hand him my copy, and he would hand me the copy with the next passage.

Bro. J.L. Reynolds of Bandy, Ky., told us the following story. "A farm wife had a dinner bell at the edge of a kitchen porch. A grape arbor was attached to the bell post and stretched out into the yard. One summer day the grapes were ripe and a little fox came to steal some grapes at the exact moment the farm wife rang the bell to call her husband in for lunch. The little fox ran away scared out of his wits. When the racket stopped the little fox came back to investigate. He looked up at the bell and remarked, 'A long tongue, and a big head, a lot of racket and nothing said!'"

Barney was moderating in a debate I had with a loud-mouthed Sabbatarian at Mtn. Home, Arkansas. In the middle of one of his tirades, Barney leaned over to me and stated, "Long tongue, big head, lot of racket and nothing said." Barney never forgot a funny story or incident and had a way of repeating such in a very entertaining way.

I performed Barney and Bea's wedding. Barney preached our first daughter's funeral. We prayed together, preached together, traveled thousands of miles together, debated together, wept and laughed together.

One thing that Barney struggled with was his inability to sing. It was not for lack of trying. As in every other spiritual thing, Barney gave it his all. He spent time and money to attend a 3 weeks singing normal under some of the best singing instructors available. He learned music theory as well as any, but could not put it to voice. This was only one of many things that demonstrated his grit, and determination to grab on to anything he needed to do or learn and stay with it until he had accomplished what he could.

Some folks thought Barney and I were related. He and I have both been addressed as Barney Barnes, or some other concoction of both our names. Barney and I were no blood relation. Barney's wife, Obta, is my wife, Barbara's aunt. Barney's skill as a preacher of the

gospel speaks for itself. In my opinion, when Barney was in his prime he could cover as much ground in an hour's worth of good preaching as anyone I ever heard. I miss him more than I can say. On behalf of all the Barnes family members and the church at Pleasant View, Springfield, MO., I extend to Obta, and her children and grandchildren, and to the church at Sharonville, our deepest level of love and sympathy.

In some ways, our relationship seemed unlikely. He was raised in Cincinnati. I was raised on a farm in the Ozark Hills of north Arkansas. It was only through Christ, His gospel, His church and His Cause, that this special friendship evolved. The only consolation in his untimely passing is that he is resting from his labor and is free from the incessant pain and suffering he endured for the past several years.

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?continued from page one

life, we can rest assured, therefore, that it has meaning, purpose. and a destiny. Man is more than an animal who lives on instinct - he is a unique being created in the image of God with eternal life offered to him. There is more to life than living. We are placed here for a purpose. God said in Isaiah 43:7 that He created man for His glory. We were put here for one purpose - to glorify, magnify, and worship God, and to live in fellowship with Him. Solomon tells us in the Book of Ecclesiastes how he made all kinds of experiments with life. He tried it all- materialism, pleasure, and sins of all kinds. Each time he made an experiment, he would say, "It's all vanity". In the last chapter he reached the conclusion of his experiments and declared, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). That's what it's all about, dear friend, living in awe of God and heeding His blessed will. When we learn that truth, internalize it, and apply it to our lives, everything will fall into place and life will run more smoothly. We then can live a fulfilled and meaningful life.

What is life? Real life is knowing God Jesus, in His intercessory prayer, said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Paul stated that the whole direction of his life was toward knowing Christ. He said he had suffered the loss of all things for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:8-10). To know Jesus is to know God (John 14:9). We know God through a daily intake of His word and constant participation with Him in carrying out that word.

What is life? Paul declared, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Life is about Christ and living the Christ life. Christ becomes for us that motivating, pulsating principle that gives direction to our lives. To live life to the fullest, we must transcribe into our lives the characteristics of the wonderful Christ. Jesus has left us an example that we should “follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). Paul said that he “imitated” Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). So must we. We must imitate His love, mercy, kindness, gentleness, compassion, forgiveness, sacrifice, and obedience. Paul commanded, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). He goes on to tell us that it is a self-emptying mind or attitude. Jesus emptied Himself of Himself. He gave up what He wanted for what we needed. If you really want to live life to the fullest, you will empty yourself of yourself. You will say “I don’t really matter anymore - only Jesus does.” That’s life - real life.

So, we ask, what is your life today? Is it real life on the highest spiritual plane or is it merely biological life on the lowest plane? God has given us the chance for “abundant life” in Christ -life on the mountain top. God help us to choose life. Moses told the people of Israel that “life and death” had been set before them, “therefore, choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19). The same choice is set before us. Choose life, real life, eternal life. Say with Joshua, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”. wfussell@comcast.net

BUILDING UP...continued from page two

as in apostolic times, and will bear the same fruit.” He then concludes: “Did the church prosper in those early days of Christianity? Great multitudes were obedient to the faith, and, notwithstanding the persecutions which afflicted the saints in every nation, the church flourished as it has never flourished in any other age. It even passed into a proverb, ‘that the blood of the martyrs has become the seed of the church.’ Were those saints of old humored, and petted, and flattered, and coddled by the professional visits of pastors, who prided themselves on being good ‘mixers,’ to get them to assemble for worship in caves and dens of the earth at midnight’s secret hour? Were churches then built up by the popularity of pastors, the artistic performance of godless choirs, the imposing appearance of costly houses of worship, the wealth and social position of leading members, or the worldly attractions of the services? Ah, no. Those

were the blessed days when sinners were converted and saints controlled by faith.”

(From a speech by T.W. Caskey, as reported by F.D. Srygley in *Seventy Years In Dixie*, pp. 24-28).

A common practice in our generation among denominations is to change “worship” into “entertainment.” Instead of congregational participation, professional musicians perform on stages and the people cheer and applaud their efforts. Massive crowds assemble in arenas in some places to listen to preachers who have promised to never mention anything of a negative nature. No mention is made of sin, or the need of man for forgiveness. Welcome to the “I’m O.K., You’re O.K.” philosophy. In other quarters, efforts are made to address man’s “felt needs.” Sinners are asked: “What would you like to see in a church?” And so the church becomes a place where young people can find hamburgers, hot dogs, cold drinks, and amusement to satisfy their “felt needs.” In our society, people now consider financial advice, child care, marriage counseling and all sorts of things as the mission of the church. That is not to say that such things are unimportant but that it is simply not the mission of the church to make that its work or to hold it out as an inducement to build membership in the church.

I also see a danger among our own fellowship today. I have in my possession a recent flier from one of “our” congregations. It advertises “a meeting devoted to the younger generations assuring them that the congregation loves, appreciates, and respects the young adults in this congregation and the brotherhood.” The advertisement continues to say, “The _____ Congregation tries to make your coming to this event without spending a fortune. Here is what we plan.” Then follows a list that includes “food, fun, singing, games, etc. Gym rented that will provide volleyball, basketball, ping pong, sitting area, etc.” Again, nothing wrong with those things, per se, but when did it become the mission of the church to provide such things?

We have drifted away from the mission of the church and in the thinking of this humble scribe we need to return to the what we can read in the Scriptures - (1) preaching the gospel; (2) edification of the church; and, (3) benevolence, (care for poor saints). Let us, as members of the church, develop a deep faith in the Word of God that will cause us to love God and our Lord Jesus Christ so that we will never have to be cajoled to attend worship, but look forward to expressing our faith in worship at every opportunity. —OPA

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE FOR YOURSELF

BY AARON BATTEY

Perhaps you have come across a disturbing passage in the Bible, but you don't know how to decipher the meaning. A passage may seem to downplay your entire belief system. Maybe the passage is disturbing simply because of the mystical language used by ancient Bible writers. How do you respond in this moment of struggle for definition of God's word? Before anything else, remember what Paul said to Timothy in 1 Tim. 1:5-7. Paul reminded Timothy to always maintain a pure heart, a good conscience, and be sincere in his faith. Being sincere enough to admit error when presented with the truth of God's word is foremost. Diligence and care come only a breath behind sincerity. Being diligent to study God's word with integrity and a systematic method is paramount. Jesus did not call fishermen like James and John for their laziness, ineptness, or disregard for properly understanding His teaching. These men consistently asked Jesus questions to better understand His mission and call to discipleship (Mark, 9:10-13, 10:10 & 13:3-4). Consider consistently asking yourself systematic questions when studying any given Bible passage. The questions to follow will hopefully guide you in this effort and lead you to Truth's doorstep.

The questions in this article are a bare bones skeleton of what should be asked whenever seeking clarity on a Bible passage. These questions also assume the reader to be established in two principles of thought: there is such a thing as absolute truth, and the proper interpretation of a passage is that which was intended by the original author. No more will be said on these points. Now, for the feature presentation, read on.

1. The Bible is a book of literature. This literature consists of poetry, history, narrative, argumentative discourse, and figurative/prophetic texts. With this knowledge, ask the question: What type of literature is this single verse found within, and how might that affect how I interpret the verse?
2. Why is the author writing this book? Does my interpretation of this single verse agree with the author's ultimate purpose in writing the book?
3. What is the immediate (surrounding) context of the verse I am studying? Does my interpretation of this single verse fit the immediate context?
4. Before I make personal application of what is taught in the verse, do I understand what the passage originally

meant? Personal application should never be made until the verse's original meaning is understood. Otherwise, you are dangerously near to making an application the Holy Spirit never intended to be drawn. This fallacy is at the root of many a belligerent and ignorant internet blogger.

5. Does anything within the passage allude or echo back to an Old Testament passage or teaching of Jesus (i.e. John 8:58)? If so, go back to the passage alluded to and gain a better understanding of that text. Many times, New Testament writers allude back to an Old Testament prophecy, teaching, story-line, character, or theme, making a parallel application to the audience of the New Testament.

Paul wrote God's revelation down so that his audience could read and understand it (Eph. 3:3-4), not be confused. God's word is not beyond our grasp, our grasp just has to reach farther than the TV remote. Now close your screen, pick up your Bible, and glean from God's treasure chest, "things new and old," (Matthew 13:52).

Our Departed

KUCHERA - Nellie "Nell" Faye Kuchera was born January 19, 1937 in Fox, Oklahoma to J.D. and Susie Elmore. She passed away with her family by her side on January 21, 2019 at the age of 82. She was preceded in death by her loving husband, Jim Kuchera. Nell was a high school graduate of Healdton Schools and worked for the State of Oklahoma in the welfare department for several years. She was quite a sales person too, selling Avon, air purifiers, and jewelry. Nell loved to garden, travel with Jim in the RV, collect beanie babies, and spend time with her family. She was a faithful member of the West View congregation in Piedmont, where she sat regularly on the front pew for worship until she was unable to attend services. Nell loved music and shared that passion with her children and grandchildren. One of her most cherished memories was Singing with her sisters in the Harmonies of Home quartet and the OKC Chapter of Sweet Adelines. She is survived by her children, Deanna McBride and husband Gary; James Kuchera and wife Anita; Patti Bundrum and husband Bobby; and Andy Kuchera and wife Tammy. She is also survived by 11 grandchildren, several great-grandchildren, loving siblings, nieces, nephews, and cousins. My wife Phyllis is also from Healdton, Oklahoma, and our long association with the J.D. and Susie Elmore family has made me feel like an extended-family member for a long time. I was honored to be asked by Nellie's family to officiate her funeral service.

A standing-room-only crowd attended the service at Resthaven Funeral Home, in Oklahoma City. Andy Kuchera read the obituary and gave a beautiful eulogy of his mother and congregational singing was led by nephew Hollis Allen. May God bless them all and enable them to find comfort in His wonderful promises.
--Carl M. Johnson

OWENS - Russell Barney Owens Jr. was born on July 18, 1943 and passed away February 20, 2019 at the age of 75. He is survived by his loving wife of 54 years Obta "Bea" Owens. Two sons, Randy (Kelly) Owens, Stan (Ann) Owens, and 1 daughter Bonnie Owens; One sister, Glenda Owens. Seven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. He was preceded in death by his parents Russell and Lucy "Sis" Owens. He was an evangelist for the Church of Christ for 57 years, former editor of the Old Paths Advocate, and a school bus driver for the Lakota School District for 33 years. I first became acquainted with Barney in October of 1967 when he held a meeting at my home congregation in LaGrange, GA. To be quite honest, I wasn't impressed because he preached about people putting ballgames and other amusements above Gospel meetings. LaGrange High School had a home game that Friday night and I was on the team. Little did I know at that time that years later I would be preaching the same thing. Barney worked with the church in Marietta where I attend today. My aunt and uncle were members there and we would often visit them. Through those visits, Barney and I became better acquainted. In July of 1968, Barney and I were roommates for three weeks at the National School of Music in Roanoke AL. He was older than most who attended the school, but all the kids grew to love him. Barney had to leave on Thursday, before the school was over. Several of us kids, not just church kids, went with Barney to the local Dairy Queen and after lunch we all bid him a teary-eyed goodbye. In June of 1969 Barney invited me to go with him and his family to a meeting in Lowery, AL. We stayed with Sarah and Chapman Grimes. It was here that I met their niece, a lovely young 13-year-old girl named Jane. By this time, a great friendship had developed between me and Barney that lasted all these many years. Whenever he was anywhere nearby, I made it my goal to get to the meeting, so I could visit and hear him preach. In fact, the first meeting that my oldest son Matt attended, as a 2-week-old, was a meeting Barney held in LaGrange. We moved to Marietta in 1970, but by that time Barney had already moved to Ohio to work at the congregation in Sharonville. As the years rolled on, often in the summer between his meetings, Barney and Bea would come to my parents' house and can vegetables. In June of 1974, Jane and I were married. We thought that it was

only fitting for us to ask Barney to perform our wedding ceremony since I was travelling with him when Jane and I met. Ours was the first wedding that Barney ever performed. Over the years, his and Bea's children grew up and Jane and I had children of our own. Our families became lifetime friends. Many times, he would stay with us during his meetings in Marietta. Jane and I have had the pleasure of staying in his and Bea's home when I have held meetings at Sharonville and always enjoyed that. Barney had a great sense of humor. I'm sure we all could give some examples of his sense of humor. He was always fun to be around. Barney was his own man and didn't play the political games that so many do. I greatly admired and appreciated him for that. He was well versed in the scriptures and had a knowledge possessed by few. Many have said that they never heard him preach that they didn't learn something. To say that he was a great preacher is really an understatement. Bea told me that Barney's dad told him when he started out to preach, "don't call your little talks sermons, and don't call yourself a preacher; time will come when other people will do that. Till then try to study so you can teach somebody something." That's great advice for any young man who has a desire to preach the Gospel. That young man that Russ Owens gave that advice to many years ago, became one of the greatest Gospel preachers that our brotherhood has known. 2 Samuel 3:38 "And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?" Over several years, Barney suffered many health problems. He often traveled to hold meetings when he didn't feel like it. Things that would have stopped many men didn't deter Barney. Our hearts are happy that Barney no longer suffers the infirmities of the flesh, but our hearts are also selfishly saddened that he is no longer with us. After the funeral, I was talking to Barney's son Stan. Stan said, "all the people from the community that attended the funeral had no idea the void that his death left in the congregation at Sharonville and in our brotherhood." What a true statement. Certainly, his death has left a great void. Barney was well-respected, around 200 people attended the visitation and a large crowd attended the funeral. There were by my count, fourteen Gospel preachers who attended the visitation or funeral. It was my honor to be asked, by the family, to speak at his funeral. I was honored to have Brother William St. John by my side. Congregational singing was led by Brother Bobby Anderson. As death takes our loved ones and friends from us, life must go on and we must learn to live without them. However, from that time forward, life is forever changed for us. Life for us personally, and as a brotherhood will be forever changed. —Rick Martin

COOPER - Shirley Cooper of Ozark, MO, daughter of Benny and Anita Claxton, was born on Nov. 23, 1939 in Purcell, OK and passed away on Feb. 14, 2019 at the age of 79. When I began laboring with the Jamesville congregation in 2003, Judy and I quickly learned that Warren and Shirley were easy to love and admire because of their faithfulness to Christ and His church. During those 16 years a deep friendship developed between us, hence it is a profound sense of loss that we are feeling at this time. Shirley was a devout Christian for over 40 years, being baptized into Christ by Carl Johnson in the 1970's, and right up to the end she assembled each Lord's day with us at Jamesville (even while suffering with declining health). She was a faithful and devoted wife to Warren for 61 years, to which union 3 children were born - Tim Cooper of Monett, Terri Pribek of Kimberling City and Denise Jones of Nixa - all in Missouri. She was also "Granny" to 5 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren. When Warren had a debilitating stroke in 2010, Shirley was determined to care for him at their home in Nixa and tend to his needs personally. That is what she did for 6 years until she also suffered a stroke in 2016, eventually making it necessary for them to reside together in a nursing home in Ozark. Like the "virtuous woman in Prov. 31, Shirley was a wife and mother who watched over the affairs of her household and did not eat the bread of idleness (verse 27). Although this is a time of sadness for her family, brethren and friends, we do not sorrow "as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:15). Our dear sister's faith in God, united with her hope in Christ, remained with her to the end. Indeed, the hope she had in life is the hope we have for her in death! Her body was laid to rest in the Jamesville Cemetery, a picturesque spot right behind our place of worship, and there she "shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11 :24). What a great homecoming day that will be for all of God's saints! Although the funeral took place on a bitterly cold and icy day, a good crowd was present to give a final farewell to our dear sister in Christ. It was my honor to conduct the service. --- Billy D. Dickinson

Field Reports

Don L. King, 1147 Sherry Way, Livermore, CA 94550, old_paths@juno.com, March 12, 2019. The home congregation is at peace, for which we give thanks. We have several teachers who are developing at this time. We are involved in the work in the Philippines, Hawaii, and until recently Australia, along with a few other places. We look forward to Carl Johnson being with us for a meeting April 7-14. We always enjoy having him

and all of our preachers for meetings. Bro Sam Garrison will be here for this next weekend and we look forward to that. My health is gradually improving we believe. Lord willing, we will be in Bakersfield next Lord's Day, and we have enjoyed preaching at home several times recently. We're looking forward to several meetings this summer. It was very sad to hear of Brother Barney Owen's passing recently. His health had been in poor condition for some time, but we are never ready to lose such preachers. His absence will be keenly felt for a long time. We are fortunate to have an interesting article about him by Brother Irvin Barnes in this issue. Please read and consider the hard work both Irvin and Barney did to develop into the preachers they became. Barney was a great preacher. His talents were many and unique. May God bless his family in their loss.

Carl M. Johnson, 1400 Northcrest Drive, Ada, OK 74820, carlmj@cableone.net, Mar. 11, 2019. We conducted our 43rd Annual March Meeting (Mar. 1-3), and it was a good one. We worried that the threat of winter storms might hinder the turnout, but our crowds were good. We had some folks who attended the meeting for the first time and they say they plan to be back next year. The theme of the meeting was, Love Thy Kingdom Lord. Topics included The Kingdom in Prophecy, Entering the Kingdom, The Nature of the Kingdom, Problems with Premillennialism, The King of Kings, and The Need for Faithfulness and Fruitfulness in the Kingdom. Jimmy Cating conducted the meeting again and enlisted Noah Howard, Jason Coon, and Marcus Mathis to help him in presenting the topics. These topics are the kind you might expect to hear at a preachers study. They are rich in theology and deal with some of the great doctrines of the Bible. I was anxious to see how the speakers would deal with them and I was not disappointed. The presentations were excellent. We have been busy since the Oklahoma New Years Meeting. I have had Sunday preaching appointments at four or five different congregations the past two months, and I have preached here at home several times. Lord willing, by the time you read this report we will be in Livermore, CA (Apr. 7-14). My schedule then includes: Mountain Home, AR (Apr. 24-28), Hillcrest, MS (June 2-9), Pleasant View (Springfield), MO (June 16-23), San Angelo, TX (July 14-21), Napoleon, AL (Aug. 4-11), Shawnee, KS (Sept. 6-8), Blue Springs, KY (Sept. 18-22), KC, MO (85th & Euclid Oct. 9-13), and Weatherford, TX (Oct. 25-27). Please continue to pray for us.

Frank Brancato, 12718 Larkin Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93312, March 14, 2019 email: frankbrancato@sbcglobal.net. I have enjoyed being home this month, and working with the church here locally. I am happy

to report that the work in Bakersfield continues to move forward in a positive direction. 16 more prospects started the Bible Correspondence course this month, and we currently now have 36 taking the course. Private bible studies continue each week, and we had one baptism this month. We are looking forward to having Don King speak for us this Sunday, and Lord willing I also plan to give the Philippine power point presentation from our recent trip. Also if the Lord wills, my upcoming meeting schedule will be as follows: 21st Street OKC (April 7-14), and Ada OK (May 5-12). May God bless His faithful everywhere!

Paul O Nichols, 14217 Rosehill, Overland Park, KS 66221. The weather has been unstable in this part of the country for quite awhile. We have had more snow than usual, which has been a hindrance to the work and worship of the church in the Kansas City area.. At this writing there are snow heaps everywhere. However the main roads have been treated and cleared, and the steep hill to the church building is clear of ice and snow. There are several congregations in this area, and all have been effected. I recently fell and fractured a couple of ribs and was somewhat bruised, but am recovering well. At the age of ninety-six I am restricted, but I am still able to preach periodically. We have several capable brethren who are good teachers and song leaders, who are able to take the lead and who will see that the church at 79th and Kansas Ave will continue to contend earnestly for the faith in the feature. May the Lord bless all the righteous efforts of all faithful congregations everywhere.

Greg Gay, 916-804-3787, papagreg@aol.com, March 15, 2019. After a brief 40 years, we are planning to leave California in April to relocate to Oklahoma. Lord willing, Cassie, Tye, and I will relocate to Edmond to be nearer family. We look forward to the association with all the congregations in the area and to being helpful as opportunities arise. I plan to leave my "day job" at the end of March after being with the company (Meek's) for 47 ½ years, the longest of any current employee in the West and Midwest. I have enjoyed my career with the company, especially the decades I have been involved in Human Resources and Training. I have especially appreciated the integrity of the family that owned the company and the flexibility I have had to be able to preach locally and beyond. We will end our work with the 64th. St., Sacramento congregation at the end of March after working with them for 22 years. We dearly love the small group we have had as our home congregation for all these years and appreciate all that so many go through on their journey from a life of worldliness to do their best to make God first in

their lives. Thankfully, Aaron Newman and family will begin working with the congregation in April. I am so thrilled for Aaron and for the congregation. Aaron has been a monthly guest speaker for us for several years. He is to be ordained as an Evangelist the end of March by his home congregation at Placerville and plans for now to continue to work at his regular job in the IT world. He, Rachel, and baby Bree Ann are a delight to all! We regret that we are leaving behind our son Chris and his family, at least for now, and a host of friends up and down the state who we will miss seeing very much. Cassie, Tye, and I are excited to turn a page of life and see what wonderful adventures await us. It is somewhat comforting to know the house we are buying in Edmond has a "safe" room. Safe from what, I'm not exactly sure...

Wayne Fussell, 6126 Land O' Trees, Shreveport, LA 71119 wfussell11@comcast.net. It has been a few years since I have reported to the OPA. When I was a young preacher it was the regular practice to report each month. Like many, the first thing I read in the paper are the reports. I apologize for not doing so in recent years. I continue to work with the Midway church in Shreveport. The South Shreveport congregation merged with us some time ago, and it has been a blessing beyond words. I continue to hold meetings: Texarkana (May 1-5); Denton County Memorial Day Meeting (May 24-26); Red Oak, TX (July 17-24). God has been good to this old preacher. May God bless you all.

Irvin Barnes, 3218 East Farm Road 88, Springfield, Mo.65803, March 13, 2019. The congregation here at Pleasant View has reason to weep and to rejoice. Kent May who has served with great distinction as an elder for over ten years has been diagnosed with serious heart problems. Nancy Crooks has had a brush with death from pneumonia and 2 types of flu. Please pray for Kent and Nancy's recovery. Evan and Casey Barnes have moved to Somerset, KY. We will miss them in the church here, however, we believe they will be a great help to the church where ever they live. We are deeply saddened by the passing of Bro. Barney Owens. On a lighter note, Matthew and Sunila Brown have adopted a baby boy. They came home with him yesterday. Little, Odas Drue, will be 3 weeks old tomorrow. Barbara and I are ecstatic to have a new grand baby in our family. Two Sundays ago we had a new couple attend our services as a result of the TV programs. We recently enjoyed having David Killingsworth and his family with us. David gave 2 good lessons. In my email address please notice the "e" is not included in Barnes. irvinbarns@aol.com.

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WALKS THROUGH THE BIBLE...

NEVERTHELESS, THE CHILDREN OF KORAH DID NOT DIE

By JERRY DICKINSON

“These are the Dathan and Abiram, representatives of the congregation, who contended against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the Lord. And the earth opened up its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men, and they became a sign. Nevertheless, the children of Korah did not die.” (Numbers 26:9-11)

The children of Korah did not die! That is a remarkable revelation. Numbers 16 records the rebellion against Moses and Aaron which was led by a man named Korah. He was from the tribe of Levi and was a member of the family of Koath. The Koathites had the awesome responsibility of taking care of and guarding the holy vessels in the Tabernacle. When the Tabernacle was set up, or taken down to be moved, the Koathites were the ones who moved and protected the Ark of the Covenant, the golden lampstand, the altar of incense, etc. They were the “doorkeepers” in the House of the Lord! Who would not be satisfied and grateful to have such a job? Not Korah! No, he decided this work was too menial and insignificant for him. He decided he wanted to be the High Priest. Of course, that job was already taken. God had chosen Aaron for that role and his sons after him.

Korah, however, like a good politician, convinces Dathan and Abiram along with 250 of the leading men in Israel to go along with his rebellion. He accuses Moses and Aaron of usurping their authority and positions. Moses? The Bible says Moses was the meekest man in the earth. He did not usurp anything! God placed Moses in his position of leadership and it was the Lord’s decision to make Aaron the High Priest. The Lord told Moses to command the children of Israel to get away from the tents of Korah and his followers, and then the Lord opened up the earth and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, along with their tents and their families and all they possessed, went down into the chasm and the earth closed back up. The 250 leading men who went along with the rebellion were consumed by fire which came out from the presence of the Lord. The Lord demonstrated in a dramatic and horrific way that He had chosen Moses and Aaron and these rebels were rejected and destroyed.

The story as recorded in Numbers 16 seems to indicate that the families of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram suffered the same fate as these men, but then in our text we learn that the children of Korah did not die. Apparently, the sons of Korah did not go along with their father’s rebellion and therefore they did not perish with him and the others who did participate in challenging what the Lord Himself had ordained. What a remarkable lesson! Everyone is responsible for their own behavior – the righteous do not suffer the fate of the unrighteousness, even if the unrighteous person is your father or mother or child.

In Exodus 20:4-6 Moses taught that God visits iniquity on the third and fourth generations. Note, however, that the generations referred to are, “those who hate Me.” He goes on to declare that the Lord, “shows mercy to thousands who love Me and keep My commandments.” The principle is that every generation is punished and rewarded for their own obedience or disobedience. The sons of Korah did not follow their father in his sin and therefore did not die. Just because members of our families leave the truth does not mean we have to follow them! Take a stand for truth and righteousness regardless of what others may do, even those closest to us. God will bless us if we do. Interestingly, and amazingly, the descendants of Korah became noteworthy in the history of Israel. Some scholars even believe that the prophet Samuel was a descendant of Korah! Obviously too, they became singers in the days of David who apparently composed many of the Psalms. Again and again we read in the title of different Psalms the words, “A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah.” (Psalm 88) Remember that they were doorkeepers, as it were, in the House of the Lord, the Tabernacle. Remarkably, in Psalm 84, another of the Psalms of the sons of Korah, we find these wondrous words.

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
Than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
For the Lord God is a sun and shield;
The Lord will give grace and glory;
No good thing will He withhold
From those who walk uprightly.
O Lord of hosts, Blessed is the man who trusts in you!

These men, sons of Korah the rebel, had separated themselves from the tents of wickedness and had put their trust in the Lord, walking uprightly and the Lord was to them their grace, glory, sun, and shield! May we pledge to be like the noble sons of Korah and follow the Lord no matter what our friend or even our closest loved ones decide to do. If we will make good such a pledge we may save some of our friends and loved ones. We certainly won’t help them if we go along with them! I too, like the sons of Korah, would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness! What about you?