



The Country Preacher's Newsletter

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/pdf/nltv1n1.pdf>

Welcome to the first edition of "The Country Preacher's Newsletter." This will be a biweekly electronic publication of CountryPreacher.com. It will include links to sermon outlines, research documents, bulletin articles, brotherhood events, suggested reading, news impacting Christianity, computer products, software and other useful information. The email version will not contain HTML formatting, because many individuals are not using email programs which have HTML capabilities. You may read and download a formatted version at the "Suggested Reading" page.

I occasionally receive sermon outlines and other articles from faithful brethren. Unless otherwise informed, I will feel free to pass those outlines on to others.



Sermon Outlines and Other Articles of Interest

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons.html>

Article: "Character Doesn't Count?" Randall F. Matheny
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons/Charactr.doc>

Article: "The Sins of the Flesh," John M. Grubb
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons/grubb1.doc>

Sermon: "Developing Leadership Potential," Randall F. Matheny
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons/Leadship.doc>

Sermon: "Stand Still, Go Forward & Get Your Feet Wet," Glann Lee
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons/glee1.doc>



Brotherhood Events

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/calendar.html>

Annual Stark County Ohio Youth Meeting

March 26-28, 1999. "I Want to Know Christ." Keynote Speaker: Willie Franklin. Contact: Market Avenue Church of Christ, 2651 Market Ave N, Canton, OH 44714-1931. (330)492-5523.

7th Annual Southeastern Pennsylvania Lectureship

April 18-21, 1999. "Nothing But the Blood." Contact: Emmitt Channell, Director. Coventry Hills Church of Christ, 1339 S Hanover St, Pottstown, PA. 19464 (610)326-4028. <chcc@fast.net>

13th Annual Greater Kanawha Valley Lectures

August 3-6, 1999. "Hope: The Confidence of Christianity." Contact: Sonny Davis <NDavis4120@aol.com> or Jim Brinkley <jmbrink@juno.com>, CO-directors. Washington Street Church of Christ, PO Box

117, Saint Albans, WV 25177. (304)727-0761.

Submit event announcements at <http://www.countrypreacher.com/calendar.html>.



News You Can Use

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/news.html>

Since the murder of a European "missionary" by tribals in Gujarat, India, a media debate has raged in Indian media regarding "Christianity" and it's perceived role in India. Blame is being cast "from pillar to post" for anit-Christian bias. Violence against Indian "Christians" has erupted in other locations. To read more, click, or set your browser to <http://www.rediff.com/news/dang.htm>.

Y2K information, useful and otherwise, can be found at <http://www.countrypreacher.com/y2k.html>. A freeware Y2k diagnostic program and a freeware fix can be downloaded at <http://www.RightTime.com>, or by writing to: <GTBecker@RightTime.com>. Visit the "Y2K Neurotic's Reading Room" at [countrypreacher.com/y2k.html](http://www.countrypreacher.com/y2k.html).



Business Directory for Members

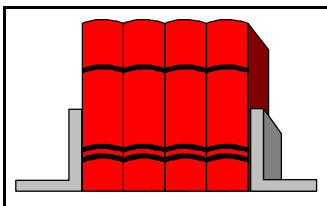
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/business.html>

If you're like me, you prefer to do business with brethren whenever possible. Please visit the web page above to obtain application, then make it available to members of your congregation. Completed applications may be emailed to <directory@countrypreacher.com>, faxed to (814)728-8775, or mailed to PO Box 911, Warren, PA 16365. The listing will be free to members of the church of Christ who have business, full or part time, that would be of interest to other church members.



Suggested Reading

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/reading.html>



I have been periodically counseling with a brother who is trying to reconcile his marriage with his wife. This compelled me to do some research, not only Biblically, but to see what other publications might be available to help with the situation. I would like to suggest the following four books for your libraries:

"How to Save Your Marriage Alone" (Softcover) \$3.19 by Ed Wheat, M.D

"When a Mate Wants Out" (Hardcover) \$11.19 by Sally Conway & Jim Conway

"Hope for the Separated" (Softcover) \$8.79 by Gary Chapman

"Reconcilable Differences/With Study Guide" (Softcover) \$8.79 by Jim Talley

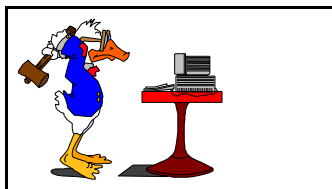
Only "How to Save Your Marriage Alone" was available in the brotherhood bookstores that I called, and at a bit higher price. All of the above titles are available at Amazon.com. Click on, or set your browser to, <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/redirect-home/countrypreach> etc.

Search for the books by title and/or author for a brief review. I do not endorse everything that these authors say, some of which is unbiblical, but found much useful material in each of these books. Do any of you know of any books, papers or articles dealing with marriage reconciliation which are written by faithful brethren? Please inform me and I will pass it on.



Computer Products and Software

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sharewar.html>



The Country Preacher's shareware/freeware picks of the month are, January: "**ICQ**," by Mirabilis, Ltd. February: "**File Notes**," by Jam Software. March: "**TaxACT '98**," by 2nd Story Software, Inc. Click the link above for more information.

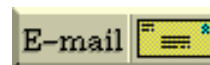
If you are in the market for a new computer, peripherals, software or other products, you owe it to yourself to visit "**Hand Technologies**" at

http://www.handtech.com/com_asp/public/cart/Storefront.asp?host=sctech. **Hand Technologies** markets major brands as well as their own brand, **Viva Pro**. A one year on-site service contract added to Hand's already competitive prices often still undersells the competition.

If you have software on your computer that you know you are under utilizing because of lack of proficiency, **Hand** offers economical online training for many major programs at http://www.handtech.com/com_asp/public/cart/Options.asp?i_classes_id=122&host=sctech. This may be the ideal investment to help boost secretarial productivity.



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Randall F. Matheny, Editor
PO Box 911
Warren, PA 16365-0911



The Country Preacher's Newsletter

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/pdf/newsltr.pdf>

Sermon Outlines and Other Articles of Interest

Everyone Has An Opinion

Randall F. Matheny

"That's just your opinion, and everybody has an opinion." Have you ever heard anyone say that or something like it? Perhaps even you? It seems to be said more often regarding to the Bible than anything else. It is true that there are myriad opinions which circulate in the religious world of our day, resulting for many in bewildered confusion, abject apathy, rejection of any objective standard for truth or a rigid, obstinate refusal to reason regardless of the evidence presented. It's no wonder that "church" has become "pot luck," an "everyone bring your own" type of affair. It may seem that churches are hopelessly divided, but there remains that which we can do to keep from contributing to the problem: *"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you are disqualified?"* (2 Cor. 13:5; cf. 1 Cor. 4:6; Col. 2:6-10). The only infallible standard by which to examine ourselves, and formulate our opinions remains the Bible.

In spite of the value that we each place upon our own opinions, not all opinions are equal. Read Elijah's trial of the false prophets: "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between

two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word." (1 Kings 18:21). Further reading reveals that the simple difference between the "two opinions" was that one was wrong and one was right. Those who base their opinions upon a faithful, diligent study of God's word have the only valid, defensible position. Further, convictions arising from that study will be well grounded in truth. To contribute to the cure, rather than to the disease let us each determine to accept God's word as authoritative and final.

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2. Sermon: "God's View of Sin," Randall F. Matheny
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons/sin.doc>

3. Article: "Decent," Skip Andrews
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons/andrews1.doc>

4. Research: "An Overview of Hinduism," Randall F. Matheny
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons/Hinduism.doc>

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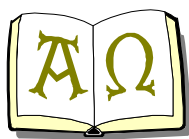
Ho-Ho-Hoaxes and E-mail Chain Letters

I sometimes receive upwards of fifty e-mail messages a day and some of them are invariably warnings of "e-mail viruses" or aggravating chain letters passed on by the good intentioned.

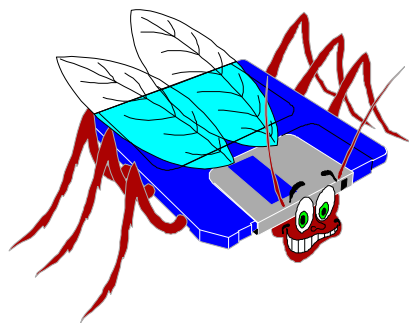
Welcome to the second edition of "The Country Preacher's Newsletter," a biweekly publication of "Country Preacher.com." In addition to regular features such as sermon outlines, research materials, brotherhood events, suggested reading, computer products and software, this issue will also address **computer viruses, virus hoaxes and e-mail chain letters.**

Some of the recipients of the first e-mail edition reported difficulty in reading it. All those reporting problems were using an older America Online or Netscape browsers. I suggest that you upgrade your current browser to the latest version by logging on to the publisher's Internet Web site. Virtually all browsers can be upgraded free of charge. The e-mail edition of the Newsletter will not contain special characters or HTML language. You may read and download a formatted version of the Newsletter from the "Suggested Reading" page of <http://www.countrypreacher.com>. If you find this Newsletter useful, please email a copy to your friends.

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Although there certainly are some e-mail transmitted viruses to be concerned about, such as the recent Melissa and Papa Macro viruses, most of the messages I have received turned out to be hoaxes. One of the most pervasive was the "Bill Gates Hoax" suggesting that there would be a reward for passing the message on to others.



There are several excellent virus information sites on the WWW that list real viruses as well as hoaxes. It would be helpful if everyone who receives one of these e-mail warnings from a friend or acquaintance would connect to one of the following sites to verify the accuracy of the warning:

Symantec Antivirus Research Center
<http://www.symantec.com/avcenter/>

Dr. Solomon's Virus Central
<http://www.drsolomon.com/vircen/>

DataFellows Virus Information Center
<http://www.datafellows.com/vir-info/>

Stiller Research Virus Information
<http://www.stiller.com/>

Virus Bulletin Home Page
<http://www.virusbtn.com/>

To view a more thorough list of Virus Information Centers, got to <http://www.countrypreacher.com/sctech.html> and click on "Computer Virus Information."

According to CAIC, operated by the U.S. Department of Energy, hoaxes can usually be identified by two known factors that make

a successful virus hoax: (1) technical sounding language, and (2) credibility by association. Credibility by association refers to whom sent the warning. A further indication of a possible hoax is if the warning urges you to pass it on to your friends. Visit CAIC's list of known hoaxes at <http://www.ciac.org/ciac/CIACHoaxes.html>.

It's always safer to err on the side of caution, but before you contribute to the flood of useless e-mail messages, check it out!



Brotherhood Events
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7th Annual Southeastern Pennsylvania Lectureship
 April 18-21, 1999. "*Nothing But The Blood.*" Contact: Emmitt Channell, Director. Coventry Hills Church of Christ, 1339 S Hanover St, Pottstown, PA 19464 (610)326-4028
[<chcc@fast.net>](mailto:chcc@fast.net)

13th Annual Greater Kanawha Valley Lectures
 August 3-6, 1999. "*Hope: The Confidence of Christianity.*" Contact: Sonny Davis [<NDavis4120@aol.com>](mailto:NDavis4120@aol.com) or Jim Brinkley [<jmbrink@email.msn.com>](mailto:jmbrink@email.msn.com), CO-directors. Washington Street Church of Christ, PPO Box 117, Saint Albans, WV 25177 (304)727-0761.



News You Can Use

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/news.html>

Authentic information on new computer viruses will be linked to the "News You Can Use" page. Since I have more than a passing interest in India, you'll find several links to Indian news publications. I will add links for news from other countries as they become known to me.

A freeware Y2K diagnostic utility and a freeware fix may be downloaded at <http://www.RightTime.com>, or by sending an e-mail message to [<GTBecker@RightTime.com>](mailto:GTBecker@RightTime.com). Visit the "Y2K Neurotic's Reading Room" at <http://www.countrypreacher.com/y2k.html> for late breaking news on the Y2K Bug.



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If you're like me you prefer to do business with brethren whenever possible. Please send an email message to: [<directory@countrypreacher.com>](mailto:directory@countrypreacher.com), with the Subject: Registration Form Request. A form will be automatically sent to you, so you can make it available to members of your congregation who own or operate businesses and would like to be listed on the Internet free of charge. Completed electronic forms may be returned to [<directory@countrypreacher.com>](mailto:directory@countrypreacher.com), faxed to (814)728-8775, or mailed to PO Box 911, Warren, PA 16365. New listings to date include "Good News Enterprises," and "Scandia Technologies."



Suggested Reading

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/reading.html>

"Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross," by Norman L. Geisler, Abdul Saleeb. (Paperback) \$14.39 at Amazon.com, is among the best books on world religions that I have read within the past few years. Needless to say, reviews from Muslims are less than favorable. However, I found the book easy to read, enlightening and useful in dealing with stock Muslim arguments. According to the Saudi Arabian Embassy there are more than 5 million Muslims in the U.S.A., and counting. This book should be in every preacher's library. Go to <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/redirect-home/countrypreacher> and search by author or title.



The Country Preacher's General Store

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/store.html>

The General Store is starting on the proverbial "shoestring." Although the store does not yet have an inventory (that will come later this year), I would like to make the unique offer of doing your shopping for you. If you are in the market for Bibles, books, computers or software, and can afford to wait two or three days for shipment in order to enjoy significant savings, visit the General Store page and follow the instructions given there. My goal is to significantly beat the

best price you have found to date in order to do business with you. While you're there, please take a little time to download and complete the Survey.

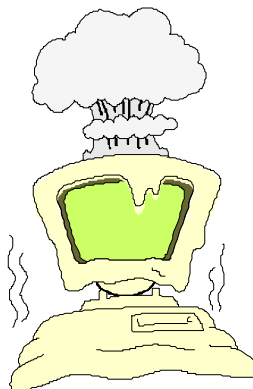


Computer Products and Software

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sharwar/e/>

The Shareware Pick of the Month for April is: "PrivateExe,"

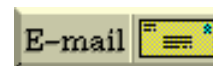
by MidStream, Inc. PrivateEXE provides the ability to password protect Windows executable files in both 32-bit and 16-bit formats. PrivateEXE modifies existing .EXE files so the program first asks the user for a password and doesn't start unless the correct password is entered. One excellent feature is that PrivateEXE does not change the registry or create hidden files. It works with Win'95, Win '98 and NT regardless of installed file system (NTFS, FAT, FAT32, etc.) or network configuration. Requirements: Windows 95/98/NT. Download Size: 152 KB. SHAREWARE: Free to try for 30 days, \$29.95 to register.



Affordable Online Training for Every Skill Level

http://www.handtech.com/com_a_sp/public/cart/Options.asp?i_class_id=122&host=sctech

Most people grossly under use much of their software, primarily due to difficult to understand documentation and/or lack of time to read and digest a manual. Most people would also be surprised to learn what modern, sophisticated software can do to make their work easier. Online, intuitive training may be the answer you or your secretary are looking for. Visit the Hand Technologies link above and browse around. Send me an e-mail message if I can be of help.



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Randall F. Matheny, Editor
PO Box 911, Warren, PA
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Handling Aright The Word Of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15)

By Randall F. Matheny

The admonition to properly handle the word of truth implies that it may be handled improperly. The proper handling of the word of God will result in the saving of souls (1 Tim. 4:16), while the mishandling of the word is likely to have the opposite effect (2 Pet. 3:18).

One of the most widespread errors regarding the Bible is the failure to properly distinguish between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, leaving many people confused as to what authority to accept as governing Christian service and worship. The New Testament of Jesus Christ is abundantly clear on this matter. The law of Moses served as a "...tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (Gal. 3:24-25)." Paul, by inspiration, continued, "But now we have been delivered

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<http://www.countrypreacher.com/pdf/newsltr.pdf>

from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (Rom. 7:6)." The turning point in history wherein the law of Moses was fulfilled (Mat. 5:17-18) and the New Covenant was enabled was the death of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:16-17). Until Jesus died on the cross the law

obey Him (Heb. 5:9)." Moses, himself, prophesied that his authority would be superseded (Deut. 18:15, 18-19) and Peter confirms that this was accomplished in Christ (Acts 3:19-24). Yet, the Old Covenant remains important as an instructor and advisor pointing the world to Jesus, and that from the patience and comfort revealed therein, we may have hope (Rom. 15:4).

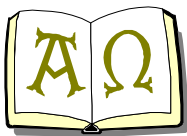
Among the many errors perpetuated by failure to accept the

One of the most widespread errors regarding the Bible is the failure to properly distinguish between the Old and the New Covenants

of Moses was the indisputable authority in service and worship, every "jot" and "tittle" of which was to be obeyed, until it's fulfillment in the death of Christ. Regarding the death of Jesus Colossians 2:14 affirms, "...having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." This must forever settle the issue for all who believe Jesus (Jn. 8:24), and that He is "...the author of eternal salvation to all who

exclusive, binding authority of the New Testament would be the belief in a separate, modern day priesthood within the church. This grievous error is corrected by Peter, who declares that the entire church of Christ is a "royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9)." Second, would be the equating of the Old Covenant tabernacle and/or temple to the church building, using terminology such as altar and sanctuary to refer to parts of the building, thus encouraging the further error of considering the church to be the build-

ing rather than the Christians who assemble there. Third, also without New Testament authority, which authorizes only that we sing, making melody in the heart (Eph. 5:15-21; Col. 3:16-17), is the attempt to justify the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship by appealing to the Old Testament. It strikes one as odd that those who appeal to Old Covenant authority do so very selectively, ignoring James 2:10 and oblivious to Galatians 2:21; 3:10-11; 5:1-4, which mandate that what the Old Covenant authorized in terms of worship and service it binds as a whole, never in part, upon its adherents. Failure to accept the New Testament authority of Christ as exclusive and binding has in no small way contributed to the muddle and confusion in many religious circles of today.

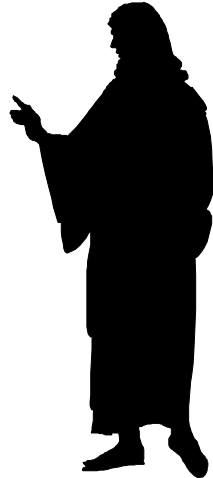


Bloodshed Upon Bloodshed

By Randall F. Matheny

I recently exchanged correspondence with an individual with whom I disagreed over Dr. Jack Kevorkian's conviction. He argued that because Kevorkian's intentions were noble (in his opinion) that he should be above the law. He

also opined that "religion" had to be kept out of the debate regarding euthanasia. Part of the correspondence I sent in answer follows: "I read your message with interest and believe it was written out of compassion, although misguided. Given the information available regarding Kevorkian's killings, he does not counsel his victims, nor does he suggest alternative solutions. His victims come to him at their most depressed and disillusioned. Having dealt with potential suicides on several occasions I know their most fervent, though invariably unspoken, desire is for someone with enough compassion to tell them their life is important and help them find a reason for living. Society is made "society" by rule of law. No one is above it. The perceived needs of any individual do not justify one becoming a law unto himself. If putting one's self above or beyond the law is right for one person it must necessarily be right for all. I'm glad that not many people reason like Kevorkian or we would definitely be living in a state of anarchy. Finally, religious convictions, positive and negative, are a very real part of everyone's thought processes, including yours.



Your suggestion that they should not be part of the debate has made them a part, and opens the door to further rebuttals that they should be. The rational mind would consider various points of view, including those that are Bible based, before reaching a final determination and would never base a life or death decision on a purely subjective or emotional level."

Jehovah spoke to the nation of Israel saying, "*Hear the word of the LORD, You children of Israel, For the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn; and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air; even the fish of the sea will be taken away. Now let no man contend, or rebuke another; for your people are like those who contend with the priest. Therefore you shall stumble in the day; the prophet also shall stumble with you in the night; and I will destroy your*

mother. *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children (Hos. 4:1-6).*" I am deeply convinced that a similar godless attitude prevails today and that all of the shocking events of recent history can be attributed to it. Keep religion out of the debate? That is just exactly what has been lacking, as it was in Hosea's day. Jehovah states the cause of Israel's condition: *"There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land."* Then He details the condition of the nation (notice the correlation between sins as lawlessness develops): By swearing and lying, they evidenced their disregard for truth and honesty; murder evidenced their disregard for life; stealing evidenced their lack of respect for personal property, for the Lord's work ethic and for dependence upon Him; adultery evidenced their disrespect for the institution of marriage and God's will concerning it, thus the disintegration of the family paralleled the disintegration of society. As the restraints against sin, put in place by Jehovah, fell

one by one an utter disregard and disdain for personal responsibility and accountability became prevalent and bloodshed followed bloodshed. Further study reveals that Israel was concerned about her condition, but she was deceived into complacency by a brief prosperity. Further, when she weakly endeavored to seek solutions she did so on a materialistic level which multiplied false religion and promulgated unwise, destructive foreign

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policy. The entire nation, leaders and followers, had become corrupt. Israel's end was sealed because the will of God was left out of the debate. Israel had become like the other nations and would fall as one of them. Restoration could only be realized through repentance and in the Messianic kingdom which was yet to come (compare Hos. 1:10-2:1 with 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:10; Rom. 9:26).

Jehovah's depiction of Israel accurately describes every nation which has declined and fallen due to religious error and moral decay, including mighty Rome (Rev. 13-14), and could be read as commen-

tary on our own country today. The objective, inspired and confirmed word of God does have a valid and vital role to play in the affairs of mankind.

The only consolation that remains is in the fact that God's holy nation of today, the church (1 Pet. 2:9), need not and must not reflect the condition of the world in which it exists. The church of Christ must remain separate from the world though it is in the world and the world must

be kept out of the church. The church and the precious treasure of the gospel which it holds in trust and

proclaims to every nation is the only enduring and redeeming influence that exists upon this earth (Mat. 5:13-16; 2 Cor. 4:7; Mk. 16:15-16).

This is not the time to be shamed into silence by infidels who ridicule (1 Pet. 2:11-13; 4:11-19), it is not the time to be fearful of persecution for standing for the truth and contending for the faith (2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Jn. 3:13; Rev. 21:8), and it is not the time to gut the church of its vitality and zeal by compromise with false, man-made denominations (Mat. 15:13; 2 Jn. 9-11; Col. 2:6-12). There remains but one remedy for sin whether it is committed by

children or adults, and whether it occurs in Paducah, Littleton or Washington, D.C.: the Christ and His gospel (Heb. 5:8-9). Secular laws may deter some lawlessness because of the threat of punishment, and punish those who persist in wrongdoing, but neither they nor any other influence of human contrivance have the power to actually convert a soul, or change a mind from that of a sinner to a saint. The sole power change mankind is revealed in the word of God (Psm. 19:7; Rom. 1:16: 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:22-25), but that's what people want to keep out of the debate.



Sermon Outlines and Other Articles of Interest

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/warren/sermons.html>

1. Sermon: "Answering the Ecumenical Movement," Randall F. Matheny
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons/ecumenic.pdf>
2. Research: "Ten Steps to Effective Planning and Leadership," Randall F. Matheny
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons/tensteps.pdf>
3. "Some Things You May Have Wanted To Know About Your Preacher, But Were Afraid To Ask," Glann Lee
<http://www.countrypreacher.com/sermons/glee2.pdf>



Suggested Reading

<http://www.countrypreacher.com/reading.html>

"Piloting the Strait," by Dave Miller. \$19.95. Sain Publications, 217 E. Jefferson, Pulaski, TN 38478, (615)363-6905. This book should be in every Christian's library. Brother Millers probing, balanced, Biblical analysis of contemporary problems confronting the church provides invaluable information for use in identifying and resolving those problems. "This book has as its objective the task of identifying, describing and discussing the changes that churches of Christ are experiencing." (p. 11).

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Contact: Sonny Davis <NDavis4120@aol.com or Jim Brinkley <jmbrink@mail.msn.com>

7th Annual "What Sayeth the Scriptures" Bible Lectureship

August 27-29. "Hard Sayings of the New Testament." Longview Church of Christ, 1401 Eden Dr., Longview, TX 75605. (903)236-0988
Contact: W. Hurley <whurley@texramp.net>

Computer Products and Software

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The Shareware Pick of the Month for May is: CuteFTP v.2.8 by GlobalSCAPE, Inc. This is an excellent, trouble free, easy to learn and use, program for uploading and downloading files to or from your Internet Web site server. \$34.95 to register. Download a free evaluation copy now.



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The Country Preacher's Newsletter

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Who's Sowing to the Good Soil?

In the parable of the sower (Luke 8) four classes of soil are described. The "wayside" soil represents the largest area, occupying the fringes of the field and beyond, the well-trodden walkways, but is least prepared for planting. It has a closeness to the Devil that allows him to snatch away the word so quickly that it is hardly missed. Involvement in the affairs of the world is so deep that the gospel of Christ is rejected as foolishness (1 Cor. 1:18). No time is found or given for Christ and His teaching. Next, decreasing in size, but slightly less inhospitable, is the "rocky" soil. This group is predictably unstable, easily tempted and easily led astray. The Word could not be snatched from them, but enough lust is found in their hearts (James 1:14-16) to leave them undefended from the Tempter. Then, closer yet to the fertile heart of the field, cleared of rocks, shrinking further in size, is the soil that cannot be distinguished from

the good except that seeds of thorns and weeds lie ready to spring up and choke out the good seed. The "cares, riches, and pleasures of life" have enough appeal to distract all but the most faithful. The antidote to this challenge is: "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with

comfort and entertainment." It is no surprise that as worldly methods are used to attract and keep worldly people more reports of adultery, fornication, homosexuality, child molestation and other sins come now from the community that was once seen as a safe haven from the wickedness of the world.

Which church is wholly given searching out truth, preaching it in love, living it faithfully, worshipping God in spirit and in truth, giving man what he needs rather than what he wants?

such things as you have. For He himself has said, I will never leave you or forsake you (Heb. 13:5)." Only then can we enjoy the true joy of Christianity.

It sometimes seems that the first three soils are given an unfair amount of attention in the desire to have the largest church, the richest treasury, the finest building and the most renown. This has spurred the creation of denominations where behaviors which once kept people out of churches are now common, and unopposed, within them. "Mega-churches" have arisen where what is believed is de-emphasized and truth long ago gave way to "atmosphere,

In all of this, who is ministering the good seed to the smallest, but most receptive and fertile section of the field, good and honest hearts longing for God's truth (Jn. 17:17)? Where do people go who hunger for truth and righteousness? Which church is wholly given searching out truth, preaching it in love, living it faithfully, worshipping God in spirit and in truth, giving man what he needs rather than what he wants? Without a doubt, this is the smaller group (Mat. 7:13-14), but it is also the most abundantly faithful (Lk. 8:15). The seed is to be broadcast, but let us remember that when good soil is found, Christ will bring them in (Psm. 19:7; Jn. 12:32). Those who truly come to Christ must come on His

terms. There is no shame in striving to be the church that Jesus built (Mat. 16:18).

• • •

Hand-Me-Downs

When I was growing up “hand-me-downs” were a fact of life. Traditions handed down from generation to generation are also a fact of life. “*Paradosis*” is the Greek word translated “tradition” in the New Testament. It means to “hand down, give over; what has been transmitted by way of precept, doctrine.” Biblically, there are two classes of tradition to be considered. First is tradition handed down by man. Whenever this class of tradition came into conflict with the will of God, Jesus and His apostles rebuked it and those who held to it (Mat. 15:1-13; Mk. 7:1-13; Co. 2:8; 1 Pet.



1:17-19). In each of case human tradition had come into conflict with God’s will. The two cannot coexist in conflict, so one will invariably neutralize the other. Does this mean that all human traditions are bad? No, only those which are incompatible with the word of God, or which are bound upon others as obligatory such as the effort made by the Scribes

and Pharisees to bind the ceremonial washing of hands be fore eating, thus supplanting the will of God with their

Human traditions which alter, contradict, or otherwise violate God’s recorded word must be changed or abandoned.

own law. The other class of tradition is that which has been handed down by God though Jesus and His apostles. “therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle (2 Thes. 2:15; also 3:6).” These traditions, delivered to us by inspired men of God and written in the Bible, are obligatory and must be accepted and obeyed as doctrine. It is concluded that human tradition which does not come into conflict with the will of God may be kept and enjoyed. This “neutral” tradition forms a bridge between generations, welds communities together and generates security and well-being among its adherents. Also, traditions which aid in carrying out Bible instruction, but which do not alter it, may be kept and practiced freely. These may be changed, but carefully, so as not to tear asunder that which they help to bond. Human traditions which alter, contradict, or otherwise violate God’s recorded word must be changed or abandoned. An example of such would be the

addition of manmade instruments of music to the vocal singing tradition handed down to the church via the New Testament (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Such additions corrupt Christ’s revealed word and become unacceptable.

Those who cry against tradition in favor of change must prove that the changes they espouse are biblical and that their suggested traditions are superior to those in place. They must also respect what has been held dear by previous generations. To do otherwise divides between generations and robs the younger of a vital link to the older. Not all tradition is bad, but neither is all change good.

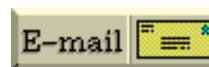
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The Power of a Positive Example

Years ago I studied the Bible with an elderly couple who were not members of the Lord's church. They were difficult to communicate with because of years of sectarian indoctrination and the bonds that they had developed with friends in their religious preference. I was surprised to learn that at one time both had an interest in New Testament Christianity. Their exposure had been through a dynamic and persuasive "tent meeting" preacher, who later came to be known as an alcohol abuser. I am told that he could eloquently preach the truth, but that he never gave up his ungodly habit until late in life. If the story true, his horrid example was contrary to the message that he preached and posed an obstacle to many precious souls in search of the truth of God's word. One miserable example contributed to a wonderful elderly couple, both now deceased, turning from the truth into the embrace of error. The responsibility to search the scriptures

(Acts 17:11) and obey Christ (Heb. 5:8-9) is ultimately the individual's (Rom. 14:12), but this story caused me to wonder what there might be about me that could prove a hindrance rather than a help to others who are searching for the truth.

Teaching the truth is only a

Teaching the truth is only a part of Christianity. The Bible also emphasizes the living of the doctrine that we teach.

part of Christianity. The Bible also emphasizes the living of the doctrine that we teach. Jesus reinforced and illustrated His doctrine by His example: "...For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you (Jn. 13:12-15)." Paul pointed to Jesus as the model for all Christians: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ (1 Cor. 11:1)." Consequently, it is good for us to ask, "What am I doing that Jesus would not do, and what would Jesus do that I am not doing?" Answering this question and taking appropriate action would help us to set a positive example, complimentary to the doctrine of Christ, and would

pose no hindrance to any honest seeker of truth.

Finally, some behavior may not be wrong in itself, but still prove a hindrance to others. Eating meat previously offered to idols is a case in point, but notice how it is dealt with in 1 Cor. 8:4-13 and Rom. 14:14-23. Paul's statement,

"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend (1

Cor. 8:13)," should be our motto. Concern for others' souls must always temper our behavior if we would be effective servants of Christ. What about ungodly language, immodesty, tobacco use, social or recreational use of alcohol or other drugs? "But whoever causes one of these little one who believes in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Mat. 18:6)" "Do as I say and not as I do" is nonsense. There is no denying the power of a positive example (1 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 2:7-8).



Character Doesn't Count

The title is stated as a declaration because that is the way the statement is often heard today. Character does count in every aspect of life, whether civil, social, family, or religious. If character does not count, then it is utterly impossible to trust anyone or anything that anyone says. Character counts in the civil arena. God has granted governments the responsibility to "bear the sword," that is to exercise just authority in governing and enforcing law (Rom. 13:1-7, esp. vs. 4). If leaders are of immoral, untrustworthy character, if they cannot be counted upon to obey the same ordinances that they are empowered to enforce, and if they refuse to hold one another accountable, then they have violated God's trust as well as that of their subjects and are no longer fit to govern. Historically and Biblically, no nation (including ancient Israel - Amos 9:8-10) that has suffered an immoral, ungodly leadership has survived. We are not so special that we are exempt from accountability to God.

Character counts in the family. Husbands are to love their wives (Eph. 5:25) and dwell with them in understanding, honoring them (1 Pet. 3:7), and wives are to be submissive to their own husbands (1 Pet. 3:1-6). Infidelity, failure to assume

God-given responsibility, untruthfulness, untrustworthiness, all lead to the destruction of the family. Godly character will not lead to the breaking of marriage vows; will not starve children spiritually, provoking them to disobedience (Eph. 6:4); will present a positive

The only place character doesn't count is in Hell.

image in word and deed; and will help assure a respect for honor, integrity, truthfulness, virtue and honesty in future generations. Godly character will not perpetuate sins that plague many families generation after generation, for example: slothfulness, drunkenness, divorce, sexual immorality. Like it or not, we must decide what we will pass on to our children, for pass it on we will.

Character counts in religion. Christianity is the only world religion that has an infallible, sinless, perfect founder (1 Pet. 2:22; Heb. 5:8-9; Jn. 1:17). The character of Jesus Christ, although it has been attacked countless times by countless infidels, remains impeccable and unimpeachable. Christians are to always uphold truth (Eph. 4:15; 1 Tim. 3:15), even if it means going against the will of society (Acts 5:29). Our word is to be inviolate (Mat. 5:37; Jas. 5:12; Mat. 12:34-37), our word and our deeds are to be uncorrupted

(Titus 2:1-3:3) and serve as examples for others to follow (1 Tim. 4:12). The church of Christ must always provide a safe haven for all those weary and heavy laden, oppressed souls in search of truth, sanity and a Savior in a sin-afflicted world. Character counts.

Don't let anyone fool you. The only place character doesn't count is in Hell.



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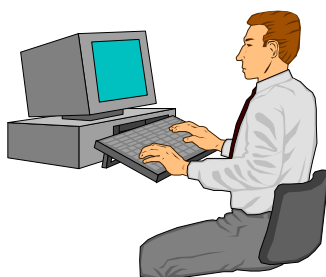
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The Friendship of Jesus

By Randall F. Matheny

Much has been said about Jesus being our best friend. Unfortunately, the concept of friendship has occasionally been misused in attempts to de-emphasize the importance of the obedience of the gospel (Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Thes. 1:8). A brief look at a few Bible verses will help us to understand the importance and value of friendship with Jesus.

Proverbs 17:17 states, *"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity."* Jesus epitomized this constancy of love in His life and death. The worst adversity that man has ever faced is sin (Rom. 6:23), yet Jesus came to redeem sinners (Lk. 19:10), and died for that same purpose (Rom. 5:6-8). Jesus, our friend, loved us in our darkest hour of need. We may return a bit of that love in obeying Him (Jn. 15:13-14).

Proverbs 18:24 says, *"A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."* An

individual who would enjoy the friendship of others must be willing to take the initiative in establishing a relationship. Jesus did this when He left heaven to live, suffer, and die among us (Phil. 2:5-8). He took the initiative in reaching out to us when sin had so dulled our senses that we

There are many burdens that man cannot bear alone, but none as weighty as sin and judgment.

knew not who, or what, to reach out to. He became like us, was tempted and suffered so that He could care for us and serve as our high priest (Heb. 2:17-18).

Proverbs 27:17 relates, *"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."* A true friend will always serve to lift us up rather than drag us down. A true friend, in seeking to better those whom he has befriended, will make no excuse for error or overlook anything that would endanger his friend in order to maintain a relationship. Jesus challenges us daily to be better than we were the previous day (Lk. 9:23). The apostle Paul

recognized this (Phil. 3:13-14), and we, like Paul, ought to determine to break the shackles of the past and *"...press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, *"Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor.*

For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: But woe unto him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to lift him up."

Jesus stands ever ready to help those who come to Him, learn of Him and take His yoke upon them (Mat. 11:28-30). There are many burdens that man cannot bear alone, but none as weighty and sin and judgment. All accountable people sin (Rom. 3:10, 23), all are worthy of death (Rom. 6:23), and no sinner can plead his case without Christ. Do you really want to face the Judge without an Advocate (1 Jn. 2:1-3)? Jesus, like a true friend, stands ready to sever as an Advocate to satisfy the justice of God on behalf of all whom He knows through their keeping His commandments.

How might we respond appropriately to the friendship that is offered to us by Jesus? We must show ourselves friendly in laying down our lives for Him in obedience to His commandments (Jn. 15:13-15), and by laying down our lives in service for one another (1 Jn. 3:16). "There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus. No, not one."

• • •

Making the Correct Change

By Randall F. Matheny

Just the other day I was thumbing through a magazine and came across an ad for a product that declared, "Change is terrible." This was said, of course, to reassure consumers that the product remained the same reliable one that they were accustomed to. There are some things that we do not want to change. Then, one sometimes hears the challenge, "Change or die." Obviously, there are some things in life that need to change.

What should change when men and women find themselves at odds with the teaching of the Lord Jesus? There are only two alternatives: Change the person or change the Bible, the rules by which we are intended to live. Historically, people have resisted changing themselves even to the point of condemnation, preferring rather to try

to change God's inspired word. Stephen called such people "...*stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears (Acts 7:51).*" Seemingly, some attempts to retranslate the Bible, when there are already many modern language versions in existence, will continue until man gets something he thinks he can live with. Still others have declared that the tradition of the church, as determined by synods, conventions, conclaves, councils, etc., is authoritative where the Bible is not. Others have attempted to reconcile their peculiar teaching with the Bible by writing equally peculiar denominational handbooks, doctrines and rules of faith. Yet, the Bible affirms that when man conflicts with God, "*We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).*" A doctrine that includes more than the Bible, includes too much; if it is less than the Bible, it is too little; if it is the same as the Bible, it is unnecessary.

Jehovah has expressed His will in the Bible, because "... *the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. (Jer. 10:23).*" God did not instill within us the ability to govern our lives apart from Him. It matters not how many may agree upon a doctrine, a tradition or a philosophy (Ex. 23:2), if it is inconsistent with

the doctrine of Christ (2 Jn. 6-11) it must be rejected or changed, for the doctrine of Christ remains changeless (Lk. 21:33; 1 Pet. 1:24-25). No matter what the religious institution, how popular the philosophy, how wonderful the family, how dear the relationship, or how old the tradition, Christ's word must, and will, prevail (Mat. 15:7-14; 10:33-40; Col. 2:6-9). All of us then, at one time or another, will hear something from the Bible that makes us initially uncomfortable, or perhaps even angry. When we do, and we surely will, let us remember that the change that is mandated must occur in us (Rom. 12:1-2), for God will accept us only on His terms (2 Tim. 2:15). The Word of God remains settled forever (Psm. 119:89).

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To Grow, Or Not To Grow

By Randall F. Matheny

"And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:62)." The proficient ploughman has the proper completion of his task in mind, and other than to have begun well, is not concerned with what lies behind. To dwell on things past distorts perception of the present, retards growth and accomplishment, and makes the end result of our pilgrimage on earth unnecessarily uncertain. Paul was determined not to allow things past to distract or divert him from achieving the all important goal of his life (Phil. 3:12-16) and he encourages all Christians to be of the same mind as he. He was a goal-setter for whom every minor goal was a step toward the greatest of all goals. Each Christian must also be a goal-setter, for the one who would go to heaven cannot allow his life to be governed by chance.

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Take a moment to read Hebrews 5:11 through 6:6, and observe the following points.

First, lack of attention to inspired teaching retards spiritual growth and results in a condition of perpetual spiritual childhood, which if widespread enough would completely rob the church and the world of desperately

was not lack of proper teaching, but that they were neither listening to, nor using, what was being taught. Every Christian must acquire a practical knowledge of the Bible, and make faithful use of it in daily life in order to fully appreciate its value in enabling us to discern between good and evil. Each must strive to develop and maintain the

Every Christian must acquire a practical knowledge of the Bible, and make faithful use of it in daily life in order to fully appreciate its value in enabling us to discern between good and evil.

character and qualifications necessary to fill an ever growing role in the church and encourage others to do the same.

Third, Hebrews 6:1-6

declares the absolute necessity of growing beyond the "first principles" of Christianity. Failure to do so exposes the Christian to the possibility of falling into such a state of apostasy that repentance and faithfulness are no longer personal concerns. This tragedy (see 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Heb. 10:26-31) can only be avoided by diligent, personal study and application of the word of God (2 Tim. 2:15).

needed teachers of the gospel. This is especially important when the need for church leadership is considered, for too often it is blamed on that slippery character "opportunity" that many men have failed to grow spiritually, and when leaders are needed there are none to be found. This condition occurs where "chance" has been the chief teacher. Concrete, objective, Biblical training must be provided and participated in so that at least some Christians are qualified, equipped and motivated to teach and to lead. Second, the problem with the those addressed in Hebrews 5

declares the absolute necessity of growing beyond the "first principles" of Christianity. Failure to do so exposes the Christian to the possibility of falling into such a state of apostasy that repentance and faithfulness are no longer personal concerns. This tragedy (see 2 Pet. 2:20-22; Heb. 10:26-31) can only be avoided by diligent, personal study and application of the word of God (2 Tim. 2:15).
Every Christian is valuable to Christ's mission through His church. It is our personal responsibility to be certain we are trained, qualified, and

motivated to serve at every opportunity according to the abilities God has given each of us (Mat. 25:15; 1 Pet. 4:11). Let us not leave our spiritual development to "chance," or chances are we will not develop at all.

• • •

On to Perfection

By Randall F. Matheny

The possibility of apostasy (falling away from Christ and the faith) is real and must be understood Biblically if the church is to remain strong and vital (see 1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Heb. 6:1-6). When Christians become unfaithful they return to association with a world that is without Christ and which is void of spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 2:2-22). Examining the Bible to find out why people become unfaithful, and discovering what may be done to help prevent unfaithfulness from occurring, will help us all in arriving at a solution.

Few would argue that all apostasy does not have its roots in ignorance of the word of God (Hos. 4:1-7), which leads naturally to an inordinate love of the world apart from God and an esteem of created things above the Creator (1 Jn. 2:15-17; Rom. 1:18-32). When one's affections are set on things below, rather than upon things above (Col. 3:1-5), the chances of being tempted and drawn away by

lust (Jas. 1:13-17) are multiplied proportionately. Since the course of this disintegration is identifiable, it becomes avoidable and inexcusable. Those who fall away from the faith do so in spite of all that God has done, and all that He has prepared, to keep them faithful.

It must become a priority for all who are baptized into Christ to set a course that will strengthen their faith and remain on it throughout life (2

Few would argue that all apostasy does not have its roots in ignorance of the word of God . . .



Tim. 4:6-8). Establishing good, consistent Bible study habits (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 3:14-15; 2 Tim. 2:15), coupled with a firm commitment not to willfully forsake any assembly of the church are essential first steps. Respect for authority ordained by God in the church (Mat. 28:18; 1 Tim. 3:15), civil society (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), and home (Eph. 6:1-3; 1 Pet. 3:1-7) is another characteristic of the faithful. Those who fail to submit to proper, godly authority fall away and are condemned (2 Pet. 2:9-13). The Christian who would remain faithful unto death will also seek out the most faithful (not neces-

sarily the most popular or most visible) Christians as examples to follow. Every Christian must provide a good example and pattern to be followed by others (1 Tim. 4:12; Tit. 2:7-8; 1 Pet. 2:11-17), for we all are being watched by someone. Finally, every Christian must seek to be involved in the work of the church (Eph. 2:10). Do not wait to be asked to serve, but take the initiative as Jesus intends for all His disciples to do (Lk. 9:23). Every Christian has something to offer in terms of service (Rom. 12:4-8), and the Lord requires of us according to the ability that He has given each of us (Mat. 25:15). When every member is involved the church is edified (Eph. 4:11-16), but when too many are "out of service" the entire church suffers (1 Cor. 12:14-26). People who are not busy for the Lord are at risk to become troublesome, meddlesome busybodies (2 Thes. 3:10-15; 1 Tim. 5:13) who ultimately become unfaithful (1 Tim. 5:15). The old axiom, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is Biblically sound in it's meaning. "Therefore my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58)."

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The Importance of Baptism

By Randall F. Matheny

Perhaps the most powerful and compelling argument set forth in the New Testament on the essential nature of baptism, second only to it being a command of Jesus (Mat. 28:19-20), comes in its association with His death, burial and resurrection. Paul sets forth in Romans 6:3-11 the following points: (1) Baptism is into the death of Jesus, (2) it is a burial (*baptidzo* means to "immerse," never to sprinkle or pour) from which an individual is raised by God, (3) newness of life (being born again) follows baptism, (4) it is in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection, (5) in baptism our "old man" (body of sin) is crucified with Christ, (6) only then are we freed from sin, (7) and only then are we "...*alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*" The Bible student can clearly see by this comparison that the obedience of faith manifested in baptism is of no less importance to the sinner than the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus with which it is associated. The very power of the crucifixion of Christ is brought to bear on behalf of the sinner when he is baptized into Christ. Paul's Spirit inspired mastery of logic is withering to the false doctrine of salvation before, or apart

from baptism. Baptism cannot be viewed as a work of human merit, but only as a precious, obedient privilege to be desired and embraced by all who would love Jesus.

Note that for each of the preceding positive points there are possibilities of seven negatives: (1) Apart from baptism man is apart from and out of the crucified Savior (also Gal. 3:27), (2) one who has not died with Christ cannot be raised by God, (3) newness of life cannot be enjoyed by the one not baptized (also Jn. 3:3-5), (4) nor may one be raised in the likeness of Jesus' resurrection, (5) having not obeyed from the heart one remains in the body of sin and a servant of sin (also Rom. 6:16-17, 23), (6) not being freed from sin one remains in bondage to it, (7) remaining dead in sin one cannot be alive unto God through Christ.

Peter makes the unmistakably clear statement that, "*There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 3:20-21).*" To the follower of Christ Peter says that baptism is no more a mere symbol of salvation than the ark would have been a mere symbol to Noah and his family. God chose the ark (in its detail, construction,

loading, etc.) as the means by which Noah was to express his faith (Heb. 11:7), without which he and his family would have been destroyed with the remainder of the world. Clearly then, baptism, immersion in water unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 8:36; Mk. 16:16), is of no less importance to the one who would please God today as was the ark for Noah, and without which the disobedient will be lost with the rest of the world.

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Euphemistically Speaking

By Randall F. Matheny

James said, "...*If any man offend not in word the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body (Jas. 3:2),*" and, "...*the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and is set on fire of hell (Jas. 3:6).*" Life would certainly be more enjoyable for many of us if we would but learn to master our tongues, that is, learn to control our speech. Interestingly, the Bible teaches that our speech is related in some way to virtually every other aspect of our lives: Personal and spiritual relationships are influenced, strengthened or weakened by our speech habits and practices (Col. 4:6; 2 Tim. 1:13; Tit. 2:8), even our own inward, personal state of being is not left untouched, because who we are inside is invariably manifested outwardly by our speech (Lk. 6:45). In other words, our speech is in direct

relationship to what we think of others, ourselves and God. An accurate summary of James' statements would be, "Master your tongue and master yourself."

The use of expletives, cursing, slang and generally foul language has permeated our literature and language to the extent that many people seem to be unable to communicate without them. While the use of this type of language indicates lack of self control, difficulty in self expression and an inadequate vocabulary, it has become so

Our manner of speech tells more about who we really are than nearly anything else.

commonplace that it is mistakenly thought to be "normal." The rejection of this ungodly communication by most Christians is to be applauded and encouraged. However, even Christians who would not overtly curse must be on the lookout for euphemisms, which are probably even more common. A euphemism is a weak oath that is defined as: "Substitution of a mild or roundabout word or expression for another felt to be too blunt or painful." Weak oaths

are feeble attempts to camouflage stronger, deeper, darker feelings. What does one really mean when he says, "gosh-darn," "gee," or "shoot?" Most modern dictionaries will show that these are substitutes for much stronger oaths. What about when the names of God and the Lord Jesus are invoked in an oath? Is this fit communication for the child of God? Or, is it evidence that the one who so speaks is like those of Matthew 23:27-28, full of inward corruption?

Let us remember that our speech is a tool by which the gospel is spread and that it is not to be that "*Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing (James 3:10a).*" Our manner of speech tells more about who we really are than nearly anything else. Let us each endeavor to master our tongues, be mature and be in control!

• • •

A Glorious Church

By Randall F. Matheny

When you hear the word "church," what immediately comes to mind? If popular culture is any indication of what people think, it would

seem that opinions run from “fundamentalist fanatics” to senseless, silly social organizations. “Church,” and Christianity by implication, is made the subject of jokes, but should be the last thing people would joke about (Eph. 5:4). Those who reject personal accountability and responsibility make it the scapegoat for society’s problems, when in reality the true church is a sinful world’s only city of refuge and is the sole promoter of the only influence that makes this world a place worth living in (Mat. 5:13-16). What would this world be like without the church and gospel of Christ which it proclaims? Can you even imagine living in a world where Christianity has had absolutely no influence? The very thought makes one shudder.

The New Testament presents a picture of a glorious church (Eph. 5:27) that is in stark contrast to popular opinion. Peter speaks of the church as “...a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people (1 Pet. 2:9).” Jesus compares the church and its worth with a “...treasure hidden in a field,” and “...a pearl of great price (Mat. 13:44-46)” worth more than all the riches of the world combined. Several things account for the worth of the church of Christ: (1) Its worth is based on what God was willing to give and Jesus was

willing to pay for it, the life and blood of Jesus (Eph. 5:25; Acts 2:28). (2) The church is the dwelling place of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 3:16-17) and He who dwells in the church dwells in the Christians who constitute the church (1 Cor. 6:19-20). (3) The church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). (4) The church is the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15). (5) The church has in trust and is commissioned to teach God’s power to save (2 Cor. 4:7; Rom. 10:13-18; Rom. 1:16). (6) The church, by its existence and mission, has the singular responsibility of making known to the world the manifold wisdom of God according to His eternal purpose in Christ (Eph. 3:10-11). (7) The church is composed of the saved (Acts 2:47), who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19). (8) Members of the church of Christ are members of His body (1 Cor. 6:15; 12:27; Eph. 5:30). (9) The church is the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). (10) The divine destiny of the church is to occupy eternity in heaven with the Father and the Son (1 Cor. 15:24; Rev. 21:22-27; 22:1-5, 14). All of these verses present a glorious church beyond value, to which any truly grateful person would be honored to be added to by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

Paul reflected a true appreciation for the worth of the church and the Lord who bought it when he said, “But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ (Phil. 3:7; also vv. 8-11),” and “...besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches (2 Cor. 11:28),” and “I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls... (2 Cor. 12:15a).” When you hear the word “church,” what immediately comes to mind?

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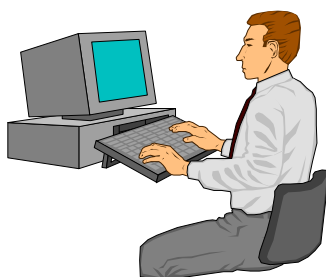
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Growing Up in Christ

By Randall F. Matheny

Almost everyone enjoys watching children grow up. When they are in their tender, younger years they seem to change so quickly in so many ways. As children most of us probably took pleasure in indications of growth such as reaching a level with

Daddy's belt, a steadily rising series of marks on the door post, outgrown clothes and shoes. A

sense of accomplishment and fulfillment filled the breast with pride! I cannot think of a three year old that I have ever met who did not want to be four; a twelve year old, thirteen; or a nineteen year old, twenty. At some point though, in adulthood, aging becomes less of a thing to be anticipated and the carefree days of youth a thing to be longed for, but that is not the natural order of things.

Putting physical growth aside, we all have room to grow spiritually and must do so if we are to be pleasing to the Lord and useful in His service. We are commanded,

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious (1 Pet. 2:1-3)." What might be some of the indications of spiritual growth? Perhaps some of the following will help, though no

I cannot think of a three year old that I have ever met who did not want to be four; a twelve year old, thirteen; or a nineteen year old, twenty.

doubt you can think of more.

The mark of *compassion*, when we finally come to esteem others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3). The mark of *obedience*, when the premier question becomes, "How can I get it done?" Rather than, "Someone else will take care of it." (James 1:22-25). The mark of *service*, when the greatest happiness is derived from giving rather than receiving (Acts 20:35). The mark of *faithfulness*, when doing the will of God is without exception the first priority (Mat. 6:33). The mark of *empathy*, when we, like Jesus, begin to look upon the world of the

lost with lamentation (Lk. 13:34-35). The mark of *commitment*, when we truly give diligence to be workmen approved of God (2 Tim. 2:15; Jn. 8:31). The mark of *fellowship*, when cannot stand to miss an assembly of the Saints and arrange our affairs based upon our Christianity, rather than trying to find time for Christ amidst the affairs of life (Heb. 10:23-27; Mat. 10:37-39).

These are but a few things to think of and aspire to achieve as we "grow up in Christ" (Eph. 4:11-16). As we reach these marks of spiritual growth the sense of satisfaction and accomplishment to be felt as a mature Christian will be greater than any other that we have ever known.

• • •

Grace, Faith and Obedience

By Randall F. Matheny

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good

works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).” These verses have inspired some and perplexed others. Doctrines have evolved isolating each of the three actions mentioned here to the exclusion of the others, for example, the extreme doctrines of salvation by grace alone, salvation by faith alone and salvation by meritorious works alone. In reality, all three play unique, but complementary, roles in the gospel plan of salvation.

Grace is generally defined as “unmerited favor,” which may be understood from the following verses: “...the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men (Tit. 2:11),” “...grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17),” and “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).” Hence, grace is from God, through Christ, to sinners, who in that corrupt state are incapable of meriting a divine gift. It stands to reason that if man had deserved Jesus, he would not have needed Him to die as the final sacrifice for sin. But, since that was not the case God extended grace through His Son, not in response to man’s merit, but to call for man’s response.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Heb 11:6).” Faith that pleases God involves coming to God, diligently seeking Him, believ-

God’s extension of grace must be met by man’s “obedience to the faith (Rom. 1:5)” and “obedience of faith (Rom. 16:26)” in order to result in salvation.

ing that He is and that He will reward these efforts. “Jesus answered and said to them, This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent (John 6:29).” The word “work” in this verse is from *ergon*, meaning a deed, action; task, occupation, undertaking; practical expression. These verses show conclusively that faith is more that mental activity. Further, 1 Thes. 1:3, 2 Thes. 1:11 and Jas. 2:14-26 add to the evidence that faith is much more that simple mental acceptance, assent or trust. These things are all important, for faith must begin in the mind, but faith must be developed and strengthened until it manifests itself in action before it becomes acceptable to God and sufficient unto salvation. “...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of

eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9).” Faith, devoid of obedience, cannot save (Jas. 2:24) and is no better than the dead belief of demons (Jas. 2:19). Ephesians 2:8-10 denies the efficacy of works of merit, which would include the works of the law of Moses, but affirms the obedience of faith in works that have been “prepared beforehand” for the one who would be a Christian. God’s extension of grace must be met by man’s “obedience to the faith (Rom. 1:5)” and “obedience of faith (Rom. 16:26)” in order to result in salvation.

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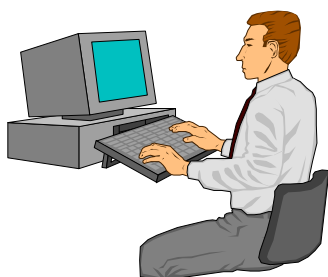
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Y2K Bugged

Randall F. Matheny

It seems that no matter where you look or listen, something about the coming of the year 2000 is mentioned. Attitudes range from the Alfred E. Newman, "What, me worry?" to the Chicken Little, "The sky is falling!" Little reassurance has come from the "powers that be" that all will be well, but most rational people seem to think that potential problems have been exaggerated by those who have something to gain from people's fears. The business segment created primarily to feed upon the paranoia and anxiety of many people over end of the second millennium has certainly been booming. Religious people have been inundated with portents of doom, apocalypse, and so on. What should the Christian do, if anything, to prepare?

First of all, common sense accepts that there will be some problems in an economy that relies heavily upon computer systems. There are bound to be disruptions of commerce, utility service, financial services and government services; the only question being, "Where, how much and how long" According to credible emergency prepared-

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ness organizations problems are not expected to be widespread, but scattered and localized. Most people will be well served in preparing for the turn of the century by laying in supplies (including food, fresh water and essential medicines) for at least one week, as if they were preparing for a forecasted snowstorm or a flood. Some have suggested

Will the Lord return in 2000? He may, but not because of the misguided prognostications of those who chronically mishandle the word of truth.

that families in rural areas should consider the purchase of a gas or diesel powered generator sufficient to power lighting and refrigeration. Alternate heating and cooking fuel should also be considered for the short term.

Will the Lord return in 2000? He may, but not because of the misguided prognostications of those who chronically mishandle the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:16; 2 Thes. 2). They have been wrong too many times to have any remaining credibility. Jesus has clearly said that He will come again (Jn. 14:3), that His coming will be unexpected (1 Thes. 5:1-3; Mat. 24:36-41), and that Christians should be prepared whenever that great day arrives (1 Thes. 5:4-11). The best thing that a non-Christian can do in preparation is to

become a Christian in obedience to Christ's gospel (Heb. 5:8-9; Acts 2:38). The faithful child of God does not become anxious over the predictions of doomsayers, because he readies himself daily and watches for the Lord's coming (Lk. 9:23; Mat. 24:42-44), for one day He will come and He will not tarry (Heb. 10:37). Until the Lord comes, we will live as we always have:

One day at a time. Let us resolve to live for Him that day and to try to lead a soul to Him that day (Mat. 6:33). Do not worry about 2000, which is really the last year of the second millennium. "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Mat. 6:34b). What condition would the Lord find you in today, if He were to return? Wouldn't it be ironic if He chose to return on a Lord's Day during Bible class or worship assembly? He'd find you where?

• • •

“Confess Your Trespasses To One Another”

By Randall F. Matheny

Much is said and written about what the non-Christian, or alien sinner, must do to be forgiven of sin, but what about the Christian

who sins? Are there any consequences? Is there anything that a Christian who sins must do to be forgiven? As always, the Bible has the answer if we are but willing to read and heed what it says. The New Testament does speak regarding Christians who sin. Simon, the former sorcerer of Samaria (Acts 8:12-24), sinned in thinking that a spiritual gift of God granted to the apostles of Jesus could be bought as merchandise, and perhaps even his motive for thinking such was impure although the scripture is silent except to say that his heart was not right in the sight of God. Simon was instructed to repent and pray in order to be forgiven. Some people would suggest that Simon had never truly become a Christian to begin with, but the record states clearly that Simon himself also believed and was baptized (v. 13).

John also adds to the inspired remedy for the Christian who sins in 1 John 1:7-10. John's use of the pronoun "we" and the addressing of his remarks to "brethren" (2:7) clearly show that he is addressing Christians and not alien sinners. John specifies that the Christian who would remain forgiven must "walk in the light," that is, in accordance with the doctrine of Christ, and adds, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)." James, the brother of the Lord Jesus, expands on the concept of confession, adding, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one

another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16)." Public confession of sin serves several

Is there anything that a Christian who sins must do to be forgiven? As always, the Bible has the answer if we are but willing to read and heed what it says.

purposes: It is an indication of a broken heart and contrite spirit (Psm. 34:18; Isa. 66:2), it is visible fruit befitting repentance (Mat. 3:8; Acts 26:20), it allows the church to pray on behalf of the one seeking forgiveness (James 5:16b), and it makes known the desire to be restored to full fellowship and to resume participation in the great work of the Lord's church. James 5:16a also recognizes, at the very least, that a heart laden with unconfessed sin has a definite negative impact on one's health and that the prayers of faithful brethren are a necessity to remaining strong in the Lord.. How public a confession of sin should be can only be determined by how widely the sin is known, for example, a sin such as willfully forsaking the assembly (Hebrews 10:24-27), or otherwise bringing reproach upon the body of Christ in a way that is generally known by the church (for example 1 Cor. 5), should be confessed before the church, while a sin known only to God may be confessed only to God. The consequences of remaining in sin as a Christian are dreadful. They may include withdrawal of fellowship (2 Thes. 3:6-15; 1 Cor. 5:9-13) for the purposes of bringing the sinner to repentance

(1 Cor. 5:5) and protecting the church from the ravaging influence of sin (1 Cor. 5:6-8; Rev. 2:20-23), and if unrepented, the loss of an eternal soul (Heb. 4:11; 6:4-8; 10:23-31, 35-39). The remedy for the Christian who sins is repentance, prayer and confession.

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