

LIVING IN A FISHBOWL

By Steven Prine

A math teacher worked ten problems on the chalkboard for the class to see. From the beginning, she heard giggles as she continued writing. By the time she had finished, giggles had turned to laughter and ridicule. Putting down the chalk, she turned around and asked the class, “What’s so funny?” One student said, “You got the first problem wrong!”

The teacher responded, “I know, and I did it on purpose. I wanted to show by example that all of you focused on what was wrong. No one bothered to see that the other nine are correct!”

Christians live in a fishbowl. Jesus said to let our light shine (Matthew 5:14). We all make mistakes in judgment at times, lose our tempers, etc. It’s too easy to criticize a work being done, a lesson taught, no one visited the sick, etc.

I wonder if we get so caught up in expecting perfection in others performing the works of the church that we don’t notice the good being accomplished. What catches our eye is the mistake or less-than-expected result. We complain about what could’ve been done better, or what should’ve been done. Perhaps the task at hand could’ve been done better if we had pitched in and contributed our talents!

Worse yet, we complain about our fellow- Christians’ flaws in their work or character to someone who isn’t a Christian. How many times have I seen that? And we wonder why our neighbors and friends have no interest in listening when we talk about God!

Yes, we are in a fishbowl. The world will see our good; but the bad can overshadow our good. We must all work together, encouraging each

other, “exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

Let’s focus on encouraging each other, not on joining Fault-Finders, Inc. — Turlock, CA

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:31,32).

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

HOW ARE BELIEVERS SAVED?

by Joe Dale Wilson

Jesus was speaking in the Temple following the Feast of Booths, just six months prior to His being nailed to the cross. Some were listening to Him to learn, and faith was produced in their lives. According to John 8:30, “As He spake these things, many believed on Him.”

Believers have always been made by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17).

In the Gospel of John the rulers of the Jews were called, “Jews.” In John 10:19 a sharp division occurred among the Jewish leaders with some saying Jesus had a demon (for the fourth time in the Gospel of John). Others of the leaders were saying a demon could not heal a man born blind. In one of their previous divisions about Jesus (John 7:48-52) they had accused Nicodemus of being a follower of Jesus (“Are you also from Galilee?”) when all he had done was ask them to follow the law by hearing the accused (Jesus) prior to judging Him.

Nicodemus had earlier admitted that no one could do what Jesus was

doing without God being with him, when he had come to Jesus at night (John 3:2). Evidently others of the Sanhedrin Court had recognized that Jesus had come from God because of His miracles because Nicodemus said, “We know you are a teacher come from God” (John 3:2, McCord). Then John 8:31 begins by telling that some of the Sanhedrin Court believed Jesus: “Then Jesus said to those Jews that believed Him.” He was speaking to believers who were some of the most powerful leaders in the Jewish faith.

Then He tells them how they must demonstrate their faith. “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”

The word “if” proclaims that discipleship is conditional on more than mental belief in Jesus, but upon “abiding” in His word as well.

To abide means to make one’s home in His word. Disciples are guided in all they do in His name and are obedient to His word! (John 3:36; 14:15; Hebrews 5:8,9; James 1:25).

Since members of the believers

among the Sanhedrin Court were to abide in His word in order to be true disciples, what are people to do today to be disciples? Is it not the same?

— Seneca, MO

“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 1:22-25).

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:2,3).

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

DOING OUR BEST TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

By Danny Boggs

Suppose you receive the sudden diagnosis of a fast-moving, unstoppable disease. Suppose a tornado rumbles through. Suppose an accident occurs. Or what if Jesus comes back today? Will you be ready?

You know you need to be right with God. Do you also realize that to be right with God, you have to do your best to be right with people?

Listen to John, the apostle of love. “Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in light, and in him there is not cause for stumbling” (1 John 2:9,10). Loving others keeps you basking in God’s light. Antagonism toward another locks you in darkness.

When love is not your attitude toward another person, you’re more like the first murderer, Cain, than you might think (1 John 3:11,12). “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:14,15). Who has grabbed hold of eternal life? A Christian who keeps loving others. But a person of animosity is in the grip of death. He is a murderer. Impenitent murderers are headed nowhere but for the eternal lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

Surely the Lord doesn’t expect you to love someone who has hurt your feelings terribly, does He? What if the estranged person has done something even worse to you? “By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16). Jesus didn’t lay down His life for you because you had been so good to Him; it was the opposite.

“Beloved, let us love another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:7-11). What will it cost you to be reconciled to the person who has become your enemy? Nothing like the bloody price paid by God to reconcile you to Himself.

Can you go to heaven mad at someone? Why try to presume upon the grace of God? To be right with God, you must do all you can to be right with other people. Are you doing your best?

— Neosho, MO

GOD’S CALLED OUT PEOPLE

By Milton Smith

Ekklesia is the Greek word that is translated into our English word church. It is derived from the very ekkaleo which carries the meaning “to call out.” The word, in its simplest form, refers to any “group” of people who might be called forth or assembled together for any particular purpose. Thus, as one reads through the New Testament he will notice that Ekklesia is used in more than one sense.

First, this word is used to refer to an assembly of people in a most general way. For example, we find ekklesia being used to refer to a gathered assembly of citizens (Acts 19:39), Israel as a group of people who were called out of Egypt into the wilderness (Acts 7:38), and, of course, people gathered together for religious worship (Hebrews 2:12). Thus, we find that this word is used in the New Testament in a general sense of a group of people gathered together for any special purpose. But we quickly notice that this word is used to refer to an assembly of Christians in a local area. Thus, we read of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church in Antioch (Acts 11:26), the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1) , and the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2).

But we notice that this same word is used in the plural to refer to congregations that assembled at different locations. When Paul addressed “the churches of Galatia” (Galatians 1:2), he was referring to congregations that assembled in different areas of Galatia. Likewise, the apostle John was instructed to write to “the seven churches of Asia” in Revelation 1:4; a reference to seven churches located in the region of Asia Minor. But this same word is also used to refer to the collective body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18). In other words, every Christian in the world belongs to the spiritual body of our Lord. No greater honor can be bestowed upon a person than to belong to this particular body. All Christians should rejoice every day that our Lord has given to us the privilege of belonging to His body as His special “called out group.”

— Tulsa, OK

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22,23). “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

THE CHANGE
THAT MATTERS

by Dalton Key

With tensions high and hate abounding,
Close to home and past the sea;
Truth is now as ever shouting,
Change begins with you and me.
The time we waste in pointing fingers,
Not a single problem solves;
When all’s been said but one truth lingers -
We can only change ourselves.
The mind that looks for faults in others,
Sees mistakes most everywhere;
As we seek so we discover,
Forming much of what we fear.
With heaven’s help may we remember,
Hearts to help first look within;
Change will come as we surrender,
All of self to all of Him.

“So brothers and sisters, since God has shown us great mercy, I beg you to offer your lives as a living sacrifice to Him . . .” (Romans 12:1, NCV).

EDITORIAL . . .

WHY DO YOU BELIEVE WHAT YOU
BELIEVE?

by Dalton Key

To know what we believe is one thing; to know why we believe it is something else entirely. Our convictions are truly ours only after we have thought them through and made them our own.

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). Genuine faith has always been a “hands-on”, first-person matter. While good Bible teachers and faithful gospel preachers may guide us, they can never do our thinking for us. We accept and embrace truth, not because others believe it as truth, not because others teach it as truth, but because it is truth, and this realization comes as it always has - as a result of personal study and individual thought.

Paul’s admonition to “test all things,” and “hold fast what is good” applies to all of us. (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Note that the apostle did not say, “Let the preacher test all things and then hold fast to whatever he says is good.” While this updated rendering better reflects the thinking of many of today’s more misinformed disciples, it is wrong nonetheless. “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12).

And what of Peter’s inspired counsel? “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15). Again, observe that Peter’s instruction is not given to preachers or church leaders in particular but to Christians in general, to God’s “own special people” (1 Peter 2:9).

There simply is no substitute for individual Bible study, reflection, and the personal, Bible-based faith which such produces. Even Timothy, who shared the same strong faith cherished by his grandmother and his mother, did so because “from childhood” he had “learned and been assured of . . . and known the Holy Scriptures” (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14,15). Timothy had help from his family; he had the instruction and example of Paul; but in the end, when all was said and done, his faith was his own.

Do you know what you believe? Good. Now answer this: do you know why you believe what you believe?

If not, why not?



IF THEY HATED JESUS, THEY’LL HATE YOU

by Danny Tunnell

The word “hate” keeps coming up in the Bible in regard to the devil and his activity. “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:13). “We know the we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer; and no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:14,15). “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). That’s why Cain killed Abel, because his deeds were evil and Abel’s righteous (1 John 3:12).

“For everyone that does evil hates the light, neither comes to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:20). The “light” is the truth. Many viciously hate the truth. They hate the truth because their deeds are wrong.

Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day and to those who had rejected Him: “The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil” (John 7:7). The world hated Jesus. Why? Because He didn’t tell them what they wanted to hear. Instead, He told them that what they were doing was evil. He called “evil” evil and “sin” sin, and “bad and

wrong” bad and wrong. Because He did that, the world hated Him. They hated Jesus for the same reason people may hate you.

Someone may say, “But I want everyone to like me!” What Jesus presented is an either/or thing. If you’re friends with the world, you’re not going to be close to God (James 4:4). “If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” (John 15:18-20).

Jesus told them very clearly what was right and what was wrong. It was an opportunity to repent and get right with God. Instead of repenting, many decided to attack God and stop the messenger.

Many hate the light, they hate the truth, but it is really God they hate. Jesus said this about His followers: “I have given them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the

world” (John 17:14).

The only alternative to not being hated by the world is to be part of the world. Which do you want to be? Apart from the world, or part of the devil’s crowd on the way to destruction?

Although we’re living in this world right now, we’re not of the world. Our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). Because we are on the right path, you have the greater One on the inside (1 John 4:4). There is a grace, a strength, and angels to help us (Matthew 11:28-30).

“In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Contrast this with the devil’s crowd: “The way of the transgressor is hard” (Proverbs 13:15). Not only in this life, but also in the life to come.

Daniel C. Roberts wrote, “Refresh Thy people on their toilsome way. Lead us from night to never ending day.” “The path of the just is like the shining light, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18).
— Miami, OK

Our Faith Is Not Blind!

By Joe Slater

Skeptics of various types routinely mock Christians for having “blind faith.” Unfortunately, many professing Christians have fed that myth by basing their faith (if you can even call it that) on their feelings. Ask them why they believe as they do, and their answer is, “I feel it right here in my heart!” Even some of the songs we sing betray this notion. One quick example: I Serve a Risen Savior has this line at the end of the chorus: “You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart!”

Does Jesus live within your heart? Assuredly so! But is that how you know He lives? Certainly not! You would know nothing of His death, burial, and resurrection but for the fact that God has revealed it in His word! Because His word has been revealed, confirmed, and recorded, our faith rests on solid evidence; it is definitely not blind!

When we put our confident trust in Jesus and obey His will, we ought to feel good about it! But let’s keep things in order: first come the facts (as revealed in the Bible, John 17:17); then comes faith, which is based on the facts (Romans 10:17); finally come good feelings (Acts 8:39).

Facts, faith, and feelings - in that order. When feelings are the basis for faith, we’re on dangerous ground! Saul of Tarsus felt like he was doing right by persecuting Christians. Islamic jihadists feel like they are doing right by blowing themselves up to kill Jews and Christians. Those feelings are as real as yours. If feelings are the basis for acceptable faith, then we should honor those behaviors! (But they aren’t!)

As Christians, our faith isn’t blind, but rests on the rock-solid evidence of the revealed, confirmed, recorded

word of God.

“Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed” (Luke 1:1-4).

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

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