



How To Win At The Lottery

By Randall F. Matheny

There is a sure way for everyone to win at the lottery: Take the money you intend to spend on gambling, put it in a sock and stuff it under the mattress. Or better yet, put it in a good savings account, a good mutual fund, or an Educational IRA for your children. Otherwise, the lottery is designed to produce the state a profit and the gambler a loss. In defense of playing the lottery one might seek justification in reasoning that "the end justifies the means." The rationalization goes something like this: "If I win, I'll give a portion to the church, to my kids, etc. And even if I lose, the money is going to a good cause, like the elderly, or education, isn't it?" The problem with this rationalization is that it is alien to the word of God, wherein we learn that only God's approved means produce a justifiable end. Government sponsored lotteries are ingenious and unique in the sense that they suggest that profits will go to worthy causes such as education, making them the only form of gambling of which I am aware that attempts to strike a philanthropic chord in the hearts of

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those they intend to entice and ensnare. The Bible affirms a work ethic. It was so from the beginning (Gen. 2:15) and is today (1 Thes. 4:11). The lottery is contrary to God's work ethic. The lottery entices participants with promises of big winnings which would certainly encourage the idolatry of covetousness (Col. 3:5) and would seem to be aimed

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directly at lovers of money. The Bible teaches that the love of money is the root of all evil and is directly responsible for deep sorrow and erring from the faith from which the faithful are to flee (1 Tim. 6:10-11). The justification that concerns us comes by faith (Rom. 5:1; 14:23), and faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17). Thus, we should ask if the lottery, or any other form of gambling, is compatible with a life that is being led by the word of God.

The Bible teaches responsible stewardship toward God (1 Cor. 16:2; Mal. 3:8), our families (1 Tim. 5:8), the needy (Jas. 1:27), and to government (Mat. 22:21). The odds of winning in lotteries are fixed so that the sponsor of the lottery profits. In the case of a government sponsored lottery, this amounts to a voluntary tax,

collecting above and beyond what is legally required of the taxpayer. This may seem inoffensive, but who's being robbed so that the lottery may be played? Is it God? Is it the family? Is it the needy? One may be sure that organized gambling hopes the gambler does not think of these things, and if he does, that he does not think on them too long.

Finally, consider that thousands of gamblers must lose so that a few may win. Since organized gambling counts on most gamblers not to track wins and losses, it is not surprising that many people who think they have won money have in reality lost. Many gamblers are unaware of this because they gamble what they consider to be "pocket money" and do not miss it until the groceries begin to run low, a child needs a new pair of shoes, or there is not enough money to pay bills. The astronomical odds against winning guarantee, for the vast majority of gamblers, a net loss of money over time. A loaf of bread for the hungry is treasure laid up in heaven. A lottery ticket is a guaranteed loss here and in eternity. Christ commended a poor widow for what she did with just two "mites" (Mk. 12:42-44). How much money we have doesn't matter, but what we do with what

we have does. Why hazard your soul over "...the gold that perishes" (1 Pet. 1:7)?

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"What Hast Thou Giv'n For Me?"

Randall F. Matheny

"I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed, that thou might'st ransomed be, and quickened from the dead; I gave, I gave My life for thee, what hast thou giv'n for Me?" That haunting first verse from the song by Frances R. Havergal ought to give every Christian pause to think about how his attitude toward Christ is reflected by his activity or his apathy. It is a reflection of true love for the Lord when we hold nothing back in His service, while it is a mere shade of love grown cold when we do nothing, or as little as we deem necessary to "get by." The Lord who bought us (1 Cor. 6:20) and to whom we owe our all deserves more than what he gets from us even at our very best: *"So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do"* (Lk. 17:10).

The "Parable of the Talents" (Mat. 25:14-30) is another case in point. To one servant was given five talents, to another was given two talents, and to the last was given one talent (talents refer to a sum of money, but represent varied abilities to serve). It is noteworthy that the Lord did not require the same return of service from the three, but required a

return comparable only to what had been given "...to each according to his own ability." It is also noteworthy that there is no mention of anyone who had been given no talent, and from whom was expected no return in service. The "one talent man" would have been given the same blessing as the two faithful ones, who were equally rewarded, had he only employed his ability in the Lord's service. The measure, then, is not between men in terms of merit or production (2 Cor. 10:12), but between what is expected of each individual based upon his God-given abilities (whether they are great or small) and what he does with those abilities. Matthew Henry, in commenting on the parable, says, "We must all be reckoned with as to what good we have got to our own souls, and have done to others, by the advantages we have enjoyed. It is not meant that the improving of natural powers can entitle a man to Divine grace. It is the real Christian's liberty and privilege to be employed as his Redeemer's servant, in promoting his glory, and the good of his people: the love of Christ constrains him to live no longer to himself, but to Him that died for him, and rose again. Those who think it impossible to please God, and in vain to serve him, will do nothing to purpose in religion. They complain that He requires of them more than they are capable of, and punishes them for what they cannot help. **Whatever they may pretend, the fact is, they dislike the character and work of the Lord.**" Well said. Let each of us who love the Lord give as we

have been given, and rejoice to hear, *"Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."*

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Shameless Religion

By Randall F. Matheny

The past few decades have been harsh on evangelism. There seems to have been a virtual consensus among those controlling mass media that Christian thought, philosophy and political activity must be suppressed. Attempts continue from ungodly quarters to shame Christianity into silence, withdrawal and ultimately, destruction. It has been so since the first century. Those who profess Christ and adhere to the doctrine of the New Covenant have suffered tremendously through periods of intense persecution. Some surrendered to this ceaseless onslaught, abandoning the faith, yet others stood their ground upon the "Solid Rock," and as a result the church still lives, and Christ still refuses to be silenced. There is no reason to be ashamed of such a courageous, resilient, dynamic, living, kingdom shaking, history shaping force as the religion of Jesus Christ.

Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Rom 1:16)." I can almost hear the people of

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Paul's day: "You people think you are the only ones who will be saved!" They would have been right! Why would Paul have suffered as he did, if there were valid alternatives to New Testament Christianity? Why would first century Christians, though driven from their homes and harassed even unto prison and death, go "...everywhere preaching the word (see 2 Cor. 4:1-11, Acts 8:1-4)?" If New Testament Christianity (as opposed to human religions to which the

Why, indeed, do we even have the New Testament if what we believe, what we do, and how we do it is unimportant?

name has been misapplied) was not the sole religion approved by God the Father, to the exclusion of all others, why did Jesus die upon the cross? Why did he commission his disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned (Mk. 16:15-16)?" Who's gospel? Believes what? If all churches are equal and have God's approval, and all that is necessary to salvation is that one be sincere in what he believes, then why did Jesus declare that some believers would be lost (Mat. 7:21-27)? Why were the epistles

written to direct and correct the church? Why did Jesus rebuke five out of seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 2-3)? Why, indeed, do we even have the New Testament if what we believe, what we do, and how we do it is unimportant?

When men, especially those who profess Christianity, reject the narrow, difficult gate which leads to life (Mat. 7:14), they hold in disrespect the Lord Jesus and all those who have served him faithfully as His church. The way of the world, the only other way, may be easier - the danger of rejection and persecution much reduced - but the end is destruction (Mat. 7:13). There is no other gospel, no other way to heaven, and no other church, but Christ's. Narrow-minded? Maybe. Exclusive? Without a doubt. But, I am not ashamed.

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A Framework For Discipleship

By Randall F. Matheny

Jesus, early in His earthly ministry in what is known as the "Sermon on the Mount" (Mat. 5-7), laid the framework upon which discipleship and Christianity would be built. He addressed virtually every important area of life, inclusive of inward attitudes, outward actions, relationships with others, the sanctity of

marriage, dealing with enemies, prayer, forgiveness, relying upon God, hypocrisy, identifying false teachers, acceptable service toward God, and how to build a life upon His teachings that would withstand the conflicts and trials of life, and emerge victorious in the end.

Jesus begins His sermon by emphasizing attitudes and characteristics which must be developed in every successful disciple. It is self-evident that these "Beatitudes" are not hereditary human characteristics, or everyone would have them. Neither are they the exclusive domain of a particular culture or ethnic group, for although Jesus' initial ministry was to the Jews (Mat. 15:24), he repeatedly uses pronouns such as "they" and "their" which would include both the Jews of the present and the Gentiles who would later be given access to the kingdom (Acts 11:17-18). The Beatitudes remain a vital starting point for anyone who would build a life devoted to Christ and destined for heaven. The one who would be greatly rewarded in heaven (Mat. 5:12) must humble himself (poor in spirit) to subject his own will to the will of God. "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7). No longer must it be "my will" but, "...thy will be done" (Mat. 26:42). There must be a deep sense of mourning over personal sin against God (Psm. 51:1-4), over the devastating effect of sin

in the world (1 Jn. 5:19) and among those we love (Lk. 13:34; Rom. 10:1-3). Only this intense sorrow for sin is sufficient to motivate one towards repentance (2 Cor. 7:10) and cause one to take seriously Christ's "Go ye therefore..." (Mat. 28:19-20). There must be a will to fully submit (meekness) talents, abilities, strengths to the service of

expect two distinctly opposite results: resistance and persecution from Satan and his servants, and great reward in heaven for the one who overcomes (see also Rev. 2:10). Let every disciple determine to stop nowhere short of "the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

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"Lord, what would you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) and "I was not disobedient" (Acts 26:19) ought to come easily and readily to the lips of every Christian.

God (Rom. 12:1-2), realizing that all that the Christian does, with no exceptions, is to be viewed as done for God (Col. 3:23-25; 1 Cor. 10:31).

Building upon the Beatitudes, the disciple is prepared for the focus of life to become the desire to be right (righteous) in the sight of God, manifested by both the desire and the will to be obedient. "Lord, what would you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6) and "I was not disobedient" (Acts 26:19) ought to come easily and readily to the lips of every Christian. Compassion and mercy shown in every kindness (Eph. 4:32; 1 Pet. 3:8-9); a pure heart, kept and guarded against sin (1 Jn. 1:6-10; 3:1-3; Prov. 4:23); an earnest pursuit of peace between men and God (Rom. 12:18; 1 Pet. 3:11) become second nature to the one who has become so prepared and devoted.

Finally, the disciple who develops, nurtures and lives by the attitudes above defined must

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A New Commandment

By Randall F. Matheny

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:34-35). Some have wondered, since "love" has become a relative term in our culture, why Jesus would choose such a characteristic as the one thing about which He said, "By this will all know that you are my disciples." First, Jesus used the Greek word "*agape*" which goes beyond affection to unconditional devotion (see 1 Cor. 13:1-8), as in, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. (John 15:12-13)." Second, Jesus defines the love of John 13:34 "...as I have loved you." The love that is to be between Christians, which testifies of true discipleship, is to be of the same nature as that of Jesus for His disciples. He left the glory of heaven for them (Phil. 2:5-8). He was born, He lived and He died for their benefit (Mat. 1:21; 20:27-28) and for all who would obey Him (Heb. 5:8-9). It is only by examining the love of Jesus for His disciples that we can understand love at all

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(1 Jn. 3:16). If faithful and true Christians have a testimony to give to the world, this is it: the Christ-like love that they have for one another.

Since it is understood that this evidence of discipleship is to be demonstrated so that it may be observed, let us consider a few ways that Christians may accomplish this: (1) "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another" (Rom

devouring and consuming one another (Gal. 5:13-15). (7) "...with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:2-3). (8) By being kind, tenderhearted, forgiving (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13) and submitting to one another (Eph. 5:21). (9) By comforting and building up one another (1 Thes. 4:18; 5:11). (10) By considering "one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another..." (Heb. 10:24-25).

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12:10). (2) By treating one another fairly and equally (Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 12:23-26). (3) By not judging one another in matters of opinion wherein there is liberty. (4) By accepting one another to the exclusion of none (Rom. 15:5-7), excepting the disorderly and divisive (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thes. 3:6, 14-15) whom we must admonish and seek to restore in love (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20). (5) Being filled with goodness and knowledge, willing to admonish one another when sin threatens (Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16). (6) Being considerate and attentive to the needs of one another (1 Cor. 11:33). (7) Through love serving one another rather than biting,

In summary, faithful Christians want to please God by serving one another, they want what is best for one another and willingly sacrifice of themselves to achieve that end, they want to be together at every assembly and will allow nothing of lesser importance to keep them apart, and they are satisfied with nothing less than the church as Jesus would have it to be. Loving one another as Jesus loves us presents undeniable evidence that He has disciples on earth today and will draw more attention to the Lord and His church than anything else could do. Nothing will substitute for love and without it nothing else has enduring virtue (1 Cor. 13:1-8;

Rev. 2:1-5). "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him" (1 Jn. 3:18-19).

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Being Committed Is No Shame

By Randall F. Matheny

Loyalty and commitment seem to have become two of those archaic words, although once esteemed and spoken firmly, that have fallen into disrespect and disuse. Our society manifests this in several ways, not the least of which is a divorce rate of well over 50 percent of all marriages, and the fact that so many people exhibit no shock or outrage when political leaders routinely lie, saying that they all do it and that they have come to expect nothing better of them. This is more than tragic, because if one cannot trust a spouse, or those lead our land, then cynicism and apathy are certain to be the result, which will foster even more lack of loyalty and commitment.

Christians cannot shun the ideals of loyalty and commitment, but must be in the forefront of those upholding their need as fundamental building blocks of society from its smallest unit to its greatest. Jesus was fully committed to doing the will of the Father, even unto the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-10). Peter teaches that the commitment and loyalty of Jesus serve as examples for all of His disciples (1 Pet. 2:21-24). Paul declared his unashamed defense of the

gospel of Christ as the exclusive power of salvation to all who believe it (Rom. 1:16; Phil. 1:17), and presents himself as a role model for all Christians who would follow (1 Cor. 11:1). It seems that God expects and will accept nothing short of full commitment, total loyalty, to Him through His Son.

Christians, of all people, understand loyalty and commitment. "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" means that the Christian can be taken at his word (Mat. 5:37; Jas. 5:12). The words of Jesus stand as stark warning, "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (Mat. 12:36). Giving one's word to something, whether "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" before being baptized, or "for richer for poorer, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, until death do us part," or in any other thing, is a profoundly serious matter in the eyes of God even if it is not in the blinded eyes of the world. While the disloyalty of the world can be easily seen in the routine breaking of vows, the loyalty of the faithful child of God is just as readily seen in the keeping of them. Marriage and family are viewed as a divine institutions to be protected and preserved. The assemblies of the church take top priority at their appointed times - a faithful Christian would never willingly miss a meal at the Lord's table, reject an opportunity to feast upon the word, or be in fellowship with others bought by the same blood. The Lord's

work in daily life is seen as a privilege and opportunities to serve are sought out. Being Committed Is No Shame. "Where He leads me, I will follow."

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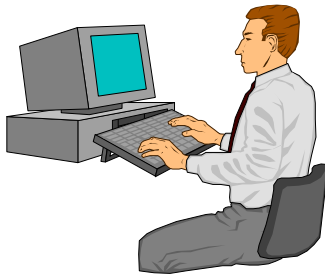
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Getting A "Cure" By Randall F. Matheny

I freely admit that I am no medical doctor, but I have always had an interest in things medical. My mother spent 45 years as registered nurse, and when I was little the "autoclave" room at the hospital was often daycare center for me and my siblings, and various nurses, who would check on us from time to time were our baby sitters. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that all four of my sisters entered the nursing profession and, after a brief experiment with law enforcement, I applied for and was accepted in the pre-med program at Ohio University. I guess that I was trying to talk myself out of the direction that my life was already headed in, that of preaching the gospel. I am happy preaching finally won out, although I did keep my hand in the medical field for a number of years as an Emergency Medical Technician.

These experiences probably qualify me for nothing more than an observer with just a little bit of an edge over the average person. I have observed many people seeking a "cure" for their ailments, but who never seem to

fully achieve what they seek, because they were willing to do little or nothing for themselves in making the changes necessary to full recovery and wellness, including those of habit, environment, attitude, diet and activity. Those who get "cured" are those who not only seek and secure the best medical advice and treatment, but who also accept a healthy helping of personal responsibility in making whatever

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changes are necessary to achieve and maintain wellness.

Sin, in the Bible, is often illustrated in the figure of a disease, such as leprosy (2 Kng. 5:1-14), blindness (Mat. 15:14), or cancer (2 Tim. 2:17-18), while Jesus is recognized as the "Great" physician (Lk. 5:31-32). Searching for a cure, many people come to "church" only to find that their lives are as troubled there as in the world, who never seem to fully achieve what they seek, because they are willing to do little or nothing for themselves in making the changes necessary to full recovery. Jesus teaches, in order to be cured of the disease of sin, that repentance is necessary. Repentance means change, but

change cannot come short of admitting, in confessing sin (1 Jn. 1:8-9; Jas. 5:16), that we have been wrong. Repentance demands a change in habits, which include regular assembly, prayer and Bible study; a change in environment, including preferring the company of Christians over that of non-Christians; a change in attitude, from "me first" to "Christ first;" a change in diet, from the bread of wickedness (Prov. 4:17) to the bread of life (Jn. 6:35); a change in activity, from wasting away in sin to having the "senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14), and from being a slave of sin unto death to obedience leading to righteousness (Rom. 6:16). Those who get "cured" of sin are those who not only seek out and secure the best spiritual advice and treatment, but who also accept a healthy helping of responsibility in making whatever changes are necessary to achieve and maintain righteousness.



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“Come Lord Jesus”

By Randall F. Matheny

John closes out the book of Revelation with these heart touching words, “He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming quickly.” Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Rev. 22:20-21). This was spoken to the church of Christ during a time shortly preceding several periods of intense persecution of the church which would end in the fall of the mighty Roman Empire. Throughout the Revelation Jesus had comforted and encouraged His faithful by revealing His majesty, authority and might, and in reassuring them (eight times in eight verses) of their victory and their eternal reward if they “overcome.” (Rev 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:5; 3:12; 3:21; 21:7) If John was truly “that disciple whom Jesus loved” (Jn. 21:7), he had a special interest in seeing the Lord whom he had loved so deeply return once again. Some suggest that since John likely referred to himself as the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” that the Lord had a special affection for him that He did not have for the others, but it is equally likely that John simply recognized and appreciated Christ’s love for him as worthy of emphasizing as he does in the gospel of John and his four epistles. Do we appreciate Christ’s love for us so much that we are willing to emphasize it in our lives and in our relationships with others? Do we have the same longing to see the Lord who

bought us with His blood? Can we say, “Even so, come Lord Jesus?”

Those who are longing for the Lord will always be in a state of readiness for His coming. “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Lk. 12:40). They will be using their diverse abilities wisely and constantly in His service (Mat. 25:24-30). They will be busy ministering to the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick and imprisoned (Mat. 25:31-46). They are faithful to consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together (Heb. 10:24-25). They remain composed and steadfastly faithful when harbingers of doom stir up the fearful with their misinterpretation of “signs,” for when the end come we are assured that His coming will be unexpected (Mat. 24:36-39; 1 Thes. 5:2-4). Those who love Him will always be ready. “But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thes. 5:4-6).

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Tidbits

Overcoming Obsacles

“Good timber does not grow with ease. The stronger the wind the stronger the trees.” -- *Williard Marriott*

“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome while trying to succeed.” -- *Booker T. Washington*

“Any great achievement is preceded by many difficulties and many lessons, great achievements are not possible without them.”

-- *Brian Tracy*

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What Is A Family?

By Randall F. Matheny

The most unique and precious of all human relationships, second only to Christianity (Mk. 3:33-34) is that of a family. There is no other relationship on a human level which can provide the love, companionship, friendship, comfort, support, security and edification that can be enjoyed within a family. It is comforting to know that in an age where the definition of "family" has come under incessant attack that God has been clear in His definition of family as well as in His plan for the same.

In the beginning God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, so after Adam named all the animals from among which there was found no helper comparable to him, God created woman, brought her to the man and she became his wife (Gen. 2:18-25). Adam and Eve were brought together, married, by God into a relationship in which they were no longer "two," but in which they became "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24; Mat. 19:5-6). God could have brought another man to Adam, or created some special animal, but He did not do so. Instead, God saw that only

woman could properly fulfill man's need for intimate companionship. Adam was joined to his wife in such a spiritual, physical, psychological and social way that is utterly impossible to achieve, or even approach, in any other human relationship. No other human relationship, whether it is on the lawful and noble level of the friendship between Jonathan and David (1 Sam. 18:1, 3), or whether unlawful such as

The most unique and precious of all human relationships, second only to Christianity is that of a family.

between homosexual males or females (Lev. 18:22-23; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9), can be held as equal to the marriage relationship between one man and one woman: the basic unit that characterizes the true family. The potential for procreation (Gen. 1:27-28, 24) and raising godly offspring (Mal. 2:15-16) are also indelible and unchanging characteristics of the true family. This does not mean that a married man and woman who cannot conceive a child due to medical problems cannot adopt children, because adoption is biblical and they have not violated God's pattern for marriage. It does mean that homosexual couples, who are entirely incapable of and unsuit-

able for natural procreation, do not fall within the biblical definitions of marriage or family and cannot raise godly offspring. The homosexual arrangement fails every test. It also means that godly offspring cannot be properly raised by single parents, for this is one of the main reasons that "the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce" (Mal. 2:15-16) and certainly one of the reasons that young widows are instructed to marry again (1 Tim. 5:3-14). Fathers and mothers both make unique, irreplaceable contributions to the proper upbringing of children: neither can be replaced and neither can be dispensed with without having a detrimental effect upon the development of children. There may be human relationships which mimic marriage and family, but there are none which are comparable or equal to the true family, or which can meet the needs of intimate companionship better, raise better children, or make a more positive contribution to society and the world at large, than that of the marriage and the family as God would have them to be.

Societies may attempt to redefine honorable, godly estates such as marriage and family in order to accommodate and perhaps placate those who live in relationships which deviate from

God's norm, but the will and word of God remain the unchanged (1 Pet. 1:25; Jas. 1:17). Such deviations can never be more than deficient imitations of true families, regardless of the sincerity and affection with which they are entered into. Those who reject God's plan and His right to rule among men and women will be judged by what they have rejected (Jn. 12:48) but, no one need be deprived of family's divine blessing. Every sinner, if properly motivated (2 Cor. 7:10), can change, be forgiven (1 Cor. 6:11) and rejoice in the abundant life of Christianity (Jn. 10:10). God's arrangement for marriage and family remains the best. His church is here to help.

• • •

Three Little Words

By Randall F. Matheny

"God so loved..." (Jn. 3:16a). Three little words which span millennia and reach out to every human being who has ever lived, or ever will live. Three little words, which if properly understood in an "honest and good heart" (Lk. 8:15), will cause a reaction which is literally transforming in its proportion. They speak of a God who, in all of His marvelous creation, has special affection for, and has given special attention to, those who were created in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). They speak of a God who will never give up on His children by creation, whose hatred of sin can only be understood in contrast to His great love for man, who has consistently purged out evil for their protection, and who has spared nothing,

even heaven's greatest gift, for their nurture and eternal well being. These words reveal a God who not only has the capacity for the greatest love, but who is characterized as love in the totality of His being (1 Jn. 4:8). And these words speak of the greatest love that has ever been, or ever will be expressed, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16).

How we react to the "Golden Text" of the Bible is more telling of the condition of our hearts than perhaps any other thing. If we truly comprehend the importance of God's gift, and accept it, we cannot help but be filled with the greatest gratitude, which will be expressed in worship, praise and thanksgiving. We cannot help but be filled with the greatest sense of commitment to the cause of Christ and to spreading His Good News far and wide. We cannot help but be awed by the inestimable value that is placed upon our souls, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Pet. 1:18-20). We cannot help but be inspired by the promise and the hope of eternal life. And like Paul, we cannot help but be willing and eager to do whatever Jesus calls for us to

do (Acts 9:6). Have you reflected on God's love for you lately?

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God Is Love

By Randall F. Matheny

No Christian will argue the biblical fact that God is love (1 Jn. 4:8), or that "... he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 Jn. 4:16). There is much disagreement, however, about what the preceding two verses imply. Popular theology holds to the view that a God of love does not condemn personal sin, nor will He allow the unrepentant sinner to be condemned. Those who hold this false doctrine have twisted the scripture to their own destruction (2 Pet. 3:16), and have developed a view of the Bible that makes it meaningless. Robert Williams, a homosexual and ordained Episcopalian priest, in justification of homosexuality, states, "...if it brings life to people, if it brings people into an encounter with the living Christ, then its Scripture. If it brings death to people, it is used in a way to label people, to harm people, if its used as a club to beat people over the head, which most of the passages about homosexuality are, then we can't in good conscience call it the word of God. We can't read it in a worship service and afterward say, 'This is the word of the

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Lord.' If it's a harmful and negative passage, it's not the word of the Lord of love." ("The Williams-Asher Debate on Homosexuality." 1997, Jeff Asher.)

God defines His love and expresses it accordingly. Love provides a means of salvation from sin for "whosoever will" (Mk. 8:34; Rev. 22:17): "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

"God is love," but the definition, terms and conditions are His and not according to the whims and fancies of fallible man.

teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age..." (Tit. 2:11-12, also Jn. 3:16; 12:47-50). Love chastises wickedness and rebukes sin: "For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons" (Heb. 12:6-8) and "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19). Love protects the individual and the

church through discipline: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:4-7). Love rejects the self-destructive arrogance of willful sin: "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins..." (Heb. 10:26). Love accepts the one who turns from the paths of sin in obedience to Christ: "...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, also Acts 2:38; 3:19; 1 Jn. 1:5-10). The Bible also reveals the expression of love that God will accept in return from mankind: obedience to His commands: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 Jn. 5:3a); "If

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you love Me, keep My commandments” (Jn. 14:15); "He who does not love Me does not keep My words..." (Jn. 14:24a); "...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..." (Mat. 28:20a). He does not give liberty to choose the commands that we will accept or reject. "God is love," but the definition, terms and conditions are His and not according to the whims and fancies of fallible man.



When Worship is Boring

By Wayne Sharpe

It would not be hard to get the idea that sometimes the worst thing that could ever happen to you is to be bored! And, to be honest with ourselves, we really don't like being bored, do we? But what makes us bored? Why are some things boring and others are not?

It all depends on our interests. If we are doing something that interests us, it is not boring. It may be to someone else, but not to us. Some people find worship boring. Others never even think about it being boring but look forward to every opportunity to worship God. Could it be a lack of interest that makes worship boring to some? Could it be that rather than looking at worship as an opportunity to pour out from my heart praise and adoration to a great, loving and gracious God, I am merely looking for what pleases me?

People in Malachi's time had a problem with worship. Their worship was merely an external thing and it had become a burden to them. Through Malachi, God

said that the people were not honoring God's name. Malachi wrote, "But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of the food, 'It is contemptible.' And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously, says the Lord Almighty. 'When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?' says the Lord" (Mal. 1:12-13).

Worship was a burdensome, boring thing to them and the blemished sacrifices they offered dishonored God. He told them it would be better if they shut the gates to the temple rather than worship in such a way. Why had worship become boring to them? It was a lack of interest in God and in honoring God for all He is and all He had done for them. He said to them, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord God Almighty. It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name" (Mal. 1:6).

If we view worship as boring, perhaps we are focusing on the wrong things. Perhaps we are more concerned about pleasing ourselves than we are about honoring God. Maybe part of the problem is that we don't take enough time through the week thinking about God--how great He is, how wonderful all of God's deeds are, how gracious He is to us, how He blesses us beyond measure, what great promises and hope we have because of what He has done for us through Jesus His

Son--and praising God for all this with other Christians on the Lord's day.

If all that bores us, perhaps we have not developed enough interest in things above!

(Edited)

--Via Bulletin Digest



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Churches and Choices

By Randall F. Matheny

Seekers of truth are faced with a multitude of churches, most of which admit to being denominations: distinct organizations that are kept unique by creed, confession and doctrine. The separation between denominations remains unbreachable as long as contradictions in doctrine exist, and contradictions in doctrine will exist as long as the authority of Jesus Christ, revealed in the Holy Spirit inspired New Covenant, is not accepted as absolute and binding upon all mankind. Was there ever a time in history where it could be shown that a church free of doctrinal, creedal and confessional divisions existed? And if it can be shown that such a church did exist, can it exist today? If it does exist today, should not everyone who confesses Christ as Lord desire to be a member of it?

The one who accepts Matthew 16:18 as fact will have no trouble with the preceding questions, the answers to which are revealed in the Acts of the Apostles 2:41-47. Peter preached a crucified and risen Jesus (vv. 22-36), to whom all authority for salvation is acceded. Further, we learn that there is none other who can save (Acts 4:12 and no other authority

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to which one might appeal for salvation from the damning effects of sin (Rom. 6:23). It is Jesus who must be believed (Jn. 8:24), confessed (Mat. 1:32-33; Rom. 10:9), and obeyed (Jn. 14:15; 15:14; Heb. 5:8-9). It is Jesus who is the singular head of a singular body, which is His church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:13). It is Jesus in whom all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3), through whom we have access to the Father (Jn. 14:6), and by whom all will be judged (2 Cor. 5:10). It is by the authority of Jesus Christ that a repentant believer may be baptized unto the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). (Incidentally, the Holy Spirit deemed it necessary that all the sinners present that day understand that immersion by the authority of Christ is unto the remission of sins.) The inspired declaration is that allegiance, expressed by confession, must be given to Christ (Mat. 10:32-39). The idea that allegiance can be given to any sect or denomination that arose centuries after the Lord established His church on His terms is alien to the Bible (1 Cor. 1:10-13). To this day the inspired words of the Son of God remain steadfast and exclusively authoritative (Mat. 24:35). To say otherwise is to say that there is a law greater than Christ's, and this is expressly rejected by a

multitude of scripture (Mat. 15:8-9, 13; Mk. 6:9; 1 Cor. 4:6; Gal. 1:6-10; Col. 2:6-10; 2 Jn. 7-11; Jude 3). The only other option to the allowed by God is spiritual death (Rom. 6:23; 8:2), an eternal separation from God (1 Thes. 1:8-9; 2 Thes. 2:8-12).

On the Pentecost of Acts 2, three thousand people made the only right decision (Acts 2:41), and the Lord added them to the body of those being saved (2:47). As far as the Bible is concerned that is all there is: Those who have been baptized into the body of Christ (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4), and those who remain lost in a world of sin. Jesus shed His precious blood to purchase His church (Acts 20:28; Eph 5:25), which is His body, the only one that we can read about in the Bible. This is the church to which the saints of the first century belonged, for there were no others. It was not a matter of joining the church of their choice, but upon obedience to the gospel, being added to the church of Christ's choice. Who would affirm that the crucified Lord must also be divided as sectarianism is today? The scriptures affirm but one church from foundation (Mat. 16:18) unto deliverance (1 Cor. 15:24), and but only one way to become a part of it (Acts 2:37-47; 1 Cor. 12:13). It stands to reason that if the one who accepts the authority

of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Covenant hears the same message that those who became Christians in the first century heard, and is obedient to the same doctrine to which they were obedient, that he will be forgiven in the same manner and be added to the same church, which can and does exist today. "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). The decision should not be that difficult.

• • •

Dressing To Please God

By Randall F. Matheny

With the coming of Summer also comes the annual effort to "beat the heat." Over the years a few inventions have surfaced, some enduring and some short lived, such as personal fans (manual and electric), "breathable" fabrics, ventilated clothing, and so on. Many folks, though, resort to the custom of removing as much clothing as possible, often times not very short of being illegal. The Christian is faced with the same challenges as other people: What is appropriate and what is not? It is quite clear that the worldly minded individual does not care what the Lord thinks, and often does not care what others think as long as they believe themselves appealing to those they are trying to influence. However, the Christians have another consideration, for they must be pleasing unto God. Following are a few tests that we can take to help insure that we are inoffensive to God and man.

Take the "alternate place" test: Would what you wear at the beach or the pool be appropriate in an alternate place such as the grocery store or a church picnic? If not, why not? According to a survey done a few years ago some people dress more modestly in their bedrooms than they do at the beach. Take the "alternate person" test: Would you be comfortable being seen by faithful Christians, or perhaps the preacher? If not, why not? Take the "alternate identity" test: Would you have any problem confessing that you are a blood bought child of God, or admitting that you are a Christian and taking up an opportunity to teach a lost soul while in a particular manner of dress? If not, why not? Finally, take the "What would Jesus do?" test: The answer to this one is simple. "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." (Jn. 8:29). Asking the following question would solve many problems: "Would my manner of dress please God?" Of course all of these things assume that we care what pleases God. If we do not, then none of these tests will matter. If we are willing to accept the consequences in terms of a damaged reputation, which hampers our ability to serve the Lord, and put our own souls at risk, then so be it (1 Pet. 4:1-5). There is little that can be said.

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Tidbits

"It's not what you are that holds you back, it's what you think you are not." -- **Denis Waitley**

"Confidence is: Going after Moby Dick in a rowboat, and taking the tarter sauce with you. A Bullfighter who goes in the ring with mustard on his sword." -- **Zig Ziglar**

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What Is A Disciple?

By Randall F. Matheny

The Great Commission of Jesus to His apostles stands as a declaration of His victory over sin and death. The Shepherd had been smitten and the sheep had been scattered (Zec. 13:7; Mk. 14:27). Although the power that put Jesus in the tomb was great, an even greater power raised Him from death to live ever more (Rev. 1:18; 2:8). This victorious Jesus, in whom resides all authority in heaven and earth, has sent forth a command for making disciples until the end of the age (Mat. 28:18-20). Are you a disciple?

The word translated disciple is not an ecclesiastical term, but a word that was in everyday use among the peoples who spoke the common (*koine*) Greek language of the first century. "Disciple" is defined as "a learner; a pupil," but an examination of Jesus' use of the word shows that there is more to it than simply absorbing information. A true disciple never imposes his

preconceptions upon his teacher (Mat. 10:24), but wills himself to become like his teacher in all things (Mat. 10:25; Lk. 6:40). Discipleship presumes to know nothing until taught by the Master, and accepts the Master's authority in all areas of life (Col. 3:17). "Lord, what do you want me to do? (Acts 9:6)" ought to come readily to the lips of

Rom. 12:4-5) (see also Acts 11:26). It is impossible to discern the Head apart from His body, and the one cannot be loved while holding the other in disrespect. The body (church) without the head (Christ) is dead, just as members (disciples) apart from the body (church) are dead because they are separated from Christ who sustains all (Jn. 15:6).

"Lord, what do you want me to do? (Acts 9:6)" ought to come readily to the lips of every disciple...

every disciple, every breathing moment (Lk. 9:23), including during the regularly appointed hours of worship and Bible study. A disciple of Christ accepts His authority in matters of home and family (Lk. 14:26), which are never to come before loyalty to the Master, for when they do, the headship of God and Christ (1 Cor. 11:3) are rejected and the family becomes its own insufficient hope. The family without Christ at its head is doomed. A disciple of Christ sees the inseparable relationship between Christ (the head, Col. 1:18), the church (His body, Col. 1:18) and Christians (members of the body,

It is a tragic thing, but disciples can go back to the world and walk with the Lord no more (Jn. 6:66). But, a true disciple realizes that there is no one else to whom one may go for the words of eternal life, other than Christ the Lord (Jn. 6:67). Like Mary, let us choose the good part which shall not be taken away from us (Lk. 10:40-42), and never let lesser, though perhaps important, things come between us and our Lord. "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10b).

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Will He Find Faith On Earth?

By Randall F. Matheny

At the end of the parable of the "Persistent Widow" (Lk. 18:1-8) Jesus asked a probing and intriguing question, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Lk. 18:8b). This has been said to be one of the more difficult sayings of Jesus, but is it really? Like the widow, faithful Christians must persevere in the just cause of Christianity regardless of sometimes seemingly insurmountable opposition knowing that Christ, the righteous Judge (2 Tim. 4:8) will administer justice in the end (2 Cor. 5:10). This persistence in the face of adversity and opposition seems to provide the answer to the Lord's question: He will find faith only if Christians are unwaveringly persistent in increasing their faith and in the consistent practice it. Each Christian must realize that he or she holds the key. Faith is possible for every person because faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom. 10:17) and the word of God endures forever (1 Pet. 1:25) -- it will never pass away. As always, He leaves us free to either choose or reject it. The question that I should ask is, "When Jesus comes, will He find faith in me?"

The Lord will find no faith in me if I do not seek it like the apostles did (Lk. 17:5). He will find no faith in me if I do not hungrily consume the word (Jer. 15:16) for the joy and delight of it. He will find no faith in me if what I have learned from Him is never made complete in obedient service (Jas. 2:22-24). Real faith is not hammering out the tough issues of life, but surrendering body and soul to the will of God. When we do that, even the tough issues will begin to tumble down. Will He find faith in me? Will He find faith in you? What if He comes today? What if life ends before you have made up your mind? What if you give your life in obedience to Christ today and never look back? What if?

• • •

Tidbits

"Don't dwell on what went wrong. Instead, focus on what to do next. Spend your energies on moving forward toward finding the answer."

-- *Denis Waitley*

"The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem."

-- *Theodore Rubin*

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To Live Is Christ

By Randall F. Matheny

Paul's statement, "For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21) should be the goal of every Christian. There can be no greater goal in life or death than to be the best Christian that I can be so that when I die I can be with Christ forever. What other doctrine or philosophy can measure up to the love, benevolence, comfort, instruction in right living or the unparalleled moral system of the New Testament of Jesus Christ? Anyone who is truly interested in nearing their potential as human beings will find Christianity worthy of most intense attention and pursuit. Likewise, the faithful Christian will always be interested in examining himself, whether he is in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5) and whether or not he is growing spiritually (1 Pet. 2:1-3; Heb. 5:14-6:3).

The Bible is the standard by which we must all examine our spiritual growth (1 Tim. 3:16-17) and as such, contains many indicators of growth or the lack of it. A few of the most obvious ones would include: (1) Diligence to seek God's approval

as a workman who properly handles the word of truth (1 Tim. 2:15). (2) Daily Bible study so that one may handle properly the word of truth and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:1-3). (3) Thoughtful, edifying speech (Jas. 1:19-20). Do you often find yourself saying things that you are later sorry that you said, or

do not even know that you are a Christian? (6) Prayer (Rom. 12:12; 1 Thes. 5:21). Is prayer a forethought or an afterthought? Does prayer come easily to you in most situations or do you find yourself struggling to "get in the mood?" (7) Brotherly love (Jn. 13:35; 1 Pet. 1:22; Rom. 12:10). Are there brother or sisters in Christ that you just don't like to be around? What

company do you seek out for regular companionship, comfort, recreation, or edification (1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14-18)? (8) Faithful assembly with the

saints (Heb. 10:24-25). This is the most obvious indicator of spiritual maturity and certainly the one that is most obvious to others. Do you long for the company of your brethren in the Lord (Rom. 1:11-12)? Or do you often find it inconvenient to assemble with the saints when you are faced with a conflict of interest during a time when the saints regularly assemble? Would you rather be in the presence of Jesus (Mat. 18:20) and His faithful, or does it come easily to choose worldly people or endeavors (Mat. 8:18-22; Lk. 10:38-42)? Granted, that these seven indicators of spiritual growth barely scratch the surface, but they are a good place to start.

What other doctrine or philosophy can measure up to the love, benevolence, comfort, instruction in right living or the unparalleled moral system of the New Testament of Jesus Christ?

feel compelled to explain away or apologize for saying? (4) Answering challenges to your faith (1 Pet. 3:15). Do you welcome opportunities to tell others why you are a Christian or do you find yourself avoiding situations where you may find your knowledge of the faith put to the test? (5) Evangelism (Acts 2:42-47; 8:4; 1 Cor. 9:16; Heb. 5:11-14). Are you so completely committed to Christ that one of your greatest joys is to share the gospel with a hungry soul? Are you able to show someone from the Bible what Christ requires of us to become Christians? Or are there those among your associates and perhaps even among your closest circle of friends who

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Our Part in the Lord's Harvest

By Randall F. Matheny

The coming summer months are shaping up to be quite busy, and hopefully productive for the Lord's sake. Perhaps the Lord's words to His disciples, "*The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest (Mat. 9:37-38),*" will take on an immediate and personal meaning to each of us as we consider what we have to offer Him in service. Understanding that no more will be required of us than that which we are able to perform (Mat. 25:15), let us each determine to bear our fair share of the burden in our small part of the Lord's harvest.

The most important first steps in Christian service are simple, easy, and require little effort, but nonetheless seem difficult for many. We must begin by being faithful to Christ in the assembly. No stretch of the imagination could conclude that in view of all that Jesus has done for us that He requires us to assemble too often. Out of the 8760 hours in a year, our regular assemblies account for only 156 hours, or 3 hours out of 168 per week. Even if one were never to miss an assembly, it could hardly be said that the time spent was sacrificial. In the light of Hebrews 10:23-27 every Christian should assemble regularly to build and maintain the spiritual strength needed to at least be minimally involved in the good

works that the Master requires of each of us (Mat. 5:13-16; 25:31-46; Eph. 2:10). We can also determine to be faithful and fervent in prayer on behalf of our congregation and our evangelistic efforts (Rom. 12:12; 1 Thes. 5:17), always remembering and believing that, "*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16b).*" We must never doubt that if we muster the love, courage and resolve to sow the blessed seed, that God will grant the increase (1 Cor. 3:6; Lk. 8:11, 15). The more abundantly we labor (1 Cor. 15:58), the more abundantly the seed is sown, the more likely the increase. Be positive and enthusiastic, not doubtful and negative. If the soil is hard God will judge it, not us. And we must remember that the condition of our own hearts will be counted among our successes or failures. Our attitudes will either fan the flames of zeal, or smother them. Let all that we do be toward the edifying of the church (Eph. 4:11-16) and, "*Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers (Eph. 4:29).*" Our gratefulness to the Lord can only be shown by our willingness to obey *all* of His commandments (Mat. 28:20; Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 5:3).

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Tidbits

"How different our lives are when we really know what is deeply important to us, and keeping that picture in mind, we manage ourselves

each day to be and to do what really matters most."
 -- **Stephen Covey**

"To reach a port, we must sail - sail, not tie at anchor - sail, not drift."
 -- **Franklin Delano Roosevelt**

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The Country Preacher's Newsletter

"...speaking the truth in love" Ephesians 4:15

Hell Hath No Fury?

By Randall F. Matheny

"Hell Hath No Fury" (US News & World Report, January, 2000, pp. 45-50.), identified several modern rebirths of revisionist thinking regarding the nature of "hell." A Vatican audience was instructed that "rather than a place, hell indicates the state of those who freely and definitively separate themselves from God." Referring to a "US News" poll, the report states, "that more Americans believe in hell today than did in the 1950s or even 10 years ago. But like the Pope, most now think of hell as "an anguished state of existence" rather than a real place." According to a professor from Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis, a literal hell is "a part of an understanding of the cosmos that just doesn't exist anymore." The 1960's are pinpointed as the decade during which teaching about an eternal hell "all but disappeared from the religious mainstream" and that "theological discourse on the subject at the nation's divinity schools almost evaporated. And while polls showed that the majority of Americans professed to believe in

hell's existence, almost no one thought he would go there." Some "conservative theologians" suggest that hell is not eternal torment, but rather annihilation, or the cessation of existence. Finally, a professor at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, suggests that the main concern regarding hell is, "retribution in this life . . .

If hell is to be understood simply as a state of being rather than a place, then so must heaven, but those who wish to relegate hell to pure symbolism are hesitant to do so with heaven.

in the harmful ways we treat each other."

The Bible speaks of hell in the type of language that it uses to speak of heaven: as eternal (Mat. 25:41, 46), and as a prepared place of consciousness (Mat. 13:49-51; Jn. 14:1-4). Consequently, if hell is to be understood simply as a state of being rather than a place, then so must heaven, but those who wish to relegate hell to pure symbolism are hesitant to do so with heaven. The Bible uses symbolic language to describe both heaven and hell, but it is not because heaven or hell are themselves symbolic. Temporal beings have no experience that can help them comprehend the blissful splendor of heaven, or the horrendous

terror of the place prepared for the Devil and his angels, so symbolic language is used to portray heaven as a place that is beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend in terms of splendor and glory, and likewise, hell is portrayed as a place that is beyond the ability of the same mind to comprehend in terms of hostility, horror and torment for the lost soul. In other words, heaven will be better than the human mind can possibly imagine, and hell will be exceedingly worse. The removal of the biblical doctrine of hell from modern theology has also removed the basis for contrasting ultimate good with ultimate evil making sin more difficult to define. If hell only exists in this life and there is no ultimate accountability for personal behavior, then there is no credible restraint against evil, period. The desire to wish hell out of existence is foolish from all angles. If we do not choose heaven, and view it as a place worthy of all effort to get there, then the only alternative place is hell, where anyone can go without even trying (Mat. 7:13-14).

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The Whole Truth

By Randall F. Matheny

Many views of the nature of the Bible are bandied about in scholarly circles today, as they have been for ages. We will examine some of those views of its inspiration in the next several articles.

One view of the Bible's nature is that it only contains truth -- the word of God -- which implies that it also contains error and that which is not the word of God. An argument put forth in support of this is that it records the statements of many uninspired people, and on several occasions, the words of Satan himself. Another argument is that the original writings of scripture were much shorter than they are today, and took their present form due to numerous editorial additions and embellishments. If either argument is true, the promise that the Lord's word would be preserved was an empty one (1 Pet. 1:25). This does not mean that His word cannot be corrupted by those of dishonorable intent, but that it would be available to those who seek it with pure motives (Mat. 5:6; Jn. 17:20-21; Rom. 10:13-15). One of the many internal evidences of inspiration is that the Bible typically provides information that is not typically seen in other ancient writings which show nations and peoples in the most favorable ways. In other words, it does not seem reasonable, when compared with other writings of cultures contemporary to them, that Hebrew writers would record a history that so often shows their

nation in such a bad light. The Bible calmly records not only the great exploits and victories of people of faith, but also the errors and blunders of the unfaithful, the faithless, and even the momentary lapses of otherwise godly people, with equal candor. The Bible's record of the statements of the ungodly, the uninspired, and even Satan, does not mean that what is recorded is not true. To the contrary, the word of God bears a true record regardless of whom it tells about. When Paul wrote that, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God..." (2 Tim. 3:16a), he meant all, including what is said about the good, the bad and the ugly. Further, the Bible repeatedly reminds its readers that they are viewing the word of God and not that of man. Statements such as "thus says the Lord," "the word of the Lord," "the word of God," and "the Lord says," appear 737 times in 731 verses in both of the Testaments. Jesus declared that He spoke the word of the Father (Jn. 12:49; 17:8) and His apostles affirmed that they spoke by inspiration (1 Cor 2:13; 14:37; Gal. 1:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:20-21; Rev. 1:1). The Bible is the truth, the pleasant and the unpleasant, from cover to cover. As such it not only reveals God's will for mankind, but it uncovers the nature of mankind as we are and shows us what God would have us to be (1 Cor. 13:12; Heb. 4:12). If it were any different, even slightly deficient, it could never be "... 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" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).



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"...speaking the truth in love" Ephesians 4:15

What Is Marriage?

By Randall F. Matheny

Marriage can only truly be defined by the Bible. Society in general cannot agree upon a definition, or even if the concept of marriage really exists. The Bible, however, has much to say.

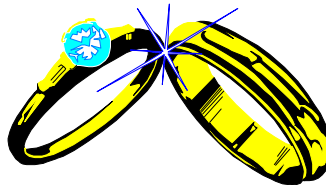
Marriage, by original design (authentic marriage), is between one man and one woman who are brought together by God. "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mat. 19:4-6).

Marriage is more than a union, it is unity: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24; Mat. 19:5; Eph. 5:31). Marriage is more than companionship, it is

Marriage, by original design (authentic marriage), is between one man and one woman who are brought together by God.

commitment: "... yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant" (Mal. 2:14b). Marriage is more than a relationship, it is esteemed as "... honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). Those who encourage sexual immorality by cheapening marriage

will also be judged (see Mat. 18:6-7). In other words, marriage is to be held in honor



among all mankind as a unique relationship different from all others. Sexual relationships which violate God's design for marriage dishonor marriage and are condemned. Although many interpersonal relationships exist not all of them qualify as marriages, since marriage in general is ordained

of God and must meet His requirements.

Because all lawful marriages are joined by God, man has no authority, personally, civilly or socially, to break the covenant except according to the terms of God's will. A search of the scriptures reveals that God will dissolve the covenant only

because of sexual immorality (Mat. 5:32; 19:9), or due to the death of a spouse (Rom. 7:1-3). Marriage is a divine institution, ordained of God, and is not to be entered into lightly, but reverently, discreetly, soberly and in the fear of God.

• • •

A Living Sacrifice

By Randall F. Matheny

Sacrifice is often confused with asceticism, which is the idea that giving up everything to embrace nothing is somehow the highest expression of religion. Sometimes this manifests itself in such things as taking a "vow of poverty," spending a few years in a monastery, or secluding one's self in some other way, or perhaps in giving up modern

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amenities to "get back to nature." Does God really want us to give up everything? Hardly. What He does require of us is that we make use of what we have, everything that we have, for His service. We learn from the parable of the talents (Mat. 25:14-30) that, having been blessed by the Lord according to differing abilities, He expects us not to give up what we have, but to put all that we have to use for Him. That's what it means to offer one's self "a living sacrifice," which is our "reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1-2).

Although some modern versions render the last phrase of Romans 12:2 as "spiritual worship" or some close variant, feeling that worship is implied, the better rendering is "service." The word usually translated "worship" does not occur in the verse. The emphasis remains on service which is to be rendered by living sacrifice. So then, the sacrifice that God requires of Christians is not that of asceticism, or even death, but to serve Him in living for Him. A fair commentary on this would be Colossians 3:22-25, "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." Although spoken to servants with human masters, those who serve a divine

Master would be expected to be no less loyal. So, what is a living sacrifice? First, it is holy, meaning that the individual has been purified through obedience to the truth (1 Pet. 1:22; Jn. 17:17). Second, it means that we present ourselves to God's keeping and command (Mat. 7:21). Third, it means that we must recognize and desire the uniqueness of Christianity over "fitting in" with the world. Fourth, it means that we joyfully and eagerly accept the mind of Christ which is imparted to us through our study of the scriptures (Phil. 2:5; Jn. 20:30-31). And finally, it means that we must willingly allow God's will to be worked out through us every day, of every year (Heb. 13:20-21). When we use all that we have for God's service we will truly be living sacrifices.

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Tidbits

"When you were born, you cried and everybody else was happy. The only question that matters is this: When you die, will YOU be happy when everybody else is crying?" -- **Tony Campolo**

"Every living creature that comes into the world has something allotted him to perform; therefore, he should not stand an idle spectator of what others are doing." -- **Sarah Kirby Trimmer**

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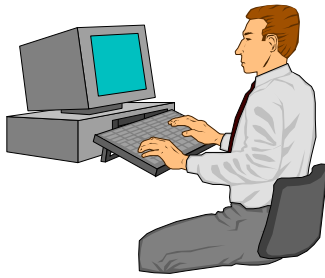
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The Country Preacher's Newsletter

"...speaking the truth in love" Ephesians 4:15

I Am Not Ashamed

By Randall F. Matheny

"I'm not ashamed to own my Lord, nor to defend His cause, maintain the honors of His word, the glory of His cross" is a refrain from a beautiful song in our hymn book. There is no way that anyone can sing the song, with their mind properly attuned (1 Cor. 14:15), without making a probing self-examination. Am I ashamed to own (acknowledge my relationship) my Lord?

I am not ashamed of my Lord, because He is not ashamed of me (Heb. 2:11-13). Being sanctified by Christ means being set aside by Him through obedience of the truth (Jn. 17:17; 1 Pet. 1:22-23) to be with Him; in service, in suffering and in glory, so that He can declare, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me." "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ..." (Rom. 1:16-17), because it is the sole, exclusive means of salvation for people of all nations, and it is the only means by which one may live by faith. Major denominations have agreed that pagan religions are God's way of preparing people for Christianity, but how can

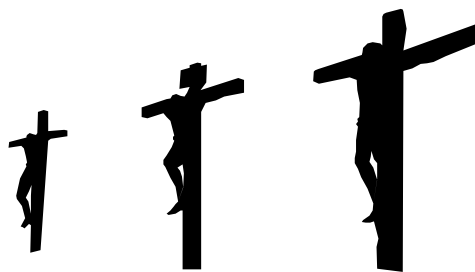
idolatry, animism, astrology, witchcraft, sorcery, which are all strongly condemned by God in the Bible, prepare anyone to accept the Christ of the Bible? Pagan religions do not help man draw closer to God for, historically and biblically, they have hindered him and caused his destruction.

I know that when my heart is filled with God's word I am strong and unashamed (Psm.

faithful service and assembly, even if it means that I am apart from them because they will not assemble with me. And I know that they will be worse off if my example is as a weak, uncommitted, hypocritical Christian, when both I and they know that I am doing something I should not do, or am not doing something that I should. I am not ashamed because I know that Jesus Christ is the only hope that I, and all those I love, have of securing eternal life and escaping the only thing that sinful mankind deserves (Rom. 5:5; 6:23). I am not ashamed of the church of Christ, because

Jesus Christ is the only hope that I, and all those I love, have of securing eternal life and escaping the only thing that sinful mankind deserves.

I know that it is Christ's body (Col. 1:18) and that it is not possible to esteem the body of the Lord too highly (2 Cor. 7:14). I am not ashamed because I know there is a better place than this, prepared by God, and I am secure in that knowledge that He is not ashamed of me (Heb. 11:16). I am not ashamed to suffer for Christ's sake, whether it comes from strangers, family or friends, "...for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12). I am not ashamed.



119:80), but when I am ignorant I am weak and hesitant to declare my relationship with Christ. It then becomes easier for me to hide my Christianity, to excuse myself from opportunities for service, to shun the fellowship and company of my brethren and to absent myself from the regular assemblies of the church. I know that my loved ones will be better off if I set a godly example in

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Peace, Perfect Peace

By Randall F. Matheny

Job's lament that, "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1) bears testimony to the turbulent, trying world that we live in. In spite of the repeated efforts of man to create a utopia, or another Eden, he has never come close to being successful. Like the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9), man's greatest achievements are met and countered by new challenges and obstacles. To Adam God said, "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return." (Gen. 3:17b-19). Paul informed us that, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). And Peter confirmed that only after we have suffered awhile will we be perfected, established, strengthened, and settled (1 Pet. 5:10).

It is nothing short of marvelous that in the midst of turmoil, strife and trouble God assures the faithful that there can be peace found. Luke reveals that the "Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace." Jesus teaches His disciples that it is through the things that He has

spoken that they may find peace in Him, and that tribulation in the world has not threat for the followers of Him who has overcome the world (Jn. 16:33). So, does having peace mean that everything must go the way we wish it to go? Or that we encounter no trouble in life? Hardly. But it does mean that the Christian has an advantage in coping with the troubles of life and in not being overwhelmed by them so that they can be at peace even in the midst of hardship. They have Jesus who has made peace between them and their God (Eph. 2:14-16; Rom. 5:1). They have prayer through which they may be anxious for nothing, and through Christ may be guarded with "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 3:6-7). They have peace in the presence of Christian friends and in the goodwill of the church (2 Cor. 7:5-7). They have grace and peace multiplied to them in the knowledge of God and Christ (2 Pet. 1:2). Peace is a precious commodity. It must be sought and pursued (1 Pet. 3:11), but it can be had, and it's worth the effort. "Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin: The blood of Jesus whispers peace within."

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Suggested Reading



"The Suicide of Modern Theology," by John Warwick Montgomery

Mr. Montgomery, a conservative denominational scholar,

describes and defines the philosophers of the past two centuries who have had weighty influence on current religious thought. This is not light reading, but if you've ever wondered where some of the philosophy which is now troubling the church had its roots, this volume is a good place to start.

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