

GRACE & TRUTH MAGAZINE

- 
- ***Marriage
– More Than Paper?***
 - ***Racial Prejudice***
 - ***Challenges From
Nicodemus***

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EMPHASIS

1 Stretched Beliefs

Paul Alberts

WORSHIP

2 God's Care: Lessons From The Eagle

Alfred Bouter



FEATURES

4 Marriage – It Is More Than A Piece Of Paper!

David Anderson

8 Marriage – Just A Piece Of Paper?

Emmanuel V. John

11 Marriage – More Than A Piece Of Paper *Eugene P. Vedder, Jr.*

ISSUES

16 Races, Racial Prejudice And God's Plan In All This *Eugene P. Vedder, Jr.*

SERIES

20 Sign Gifts – Part One *Alfred Blok*

DISCOVER

26 The Bible – Its Writers *Alan Groth*

UPLOOK

28 A Few Challenges From The Story Of Nicodemus *Curt Darling*

SERVING

31 Thoughts As To Shepherding

OVERVIEW

33 1 Corinthians *Leslie M. Grant*

YOU•ASKED

34 Do people become angels when they die? *Eugene P. Vedder, Jr.*

RESPONSE

36 “It can only be God ...”

GOOD•NEWS

38 The Virus Of All Viruses *Jefferson Alleyne*

NEXT MONTH: GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

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Stretched Beliefs

How often do we hear comments that fail to take into account the true value of something? There are many things in this world about which people battle for what they think is right, even though their expressed views are often based on nothing more than selfish pride or opinion. By contrast, those who base their position on an accurate interpretation of Scripture have a firm foundation for their convictions. The Lord Jesus is “the truth” (Jn. 14:6 NKJV) – there is no other. We should ask ourselves individually, “Are the principles I hold right before Him?”

Like a piece of clothing that has been stretched out, over time we can too easily lose the biblical accuracy in our beliefs. This may happen by going beyond what the Bible says about a matter, or we might compromise regarding scriptural instruction and fall short of what is right. Changes either way need to be corrected, for the consequences can be quite significant. Good or bad, our positions on matters will affect others. More importantly, will our Lord be honored and glorified by the views we hold and express that are outside of the

teaching found in the Word of God? Of course not.

But how can we be confident of the accuracy of a view we hold? First, we must read, study and meditate on His Word. This is not a once in a lifetime activity, but a daily privilege to spend time in the Lord’s presence, learning as Mary did at His feet (Lk. 10:39; Acts 17:11). Second, prayer must accompany our desire to learn from Him (Mk. 10:10). Third, we need to realize that the Holy Spirit will teach us truth (Jn. 14:26) free of error – something that is not true of even the best Bible schools. Fourth, it is not possible to be seeking our own way at the same time as we are trying to learn what is right before God (Lk. 10:29). Finally, sin and its associated partners will prevent us, by grieving the Holy Spirit, from seeing the truth of Scripture (Eph. 4:30-31); they must be confessed (1 Jn. 1:9).

As the Word of God is presented in the articles this month, let us be ready to receive what He would open to us for our blessing and that of those near and dear to us – all to His glory.

Paul

God's Care



Lessons

From

The

Eagle

by Alfred
Bouter

The eagle is a large bird of prey with a massive hooked bill and long broad wings, known for its keen sight and powerful soaring flight.¹ It may have the status of “king” among birds, much like the lion on land. Eagles are powerful, having striking features that God has used to describe some of His actions in delivering His people Israel from Pharaoh’s bondage in Egypt. “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself” (Ex. 19:4 ESV). He led them out of their servitude and brought them to absolute safety, resembling the eagle who builds its nests very high in the mountains to keep its young out of the reach of foes (Job 39:27). The LORD fed, guided and protected them, as Moses wrote, “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions, the LORD alone guided him” (Dt. 32:11-12).

However, Moses predicted that Israel would become disobedient, and God would discipline them by delivering them to a strange nation, which would act like an eagle swooping on its prey (Dt. 28:49; Job 9:26). God will act in a similar way with all nations because He controls everything, even though all are fully responsible and accountable to Him (please read carefully Acts 17:24-31). Moses compared God’s care of His people when leading them through the wilderness with a man who carries his son (Dt. 1:31). Paul summed up this protection and treatment by saying that God nourished them, implying the idea of a mother taking care of her baby (Acts 13:18). Others link this verb with a slightly different reading, that God “put up with them,” which would highlight their resistance during the wilderness journey (see Dt. 8). What a contrast with the Lord Jesus who always obeyed!

Nonetheless, God did take care of them – something that He does for us all, whether we see and appreciate it or not. David praised God for His care by saying that He “satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Ps. 103:5). From observation we know that the eagle parent at some point in the upbringing throws its young out of the nest to teach it to use its wings, and swoops underneath to catch and carry it back on high. Perhaps we may link this point with Isaiah 40:31: “... shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary.” This verse describes how God re-energizes the believer who puts his trust in Him, even in old age (Ps. 92:12-14).

Ezekiel described very remarkable visions in which he saw amazing creatures, each with the faces of an eagle, a man, lion and ox (Ezek. 1:10) or an angelic being called a “cherub” (10:14). These details are associated with God’s unfathomable greatness, acting in judgment according to His wisdom and power (Ezek. 1:10, 10:14; see Jer. 4:13, 48:40). Revelation describes these created beings, calling them “living beings,” as being intimately linked with God’s supreme power, wisdom and control (Rev. 4:6-9, see Jer. 49:16,22; Lam. 4:19).² For sure, all these things are “too wonderful” (Prov. 30:18), or beyond our grasp. Nevertheless, they describe God’s wisdom, control, power and loving care of His creation, as displayed in His providence and righteous judgment. These details have been written and communicated to us that we may bring honor and glory to God, now and forever.

Let us worship Him who was manifested, or seen, in the flesh, and for whom the wise men came all the way from Babylon to Jerusalem. “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16 NKJV). **GT**

Endnotes:

1. Concise Oxford English dictionary, 11th edition.

2. Mentioned 20 times in Revelation (4:6-9, 5:6,8,11,14, 6:1,3,5-7, 7:11, 14:3, 15:7, 19:4).

IT IS MORE THAN A PIECE OF PAPER!

MARRIAGE

by David Anderson

God-designed Marriage Is A Permanent Husband-Wife Relationship

For all matters concerning the Christian faith and its practice, the first and foremost question is, “What did the Lord Jesus say and teach about the issue?” When the Pharisees aggressively questioned Him, albeit primarily for His views on divorce, He replied: “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Mt. 19:3-6 ESV). He said that they – and we – must consider marriage as God instituted it for mankind on the sixth day of creation. The Lord definitely meant from the very creation of Adam and Eve: “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’” (Mk. 10:6). He insisted

that this relationship must not be altered in any way or by anyone.

The Lord was saying that our Maker provided family relationships for mankind, and He directed everyone to read about their beginnings (Gen. 1:26-31, 2:18-25, 3:20, 4:1-2). Genesis 1:26 states that God decided by divine council to make man in “Our image, after Our likeness.” Therefore mankind is unique among all of God’s creatures. This transcendental, or superior, nature of human beings manifests itself in many ways. But with respect to marriage, it is expressed in the union of one man and one woman to form the fundamental social unit of mankind: the family. Eve (woman) was designed to be Adam’s (the man’s) companion, a “helper fit for him.” She was to be his counterpart suitable to help him and to make his life complete. God designed woman to be like man, that is partaking of his nature, and formed Eve from part of Adam’s body. Her function was to help, comfort and benefit her husband – to be his soul mate. On the other

hand, Adam was designed to love and to care for his wife.

From this initial intimate relationship, family relationships developed by the procreation of children. This was in order to progress human life and populate the earth. From Genesis 2:18-25 we learn that God provided these human relationships, and the love commensurate, or appropriate, with such relationships within the family unit, by the special creation of woman for man. The LORD God recognized that it was not good for Adam to be alone, so He blessed Adam by providing Eve. He saw what was necessary for Adam and said, "I will make him a helper fit for him" (v.18). Adam did not, and could not, find a helpmate for himself in the animal kingdom (vv.19-20). So the LORD God built – the literal translation of "made" in verse 22 – Eve from Adam's side and presented her to him as his wife. Adam found in Eve his perfect counterpart, who was like himself (one of his kind). But she was also his complement, and one upon whom he could joyously display his love.

The final divine comment or command in the creation account about marriage was given by the Holy Spirit through Moses in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his

mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Family life was to be maintained from generation to generation by means of the institution of marriage. Families therefore were designed and established by God at man's creation. It is a fact of history that almost all peoples of all times have practiced family life based upon the permanent marital union of one man with one woman.

No details are given of how a man would find or get himself a wife or of how society would regulate the marriage institution. But Genesis 2:18-22 implies that God would provide each man with his own wife. We do learn from Genesis 1:27 that the intimate relationship of man and wife was based upon their distinctive sexualities of male and female. Thus "one flesh" is the sexual relationship that enabled Adam and Eve, then subsequently all of mankind, to obey the first divine command made to them: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (v.28). Such emotional and physical (sexual) intercourse was good, proper, beneficial and healthy to both of them (2:25). However, it was not until after their fall into sin that Adam "knew" (the Hebrew idiom for sexual intercourse) Eve; and that they actually produced any children (3:20, 4:1-2).

It is obvious that the final part of Genesis 2:24, “hold fast [cleave] to his wife, and they shall become one flesh,” cannot mean that marriage is just a piece of paper! Nor can it mean anything other than one man married to one woman for the whole of their life. It cannot mean anything less or anything more. Nothing else can be substituted for it. A permanent monogamy is implicit in this verse.

Marriage Is A Promise Made Before, And With, God

Let’s consider two verses as we progress: “The wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant” (Mal. 2:14) and “The adulteress ... who forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God” (Prov. 2:17).

While it is true that marriage is more than a piece of paper, it is necessary to stress that it is a formal commitment by both spouses. Throughout Israel’s history, marriage was viewed as a formal contract. Malachi 2:14, which we just quoted, shows that this contract was made not only between the families of the bride and the bridegroom, but by each spouse before God. Each committed himself or herself to obey God’s original command in Genesis 2:24 and to remain faithful to his or her partner. They commit-

ted themselves to each other and to God “by covenant.” In civil law such formalities require witnesses and certification. But the reality is that all verbal commitments made during the marriage ceremony are oaths also heard and witnessed by God, and He regards each and every marriage as a covenant between Himself and the spouses. Nowadays, at least in the western world, there is a legal requirement for the couple to confirm the promises made to each other by their signatures to a marriage certificate. The law requires this record for good civil order and government, but the principal issue remains true: The commitment to each other by husband and wife is a solemn oath before God. Both Genesis 2:24 and Proverbs 2:17 indicate that God requires every married person to act in faithfulness to their word.

Marriage Portrays The Eternal Union Of Christ And His Church

Marriage is also more than a piece of paper because it pictures the reality of the eternal union of Christ and His Church. Ephesians 5:22-32 discloses this amazing and profound mystery, which has been made known to believers of this time period (3:1-6). In 5:31, Paul uses Genesis 2:24 as the proof text for his statements that the Church is the body of Christ (Eph. 5:29-30), and that a hus-



band's love for his wife must reflect that which Christ has for His Church (vv.25-30). The intimate marriage relationship of man and woman is designed to reflect the fact that Christ and His Church are one body (1:23). This reality will be seen in the future when He comes again to claim her as His bride and marries her in heaven. Currently, the Church is being prepared for that wonderful event (5:26-27).

The steps which the Lord took to get His bride and how He makes her suitable to marry Him are taught in Ephesians 5:25-27. "Christ loved the church" goes back to eternity past – we were "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (1:4). He was "the merchant man," who sought and found the "one pearl of great price," and who then sold all that he had to be able to buy it (Mt. 13:45-46). The cost was exceedingly great and beyond measure: "the

church of God, which He obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Yes, Christ so loved the Church that He willingly offered Himself in sacrifice to God for her (Eph. 5:2).

During this present age, the Church is being built by Christ Himself (Mt. 16:16-19). It is also a betrothal period in which He is actively purifying "her by the washing of water with the word [of God]" (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:26). When the building and cleansing works are complete, He will "present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (v.27). Soon, the Church will be raptured to be with Him forever (1 Th. 4:15-17). As her Bridegroom, He will take her to the wedding place, heaven itself (Rev. 19:1,9; Mt. 25:1-10).

After the wedding and the celebration of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9), the Church will reign alongside Him throughout His millennial kingdom (20:4-6). During His reign, she will be the heavenly administrative city (21:9-22:5). At the end of the kingdom (see 1 Cor. 15:24-28), the Church will go into eternity with her husband to be the object of His love forever (Rev. 21:1-6). The Church is to be Christ's wife for a thousand years, but His bride for eternity! **GT**

MARRIAGE

Just A Piece Of Paper?

by Emmanuel V. John

There are various concepts of marriage. From the Christian perspective, marriage is a covenant, commitment and pledge based on the unconditional love of God. It is usually made in the consciousness of the presence of God and other witnesses. This covenant is a complete commitment to the Lord Jesus and each other, more binding and lasting than any legal contract.

Distortion Of The Concept Of Marriage

There seems to be an increasing distortion of the concept of marriage. Some couples express their beliefs that marriage is “just a piece of paper,” or a mutual contract based on trial and error that can be terminated at any time. On the other hand, some are justifying their relationships of living together without marriage. Sadly, their beliefs are often communicated to their children, families,

friends and others. Instead of loving, giving, existing, enduring and enjoying each other, the behaviors in unmarried relationships are often reflected in hardness and coldness, being thin-skinned or sensitive, a lack of joy, lusting and getting. Individuals tend to be easily displaced, discarded or divorced.

However, there is hope and help for every hurting heart in such a relationship. Jesus is still the answer today for all our questions in relationships. We do not seek to depend on religion, rituals, regulations, reformation or reincarnation; but on a relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Divine Perspective Of Marriage

The sacred institution of marriage was established by God Himself, not by man, in creation: “The LORD

God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman because she was taken out of Man.' Therefore a man shall leave father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:21-24 ESV). Therefore, according to God's design, marriage is a relationship between a man and a woman that is intended to be a monogamous relationship in which various needs are met – physically, spiritually, sexually, socially and other ways.

The Lord Jesus sanctified marriage by His presence at the wedding at Cana of Galilee. He was invited to the wedding, but after a while there was no more wine, a symbol of joy. It is possible for the joy to run out in a relationship, but Jesus can restore it. This wedding was graced by the presence of Jesus and gladdened by His power, in that He turned the water into wine – better wine – and gave glory to God (Jn. 2:1-11)

The Holy Spirit approves marriage as a blessed union between Christ and His Church. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved

the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). In order for Adam to receive his bride, he gave up a part of his life, a rib; but the Lord Jesus gave up His whole life for the Church – all believers. How important it is for a husband to go all-out in responding to the needs of his wife.

The Holy Scripture affirms marriage: "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous" (Heb.13:4). Sex in the marital relationship is blessed of the Lord and is a mode of procreation, recreation and communication in an intimate and loving way.

The Dynamic Prescription Of Marriage

It is conclusive that marriage is more than a piece of paper, although the paper, or license, is important as a proof of marriage and commitment to each other in the presence of God and others. Since God has established marriage, then His guidelines in the Bible are the best for all relationships.

Many relationships fail because they despise His Word – deny, distort and disregard His guidelines. But today you can decide to have a new beginning by obeying the Lord and His Word, the Bible. It is not too

late to do what is right. You can never go wrong in doing what is right in God's sight, that your marriage will be *more* than a piece of paper as it is centered in the precious person of Jesus Christ. **GT**



In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear;
And safe is such confiding, for nothing changes here;
The storm my roar without me, my heart may low be laid,
But God is round about me, and can I be dismayed?

Wherever He may guide me, no want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me, and nothing can I lack;
His wisdom ever waketh, His sight is never dim;
He knows the way He taketh, and I will walk with Him.

Green pastures are before me, which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o'er me, where the dark clouds have been:
My hope I cannot measure, my path to life is free,
My Saviour has my treasure, and He will walk with me.

We'll see Thee soon, Lord Jesus, amid the ransomed throng,
Its glory, joy and beauty, its never-ending song:
Oh, day of wondrous promise, the Bridegroom and the bride
Are seen in glory ever, for ever satisfied!

—Annie L. Waring (1820-1910)





More Than A Piece Of Paper!

by Eugene P. Vedder, Jr.

“Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”

—Hebrews 13:4 NASB

Marriage is the oldest of human institutions. It dates back to the garden of Eden, man’s first home, and was created expressly for man by God. Marriage was not man’s idea, but God’s. Contrary to what many people think, marriage was instituted by God for His glory and for man’s enjoyment and blessing. No piece of paper was involved in that beginning long ago; in fact, the first marriage was absolutely simple, consecrated by God Himself.

God shows us in His Word that human marriage, wonderful in itself, is a picture of something far more magnificent. God planned long before He created mankind, or even the earth on which we live, that human marriage was to picture the marriage of the Church to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. This marriage will soon take place in heaven. Although the Church was a mystery hidden by God and thus nowhere mentioned in the Old Testament, some pictures foreshadowing this glorious marriage are already given us there.

When we look at Ephesians 5:22-33 and other passages in the New Testament we see what mar-

riage means to God. Therefore, we can well understand that He promises to judge anyone who deliberately spoils or abuses this depiction of His glorious purpose which He has also lovingly designed for man's pleasure and benefit. Both fornication and adultery are deliberate acts involving the will of two individuals. God differentiates these sins from rape – the forcible sexual violation of one person by another. God's Word does not, however, recognize any "accidental" commission of these sins! By contrast, God makes a distinction between murder and manslaughter in His Word. He provided cities of refuge in Israel for those who accidentally, or unintentionally, killed someone else; while for murderers there was no such provision made. Seven times in Numbers 35, God commands that the murderer must be put to death.

The model God gives to us to exemplify His ideal of marriage, as we have already noted in Ephesians 5, is that of Christ and the Church: "Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her" (v.25 KJV). He is the Head of the Church and the Savior of the Body. He sanctifies, cleanses, nourishes and cherishes her – loves her as His own body. One day He will present her to Himself in glorious, splendid, spotless

beauty. What a wonderful example He gives in this way to husbands, who themselves are exhorted to love their wives as Christ loved the Church. The Church in turn is subject to Christ and respects Him, a subjection and respect that are not forced on her but that comes from the depths of her heart. This is the example for wives who are to be subject to their own husbands in everything as to the Lord.

Marriage, in this way, is a relationship built to the utmost degree upon giving. It is not based on getting – but oh, how much each one gains by this wholehearted, unre-served giving. Christ gave Himself; He gave His life. In fact, He, God the Son, the Lord of Glory, stooped to become Man in order to be able to give His life. The Church is to be His eternal Consort,¹ whom God (looking back to the picture given us in Genesis 2) designed to be a help perfectly suited for her husband. Being made by God as a product of the Son's death, she submits to Him with full respect in everything as a part of Him. Such is God's ideal for marriage.

Only A Piece Of Paper?

Marriage is certainly more than a piece of paper! What is this expression, "a piece of paper," all about? Sad to say, more and more people today are rejecting what God tells

us about marriage. Many people in today's world think there is nothing wrong with a man and a woman simply living together without being married. Some give reasons why they prefer this "free lifestyle" to the bonds taken on in a legal marriage. They ask why two people who love each other should have to go through the formality of getting legally married. Many feel that without the legal constraints of being married they are not tied down to only one person, or they are free to move on when they are no longer in love or it no longer suits them to live together. Just how is it that a piece of paper called a "marriage certificate" or a "marriage license" makes a marriage legitimate? "Isn't love the main thing?" they ask. What connection does love have with a piece of paper?

The piece of paper itself is not the important thing, but what it stands for is absolutely vital. God has established marriage as a relationship whereby a man and a woman are united together before God and man, as husband and wife. In creation, God had made the woman out of the rib He had taken from the man, whom He had caused to fall into a deep sleep, and had brought her to Adam. Scripture then immediately says, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to

his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:24-25 NKJV). From this point on the woman is referred to either as "the woman," "Adam's wife," or "Eve" after Adam gave her that name. She was not his "girlfriend," "significant other," "mistress," "concubine," "fiancée," or "roommate." No, she was his wife!

A wife in Scripture is a woman in a definite relationship to a particular man. This man has left father and mother; thus he is no longer under their authority. He has left them to be joined to his wife in a profound new relationship that is referred to by several expressions that involve both the sexual union and the intimacy that goes beyond physical union: "knowing her," "becoming one flesh." In fact, the expression used of being naked and not ashamed indicates the liberty of complete openness, without any reserve between husband and wife. In marriage, "yours" and "mine" fade into the background while "ours" shines out bright and clear.

We do not find any reference in Scripture to a wedding ceremony, but weddings in God's Word are usually associated with feasts — sometimes, as in Samson's case, lasting for several days. Thus, a wedding was a definite

event, normally a joyful one, that marked a public change in the status of the two individuals involved. These two – always a man and a woman – thereby became husband and wife.

While custom in today's world usually places the emphasis on the bride, this was not so in weddings recorded in the Bible. There the emphasis is normally on the bridegroom, for the bridegroom pictures Christ. In the account of the first wedding in the garden of Eden, God created the woman for the man to be his helpmate.

That first marriage was respected throughout the Bible. This was true even of wicked men beginning with Cain and his descendant Lamech in Genesis 4. Incidentally, this Lamech is the first polygamist mentioned in God's Word. In time other perversions have also damaged the marriage relationship that God began in purity and simplicity. Godly men in Scripture, sad to say, also are often seen involved in polygamy although they honored the institution of marriage. Sexual intercourse outside of marriage is always viewed as sin in God's Word. Sleeping around and prostitution are always wrong, for sex was not given to mankind as a toy with which to play.

Sex within marriage is not only for procreation, but it is pleasurable

and is commended in Proverbs 5:15-20 to the young man who has just been warned against the immoral woman. Other passages show us that sex within marriage is a fantastic gift from God, giving the married couple the ability to express their love and appreciation for each other in a physical way. This gift of God gives pleasure even when misused. However, God calls such misuse "fornication," or when married persons are involved, "adultery"; and He absolutely condemns both of these sins.

Marriage is definitely more than a piece of paper. Why insist on that piece of paper then? God has appointed authorities in this world for our good. Before He did so, when man had no government but simply had his conscience to guide him, his wickedness increased until God intervened with the judgment of the flood. The Book of Judges gives us examples of the dreadful things that happened in Israel when there was no king, and every man did what was right in his own eyes. In the increasingly lawless world we live in, immorality is blatantly out in the open and is being promoted and protected, even called "right." Yet for the good of society, governments are still recognizing and, to a certain extent, protecting the institution of marriage. We

Christians are told in Romans 13, 1 Peter 2 and elsewhere to obey the laws that governments make and to pay the fees they demand. A license to marry is one of these. A marriage ceremony is another. These “pieces of paper” are a part of what governments require as they function under God to protect and promote marriage. They help to keep man’s passions in check and under control. We Christians should pay the fees they demand and obey their requirements as they act within the framework of the authority God has committed to them. In doing so we are obeying God’s Word.

Yes, marriage is more than a piece of paper – much more! But

that piece of paper the government requires is an integral part of marriage in our countries, for it makes a marriage legal and openly recognized as being the bond that binds a man and a woman together while on earth. Marriages may be made in heaven, but heaven tells us to submit to the authorities it has established for man’s good on earth. We do this in obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ who has told us to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s. **GT**

Endnote:

1. A “consort” is a “spouse, especially of a reigning monarch,” according to Dictionary.com

Ephesians gives the positive side of what we have in Christ and raises the Christian up to the full height of his position. The epistle has very decisive marks for there is no book that so opens the heavenly places for us: Hebrews, indeed, as worshippers; but Ephesians to set us there in Christ.

We have not the Christian as dead to sin, law or the world now, but first dead in sins and then quickened, or made alive, and raised up with Christ – a wholly new creation. Sanctification is thus provided for: “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10 KJV).

We are made to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (v.6). From

being afar off we are brought nigh to God and have access through one Spirit to the Father. And not only so, but we are made a spiritual habitation of God, growing into a holy temple in the Lord.

We have the revelation by the Spirit of the mystery of the Church before hid in God, that to the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be made known through the Church the manifold, or multifaceted, wisdom of God.

The apostle’s prayer was that through the power of the Spirit “Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ... that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God” (3:17,19).

The Spirit and union by the Spirit, with its result, characterize Ephesians.

—F. W. Grant (*adapted*)



Races, Racial Prejudice And God's Plan In All This

by Eugene P. Vedder, Jr.

Have you ever faced questions like these:

- Who am I, and why am I of a certain race?
- Why do people of different races often not get along well with each other?
- Why are so many people, often even Christians, racially prejudiced, sometimes even to the extent of persecuting or killing one another?
- Is one particular race best?

When God created mankind He created them male and female. God does not tell us in His Word the color of Adam and Eve. Scientists speculate, research and periodically come up with new theories. Famous artists have painted rather intriguing pictures,

and most children's storybooks have their own depictions of Adam and Eve. It is interesting that believers, especially children, in various parts of the world often portray persons in Scripture to look like themselves. In other words, they identify with them. The race each one of us belongs to is the human race; and truly, God's Word is for each one of us.

Genesis 1 says clearly that God created mankind male and female. Chapter 2 shows that the female was created from the male and was given to him by God to complete him and give him joy. These are the only two kinds of people God made – and He made them so they would need one another and that the human race

would go on. Ephesians 5:21-33, one of many Scripture portions that refers to this, points out that what God gives us in Genesis is a beautiful picture of something even more wonderful: Adam and Eve represent Christ and the Church. Christ loved the Church and gave Himself in death for it, and now is graciously preparing it to be His bride forever in glory. This picture shows us too what God's will is for the loving, self-sacrificing relationship of husband and wife in marriage.

More important than race, Acts 17:26 tells us that God "has made *from one blood* every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings" (NKJV). While there are several different blood types which one must be careful to distinguish when giving blood transfusions, none of these types is specific to one race. If I would need a blood transfusion, the race of the person providing the blood would not matter. And when God speaks of sinners, He tells us that *all* have sinned. He never breaks this down by race, as men so often do with statistics. We can be thankful that in this day of grace God offers salvation freely to "whosoever will" (Rev. 22:17 KJV). The Bible assures us that God is no

respector of persons. Men make differences among people, race and color, but God makes no such distinction.

When we read Genesis 6-9, we see that because of man's wickedness God destroyed mankind off the face of the earth through a tremendous flood, which even covered the tops of the mountains. Only one family of eight persons – Noah, his wife, their three sons and their sons' wives – was spared. From them, the present population of the earth has descended. As one traces their progeny through Genesis 10 and 11, it becomes plain that Shem was the one through whom the Savior eventually came. He was the ancestor of the people of Israel as well as of their Arabic-speaking Middle Eastern neighbors. Japheth was the ancestor of the people who lived in Europe. Ham, whose name means "black," was the ancestor of the majority of Africans and the probable ancestor of most Asians and Native Americans. Ham's descendants were very practical and are credited with the largest amount of the great inventions of ancient times.

Returning to Acts 17:26 we see that God in His wisdom has "determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings" (NKJV). In His wonder-

ful grace He has fitted people for the environments in which He has placed them, even though people have moved, and have often been moved, to many places besides their ancestral homes. A man with dark skin living near the equator can really thank our all-wise and all-loving God that He has made him that way, for science says his skin does not sun-burn as easily as others. This is but one reason to appreciate God's provision for people. There are many other such evidences of our Creator-God's loving, tender care for His creatures too.

In Matthew 11 we see the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, looking back over the past years of His ministry. He spoke sadly as He denounced cities where He had done many of His mighty works, but who had not believed on Him. Then we see our Lord Jesus turning to His God and Father and saying, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. *Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight*" (vv.25-26).

This statement of the Lord's must ultimately be our answer as Christians to questions about how God has made us – things we do not understand. Human reasoning is not going to give us the answer.

God's Word tells us of God's love for us. It tells us of His goodness and His wisdom. It tells us that He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. Scripture tells us that "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). The Bible reminds us to "behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 Jn. 3:1). And it tells us that we are soon going to be like our Lord Jesus, for we shall see Him as He is. May we with the apostle Paul say, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Another thing: In John 9 the disciples asked the Lord why the man who was blind from birth was blind, whether it was because he or his parents had sinned. The Lord answered that it was not for either of these reasons, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. The chapter goes on to detail how the blind man was healed and how this brought him into much difficulty with the Pharisees. In fact, eventually he was cast out of the synagogue, but through all these problems he became a worshiper of the Lord Jesus.

I would suggest that you, who-

ever you are, were born the way you were not because of any sin of your own or of your ancestors, but that the works of God should be revealed in you. God may have uniquely fitted you to be able to serve Him where you are or in a place or situation in which He is getting ready to place you. For a person of another race to do the work He gives you to do could very well be a much more complicated and difficult matter.

Passing on to the subject of prejudice, especially racial prejudice, we have noted that God is no respecter of persons. God has made the different races. He does not play favorites. His grace reaches out to all. Again and again He exhorts us to be like Him. In the Old Testament we find Him repeatedly exhorting His people Israel to show kindness to the strangers among them. Prejudice is one of the ugly products of pride. It is taking an attitude of superiority to another individual, race or group in society. It is totally un-Christlike.

Again consider Acts 17:26, where we see that God “has determined [every nation of men’s] pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.” Sinful man has done much to disturb this order. Rulers have moved peoples they subjugated to other places. In the Bible, the con-

quering Assyrians did so with the people of the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, and the Babylonians with the people of Judah. In later years African chiefs often sold their captives to Arab, European, or American slave traders, and these captives were forced into slavery in lands far from their homes. Today, vast numbers of people are trying to escape from warfare, persecution, poverty or other difficult situations by migrating to nations where they feel their condition will be better. Many are losing their lives in the process, and countless others are deeply resented or hated. Human pride, jealousy, lust and other sinful conditions of heart are causes of such wicked attitudes and the deeds that spring out of them.

How sadly different such attitudes are to the loving heart of our God who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, still extends His loving invitation to all mankind, regardless of race or skin color: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Mt. 11:28-30). How have you responded to Him? **GT**



SIGN GIFTS – PART ONE

The Gift of Tongues And Its Use

by Albert Blok

There are many differing opinions about the importance and use of tongues. Some believe that if one does not speak in tongues, that person is not saved. Others consider speaking in tongues to be a gift that is still important today, but they do not say that it *must* be done to be a born again Christian. Then there are other people who believe that speaking in tongues was a gift of the past and that this gift is, generally speaking, not in function anymore.

But what do we learn about speaking in tongues as we see it in the Bible? To start, we need to understand the meaning of the word

“tongue” as it is used in Scripture.

The Word's Use

The word “tongue” is used in several ways. It is applied to the muscle that we have in our mouth, as we see in the story of Gideon: “Every one that laps of the water with his tongue, as a dog laps ...” (Jud. 7:5 KJV).

“Tongue” is also used to indicate speech or talking, as in Exodus 4:10 when Moses said, “I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.” Similarly, Esther stated, “But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue ...” (Est. 7:4).

James observed, as to our quickness in often talking unadvisedly, “The tongue is a little member, and boasts great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (Jas. 3:5-8).

A third manner in which “tongue” is used is in terms of a specific, known and identifiable language. One example is found in Ezra 4:7, which says, “The letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue.” In Acts 2:7-11 the many foreigners “were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? ... We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.” From these verses we see that the third explanation of “tongue” is the one that applies to our study.

Three Occurrences

There is no example of anyone

speaking in tongues in the Old Testament. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that we have no account or indication that John the Baptist, the great herald of the coming Messiah, ever spoke in tongues. Nor do we have a record of the Lord Jesus doing so. It was however something that would come later, and the Lord Jesus in His parting message told His disciples that there would be those who would speak with new tongues (Mk. 16:17).

The first mention and time that we have of speaking in tongues was at Pentecost in Acts 2:4-11, a passage we already referenced. The Holy Spirit had come down and had baptized all the believers into one Body, the Church. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. What was the subject? It was the “wonderful works of God.” Although unknown to those who spoke them, the words were known to the listeners – the actual languages of every man in their own language.

The second time that tongues is mentioned is in Acts 10:44-46, and it is further explained in Acts 11:15. “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also

was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God" (10:44-46). The newly believing Gentiles spoke in tongues, which were understood by the Jews as they recognized that they were magnifying God.

The third encounter as to the use of tongues took place in Ephesus, as recorded in Acts 19:1-7: "It came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied."

In all three cases, when the people received the Holy Spirit they spoke in tongues. Each time there was a change or demonstration that

God was working in a special way. In Acts 2 it was a new relationship: The Lord in heaven identifying Himself with a group of believers on earth, baptizing them together and thus forming the Church. At that time there were only Jewish believers.

The adding of Gentiles to the Church, and that equally in relationship with Christ, is noticed in Acts 10. They spoke in tongues just as the Jews had done on the first day, at Pentecost, showing that there was no longer any distinction between believing Jews and Gentiles. This may not be such an important difference to us now, but at that time it certainly was marked. Therefore we understand Peter's explanation: "For as much then as God gave them the like gift [the Holy Spirit] as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" (11:17).

In Acts 19, certain men of Ephesus were looking for Christ to come as the Messiah, having understood only this much from the preaching of John the Baptist. It was a Jewish position. But since the preaching of John the Baptist, the Lord had been rejected and had gone to heaven. When they understood this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus and received the Holy Spirit. This took them from an Old

Testament position to a New Testament one. God wanted to show the change by having them speak in tongues. We need to understand that this was a situation that occurred at that time, but it cannot be repeated because the teaching of John the Baptist has been replaced.

The Fourth Occurrence

It is interesting to consider that speaking in tongues is spoken of only four times in the Scriptures. The fourth and last time is in 1 Corinthians 12-14, and the subject is about gifts as given to each one individually as the Holy Spirit willed and gave. The emphasis of the teaching in these chapters in relation to the gift of tongues is the correcting of the abusive, incorrect use of this gift in the assembly of Corinth.

As we read these three chapters in the context of the entire first letter to the Corinthians, we quickly see that they were very carnal, desiring to satisfy their flesh. That group of believers had many difficulties. There was gross immorality, infighting, selfishness and a spirit of division. Among these believers were those who had the gift of tongues, as given by the Holy Spirit as He willed. However, they were using this gift incorrectly. From this example we see that speaking in tongues was

not a sign of spirituality, as many teach today. It was not proof of someone being saved or an indication of being filled with the Holy Spirit, for a believer who is filled with the Holy Spirit could not use a gift in an incorrect way.

Some believe speaking in tongues is a necessary proof of salvation, because of what took place in Acts 2 and 10. However, the people who spoke in tongues in Acts 2 had already believed in the Lord Jesus as their Savior. Instead, what happened at Pentecost was the beginning of the Church. Likewise, the Gentiles in Acts 10 spoke in tongues when the Holy Spirit fell upon those who heard the Word, showing that they were now received in the same manner as the Jews had been – this did not take place as a proof of their individual salvation. There are many other examples in Scripture of individuals who never spoke in tongues at their conversion, such as Saul of Tarsus, Lydia of Philippi and the jailer in Philippi and his family.

As A Sign Gift

It is important to notice that speaking in tongues is placed last in the list of gifts (1 Cor. 12:7-10,28). Rather than having the desire to speak in tongues, believers are admonished to seek the gift of prophesy (14:1-5).

As stated before, it is important to see that the gift of tongues is only used in New Testament Church times, not in the Old Testament. The sign gifts, of which tongues would be considered part, were for the confirmation of the message of the gospel: "If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Heb. 2:2-4).

Although signs were a demonstration and verification of the work of God in the preaching of the gospel, the gift of tongues was principally a sign and proof to the unbelieving Jews of the truthfulness of the new message that was being proclaimed: Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior *by faith*. We see this in 1 Corinthians 14:21-22: "In the law it is written, with men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear Me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not." Paul, as

directed by the Holy Spirit, said that tongues were a sign to the unbelievers – the ones under the law, the people of Israel. So the purpose of tongues was to show the unbelieving Jews that God was now working in a special way, different than before.

One may wonder why this would apply even in Corinth, but we know that Jews were scattered all over and Paul's practice was that he would reach out to his own people with the message of the gospel in almost every place he went. This was the case in Corinth too, where "he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks" (Acts 18:4).

Concluding Thoughts

In the correct understanding of Scripture, there is a principle of "first mention." This principle is that unless clearly indicated otherwise, the significance of the word is to be interpreted by its first use, which in this use of "tongues" means a specific, known and identifiable language. This is clearly understood in the passage of Acts 2 where various languages are named. In Acts 10 and 19 the hearers understood what was being said, so in all three cases it was an identifiable and understood language. There is no justification to think otherwise. Considering this,

the practice by some to utter unintelligible sounds and noises with the pretext that they are speaking in tongues has absolutely no Biblical justification or support and thus must be dismissed as something that is artificial and false.

As we read through the book of Acts we see that the miracles and sign gifts diminished rapidly as time passed. Historically we read nothing about the use of tongues after Acts 19, only 27 years after Pentecost. There is no further mention of the use of tongues except for the corrective letter to the church in Corinth.

It is important to notice that Peter, James, John and Jude were all present at Pentecost and personally experienced what happened that day. All wrote letters, which we have in the New Testament, but none of them wrote about tongues in their letters even though they did speak about the Holy Spirit (collectively a

total of 27 times).

Peter in 1 Peter 2:2 told us that we are to grow and be built up. How, by tongues? No, but by the pure milk of the Word.

Paul wrote 13 or 14 letters and in only one of these letters did he write about tongues. It was in one of his earliest letters – 1 Corinthians – and when he did it was in a corrective way.

The gift of tongues was used in praise or prayer (Acts 2, 10; 1 Corinthians 14:2,14), and for edification (v.26), but there are no occasions in Scripture to suggest its private use. It was for public use before unbelieving Jews with the application of perfect love, as put forward in 1 Corinthians 13, to verify the message of the gospel of grace by faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ. **GT**

Look for the conclusion in next month's magazine!

WE DO NOT FIND SPEAKING IN TONGUES IN THE GOSPELS, other than in the prophecy of the Lord Jesus in Mark 16:17. In verse 14 the Lord reproached the *Eleven* for their unbelief and hardness of heart. He then gave *them* the commission to preach the gospel to all the creation, indicating the consequences for the hearers and the signs that would follow those who believe (vv.15-17). The *Eleven* went forth and the Lord fulfilled His promise, confirming the word by the signs following it.

Notice these points: Signs were only given as *confirmation* of the word, it does not say signs would follow *all* believers, and the promise in this passage was given *only* to the Eleven.

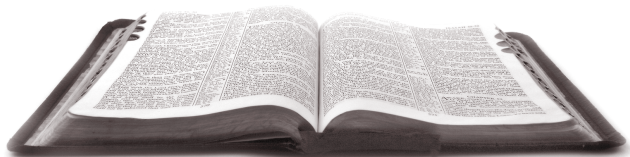
—H. L. Heijkoop (adapted)



The purpose of this column is to help you study the Bible on your own. Look up the Bible references and think about them before writing your answers. Do not send this study to us, as this is not a correspondence course.

The Bible – Its Writers

by Alan Groth



Our study this month will be about Paul, who we know wrote 13 New Testament books. From some of these books, along with Acts and 2 Peter, we will learn about Paul's testimony, activities, responsibilities, sufferings, exaltation and last words.

Read Acts 21:15,37-40, 22:1-21; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

1. Where was Paul born? _____
2. What city was he brought up in? _____
3. Who taught him? _____
4. What was Paul's other name? _____
5. Where was Paul converted? _____
6. Who did he see and hear? _____
7. Where was he sent by the Lord (22:21)? _____

Read Acts 7:54-60, 8:1-4, 9:1-31, 11:22-30, 12:25, 13:1-13, 14:26-27, 15:36-41, 16:1-3,6-10, 18:1, 19:1, 21:15, 27:1-2, 28:11-16,30-31

1. Who watched over the clothes of the men stoning Stephen? _____
2. What did Saul do to the church? _____
3. Describe what happened at Damascus. _____
4. How did Saul leave Damascus? _____

5. Where did he go? _____
6. Where did the brethren in Jerusalem send him (9:30)? _____
- _____
7. From the rest of these passages, name some of the regions and cities where Paul ministered. _____
- _____

Read Galatians 1:1,11-24, 2:1-10

1. What was Paul? _____
2. How did he receive the gospel? _____
3. To whom was Paul sent to preach the gospel? _____
4. Who gave him the right hand of fellowship? _____

Read Colossians 1:21-26

1. Paul said twice in these verses that he became a minister. What two ministries were entrusted to him? _____

Read 2 Corinthians 11:22-33, 12:1-10

1. What were some of the things Paul suffered? _____
- _____
2. Why was he given a thorn in the flesh? _____
- _____

Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8

1. How did Paul face death? _____
2. What will the Lord give Paul? _____
3. Will he be the only one to receive it? _____

Read 2 Peter 3:14-16

1. What was given to Paul? _____
2. What does Peter say about Paul's epistles? _____
- _____
- _____

Research question: How many books of the New Testament begin with Paul's name? _____

In our next study we will learn more about the Bible and its writers.

A FEW CHALLENGES

From The Story Of Nicodemus

by Curt Darling

WHO WAS NICODEMUS? Reading through John 3 we see that he was a Pharisee who had a curiosity about the Lord Jesus. Others of that same ruling class probably had questions about Him, but they were not apparently interested in finding out the truth. Do you want to know the truth, the real truth?

Nicodemus was a man of reputation as a ruler of the Jews, yet he came to Jesus by night so as to not damage it. Many people do the same thing. Rather than being open about their interest in Christ they seek to keep their standing in their social circles, whether in their family, friend, school or work settings. Could this be a lesson for us as well?

This Pharisee had been noticing Jesus and admitted that He was a “teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him” (v.2 KJV). Jesus’ response, recorded in the next verse, was likely unexpected by Nicodemus: “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” This was something Nicodemus



could not understand, so he asked, “How can a man be born when he is old?”

Jesus told Nicodemus that a man had to “be born of water and of the Spirit.” Ephesians 5:26 tells us that water is representative of the Word of God. We are only born again by the work of the Word of God and Spirit of God in our hearts, minds and lives. Our natural birth was one of flesh, following in the line of Adam, but to be born of the Spirit means new life in Christ! Like the wind, one

cannot see the Spirit, but its effects are very evident. Does this seem to be too much to grasp?

It was for Nicodemus at the time. Jesus rebuked him because as a teacher in Israel and knowing the Scriptures he should have known better. But the Lord patiently continued, speaking of descending, ascending and being in heaven. The Lord Jesus is God. Do you believe that?

Jesus gave an illustration from the written Scriptures in that day (Num. 21:4-9) to help Nicodemus understand. When the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness, they complained about the manna God gave them to eat. The wandering they experienced, to begin with, was their own fault as they had not followed Him by faith. Are you wandering through life because you haven't trusted Him? The manna, which the people said they "loathed," pictured the Lord Jesus and the provision of life He gives through Himself (see Jn. 6:50). How dared they abhor it and, in type, the Son?

This attitude angered God then as it does today, and it demanded judgment. Serpents appeared, biting the complainers; and many people died. Through this the people still living recognized that they had sinned against the Lord – something that death still tells us now – and they asked Moses to

pray for them. Instead of acting for yourself, are you trying to be saved from God's judgment through the faith of a godly person you know?

As an intercessor, Moses prayed for them, but that was not sufficient to keep them from this judgment of death, nor is it today. The Lord told Moses, "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live" (Num. 21:8). A person realizing death was coming had to, by faith, turn toward that pole and simply look at that serpent. That person would then live. It worked because God said it would. The fiery serpent on the pole, the Lord revealed to Nicodemus, was a picture of Himself: "He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus works today too! Do you believe?

Whoever believes in the Lord Jesus will not perish. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (Jn. 3:16-17). Jesus continued by telling Nicodemus

that a person who believes is not condemned; but the one who does not believe is condemned already. The Lord was the light that came into the world. Unbelievers hated that light for it revealed their evil, but believers came to the light. Don't you think that Nicodemus was touched by what Jesus said?

Turning to John 7:44-52 we read of how the Pharisees sought to take Jesus. But the officers they sent to do so returned without Him, reporting that "never man spake like this man." In the course of the ensuing discussion, Nicodemus said, "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" Do you want to hear what Jesus said and did?

The Son of Man was lifted up just as was the serpent Moses had made in the wilderness. As Nicodemus saw the Lord Jesus on the cross he must have remembered the first conversation they had had in secret. This Pharisee

believed; have you?

Later, John 19:38-42 tells us how Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus took care, at their own expense, of the body of their Savior. They placed it in a sepulchre and wrapped it in linen cloths with a large amount of myrrh and aloes. This was in keeping with the Jewish custom. But there is more to this story, for to touch a dead body, according to the law of Moses, was to become unclean and would keep them from celebrating the Jewish Passover, a most important feast, held then. In effect, these men who had followed the Lord secretly, now in a very public way, separated themselves from religion to be attached to the Lord Jesus Christ. They knew who He was and what He did. So, they believed and acted in faith to the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ – God Himself. When you look at yourself with this in mind, do you see anything like this in your life? **GT**

GOD'S WORD IS LIKE A HAMMER that breaketh the rock in twain;
A lamp to guide our footsteps, and a light on the stormy main;
A sword that has two edges, and a mirror ourselves to see.
Oh, yes, this is the best of books, the B-I-B-L-E.

GOD'S WORD IS LIKE A LIGHTHOUSE, on a wild and stormy sea.
It points to Christ, the Saviour, bidding us from wrath to flee.
He wrote it by His Spirit, it was given for you and me.
Oh, yes, this is the best of books, the B-I-B-L-E.

Thoughts As To Shepherding

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” —Psalm 23:1 KJV

“For I have not shunned to declare unto you ... all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers ... to feed the church of God.”

—Acts 20:27-28

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” —1 Peter 5:1-4

“He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” —Isaiah 40:11

The following lines are thoughts shared by an older brother in the Lord who had been given the gift of shepherding. During his decades of caring for the flock of God, he served in a very self-sacrificial way, giving glory to God.

The above opening precious statement of Psalm 23 is essential. He is my possession, ever filling all my needs. It is only then that we receive all the counsels of God.

The charge begins with an exhortation: Take heed to yourselves first and then to all the flock. Be sure to notice this: It is the Holy Spirit who makes us or sets us up as overseers! A note by

the well-known Bible scholar J. N. Darby (1800-1882) on shepherds is very vital: "They are to act in this character, or have it by acting!" It is not simply an exhortation to do it, but to acquire that character by doing it – to be so characterized. *Be shepherds.*

The elders are addressed in 1 Peter 5. They are mature in serving God in the God-given capacity that is according to 1 Corinthians 12, one of the many spiritual gifts that He has bestowed on His redeemed people, "the sheep." God knows that the sheep need oversight and feeding, with rich up-building while strengthening Christ-likeness. The feeding, or rather the service of it, is not by constraint, but by wholehearted willingness and "of a ready mind." The passage goes on to warn against human means of dealing with God's people, instructing elders to be examples to believers, the flock.

The foregoing, may I suggest, is the means to an end, namely to train "the younger." They are written about in 1 John 2:13-14: "... Young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one ... Young men, because ye are strong and the Word of God abides in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." This work must be

current and ongoing, to be given up totally and unreservedly in service to the Master, who came not to be served but to serve! Through 1 Peter 5:4, the elders are exhorted to feed the flock of God, taking oversight willingly, being of a ready mind and examples to the flock. But in verse 5, Peter commands, "Ye younger likewise submit unto the elder and both to each other, yes to be subject one to another clothed with humility."

This is the preparation of a vessel, or servant, called by God to be with the sheep like the shepherd David of old. All of the foregoing has instructions for the welfare of the souls. Isaiah 40:11 speaks of the love and care of God for His people Israel, yet it is very practical and an example to us in relation to families, households and assemblies.

In closing I would just like to refer to Abel and Enoch. Abel was a keeper of sheep. In Genesis 4 we read of Abel's flock of which God had respect, that is, unto Abel and his offering.

Abel walked with God. Then we read twice in Genesis 5 that Enoch "walked with God" (vv.22,24). "Enoch walked with God and he was not; for God took him." May we be of like faith – ever walking with God! **GT**

1 Corinthians

by Leslie M. Grant



"But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

—1 Corinthians 1:23-24 NKJV

First Corinthians (Corinth means "satiated" or "satisfied") was written by Paul to correct the disorders allowed at Corinth in the early Church. This epistle lays down solid, practical principles of local assembly government and order, most necessary for the Church of God around the world. This authoritative universal application is emphasized in 1 Corinthians 1:2, 4:17, 11:16 and 14:33,37.

The city of Corinth was a center of Greek philosophy, and it was morally corrupt. Hence the world's wisdom is discarded in chapter 1. Chapter 2 replaces it with God's revelation by His Spirit because "the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God" (v.14).

Human wisdom cannot order the path of the Assembly of God, but the Word of God applied by the Spirit of God to hearts and consciences is sufficient to maintain divine order according to the mind of God. In 1 Corinthians 1-2

intellectual pride is rejected; in chapters 3-7 fleshly corruption is as fully judged; and chapters 8-10 guard against fellowship with any demon influence through idolatry. First Corinthians 11-14 give basic details of assembly truth and practice.

The unity of the body of Christ, in separation from unholy associations, is stressed throughout the book. Yet the unity is seen to be displayed in a wonderful diversity of gifts which call for godly exercise. The importance of sound doctrine also is a vital matter, and chapter 15 strongly stresses the truth of the resurrection both of Christ and of His saints at His coming as being basic to the testimony of the Assembly, or Church.

First Corinthians is a valuable book to encourage appreciation and concern for every member of the body of Christ and to strengthen collective testimony according to the mind of God. **GT**

*This column is taken from the book "The Bible, Its 66 Books In Brief."
It is available for purchase from Believer's Bookshelf USA (www.bbusha.org)
and Believers Bookshelf Canada (www.bbcan.org).*

Q&A

Do people become angels when they die, and can they watch their loved ones who are still on earth?

The brief answer is an emphatic, “No!” To help us to answer these questions let’s look at a story the Lord Jesus told that is recorded in Luke 16:19-31. Other Scripture passages confirm what we learn from this story, and add more details.

A rich man who lived in luxury every day and a poor beggar name Lazarus, full of sores, ultimately died. Indeed, Romans 3:23 tells us that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is death.

When Lazarus died, he “was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom” (NKJV), a term the Jews used to indicate heaven. The Bible refers to Abraham as “the friend of God” several times. Notice, the beggar did not become an angel; rather, he was carried by the angels.

Hebrews 1:14 says that angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.” An angel is a created being, but a spirit being. When God sends an angel on an

errand to people, the angel normally appears in a bodily form, looking like a person. The Bible often describes an angel that appears to someone as looking like a man or a young man, sometimes in white garments. Never do we read of an angel resembling a woman or looking like a child. The Lord Jesus tells us in Matthew 22:30 and Mark 12:25 that the angels of God in heaven do not marry, so these mighty created spirit beings do not multiply. Although they are ancient beings, for angels were present and rejoicing when God laid the foundations of the earth (Job 38:4-7), we never find a reference to age in connection with God’s angels.

The Bible refers to angels in heaven, but nowhere does it indicate that a believer should look forward to fellowship with these exalted beings, great in power. The Christian’s portion is “to depart and be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil. 1:23), and “thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Th. 4:17). We shall be

there in worshiping adoration, falling down before the throne, singing of the worthiness of the Lord Jesus as Creator and Redeemer, and as the One worthy to loose judgment upon the earth.

Nowhere do we find saints in the presence of the Lord looking back on the earth, occupied with the persons and circumstances that were part of their former life on earth. From reading Scripture carefully I would believe that we will be aware of things that are happening as the Lord visits judgment upon this guilty world. But then we will see things from His point of view, for our old, fleshly nature will no longer be a part of us. Until the rapture, only our soul and spirit are in that wonderful condition of bliss with the Lord, for our bodies are in the grave or elsewhere. At the rapture, our body will be changed to be like the Lord's present body of glory, and it will again be united to our soul and spirit. Our portion as redeemed saints is higher far than that of angels, and our interest and joy will be to gaze on the lovely face of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ with hearts bowed in adoration.

The rich man, we read, "also died and was buried." He may have had many servants during his lifetime, but there were no angels to serve him after his

death. He was "in torments in Hades, longing for a drop of water." He thought of his five brothers and wanted them warned so they would not come to this place of torment. Hades, the place of torment for the soul and spirit of the unsaved dead, is not a place a person can enjoy together with his friends and loved ones. Our Lord described the destination of the unsaved dead as a place of outer darkness where there is weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth – there is no fellowship in such horrible suffering!

The person suffering in Hades will already be in extraordinary torment in the flame. He will be able to remember what he had in his life on earth and will doubtless remember every opportunity he had to be saved, which he neglected or rejected. Also, he will be made conscious of that great gulf that will forever keep him where he is – lost and eternally separated from God. He will have no chance to change his condition or to go back and warn others against coming to that dreadful place he is in. And hell, the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, will be full torment for body, soul and spirit forever and ever. No one becomes an angel there or tenderly watches his loved ones back on earth to see

what they are doing. He has absolutely no ability to help anyone then.

It is here on earth that God invites us to receive the salvation His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, has wrought for us on the cross at Calvary. Then one day soon we will be with Him forever. On the

other hand, to reject or neglect to receive the salvation God so freely offers us will result in the eternally fatal consequences of hell forever. Choose now, for God says, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation"! (2 Cor. 6:2).

—Answered by Eugene P. Vedder, Jr.



RESPONSE

I am so grateful to you folks for your writing and organizational talents. I receive so much from your themes and supporting writings. They provide affirmations beyond mention, such that it can only be God blessing me and others through you. Keep up the good work, and may your efforts be well rewarded by God our Father through our Savior Jesus Christ

— Ohio, USA

Your May 2017 issue was very good. I really liked the "Growth and Change" article as well the article on "Resolving Family Conflicts." All articles were good, but these two were exceptional. The opening, "At What Age," was very insightful

— Florida, USA

I want you to know how much I value *Grace & Truth Magazine*. I am a lay preacher with our local church and frequently source extra inspiration from your magazine's excellent articles.

— Levin, New Zealand.

I have been receiving your very important and life changing magazine for three years. The articles have been of great help not only to myself as a pastor but to the whole congregation with whom I have been sharing them.

— Jinja, Uganda

I am sending my address label to continue my subscription. I love to read every issue of your magazine.

— Catarman, Phillipines

The Origin Of The Virus

Just like AIDS, sin has an origin. Its origin is through Adam. "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12 NKJV).

Sin is here in this world because of the disobedience of Adam. God had told him to freely eat of all the trees that were in the garden except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The devil fooled Eve and she ate of the fruit and then offered it to Adam. Sadly, Adam knowingly disobeyed God and brought sin into this world with all of its ruin.

The Effects Of The Virus

The consequences of AIDS are terrible, but those of sin are greater. The evidence of sin is undeniable; its ruin and misery are everywhere. Corruption and violence are rampant. We see its effects in the hospitals, prisons and graveyards. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

The Spread Of The Virus

AIDS, they say, does not discriminate; anyone exposed to it can get it. Sin does not discriminate, for everyone in this world gets it.

"Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5).

We have the evil root of sin in us, and from it the fruit of evil acts come. It is universal. None of us can point fingers at Adam or Eve because we also sin against God. At times we are deceived, and at other times we deliberately sin against God.

The Remedy For The Virus

Although there are treatments, there is no known cure for AIDS. However, God has a perfect and complete remedy for sin. It is found in Christ Jesus who was crucified for you. Christ "has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26). Look to Him and He will save you. "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29). "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (3:14-15).

God says to call on Him and He will apply His remedy to your life. "For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13). Call on Him and be saved from all your sins today! **GT**

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The Virus Of All Viruses

by Jefferson Alleyne



In the 1980's doctors made a declaration that they had discovered a deadly virus and that it was going to take many lives. There was a lot of talk and money spent, but thousands of lives were still lost.

People all over the world took note of it and began to ask numerous questions. Where did the virus come from? Who are those that can get it? How is it passed on? What are the consequences? Is there a remedy?

Mankind in general has taken the virus seriously, but it has affected man in a very serious way. This virus is known as the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS. There have been various opinions as to its origin, yet there is no doubt as to how it is being passed on. The effects and consequences of it are evident worldwide. But man does not yet know an effective remedy.

There was another important declaration made thousands of years before the one in the 1980's. It was about a much greater virus: The greatest virus of all – sin. God made this declaration and He pointed out where this virus came from and what are its consequences. He has also shown how it is passed on and who would be infected. But thankfully He has also shown the remedy for it. Hallelujah! *—continued on inside back cover*

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