

# think

CURRENT ISSUES FROM A DISTINCTLY CHRISTIAN VIEW

FEBRUARY 2015

THE HORRIBLE  
TRUTH ABOUT  
RACISM

Page 20

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OR BLIND  
CHRISTIAN



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"But we all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the  
glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same  
image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

2 Corinthians 3:18

in this issue

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## From the Editors *Billy Davis, Brad Harrub, Keith Parker, Jay Lockhart, Jack Wilkie, Andrew Chavarrilla, Savannah Cottrell, and Jake Doberenz*

### A BIRD IN THE THE HAND

We can be so very sure of ourselves, can't we? When you initially read this statement, what did you see? If you were like me, you stumbled over an obvious mistake! Upon closer examination, the truth was always there—right before my eyes. The impulsive response is not always the best response! I would venture to say that several of you got it wrong too! We failed to pay attention to what we saw and read. In many cases there are Scriptures we have looked at dozens of times—or for dozens of years—and yet, we missed it. It was right before our eyes, and yet we missed it.

It is easy to go through life not seeing the pain, hurt, loneliness, and despair so many grapple with. The tendency to look at the world through **rose-colored glasses** is alluring and allows us to dismiss/overlook/neglect the real vicissitudes of life. This happens to people in the world as well as those who serve the Lord Jesus Christ. In the powerful discourse that Jesus had with the woman at the well in John 4, the disciples and the woman appeared to see everything **except** their own racial and social prejudice. And, if left to their own devices, this ungodly life position would have led to the woman's continual agony, pain, and separation from God. But, when this scene is viewed through **Christ-colored glasses**, the emphasis and focus is correctly placed on a lost soul that needed to drink deeply from the fountain of Living Waters. And, in Luke 9:51-56, after years of listening, praying, following, learning, and being with Jesus, what did the disciples see when the Lord Jesus Christ was spurned by the Samaritans on His way to Jerusalem? They saw an opportunity to kill and destroy them—with fire from heaven! They failed to look at these souls and the situation through **Christ-colored glasses**, which would have led them to say as Jesus did on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," (Luke 23:34).

I have often wondered how the believers could go from having "all things common," (Acts 2:42) to disregarding and overlooking/neglecting a key population in the congregation (Hellenistic widows) in the daily serving of food, (cultural/ethnic bias), (Acts 6:1-6). Their carnal view of 'I don't mind and you don't matter' was in stark contrast to "everyone matters" as viewed through **Christ-colored glasses**. Yes, even Peter, one of the most dynamic characters in the New Testament, was rebuked by Paul in Galatians 2:11-14 because he capitulated to racial and cultural prejudice rather than consistently standing for the truth of God.

While we can rehearse other instances and situations in the Scriptures, the real issue comes down to our own actions and behavior. Stop for a moment and ask yourself how you view those you come into contact with on a daily basis. Do you look into their soul through **Christ-colored glasses** in an effort to see if they are in pain, hurt, lonely, or in despair? Or do you smile, nod and reach up and adjust your **rose-colored glasses**—and continue thinking everything is just fine? What spiritual metrics have you utilized to gauge your growth and maturation in this area? As you take your spiritual vision examination through this issue, we encourage you to be honest and candid with regard to the results. The lost and dying

in each of our respective worlds is counting on us to see, live, learn, love, and serve them through the eyes of Christ.

In 1971, Steven Schwartz and John-Michael Tebelak produced the musical, *Godspell*. "Day by Day" is the third song in the show's score. The words are powerful and profound in application:

Day by Day,  
Day by Day,  
Oh, Dear Lord  
Three things I pray

**To see Thee more clearly** (*emphasis mine*)

Love Thee more dearly  
Follow Thee more nearly  
Day by Day

The only way that we will ever see our Heavenly Father and the great opportunities before us is to look at the world through **Christ-colored glasses**. In this powerful issue of *Think*, we open the door on a topic that is making headlines and often neglected in the realm of Christianity. While we know the world has identified several different "races" we know the Bible describes only one—the human race. We invite you to read these eye-opening articles with an open mind, open Bible, and hopefully a desire to wear **Christ-colored glasses**. It is eternally important for us to *think* on these things. ▲



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# Mailbag

## Alan & Kathy G.

Enclosed please find a donation to your organization. We receive your Think magazine and have read some of your books. They have enlightened us and have been an encouragement to our family. May God bless you in the coming year!

## Carolyn P.

May God continue to bless and guide you in your service for Him. We appreciate all you do in His name. Your work is a blessing to us and so many more.

## Phil P.

We appreciate your knowledge and dedication to God! You are doing many great works.

## Tim S.

I loved the new catalog. In previous years, I could not read it because the print was too small. I was pleasantly surprised to receive the October issue and see items clearly and easy to read. Thank you for listening to us old people and making the change. Now maybe the next step will be the printing type of the magazine.

## Staff

A gentlemen just called in—had just seen our Father's Day issue of Think and wanted to send a subscription to his son. An older, Texas—slow talking gentlemen! After I finally got all the addresses and credit card info (still not sure the numbers he gave me will be correct)—I told him I would also send him one of our latest issues for him to read ... I love what came next ...

He said he was in the doctor's office and was so surprised to read this fine, Christian magazine—that he stole it! **"Yep, I stole it—brought it home with me! Yep, I knew it wasn't the right thing to do, but did it anyways!"**

## Joan B

Our family has enjoyed *Think* magazine for at least two years. Thank you to all the editors for your hard work and determination to supply those of us in the church with important information to help our families grow in Christ.

We have a gospel outreach program at our congregation, the North Beaton church in Corsicana, Texas. The last Saturday of each month we knock on doors in the church neighborhood to invite our neighbors to worship and study the gospel with us. We usually run into quite a few children on those days as we generally visit at least 100 homes, and several months later again visit the same homes. We are discussing having a hand-out for the children to encourage them to think about Bible things and come for classes. Is it possible to sell us packs of *WeeThink* to distribute to our neighborhood children?

*[Eds. Note: Each month we print extra copies of WeeThink for individuals to use in Bible classes and for outreach. We are honored to be able to offer those to you at cost.]*

## Dewey

I hated to miss the seminar at the Green Lawn church last weekend, but a family emergency pulled me away. I appreciate the permission to video your sessions and make them available to others who could not attend. Would you be willing to send me the PowerPoint files you used in your sessions? Last time we put DVD recordings together from your seminar we were able to insert the PowerPoints into the video at the appropriate locations. It made for a very effective DVD. I'd be happy to send you a copy of the completed DVDs when we have them ready.

*[Eds. Note: We are in the "information getting out" business, and are happy to help with your request!]* ▲

## FROM THE ROAD

Several months ago I approached Willie Franklin to help us with the editorial duties of *Think* magazine. Even though it was at busy time in his life—he was preparing his son for the NFL draft—he accepted. Willie is one of those men who you will rarely forget if you ever have the pleasure of meeting. His "chocolate kisses" have led to countless studies and many lost souls buried with Christ in baptism. He has taught his son this same love for souls and evangelism. They often have more studies than they can conduct, especially on college campuses. Last month Willie contacted me and let me know he could no longer serve as an editor for *Think*. He has taken on a new area that I encourage EVERYONE to look into for your own congregation. He brings high profile athletes and coaches together to talk frankly to Christian teenagers about how to not get entangled with the world. He also helps show them how to succeed on and off the field/court. We will miss Willie and his chocolate kisses, but look forward to working with him on future projects. BH ▲

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# Growing out of Sin

In this space last month, we examined the problem of Christians and churches who grow complacent in their walk with God, rarely finding ways to grow in Christ. Ephesians 4:14-16 discusses our need to leave our spiritual childhood behind and grow in Christ to help build up the church. Simply put, it's not acceptable to be a Christian who isn't actively trying to grow. So, as we continue this series, we're going to examine various ways in which we need to grow, and give practical steps as to how we can do so.

I recently surveyed about every Christian I could find with one question: What are ways in which Christians can become too comfortable? I received a lot of helpful answers, but one I found particularly interesting was given by my brother. He said that we're too comfortable both with our lack of sin and with our sin. We feel like good people because we don't commit sins *x*, *y*, and *z*, and the sins we do commit are just fine because there's always an excuse for them and we'll be forgiven for them anyway. Like Goldilocks, we can fall into the trap of thinking our amount of sin is *just right*. But a life that is properly growing in Christ won't just accept sin. Accepting sin is like accepting a rat infestation. It's unthinkable to consider "just living with it" instead of doing everything possible to weed it out.

I suppose this can stem from an over-emphasis on justification without a proper equal emphasis on sanctification. When we talk about Heaven, Hell, and baptism into Christ's blood, we're discussing parts of justification, where we are forgiven for our sins, saved from punishment, and promised eternal life. All of that is crucially important for us to understand, but it isn't the entirety of the Gospel message. Sanctification, on the other hand, is what each of us should pursue after becoming Christians. Baver et al defines it as "personal dedication to the interests of the deity, *holiness*, *consecration*, *sanctification*; the use in a moral sense for a process or, more often, its result (the state of being made holy)."<sup>1</sup> It's about being transformed into the image of Christ day by day, leaving the old man of sin behind. Justification doesn't last very long unless sanctification follows.

When we get caught in the trap of checklist Christianity, trying to figure out what we can and can't do to keep our spot in Heaven safe, we're missing out on the joy of sanctification. "Jesus doesn't care what TV shows I watch." "Yeah, I struggle with lust, but that's just natural." "I know I'm supposed to treat that person with love, but she makes me really angry." "God's not going to send me to Hell for . . ." If we don't want to grow more like Christ here, why do we want to go to Heaven with Him? It doesn't say much for the growth our faith if we think God's commands are keeping us from something rather than helping us live a joy-filled life.

Having said that, I don't think that there are many Christians who consciously decide that they are just fine coasting into Heaven the way they are. On the other hand, I know it's not too much of a stretch to say that we don't always think about conquering our sins. We ask forgiveness of them, "try to do better next time," and go on with life. But without a conscious effort to grow out of sin, we won't get there.

So, what do we do? Spending time in the Word and praying are the obvious ones, but defeating sin isn't something we often do alone. We need close brothers and sisters who keep us accountable, who can confront us when they see us failing. We live in a society that can't tell the difference between constructive criticism and attack, and we can instantly get defensive when confronted. But the "quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger" of James 1:19 is about those very confrontations. Be open with your struggles, and let those you love and trust correct and guide you. Make a plan with them for how you'll respond to temptation and how you'll stay accountable, and have them pray for you and with you.

As long as we keep tolerating and making excuses for the same old sins in our lives, we'll never develop the relationship with God that He wants us to have with Him. As we all aim to grow, let's be intentional about fighting our sins head on and continuing our sanctification in the power of God and His Word. ▲

1 Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 10.





# Faith and Finance

Clint A. Oppermann, CFA

## PROPERTY RIGHTS

Like the Israelites of some 3400 years ago, the Pilgrims of 1620 ventured to an unfamiliar land for a new beginning. They fled from oppression and persecution. The 102 precious souls aboard the Mayflower came to America for a fresh start; in the New World, they enjoyed religious freedom and the liberty to establish a new economic system.

Interestingly, the Plymouth Plantation under Governor William Bradford first employed a system of communal property rights. Land, food, and supplies were held in common and then distributed by administrators according to equality and need. This economic experiment was an unmitigated disaster. William Bradford writes:

[T]hat the taking away of property and bringing in community into a commonwealth would make them happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than God. For this community (so far as it was) was found to breed much confusion and discontent and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort. For the young men, that were most able and fit for labour and service, did repine that they should spend their time and strength to work for other men's wives and children without any recompense. The strong, or man of parts, had no more in division of victuals and clothes than he that was weak and not able to do a quarter the other could; this was thought injustice. The aged and graver men to be ranked and equalized in labours and victuals, clothes, etc., with the meaner and younger sort, thought it some indignity and disrespect unto them. And for men's wives to be commanded to do service for other men, as dressing their meat, washing their clothes, etc., they deemed it a kind of slavery, neither could many husbands well brook it (Bradford).

The Pilgrims tried this economic system and found it wanting; it bred confusion and discontent and held economic output well below its potential, resulting in continued scarcity. They would have done well to study the Bible earlier to discover the economic system hinted at within its pages. Moses writes the words of God:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates ... You shall not steal ... You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:8-10, 15, 17 ESV).

As the Israelites were delivered from Egypt on their way to the

Promised Land, God gave them commandments to obey. It would have been good for William Bradford and the other Pilgrims to study this text on their own journey and notice the type of economy spoken of by God in the Ten Commandments. The Decalogue presumes the property rights of individuals rather than communal property rights.

Obviously, God encourages ownership of personal property. Otherwise, the prohibitions against stealing and coveting make little sense. Similarly, God anticipates private ownership of the means of production (e.g., livestock, ox, donkey), including even land (Deuteronomy 19:14). Lastly, He presumes that each individual is entitled to the fruit of his own labor (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:10). If there were no economic benefit to working, God wouldn't have had to tell the Israelites to cease from work on the Sabbath. As we see here and throughout the rest of the sacred text, property rights for individuals are expected by God.

After a couple of years of communal property rights, the leaders at Plymouth Plantation wised up and implemented a system of private property rights. Notice the happy result:

At length, after much debate of things, the Governor (with the advice of the chiefest amongst them) gave way that they should set corn every man for his own particular, and in that regard trust to themselves; in all other things to go on in the general way as before. And so assigned to every family a parcel of land, according to the proportion of their number, for that end, only for present use (but made no division for inheritance) and ranged all boys and youth under some family. This had very good success, for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corn was planted than otherwise would have been by any means the Governor or any other could use, and saved him a great deal of trouble, and gave far better content. The women now went willingly into the field, and took their little ones with them to set corn; which before would allege weakness and inability; whom to have compelled would have been thought great tyranny and oppression (Bradford).

An economic system based on individual property rights is far superior to one founded on communal property. The former is presumed and supported by the Scriptures. Furthermore, every historical experiment of the latter has ended with economic ruin. I pray America doesn't ever have to relearn the lesson learned the hard way by the Pilgrims 400 years ago. ▲

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Teresa Hampton

## Wellspring

Brrr ... it's cold out there! It's time to put the coat on again. Often when I put on a coat, I think of years ago when I put on Christ with obedient faith. I wanted to be in Jesus. I wanted Him to surround me, so I put Him on in baptism. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

Putting Jesus on was not complicated. Thankfully, it didn't require the intelligence of a rocket scientist, or an act of Congress. This preteen was able to understand the simplicity and necessity of putting on Christ in baptism, not as a work, but as a call or appeal to God for a clean conscience (1 Peter 3:21).

As the years unfolded, however, I soon came to realize that just as easily as one can put on Christ, one can take Him off. He is as removable as a winter coat. In fact, Satan is ever at work to entice all Christians to take Jesus off. He tries to convince us of the practicality of wearing Jesus when it suits us. He tries to persuade us that Jesus is cumbersome, out of date, or doesn't fit anymore, and we should shop for something new. He tempts us to satisfy our desires or feed our pride, so we conveniently take Him off for awhile, but soon discover that desire and pride are empty.

The truth is Jesus is a perfect fit for anyone who chooses Him. He's never out of date, but has clothed willing souls for nearly two thousand years. He's not cumbersome or heavy. "My yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). We could shop the world over, but being clothed with Jesus is the only way to have eternal life. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Me" (John 14:6).

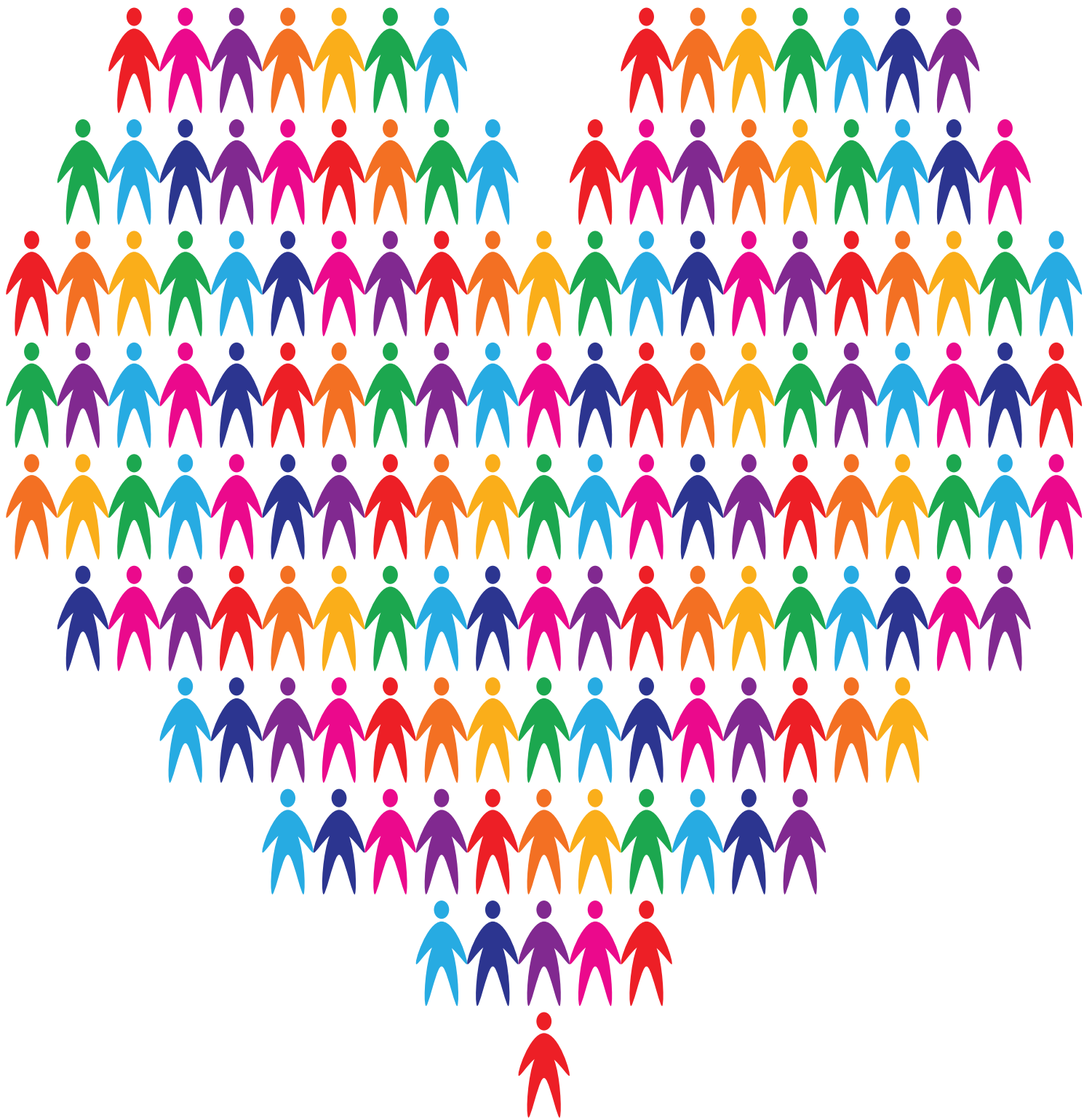
The society in which we live is a spiritually cold, sinful place. The only way to survive is to be clothed at all times with Jesus, surrounded by the warmth of His love and the assurance of salvation.

**TODAY'S VERSE:** *"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall be joyful in my God, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10). ▲*

# It's Cold Out There!

DOUG SMITH

# GOD LOVES EVERYONE;





# DO YOU?

The love of our great God is one of the profound themes of the Bible. The golden text of the Bible assures us that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). John, commonly referred to as the apostle of love, wrote, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). The writer of Lamentations stated, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). John makes an amazing statement when he writes that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). The fact that God loves everyone cannot be denied. What our magnificent God has done for us proves His love again and again.

The love of God calls for a response on our part. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). If we love God, we will do what He says without questioning His authority. We are admonished by the words of John who said, "Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked" (1 John 2:6). To walk as Jesus walked is to live like He lived and love like He loved. God loved every single individual that ever lived on this planet so much that He gave His own Son, Jesus Christ, as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. God loved us when we were unlovable and He saved us when we were unsavable (Romans 5:8). One of the most important things we can do as Christians is love God and love people. But before we can love anyone, we have to receive God's love because you can't give away something you don't have. When I try to comprehend how much God loves me, it should naturally lead me to love as He loves. God loves everyone, and so must I if I am to be pleasing to Him.

The Bible admonishes us to love everyone from our brothers and sisters in Christ to our worst enemies. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (John 13:24). We are challenged daily with the words of 1 John 4:11 which states, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." This is much easier said than done, but we are not left without God's guidance in this matter.

If you really love someone, you show it by how you act toward that person. Love is more than some physical attraction and more than

arousal. It's also more than sentimentality, like so many of today's songs suggest. When this standard is used, is love dead when the emotion is gone? We have to see love as an action or a behavior. Love is a determined commitment to sacrificial action for other people. The Bible tells us that loving God is equal with obeying His Word (John 15:15).

In our time and culture, most people define love as some kind of **feeling**. The modern definition of love might be stated as a **feeling that you feel** when you **feel** that you are **feeling a feeling** that you never felt before. The world's definition of love is selfish in nature. Those in the world will not give love unless it benefits them in some way. There may be strong emotions which accompany love, but it is the commitment of the will that will allow love to remain steadfast and unchanged over the course of time. Once we really understand that love is a determination of the will and it is demonstrated by our actions toward others, then and only then are we on the path to loving everyone as God does.

1 Corinthians 13 has come to be known as the "Love Chapter." This great chapter tells of the importance of love, how love acts and behaves, and the eternal nature of love. We find in verses 4-8 the characteristics of true love and the nature of love that involves our thoughts, words, and actions. We can love everyone as God does when we discipline ourselves to make these characteristics a part of our daily lives.

**Love is patient (longsuffering).** Many times we want to forcefully express ourselves when the right thing to do is to think things through. Love will endure pain and trials without complaining and when provoked, it will show forbearance and restraint. When difficulties and adversity come into our lives, love will remain steadfast and calm.

**Love is kind.** When the temptation comes to tear down and destroy someone with our words and actions, love is sympathetic, kind, gentle, and agreeable. This needs to be our attitude toward the members of our family, toward our brethren in the Lord's church, and even toward our enemies. We are not "to be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

**Love is not jealous.** It does not envy. It could be that someone is getting noticed more than you are and they are receiving the praise and honor you feel should be directed toward you. Love will not allow one to participate in rivalry and will not be mean or hostile toward those who are perceived to have an advantage we don't have. We need to realize that God made us who we are and therefore He requires we give our best. We should not compare ourselves with others.

**Love does not brag (vaunteth not itself).** There are many times when we might want to stand up and shout to the world about our accomplishments. Instead of self-glorification, we need to lift and build up others. If we seek the praise of men above the praise of God, that will be our only reward (John 12:43).

**Love is not arrogant (is not puffed up).** There will be times when we are sure that we are right and others are wrong. But love will not be overbearing in those situations. Love does not have an exaggerated estimation of self. If we are not careful, we can become more focused on impressing others than pleasing God.

**Love does not act in an unbecoming way.** Being boastful or rude may get you attention and perhaps allow you to get your own way, but love conforms to what is right, fitting and appropriate to the situation in order to honor God.

**Love does not seek its own.** It is not selfish and self seeking. Love is an act of the will which seeks to serve and not be served. It is considering others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4).

**Love is not easily provoked.** It is not aroused or incited to outbursts of anger.

**Love thinks no evil.** It does not attribute evil motives to people and it does not hold grudges. It forgives and forgets.

**Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness.** It mourns over sin and seeks to reconcile others with the Lord.

**Love rejoices in the truth.** Even when it is easier and more profitable for the unscrupulous to lie, love is joyful when the truth is known even when it leads to adverse circumstances.

**Love bears all things, believes all things, and hopes all things.** It is being tolerant of others who have personality traits which cause problems in relationships. It accepts trustfully and does not judge the motives of others. Love anticipates the best in all situations.

The fact that God loves everyone means that He will never fail anyone as love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:8). As children of God we are duty bound to love others just as God does. Meeting this challenge in our lives on a daily basis will bring glory and honor to God. ▲



## HE WHO SEES LITTLE, LOVES LITTLE

DAVID R. CREEK

Jesus Christ once spit in a man's face. Right in his face.

There were people watching, begging Him to act, and excitedly waiting to see what He would do as He stood face to face with him.

And the next thing he knew, Jesus had spit in his face.

But this wasn't an act that occurred during a heated altercation in the street, or some situation that mushroomed out of control and became a hostile incident. It wasn't an enemy of His managing to say just the right thing, succeeding in pushing just the right button to cause Him to lose control and lash out.

When Jesus looked at this man and spit in his face, it was one of the most wondrous, moving, and unsung moments we find from His three and a half years on the earth.

To top it all, this man was disabled. He came not to find a fight, but sight. He had no perception whatsoever of the properties of light. All he knew was the wretched pitch black of night in his eyes. He was blind. Completely blind. Blind was his plight.



He was brought to Jesus that day on the east bank of the Sea of Galilee, in Bethsaida (Mark 8: 22-26). Standing by, he could hear voices all around him pleading with a man named Jesus to lay His hands on him so his blindness could be taken away. It was then that he felt someone take his hand. And together they began to walk. And walk. And walk.

In his account, Mark records that Jesus led him by the hand out of the village, perhaps away from however many people were there to where it was just the two of them. It was then we are told that Jesus spat on his eyes.

This is **not** to be confused with the separate occasion that John records, of which He had healed another blind man by spitting on the **ground** and administered the clay from the spittle to his **eyes** (John 9: 1-7). On this occasion, Jesus spat on his eyes and placed His hands on top of them.

A glinting kaleidoscope of haze began registering in his sockets. Pigments ... Textures ... Rays of light! The development of shapes coming into view. Virgin eyes filled with sight for the very first time. Vision, sweet vision at last.

This is what the world looks like ...

He hears the voice of Jesus again, asking him a question: "Do you see anything?" Looking up, he describes exactly what it was that he was seeing. It's an interesting statement—at first, all he could see were figures of people, but "like trees walking around."

He could have made a humorous observation—"Wait, all these years I've spent imagining what the world looks like, trees have been walking around? Are you telling me that trees have the ability to walk?" No ...

Jesus places His hands on his eyes once more. And now, at last, he sees.

What's interesting is that he didn't see man properly until he looked at them **intently. Intensely.** When, and only when he had looked at them in such a way, Mark says, "He began to see everything clearly."

The "clergy" of the day thought they could see. They considered their vision to be beyond 20/20. They fancied themselves as guides to a world of religiously blind people stumbling around in the dark, in need of elaborate public showings of their righteousness to serve as a shining example, though a standard of uprightness impossible for them to attain.

But when Jesus came, He exposed the blindness of the very ones who pompously seized the necks of others to guide! When He pronounced His famous woes upon the Pharisees in Matthew 23, Jesus calls attention to their blindness five different times. He refers to them as *blind guides, blind men, blind fools and blind Pharisees.*

When they looked at themselves, they saw "eliteness," "righteousness," and "superiority" over others. When they looked at tax collectors and prostitutes, they saw dogs, the scum of the earth: a certain type of non-person, insidious parasites in their luminous midst who stood worthy of being designated as **sinners.**

They did not see their law-breaking counterparts, God's creation, or people with souls that needed the forgiveness of God. Squinting, through

Christ-less eyes, all they saw were a bunch of trees walking around.

And then here comes Jesus, seated at a table, surrounded by them as they share the intimacies of a meal. Reaching out and touching the untouchable leper. Healing blind guys on the Sabbath. Conversing with the reviled Samaritan woman who was shacking up with her sixth man. Defending and sparing the life of even a woman caught as a guilty party in an illicit sexual act.

Here comes Jesus speaking in parables and making scathing declarations, referring to the **Pharisees** as the merciless, unrighteous sons of Hell standing as bouncers in front of the kingdom of Heaven—but referring to the **Samaritans** as the compassionate protagonists in the very same parables; the reality check issued that repentant prostitutes and tax collectors were in fact entering God's kingdom—and doing so ahead of them (Matthew 21:31).

They were spitting angry. They were filled with blind rage. And though time and again,

## We will open our eyes as if we had never seen anything before.

Jesus warmly clasped their hands in His and sought to lead them from out of the village and from out of their plight, **these** blind men violently broke free of His hold, refusing His direction, awkwardly stumbling around in the darkness.

Before He could lead them out of the city, they led **Him** out of the city with a cross beam on His back.

Before He ever got a chance to spit on their eyes so they could see, they spit in **His** face.

Before He got the chance to reach out His hands and touch their eyes, they balled up their fists and disfigured His face with punches and slaps and blows to the head.

A sad, sad world of blind fools who murdered the only one who could ever open the eyes of our hearts and cause us to see clearly.

Simon was one of those blind guides who thought he could see (Luke 7: 36-50). He extends an invitation to Jesus to come under his roof and share a meal at his table. He comes—and as they eat, a woman enters his home.

This was one of those despicable people walking around with that title of **sinner.** Her sins were common knowledge in the streets. She comes inside with a vial of very costly perfume. She stands behind Jesus so heartbroken—she is speechless. She falls to the ground weeping. Her tears splash His feet as she pours the perfume on them. As one of the most beautiful, poignant demonstrations of worship and sorrow

over sin unfolds before his eyes, Simon doesn't see a heroine in the faith.

All he sees is that **sort** of person, the **sinner,** as well as the proof he thought this validated that Jesus wasn't a true prophet (for not knowing a sinner was touching Him). On this day, Simon mirrors the proud Pharisee, praying to God about how righteous he is (Luke 18). The unnamed woman mirrors the contrite tax collector who can't even lift his eyes to the heavens, who could only beat his chest and say, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!"

Jesus takes Simon by the hand and even more, **seeks to take him by the eyes ... "Do you see this woman?"** He asks him.

Although Jesus entered his house a guest, Simon wouldn't even bring a basin for Him to wash His own feet in. But the heart of this woman is bursting at the thought of her sins to such a degree that she kneels before Him washing His feet with her **tears** and drying them with her hair. When Jesus entered his house, Simon wouldn't extend Him the proper greeting of a kiss on His cheek. But from the moment she walked through the door—**uninvited by the way,** she had not stopped kissing His **feet.**

As He passed through his door, Simon refused Jesus' head of any oil. But she brought the most valuable perfume she could get her hands on and anointed His feet with every last drop. "For this reason," Jesus said, "her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little."

And as I have learned in my 17 years as a follower of Christ and am learning more with each new day, He who sees little, loves little.

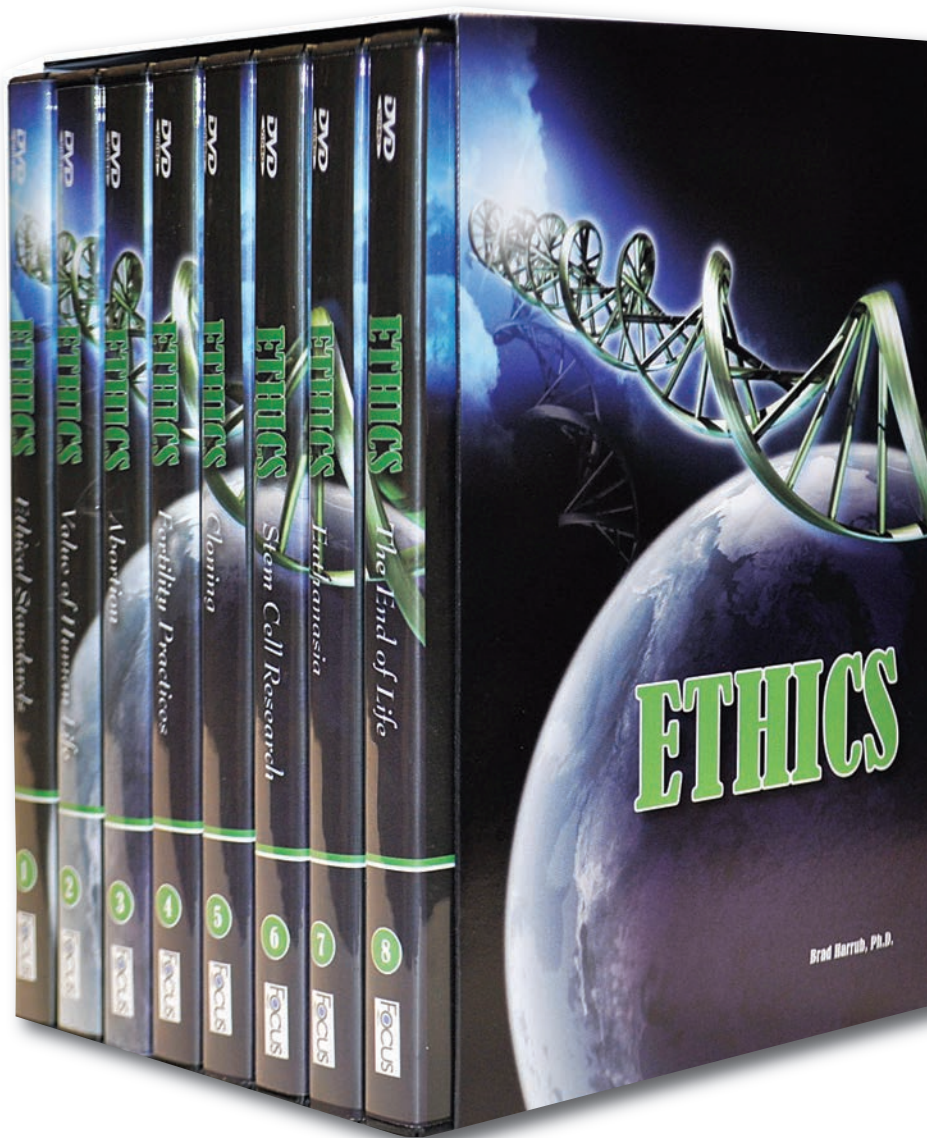
At first when we look at the world, all we're going to be able to see is a bunch of terrible sinners who want the opposite of what we want, people we aren't coming anywhere near or having anything to do with.

When we look at our fellow Christ-following believers, at first, all we will identify are the hazy shapes of buildings and signs and people who have hurt us and who ought to be shunned. When we worship, at first our perception of it will be an hourly smorgasbord of mechanical rituals in a auditorium; when we break the bread and drink the cup all we will see are trays and a mini-glass; when we see the destitute man standing outside the 7-Eleven, all we will see is a con artist begging for a line of blow.

But if we permit the Lord Jesus to take our hand, He will guide us from out of those places we have been blind for so long. If we do not resist the unique ways He drives our blindness away, we too will look intently and will no longer see men walking around like trees. We will open our eyes as if we had never seen anything before—seeing the lost in vivid HD color and recognizing who we used to be in their faces, seeing fellow disciples in need of encouragement, seeing worship as the greatest joy of our existence, looking at the homeless and the hospital patient and the inmate and seeing Jesus in their eyes with an empty hand extended.

Then, and only then, will we see it all clearly. Then and only then will we see the world through Christ-colored glasses. ▲

*Finally* . . . the right decision  
is just a heartbeat away.



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FEBRUARY 2015



# dolphin



## CREATURES THAT DISPLAY DESIGN



**Jeremiah Tatum**

# The Bible's Dolphin Tale

In Genesis 1:20-21, the Bible says, "Then God said, 'Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.' So, God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind,

and every winged bird according to its kind. And

God saw that it was good." In other words, God made every living animal of air and water on the fifth day of creation. And He made them suited for that environment.

But evolution seeks to teach us otherwise. School science books teach that fish turned to amphibians which crawled onto land and eventually became humans. They disregard what the Bible says about all land animals and humans being created on day six. Evolutionists seem to think every animal had to advance from a very primitive animal to a more complex one. Supposedly this happened over millions of years. But the story from the sea teaches the truth. Consider the dolphin.

There is absolutely no evidence in the fossil record that indicates any animal that would have been a transitional stage of a dolphin which was headed toward being a land dwelling creature. Since they breathe air from the top of their heads, where would the nose go? When did they ever develop claws or feet in place of flippers and fins? And while it was changing from sea creature to land dweller, when did the dolphin drink salt water and find a way to make it fresh water? Dolphins are as they always have been. God never intended them to be on the land. He specifically designed them for the sea.

Scientific discovery eventually proved the Biblical account. In 1938, a German researcher named Max O. Kramer, patented a "Device for the Reduction of Friction Drag." This invention was designed to reduce the turbulence caused by the flow of water over a battleship or air over a missile. As he developed his invention he examined the outer skin of dolphins. He was amazed at how they moved so swiftly through the water without any resistance. Continuing his research in 1995, as he looked at the skin of the dolphin under magnification, he found out why.

Dolphin skin is not waterproof! Can you believe it? Wouldn't a creature that lived in the sea "evolve" in such a way that no water would permeate its outer surface? But instead, the dolphin's skin has been designed by the heavenly Creator to be more like a sponge. Water is allowed into the dolphin's skin to an area that is about 1/16 of an inch thick. On the very outside there is a membrane that lets the water in. On the very inside there is a thicker wall that stops the water in its tracks. And in between, there is a fatty section of thousands of tiny, spongy pillars that will both collect the water from the outside of the dolphin and move with every change of the water in the ocean. So, there is no drag and no resistance! Dolphins glide through the water because their skin has been designed to move with the movement of the ocean.

In short, the world's most brilliant scientists and inventors could never design any device that is as efficient to reduce friction and drag as what God has already created within the skin of the dolphin. Evolution says dolphins had to advance. The Bible teaches that dolphins are advanced. And that is God's true dolphin tale.

*Jeremiah Tatum received his Bachelor of Science in Biology from California State University at Stanislaus in 1996. He currently preaches for the Willow Ave. church of Christ in Cookeville, Tennessee.*



## CHARACTER STUDY

# JESUS

## TRUTH

As we continue looking at different facets of Jesus' character each month, we see an almost endless list of attributes we need to try to copy in our own actions. As we've examined so far, Jesus was full of compassion—He cared for other people, and He showed it. Additionally, He took time to serve the people around Him, looking out for their needs and doing what He could to help them. In this month's article, we're going to look at Jesus' commitment to doing God's will.

Without commitment, it's very easy to get distracted or find excuses to change what we're doing when the going gets tough. Jesus had plenty of distractions and trials that could have knocked Him off of His course while here on earth, but because He was committed to doing the will of the Father in all things (John 8:28), He didn't ever lose focus of His commitment to fulfill His ministry and die for us. If you've ever sang about how Jesus "could have called 10,000 angels to destroy the world and set Him free," you understand just how easily He could have saved Himself from dying on the cross. Why didn't He? Because He knew what God wanted Him to do, and He was committed to getting it done.

How can we learn to be committed to doing the right thing like Jesus? First, we have to learn what it is we need to do. In Luke 2 we see Jesus among the teachers in the temple, learning and asking questions even as a 12-year-old. He knew what His purpose was here on earth but to get there He had to go through the process of humbling Himself (Philippians 2) and being obedient to the Father (Hebrews 5:8), and it was because He did these things that He was able to stay committed to His purpose all the way to the cross.

For Christians, we learn our purpose by studying the Bible. Even when we don't see His whole plan, we can see what God wants from our lives. Once we learn that, we can use the tests and trials in our lives each day to build our commitment to God. When you're young, you can start laying the foundation for a life-long commitment to God well before you even consider becoming a Christian. Make commitments to be honest, to treat people kindly, and to respect your parents. While we aren't able to stay perfectly true to our purpose the way Jesus did, we should always try to know what's right and do it

to the best of our ability. That way, when a lie would get you out of trouble, or when someone angers you, or when you feel like disobeying your parents, or doing anything else you know you shouldn't, you've already made a commitment to do the right thing.

### word search

COMMITMENT

CREATED

DECIDE

DOLPHIN

FRICTION

JESUS

OBEY

RIGHT

SKIN

WATER

R	E	Z	C	I	P	F	V	Q	J	S	J	I	H	E
Q	T	D	R	O	F	F	X	W	E	K	B	N	T	L
T	M	D	I	T	M	T	X	Z	C	I	Z	N	I	T
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B	A	T	U	M	O	D	R	T	J	P	I	P	D	V
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# FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

# FEBRUARY

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**THiNK**

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**Phillip Johnson**  
Devotional Writer

**Brad Harrub, Ph.D.**  
Editorial Advisor

## WEEK ONE: CAREFUL JUDGMENT

**OBJECTIVE:** To discuss the dangers of judging others.

### FEASTING ON THE WORD:

Read James 4:11-12, Matthew 7:1-6 and Galatians 6:1-2 together as a family.

### FAMILY DISCUSSION:

Look at James 4:11—How should Christians speak of each other? What happens if we talk evil against a brother?

According to James 4:12, who is the one Lawgiver? What power does the Lawgiver have?

Looking at Matthew 7:1-2, what are the dangers of judging others? What warning does Matthew give in verses 3 & 4?

What should we first do with ourselves before we go and try to help others remove sin from their lives?

What should we do if we know someone is in sin according to Galatians 6:1-2? How should we help the person in sin?

What must we be careful of when having to make a judgment?

- Remember that how we judge is how we will be judged (Matthew 7:2)
- Remember that we must first deal with our sin (Matthew 7:3-5)
- Remember we must help people in sin with gentleness (Galatians 6:1)
- Remember that God is the only true judge with the power to save and destroy (James 4:12)

### CHALLENGE:

Have you ever been judged unfairly? How did that make you feel? What are some things we can do to help insure that we will not judge people unfairly?

**WEEKLY MEMORIZATION GOAL:** Ephesians 4:29

## WEEK TWO: TODAY MATTERS

**OBJECTIVE:** To discuss the dangers of leaving God out of your plans.

### FEASTING ON THE WORD:

Read James 4:13-17 and 1 Timothy 2:3-4 together as a family.

### FAMILY DISCUSSION:

What is the person doing in verse 13? Why was this individual wrong for making future plans?

Is it wrong to make plans for your future? It is wrong to make future plans without considering God's will for our lives. What is God's will for your life according to Paul in 1 Timothy 2:3-4?

Why should we be careful in making plans for our future? (We do not know what tomorrow holds.)

What does James compare life to in verse 14? Why is it important to be faithful to God today?

How long does steam from a tea or coffee pot last? What happens to early morning fog later in the day? How does this apply to the length of life?

Are we promised tomorrow? Who should we consider first as we make our plans for tomorrow?

How does James define sin in verse 17? How is this definition different than how we typically describe sin?

### CHALLENGE:

As we review today, did you find yourself thinking about God and keeping Him in the things you planned? Did you consider His will as you made choices and plans for your future? Make a list some ways that will help you keep God in the planning of your time. Make a list of good things that you know you should do in service for the Lord

**WEEKLY MEMORIZATION GOAL:** James 4:14

## WEEK THREE: BE FAIR TO OTHERS

**OBJECTIVE:** To read and discuss James' warning to those who oppress others.

### FEASTING ON THE WORD:

Read James 5:1-6 and Matthew 19:16-30 together as a family.

### FAMILY DISCUSSION:

To whom does James direct this section of Scripture? Why does he tell them to weep and howl? What does James say about their riches in verses 2 and 3?

What had these rich oppressors done wrong? What does it mean that "the cries of the reaper have reached the ears of the Lord"? These rich oppressors lived in luxury while the people who worked for them were not paid, and were mistreated.

Verse 6 tells of more sins of the oppressors. What are they? You may be thinking, "This doesn't apply to me. I am not a rich person with unpaid workers."

How can this principle apply to each of us? The main idea of this section of Scripture is "be fair to others." It is not a sin to be rich, but there is a danger in it. We should never allow money to become our god. We should use our financial blessings to help others.

Most people in poverty stricken, third world countries think of EVERY American as rich. Compared to people who have very little food or clothes, or no home to live in ... are you rich?

Read Matthew 19:16-30 to find out what Jesus told a rich man to do. Why did the rich young man walk away from Jesus sad?

### CHALLENGE:

How can each person in the family use their own money to honor God?

**WEEKLY MEMORIZATION GOAL:** Proverbs 22:2

## WEEK FOUR: BE PATIENT

**OBJECTIVE:** To read and discuss what James says about patience and perseverance.

### FEASTING ON THE WORD:

Read James 5:7-12 together as a family.

### FAMILY DISCUSSION:

What is the first thing James tells us to be patient for in verse 7? What word picture does James use to illustrate this? Look at verse 8—Discuss what it means that "the coming of the Lord is at hand."

What does it mean to "grumble" against one another? Why should we

**Not** do this? If we are patient with each other, it will keep us from grumbling!

Verse 10 speaks of prophets who were patient in suffering. Verse 11 says the prophets were counted as blessed because of their endurance. Share some things we must endure as Christians.

Verse 11 shares an example of one who endured patiently during suffering. Who was it? What important lesson(s) do we learn from Job's example?

James is telling us to be patient about the Lord's coming, be patient with each other, and be patient during suffering. How can you train yourself to be patient in each of these circumstances?

Verse 12 is an important commandment to us. Read and discuss its meaning.

What is the warning at the end of verse 12?

### CHALLENGE:

We are to be patient for the Lord's coming. Have you thought about the fact that TODAY may be the day when the Lord returns? Do you keep that in mind every day? Since we don't know when it will happen, what should we be doing to get ready?

**WEEKLY MEMORIZATION GOAL:** 2 Peter 3:9





Savannah Cottrell

## Not a Statistic

# LESSONS FROM Queen Vashti

As of my writing this article, I am currently reading through the book of Esther, one chapter per night. I began my re-reading excitedly, as Esther is one of my all-time favorite books of the Bible. I began with Chapter 1, and as I read, I found myself intrigued by Queen Vashti, Ahasuerus' queen before Esther comes onto the scene. She gets a bad rap; she refuses to parade before the king and his guests, only to find herself cast away, never to be seen or heard from again—at least in the Biblical account.

As I thought more and more about her, I found myself thinking about what I and my fellow young adult brothers and sisters in Christ can learn from Vashti. She only appears in the Bible for what seems like a moment, and there is actually quite a bit that young Christians can learn from the former queen of Persia.

Here are the lessons I found from Vashti's character, and how they apply to both relationships and character that Christians should have.

## 1. Never, ever, ever settle.

I have been told this adage for quite possibly my entire life, but this advice rings true, especially today. But how does it relate to Vashti? Her husband, "merry with wine," asked her to parade her beauty before a wide audience of equally raucous men (Esther 1:10-11). How would you feel if your spouse asked you to do the same? While that scenario seems unlikely in this day and age, you don't want to be seen and valued just for your looks, or be someone's "trophy" on a shelf. You should be valued for your heart and soul, and your spouse should strive to walk the path God has set before you both, with the ultimate goal of Heaven in mind. This idea is so important to utilize now, especially within a culture that says it's okay to divorce your spouse if things "don't work out."

## 2. No one person is the sum of their appearance.

King Ahasuerus wanted Vashti to come out to his feast in the first place because "she was beautiful to behold" (Esther 1:11). Elaborating on a thought from my previous point, no one person—male or female—should be sought after as a husband or wife just because of his or her appearance. God has given everyone talents, and God has also given specific roles to both men and women that not only benefit His Kingdom,

but also the marriage relationship. Men should strive to be the spiritual heads of their households, while women should strive to be loving helpmeets and nurturers of their children. And, ultimately, as stated by Jesus Himself in Mark 10:6-9, "... From the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh;' so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." Thus, every talent that a husband and wife possess individually can be used to contribute to their marriage, allowing it to thrive, no matter the appearance of either person.

## 3. Refuse to back down from your convictions, no matter the situation.

If anyone—friend, classmate, or co-worker—berates you for not wanting to partake in an action or standing for a particular cause, you have every right to hold true to your beliefs. The consequences of this can be steep, especially when it comes to occupations or personal relationships. But the truth of the matter is that standing for God has a much greater positive outcome in the long run. In scenarios like this, I turn to one of my favorite scriptures, Hebrews 6:19-20: "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Placing your relationship with Him above all things—and anchoring yourself in His promises—will open more doors in life, as we see with Esther later on in her story. We don't know what happens to Vashti, but we do know that her standing up for her own convictions ultimately contributed to the good that would come out of the story of Ahasuerus and Esther.

In conclusion, Vashti can actually teach us important lessons about our walk with Christ, both individually and in a marriage relationship. What I personally learned from this look at the character of Vashti is that anyone, great or small, has a role to play in the story that God has written, even if they are mentioned for what seems like a few words on a few pages, and they all have a story to tell and a lesson to share from their actions. I hope that we all can look at any person in the Bible with the same lens and value their contributions in God's design. ▲



MELVIN CALISTE

RED AND YELLOW,  
BLACK AND WHITE ...  
I CAN'T STAND YOU,  
LEAVE MY SIGHT!

# THE HORRIBLE TRUTH ABOUT RACISM





The Webster's dictionary defines *racism* as: "1. A belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race. 2. Racial prejudice or discrimination. 3. Poor treatment of or violence against people because of their race. 4. The belief that some races of people are better than others." Racism, then, involves superiority, prejudice, discrimination, and violence. The construct of race is based upon the biological myth that race determines whether some human beings are superior to others. Therefore, individuals who participate in racist behaviors do so upon false presumptions. The reality and truth is there are no subsets of the human species. Race, then, is not a biological construct but a social and cultural one. Professor Joseph Graves posited in his book *The Emperor's New Clothes: Biological Theories of Race at the Millennium*, "What we call race is an invention

would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children'" (Acts 17:24-29, emp. added). Therefore, racism is contrary to the truth of God and can never be in harmony with His will. And those who practice it can never be acceptable to God. Ironically, many proponents' of racist ideology couch their hateful rhetoric and improper deeds in the blanket of "It is the will of God."

Racism is antithetical to the doctrine of Christ. In Galatians chapter three, the apostle Paul upbraided the apostle Peter for showing a racist attitude toward the Gentiles. The record says, "But when Peter came to Antioch, I [Paul, MC] opposed him to his face, because **he stood condemned**. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter in the presence of all, 'If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'" (Galatians 2:11-14, emp. added). Moreover, the characteristics of racism are identified in Scripture as **deserving of death**. The apostle Paul elaborated on this notion by stating, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient

to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things **are worthy of death**, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Romans 1:28-32, emp. added). Notice the racist's characteristics in this verse: arrogant, boastful, depraved mind, wickedness, greed,

## Racism denies the **fundamental Biblical truth** that we are all created in the image of God.

not of nature but of our social institutions and practices." Graves further stated, "All of America's racist thinkers have relied on three unchallenged assumptions: 1. That races exist, 2. That each race has its own genetically determined characteristics, and crucially, 3. That social hierarchy results from these differences." Angela James noted in her article "Making Sense of Race and Racial Classification," "Race is an exceedingly slippery concept. Although it appears in social life as ubiquitous, omnipresent, and real, it is hard to pin down the concept in any objective sense; this is because the idea of race is riddled with apparent contradiction. While it is a dynamic phenomena rooted in political struggle, it is commonly observed as a fixed characteristic of human populations; while it does not exist in terms of human biology, people routinely look to the human body for evidence about racial identity, while it is a biological fiction, it is nonetheless a social fact." W.E.B. Dubois in his book *The Souls of White Folks* said, "Race is utilized to maintain and control power due to fear of losing power and the current dominant position." The Declaration of Independence says it best: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that **all men are created equal** [emphasis MC], that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." When we consider the Biblical aspect, the apostle Paul by divine inspiration declared, "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and **He made from one man every nation** of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they

murder, malice, unloving, and unmerciful. While doing research for this article, I came across a very disturbing picture of a mob scene where two African American men had been lynched and their bodies were burning, and the mood of the crowd was very festive. What I saw in this picture were people who were unloving and unmerciful. Violent acts of terrorism are major tools of the racist's ability to keep and hold power.

Historically, racism has always and in every case cultivated suffering and death. The name Adolf Hitler immediately brings to mind the horrors of the Holocaust in which over six million Jews suffered and died. In America, between the years 1889 and the early 1920s, approximately 50-100 lynchings occurred—every year. While African Americans were primarily targeted, Italian Americans, Asian Americans, and Jews were lynched as well. These unsettling facts were published in *The Story of Race Transcript* ([www.understandinggrace.org](http://www.understandinggrace.org)). Educator and scholar Robert A. Gibson, in his course entitled "The Negro Holocaust: Lynching and Race Riots in the United States, 1880-1950" taught:

Most of the lynchings were by hanging or shooting, or both. However, many were of a more hideous nature, burning at the stake, maiming, dismemberment, castration, and other brutal methods of physical torture. Lynching therefore was a cruel combination of racism and sadism, which was utilized primarily to sustain the caste system in the South. Many white people believed that Negroes could only be controlled by fear. To them lynching was seen as the most effective means of control.

The 1963 bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, was one of the most notorious incidents of racism that occurred during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, where four young girls were murdered and many wounded. On the night of June 21, 1964, in Neshoba County, Mississippi, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner were murdered for registering African American voters. In Money, Mississippi, on August 28, 1955, Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old African American, was kidnapped from his aunt's home and taken to a remote location where his assailants tortured and murdered him. These are only a few instances of the horrors of racism. Where there is disenfranchisement, discrimination, exploitation, and civil/human rights violations, you will find racism. As people of God, we should never engage in, support, or tolerate the insanity and madness that presents in this manner. Our Lord Jesus has taught us a better way.

The apostle Paul provided the spiritual antidote in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8: "Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **Love never fails** ... (NASB, emp. added).

In conclusion, racism denies the fundamental Biblical truth that we are all created in the image of God and should be treated as such. Every aspect of racism stands in stark contradiction to "love thy neighbor as thyself." We as Christians must combat this evil by being the "salt of the earth" and "the light of the world." May our Heavenly Father help us to see others through Christ-colored glasses. ▲



# WOULD JESUS PLACE MEMBERSHIP AT YOUR CONGREGATION?

MIKE BONNER



Would Jesus place membership at your congregation? What a great question that is worthy of our attention and contemplation! This question raises many more questions for the churches of Christ and the validity of her soundness in many locales. This question should cause the faithful and unfaithful in Christ to consider the words of Christ in the book of Revelation. Jesus told the church at Laodicea, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock ..." (3:20). There were a few things causing the Christ to stand outside of His own church. What would keep Jesus from coming in to His own church, yea, even placing membership?

Many in the church today are seeking to do what is right in accordance with the Biblical mandate left by the Holy Spirit for us to live by. However, we must be realistic as well; unfortunately, too many are walking according to their own understanding and not according to the old paths (Jeremiah 6:16). The church has been infected and affected by change agents for the last few decades, which has brought damnable heresies to the body of Christ and has perverted her in a multiplicity of ways. To this end we must conclude that Jesus would not even dare step foot in (figuratively), yet alone remain in a sad state of affairs.

So, would Jesus place membership at your congregation? Would He stay there if the congregation did not fulfill the vital element of fellowship and vitality of the church? What is this, you may ask? Jesus told His disciples, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). The first thing Jesus would look for and really stay for is love. What does love look like? Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Doing what the Lord says is inclusive of how we think and treat one another in Christ. The speech of the church must be with grace and seasoned with salt. The actions of the church must reflect Christ living in her, the hope of glory (Colossians 4:6; Colossians 1:27).

The beauty of the church is seen in how she treats one another; as a result of this the world will know we belong to the Lord. Even though this is true, we cannot divorce ourselves from the purity and genuineness of enthusiastic worship to the Father through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). God is seeking for true worshippers, and God is Spirit; they that worship Him must do so in Spirit and in Truth (John 4:23-24). Many in the Lord's church have abandoned the faith concerning worship. Many have great attitudes in worship, yet not according to the **truth**, and many have truth and not according to **spirit**. Would Jesus place membership where instruments are being used in worship to the Father? **No!** Paul told the church at Ephesus and Colossae, "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing and making melody in your heart** to the Lord," and also "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing with grace**

**in your hearts** to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16, emp. added). Friends, there is no room for anything else except that which has been given to us by command and example. What Paul gave by inspiration of the Holy Spirit excludes handclapping, praise teams, praise dancing, humming, and the like. Jesus would not place membership in a congregation like this.

Would the Lord worship with a congregation who is mission minded? Jesus gave direct orders for the disciples to go into the world and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believes and is baptized would be saved ... (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). A congregation who is concerned enough about the souls of men and willing to go the extra mile in making sure the message is heralded out is a blessing to the eyes of the Lord. Jesus would love to associate Himself with those seeking to aid the lost in finding the Lord, knowing He's not far from them (Acts 17:27). Congregations that make a concerted effort to pass out flyers, support missionaries, utilize media strategies, feed the hungry and clothe the naked, are pleasing to the Lord and

be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality" (3:25). Jesus would not stick around a congregation that is apathetic or reluctant to discipline sinning brethren. He would certainly be "on the outside looking in" ... and making every effort to restore them to their first love of service and obedience to the Scriptures.

Would Jesus place membership with a group of people who say, "It doesn't matter what church you attend or the doctrine you teach," or those who say, "You believe what you desire, and I'll believe what I desire," because we will all end up in Heaven, right? Friends, if that is our attitude, then Christ died for nothing and His teachings are irrelevant. Why would Jesus be a member of a man-made church, which is governed by man-made teachings? Jesus told His disciples that the religious teachers of the day "Honor Me with their mouths but their hearts are far from Me" (Matthew 15:7-9). He continued by saying, "They teach as doctrine the commandments of men." The church Jesus purchased with His blood must abide in the doctrine of Christ and not pervert it with man-made ideologies and damnable traditions that lead men into destruction and

## GOD WILL GRANT US THE CONFIDENCE OF KNOWING THAT CHRIST IS WITH US.

worthy of His presence (Matthew 25:31-46). Jesus said at one time, "Let us go into the next towns that I may **preach** there also, because for this purpose I have come forth" (Mark 1:38). Jesus would love to be part of a congregation that is willing to get the Word out. Are you part of a congregation that is busy getting the Word out? If not, why not?

Would the Lord place membership with your congregation if it was negligent in correcting sin and moral dilemmas? Paul had to send correction to the Corinthians for their immorality. As a matter of fact, Paul rebuked them for their haughtiness concerning the situation (1 Corinthians 5). They should have been mourning but rather they were gloating. God is no respecter of persons in any matter (Acts 10:34). When sin goes unchecked, Paul says it acts as a leaven. He told the Corinthians, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." When sin is running rampant in the local congregation, it produces a bad name in the community and this brings reproach on the name of Christ. Consequently, the Word of God must be preached and taught on marriage, homosexuality, pride, racism, apathy, cheating, and any other actions and behaviors contrary to the doctrine of Christ. Sin must be dealt with promptly; God will not tolerate sin in the church—regardless of who is involved. Paul told the Colossian brethren, "But he who does wrong will

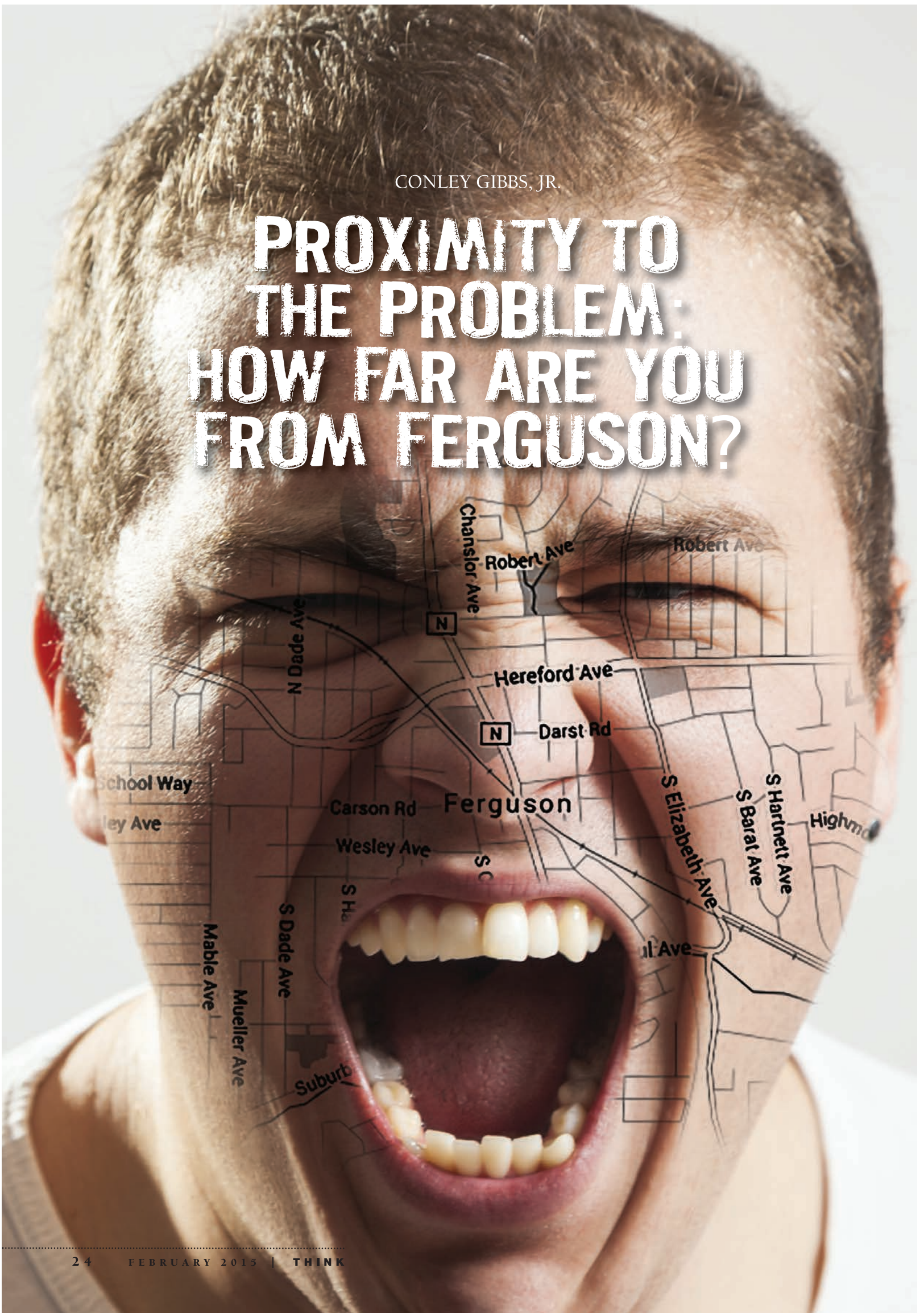
damnation. Jesus will only be apart of a congregation that preaches sound doctrine (Titus 1:2). He will only associate with those who preach the Word in season and out of season—as if God was speaking the oracles to the people Himself (2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 4:11). Only the church that Jesus built will be acknowledged and saved on the Day of Judgment. Only the kingdom of God will be delivered back to the Father. Only the called-out ones labeled as the Bride of Christ will have the opportunity and privilege of spending eternity with God. After reading this, do you think that Jesus would place membership with your congregation?

In conclusion, it's understood there is not a perfect congregation of the Lord's people. But we know the One whom we serve is perfect and His Word is perfect. Therefore, if we abide in the doctrine of Christ and inculcate His teachings, it will lead us into life everlasting. We can have assurance of salvation as the Author and Finisher of our faith guides us through the cares and snares of life. Faithfulness to God will grant us the confidence of knowing that Christ is with us. He would indeed place His membership with our congregation, because we're striving prayerfully and carefully to keep His commandments. Can the same be said for your congregation? Will Jesus be found in your place of worship on the first day of the week? ▲



CONLEY GIBBS, JR.

# PROXIMITY TO THE PROBLEM: HOW FAR ARE YOU FROM FERGUSON?





In 2012, the Lord blessed my family and me when we relocated to St. Louis, Missouri. More specifically, I accepted the role of minister at the Ferguson Heights church of Christ in suburban Ferguson, Missouri. At that time neither friends nor family had any familiarity with this small town of 6 square miles and less than twenty-five thousand people. Therefore, we just said we were moving to St. Louis because that provided a better frame of reference than mentioning this seemingly insignificant town.

Fast-forward to the horrific events of August 2014 and this previously obscure town now stands center-stage at the world's attention. Ferguson is now infamous for the events involving the shooting death of Michael Brown by Officer Darren Wilson. Once a quiet town in north St. Louis County, Ferguson is now a topic of conversation that is discussed nationally and internationally. Politicians, sociologists, educators, and religious leaders will discuss this history-making event for decades to come. Why? Trying to answer that question only validates the need for so many people around the world to continue to discuss, debate and dialogue about this drama in human history. I am, however, inclined to believe that many distant observers wrongly view Ferguson as an anomaly to human affairs as opposed to a representation of systemic problems in America that were dramatized by this one event (John 16:33).

Amazingly, people from far places question the political and social landscape in Ferguson in hopes of understanding how one person's death divided a nation. Their queries seem to infer that there must be some situational factors unique to this geographical area that made it a hotbed for confusion. Somehow the social unrest must be uniquely defined by the "DNA" of a town that is so unlike other cities that it could only happen here. As a result, we have been inundated with phone calls, letters, and even financial support offering to help with the crisis. While we appreciate the compassionate concern, it should be noted that what happened here could potentially happen anywhere. Therefore, the best way to help

is really for concerned citizens to look within the boundaries of their own communities and address the social and political problems that negatively impact those communities. Though a map may suggest that you live miles away from here, you may be closer to Ferguson than you realize. You are close because of the interrelatedness all humans share (Luke 10:25-37).

Even though the media immediately referenced this shooting as that of a white officer killing an unarmed black male, we must not allow ourselves to be misinformed about the greater concerns before us. I would suggest that we view this as an issue of humanity and not simply that of race. Because I was not present when Officer Wilson

engaged Michael Brown, I cannot speculate as to what really happened (Matthew 7:1-5). I never interviewed a witness or examined any evidence. Therefore, fairness states that I cannot form a definitive conclusion based solely on the media, popular opinion, or my emotions. What I can offer is an assessment of actual matters related to the outburst of anger that were displayed in hopes of giving a more objective perspective about why things unfolded the way they did. This will also help to illustrate the volatility in human relations in places far removed from where I am (2 Timothy 3:1-3).

Anywhere you have groups of people who differ along the lines of any significant socio-economic factors, the probability for problems greatly increases as those differences between sub-groups become more apparent. Unless those who are perceived to have the advantage exercise some reasonable concern for the underprivileged, tensions will simmer (Matthew 22:37-39). As long as tensions simmer, people may assume that all is well because the simmer itself may not be as readily seen or understood, as in the case of something actually boiling over. However, as events here have shown the simmer will soon boil over when an unplanned event ignites an atmosphere already possessing the explosive combination of anger, bitterness, confusion, frustration, and hopelessness.

Initially, it must be noted that local residents have been greatly discouraged by socio-economic factors that have adversely affected residents solely along the lines of zip code. For example, economic disparity, inferior schools, lack of access to opportunities, lack of proximity to resources, and related matters have brought tensions here long before the shooting in 2014. Many residents feel hopeless in light of the fact that St. Louis has some of the best and worst schools in the nation. How is it that one school district soars academically, and just a few short miles away, schools have lost their accreditation due to continued failure to maintain acceptable academic standards? Is it fair that companies relocated from these areas, and now towns and villages raise operational revenue by writing an excessive number of traffic tickets, fines, and ordinance violations on its residents who are already economically disadvantaged? This last matter has been such an egregious act that the state is now investigating and sanctioning municipalities for unfair practices with regards to the percentage of municipality revenues from fines, fees, and ordinance violations. Are any of these aforementioned concerns unique to Ferguson? Are these concerns exposed here just because of recent media attention? If so, how close you are to Ferguson may be a matter of how likely some of these types of problems exist in your own communities.

Furthermore, the crisis here exposes an undeniable problem in how we tend to address problems in this country. Both citizens and the government tend to address things from the standpoint of a reaction to something as opposed to proactively preventing problems in the first place. As an example, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers warned local officials that the levees in New Orleans could not withstand a strong hurricane prior to Katrina. The government knew that the I-35 bridge in Minnesota was "structurally deficient" years before the 2007 bridge collapse that claimed precious lives. In like manner, socio-economic disparity, racial tensions, and hostility between the police and community were well evident in Missouri before Ferguson garnered the attention of the world. In none of these cases were things done to prevent problems. Instead, each instance represents an example of countless others where preventative measures could have been taken to minimize a catastrophe. Yet, nothing was done until something absolutely had to be done. How far you live from Ferguson may simply be a matter of how likely it is that real concerns of human existence are being suppressed until such a time that what once was a warning has given away to wreaked havoc.

In consideration of these problems, it is important to know my continued emphasis on humanity and socio-economic differences as opposed to race. Even though the Ferguson crisis has been deemed a race problem, mainly by the media and those not close enough to the crisis to know differently, it actually is bigger than race. What the world did not see is the outrage that a considerable number of whites had about the socio-economic factors prior to the shooting. As well, the aftermath of Michael Brown's death did engage a considerable number of whites in protests, marches, and calls for improvement in the living conditions of all humans here. Just as well, I know a number of blacks who purposefully distanced themselves from even appearing to agree with the popular racial position about the shooting and in no way wanted to appear to join with others in protesting, marching, or speaking out about this crisis. Thus, the real view here has not simply been seen through the lenses of race, but rather seen through the lenses of humanity and how to address factors that unfairly help or hurt sub-groups beyond race.

Finally, I am aware that readers may not have ever visited Ferguson, Missouri. I do not believe the media and pop culture have given the most accurate view of things here. What's really important is to understand how socio-economic differences within sub-groups make any area volatile. The best way to help Ferguson is to prevent what happened here from happening in your community. Get involved proactively to help improve conditions for the human race before you have to react to problems that are dramatized on the world stage. Challenge and support your religious and civic leaders to ensure fairness, justice, and equality for all people (Matthew 25:31-46; James 1:27). **Remember, it only takes one event to make your town the next Ferguson. ▲**

Get involved  
proactively to help  
improve conditions  
for the human race.

DR. TOM SEALS

# ARE WE ONE IN CHRIST OR HAVE WE DIVIDED CHRIST?

"Carl Sandburg, the poet, writer, and wordsmith, was once asked by a reporter, 'What in your opinion is the ugliest word in the English language?' He thought a while, then answered, growling it out as if it tasted bad in his mouth: 'Exclusive!' If Sandburg is right, and much empirical data is unquestionably on his side, then we could ask, 'What is the most beautiful word in the English language?' and expect the opposite answer: 'Inclusive!'"<sup>1</sup>

One of the impressive things about the beginning days of the church in Luke's recorded history of the Day of Pentecost was the vast number of nationalities (at least 16) represented in the number of people present for Peter's first Gospel sermon (Acts 2). These individuals were not present only for the message, but apparently many were together for the fellowship and activities over the next several days (Acts 2:44-47).

From this beginning and on through the following days, including the life and ministry of the apostle Paul, there was a great emphasis on unity within the church. Paul would write, "You are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28), in harmony with the emphasis placed by our Lord in His prayer for unity in John 17:20-21.

The implications for the church today are far-reaching, which brings us to the question set forth in this writing: "Are We One in Christ or Have We Divided Christ?" Is it possible that many of our churches and fellow Christians are thoroughly racist and prejudicial? If there is one place a person can walk into and not be seen through the lens of race (as defined by society as skin color), it ought to be the church of the Lord Jesus Christ! More personally, if there was one place where there must be no discrimination according to "race" or nationality, it ought to be within my heart. We must not allow our churches to define themselves and humanity by the dictates of the terms of domination created by our sinfulness.

February is Black History Month. About 13.2% of the population of the United States is African-American (2013 census). Increasingly, this is also a country of more and more ethnic and language differences. Therefore, there is a real need to develop within this culture and its lifestyles a greater awareness of the need for diversity and our individual responsibility toward it. Yet, I fear that we have a continuing problem with racial, social, and cultural prejudice. There is virtually no aspect of our lives where this does not find expression, whether in the areas of politics, education, corporate structures, military, medicine, or the church.

It is into this situation that the church must stand as a light in this dark, self-centered world. The church for which Jesus died must manifest, not only in words, but in real-life experiences, the truth of God's Word set forth by Paul that "there cannot be Greek or Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ [who] is all, and is in all" (Colossians 3:11).

In relation to race relations in America, we must hear again the stirring words of Dr. Martin Luther King, delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963:

I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even in the state of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.



I have a dream that one day the state of Alabama, whose governor's lips are presently dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white children and walk together as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.<sup>2</sup>

One of my heroes in the history of modern religious thought is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the theologian who lost his life while taking a stand against Adolph Hitler in Nazi Germany. He warned of "cheap grace" in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*. In the same train of thought, I fear that our past history of dealing with race relations suggests a "cheap justice."

What I mean by "cheap justice" in race relations is this: We demand repentance and change in the name of God without fostering a corresponding self-critique on ourselves who claim to speak for such change. "Cheap justice" is manifested when we freely imbibe in the privileges, status, and material benefits offered by the very structures and networks that oppress. "Cheap justice" is manifested when we give more attention to rhetoric than to remedies. An illustration of "cheap justice" is seen in the racial aspect of marginalization in the social ethics of white and black flight. Affluent blacks today flee the same homes, churches, and neighborhoods that affluent whites abandoned a generation ago, and for the same reasons—crime, poor schools, lower property values, etc.

There must be  
unity and harmony,  
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"Costly justice," on the other hand, is to sacrificially commit ourselves to make a difference in this culture in race relations. "Costly justice" is to develop and maintain creative partnerships with the marginalized of our society. "Costly justice" is to engage in activities that serve the needs of the people on the margins of society. "Costly justice" is to recover the Christian ethic that will motivate us "To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8).

The implications of the aforementioned things are far-reaching for the church today. There remains division within many churches today, white and black, in spite of the emphatic teachings of the Holy Scriptures. There must be unity and harmony, the removal of all barriers and divisions among those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. And this is not to be some superficial, "politically-correct" compromise of verbal formulas. It must be an affirmation stemming from faithful obedience to Jesus Christ, a unity and acceptance based upon

what must be a deep commitment to the truth that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, black or white . . ." To fail to do so is simply an exercise of the sin of pride and supposed superiority of self above others. It is to disregard that greatest of all characteristics of the One who is truly superior to all, but who "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself" (Philippians 2:6).

These considerations cut both ways. God is as much opposed to black racism, nationalism, and other kinds of discrimination as to white racism. All discrimination of these types, from whatever quarters, are evil. We cannot regard anyone from a worldly point of view (2 Corinthians 5:16) for "all are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28), and "the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows His riches upon all who call upon Him" (Romans 10:12).

Here is a very important statement from a voice in my past:

When I was a small child someone taught me the sentence, "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless millions mourn." The disregard of one group for another has been one of the major problems of our world since the beginning of recorded history. Estrangement between brothers began in the Garden of Eden. It has continued until the present time among nations, among races, among families, and among many other groups. One of Christ's greatest concerns is to lead men to love each other and to treat each other as brethren. Let each of us examine ourselves and pledge anew to follow our Lord in loving all men without prejudice. This includes people from every tongue, tribe, and nation on the face of the earth. It also includes a love for the rich, the poor, the uneducated, the educated, the young, the old, and every other type and grouping of mankind. The battle against prejudice in each of our hearts is not won easily and quickly. However, if we walk in the steps of our Lord, little by little we can love all men as we come closer and closer to the attitude of heart exemplified in our Lord when He died for all mankind.<sup>3</sup>

What a task we have before us as those who are willing to walk in the steps of Jesus Christ! While we, in American churches, may point with pride to the passage of the Civil Rights Act, we still face the old principality and power of racism. Our challenge is to prepare the next generation to continue the age-long fight against racism. With Paul, we must be open to the power of Christ in moving us away from conformity to the power of this age and be transformed by the renewal of a mind made new by our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 12:1-2).

"Christ has made us fellow citizens, no longer outsiders vs. insiders. He has created peace between us, not merely peace of mind. He has abolished our enmity and restored our humanity in Himself, in His true humanity. Christ 'has broken down the dividing wall of hostility,' declares the author of Ephesians, and has created in Himself one new man 'through the cross' (Ephesians 2:14ff.)."<sup>4</sup> Anything less than this will mean that Christ's work on the cross is incomplete because it has failed to recover God's purpose for humanity.

I close this article with a poignant piece by Langston Hughes that highlights the cost in human suffering created by the evil of racism, a piece depicting a small child standing before a merry-go-round at a carnival:

**Where is the Jim Crow section**

**On this merry-go-round,**

**Mister, 'cause I want a ride?**

**Down south where I come from**

**White and colored**

**Can't sit side by side**

**Down south on the train**

**There's a Jim Crow car.**

**On the bus we're put in the back—**

**But there ain't no back**

**To a merry-go-round!**

**Where's the horse**

**For a kid that's black?**

When we see the world through Christ-colored glasses, we too, will have the heart, mind, and innocence of a child. And Christ will be glorified once again. ▲

1 Paul B. Brown, *In and For the World: Bringing the Contemporary Into Christian Worship* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992) p. 94.

2 Transcribed from audio recording at Martin Luther King, Jr. Library and Archive, Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc. Atlanta, GA.

3 Batsell Barrett Baxter, "The Problem of Prejudice," Sermon at Hillsboro church of Christ, Nashville, TN, May 10, 1970.

4 Todd H. Speidell, "Incarnational Social Ethics," *Essays in Honor of Ray S. Anderson: Incarnation & Ministry: The Presence of Christ in Church, Society, and Family*, ed. Christian D. Kettler & Todd H. Speidell. Helmers & Howard, Colorado Springs, CO. 1990, p. 144.

## The Fate of the Soul

I have tried to recall my first. I know that it was at Vanderbilt Medical Center and I know that it was on the south side of the 7th floor, but that is all I remember of the details. Since then, there have been countless others, and it makes me sad that I cannot pull from my memory all of the names or even the faces. There is something that I do remember, though. Whether it was my first encounter with death, or my thirty-first, there was something in those moments that I will never forget—something that I have, in vain, attempted to describe on occasion. Maybe this time I will find the words.

At the end, something changes. More than the physiological signs that indicate the arrival of death, there is the distinct departure of life. Described in James 2:26, it is the separation of the physical and spiritual. It is the difference in the soul being present in the body and the soul having left the body. It is the realization that the body is only a shell and in that moment, for that individual, the soul is experiencing its first entirely spiritual existence without the physical limitations of the body. It is sobering. It demands reflection.

I have been deeply affected by those moments—wondering what the soul might be encountering—**right then**—as I am standing at the

bedside holding the hand of the body left behind. He or she has either been taken to a place of torment or to a place of comfort—a place of suffering or a place of joy—a place of never-ending death or a place of never-ending life. He or she has learned their eternal fate. He or she **knows**.

At those times, I feel so close to the spiritual world around me. It's right there. We are sharing a room. As I hold the hand of one whose soul is entering into the Hadean realm, for just a second, I understand clearly how close we really are to that place.

I do not mean for this to sound cold or frightening, but I do mean for us to think about that moment. I want you and me to think about it because in this life we can **know** what the destination of our souls will be at that second we separate from our physical bodies. We can **know** what to expect when death comes, and we don't have to be afraid.

First, consider these two truths from God's Word:

1. The fate of your soul will not rest only on your goodness (Matthew 7:21-23).
2. The fate of your soul will not rest only on your faith (James 2:14-26).





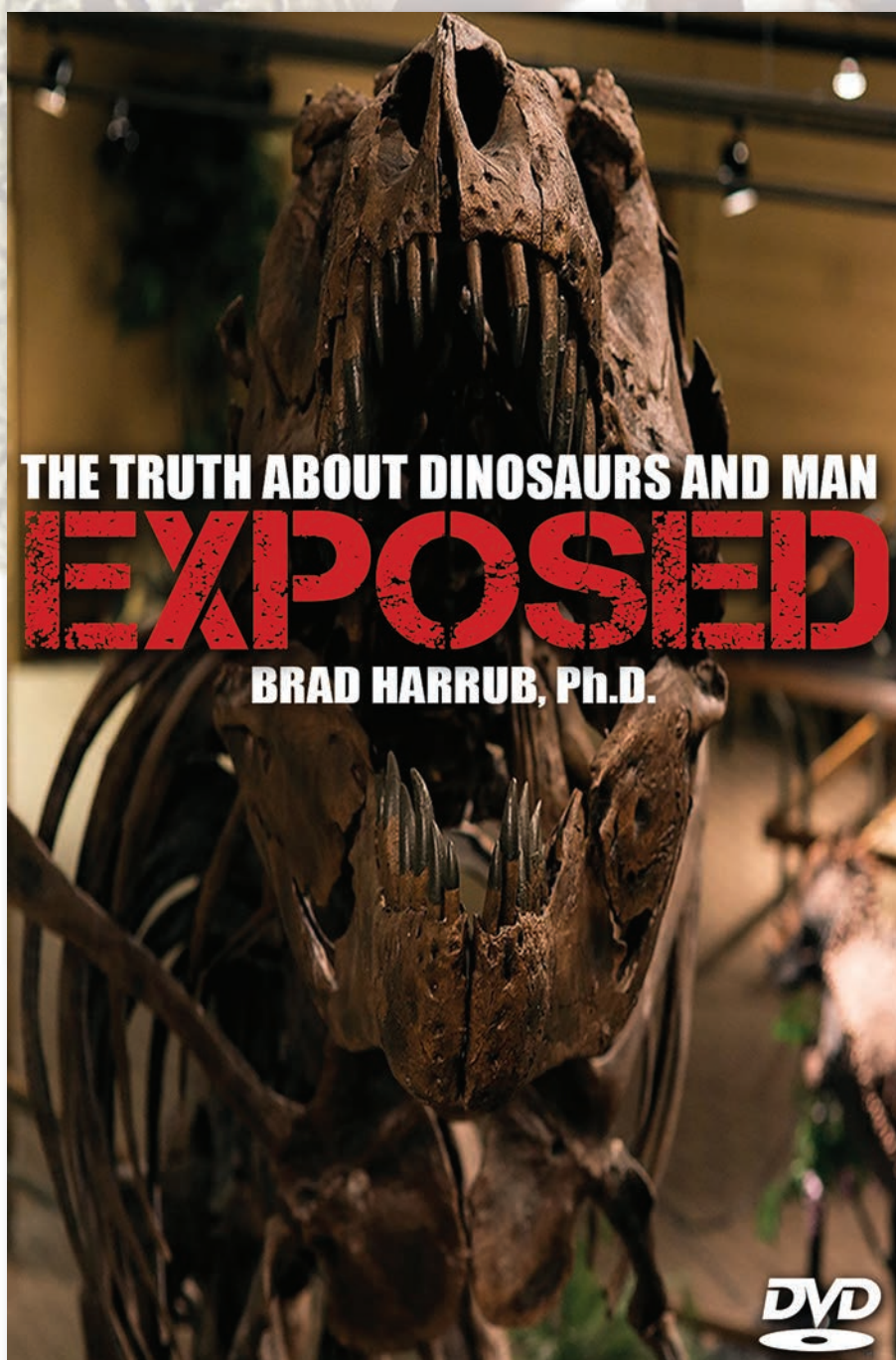
This is not to say that both aren't necessary, but we must realize that goodness and faith, in and of themselves, do not determine our eternal destination. If goodness and faith are all that matter—then Jesus should not have had to die. But He did. He died because a perfect sacrifice was required to atone for our sin. His blood had to be shed because all of the goodness and all of the faith in the world would never be enough to save man.

The truth is, there is none that is righteous—not one (Romans 3:10). We all sin and fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). Our goodness cannot get us into Heaven because our sin keeps us out! Our sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2), but Christ suffered for our sins so that we might be brought back to Him (1 Peter 3:18). It is through the blood of Christ, which He shed on the cross, that we receive the forgiveness of our sins (Ephesians 1:7, Revelation 1:5b, Matthew 26:28). We contact His blood when we are buried into His death through baptism (Romans 6:3-4). His blood cleanses us from sin (1 John 1:7) and when we rise up out of the water we walk in a new life (Romans 6:4), as followers of Christ—as members of His church (Acts 2:47)—as Christians (Acts 11:26).

After we have been baptized into Christ, we live faithfully as Christians—not perfectly—but **faithfully** (Revelation 2:10). Obedient faith calls us to take action! Just as James 2:26 tells us that the body without the spirit is dead, faith without works is dead also! We try to have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). We show love to others (John 13:34). We do good works (Ephesians 2:10). We teach others the Gospel (Mark 16:15-16). We read and study the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). We do all of these things and more—not because we will save ourselves by doing them (Ephesians 2:8)—but because God has told us to do them and when we love God, we keep His commandments (1 John 5:3).

I am comforted that I can know where I will go at the moment of my soul's separation from the body. If you have heard the Gospel, repented of your sins, been washed by the blood of Christ in baptism for the remission of sins, and remained faithful, then you do not have to be afraid of what awaits you after death. For the Christian, it will be coming home to live forever in the presence of God. What a glorious future! We can speak with joy the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:8, "We are confident, yes, well pleased, rather to be absent from the body and to be present with Lord." ▲

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## Heart of the Matter

IDENTIFYING  
THE ENEMY

*Having looked into the tearful eyes of parents whose children have abandoned the Faith, I have learned there are a million miles between our children "going through the motions" in reference to their spiritual lives versus our children possessing hearts that dictate their actions. In this column, I plan to share with you what I hope to instill in the hearts of my own children and those whom I love.*

In Romans 7:21-25, Paul describes a battle going on within himself. While his mind knows and wants to obey the law of God, there is another law "in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members" (v. 23). Consider for a moment that this is the apostle Paul speaking, and yet he revealed that he still has this war going on in his flesh. If Paul faced this challenge, then modern Christians will too.

While we comprehend this battle, most pulpits focus only on the remedy—that if you sin, you will be forgiven—but they remain silent on God's original design. The design is that we are saved **to be holy and reflect Christ**. What many hear is "you're forgiven" and they go right on sinning. In neglecting the design we are only preaching a portion of the Gospel—and not transforming ourselves into the image of Christ. Rarely do we meditate on what we are doing to Christ and God's original plan for man.

**Here's what I intend to teach my children regarding the ugliness of sin.**

In chapter three of the famous Chinese general Sun Tzu's book *The Art of War* on military strategy, Tzu reminds readers of the importance of knowing your enemy. He says you must know both the enemy and

yourself or you will not win. As we translate his advice into the spiritual battle going on inside us, the first thing you must do is recognize the enemy—sin.

Understand that Satan will do all he can to camouflage sin as acceptable or good. A fish would never bite down on a naked hook—so a fisherman hides the hook behind spinners and shiny things to distract the fish. The hook is still there. Likewise, Satan tries to veil sin by every conceivable means. He may hide it behind a shiny spinner called worldliness. Or he may disguise the hook and try to hide it in the darkest recesses of your heart. Or he may show you something that is tempting and tell you that you are being too legalistic. But remember—the hook is still there. Learn to look for the hook. If you ever hope to win this battle you must first recognize the enemy. Remember, Paul called it the "law of sin."

Sin is the master of disguise, and that's why you must constantly have your head in the game. Your flesh will be tempted when you are at the top of your game or the bottom. It will hit when you are rich or poor. Remember what James said, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

You have a war going on within you. In Galatians Paul declared, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish" (Galatians 5:17). My prayer is that early in your life you will recognize the enemy and you will use whatever means necessary (silver bullet, stake through the heart, kryptonite, etc.) to kill this monster. I want you to reach the point that sin becomes sickening to you—because it is to God. It will not happen overnight. It will be a lifelong battle that may on occasion leave you weary. But never forget you have Jesus on your side, and therefore you will reign victorious in the end.

When you are baptized your sins are washed away—but that cleansing came at the ultimate cost of God's Son. Unfortunately, sin re-enters the picture. Many Christians just rest under the notion that being washed in the blood of Christ means we are forgiven and they do nothing about the new sins that creep up in their lives. Being washed does mean we are forgiven, but God's design was that we would walk on the narrow path (Matthew 7) to reach the narrow gate. Paul wrote, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:14).

In order to fight back, you need to imagine your mind as a watchman for your soul. Do not allow the watchman to become entangled in sin. Proverbs 4:23 records, "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life." Keep a watchful eye for holes in the walls of your fortress where sin might try to get through. To keep your mind sharp and ensure you are winning the battle make yourself meditate on God—on His goodness and His holiness. Out in our back yard, I've designated a couple of large rocks for you to have some alone time to pray and meditate to God. Get into the Word and focus your attention on the things that are pleasing to God. Find time to just get away and talk to God.

Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble . . . (Philippians 4:8). Think on these things. ▲



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