

ABOUNDING IN THE LORD'S WORK

By Cecil Burch

"But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22-24.)

Many years ago, a story was told about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. An important job had to be done, and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it and that Somebody would do it. But Nobody realized that

Everybody thought Somebody would do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

The Apostle Paul left no doubt that Christians must work for the Lord. He said, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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 Corinthians 15:58.)

Even Jesus Christ Himself said, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work." (John 9:4.) When He was preparing to go back to Heaven He prayed to His Father saying, "I have glorified you on earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." (John 17:4.)

We will be judged according to

what we have done. Paul said, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, whether good or bad." (2 Corinthians 5:10.)

We dare not pawn our responsibilities off on someone else. Paul told the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:12,13.) Every child of God longs to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of your Lord." (Matthew 25:21.)

— Amarillo, TX

WHY OFFER A PUBLIC INVITATION?

by Milton Smith

Anyone who attends a few worship services in the church of Christ will quickly notice that an "invitation" is almost always extended by the preacher at the end of his sermon. Some might be curious as to why we practice this. We must admit that there is no direct command in the Scriptures telling us that a public invitation was a normal part of the worship of the early church, and there is no historical evidence that would lead me to doubt this fact. I have had numerous members tell me that they have attended services in the past that did not include such an invitation. I have even had some suggest that this practice could lead to a person ignoring the urgency of responding to the gospel during the week so that he might follow "protocol" and come forward Sunday morning. What if such a person's life ended before Sunday?

Often - as I have extended the invitation - I have stated from the pulpit that a person can "respond" anytime he/she wishes to do so. I hasten to add that to eliminate such a public call to respond would certainly not be a sinful act; we cannot even

say that such would be inappropriate because we have no scriptural reason to make such an accusation.

So why do we practice this public call to respond?

I have always viewed the invitation as simply taking advantage of the opportunity! A person might attend the worship service on a particular Sunday (or Wednesday evening), with no intention of getting his life right with God; but something might be said during the service that might cause this person to seriously reflect upon his spiritual condition. In this case, a public call to respond might be the final encouragement that this soul needs to get his life right with his Savior. I have known of such cases in which a person is touched by something said and comes forward that very day.

The key word here is "opportunity." Because there is nothing unscriptural about a public invitation, to offer such a call to respond can (and often does) prove expedient. Again, one can respond any time, but what better time to do so than "today," and this certainly includes those times when the church

assembles together publicly.

"Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation . . ." (2 Corinthians 6:2.)

— Tulsa, OK

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

HIDING BEHIND THE CROSS

By Dalton Key

The story is told of one preacher who, after what he considered one of his more stellar sermons, asked his wife, "How many truly great preachers do you think there are in the brotherhood?" Her reply? "One less than you think!"

Cicero, once billed as "the greatest Roman orator," suffered from the same malady. He was, to say the least, enamored with himself. It was reported that often, after one of his speeches, Cicero's hearers would cry out, "Behold, how well did Cicero speak!" And he could not have agreed more. He once remarked, "When I write on philosophical subjects and lay my writings aside and later have occasion to return to them, I can scarcely believe that Cicero wrote them, they sound so philosophical!"

Cicero's mistake was one of pride. He came to believe too much in himself and in all the lavish praise which was heaped upon him.

Herod Agrippa suffered similarly. Luke records the king's sad story: "So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man.' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 12:21-23).

Cicero and Herod, falling for the flattery which swept over them, both succumbed to that "proud look" which heads the list of those things hated by the Lord (Proverbs 6:16-19).

When Scripture admonishes that we "be clothed with humility," it further reminds us that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Those of us who teach and preach are especially - and continually - in need of such reminders. While many young preachers have been discouraged and decimated by unwarranted criticism, many others have been spoiled and ruined by well-meaning, but overblown, praise.

While we should not believe all the bad that may be said about us, neither should we foolishly accept as fact all the good! Every sermon is not a home run. We are not in a reality-show-type preaching competition. And no, none of us are "superstars" within the brotherhood, regardless what others might say or what we may foolishly believe.

Paul's attitude deserves imitation: "Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others . . . But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (1 Thessalonians 2:6; Galatians 6:14).

In answering so many fervent prayers of yesteryear (seeming longer ago and further removed from now than ever), may those of us who preach and teach "hide behind the cross" as we proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ.

MUST YOU TELL EVERYTHING YOU KNOW?

By Joe Slater

Perhaps you've read "Anne of Green Gables" (or seen the videos, or both). "Tales of Avonlea" is a follow-up series of made-for-television programs featuring some of the same characters in the same quaint little town of Avonlea on Prince Edward Island about a century ago.

One of the many recurring themes in both the books and the television shows is the propensity of people to gossip. What someone said or did decades ago is hashed and rehashed. Who was seen with whom, and what it might mean, becomes grist for the rumor mill, replete with speculation, arguments, exaggeration, and an abundance of jumping to conclusions. Ironically, not even church diminishes the desire to dredge up dirt. No sooner have services concluded than the backbiting begins anew in their Sunday best! Of course, the author presents it in such a way that we say, "Shame on them! I would never do that!" But is that always true?

"A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter" (Proverbs 11:13). Someone protests, "But everything I said is true!" Let's suppose that's true. The question is, "Must you tell everything you know?" Even if something is true, you might do better to keep it quiet. What if some salacious scrap of scandal surfaced about you? Would you want anyone who learns of it to broadcast it to the world?

Someone smarter than I recommended three tests before speaking: 1) Is it true? 2) Is it kind? 3) Is it necessary? I have a hunch that heeding those three tests would result in far less gossip.

"Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases" (Proverbs 26:20).

You really don't have to tell everything you know!

— Justin, TX

"And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not" (1 Timothy 5:13).

ONE SMALL LIGHT!

By Richard Dent

During an Atlantic Ocean crossing, a severe storm arose, and a passenger lay in his bunk very seasick. In the dark of the night he heard a cry, "Man Overboard," as some poor soul was swept from the deck of the ship.

The sick man lay there thinking there was nothing he could do to help. But then he thought, "I could at least put my lantern in the porthole of my room."

The almost drowned man was rescued and he recounted the story the next day: "I was going down for the third time when someone aboard the ship put a lantern in a porthole. It shone on my hand, and a sailor in the lifeboat grabbed me and pulled me in."

One small light! It belonged to a sick man. But it enabled a strong sailor to save a life.

Was the sailor who pulled the man into the lifeboat more important to his "salvation" than the man who put the light in the window? Which of the two could he have done without?

Every Christian can do likewise for his fellowman. Someone may actually pull the lost into the boat, but a light is needed. The light may be a well-prepared Bible class lesson from God's holy word. Perhaps it may be the example of faithful attendance to services of the church down through the years. It could be a number of good deeds done for strangers we may never know that well.

Remember that Jesus said, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16.)

God's word is light! Your influence can be light! Never underestimate its power.

— Liberal, KS

"Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain." (Philippians 2:14-16.)

EDITORIAL . . .

WHAT CAN WE DO? WE CAN PRAY!

By Dalton Key

The Colossian letter mentions Epaphras as Paul's "dear fellow servant" and a "faithful minister of Christ" (Colossians 1:7). He is recognized of heaven for his "great zeal" for the brethren at Colossae (4:13) and for "always laboring fervently" for the church's growth and maturity (4:12).

How did this Christian servant direct his great zeal? In what way did he labor fervently? Read Colossians 4:12 closely: "Ephaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." His zeal for the church and his work for the church was accomplished through his prayers for the church.

We should, as health and opportunity permit, do more than pray for the Lord's work. We are admonished to "preach the word" (Acts 8:4; 2 Timothy 4:2), to exhort and edify one another (Hebrews 3:13; Ephesians 4:29), and to "do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

It is possible, though, to place too much emphasis on our efforts and too little upon the tremendous power of prayer and the God to whom we pray. We may plant; we may water; but God gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6).

The apostles encouraged the Jerusalem brethren to select "seven men of good reputation" to "serve tables," thus allowing the apostles to give themselves "continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:2,3).

Jesus taught "that men always ought to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

Paul frequently asked for the prayers of his readers and promised the brethren that he was praying for them as well (Colossians 4:3; 1:3).

It is humbling but true: more may be accomplished through an hour of ardent prayer than through a week of frenzied labor or a year of needless worry. In the words of Tennyson, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Or in the more worthy words of the Bible, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).

The church desperately needs more servants willing to give themselves to a ministry of prayer. Our world is on a collision course with the second death. Saints of God must shine as beacons of light in an ever-darkening world, pointing lost humanity to the life-giving Savior. But we can't possibly do it alone, of our own strength. We must rely heavily, as the best of God's people always have, on the amazing power of prayer.

Could it be that we have not because we ask not?



GOD'S VIEW TOWARD SIN HAS NOT CHANGED

by Danny Tunnell

Every command or instruction God gives us is for our good (Deuteronomy 10:13). Over the centuries, the nature of God has not changed. He is still the same. "I am the Lord, I do not change" (Malachi 3:6). There is no variation or shadow of turning with God (James 1:17).

God is unchanging in holiness (Revelation 4:8). There is no impurity, no sin, in God.

God is unchanging in His love. He demonstrated His love toward us, in that while we were sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). God is love (1 John 4:8).

The word of God, the Bible, has not changed (Isaiah 40:8; Psalms 119:89).

Human nature has not changed. "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it" (Jeremiah 17:9)? The biggest issue on the planet is that by and large God's creation has rebelled against Him. What we are watching daily on our television screens has been going on for centuries. Violence, wars, and killings took place

in the days of Babylon, in ancient Egypt, and Rome during the Middle Ages. It has all happened before, because human nature has not changed.

What we're seeing and hearing today may seem shocking to us. But it's what people have always done when they depart from God, when they disobey God.

God still holds the same view toward sin that He had in both Old and New Testaments. What once was sin in the eyes of God is still sin in His eyes. What once was an abomination and detestable to Him is still abomination and detestable to Him. If it was evil to God decades ago, or centuries ago, or millennia ago, it is still evil today.

God's moral laws have not changed. The "Ten Commandments" were not "Ten Suggestions" (Exodus 20:1-17).

Today, many seem to believe that God has changed His view toward sin. Many are calling evil "good" and good "evil" (Isaiah 5:20). If evil were not made to appear good, there would be no

such thing as temptation.

Our society used to have laws against fornication and adultery, but today those sins are glorified in films and literature. Honesty was once the hallmark of character. Today, many believe dishonesty is alright as long as you don't get caught.

The Bible says, "He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but he who confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

It's not surprising that sinners sin. After all, that's what sinners do! It is also no surprise that people without God will often see evil as good and good as evil. But we need to disabuse ourselves of the idea that somehow because sin is so widely accepted and pervasive today, God has changed His view toward sin.

God has never lowered His standards. His view toward sin has never changed and it never will. He has always been the same.

— Miami, OK

GOD'S GRACIOUS HAND

By Milton Smith

A falling object of most any size can be dangerous. If we walk near a construction site we might see signs posted to warn us of potential "falling objects." Why? Because an object of any size that falls from any distance is capable of bringing serious injury (or even death) to the person who might be unlucky enough to be struck by such an object.

But without a doubt, the most dangerous and deadly thing that can "fall" is the eternal soul of a person in rebellion to God. To fall away from the grace of our Lord is so dangerous the Bible contains many warnings about such a terrible fate.

We have many examples in God's Word of people falling from grace. One does not need to turn many of the Bible's pages before reading the story of Adam and Eve and how they sinned and brought about their own downfall. The Jews, as a nation, often went into captivity because of their rebellion against God and His Divine Law. In the book of Revelation,

the letters to the seven churches of Asia provide examples of entire congregations being warned that they were in danger of falling away from God. Paul even warned the Galatians, "Christ is become of no effect unto you; whosoever of you are justified by the law, you have fallen from grace." (Galatians 5:4.)

One can fall from the security of God's grace by yielding to worldly influences, failing to do what is right, a lack of diligence, or failing to overcome temptations. It is important to recognize the dangers of falling away so that we might protect against such a terrible thing from happening. But we rejoice over the fact that the Bible also contains examples of people who were guilty of falling away, but soon recognized their dilemma and turned back to God. Peter would be a classic example of this. As the Psalmist has written, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delights in His way; though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for

the Lord upholds him with His hand." (Psalm 37:23-24.) We later read in this same Psalm, "Depart from evil and do good, and dwell for evermore."

The erring Christian will always find the gracious hand of God extended to him any time he is ready to repent and turn back to Him.

— Tulsa, OK

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