

Wisdom & Power

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In this Issue:

What Frightened Herod?	3
What happens so long ago is still happening today. Pastor Jeff tells us about the terrifying effects of threats and how to deal with them.	
Interacting with Yahweh.	5
This is an interesting article about grace. It tells us about the times when we can expect to realize God's grace in our lives.	
What Is the Gospel?	7
Patrick Navas continues his study on what the Gospel means, by looking at the history from Moses to the Messiah.	
Unity of the Spirit.	10
Sister Jan Magiera gives us a discussion of unity and peace based on the fact that we each have the same Holy Spirit.	
The Faith of Jesus.	12
In this article Mario points out that Jesus also had faith in the kingdom that was the center of his gospel.	
The Great Tribulation.	14
Brother William Wachtel gives us a good overview of the tribulation, from and historical perspective.	
The Story of Susanna.	16
A selection from the Apocrypha is presented for your reading and enlightenment. Not many of us have read it.	
Thoughts from James.	19
Pastor Steve Taylor gives us some insightful thoughts from the letter of James. What Steve has to say is useful for today.	

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We hope each issue gives you something to think about, laugh over, pray on, and pass around.

Readers are urged to submit articles for publication. We can't guarantee that they will be used, however.

We gladly receive mail from you. Tell us what you think of the magazine.

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First Words.	2
So Many Creeds.	6
Drug problem?	11
Thankful Power.	18
Dog logic.	18
Head Scratchers.	20
Letters to W&P.	21
Verses to Live by.	22

First Words

“Imagine No Religion”

There was a brief article in the local newspaper regarding the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s billboard message. A picture accompanying the article showed the sign’s message: “Imagine No Religion”. The co-founder of the foundation is quoted as saying, “This message introduces the belief that our society doesn’t need religion to function.” The article concluded with a couple of short responses. What follows is mine.

In these sorts of discussions it always a good idea to clarify the definitions that are being use. In the King James Bible the word religion is used only a few times. One place is James 1:26-27. Here the Greek word “threskos” (translated religion) could better be translated worship or service. As religion has today, “threskos, had a double meaning. One was outward ritual, the other was worship and service from the heart.

As James says, pure and undefiled religion (or worship) that is acceptable to God is to visit the orphans and widows in their trouble. And to keep separate from the world. Whether we use religion or worship, James’ definition stands; “Look out for those less fortunate.” I hardly think this is what the Freedom from Religion Foundation is advocating we give up.

For a modern definition, the dictionary tells us that religion is a set of institutionalized attitudes, beliefs, or practices. This may be what the Atheists are opposed to. Religion in this light carries only the trappings of piety. The practices are done wholly for show. In this case the pomp and rituals are empty and meaningless as we will see shortly.

I tend to agree with the Atheists. Hear me out before you judge me. Religion in its institutionalized facade should be allowed to die. These rituals are not the worship of Yahweh. Nor are they the service to others that Jesus championed. Consider the two great commands.

The Old Testament prophets denounced the ritual practices because they didn’t affect, nor were they conceived in the heart. In fact Yahweh says, through the prophet Amos (5:21-24), that He hates and despises their sacred assemblies, He will not accept their offerings, or hear their songs. This type of religion is

more concerned with controlling behavior by coercion, force and pressure rather than a change of heart. This leads to hypocrisy which is one of the Atheist’s complaints.

I realize that some will find offense with this billboard message. There may be some sort of backlash from the institutionalized religious fundamentalists. Those who employ and encourage “religion” will be worried about this threat of people thinking. However, that isn’t where their concern should be. They should be worried about what Yahweh, the Great and Awesome God thinks.

Those who worship Yahweh in spirit and truth know He fights for us. We can find confidence in His presence, just as Jesus did. If criticisms arise we can be bold enough to look at them and consider them honestly. There may be something we’ve overlooked.

As I understand the end times, our real challenge will come from those who “have a form of godliness but deny its power.” I’m convinced that functioning believers will find the greatest contest with those “who profess to know Yahweh but in works deny Him”. I do not believe the primary trouble will come from those who say that God doesn’t exist.

Let’s hold fast to our faith and live it as worship to the Almighty. What Yahweh desires is truth in the heart, justice toward others, and mercy. Not even the Atheists could be against that. Living the truth from the heart will silence the critics as Proverbs 16:7 says, “When a man’s ways please Yahweh, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.”

This first issue of the year comes with some insight into living in 2009 in various articles. Take them all to heart, and if you have any questions, or comments, please contact me. I’m not an expert (but I have friends that are).

Be blessed and not troubled as you read on.

Chuck Jones.

What Frightened Herod?

Jeff Fletcher



In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. -Matthew 2:1-12

In Matthew chapter two we see the story of the wise men who came to King Herod and asked him about the child who had been born to be King of the Jews. Herod's reaction to their question was quite interesting. Matthew records that Herod was Frightened (NRSV) Other versions of the Bible say that he was disturbed, troubled, my favorite is the Message which says he was TERRIFIED.

Now, this isn't just an ordinary Joe this is King Herod. The most powerful man in all Jerusalem, yet he never felt secure in his power. Even though he was king of the Jews he served at the mercy and good pleasure of the Roman Caesar. He was not a popular king, he was

really an insecure, blood thirsty tyrant.

I thought about Herod back when Sadaam Hussein was executed. Hussein was also a blood thirsty dictator who rose to power through violence and oppression. Hussein once ruled over a council meeting where he accused about 60 council members of betraying him, one by one Hussein confronted the men, and one by one the men were led out of the meeting and shot, the remaining men swore an oath of loyalty to Hussein and helped solidify his power. Herod and Hussein were cut from the same cloth. Hussein became a maniacal demagogue who believed that he couldn't be touched but this outwardly blood-thirsty bravado masked an inner fear that one day his power would be taken away which it was during the Iraq war. Hussein ended up in hiding and eventually lost his life at the end of a rope. Terrorists live their lives in terror because they know deep in their hearts that justice will prevail.

Herod no doubt lived each day in fear that his kingdom would be taken from him so when the magi came asking about the child who was born to be king Herod the

terrorist, became Herod the terrified.

You know the rest of the story, Herod puts in a place a plot to discover the identity of the child so he can have his rival killed. When that fails, Herod has all the Jewish Males under age two put to death. Of course, God protects the infant Jesus who grows to be a man, our savior and future king.

Soon after, Herod died. The Herod we later meet when Jesus goes on trial is one of Herod's sons who succeeded him. That Herod died as well. But Jesus is still alive and Jesus will return to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.

When Herod came face to face with the news of the birth of the Messiah, he had a time of decision. He could have decided to join the magi, he could have gone with them to Bethlehem and brought his own gifts and knelt down before God's anointed and honored him as God's choice for King. If Herod was seeking first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness that is exactly what he would have done.

You see, when our lives our flowing with God's plan for the world and for us we will find ourselves doing what is right and appropriate. But when we allow our choices to be guided by our fears and anxieties, like Herod did, we will find ourselves caught in the mire of our own sinfulness.

Herod was Terrified because he saw in this child Jesus a threat. If Jesus was to be king, there was no place for Herod to be king as well. Herod would not allow himself to submit to God's will for his life. As a result, he sinned and caused much violence and hurt to others.

Jesus would one day come face to face with the crisis of his own death. In the Garden outside of Jerusalem he would sweat great

drops of blood as he knew the soldiers were coming to take him away, to stand, eventually, before another Herod to face his judgment not for his own sins, but for the sins of the world. Yet, even as Jesus faced the fear of death, he was able to respond in a godly and spiritually healthy way, as he prayed "God let this cup pass from me", he also prayed, "not my will but thy will be done". He submitted himself to the will of the father and an angel came to comforted him, from that moment on Jesus faced the last

"...the good news is, whatever the source of our fears, we have one who is greater than our fears to help us."

hours of his life with confidence.

We will all like Herod and like Jesus, face situations that cause us to experience fear and anxiety. For some, fear will be an isolated event, for others who suffer anxiety disorders of all types, it will be an ongoing struggle, but the good news is, whatever the source of our fears, we have one who is greater than our fears to help us.

Paul was no stranger to fear and anxiety and he wrote in Philippians 4:6-9; "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever

is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

Just as Jesus knelt before the father and made his petition to God he was granted the gift of peace. We too can receive the gift of peace whenever we honestly bring our fears and anxieties before our father and submit ourselves to him.

Jesus did not want to die and he told God that. We must always be honest with God about how we feel. That's part of the healing; honestly coming before God and pouring out our hearts before him. But notice, even though Jesus didn't get what he wanted, God still gave him peace.

When you are experiencing fear and anxiety, you might pray to God to spare you from some terror and God may choose to spare you or he may choose to let you go through the terror for his greater purposes. The key is not the circumstances, the key is, are you trusting yourself to the father? Ultimately, death could not destroy Jesus, God raised him to everlasting life and that is true for us as well, no matter what threat, real or imagined that is bringing you anxiety and fear, it is not greater than God who can and will save you. So we can go in peace trusting in the Father's mercy and grace. 🙏

Interacting with Yahweh

by Chuck Jones

The team was beaten, they lost the contest even though no one had made any mistakes or errors they were outplayed and regardless of giving it their best effort, they lost. The coach however was not disappointed and he conveyed his pride to the team following the match. "Team", the coach said, "don't hang your heads, the final score doesn't tell the story of the effort you all put into playing. I'm proud of you, there are some more things we have to learn, but you already possess what can't be taught; the desire to put everything you have into playing".

The coach commended his team for the effort they put into the game. This made each team member more willing to put his all into play. Wouldn't you like to play for a coach like that? In a manner of speaking we do.

I'm thinking of grace, Yahweh's grace. That's the commodity that

God gives to the humble (Proverbs 2: 8). We are told that "by grace we are saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Paul opens and closes most of his letters with pronouncing grace on the readers. Peter talks about the "manifold grace" (1 Peter 4:10). It is a word often used but not always understood.

This commodity, grace, is a transaction between Yahweh and his people. We need it and he gives it. By giving and receiving grace we are interacting with Yahweh. That is incredible!

In order to know when grace appears, I think, it's good to know what it is. In the Greek text we find grace most often translated from "charis". This word is also translated favor, gift, thanks, credit, commendable, thank worthy, and acceptable. Here we can find some help in defining grace.

Grace is given in tough, painful, or hard situations in life. Let's take one of these times as an example. The apostle Paul recounts for us a time when he prayed three times that his "thorn in the flesh" would be removed. God answer to Paul was, "No, my grace is better than having that removed" Paul then declares that he will brag about his infirmities so that "*the power of Christ may rest on me*". Here Paul compares grace to the power of Christ. This grace is indeed sufficient above the infirmities, reproaches, needs, persecutions, and distresses (2 Corinthians 12:8-10).

It's during these times of hardship that God's Spirit bears witness with ours that we are acceptable to him (Romans 8:16). The apostle Peter echoes these thoughts when he says: "*For this is commendable [grace bringing] if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if*

when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer patiently this is commendable [grace bring] before God (1 Peter 2:19-20).

It's during these times of suffering, and taking it patiently that Yahweh commends, He sees us, He has promised never to leave us, His grace is evidence of that promise. There is no better proof of his existence and when we realize his grace in tough times. It's obvious to me why the atheists don't recognize His reality.

There is more to be considered. Grace is the commodity that gives us the ability to go the extra mile. It's the encouragement of God's spirit that enables us to change; to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). In Luke 6:32-34, Jesus asked three questions with the same answer. "*If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you?*" In each instance "credit" is translated from "charis". So, Jesus is in effect asking, "if you don't do any more than sinners do, where is grace in your life? What are you doing that is commendable before Yahweh?"

To drive this point home, in another place Jesus is teaching about forgiveness, in response to the disciples request, "Lord increase our faith!" Jesus spoke these words, "*and which of you having a servant plowing or tending sheep will say to him when he has come in from the field, come at once set down and eat? What will he not rather say to him, prepare me something for my supper and gird yourself and serve me so I have eaten and drunk and afterwards you shall eat and drink. Does he thank [charis] that servant*

because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise when you have done all of these things which you are commanded say, we are unprofitable servants. We have done what is our duty to do (Luke 17:5-10).

If we do only those things that come easy there is no grace period. There is no interaction between ourselves and Yahweh. Grace is not a warm fuzzy feeling, it's the impetus to go beyond, to be transformed, to be renewed, to put off the old man and put on Christ.

How important is grace? Is it a take it or leave it proposition? Hardly so. Here's what Paul wrote: *"for by grace you have been saved through faith. And that not of yourselves it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10).*

By grace we are able to go beyond what comes naturally (selfish works) to accomplish the good works that God desires for us to do. It takes more than our willpower, it takes that interaction with the Almighty against every temptation, struggle, and difficulty.

Grace is important for us to fully realize what Jesus meant when he said, *"if anyone desires to come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it"* (Luke 9:23-24). These two good works, denying ourselves and taking up our cross, are accomplished through God's grace. We will discover that God's grace is more sufficient than not taking the cross, and more sufficient than saving ourselves. Yahweh's

grace is important to every believer. When we fail to find refuge in God's grace the dangers of fleshly lusts arise. Often these are the things we take refuge in; bitterness, self gratification, fornication. Seeking refuge in these can, as Hebrews 12:15-17 indicate, cause us to sell our birthright. This warning needs to be understood! Let's not fall short of the grace of God.

Do you have a desire to interact with Yahweh? Would you like evidence in your life that you are His child? I believe Hebrews 4:15-16 will be some help. *"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find*

“By grace we are able to go beyond what comes naturally”

grace to help in time of need”.

Jesus is not unaware of the struggles you face daily, in fact, I'm convinced that Jesus displayed a life lived in the grace of God. *"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"* (John 1:17). We have in Christ's example the knowledge of how to stand and Yahweh's grace.

I'll close with these words from 2 Peter 3:17-18: *"you therefore beloved, since you know this before hand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and for ever amen"* 🌹

“SO MANY CREEDS”

From the book *Mental Vitamins in Verses* by Uncle Frank (Frank Beilfuss in 1946).

Submitted by Dave Opel

So many churches, so many creeds
Yet one form of worship is all man needs.

One simple creed, one earnest plea
As taught the man of Galilee.

His way was not a tedious form
For sinners all to be reborn.
His altars, just the hills or shores
And now we find so many doors.

While many creeds have turned to
rust;

Their high priests mingled with
the dust.

Heathen lands are fertile soil,
Awaiting but the missions toil.

Should we fuddle up their minds,
With creeds of many different
kinds.

These Pagan people we would free
Might wonder why we can't agree.

What was once a simple creed,
Man has added useless need,
And muddle up a Godly plan,
The golden rule for every man.

We, at home are not confused.
We know the book all churches
use.

Although some say there's real
attrition.
We know it's friendly competition.



What is the “Gospel”?

From the Law of Moses to the coming of the Messiah

by Patrick Navas

This is the second in this study about the good news.

The Law of Moses – along with its ‘ten commandments’ – was given by God 430 years after the time of Abraham. But the Mosaic Law, assigned exclusively to Israel as a nation, held only a temporary role in the outworking of God’s purposes (Gal. 3:17; Psalm 147:19, 20; Deut. 4:8). The daily animal sacrifices instituted by God, and the annual day of atonement (important features of the Mosaic Law), served as a constant reminder of Israel’s sinful condition, and as a means to impress upon their minds the absolute holiness of their God, Jehovah, and the need to be pure before Him (Heb. 10:3; 1 Pet. 1:16; Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7). But rather than functioning as a permanent institution, or as a remedy for the peoples’ sins, in the end the Law served as a means to *identify* and *expose* the sin that existed, bringing about “wrath” against all violators of its standards. —Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13, 20; 7:5-13; Compare Ex. 21:12-29

Since it was “but a shadow of the good things to come” and “not the substance,” the covenant of Law

would exist only “until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made” (Heb. 10:1; Col. 2:16, 17; Gal. 3:19). According to the Christian records, the lineal descendant of Abraham and David through the tribe of Judah—Jesus of Nazareth—proved to be the “offspring” of promise through whom God would “bless all nations” of the earth (Matt. 1:1-17; Gal. 3:16). But, as Scripture says, “before this faith came, we were held captive under the Law, imprisoned until the coming faith [of the Messiah] would be revealed.” —Gal. 3:23

The Law of the old covenant functioned, then, as an agent of “condemnation,” exposing Israel’s unfaithfulness to God and to the conditions of their covenant, representing a “curse” from which the Messiah came to redeem God’s people (Gal. 3:13). Although it was “holy,” “righteous,” and “good,” fulfilling the role of a “school master” or “disciplinarian until Christ came,” the Law itself made “nothing perfect” (Rom. 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8; Gal. 3:24; Heb. 7:18). It was, in the final analysis, a “ministry of death carved in letters on stone”—“the letter” that “kills”

in contrast to the “new covenant of the spirit” that “gives life.” —Compare Ex. 21:12-29; 31:14, 15; 35:2; Lev. 20: 9-27; 24:16-21; 2 Cor. 3:6, 7

Because the Law represented a standard the Israelites could not live up to, a debt they were unable to pay, the apostle Peter, himself an Israelite, went so far as to describe it as a “burden” or “yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear” (Acts 15:10; Col. 2:14). As critical as the Law had been to the religious life of Israel, it was, in fact, never the case that a man, apart from faith, would have been justified, or found righteous in God’s sight, by mere outward conformity to the deeds prescribed by it; for, as the apostle Paul stated elsewhere, the Law itself was “not of faith,” but it was “through the law” that came “the knowledge of sin” (Gal. 3:12; Rom. 3:20). That is, the purpose of the Law and its sacrificial system was not to *save* or *liberate* the people from their sins, but to make the people *conscious* of their sins in their transgression of it, preparing them for, and pointing them to, the coming deliverer.

Although he came “not to abolish the Law or the Prophets but

to fulfill them,” the sacrificial death of the Messiah resulted in the end of the “written code” as the means of governing God’s people (Matt. 5:17; Jer. 31:31-33; Heb. 8:10; 10:16). That is why Paul wrote to the early believers in the Messiah: “*But now we are released from the Law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the spirit and not in the old way of the written code*” (Rom. 7:6). This is, likewise, why the Messiah himself is referred to as “*the end of the Law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*” —Rom. 10:4

That is to say, rather than establishing righteousness through “works of Law,” God, in his undeserved kindness, declares righteous those who live by *faith* in God’s promise and in the Messiah who fulfills it. It is, as it was with Abraham, a case of “crediting” one with “righteousness” because of “listening to God’s voice” and “exercising faith” in God’s revealed word of truth (Rom. 4:1-22; Gal. 4:21-25). The righteous, according to Scripture, “will live by faith,” since, “without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.” —Gal. 3:11; Heb. 11:6.

Although they “fall short of the glory of God” in Adam, those exercising *faith* are, like Abraham, justified before God the righteous judge (Rom 3:23-26). Whether born from Abraham’s bloodline or not, those *having faith* are the true children of Abraham, and of God, in Christ Jesus, through the good news (Gal. 3:7, 26). That is why, “Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the good news beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall

all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” —Gal. 3:8-9

Since all—both Jew and Gentile alike—were “under sin,” all stood equally condemned because of sin and under the sentence of death (Rom. 3:9; 9:32). At the right time, God would bring about his purpose to terminate the condemning effect of Law and to emancipate the human race from the bondage of sin through the one who would, by faith, fulfill every righteous demand the Law required—Jesus of Nazareth, his own Son (Matt. 3:17; Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:29-31; Matt. 22:40). As the Scripture says, “*For God has done what the Law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit.*” Indeed, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*” —Rom. 8:1-4; John 3:16, 17

According to the combined testimony of the New Testament writings, it is through His very own Son that God brings about His intention to bless all nations; blessings dependent not on Law but on God’s gracious promise, made effective by faith (Rom. 4:13-16). As the Gospel of John states, “the Law was given through Moses” while “*grace and truth* came through Jesus Christ”—“grace,” in the form of God’s gift of his Son,

“truth” in the fullness of the revelation of God’s purpose in his Son, “*who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the good news.*” —John 1:17; 2 Tim. 1:10

In the fullness of his faith, God’s Son was the only man to lead a perfectly sinless life, in unflinching obedience to the will of his Father. Although blameless before God and men, he was, nevertheless, treated as a sinner and, in the end, condemned to death as a blasphemer and criminal by his enemies. Yet the death of the Messiah was, as the apostle Peter put it, “*according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*”—since it constituted, in God’s eyes, a “propitiatory sacrifice” for “the sins of the whole world.” —Acts 2:23; 1 John 2:2

“In the fullness of his faith, God’s Son was the only man to lead a perfectly sinless life”

That the Messiah’s sacrificial death was according to God’s “definite plan” is verified in the writings of Isaiah, who wrote long before the event, that the Messiah would be “wounded for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities”—how “he bore the sin of many,” and how “Jehovah has laid on him *the iniquity of us all.*” This harmonizes with the Messiah’s own revelation of himself; namely, that he came “not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” —Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28; Compare 2 Pet. 2:22-24

As prophesied, the Messiah “was manifested to take away sins.” He was “without sin.” Yet, out of

his faithfulness to God and love for humankind, “he poured out his soul unto death.” He was “like a lamb led to a slaughter,” voluntarily laying down his perfect life as “*the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.*” —1 John 3:5; Heb. 4:15; John 1:29; 10:17-18; Isaiah 53:5-12

However, in fulfillment of the prophetic utterance, and in harmony with eyewitness testimony, three days later, God, as promised, raised Jesus to life and, a short time after, exalted him to His right hand in “the heavenly places,” powerfully marking him out as his Son and as the chosen object of our faith (1 Cor. 15:3-6; Rom. 1:4; Eph. 1:20; Luke 1:2; Acts 2:32; 3:15; 5:32; 10:39, 41). Ever since, “the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all [Jews and non-Jews] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, *to be received by faith.*” — Rom. 3:21-26; 4:25

“There is therefore
now no condemnation
for those who are in
Christ Jesus,”

Though once condemned by Law and conscience as sinners, believers, of every nation, are “declared righteous” in the eyes of God through faith in God’s

Messiah, Jesus. Those who were “once alienated,” “dead in trespasses and sins,” “without hope and without God in the world,” are now “brought near,” “reconciled to God by the death of his Son,” with eternal life in view (Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:1-13; 2 Cor. 5:18-21). By the grace of God, the sacrifice of the “spotless and unblemished lamb” effectively empties the Law and its corresponding fear of punishment of its condemning power. That is why Paul could write to believers in the first century:

“...when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with [Christ], when he forgave us all our offenses, erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the stake.” —1 Pet. 1:19; Col. 2:13, 14; Compare Eph. 2:11-22

Assured by God’s “blotting out” of the legal record that opposed them, believers are set free to exercise the kind of “faith that expresses itself through love,” as they stand not under the condemnation of Law but under the protection of God’s grace and loving-kindness (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 5:6; Eph. 2:5). “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” wrote the apostle, “*for the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death*” (Rom. 8:1-4). Just as Christ himself had promised: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*” —John 5:4

The book of Acts records examples of this good news as it was first preached by the Messiah’s closest followers. In line with the

prophecy, the apostles declared how it was from “[King David’s] posterity” that “God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised...Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:23; 38-39).

The apostle Peter went further when he declared: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but *in every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.* You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ – he is Lord of all.

“That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

“He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” — Acts 10:34-43 🌟

Unity of the Spirit

By Jan Magiera

Keeping the unity of the Spirit is a hot topic these days. It has almost become a “buzz word” in Christian circles. If you as an individual or a ministry are not promoting it, you are considered “out of sync” with the times. But, be that as it may, I do not know, that if questioned, a believer would have solid Biblical answers for: what is unity? How should it be based? How does one promote it? These are the questions addressed in this article.

What is unity? I love to study the Eastern languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, because abstract concepts (such as unity) are usually based on an action verb as the root of the word family. In other words, we can learn what the concept means by identifying the root verb and its action. Unity comes from a verb root in Aramaic that means simply “to turn towards a place or person with interest or affection.” An intensive form of the verb means “to cause to turn towards, or reconcile.” An example of this intensive verb usage is in Matthew; “Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison” (Matthew 5:25:).

The Aramaic root verb, *aoa*, in its intensive form is the word “agree.” Obviously, if the man in this verse agreed already, it would not call his opponent an adversary

and they would not be on the way to the court. Agree here means “to settle or reconcile, to make an alliance.” The way that is done can be seen in this verse: they stop on the road, sit down, turn towards one another, talk things out and cause an alliance to be made. (One note here--probably not all the differences are completely worked out, but enough to be a settling of the dispute.) So we get the idea of unity that it is an alliance or working out of an agreement.

Now keeping the action-based image of the verb in mind, let us look at Ephesians 4:3: “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” “Endeavoring means to be diligent and it implies that this takes effort. “Keep” means to guard or watch over. We are to guard our lives so that this unity is maintained. The unity is “of the Spirit.” This is the key to understanding what unity is based on. When a believer turns to another believer with interest and affection, what should happen is an instant recognition that the other has THE SAME HOLY SPIRIT in them! “For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:18).

There is only ONE spirit that is the same gift in every believer. This common touch-point, if you will, stirs our interest and desire to form some kind of bond. What is the bond then? The bond is the

“bond of peace.” Ephesians 2 tells us how we have peace in verses 13 and 14, “in Jesus Christ,” “for he is our peace,” because he broke down the separations between Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female (see also Galatians 3:28). Ephesians 2:17 says that “he came and declared peace to you – for through him we both have access by one Spirit.” There is peace because of the one spirit! The Aramaic word for peace in Ephesians 2 is not the normal word for peace, but it means peace treaty. Sound like the word for unity? I believe it has the same idea or picture. Jesus Christ formed a peace treaty between the Jews and Gentiles because he gave the same gift to each one – holy spirit.

Peace in the New Testament also is used in the context of the body of Christ and living the mystery. The gospel or glad tidings of peace are that every believer has holy spirit born in them, but also that they have a special place in the body. They are members in particular. It brings peace to know that your particular place is unique in the body of Christ. There is no competition or vying for position, because the head, the Lord Jesus Christ, directs your unique function.

So the answer to our question posed at the beginning of how should unity be based is simple. It is based on the fact that each believer has the same gift of holy spirit that is the measure of Christ (see also

Ephesians 4:7) and each believer is a member in particular in the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:27).

The last question is how we should promote unity. The word for bond in Ephesians 4:3 can be translated girdle or band. The only other place in the Aramaic New Testament where this word girdle is used is in Colossians 3:14: "And with all these [things], [put on] love, which is the girdle of maturity" [Aramaic translation]. Maturity characterizes a person who puts on love as a girdle. We have a different picture in America for girdle than they did in the East, but I believe it is appropriate to think about this understanding for a moment here. A lady who is somewhat overweight will wear a girdle to "hold it all in" or to have a more slimming appearance. Isn't that what love does? It "holds it all in" and definitely makes for a more pleasing presentation! In the East, a girdle tied the robe around the waist so it would not come loose and fall off and one could walk and carry on business without trying to continually hold the robe closed. Love is like that: it enables us to walk and carry on our own business. Love binds people together. Love is the mark of a mature Christian.

When we "turn to someone with interest or affection" and realize he is a believer, we have an instant recognition that he has the same gift of holy spirit and the same Lord we do. That gives us a touch-point that helps us to hurdle any of the other differences. Then we rejoice because we can also recognize the "Christ in" the other person and how we each have a special place and function in the body of Christ. We can then promote that unity with love, tying relationships together and developing in maturity, promoting a peace treaty. This is

keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

One last comment I want to make has to do with what I have heard many times. If I turn to another, but they turn away from me and do not want to have anything to do with me, neither recognizing the holy spirit or Christ in me or my function in the body of Christ, should I not turn away from them also and avoid any contact? First of all, Ephesians 4:1 in the last half of the verse begins, "walk worthy of the calling..." That means YOU walk worthy of the calling by being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit. It is not talking about anybody else doing this but you.

That means me, also. I have to obey the commandment of the Word of God and practice this. It does not depend on the response of others. Of course, relationships cannot be forced to happen unless two parties are willing to "turn to one another." However, I can, whenever another believer comes into my path, "turn towards him with affection" and still recognize that he has the same gift of holy spirit and a unique function in the body of Christ. I can do this, no matter what his response is.

Let's get busy being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace! 🌹

(Editor's Note: Jan Magiera's expertise in Aramaic is evident by her book: Aramaic Peshitta New Testament Translation. It can be ordered on Amazon.com. Her work is also used in Bibleworks software.)

Drug Problem?

Submitted by Ron Hardin

The other day, someone at a store in our town read that a Methamphetamine lab had been found in an old farmhouse in the adjoining county and he asked me a rhetorical question. "Why didn't we have a drug problem when you and I were growing up?"

I replied, "I had a drug problem when I was young: I was drug to church on Sunday morning. I was drug to church for weddings and funerals. I was drug to family reunions and community socials no matter the weather. I was drug by my ears when I was disrespectful to adults. I was also drug to the woodshed when I disobeyed my parents, told a lie, brought home a bad report card, did not speak with respect, spoke ill of the teacher or the preacher, or if I didn't put forth my best effort in everything that was asked of me.

"I was drug to the kitchen sink to have my mouth washed out with soap if I uttered a profanity. I was drug out to pull weeds in mom's garden and flowerbeds and cocklebur's out of dad's fields.

"I was drug to the homes of family, friends and neighbors to help out some poor soul who had no one to mow the yard, repair the clothesline, or chop some firewood; and, if my mother had ever known that I took a single dime as a tip for this kindness, she would have drug me back to the woodshed.

"Those drugs are still in my veins and they affect my behavior in everything I do, say, or think. They are stronger than cocaine, crack, or heroin; and, if today's children had this kind of drug problem, America would be a better place. I thank God I was 'drugged' in this fashion." 🌹

The Faith of Jesus

By Mario A Olcese

It's quite interesting, these words from the Apostle Paul to the Galatians, on the issue of faith and justification; "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (2:16 KJV). To the Romans Paul wrote something similar: "For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law works wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" (including Jesus, Mat. 1.1) Take note that Paul speaks about the faith of Jesus to the Galatians, and to the Romans, about the the faith of Abraham. Could it be that both sentences (faith of Jesus & faith of Abraham) are equivalent or that they point to the same faith? We will find the answer in few moments.

The Apostle Paul is very clear when he say that the faithful are

justified by the faith of Jesus. However, the great majority of "Christians" claim to have attained the justification for the mere fact to have believed in Jesus Christ but without understanding absolutely anything about what the faith of Jesus is all about. Yes, Jesus was a man of faith, and he had a faith that should be ours too. This, unfortunately, millions of Catholics, evangelicals, and members of the sects or cults do not understand.

The Faith of Jesus

Men that believe that they can please God by keeping all his laws, but ignoring the faith of Jesus, are lost. Many certainly believe in Christ but don't have Christ's faith or the faith of Jesus. Again I want to underline in order that you can keep it in mind; you must know the faith of Jesus to obtain God's justification. Unfortunately the majority of Christian believers do not have the faith of Jesus but the faith of a Gnostic Christ. You can ask many Christian on what was the faith of Jesus that can save us and you will may be surprised on finding that they all will answer in different ways.

But let's see first two more passages before continuing our investigation on the faith of Jesus. Certainly you had read these many times, but maybe you have not

reflected on what is precisely meant by that expression "the faith of Jesus".

Romans 3:26 "for [the] showing forth of his righteousness in the present time, so that he should be just, and justify him that is of [the] faith of Jesus"

Revelation 14:12: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus".

These two texts, along with Galatians 2:16, show us that there is a faith of Jesus, or a faith that Jesus had, and that it is vital to know and believe to be really justified and finally saved.

The Faith of Abraham

Now then, also we found that not only we must have the faith of Jesus, and the faith of Abraham, because without a doubt both notable individuals had faith in a singular and equal promise, for the simple reason that there is only one faith, and not two, or more (See Eph. 4:5). The faith of Abraham, like the faith of Jesus, was focused on the same goal and toward the same hope or promise that right away we will discover .

We read again in Romans 4:16 the following statement from the apostle Paul: Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the

law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all” (including Jesus, Mat. 1.1) Take note that Paul speaks about the faith of Jesus to the Galatians, and to the Romans, about the the faith of Abraham” (including Jesus, Mat. 1:1).

The Faith of Abraham, like the faith of Jesus was related to a promise, and that that promise was that Abraham and his seed (Christ) will be heirs of the world (Rom.4:13). Remember that to Abraham the gospel or good news was preached to Abraham in advance, and it consisted that the blessing of God would come for the world through a his seed (Gen. 12: 2-3). Paul says: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed.” (Gal. 3:8).

This is what Abraham had faith in, and this is the same faith that Jesus had, when he came to confirm the same promises or good news to the world of his time. Paul says in Romans 15:8, speaking to the faithful of Rome: “For I say that

Christ hath been made a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, that he might confirm the promises given unto the fathers”. This task to confirm the promises done to the AT's fathers was the faith of Jesus, and the reason of his coming two millennia ago (see Luke 4:43). Now I ask you: Is this the faith that you have? Do you have the same faith of Jesus and of Abraham that The Son of God will be the coming inheritor of the future world of justice at the millenarian kingdom?

If Abraham is the father of faith, and we are his children by faith and heirs of the same promise of the same faith. That is, if, we have the faith of Abraham, then we also have the faith of Jesus. Remember always that there is only ONE faith—The faith of Jesus or also called ‘the faith of Abraham’ (Eph. 4:5).

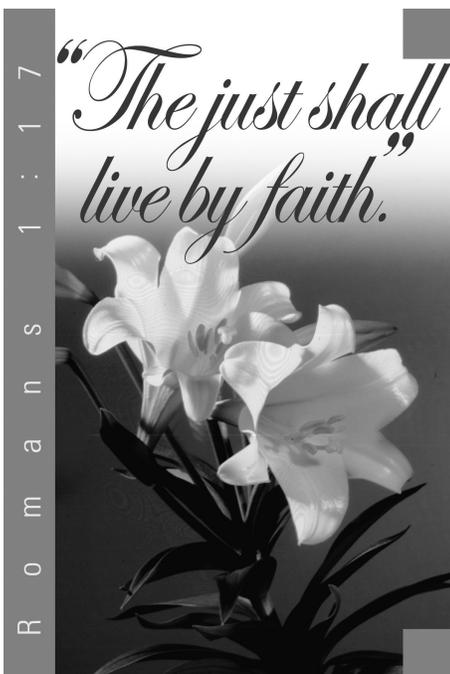
To the Galatians Paul said: “Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:16,29). So then they that are of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham (v.9).

Now I hope that you understand that you must be of the faith of Jesus to be justified (Rom. 3:26). You have to believe in the gospel that was preached to Abraham in advance, and that Christ did of his own when preaching to his peasants two millennia ago (Luke 4:43). That gospel that was preached in advance to Abraham, remember, had to do with the blessing that Christ (his seed according to the flesh) would bring into the coming world of Justice when he establish

his millenarian kingdom in the earth. Do you believe it with all your heart as Abraham and his seed believed it? If you do not share this same faith, then you will not be able to be Abraham's child and Christ's brother. You will definitively not be able to be a part of that wonderland of blessings that Jesus will bring in his parousia when he reign among men. In the parable of the ten mines, of Luke 19, Jesus is plainly clear saying: “But these mine enemies, that would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me”. The opponents to his kingdom will be definitively destroyed. There will be no contemplation.

Faith and works

Jesus showed his faith, acting in consequence, beginning his ministry by talking about the proximity of the Kingdom and calling to repentance (Mark 1:1,14,15). His parables— the Kingdom's parables— talk to us about his coming kingdom and the blessings that it will bring when it become established. To his disciples Jesus offers a kingdom and then he sent them off to preach and to announce God's kingdom to all the world (Luke 8:1; Luke 9:1,2; Mat. 24:14). To another, Jesus said: “go and announce God's kingdom” (Lc. 9:60). To others, Jesus asked, to look first for God's kingdom and his justice (Mat. 6:33) and after his resurrection, Jesus spends fourty days speaking to his disciples about God's Kingdom (Acts 1:3,6). It is clear that God's kingdom was the theme of all the preaching of Jesus, and the raison d'etre of his coming as mortal (Luke 4:43). All these verses make us clear that God's kingdom was what Jesus had faith in. ☺



The Great Tribulation

by William M. Wachtel

In Revelation chapter seven, the Apostle John is shown "a great multitude" clothed in white robes and made up of people from all nations (v.9). When he asks the identity of this great mass of people, he is told that "these are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (v.14 NIV). The word here translated "tribulation" is *thlipsis*, a word found frequently in the New Testament for "oppression, affliction, [and] persecution" (Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon).

Jesus had warned His followers to expect tribulation as part of the cost of Christian discipleship. In the landmark Parable of the Sower, He spoke of "trouble or persecution [that] comes because of the word" (Matt. 13:21). Those who seek to live in obedience to the gospel will find that this message can bring them tribulation from those who oppose it. Not everyone is happy about Jesus and what He stands for! Nor are they pleased with His followers! In fact, He said, "All men will hate you because of me" (Matt. 10:22; cf. Lk. 21:16,17; John 15:18-20; 17:14).

Historically, that hatred has expressed itself--and continues to express itself--in acts of cruelty and rage against Christian believers. They have been beaten, stoned,

starved, imprisoned, flogged, impaled, hanged, beheaded, shot--down through history-- for the simple reason that they bore the name of Christ. Even now in many lands it is a crime to confess faith in Jesus, especially if one has been reared in some other faith. In the eyes of leaders in those countries the ultimate insult to the national religion is to be baptized. They will see to it that any who dare take *that step* will pay dearly!

When the apostles went out to evangelize the Roman world, they did not hide the truth about the price to be paid. Paul told the new believers of Asia Minor that "we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). The Greek text says that we must endure "many tribulations," using the same word as Revelation 7:14.

This suggests that the present age, preparatory to entrance into the Kingdom when Jesus returns, is to be characterized as a time of tribulation and suffering for Christ's sake. This "present evil age" (Gal. 1:4) is not designed to be a time for Christians to regard themselves as being immune to--or sheltered from--troubles, trials, persecutions, hardships, and sore oppression. On the contrary! Yet, in the midst of it all, we have Christ's precious promise: "I have

told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble [*thlipsis*]. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

When Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians, he commended them for their perseverance and faith despite all the persecutions and tribulations they were going through (1:4). These trials were intended to make them "worthy of the kingdom of God" (v.5.) Their time of "rest" from such difficulties would not come until that future time when God will repay tribulation to those who are causing tribulation to His people--that is, "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels" (v.7). Again, a clear demarcation is seen between this present age of tribulation and the future age of rest for God's people. (Heb. 4:9.)

Sources of tribulation against God's people

The earliest persecutors of the church were the Jewish leaders. The Book of Acts reveals the actions that were taken by synagogue and Sanhedrin against the early Christian believers. Jesus had warned that His followers would be scourged and expelled from the

synagogue and persecuted from city to city (Matt. 23:34). These early persecutions would add to the guilt of that generation and help to bring down the wrath of God upon the nation and its Holy City (vv. 35-38; cf. 1 Thess. 2:12-16).

After Israel's "house" was left unto them "desolate" (v.38) in A.D. 70, the Jews were no longer the principal source of tribulation for Christians. The Roman government now began to fill the void! As long as Christianity had been considered merely a sect of Judaism, the Romans considered it a "religio licita" (legally recognized religion) and therefore did not trouble the Christians. But when Judaism officially banned followers of Jesus from the synagogue, that protection was lifted, and Rome started its long course of persecution against the believers. In Rome's eyes, the crowning insult was the Christians' refusal to pay an act of worship to the emperor as to a god--required by law of all except the Jews. Many Christians went to their death as martyrs--some tossed to the lions in the Colosseum in Rome itself, some executed in various other parts of the empire. History records ten specific organized persecutions against the church--beginning with Nero, A.D. 64, and ending with Diocletian, 284-305. The Apostle John was banished to Patmos during the persecution under Domitian, A.D. 96. These ten imperial persecutions may well be those foretold in Revelation 2:10.

With the coming of Constantine in 306, the situation for Christianity radically changed. He professed to believe in Jesus and induced the bishop of Rome to join him in making the empire "Christian." This, of course, brought about the famous, or infamous, union of church and state that was to become the normal

scheme of things in Europe for the next 1600 years! When Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 to decide the nature of God, any Christian not satisfied with its rulings was henceforth subject to persecution and death. The new source of tribulation and oppression against simple Bible believers was now *the professing church itself!* This was, as Shakespeare put it, "the unkindest cut of all." During the ensuing centuries, until modern times, non-Catholic Christians in Europe, Latin America, and other parts of the world were hunted down, deprived of their possessions, mercilessly tortured, and put to death by fire and sword. Some historians estimate that as many as 60 million persons died at the hands of the Catholic Church during those centuries!

What, then, is "the great tribulation"?

We saw that John was shown a great multitude of people who had come out of "the great tribulation." The question is whether this refers to believers throughout the present "church age," which--as we have seen--can be characterized by Scripture and by history as "the age of tribulation." Some students of prophecy would apply "the great tribulation" simply to a very short period of time at the end of this age. This writer does not deny that much severe tribulation may indeed await Christian believers before the Lord returns, since the entire age is one of tribulation, and it is not yet over. Revelation 6:9-11, the time of the "Fifth Seal," certainly suggests that there is a span of time between earlier martyrs for the faith and later ones. The "later ones" may well be those

who are yet to come, possibly including ourselves! In light of all the facts, however, it does not seem justified to understand "the great tribulation" as meaning *only* the final outbreak of persecution just before the Lord's coming.

The Lord's return is to be "immediately after the tribulation of those days" (Matt. 24:29). "Those days," then, are the days of the present church age, starting with the early church and its flight from Jerusalem just before the desolation of the city in A.D. 70, and continuing down through the succeeding centuries, up to the end of tribulation, when we are caught up to be "at rest" with the Lord at His coming (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7 with 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

We need to stop interpreting the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24, Mark 13, Luke 21) as though it were occupied almost solely with the end of this age. Our Savior was concerned about His church and her course throughout the long centuries ahead. His followers needed to know that severe tribulation awaited them and that no final escape was possible until the Lord Himself should return and receive them to be with Him forevermore. Meanwhile, believers have been able to take comfort in the hope and promises He has given, no matter what tribulations and trials have been permitted to befall His church. "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (James 1:2-4). 🍀

This is a story that is traditionally attached to the book of Daniel and is usually found in the Apocrypha. It is a story of how Yahweh protects the innocent. This may have been on Jesus' mind when the women caught in adultery was brought to him. Perhaps he wrote, "Susanna," on the ground, we don't know. -Editor.

The Story of Susanna

There dwelt a man in Babylon, called Joacim: He had a wife, whose name was Susanna, the daughter of Chelcias, a very fair woman, and she feared the Lord. Her parents also were righteous, and taught their daughter according to the law of Moses. Now Joacim was a great rich man, and had a fair garden joining unto his house: and to him resorted the Jews; because he was more honorable than all others.

The same year were appointed two of the ancients [elders] of the people to be judges, such as the Lord spoke of, that wickedness came from Babylon from ancient judges, who seemed to govern the people. These stayed at Joacim's house: and all people that had any suits in law came unto them. Now when the people departed at noon, Susanna went into her husband's garden to walk. The two elders saw her going in every day, and walking; so that their lust was inflamed toward her, and they perverted their own mind, and turned away their eyes toward her, that they might not look unto heaven, nor remember just judgments. By doing this they were both wounded with her love, yet did not one show to the other his grief, for they were ashamed to declare their lust; what they desired to do with her. Yet they watched diligently from day to day to see her and the one said to the other, "Let us now go home: for it is dinner time."

So when they were gone out,

they parted the one from the other, and turning back again they came to the same place; and after that they had asked one another the cause, they acknowledged their lust: then they appointed a time together, when they might find her alone. It happened as they watched for an opportunity, that she went in as before with two only maids, and she was desirous to wash herself in the garden: for it was hot. There was no one there save the two elders, that had hid themselves, and watched her.

Then she said to her maids, "Bring me oil and washing balls, and shut the garden doors, that I may wash myself." They did as she asked them, and shut the garden doors, and went out themselves at a private door to fetch the things that she had commanded them: but they saw not the elders, because they were hid.

Now when the maids were gone, the two elders rose up, and ran unto her, saying, "Behold, the garden doors are shut, that no man can see us, and we are in love with you; therefore consent unto us, and lie with us. If you will not, we will bear witness against you, that a young man was with you: and that's why you sent away your maids."

Then Susanna sighed, and said, "I am caught on every side: for if I do this thing, it is death unto me: and if I do it not I cannot escape

your hands. It is better for me to fall into your hands, and not do it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord." With that Susanna cried with a loud voice: and the two elders cried out against her.

Then ran the one of the elders and opened the garden door. So when the servants of the house heard the cry in the garden, they rushed in at the private door, to see what was done unto her. But when the elders had declared their matter, the servants were greatly ashamed: for there was never such a report made of Susanna.

And it came to pass the next day, when the people were assembled to her husband Joacim, the two elders came also full of mischievous imagination against Susanna to put her to death; And said before the people, "Send for Susanna, the daughter of Chelcias, Joacim's wife." And so they sent.

So she came with her father and mother, her children, and all her kindred. Now Susanna was a very delicate woman, and beauteous to behold. And these wicked men commanded to uncover her face, (for she was covered) that they might be filled with her beauty. Therefore her friends and all that saw her wept.

Then the two elders stood up in the midst of the people, and laid their hands upon her head. And she weeping looked up toward heaven: for her heart trusted in the Lord.

And the elders said, "As we walked in the garden alone, this woman came in with two maids, and shut the garden doors, and sent the maids away. Then a young man, who was hid there, came unto her, and lay with her. Then we that stood in a corner of the garden, seeing this wickedness, ran unto them. And when we saw them together, the man we could not hold: for he was stronger than we are, and opened the door, and leaped out. But having taken this woman, we asked who the young man was, but she would not tell us: these things do we testify."

Then the assembly believed them because they were some of the elders and judges of the people: so they condemned her to death.

Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, "O everlasting God, that knows the secrets, and knows all things before they are: You know that they have borne false witness against me, and, behold, I must die; whereas I never did such things as these men have maliciously invented against me."

And the Lord heard her voice. Therefore when she was led to be put to death, the Lord raised up the

blood of this woman."

Then all the people turned them toward him, and said, "What mean by these words that you have spoken?"

So he standing in the midst of them said, "Are you such fools, you sons of Israel, that without examination or knowledge of the truth you have condemned a daughter of Israel? Return again to the place of judgment: for they have borne false witness against her."

Wherefore all the people turned again in haste, and the elders said unto him, "Come, sit down among us, and show it to us, seeing God has given you the honor of an elder."

Then said Daniel unto them, "Put these two apart one far from another, and I will examine them." So when they were put apart from each another, he called one of them, and said unto him, "O you, that are waxen old in wickedness, now your sins which you have committed afore time are come to light. For you have pronounced false judgment and have condemned the innocent and have

Now then, if you have seen her, tell me, under what tree did you see them together?"

He answered, "Under a mastick tree."

And Daniel said, "Very well; you have lied against your own head; for even now the angel of God has received the sentence of God to cut you in two."

So he put him aside, and commanded to bring the other, and said unto him, "O seed of Canaan, and not of Judah, beauty has deceived you, and lust has perverted your heart. Thus have you dealt with the daughters of Israel, and they for fear have gone with you: but the daughter of Judah would not abide your wickedness. Now therefore tell me, Under what tree did you take them together?"

He answered, "Under an holm tree."

Then said Daniel unto him, "Well you have also lied against your own head: for the angel of God waits with the sword to cut you in two, that he may destroy you."

With that all the assembly cried out with a loud voice, and praised God, who saves them that trust in him. And they arose against the two elders, for Daniel had convicted them of false witness by their own mouth: And according to the law of Moses they did unto them as they maliciously intended to do to their neighbor: and they put them to death.

Thus the innocent blood was saved the same day. Therefore Chelcias and his wife praised God for their daughter Susanna, with Joacim her husband, and all the kindred, because there was no dishonesty found in her. From that day forth was Daniel held in great reputation in the sight of the people.♥



holy spirit of a young youth whose name was Daniel: Who cried with a loud voice, "I am clear from the

let the guilty go free; albeit the Lord saith, 'The innocent and righteous shalt you shall not slay.'

“Thankful Power”

by Kara Taylor

Sociologist William Isaac Thomas stated that “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” This statement is better known as a “self-fulfilling prophecy.”

According to this principle, individuals can determine how they view a situation. Even though we do not have control over what may happen to us, we have the power to choose how we will react to it.

Recently, I have focused on changing my attitude in circumstances that are difficult. Specifically, I have tried to think of what I am thankful for in that situation in order to diminish any negativity. Cultivating thankfulness is important, because we are called to recognize it at all times. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 states, “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Being thankful in all situations is a challenge, because it is not a natural response. Negativity can

easily take hold of us, and eradicate our sense of graciousness. When negative emotions arise, we should examine them. “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him (Psalm 42:11).” In difficult situations, we can alter our mind set in order to find the blessings that are already present.

To make this commitment a reality, prayer is a necessary element. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6-7).” Eliminating negative feelings is impossible, but finding a healthy release for them is attainable. We are given an invitation to present our difficult emotions to God in exchange for peace and thankfulness. 🐾



Dog Logic

-Compiled by Phil Pastoret

The reason a dog has so many friends is that he wags his tail instead of his tongue.

There is no psychiatrist in the world like a puppy licking your face. -Ben Williams

A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself. -Josh Billings

The average dog is a nicer person than the average person. -Andy Rooney

Anybody who doesn't know what soap tastes like never washed a dog. -Franklin P. Jones

My dog is worried about the economy because Alpo is up to \$3.00 a can. That's almost \$21.00 in dog money. -Joe Weinstein

If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you; that is the principal difference between a dog and a man. -Mark Twain

Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole. -Roger Caras

If you think dogs can't count, try putting three dog biscuits in your pocket and then give him only two of them. 🐾

Thoughts From James

by Pastor Steve Taylor

It's probably safe to say that none of us like trying circumstances. We enjoy the good times but we don't look forward to the bad times (like when we fill up our cars with gas these days:). It sounds cliché' but it is true: the hard times make us strong.

The Book of James immediately begins with words about the value of trials: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind" (James 1:2-6).

I ran track one year in high school. I hated practice. It seemed like my lungs were going to burst every day as I ran for 2 miles. In fact, I hated practice enough that I was persuaded to take a shortcut - a friend picked us up in his car just out of sight of the track coach and drove us around to near the end of our practice road. We carefully kept track of our time and then got out to run the last leg of our practice road and finish at a reasonable time. You can imagine what happened at our

first track meet - most of us didn't even finish the race because we had not been building endurance through practice.

There are no shortcuts in life around trials. I wish there were, as I'm sure you do. James challenges us to "consider" them joy. It is a mental choice; just like mentally deciding that track practice is good for building endurance to run at a track meet. Trials help us develop endurance in the Christian life. They have the potential to perfect and complete us. If there is anything that is missing in the process it is likely to be wisdom, as James says, and we can have that too by simply asking God in faith. He will supply it generously and without finding fault.

I know that some of you reading this are going through very difficult times. My prayers and wishes for you are that things can be better very soon. And yet, it may be cruel to pray and wish this way because your challenging circumstances may be exactly what the Lord sees that you need for the ultimate good of your life.

The story is told of someone watching a butterfly emerge from a cocoon. He saw the great struggle that the butterfly was having in trying to emerge so he did what appeared to be a merciful thing - he took some scissors and cut the opening wider so that the butterfly could easily emerge. As time went

by he watched and noticed that the butterfly was not able to fly. He was curious and did some research and discovered that the process of a butterfly struggling to emerge from a cocoon forces fluid into its wings, which enables them to strengthen and be useful for flight. A butterfly needs the struggle to fully develop.

And so it is for each of us. The trials; the hard times that we so much dread; are exactly what we need to fully develop.

My prayer for you is that, in the midst of trials and struggles, is not that you be removed from them but that you be strengthened in them and that you benefit from them in every way that the Lord intends.

I've really enjoyed the practical thoughts found in reading James. Especially on the connection between faith and works. Someone has said that "the faith that saves is the faith that works", and I believe that to be true. We act upon our deeply-held convictions.

Here is an interesting thought from James 4:5; "do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"?

Can you imagine loaning something to someone who refuses to let you have access to it? I was remembering a friend I knew in college who loaned his car to another student. The student he had loaned his car to invited some friends to ride in the car and travel

to a church service. It was a rainy evening and my friend was walking to church since he had loaned out his car. You can guess what happened next - he was passed by his friend in his own car who didn't even stop to offer him a ride! I suppose we could say that he "jealousy desired" to have his car back so that he wouldn't have to walk in the rain!

I believe that James 4:5 gives us an interesting perspective on why God wants to have a close relationship with us. He really wants what is His! He wants a "connection" with that Spirit that He has placed within us. We might say that He wants to stay connected with Himself.

Perhaps a good illustration is the connection that parents desire to have with their children. We have a biological connection with them and we've literally invested of ourselves in them. We want to stay connected, whether they are little children or adult children. We have a sense of jealousy, not unlike God.

When we agreed to accept God's gracious offer of salvation we agreed to His terms. His terms were that of forgiveness of sin through Jesus His Son and the potential to live for Him through His power within us, Holy Spirit. In return He expects our complete loyalty and devotion to Him. God has made a huge investment in us (and that is not even including the fact that He made us and gives us life and perfect gifts!). He is literally jealous for what is His!

I hope that these thoughts will encourage you to realize how very special you are in God's eyes, and why He wants a relationship with you. 🍀

HEAD SCRATCHES

Each sentence is a famous saying or quote. Can you figure them out?

1. Scintillate, scintillate, asteroid minific.
2. Members of a avian species of identical plumage congregate.
3. Surveillance should precede saltation.
4. Pulchritude possesses solely cutaneous profundity.,
- 5.It is fruitless to become lachrymose over precipitately departed lacteal fluid.
6. Freedom from incrustations of grime is contiguous to rectitude.
7. The stylus is more potent than the claymore.
- 8.It is fruitless to attempt to indoctrinate a superannuated canine with innovative maneuvers.
9. Eschew the implement of correction and vitiate the scion.
- 10.The temperature of the aqueous content of an unremittingly ogled saucepan does not reach 212 degrees fahrenheit.
- 11.Articles that encruscate with resplendence are not necessarily auriferous.
- 12.Where there are visible vapors having their genesis in ignited carbonaceous materials, there is conflagration.
- 13.Sorting on the part of mendicants must be interdicted.
- 14.A plethora of individuals with expertise in culinary techniques

vitiates the potable concoction produced by steeping certain comestibles.

15. Male cadavers are incapable of yielding any testimony.

16.Individuals who make their abodes in vitreous edifices would be advised to refrain from catapulting petrous projectiles.

17. Neophyte's serendipity.

18.Exclusive dedication to necessitous chores without interludes of hedonistic diversion renders John a habetuinous fellow.

19.A revolving lithic conglomerate accumulates no congeries of a small green pyrophitic plant

20.The person presenting the ultimate cachinnation possesses thereby the optimal cachinnation.

21.Abstention from any aleatory undertaking precludes a potential escalation of a lucrative nature.

22.Persons of imbecilic mentality divagate in parameters which cherubic entities approach with trepidation.

23.Missiles of ligneous or petrous consistency have the potential of fracturing by osseous structure, but appellations will eternally remain innocuous.

24.Elementary sartorial techniques initially applied preclude repetitive similar action to the square of three.

25.A unit of pome (rubicund or jaundice) ingested each sun is the patroness which disallows consociation in company with the allopath.

Answers below.

24. A stitch in time saves nine. will never hurt me.	12. Where there's a will, there's a way.
23. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.	11. All that glitters is not gold.
22. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.	10. A watched pot never boils.
21. You can't win if you don't play.	9. Spare the rod and spoil the child.
20. He who laughs last laughs best.	8. You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
19. A rolling stone gathers no moss.	7. The pen is mightier than the sword.
18. All work and no play makes John a dull boy.	6. Cleanliness is next to godliness.
17. Beginners luck.	5. Don't cry over spilled milk.
16. People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.	4. Beauty is only skin deep.
15. Dead men tell no tales.	3. Look before you leap.
14. Too many cooks spoil the broth.	2. Birds of a feather flock together.
13. Beggars can't be choosers.	1. A wink is worth two words.

Answers:
 1. A wink is worth two words.
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 12. Where there's a will, there's a way.

Letters to W&P

Howdy!

Thanks for letting Wanda and I be a part of the Bible Conference. I just finished reading "Claiming the Promises" and must say it was a blessing to me. I also appreciate "Wisdom and Power". I personally think it is our best publication in the Conference.

In His love,
Dave Cheatwood

Chuck,

Thanks for sending wisdom and power to us. It is truly a blessing. We don't live near a church of God Abrahamic Faith and thoroughly treasure the Wisdom and Power articles.

Wanda Williams

Dear Chuck,

Well, I'm certainly not a minister or scholar. But that did not keep me from enjoying the books of the Bible puzzle. I talked to my mother Lucille Scroggins and my aunt Lila Little who were also working on the puzzle by phone, several times a day. We had so much fun. We solved. The hardest for me was Matthew. I have to tell you Dr. Brian Atra looked at the puzzle and said it was too hard. What can I say?

My mother would like for you all to issue *Wisdom and Power* every month.

Thanks,
Theresa Tull Shillcutt

An Open Letter from Jim Mattison

Several years ago I decided to compile the story of my life. Although originally written to preserve memories of some of the events of my life to pass on to my children, thinking it might be an encouragement to others, the project expanded into a book that covers the entire span of my life.

Upon the urging of a number of friends, we decided to publish the book and make it available to the public. The title of the book is "The Life of a Country-Boy Preacher." Fifteen hundred copies were printed and sold out and a subsequent better-sized book has been edited, expanded, and updated and is now available in paperback.

The book covers the stories of my childhood, Bible College, early married life and fatherhood, pastoring five churches over 41 years, coping with the death of my first wife, remarriage and renewal, retirement from the active pastorate, God's call to African mission work the past 11 years, coping with the loss of my second wife, as well as stories of home life written by my eight children.

People who have read the book say it is an inspiration to them, and that they appreciate the down-to-earth "folksy style" in which the book is written. They have enjoyed the many stories of life with the church people that range from humorous to deeply touching and emotional. This book also make great gifts to any Christian or seeker who is interested in reading how one person has found

closeness to God and has tried to put God's Word into action through daily living of life.

This may sound like a commercial; I am doing this, after paying for the printing, the profits from the sale of this book will go toward funding memorial scholarships at Atlanta Bible College to honor the two angels God gave me: Mary Helen Mattison, my first wife, and Martha Jones Mattison, my second wife.

It would be wonderful if the fruit of these memories would help to honor their memory and at the same time help young people become better acquainted with God's Word.

If you are interested in buying a book, or interested in learning more about the book, please visit <http://www.malloybooks.com/mattison.html>. Click on the picture of the book for more details. Volume discounts are available for this book, and the two others: "Prophecies of the End of This Age," and "The End-Time, Time Line." If you have any comments or questions, I would love to hear from you at:

jim_matt@charter.net,

or the address below.

Jim Mattison
250 Stoneybrook
Pelzer, S. C. 29669

Verses to Live By

by Jim Mattison

“Any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.”

– Matthew 12:31

Jesus had just healed a blind and dumb man. The multitudes were amazed and began wondering if Jesus was the promised son of David. But when the Pharisees heard this, they countered the people's thought that Jesus might be the Christ by saying that “this man casts out demons only by Beelzebub the prince of the demons.”

In other words, they were saying, “Jesus is casting out demons by the power of Satan.” Thus they blasphemed against God's Holy Spirit. For Jesus was casting out demons by the power of GOD. (“God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him” – John 3:34)

Jesus told them, “Whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come.” This is the UNPARDONABLE SIN. It will never be pardoned. We must be very careful, therefore, never to commit this sin. But notice carefully what Jesus said before that: “Any Sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men,” or, is capable of being forgiven, on condition of true repentance, faith in the mercy of God through Christ, and baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).

Any sin can be forgiven except

one. This gives us such hope! This causes rejoicing! Just think what this means. If we have been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, swindlers, or have committed any other sin mankind can sin, it can be forgiven!

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says, “Such were some of you, but you are washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We have a tendency to frown upon people who have committed these great sins mentioned above. We should remember that if they've repented and been forgiven, we have no right to judge or condemn them. Have we done better? Just because we have not committed that sin they committed, does that mean we are without sin of some kind? Certainly not.

Bro. Emory Macy helped me understand this point, that all sin is forgiven when one confesses the sin and repents because of the blood of Christ. Sometimes we are especially hard on people who have been divorced and remarried and turn our noses up.

But how do we know that they may have not asked forgiveness? “Judge not,” the Bible says. It also says, “Humble yourself before God.” How can we judge another unworthy when I myself commit

sins just as bad in the sight of God?

If an adulterer's sin is washed away by the blood of Christ, what prevents that person from marrying again in Christ? If God forgives a thief who repents, even if he has to do jail time, are we not supposed to forgive him, too? Doesn't this principle apply to any sin except the one of speaking evil of the holy spirit of God?

On the cross, our Lord forgave those who were killing Him. Later, in the Book of Acts, it might be that some of those 3000 who were baptized were in that group. They were forgiven and received the gift of the Holy Spirit because they were “cut to the heart” and were baptized into Christ. Their sins were forgiven.

This passage above is a verse to live by, to remember that any sin can be forgiven, but one.

Once, I thought I committed a sin so bad it could not be forgiven. It bothered me a long time, even though I prayed scores of times for forgiveness. Finally, I saw what 1 John 1:9 was saying (the same thing Jesus said), “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”

So take heart, gentle pilgrim. Your sin can be forgiven, and you can have peace and joy in that fact. How great is the mercy of our God! “Forgiven!” that's a great word! 🍀