

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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SALVATION BY GRACE ALONE, THROUGH FAITH ALONE, IN CHRIST ALONE!

By DAVID GRIFFIN

The problem with religious slogans is that although they are often “catchy” they are often not scriptural. The above is frequently repeated by many who proudly cling to the “Protestant Tradition.” Some recite this slogan with the same confidence as one quoting scripture. Part of this confidence rests on the five-hundred-year history of the slogan (originally in Latin); and part of it on the assumption that it is thoroughly scriptural. However, to my mind there is a two-fold fault in this slogan: 1) it is logically inconsistent, and 2) it is not scriptural. Let me explain.

First, the thing that makes this slogan so “catchy” is its triple repetition of the word “alone.” It is the word “alone” that gives the user of the slogan such confidence (or perhaps makes him feel so clever). By repeating “alone” with reference to Grace, Faith, and Christ, the speaker is made to feel as though he or she is assigning all the credit to God for their salvation, taking none of the credit themselves. As far as credit is concerned, we are in complete agreement. We can take no credit for our salvation.

According to Merriam-Webster, the word “alone” means: “exclusive of anyone or anything else.” The slogan, however, lists three things that Protestant Tradition regards as essential to salvation—Grace, Faith, and Christ. Anyone familiar with New Testament teaching on salvation agrees that these three things are essential components for saving souls. Without any one of them—Grace, Faith, or Christ—one cannot be saved as far as the New Testament is concerned, and it just so happens that Protestant Tradition agrees with the New Testament at least on that point. But the inconsistency is that if all three things—Grace, Faith, and Christ—are essential, then how can all three simultaneously be “alone”?

If salvation is “By Grace Alone,” in Webster’s words, it

is by Grace “exclusive of anyone or anything else.” It is “By Grace Alone”! Grace alone amounts to universalism - everyone will be saved, because “the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11). But most of the users of this slogan would not endorse universalism.

But then, as soon as the slogan adds “Faith” to the list, Grace is no longer “exclusive of...anything else.” It is now Grace and Faith. But there’s more. The slogan not only adds “Faith” to “Grace,” but it adds “Faith alone” to “Grace alone”! If salvation is by “Grace Alone,” where is the room for “anything else” alone?

But there’s even more! A good slogan must have good rhythm in its phrasing to “appeal to the ear” when spoken. It needs some repetition and balance in its effect. So, the slogan needs a third component—“...In Christ Alone.” A two-part slogan, “By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone,” might be a good one in its own right (and I think many do use it), but a better one, like the slogan in our title, adds that all-important third part—“In Christ Alone.” But as soon as this third part is added, with a third “alone,” the conundrum is wound even tighter! With the addition of “In Christ alone,” there are now three things, all essential, yet all of which are said to be “alone.” At the least, this strains the meaning of words.

Of course, we take no exception to the expression, “In Christ alone” itself. In fact, it is the only part of the slogan that swerves into the truth. Jesus says, “No one comes to the Father but by Me” (John 14:6). “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 12). “If you do not believe that I am He,” said Jesus, “you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Yet even though we are saved by Christ and no other, the slogan as a whole is simply “non-sensical” — incoherent and illogical.

Second, the slogan is unscriptural. The Bible obviously says we are saved by grace. Ephesians 2:5 plainly states,

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Editorial

PLAYING WITH FIRE

By CARL M. JOHNSON

Several years ago my younger son David came home from high school football practice and told me that a leader of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes came by the locker room and was allowed to speak briefly to the boys and lead a prayer. David and a friend of his were startled at the extremely familiar, chummy sounding language the man used in addressing God. They imitated the man beginning his prayer with the words, "Gawd (God), you are an awesome Gawd! Can I call you Dude?" I guess the man thought he was really connecting with these teenage boys by using some of their own vernacular to address God as "Dude."

I recently saw a video of a prayer on Youtube by Tennessee preacher Joe Helms that takes the cake for the most irreverent prayer I have heard. He led the pre-race NASCAR prayer and thanked God for everything, including NASCAR technology, Goodyear tires, his smokin' hot wife, and concluded by saying, "In Jesus name, boogity, boogity, boogity, boogity, Amen."

I was shocked by such irreverence and amazed that the response Helms received from his prayer was overwhelmingly positive. The majority of the responders on Youtube loved it. Some said they enjoyed it so much they wanted to "tithe" his church, while others said that such a preacher could actually get them interested in religion again.

Obviously, one must be a child of God before he can call upon God the Father in prayer. Otherwise, any prayer attempt is futile. But, whether the prayer is in the public marketplace or in the assembly of the church, I am bothered if it is lacking in proper reverence for God.

One writer suggests that such irreverence might change if we could get people to look at the story of Moses and the burning bush as a pattern for approaching God in prayer (CT p. 32, Sept. 2019).

Moses is tending his sheep in Midian when he sees a bush that is burning with fire, but it is not being consumed (Ex. 3:2). Moses approaches the flame but stops short when God calls him by name from the flame, "Moses! Moses!" After recovering from the

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QUERIST COLUMN

By CLINT DEFRANCE

Question: What does the Bible mean when it calls something “an abomination to the LORD”?

Response: We must first define the word abomination. Conventional English dictionaries variously define the word abomination as: “anything greatly disliked or abhorred. Intense aversion, or loathing; detestation. A vile, detestable, action condition, or habit.” In the Bible, the word abomination represents between two to four Hebrew words (in the Old Testament - depending on which translation one uses) and one Greek word in the New Testament. Most of these words are illustrative of something having a rotten stench; so unbearable that persons must flee the area; stomach turning and offensive. Some linguists suggest one word or the other applies exclusively to ceremonial or religious matters (pertaining to idolatry), but this seems unsustainable in the various ways the words are used. Religious, ethical, and even dietary matters are labeled abominations in the Scripture.

In the Old Testament, there are two kinds of abomination mentioned - distinguished by the prepositional phrases attached to them. First, is what the Bible calls, “Abominations to the LORD.” This phrase appears in the Old Testament 19 times, and once God (speaking) refers to a certain practice as “an abomination to me.” This phrase describes behaviors, attitudes, and conditions that God finds detestable. The Bible teaches that God is an intelligent, moral being possessing supreme characteristics and attributes. Abominations to the LORD are those things which are contrary to God’s nature and character. For example: God is truth, and it is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1.2; Hebrews 6.18). Thus, “Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, But those who deal truthfully are His delight” (Proverbs 12.22) Consider a few other examples:

- “You shall not sacrifice to the Lord your God a bull or sheep which has any blemish or defect, for that is an abomination to the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 17.1) Why would God find this detestable? Because offering something inferior shows disrespect to God (Mal. 1.6-8).
- “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 22.5) Why would God find cross-

dressing detestable? Because God designed human sexual ethics, the home, and religious responsibility in light of His ordained distinctions between the genders. Cross-dressing, and other efforts to blur or remove gender distinction are opposed to God’s created order and attack the foundation of God’s entire system for human life, and thus they are morally vile in His sight.

- “You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.” (Deuteronomy 23.18) Why would God find this detestable? The wages of a harlot and the price of a dog speaks of monies earned through prostitution (in the ancient world, a male prostitute was called a dog). To offer this money to God in the Temple was an egregious example of hypocrisy! Similarly, in Isaiah 1.13, God declares the worship offered by Israel “an abomination to Him” because of the insincerity of their hearts - in that case, it wasn’t the action, but the attitude behind it that was detestable.

The second kind of abomination in the Old Testament is an abomination to men or to a certain group of men. Sometimes, certain cultures would find practices detestable because of their beliefs and worldview, but other cultures would find no offense in the same behavior. This is true in modern society as well. In the Law of Moses, God declared that certain foods were to be detestable to Israel.

Consider Leviticus 11.9-12, “These you may eat of all that are in the water: whatever in the water has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers-that you may eat. But all in the seas or in the rivers that do not have fins and scales, all that move in the water or any living thing which is in the water, they are an abomination to you. They shall be an abomination to you; you shall not eat their flesh, but you shall regard their carcasses as an abomination. Whatever in the water does not have fins or scales-that shall be an abomination to you.” Do you see the difference in the prepositional phrase? Previously God informed the people of those things that were abominations to Him - here he commands the people of those things that they should regard as abominations. You can read on in the chapter for more of the same, but in this case, what was detestable to men was not detestable to God. God’s assessment of all his creatures is that they are “very good.” In the previous dispensation, God allowed Noah and his sons to eat all kinds of animals - without limitation, provided they did not eat the blood (Genesis 9.3). The point being that modern efforts to justify immoral behaviors which God calls detestable in His sight, by comparing them to the

Levitical food regulations are misguided. God never found shrimp and lobster detestable; but He has always found sexual immorality, hypocrisy, and dishonesty detestable, because those things are against His nature!

In conclusion consider this: If abominations to the Lord are those things which offend his nature, should we expect that what God found abominable 4000 years ago, he still finds abominable today? I think so. God declares that His nature is immutable and unchanging (Mal. 3.6). In the New Testament, we see evidence that God still hates those things He always hated. The prohibition against eating blood, for example is present in all periods of history! In Revelation 21.8, we find that those who work abominations will not go to heaven.

For clarity, let me say that I believe the New Testament is the rule of faith, practice, and living for Christians. I believe the Old Testament was abrogated at and through the death of Jesus. But if God's nature remains the same, we should expect to find those things that He hates condemned in the New Testament as surely as they were condemned in the Old, even if not in the same words. And surely, we do! The New Testament condemns dishonoring God through giving Him less than the best of ourselves; the New Testament condemns hypocrisy, sexual immorality, efforts to remove gender distinction, and dishonesty - because no matter what changes in the world, God does not change. God always has and always will find such things repulsive, and if we would be godly, then we must cultivate the same attitude in ourselves.

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SCRIPTURAL LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

By PAUL O. NICHOLS

In order to have a strong faithful congregation it is necessary to have strong faithful leadership. It has been said that a congregation is no stronger than its leaders. This means that if those who take the lead in the church are weak spiritually, the whole congregation is affected. Peter seems to indicate this when he writes to the elders in the church, "...being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our supreme leader and He sets the example for all who would be leaders in the church today.

There are many good men in the church who want to see

the church grow and prosper, but all have not learned the importance of leadership. It is the purpose of this article to point out some Bible requirements for men to qualify for the kind of leadership the Lord wants in the church. In Heb. 13:7 we are told, "Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." The Revised Standard Version says, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith."

One of the first things we need to understand is that there is no official office in the church called "leader". Leadership is an ability. Some have the ability to lead, and others do not. Some may have the ability, but are not qualified for other reasons. Some would like to be leaders in the church, but do not have the ability or the qualifications.

In our worship services we have men who lead singing. We have others who lead prayer. In both of these capacities these individuals are leaders -- song leaders and prayer leaders -- but they occupy no official position. So it is with other leaders in the church.

In order for a man to be a qualified elder in the church he must be a leader of men. But men can take the lead in the Lord's work who are not elders.

In the Bible we have examples of men who were leaders in carrying out the will of God. Jesus is the most notable example of all. The apostle Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). Christ was the supreme leader because He was the Son of God and was always an example in doing the will of His Father. He said, "And he that sent me is with me : The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (Jno. 8:29). Again, He said, "...I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30).

In the Old Testament Moses was a leader of the children of Israel, because God selected him to deliver His people from slavery in the land of Egypt and to lead them to the place of "milk and honey". At first he offered excuses. He did not think the people would believe that God had chosen him for this job. When that excuse didn't work, he complained that he was "not eloquent" and was "slow of speech" (Ex. 4: 1, 10-16). But God would not take "no" for an answer and promised He would be with him and qualify him to serve as a leader of his people. Moses became the great deliverer with the help of God

and the assistance his brother, Aaron, and served God in that capacity for forty long years.

In the sixth chapter of Judges we read the account of another successful leader chosen by God. His name was Gideon. He was told to fight against the Midianites who were the enemies of God. Gideon did not hesitate to rally an army of 32,000 ready to go to war. But God told him he had too many. All were given permission to return home who really did not want to fight. That day Gideon lost 22,000 of his men. However, he was still ready to go against the enemy under God's direction. But He was told he still had too many men. A simple test was given. Only three hundred passed it, and with this small force Gideon successfully fought against the enemy of God.

In the New Testament the apostle Paul who at one time "made havoc of the church (Acts 8:3) became one of the greatest proponents of truth the world has ever known. He was a natural born leader of men. Before his conversion he was known as "Saul of Tarsus" and was the archenemy of Christ. And when he was converted and became an apostle of our Lord, when it came to leadership he stood head and shoulders above all other apostles and wrote more books in the New Testament than any other man. He urged other Christians to follow him as he followed Christ.

One of the requirements for a person to be a leader in the church is great faith. A man of weak faith is not, yea cannot be, a leader among Christians. The apostle Paul expressed a powerful faith when he wrote "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). Solomon said, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

Knowledge of the scriptures is an absolute requirement to be a spiritual leader. Jesus said, "...If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matt. 13:14). A person is going to have to know what the will of God is if he is going to help lead others to heaven.

Wisdom is needed for a leader to do a good job, whether he is an elder or not. Wisdom is the proper or best use of knowledge. The writer of Proverbs said, "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding" (Prov. 4:7). The apostle James wrote, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

A leader must be an example. Paul wrote to Titus and said, "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity" (Tit. 2:7). Jesus taught His apostles, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). A person is not a leader who he is not strong spiritually and sets a good example for others to follow. Paul wrote, "Be strong in the Lord, and the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10). Again, he says, "Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11).

One must not show partiality if he is going to be a leader in the church. The apostle Paul wrote Timothy and said, "I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality" (1 Tim. 5:21). Solomon wrote, "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 17:15). "He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons (Col. 3:25). One cannot be partial if he is to be respected as a faithful leader of the Lord's people.

One more requirement for a man to be a respected and efficient leader is that must show stability. He must not vassilate. He cannot be fickle. James says, "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways (1:8). Paul writes, "My beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

In conclusion let me say this. There is a dire need for good, sound scriptural leadership in the church today who know what is right and will stand for the truth. We need leadership that puts the Lord and the church first in their lives. We need men who are good examples, who command respect because they are genuine Christians and who are concerned for the salvation of souls and the strength and growth of the church. With this kind of leadership the Lord will bless His people and their efforts.

THE LORD'S DAY

By MELVIN BLALOCK

The Sabbath is not the Lord's Day, as is sometimes argued by the Sabbatarians. The requirement of Sabbath keeping ended at the cross. The Apostle Paul

wrote to the Colossians: “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Col 2:14-17). No one has a right to judge us in these things, because they are part of that old system that ended at the cross. God’s people today live under a new covenant (Heb. 8:13). The Sabbath was one of those ordinances that was nailed to the cross. The only day of religious observance for the Christian is the Lord’s Day. We find that it is called the Lord’s Day in the Revelation. The Apostle John wrote, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day....” (Rev. 1:10). Burton Coffman, in his Bible Commentary, offers the following regarding this subject: “Here, ‘Lord’s Day’ is a similar construction to ‘Lord’s Supper’ (1 Cor. 11:20). It means ‘belonging to the Lord’ or ‘consecrated to the Lord’” We read the following from Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, “.....the day devoted to the Lord, sacred to the memory of Christ’s resurrection, Rev. 1:10.” Jesus arose on the first day of the week. We read in Mark’s gospel, “And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun” (Mk. 16:1-2). In verse nine it is made clear that Jesus arose on the first day of the week. “Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons” (Mk. 16:9). When one reads Luke’s account of these events, there is no doubt that the first day of the week was the day of the Lord’s resurrection. The disciples traveled the road to Emmaus from Jerusalem on the first day of the week following the Lord’s resurrection. They established that Jesus arose on the third day as He had promised, and identified this day as the first day of the week (Lk. 24:1-19).

The “first day of the week” was a day of significance to the disciples in the first century, because the scriptures are emphatic that it was the day of the Lord’s resurrection. It was the day on which the disciples came together to “break bread” the observance of the “Lord’s Supper” (Acts 20:7). It is logical that this memorial feast would be observed on the day of his resurrection. It is not surprising that the Apostle John would refer to it as the Lord’s Day (Rev. 1:10). Nor is it surprising that they would celebrate the Lord’s Supper on the Lord’s Day.

When the churches assembled upon the first day of the week, they were also instructed to have a collection. The Apostle Paul gives these instructions to the churches in the following: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

The Sabbath of the old covenant was known as a day of rest (Ex. 20:8-11). It was the seventh day. The first day of the week, is the Lord’s Day (Rev. 1:10), and it is a day of worship for the Christian. Failing to assemble with the saints for worship on the Lord’s Day is a serious matter. Consider this grave warning: “Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:28-31).

CONTENDING FOR THE CAUSE

pt. 3 of 3

By MICHAEL BOLTON

We will resume and conclude the study of these two verses with this article. It was previously stated that we should avoid seeking contentions. It does seem that sometimes we live to fight. But the word fight doesn’t always mean a battle with a brother, or someone in the world. Associated with the idea of fleeing some things, and following some things, the Apostle Paul teaches emphatically that we are to fight for some things. In describing this struggle, he teaches us how we should pursue the things of God.

In the old KJV the word fight is used 1 Timothy 6:12 to describe the struggle that Christians should be engaged in. However, the same word appears in Luke 13:24 and Colossians 1:29, but is translated differently. Luke 13:24 says “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” Colossians 1:29 says “To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” Other translations than the KJV render this concept as: 1. Keep contending in the noble contest of

the faith... 2. Struggle your hardest in the good contest...
3. Fight the worthwhile battle...

In other words, we are to keep on straining every muscle and nerve in the noble contest for the faith. One is also reminded of the following passages. Philippians 3:14, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Hebrews 12:1, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."

The fight we are to be engaged in is red-blooded and strenuous. It is a contest between the ignoble and the noble. It is for the grandest cause in the world, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But we are warned in the first part of the chapter that it is not for wealth of this world, it is not for the love of money. Those who fight for these things fall into a trap.

We should be grateful that Paul writes to us here. He is not backward about giving his instruction. He candidly instructs us about how to fight this fight.

1. Keep the commandments. We certainly live in a world that is opposed to commandment keeping. The idea of having to obey a law is highly offensive to some. He even offers instruction about how to keep the commandment. He says, spotlessly, blamelessly, consistently. One should consider Romans 7:12, John 14:15, 21, 15:10. We understand Romans 7:12 is referring to the Law of Moses, but the passages in John are referring to the gospel. And according to Jude 3 we should be proactively on guard duty for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. Then one is to have hope in God. This is compared to hoping in earthly riches (vs 17). This involves trusting God and this addresses one of the primary things that a wealthy man is tempted with, that is becoming "high-minded." The term high-minded is an old term that describes the person who thinks he is better than he is. A Christian who thinks himself superior to poor people, or wiser than some, or having reached a "higher state of Grace." The Greek culture that Timothy lived and worked in was one who despised the humble, the lowly minded, and valued the self-assertive attitude that imposed its will on other men. But Christian lowliness or humility is learned first from Jesus Christ, and is developed out of a desire to help others.

3. Be rich in good works. One rarely thinks of doing good as fighting a war. But this seems to be what Paul is teaching. Riches furnish a rich man special means for tasting this enjoyment. The rich man's wealth should be

generously shared with all in need. This enables him to do good in many places, even though he occupies a very finite space and time.

4. Guard the deposit. Paul closes his letter with a word of caution and makes it personal. He charges Timothy with the responsibility of guarding the things committed to his trust. He describes how to guard them also. Paul says, "avoid profane and vain babblings and oppositions of science so called" (1 Tim. 6:20). Please note he does not say guard the deposit of treasure entrusted to you by refuting them, by getting in the trench and slinging mud with those men, but by avoiding them. One cannot refute a myth, an empty sound. How can a man be successful in debate with an ignorant teacher of the law when they don't even know what they are doing? Paul is instructing us through Timothy that there is only one course of action, "Turn away." Doing anything else is honoring them as if there is something in them. Paul's psychology is correct and works if applied. We learn it is sound from other scripture also (Proverbs 17:12, 26:4, 1 Timothy 1:4, Titus 3:9).

The great Apostle to the Gentiles gave practical advice to Timothy and us in these letters. We are thankful for them. We are thankful for the hope that we find in Jesus Christ in the wisdom found here. May we all apply these words to our own lives, and study them regularly to guide our lives and our actions as Christians in this wicked, amoral world that we live in. May we like Timothy, also be charged with "guarding the truth" by knowing when to flee, what to follow, and how to fight the fight of faith. In a lesson like this there are always things left unsaid that could be said. But, I hope that as we turn the page into a new and brighter year and chapter that we are careful to heed the challenge before us.

SALVATION BY GRACE....continued from page one

"by grace you have been saved"; Romans 3:24, we are "justified freely by his grace"; and Titus 3:7, we have been 'justified by his grace,' etc. Not one passage in the New Testament, however, teaches, either verbatim or in concept, that "Salvation is by grace alone." Therefore, the first part of the slogan is unscriptural, thus tainting the whole.

But there's more! The Bible obviously says we are saved by faith. We cannot be saved without it. Hebrews 11:6 reads, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe..." Jesus says, "if you do not believe...you will die in your sins"

(John 8:24), and “he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Martin Luther may have added the word “alone” to his German translation of Romans 3:28, a reflection of his own belief and the belief of millions who follow his lead, but the New Testament simply does not teach that salvation is “by faith alone.” In fact, the only passage where “faith” is coupled with “alone” or “only” is James 2:24— “...a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

In addition to Grace, Faith, and Christ, the New Testament teaches there are additional causes involved in the salvation of souls. Romans 5:9 teaches that “we are saved by his blood.” James 2:21,24,25 teach that we are ‘justified by works.’ First Corinthians 15:1 says it is “the gospel...by which you are saved.” And 1 Peter 3:21 teaches that we are saved by baptism—“There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism” (NKJV).

It is this last which is most troublesome to the users of the slogan. The NIV translation of 1 Peter 3:21 is even clearer: “and this water [of Noah’s flood] symbolizes baptism that now saves you also - not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (brackets mine, dg). Baptism saves us, not by any merit in the act itself, not by any efficacy in the water, but “it saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The power of Christ’s resurrection gives baptism its effect for salvation. Hence, in order to be saved we must have faith in Christ, repent of sin, and “be baptized for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38), “arise and be baptized and wash away your sins,” (Acts 22:16), “be baptized in the likeness of his death” and “be raised to walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4).

Millions are misled by the ear-catching slogan in the title of this article or some variation of it. Let us examine all religious claims and doctrines in the light of the inspired word. “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thess. 5:21).

PLAYING WITH FIRE...continued from page two

shock Moses humbly replies, “Here I am.” The Lord responds by warning him, “Do not come any closer... Take off your shoes (sandals), for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Ex. 3:4-5). Moses obeys, and from that distance his interview with God in the flame continues. God reveals His divine name to Moses and commissions him to go back to Egypt and liberate Israel.

On this miraculous occasion God does not use fire to repel or destroy Moses, but to attract him, to draw him near, and call him by name. Later, Israel would come to know a more fearsome God revealed by fire.

When God destroys the Egyptians at the Red Sea, He does so as a pillar of fire (Ex. 14:24). When God meets Moses at Mount Sinai, He appears as lightning, smoke, and fire (Ex. 19:16-25). His glory is so terrifying the people plead with Moses to mediate for them—the fiery God is too much for them! Even Moses trembles with fear (Heb. 12:21). As Israel is about to cross over into the promised land, Moses reminds them of their fear, telling them not to construct idols, for “your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (Deut. 2:24; 5:4-5; 23-27).

With these reminders we can appreciate better Moses’ experience at the burning bush. God, who was in the Fire, does not consume Moses or the bush. Instead, He condescends graciously to Moses and allows Moses to speak to Him directly as a friend. Nevertheless, God gives Moses clear warning that Moses is standing on holy ground and that he should proceed with reverence. Moses is to keep in mind that God is still the God in the Fire, a Flame Israel would prove unable to bear for most of its history.

The entire General Epistle of Hebrews shows systematically that Christ and the NT are superior to Moses and the OT in every way. We have a better covenant, sacrifice, high priest, and sanctuary. Therefore, we have a better confidence through Christ of entering into the presence of God. All Christians have the privilege of coming “boldly (confidently) before the throne of grace” in prayer (Heb. 4: 16; 10:22).

Just like Moses, however, we must never forget that when we confidently approach the throne of God, we are still standing on holy ground. We must still look to “remove our sandals” while approaching Him. The author of Hebrews reminds us even today that prayer is nothing less than an intimate encounter with the voice from the Fire, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28-29).

Moses spoke to God face to face as a friend, but God still insisted Moses approach Him with reverence and godly fear. The same is true for us. Because we are all priests (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), we can speak directly to God through Christ, and we can address Him as our loving Father (Lk. 11:2). Still, we are admonished to approach

Him with reverence and godly fear.

There is an old adage that says if you play with fire you are going to get burned. The adage is appropriate for anyone who assumes that the privilege of prayer includes the right to enter into the presence of God irreverently. Keep in mind that when you pray, you are praying with Fire (God in the Flame), and if you approach Him without proper reverence you will definitely get burned. cmjthebackpage@gmail.com

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Our Departed

DICKINSON - Jimie Lee Dickinson of Midlothian, Texas passed away September 4, 2019. She was born in Coolidge, Texas, April 12, 1932 to Parker and Una Mae Boyett. All of the Boyett's were members of the church of Christ and most of them are buried at the Prairie Hill Cemetery in Prairie Hill, Texas. Mom lived until she was nine around Prairie Hill. Her dad was a sharecropper and he died in 1941, leaving her mother with two young girls. Her dad's death at such a young age left an indelible memory that followed her all her life. Her mother remarried Ben Moore who became a wonderful step-dad to Jimie. The family moved to Houston where she lived most of her life. Even though she spent her last few years in Dallas she was a proud Houstonian, and even said she wouldn't mind living in downtown Houston! It was in Houston that she met and married the love of her life, William Dickinson, Jr. on October 10, 1948. Jimie was preceded in death by her father, Parker Boyett, her mother Una Mae Boyett Moore, one sister, Corlea Bunch (Charles), one brother Franklin (Linda) Moore, and her husband of 70 years William Dickinson, Jr. She is survived by one brother George (Mary) Moore, two sons, Jerry (Judy)

Dickinson, Billy (Judy) Dickinson, and two daughters Marilyn (Steve) Bowen, and Carolyn (Richard) Keele. She is also survived by ten grandchildren and twelve great-grandchildren whom she loved and cherished and who all called her Memaw. Jimie was only 16 when she and William got married and only 17 when the first son, Jerry was born. She tells of getting on a bus in downtown Houston and someone commented on her beautiful baby doll. "This is not a doll," she replied. "This is my baby!" She was a housewife and mother her whole life, and proud of that role. She had been raised in the church of Christ and devotedly took her four small children to church before Dad obeyed the gospel. It was due to her dedication and influence that he became a Christian and faithful member of the church for over 60 years. Even when Dad could not take the family to gospel meetings because of work mom would take the children on her own. She even took them to debates back at a time when folks were more interested in Bible discussions on important themes such as Scriptural authority. She left a great legacy, along with Dad, of putting the church first. Jimie and Bill were married over 70 years and they faced challenges like every marriage, but as mom was apt to say repeatedly, "They never separated in all that time!" They stayed true to their vows to each other and to the Lord. Mom had some serious health issues in her final years and Dad meticulously tended to her. Both of them were in wheelchairs just before Dad's passing and on one of their last visits together they held hands, kissed, and said how much they loved each other. Mom was a great cook and one of her specialties was shrimp gumbo. Dad was raised in Alabama and had never even eaten shrimp before he came to Texas. He loved mom's shrimp gumbo! We all did. However, she really didn't like shrimp that much and she always made him peel the shrimp while she worked on the raux. Her dressing at Thanksgiving was also her specialty and the grandkids especially loved it. Her granddaughter Leah asked for her recipe and she really did not have one. She told Leah how to make it and added, "If you have some old bread or an old biscuit, just throw that in too!" She was a unique personality. She was a wonderful wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, great-grandmother and Christian, and will be missed, but we believe we will see her again in heaven. We cling to the promise of our Lord and Savior! Terry Hays, her grandson in law led the beautiful singing at the graveside service and Steve Bowen, son in law, read the obituary and told a few stories about Memaw. Melvin Blalock spoke words of encouragement and consolation which we all appreciated so much. Her six grandsons were pallbearers. She was laid to rest in the beautiful National Cemetery in Dallas

beside Dad on Tuesday, September 10, 2019. We wish to thank all her caregivers who were so generous and loving. Thanks to all our dear brethren in Christ for your encouragement and love. —Jerry Dickinson

CORRECTION: In a recent issue it was mistakenly reported that Gary Cannon had led the singing at the funeral of Bro. Dickinson. It should have read that Gary Oden led the singing and this was per Bro. Dickinson's request. Our apologies DKL.

Field Reports

Don L. King, 1147 Sherry Way, Livermore, CA 94550, old_paths@juno.com, October 7. We appreciate the cooperation of some of our preachers in sending field reports. Brethren really enjoy reading where you have been and the results of your work. We hope more will begin sending reports as well as articles. A field report should be about 1/4 of a page of single-spaced printing. An article should be about 2 1/2 to 3 pages of the same printing. Let us hear from you soon, by the 12th of the month, please. Since getting home from MO we have been pretty busy preaching nearby as well as at the home church. We anticipate making the yearly trip to the Philippines in January. It is always a joy to be with our brethren in that Country. Livermore is supporting a large number of preachers there and we would welcome others becoming involved. If you would like to support a Filipino preacher, contact me. You can send your support directly to the preacher and he will then make regular reports to your congregation about his work. Your help is needed, so please consider supporting someone. This is a wonderful work and produces many baptisms every year. Lord bless the faithful.

Paul O. Nichols, 14217 Rosehill, Overland Park, KS 66221, pon.wjn.ks@juno.com, October 5. Time is swiftly passing, and soon there will be but a memory of us, as it has been of others since the beginning of time. About all the older preachers are gone who stood firmly for the truth and held the line against modern innovations which have plagued the church of our Lord. In time past we have had private discussions and public debates with preachers who have advocated individual cups in the communion, the denominational Sunday School system of teaching, instrument music in the worship, and fellowship of congregations and men who have compromised. We love these people who are in religious error and want to see them saved, just

as we ourselves want to go to Heaven. But, brethren, compromise is not the answer. We are told to "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude v3), and all preachers should prepare to obey this without compromise. We are not politicians who seek the favor of the majority. The apostle John warned, "Marvel not my brethren if the world hate you" (1 John 1:3) ...I am now ninety-seven, and realize that my usefulness to the Cause of Christ is very limited, and my "debt to nature" may come at any time. I suffer mentally and spiritually when I hear of congregations closing their doors, and selling our places of worship to the world. Remember, time is swiftly passing, and preparation for eternity is now.

Carl M. Johnson, 1400 Northcrest Dr., Ada, OK 74820, carlmj@cableone.net, Oct.3. We just closed a gospel meeting with the Blue Springs Kentucky congregation, located 7 miles south of Mt. Vernon. This was our first time to be with the Blue Springs church and we received a warm welcome. Zade McClure worked with the church for many years until his health failed him, but the church seems to be doing very well. We had large crowds for each service with over 100 folks attending on the Lord's Day. Among those in the congregation who have assumed the mantle of leadership is Marcus Reppert, Zade McClure's grandson. Marcus is highly respected in the area and is a tireless worker, Philip Permenter and family have recently moved to Mt. Vernon and are an asset to the church. Several preachers attended the meeting including Phillip Scott, Doug Hawkins, and Eric Bullock. Our meeting at Ada with Jimmy Cating just concluded this past Lord's Day. Jimmy did his usual superb job of preaching. One of his sermons is titled "Dig Deeper" and it is obvious Jimmy digs deep in his study of the Scriptures and in his sermon preparation. Lord willing, Phyllis and I will head to Kansas City, Missouri, next week for a five-day meeting, and then to Weatherford, Texas, for our last scheduled meeting of the year. Thank you so much brothers and sisters in Christ for your prayers and encouragement over the past year. May God continue to bless us all!

Wayne Fussell, 6126 Land O' Trees, Shreveport, LA 71119 wfusse111@comcast.net. The congregation here in Shreveport was blessed to hear the preaching of Jonathan Edwards recently. This young man thrilled us with the truths he preached in such an interesting and powerful way. Any congregation would be wise to book him for a meeting. He has published some workbooks that you would do well to order from him. I am using one in a study right now. I am sorry to say that I had to

cancel my meeting at West Plains, MO. This old body suddenly needed a pacemaker to keep the heart beating properly. I hope to hold that meeting at a future date. I continue to sing, "God is so good to me"! God bless my wonderful brethren and sisters in Christ.

David Griffin, Lebanon, MO 65536, davidgriffin75@gmail.com, October 2019. It is a great blessing to be able to work as a preacher of the gospel. The Lee's Summit congregation (near Lebanon, MO) is at peace and committed to the Lord and the church. It is a pleasure to be with them. For some time now, I have been conducting studies with some of the young people here in the congregation. They are the future of the church, and we want to see them well-grounded. It is thrilling to see them take such an interest in the Bible and the church. On the downside, for the past few months I have been quite inhibited due to "issues" with my back. A recent MRI revealed I have a herniated disc in the lumbar region (lower back), which explains a lot of things over the past several months. The doctors have charted out a course of treatment that, the Lord willing, will remedy the problem, but if not, at least alleviate it. We'll have to wait and see. I'm able to preach as long as I do so while sitting down. Because long-distance travel has been essentially impossible, I have had to cancel some meetings and a trip to Mexico for the preachers' study in Monterey. I was looking forward to these appointments and was rather disappointed to have to cancel them. I trust, however, that at some future point, I can reschedule and go forward as planned. May God bless all involved in the Lord's service!

Greg Gay, 3816 Tambos Trl., Edmond, OK 73034, papagreg@aol.com, 916-804-3787, October 11, 2019. Since last report, preaching appointments have included the Texas Labor Day Meeting capably hosted by Fossil Creek, plus Grapevine, TX, Moore, OK, Tulsa, OK (11th. St.), as well as our home congregation of Piedmont, OK. We attended 11th. St.'s annual Last-Saturday-of-September singing where we used a special book of older songs compiled by Daniel Smith. We had two hours of wonderful singing in the morning followed by the evening's enjoyment of Broken Arrow's meeting with Kevin Presley. We have also enjoyed attending the gospel meetings of Jimmy Cating at Ada, OK and Todd Richardson at Moore, OK. We were in a meeting at Wichita Falls, TX October 2-6. Many friends of our family from past decades are there including Arley Fancher and Ted Warwick and their families. We lived there for a brief period in the mid-1950's when my daddy, Sonny Gay, was singing on radio and

television with Clovis, Leo, and Travis Cook, and the Cook Sisters. Mark Bailey is now working with the congregation and the work is off to a great start from all indications. There were many community visitors and the meeting closed with one baptism, a young man who has been studying with Marcus Mathis. We enjoyed the hospitality of Mark and Janice Bailey who welcomed us in their home and even gave me a ride home when Cassie needed to return home early unexpectedly due to a family illness. We look forward to our next meetings with the brethren in Jamesville, MO, October 18-20 and Green Oaks, Arlington, TX, November 6-10.

Melvin Blalock, 214 Pearl St. Cleburne Texas 76031, October 4, 2019. I remain busy in the Lord's work in the North Texas area. I write articles every week which are published in several newspapers in the area. These articles are posted every week on Facebook under the South Walnut Church of Christ. Recently we have begun having a large readership and positive response on Facebook. Our worship services at the South Walnut Church of Christ are also live streamed on Facebook every Sunday. We have been saddened by the departure of many of our brethren into eternity. We have attended several funerals in the last several months and I have preached some of those services. We recently attended the services of Brother Bill Dickinson, and a short time later, his sweet wife, Jimie. These good Christian people have had a profound influence on our brotherhood. All of their children are faithful to the Lord. Their sons, Jerry and Billy, are two great gospel preachers and dear friends of mine. For the last few years their daughter, Marilyn and granddaughter, Rachel and her husband, Michael Osburn, along with their children have been an important part of our congregation at Cleburne. Their daughter, Carolyn Keele, and her husband Richard, live in Houston, and attend the congregation at La Marque. The influence of Bill and Jimie Dickinson continue to live on in the Lord's church. I was recently, invited to speak at the congregation at McGregor, TX. I enjoyed being with these good brethren for both services on the fifth Sunday in September. From what I witnessed I am optimistic about the future of this congregation. The influence of Brother Wayne McKamie is keenly felt among these brethren. He is loved and respected. I had the wonderful privilege of having lunch with him and spending the afternoon in his company. I was thankful also for the privilege of visiting with his wife, Jean, who is confined to a health care facility. This couple has been a great blessing to the kingdom of God. We are thankful for our faithful brethren everywhere, and pray for God's blessings on this great brotherhood.

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WALKS THROUGH THE BIBLE...

CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

By JERRY DICKINSON

“And while He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and took Him. And suddenly, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear. But Jesus said to him, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.”

(Matthew 26:47-52)

“Put your sword in its place!” That is a categorical imperative. In philosophy and ethics a categorical imperative refers to a moral obligation that is true regardless of circumstances or other considerations. The famous philosopher Emmanuel Kant described a categorical imperative as “an unconditional moral obligation which is binding in all circumstances and is not dependent on a person’s inclinations or purposes.” The “golden rule” is a categorical imperative. We are to treat others, Jesus declared, as we would have others treat us. It does not matter if they are friend or enemy. It does not matter what they have done to us or how they have mistreated us. Our moral obligation is to treat others as we would have them treat us. Period. There are no exceptions to the rule. Circumstances and our own inclinations are no reason for us to ignore the moral rule our Lord has given. It is a categorical imperative.

This is true of the statement to Peter, “Put away your sword!” Peter was trying to defend himself and Jesus, but the Lord commanded him to put his sword back in its place, and then Jesus stated a universal truth. “All who take the sword will perish by the sword.” That is true for all people, under all circumstances, at all times, and for all time. It certainly is a truth that we as Christians accept and honor. We do not take up the sword under any circumstances or for any purpose. It is as much a categorical imperative as the golden rule!

But what about cases of self-defense? What about serving in the military to defend our country against enemies? What about serving on the police force to defend and protect others? Are there circumstances and purposes that set aside the words of Jesus? What did the early Christians do when they were under, not hypothetical, but real threat and persecution? In Acts chapter nine we read that Saul breathed out threats against the church and literally went into homes and dragged out men and women. Some were tortured and some died. What did the Saints do? Did they arm themselves and form militias to fight back? Did they draw their swords?

When Paul was in prison he wrote his wonderful “prison epistles” and explained that what had happened to him had actually fallen out for the furtherance of the gospel. (Philippians 1:12) He repeatedly asked for the brethren to pray for him and “remember my chains.” Interestingly, he never asked for brethren to raise an armed force and come to break him out of prison. The early disciples never entertained for a moment the notion of using violence to come to Paul’s aid. No. They understood clearly and categorically the teaching of Jesus. “Put up your sword!” They understood, too, that the Lord’s words were not just for Peter on that one occasion in the garden, but for all Christians at all times, under all circumstances, and for all time.

Awhile back I had a discussion with a brother in Christ who maintains that a Christian can serve as a police officer and carry (and use if necessary) a weapon. Inexplicably, however, this brother did not believe a Christian can serve in the military which I tried to point out to him was the height of inconsistency. Be that as it may, he argued that Christians under some circumstances can use the sword (weapons) to defend themselves and others. My response was: “We have a scripture where Jesus declared, ‘Put away your sword!’ Can you give me a scripture where Jesus or an Apostle of Jesus declared, ‘Take up your sword!’ and defend yourself or anyone else?” Of course the brother sought to avoid the question and insist that everyone has the right to defend himself and others. It all depends on the situation and circumstances he argued.

I believe the words of Jesus are a categorical imperative; a moral obligation which is binding in all circumstances and is not dependent on circumstances or our feelings or motivations. At the age of nineteen I appeared before the draft board in Baytown, Texas to explain why I was a conscientious objector and could not serve in the military. I was asked what I would do if I or my family was attacked. I was honest and said I was not sure what I would do in the heat of the moment, but I knew what my moral obligation was. Jesus, my Lord, enjoined me to put away the sword. Also, Paul assures us that God is faithful, and will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able, and will provide a way of escape. We stand on that promise! We leave the circumstances to God. Our obligation is to follow the example of our Lord and resist not evil with evil. My obligation is to obey the voice of the Savior. “Put away your sword!”