

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. 1

BRETHREN, PLEASE READ

All materials intended for publication after December 15 should be sent to Ronny Wade as we intend to be out of the United States during the month of January. His address is P.O. Box 14352 Springfield, MO 65814. Also, through the month of January anyone may subscribe or renew their subscription to the paper for only \$10. That is 1/3 off the regular price and we hope many will take advantage of this opportunity. Please mention this to your home congregation and your friends. We hope to have announcements made at the New Year meetings as well as other meetings around the USA. The paper is still relevant and needed so let's get behind it and tell others as well. Last but not least, we want to thank Brother Matt Martin for his service over the last several years in taking care of our subscriptions, etc. We know that is a time-consuming job. Brother David Griffin will be doing this work now and we thank him for agreeing to do the work. DLK

WHY CHURCHES CHANGE

By *KEVIN W. PRESLEY*

The world is changing at a dizzying pace. Our culture is rapidly adapting to new social standards and norms and this is no less reflected in the religious community. If you had suggested fifty years ago that some mainstream denominations would be embracing same-sex relationships, we would have found it hard to believe. The past decade alone has seen the acceleration of doctrinal, moral, and philosophical change to the point that it has caused an upheaval in the religious world. What about your church? Is it changing with the times? And should it? Should we expect the church to follow the lead of the culture around it? Does the church you're a part of tolerate and practice things that a few years ago would have been soundly rejected by the leadership and the majority of the membership?

In 2 Peter 1:12-15, the apostle expresses concern that the church would change by drifting from apostolic teaching. He writes: “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.” In the next chapter he warns that false teachers would arise and lead the church into apostasy. It seems like nearly every day we hear of another religious leader or organization changing some doctrinal position to be more in line with contemporary culture. Scriptural traditions or moral truths long held almost universally by professing Christians are being reconsidered and mostly abandoned in an effort to make the church more acceptable and appealing to the world. (1 Co 11:2; Rom 12:2) Is your church abandoning its stand against sin and evil? Is it becoming more liberal and worldly with each passing year? Such changes are not without reason.

First, some churches change because they adopt a pragmatic view of church growth. This is a prime motivation in much of what we're witnessing in some churches today. Pragmatism is the idea that the effectiveness of a practice or idea determines whether it is valid and worthwhile. In other words, if it works it must be right. If it appeals to more people then it must be good. The pragmatist doesn't ask “what saith the scriptures?”, he asks “what saith the seeker?”. The result is, churches operate like businesses with a quota and a bottom line and the measure of success is the size of the crowd, the standing of a church in the community, the amount of money brought in, the popularity of the preacher, and so forth. When a church turns to pragmatism as its model for growth, the first thing that is sacrificed is truth because truth is often offensive to the world. Sinners don't like to be told they're sinners (John 3:20-21) and so the pragmatic church turns away from any kind of preaching or messaging that involves identifying and condemning sin. While the gospel is a message of love and entreaty, it's also a message of change and repentance (Luke 24:27). A gospel that doesn't convict a man of sin and lead him to give up

continued on page 6

CONTENTS

Vol. XCI No. 1



ADVOCATE

Why Churches Change 1
 Editorial 2
 Querist Column 3
 Who Do Men Say That I, the Son of Man, Am?... 4
 Do Not Be Deceived 5
 Bears and a Youth Gang 8
 Announcements..... 10
 Our Departed..... 10
 Field Reports 10
 WALKS THROUGH THE BIBLE..... 12

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Editorial

FACING THE FACTS

By DON L. KING

Facing the facts is usually not a pleasant thing for us. When we do so, we are forced to see things as they really are and not as we would prefer. It is also that way when dealing with spiritual issues and the church. We may try to make excuses for poor attendance at services by members, poorly presented lessons, (usually a lack of preparation and study) lackluster attendance at gospel meetings from surrounding areas, etc. However, when the facts are faced and we are forced to see things as they really are; it is often that the desire to be there, by those we love, just is not present. We also try to excuse some for coming to services late as a regular thing. Again, when the facts are faced there can be only one answer: they don't leave home early enough. The same people who can't seem to arrive in time for the beginning of church services don't seem to have that problem arriving at work, ball games, or social events on time. What are the facts? It would appear to be a lack of desire to be prompt for worship. Yes, that is facing the facts.

In Revelation chapter 2, Jesus speaks of a problem the church at Ephesus experienced. Our Lord was complimentary of them in several areas but was not happy that they had left their first love. The Ephesian brethren had not maintained the ardor and devotion of their love of their earlier history. You see, first works are always accomplished under the influence of first love. Ephesus had lost that. Could this be a problem where you and I worship even today? There is little doubt about it. Some of us recall when services at gospel meetings were filled to capacity where now it is less than that, to be kind. The facts are seemingly plain. A large crowd is present on Sunday morning but about half of that at the evening services and perhaps less on midweek. When this is the norm, there has to be a reason and it isn't difficult to fathom if we face the facts. Do you remember when nearby congregations cooperated with each other even to the point of attending each other's midweek services? Now, it sometimes is difficult to get even the local members to attend every night of a meeting at their own congregation. The excuse is made that times are busier now and perhaps that is true. However, we all still manage to do what we wish, and go where we wish, as often as we wish. Busy times have not stopped that,

continued on page 7

QUERIST COLUMN

By CLINT DEFRANCE

1. Should Christians participate in political protest and/or job strikes? (GA)

Response: Political protest is not the business of a Christian. The Bible teaches that we should live as strangers and foreigners in this world, honoring and respecting the laws and statutes inasmuch as they do not force us to violate the law of God (1 Peter 2:11-17). Christians should always be a voice of support and comfort to the marginalized and oppressed, however, our message is that salvation comes through Jesus - not through the policies of some political party.

In some cases, job strikes are legal ways for employees to petition for better treatment, raises, and other necessities. In cases where the law does not allow for strikes, Christians should do their best to avoid involvement in them. There may also be cases where the Christian should choose to suffer an injustice for the sake of the gospel. However, there is nothing wrong with a Christian using legal opportunities to point out and protest injustice and the deprivation of civil rights and privileges (Acts 16:37).

2. What role do angels play in our salvation? (CA)

Response: Hebrews 1:14 says, regarding angels, "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" Clearly, there is some great work that God assigns to angels on behalf of Christians. The word angel means "messenger." In some contexts, it refers to human messengers and in other places it refers to powerful, immortal, spirit beings which God created to serve and worship Him. Some angels have sinned, and these are cast down into Tartarus (hell) waiting for the day of everlasting destruction against evil (2 Peter 2:4). The fallen angels have no positive role in our lives. They are servants of the Devil and war against us (Ephesians 6:10-13). There are also holy angels (Matthew 25:31). These angels have been used by God throughout history as messengers of revelation, of aid and assistance, and of judgments. In the gospel age, God does not use angels to share the messages of salvation (Acts 8:26; 10:1-6; 11:13-14; Romans 10:14-17). Throughout the Scripture,

angelic appearances are very rare and we should not expect to see an angel now. However, they are still the invisible armies of heaven. The scripture indicates that God continues to employ them in accomplishing most of the great works He does on our behalf (James 5:4; Matthew 18:10). Although we know of them and their work only by faith in the Word of God, angels are real and we should thank the Lord for the ministries they perform for us. For more information write - Church of Christ, 2121 S. Columbia Ave. Suite LL2, Tulsa, OK 74114 and request a CD copy of "There Appeared an Angel." This is a detailed study of the subject.



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WHO DO MEN SAY THAT I, THE SON OF MAN, AM? MATTHEW 16:13-20

By AARON BATTEY

Open up the New Testament to Matthew 16:13-20 and read what follows. This passage of scripture has been the flame of many heated arguments between denominations throughout the years. Catholics adamantly ascribe the “rock” of v. 18 to Peter, claiming this passage is the scriptural pointer to Peter as the first archbishop (pope) of the church. Protestants and Churches of Christ consistently teach the “rock” of v. 18 is none other than Christ Jesus. In this study, lean in and listen to the whispering voice of the Christ, speaking through the pen of Matthew, as He dispels all doubt with His artful allusions to the Old Testament.

From the very first verse (13), notice the conversation is entirely about, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” The question is not, “Who do men say that you, the Son of Jonah, are?” The “Son of Man” title is a direct allusion to prophecy from Daniel 7. There in Daniel 7:13-14, the Son of Man comes in the clouds, sits by the Ancient of Days, and is given dominion, glory, and an everlasting kingdom. Peter himself recognizes Jesus to be the fulfillment of the Messianic king in Acts 2:34-36. In the gospel of Matthew, the “Son of Man” title is Jesus’ favorite title for Himself, as He no doubt hints with each use of this title that Jesus is the Son of Man that Daniel prophesied about. “Son of Man” appears 82 times across all four gospels and 30 times in Matthew alone (Quarles, Charles. *A Theology of Matthew*. P & R Publishing, 2013, pp. 89). During a later conversation in Matthew 16, Jesus makes a second allusion to Daniel 7, as He makes reference to His coming for judgment (Mt. 16:27-28). Daniel’s picture of the Son of Man is undoubtedly a heavy influence in Matthew 16, and the backdrop for Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 16:13-20.

Now, keep Daniel’s book of prophecy close to the mind’s eye while the “rock” of Matthew 16:18 is examined. If the traditional Catholic distinction that Peter is the rock of v. 18 is true, then this is what happens in the conversation of Matthew 16:13-20. Jesus asks, “Who is the Son of Man,” proceeds to answer a completely different question as He discusses the fact that Peter is the foundation of the church, and when it is all said and done, He has not answered the question, “Who is the Son of Man?” This is illogical. This absent-mindedness sounds like something an average Joe might do, but not the antics of the Son of Man-Jesus Christ. Instead, this more orderly flow of thought proceeds from the mind of Jesus and rhymes with logic. Jesus asks, “Who is the Son

of Man?” The Son of Man naturally reminds a faithful Jew like Peter of Daniel’s prophecy in Daniel 7. Jesus then proceeds to answer His question by identifying the Son of Man in Daniel 7 with the stone in Daniel 2. If one is a careful reader, he will notice the theme of Daniel is the Kingdom of Heaven. He will also take note that Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 are two separate visions that compliment each other, telling the same story from a different perspective. In Daniel 2, there is a stone that strikes a great image representing the kingdoms of the earth (Daniel 2:44-45). The stone grows into a great mountain (2:35), and this represents the beginning of the kingdom of God (2:44-45). The rock in Daniel 2:34, 36, and 45 represents Jesus Christ, the Son of Man. Just as Daniel says, “You (Nebuchadnezzar) are this head of gold,” in v. 38, so Jesus is the stone. To speak of the head of a kingdom is to speak of the kingdom itself. This is illustrated by Paul in Eph. 1:22-23, where Jesus is called the head of the church. The same thing said of the stone in Daniel 2:44-45 is a parallel to what is said of the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14, and these are the prophecies directly alluded to by Jesus in Matthew 16:18.

Perhaps the allusion to Daniel goes over the head of most people. Consider a simpler question. Is Jesus God? Yes, even Catholics believe Jesus is deity. If Jesus is talking to a group of Jewish disciples who have listened to the Old Testament in the synagogue their whole life, and Jesus says His kingdom will be built on a “rock”, what Biblical reference would come to Peter’s mind? Here is the answer. Peter would, without doubt, think of the oh-so-many references to God and the future Messiah as the Rock of Israel. There are a host of Old Testament prophets that ascribe this everlasting, solid and immovable “Rock” status to God and Messiah (i.e. Gen. 49:24; Deut. 32:15; 2 Sam. 23:3; Ps. 62:7; 78:35; Isaiah 8:14; 28:16; 44:8). Furthermore, Jesus had, on a previous occasion, compared His teachings to the foundation of a house built on a “rock” (Matt. 7:24-25). Jesus is the Rock, “the stone the builders rejected” (Ps. 118:22; Acts 4:11): the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:19-21). There seems to be little room for doubt. If the disciples do not immediately think of Daniel’s Son of Man prophecy, certainly Daniel’s prophecy of the stone in Daniel 2, coupled with the plethora of references to God and Messiah as the “Rock” of Israel, would reveal the answer to the question of Matthew 16:13, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” The question was answered decisively for these Jews; thus, they are instructed not to reveal this new knowledge of the Christ until the time is ripe (Matthew 16:20). Read the Old and New Testaments together, and do not let faith rest on the traditions of men.

DO NOT BE DECEIVED*By MATT TRENT*

In his final epistle, Paul explains, “in the last days perilous times will come” (II Timothy 3:1). In these perilous times, men will not serve God but self, to the ruin of those they influence. In these times, “evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse” (II Timothy 3:13). Why? How do they not see the negative consequences of evil? Why is repentance not more common this time? The reason is stated in the end of the previously mentioned passage: “deceiving and being deceived” (II Timothy 3:13). Deception is the fuel of the perilous times. The reason that perilous times continue to get worse is that men are deceived.

Deception is a powerful tool of the devil. He is a liar and the father of it (John 8:44). He is working very hard to deceive, “the nations” (Revelation 12:9). He uses the message of false Christs (Matthew 24:5), false prophets (Matthew 24:11), and false teachers (II Peter 2:15; I John 2:26). Sadly, people have fallen prey to false signs and sorcery (Revelation 13:14; 18:23; 19:20). In spite of these temporal accomplishments, the great deceiver will be destroyed in the end (Revelation 20: 1 0).

In the midst of perilous times, Christians ought to obey the admonition Paul gave Timothy in the very next verse: “continue in the things you have learned and been assured of” (II Timothy 3:14). Paul continues to explain that we have the ultimate weapon to combat the deception fueling these perilous times: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (II Timothy 3:16-17). God has given man Scripture, the Bible, to protect and guide us in these perilous times.

In fact, we actually find several examples in the New Testament where Paul actually says, “do not be deceived.” In each example, we are equipped to fight the wiles of the devil (Ephesians 6:10). We will examine three explicit warnings of Paul.

Morals Matter

The first explicit warning is found in the book of I Corinthians. In this letter, Paul writes to a confused church living in a very sinful city. Paul corrects their sinful factions (chapters 1-4), exposes their sinful approach to dealing with problems (chapters 5-6), and

answers their many questions (chapters 7-16).

In I Corinthians 6 Paul explains why it is sinful for Christians to seek rulings from non-Christian judges to settle their civil disputes. The problems they are seeking to settle in courts of law were those that should have been settled with the counsel of a wise brother (I Corinthians 6:5). In I Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul provides this insight:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

The reason that non-Christians are unqualified to make these kinds of judgments is that they do not have the same moral standard as the Christians do. When we talk about a moral standard we mean deciding what is right and what is wrong. The general view of the world regarding what is right and wrong is different than the view of Jesus. In the world, each of these behaviors can be glorified and promoted, often by those in positions of prominence.

In this passage Paul lists ten sins which will cost men their souls! However, to call these behaviors wrong in our time is not popular. To many in the world, those who teach this moral standard are backwards and uneducated. These kinds of accusations are not new. In the beginning of the book of I Corinthians we learn that the gospel is seen by the Jews as a “stumbling block” and by the Greeks as “foolishness” (I Corinthians 1:23).

We believe that these things are wrong because the Bible says they are. We know that God determines right from wrong, not man. We must continue to call things sin that God calls sin. We must hold to the right or wrong of Scripture without compromise.

Friends Matter

The second explicit warning about deception is found in I Corinthians 15:33: “Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.” Again we find Paul identifying an area where we ought to be watchful.

In this passage, Paul is actually quoting an ancient Greek playwright named Menander. In a time when the ruling class was very sensitive to material perceived to be critical of them, Menander focused on telling the

stories about the average Athenian. Having observed the lives of many an Athenian, he could say, “evil company corrupts good habits.” This truth is so obvious, even an uninspired, polytheistic Greek playwright could see it!

The truth is, our friends have an enormous influence on our future. The value of good friends is one of the themes of the book of Proverbs, a book written to help the young attain wisdom. The wise man should choose his friends carefully (Proverbs 12:26) choosing to walk with wise men rather than fools (Proverbs 13:20; 14:7). A wise man will avoid making friends with an angry man (Proverbs 22:24-25). In these, and other passages as well, we learn that one of the keys to living a wise life is choosing the right friends.

This can sometimes be a difficult thing to do. It can be hard to find friends and we might sometimes be tempted to embrace friendships we should not because of loneliness or a desire to fit in socially. The key to choosing the right friends is to first remember our best friend. Jesus teaches us, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus is our best friend. Any friend that moves us away from Jesus is no friend at all. Any social setting that asks us to distance ourselves from Jesus is a social setting we should not be part of. We should prayerfully seek out friends that help us stay closer to Jesus and that open doors for us to invite others to become friends with Jesus as well (Colossians 4:2-6).

Consequences Matter

The final explicit warning we will consider is found in Galatians 6:7-8: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” This warning is enhanced by the reminder that “God is not mocked.”

This agricultural image is absolutely true in nature. No one ever plants strawberries expecting to reap watermelons nor a pecan tree expecting a palm tree to grow. We know that what we plant is what we will reap.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. There is no one that will escape this truth. Many fool themselves into believing that it is different for them. It is not.

This rule changes for no one. No matter who we are or where we are, we will reap what we have sown.

This can be very painful, if our choices have been sinful. An example of the pain of reaping what we sow is found in the life of King David. To read the early

portions of the story of David is to read of a courageous man of faith. David seems to be able to find a way to honor God, no matter how difficult the circumstance. Then we read about the Bathsheba incident (II Samuel 11). In one short span, David becomes an adulterer, a liar, and even a murderer. This change is shocking to read. Sadly, these bad decisions lead to many bad consequences. Many of these consequences are manifest in David’s own children. He is forgiven of the guilt of his sin (Psalm 32). However, he also acknowledges that “my sin is always before me” (Psalm 51:3). We cannot control consequences. Paul explains that “he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption” (Galatians 6:8).

Thankfully, the law of sowing and reaping is not always unpleasant. In cases where good decisions are made, the harvest is full of joy. This is the case in the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-52). His life illustrates the fact that good decisions lead to good consequences. Joseph led a good life, no matter what circumstance he was in or what anyone else was doing. Over the course of his life, nearly every person of significance let him down including his father, his brothers, Potiphar and his wife, and the butler. When these people let Joseph down it resulted in suffering on his part. Yet in each case, he just kept doing the right thing. One good decision after another finally led Joseph to the second highest position in Egypt and to reconciliation with his family. These happy consequences are the result of his good decisions. While we are not all promised this degree of success, we are promised that good decisions lead to good consequences. Paul promises, “he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Galatians 6:8). The ultimate good consequence for the faithful will be the reward of eternal life on the last day.

Conclusion

The devil is seeking to deceive the world. We know that he is succeeding in many areas as we endure the perilous time that Paul promised was coming (II Timothy 3). In order to protect ourselves in this time, we do well to heed the explicit warnings provided by Paul. Do not be deceived: morals matter, our friends matter, and consequences matter!

WHY CHURCHES....continued from page one

his sin and allow the Lord to change his life is not good news. It’s the worst kind of news because it is false doctrine. Churches lose their way if they believe they have to change the message of scripture to make it more

palatable and acceptable to a lost and sinful world.

Second, sometimes churches change because they desire to be like the “nations” about them. For example, the restoration plea of the 19th century was a response to the sectarian mode of reformation. The appeal was to speak as the bible speaks and be silent where the bible is silent (1 Peter 4:11). Such is a righteous and worthy plea and makes us distinct from all others. Where human creeds, humanly devised practices, and man-given names have fragmented the religious world into dozens of denominations and a confusing myriad of sects and factions, the ideal of the restoration is to follow no creed but the bible; to call bible things by bible names and do bible things in bible ways (1 Cor 11:1-2). But that plea is being abandoned as churches seek to be like the exciting and growing religious groups around them. 1 Samuel 8 tells of how the people looked about them and envied the other nations and their forms of government. They demanded of Samuel that a king be appointed to rule over them. God replied to Samuel: “Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” They wanted a king, not because it was God’s will but because they envied and idolized other nations. God told Samuel that in so doing, they were rejecting His own Lordship over them.

Third, churches also change because they become ignorant of the scriptures. Hosea 4:6 says “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...” When people aren’t familiar with the doctrines of the New Testament they become easy prey for change agents and false teaching. It is the primary responsibility of elders and teachers to build the congregation up in the truth and guard the flock from wolves and from the natural tendency to wander off into danger. When little doctrine is taught and the teaching ceases to be challenging to the hearers, the church will soon be on a dangerous trajectory. In some pulpits today there is little emphasis upon substantive theology and sound doctrine. Faithful exegesis and emphasis upon doctrinal teaching has been replaced with devotional, feel-good pep talks. Little scripture is quoted but instead, authors and psychologists are cited; jokes and stories abound; theatrics and dramatism are used to illustrate some shallow and vapid social or moral lesson and as a result people are left spiritually starved and those churches are easily led in every which direction by the winds of culture and change.

Fourth, when churches drift away from the truth, it is often because they are taking a lower view of scriptural

authority. In other words, no longer is the bible looked at as a pattern for the work and worship of the church. Churches of Christ who long ago ignored the biblical model for one loaf and one cup in the Lord’s Supper and one assembly are now reaping the whirlwind. The inconsistent application of their long-held hermeneutic has come back to bite them when their descendants are no longer concerning themselves with such requirements. No longer do they seek a command or example from the scriptures to see if their practice is right in God’s eyes but instead, they have gone the way of others in saying that God has no pattern for how we are to worship. They interpret plain statements in the scriptures in such a way as to explain them away and essentially make them meaningless to the modern church. Paul’s plain and emphatic teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 has been set aside and “reasoned away” to allow for women preachers and elders, etc.

The silence of the scriptures used to be respected in churches of Christ. Many churches that once rejected instrumental music in worship because it is never commanded or authorized in the New Testament are now deciding that since the bible doesn’t explicitly forbid instrumental music, then it should now be employed in worship. Where will that stop? At what point do we stop saying the Bible doesn’t mean what it says? One would hope there is a line where enough is enough and it prompts serious introspection about where churches have come from and where they are ultimately headed. The agents of change, however, are never satisfied. The spirit of Innovation never reaches a point where it is enough. Churches that meddle with them who are given to change (Prov 24:21) will often leave the faith altogether. Some changes are understandable and even needful but not when they trifle with divine ordinances. Change for the sake of change; change for the sake of ‘keeping up’; or change for sake of appealing to the carnally minded is a dangerous path for any church to start down. The appeal of the weeping prophet Jeremiah to wayward Israel in Jeremiah 6:16 is still true and ever timely: “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 for your souls.” —OPA

FACING THE FACTS...continued from page two

have they? No, but perhaps our desire to be involved in spiritual things is not quite what it once was. If that is the case, just know the Lord has not failed to notice; and He is not happy with such behavior. He wasn’t with

Ephesus and He isn't with us. Face the facts.

We recall a meeting we were holding one time and on Lord's Day morning it was pouring rain. The church building sat at the top of a steep hill, and we noticed a woman walking up the hill in the heavy rain. Someone remarked that she was an out of duty member. I walked out in the rain to her and invited her to come in and worship with us. Her answer: "Oh, it is raining too hard to go to church!" The desire that she once had was apparently gone.

In Romans 10:1 the apostle wrote: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." Paul was also of Israel, though a Roman citizen, and he really had an earnest desire for his brethren to enjoy salvation. His desire was great enough that he worked toward that end. He traveled, preached, and did all he could to help them be saved. However, he had a great desire for his own salvation as well. As he wrote the Philippian letter, he said in chapter 3:7-9: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." What is immediately seen here is that Paul had a fervency for spiritual things. He loved them, put them first, and was willing to let everything else go in order to attain that end.

Now, in contrast look at us in our time. What about church members who gladly leave a meeting where the gospel is being ably preached by a humble gospel preacher, to go to some event of pleasure? A ball game, car race, amusement park trip, visit with non-member family, etc. All gospel preachers have had to feel sadness and frustration when such happens. The preacher has left home and loved ones only to realize the gospel he is preaching is not their first love. Those are the facts, and he has to face them. Think on these things.

BEARS AND A YOUTH GANG

By *TERRY STUDDARD*

II Kings 2:23-25

23 And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.

24 And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth

two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.

25 And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.

Elijah had been the great prophet to Israel. We remember him from Mt. Carmel. Discouraged, he thought the entire nation had turned its back on God.

I Kings 19:13-14

13 And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah?

14 And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

God still had 7,000 faithful Israelites who refused to bow the knee to Baal.

I Kings 19:18 - Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.

Elisha was selected by God Himself to succeed Elijah. Elisha was called when he was just a teenager, plowing his fields. About 7 or 8 years later, Elisha followed Elijah to the eastern banks of the Jordan and was there when Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. He returned with Elijah's mantle, parting the Jordan, and stopped for a short time at Jericho. This young successor to Elijah then went on up toward Bethel.

Bethel had been the center of apostasy in Israel throughout many generations. The degeneration of Bethel began in the reign of the wicked king Jeroboam. That king had pulled the 10 northern tribes away. He made two golden calves to be worship, one of which he placed in Dan in the northern portion of his territory, and the other in Bethel, at the southernmost point, about twelve miles north of Jerusalem.

A casual reading of the passage has often left an impression somewhat like this: An old bald-headed prophet was trudging slowly up the main street of Bethel when he chanced upon some innocent little children merrily playing together. In the midst of their merriment they spy him and shout, more playfully than tauntingly, "Go up, you bald head; go up, you baldy!" Instantly the old prophet becomes enraged with their

childish banter, and with eyes flashing in anger he whirls around and curses them in the name of the Lord. Suddenly, as if in direct according with his curse, two she bears rush out of the nearby forest and “devour” forty-two of the little children.

Robert Ingersoll, the renowned agnostic, said of this story:

“I find in this Bible that there was an old gentleman a little short of the article of hair. And as he was going through the town a number of little children cried out to him, “Go up, thou baldhead!” And this man of God turned and cursed them. And two bears came out of the woods and tore in pieces forty-two children! Now, just think of an infinite God [doing this]. You hate a God like that. I do; I despise him.” [Ingersoll’s 44 Lectures (Chicago: J. Regan & Company, n.d.), p. 244. Even Adam Clark remarked “But then, as they were little children they could scarcely be accountable for their conduct; and consequently, it was cruelty to destroy them.”

Is that really a true rendition of what went on that day? It is true that our English translations says they were “little children” but in a case like this we need to go back to the Hebrew. The two words translated “little children” are ketanaim and na’arim (plural of na’ar). A closer study will reveal that these “little children” were not primarily little children at all, but rather boys and young men whose age could vary anywhere from twelve to thirty. They were in that age group, apparently old enough to be married, but not yet married and established with a home of their own. These persons were old enough to know what they were doing, and cannot be excused for their vicious behavior on the grounds that they were under-aged. Besides the rude and insolent young men, there is only one other person involved in our story, the prophet Elisha himself.

With a hasty reading out of context one may get the impression that Elisha was getting along in years. But actually “Elisha, when the incident occurred, was certainly not an old man. Very probably he was not more than twenty-five years of age; for he lived for nearly sixty years after the date of this event.” As to the character of Elisha, he seems to have been very merciful, courteous, and completely devoted to God and the welfare of his countrymen. A true gentleman, merciful, courteous he is revealed as a man of gentle and noble character.

I don’t think the text reveals any personal vengeance or

malignancy in Elisha at all. It is readily admitted that teenagers reflect the views held by their parents. In this case, the parents were members of a wicked and corrupt society which was bound to influence their posterity. This doesn’t mean he cursed or swore, using the name of the Lord profanely. The main reason, however, for Elisha’s curse was that he, as a prophet of God, was duty bound to do so. The citizens of Bethel were walking contrary to the Law and were under the curse of God:

Leviticus 26:21-22

21 And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins.

22 I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate.

Elisha was pronouncing God’s judgement on these individuals in the same fashion Peter did much later in dealing with Ananias and Sapharia. The lessons of old are just as applicable today. Attitudes toward spiritual things are arrived at from parents. It has been said, “If this generation is going to the dogs it is because of the training we gave them as puppies.” If we really want better for our children and grandchildren, there is some advice we need to heed.

Proverbs 22:6 - Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 23:12-14

12 Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.

13 Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.

14 Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.

Ephesians 6:4 - And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

We need to carry our children to worship and Gospel meetings in our area. We need to see that they associate with the finest young people, for to do less is to support their future being shaped by scoundrels. Youth should not despise Sacred things. Many of today’s youth despise the Bible, think it old fashion, out of mode. Don’t despise God’s instructions for you on how to live pure lives. Be careful what you discuss in front of

your children. Openly and candidly discuss Spiritual expectations for and with your children. And make sure they know how to find forgiveness of sins.

Hear the word of God. (Romans 10:14)

Believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God. (John 8:24)

Repent of past sins. (Luke 13:3)

Confess publically your faith in Christ. (Matthew 10:32)

Baptism for the remission of sins. (Mark 16:15-16)

Terry Studdard (tstuddard75@gmail.com)

Announcement

A New Book

Brother Don McCord has recently completed and printed his Commentary on Revelation.

You may order the book from Darnold McCord Ancient Landmarks Publishing P. O. Box 1773 Covina, CA 91722, The cost including postage is \$16. We encourage you to order soon while they last.

Our Departed

MANN - Annie Pearl Prince Mann, age 95, of Woodland, AL passed away on Wednesday, November 14, at Bethany House in Auburn, Alabama. She is survived by three grandchildren and a host of nieces and nephews. Many of those nieces and nephews helped care for her and they are to be commended for service. Annie Pearl was born on April 23, 1923, the daughter of Steve M. Prince and Ruthie Kirby Prince. She was preceded in death by her parents; her husband, Gene Mann; one son, Larry Mann; four sisters and five brothers. She was a member of Napoleon church of Christ and had worked at West Point Pepperell. The funeral service was conducted by Brother Phillip Prince, a nephew and the writer, a great-nephew. Graveside services were conducted by Brother Ronnie Prince, who is also a nephew. The singing was provided by nieces and nephews. —Rick Martin

Field Reports

Don L. King, 1147 Sherry Way, Livermore, CA 94550, email: oldpaths@juno.com, December 13, 2018. California has finally gotten some good rain which has helped so much with the fires at both ends of the

State. The church at home is doing well and we are at peace, sweet peace. It was my privilege to preach at both services last Lord's Day and we are now looking forward to the Philippine trip in January. While I am gone Brother Ronny Wade will be handling the paper. All materials intended for publication should be sent to his address: P.O. Box 14352 Springfield, MO 65814. After January 15 you may resume sending to me as usual. Our sincere thanks to him for his unfailing help through the years. As you have noticed, we are in the process of rebuilding the field reports section of the paper. In the early years this was a favorite part of the paper and many said they read the reports before they read the articles. We encourage our preachers to send field reports to us before the 15th of each month in order to get them in the next issue. We also welcome articles from our preachers and hope we can hear from you soon and often. May the Lord bless us with a wonderful new year in which to win souls for Him.

Carl M. Johnson, 1400 Northcrest Drive, Ada, OK 74820, cmjthebackpage@gmail.com, Dec. 7th. We have been very busy since we completed our schedule of gospel meetings for the year. I am preaching often here at home and also at Healdton, Oklahoma on the third Lord's Day of the winter months. We plan to attend the annual Preachers Study in Oklahoma City and the Oklahoma New Year Meeting. We are also making plans for our 43rd annual March Meeting (March 1-3) here in Ada. I continue to be pleased with the sales of my new book, For Such A Time As This. Folks are buying the book for themselves and to give as gifts to others. I am most grateful, however, that folks are not only buying the book, but they are actually reading it. Some folks report they have read the book entirely in just a few days. Others say they read an essay or two each day as a part of their private family devotionals. If you read just one brief essay per day you will complete the reading in six months. It is hard to believe that Phyllis and I are now septuagenarians! However, we have a full slate of gospel meetings scheduled for 2019 and we are looking forward to them. May God continue to bless and keep us all.

Ronny Wade, P.O. Box 14352, Springfield, MO 65814, December 17. With this report our work for 2018 is coming to a close. It has been my privilege to work with a number of congregations this year in an attempt to strengthen the church and reach out to the community in an effort to save the lost. Soon, if the Lord permits, we will embark on a new year. Only God knows what will lie ahead for the church and our efforts to strengthen her in this wicked world. May God help us all to stand without fear or favor for what is right as we make our

advance against Satan and his evil devices.

Cullen Smith, 706 Terral Island Rd., Farmerville, LA. We had a great meeting in Huntsville, Arkansas at the Hartwell congregation over Thanksgiving week and it was great to be with brethren that gave me the opportunity to preach for them while I was in college. Elias Rodriguez and Jonathan Correa continue to be effective in working in our area among our Spanish speaking population and the new Christians are growing. My prayer is that we look to 2019 with excitement for the opportunity to serve in the Kingdom of God.

P. Duane Permenter, 94-371 Ikepono St., Waipahu, HI 96797, (808) 773-5523, duane@churchofchristhawaii.org, Dec 10. All is well in Waipahu and we continue in the Lord's work. The church continues to develop and grow. We recently were at the doctor's office and a middle-aged woman heard our last name and came to us after our appointment. She has a grandmother in Oregon who is a Permenter. It truly is a small world. We are going to try and see if we can develop this into a lead for the church. We have not figured out if we are related or not; however, my name Permenter is not all that common and probably somewhere in the blood line we are connected. Please pray for us and ask the Lord to open doors for us in the work. God bless the faithful!

Frank Brancato, 12718 Larkin Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93312, December 11, 2018, email: frankbrancato@sbcglobal.net. Since last reporting, I had the pleasure of holding a meeting in Arlington Texas. We had very good crowds and we pray that all were edified and encouraged. enjoyed staying with Joe and JoAnn Norton very much, and they took wonderful care of me while I was there. The work here in Bakersfield continues to move forward in a positive direction. We still have private bible studies each week, and we continue to pray for God's increase. We have several on the Bible correspondence course, and 5 more prospects agreed to start the course this week. If the Lord wills, I plan to leave for the Philippines with Don King on January 2. As I reported previously, this will be my 10th trip with Don, and I am looking forward to it very much. Also, Lord willing, my upcoming meeting schedule will be as follows: 21st Street OKC (February 1-3), 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 66221, pon.wjn.ks@juno.com. It has been sometime since I had a report in the OPA, but that does not mean that I am no longer active in the work of the Lord. Even though I am ninety-six years of age, I am still working with the

Stony Point church in Kansas City. During the past few months we have had several baptisms and confessions of faults. We have some good Gospel teachers now, and some young men who are actively participating in the services. I only teach occasionally. We have a church bulletin and I write an article and edit the paper each month. I also make out the teaching schedule each month and it is posted so all can see it. Nearly all of the preachers I have worked with in the past have passed on, or are no longer able to actively participate in the work to which they devoted their lives. This to me is sad. We owe much to them for the work they did to uphold the truth in extended Gospel meetings and debates with digressives and false teachers. Today many Christians "drink from wells they did not dig, and eat from fruit they did not plant" thanks to men who dedicated their lives to help save the lost. May the Lord bless us all in this coming new year with the zeal and the determination to uphold the Truth and do what we can to save the lost. Time is running out.

Rick Martin, 300 Clubview Terrace, Woodstock, GA 30189, December 7, 2018, mmartin@bellsouth.net. The Marietta congregation continues to do well. We have four men, including myself, who do the teaching. On the third Sunday of each month we have lunch together and then singing practice in the afternoon to help some of the young men improve their song leading. The church here has always promoted singing. It is such an important part of our worship and I wish more people would see that importance. Lord willing, I will have my fifth Sunday appointment at Napoleon, AL. We will leave that afternoon and go the Alabama New Years meeting in Dothan, AL. I am starting the work on the 2019 directory. Congregations should begin to look for the information soon. If you would like to send me any corrections, you can send them to my email address or mail them to me. Continue to pray for the church.

Johnny Elmore, 419 K SW, Ardmore, OK 73401, johnnyelmore@gmail.com - I recently spent four days in the hospital with a UTI but thanks to the grace of God, the prayers of many, and the progress of modern medicine, I am back in good health. After a month's hiatus, I am also back to speaking here at Ardmore. We recently were happy to hear Todd Risinger speak for us. In general, I find a malaise among the congregations. I don't know the reason for that but I know that we are battling the world, the flesh, and the devil. The answer may be that we need more sacrifice and perseverance on the part of every member. There is an urgent need for young men who will prepare themselves for a lifetime of preaching the gospel.

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WALKS THROUGH THE BIBLE...

IDENTITY CRISIS

By JERRY DICKINSON

“Now from among the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and Azariah, Abed-Nego.” (Daniel 1:6,7) Nebuchadnezzar had taken Jerusalem as Isaiah had foretold in his prophecy to Hezekiah some 100 years earlier. In that prediction Isaiah declared that some of the descendants of King Hezekiah would be taken captive and made eunuchs in the far-off land of Babylon. Daniel and his three companions are now in Babylon fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. They are only teenagers (probably 15 years old) and now they must spend the rest of their lives in a strange land serving in the courts of heathen kings.

What are these four young men going to do? What is their response to being taken captive and made eunuchs? They will never see their homeland or parents again! Can we even begin to imagine their dismay and fear? Well- to say they were four extraordinary young men is an understatement! Daniel seems to have been the leader of the group and his resolution was the resolution, no doubt, of them all. “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.” (Daniel 1:8)

I like that word, “purposed”. Sometimes people tell me they just do not think they can live the Christian life. “I don’t think I can hold out and persevere in the face of all the obstacles that the Devil throws in my way. I’ll never be able to overcome the temptations the world offers.” With that attitude, I tell people, you are correct. You will not hold out! You have to be like Daniel and “purpose in your heart”. You have to be single minded in your determination to remain true to God and not be defiled by the Devil and the world. It takes true grit! Daniel and his friends had what it takes and they determined to remain loyal to God and the teachings of their fathers even in the direst of circumstances in a strange land.

It is interesting to note that the Babylonians understood that if they were going to convert these young men they first had to change their identities. They had to brainwash them and that started with changing their names. The first challenge, therefore, that faced Daniel and his companions was the question; Are we Jews or Babylonians. Notice the significance of the name changes.

Daniel means, “God is my Judge”.
Hananiah means, “The Lord shows His grace”.
Mishael means, “Who is like God?”
Azariah means, “The Lord helps”.

Belteshazzar means, “Bel protects my life”.
Shadrach means, “Under the control of Aku”
Meshach means, “Who is like Aku?”
Abednego means, “Servant of Nego”.

Obviously, the parents of Daniel and his three companions were very pious Jews and the names they gave their sons reflected their devotion to God. The Babylonians knew that they had to reeducate these young Jews and turn them into Babylonians so they renamed them using the names of their gods. This was an identity crisis for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. What are we, they had to ask themselves. Are we Jews or Babylonians? I suggest that is the greatest challenge they faced in their captivity. Of course, they determined to retain their true identity as God’s servants and because of that God’s name was made known and glorified.

I believe, friends and brethren, we are facing a similar identity crisis today. What are we? Who are we? Are we Christians or worldlings? Do we recognize that the world is trying to change our identity so that there is no distinction between us and them? Are we talking and acting and dressing just like everyone around us? Are we going to assimilate or remain different and distinct? Who are we?

In our function as churches are we just another denomination, or are we the church we read about in the New Testament in our work and worship? Are we social organizations and community self-help entities, or the means of carrying out the great commission to preach the gospel to the whole world? Every generation faces this identity crisis! We revere the names of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah because they did not forget who they were. Even in a strange land and under horrific circumstances they remained loyal to what they had been taught and who they were. May the Lord help us to “purpose in our hearts” not to defile ourselves. Remember who you are!