

MUCH-NEEDED HELP IN KEEPING THE HARDEST COMMANDMENTS

By Danny Tunnell

Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15.) Some believe the commandments the lawyer spoke of in Luke 10 are two of the hardest to truly keep: (1) Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and (2) Love your neighbor as yourself.

These commandments would be hard, if not impossible, to obey without help from God. How can we love by commandment alone? Can society pass and enforce a law that would compel a person to love God or to love another? No! Why would the answer have to be "no?" Because love by its very nature has to be voluntary. No one has ever been frightened or coerced into loving anyone. If that happened it would not be actual "love."

I heard a story about a man who was very brutal with his wife. He came home from work and walked up to his wife with an angry face and said, "Where is my dinner?"

Then he commanded her to get dinner. She was afraid of him so

she hurried off to put dinner on the table. He had been abusive that way throughout their marriage.

He got what he wanted. But after dinner, he cannot walk up to his wife and say, "I now command you to love me!" Why? Because you cannot just command someone to love you! It takes willingness on their part. It has to be voluntary.

God does not command us to love Him or to love others as ourselves without His help. That help is given to the Christian. Peter told those on Pentecost, "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38.) Paul declared, "God's love (agape love) is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us." (Romans 5:5.) God's love is listed first among the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22.)

We should never look at the commands in the Bible as only rules and regulations that we must keep

without God's help. If we do that we become too judgmental of ourselves and others. That steals our joy and makes us hard to be around. It becomes hard for us to show mercy to others because we don't believe we've received it. It's hard to give away something we don't have.

It's important for all Christians to stay on the narrow path. (Matthew 7:13-14.) It is important to realize that we are made righteous by the blood of Christ. (Revelation 1:5.) But if we try to do it on our own we become self-righteous. Self-righteousness and pride always go together. Pride always needs something to be proud about.

Christians who have God's love and are made righteous by the blood of Christ are not looking for an excuse to sin. They are doing everything they can to stay out of sin. Knowing they have God's help leaves them time and incentive to truly fellowship with Him.

— Miami, OK

TO GOD BE THE GLORY

By Joe Dale Wilson

Will Rogers once said, "Americans love parades." He explained that Americans had parades for everything and enjoyed them all. If he were living today, he would almost certainly say, "Americans love titles." Every email or every letter that is received today has the title of the one that wrote the message. It might read, "Executive Secretary of the Honorable Tenth Vice President of the Waggoner Bank of Trust of Wilbarger County."

Even Christians have gotten carried away with titles. From a church bulletin: "_____ (a Christian college) most prestigious teachers" and it went on to list three men with doctorate degrees that were going to be speaking to the congregation. As far as we know, Paul was the only apostle with a formal education, and none of

the apostles would be called "the most prestigious teachers" today because none of them had a doctorate degree.

Americans and many Christians love titles.

Jesus said, "But you, do not be called 'Rabbi,' for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ." (Matthew 23:8-10.) He was talking about titles that elevate one Christian over another. He went on to point out the greatest as the servant. Hugo McCord would not allow anyone to call him, "Dr. McCord." He was a servant! Jesus said two verses later in the text, "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles

himself will be exalted." (Matthew 23:12.)

Some Christians want to be an elder or deacon in the church for reasons of notoriety. The words elder, bishop, pastor, and deacon are not titles but are descriptions of these workers in the Kingdom. They are good works that must be done and not titles meant to elevate. Denominational preachers have often sought out flowery titles and even insisted they be called "Reverend," a word used only once in Scripture and then applied only to God, not man. (Psalm 111:9, KJV.)

Christians must be humble servants and give God the glory, not men.

— Vernon, TX

Old Paths

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

"LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

By Danny Boggs

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— Neosho, MO

What Will It Profit?

By Joe Slater

"Whoever desires to follow Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:34-37.)

We usually look at profit in terms of money or other material wealth. Jesus indicates that we need to look far beyond that! Everything material, including our fleshly body, is temporary. You can accumulate vast earthly wealth, but you can't keep it. Don't believe me? Stick around a hundred years and see!

Of infinitely surpassing importance and value is that spiritual part of you called your soul. Jesus teaches three things relative to it:

First, each and every person has a soul. Sometimes "soul" refers to the entire person, body and spirit. But Jesus uses the term specifically of the inner spiritual person. "Fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell." (Matthew 10:28.)

Second, that soul can become lost. Jesus' parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son illustrate this sad fact.

Finally, even if you amass every bit of the world's wealth, but you exchange it for your soul, you have made a horrible, disastrous bargain. Surely the account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16) highlights this.

Businesspeople like to make a profit. Christians should too! "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." (1 Timothy 4:8.)

— Justin, TX

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also . . . But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:19-21, 33.)

BREAKING FREE

By Cecil May Jr.

In his first Corinthian epistle, Paul responds to questions the church asked. (7:1.) Context indicates that Paul quotes sentences from their letters and responds, usually with something like, “Yes, but.” ESV and other translations indicate when Paul is quoting by putting quotation marks around such sentences. For example: “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be enslaved by anything.” (6:12.)

While Christ teaches that all foods are clean and, therefore, lawful (Luke 11:41; Acts 10:10-15), Paul notes that in addition to being lawful, things to be engaged in need to be “helpful” and “not enslaving.”

One who continually practices sin, whatever the sin, becomes enslaved by it. (Romans 6:16.) The modern phrase is “addiction.” We are familiar with drug and alcohol addiction. There is also sex addiction, power addiction, and even money addiction. News stories abound of multi-billionaires, with more money than they could ever use, committing crimes to get more, getting caught and going to jail. No amount for them is ever enough!

A few winters back during a bitter cold spell, I was sitting in a warm restaurant enjoying a hot meal and a steaming cup of coffee. Through a nearby window, close enough to touch him if the glass had not been between us, was a tall young man in a short-sleeve shirt. He was probably in his forties. He was shivering. He was smoking a cigarette, taking puffs between shivers. How addictive! How enslaving nicotine must be to compel an otherwise sensible, healthy young person to leave the inside warmth and stand freezing to inhale some cigarette smoke! “I will not be enslaved to anything.”

Smart phones, texting, Facebook, Instagram, the internet: all can be effective tools for accomplishing good ends. Like others, I find myself saying, “I don’t know how we got along without them.” However, they too can be addictive, enslaving. A mother told me she sat across the table from her teenage son as he sat with earbuds, texting. She tried to talk to him, but he was oblivious. She finally took out her phone and texted him! If social media interferes with family time, if you cannot talk intelligibly with friends for tweeting or texting, if you cannot bear to be separated from your phone for even a few minutes, you might ask yourself, “Am I addicted?” We should say with Paul, “I will not be enslaved by anything.”

During football season I follow my favorite college teams and a few adopted pro teams. However, for some, it seems sports is their religion and their team is their god. Their conversation year around is about their team and the teams their team will play. They spend thousands of dollars a weekend to go to games. Their joy or deep grief is wrapped up in whether their team wins or loses. Are we teaching our children that Bible study and worship assemblies are more important than ball practice or ball games? Compare the time, interest, money and intensity of involvement in sports with the time, interest, money and conversation about Christ, worship and help for the needy! Remember, “All things are lawful,” but I will not be enslaved by anything.”

— Montgomery, AL

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

“DO NOT BE UNWISE”

By Dalton Key

There is little doubt that we would all make better use of our time with the Bible - in the pulpit, in the classroom, and in our own personal study - if we focused more upon what the Scriptures say, and less upon what others have said they say. The truth of God’s word is within the mental reach of most all honest seekers.

When Jesus promised, “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” He provided the much-needed answer to so many questions of biblical interpretation which have troubled pious souls throughout history. (John 8:32.) These few words from the lips of our Lord make it clear that truth - absolute spiritual truth - exists, and that it can be known or understood.

It may seem odd, at least in light of more modern theology, that Christ did not speak of this hermeneutic or that hermeneutic. He spoke openly, unabashedly, of truth; and of truth which is available and expected to be understood.

The inspired writers of the New Testament continued this same attitude toward truth. To the Ephesian brethren Paul wrote, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” (Ephesians 5:17.) He commended the early spiritual training of Timothy, his own son in the faith, by urging, “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:14,15.)

Take note of Peter’s words as well. He allowed little sympathy for those “untaught and unstable people” who were twisting the inspired Scriptures “to their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:16.) Though Peter recognized there were in God’s Word “some things hard to be understood,” he nonetheless expected his readers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:16,18.)

Inspired New Testament writers did not pen their letters as discussions of this interpretation compared with that interpretation. They wrote - and wrote concerning - scriptural truth which could be learned, understood and agreed upon.

Paul never suggested that we all have the right to handle spiritual truth as we choose; he never spoke of truth as absolute but our understanding as relative; he never sacrificed truth at the altar of the latest poll-tested, pseudo-intellectual hermeneutic. No, the peerless apostle expected workmen in the “word of truth” to rightly divide it, to handle it aright. (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV, ASV.)

Divine truth could be learned and understood, known and handled aright in the first century. Are we to believe the same is not possible for those of us living in the twenty-first century?



MADE BY GOD

By Milton Smith

I guess this means that man ultimately came from hydrogen gas. Not much adventure and romance involved in this rather fanciful suggestion.

The Bible has proven itself to be accurate over and over again in areas such as archeology, science, history, etc. So why do so many want to abandon this amazing book at its very first verse which states that it was “God” who created the heavens and the earth? The inspired record also tells us that this same God created the first man (Genesis 1:26) and the first woman (Genesis 2:21-23.) But not only this, God made them in His own image. (Genesis 1:27.) He did this by placing an eternal soul (spirit) within them. Many centuries later it would be none other than the Son of God Himself who verified the inspired record of Genesis. In Matthew 19:4, Jesus asked, “Have you not read that

He who made them at the beginning made them male and female?”

Does man want the answer to the age-old question “where did we come from?” The answer has always been available to us, and it is found in the first book of the Bible. When scientists begin to say “in the beginning God,” they will begin to find those illusive answers that keep evading them.

— Tulsa, OK

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” (Genesis 2:7.) “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well.” (Psalm 139:13,14.)

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

By Danny Tunnell

God gave the ultimate gift. “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16.) “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things.” (Romans 8:32.)

Jesus left us an example for us to follow His steps. (1 Peter 2:21.)

A day in the life of Jesus was not without interruptions, and yet He still lived a perfect life. No one ever spoke like He spoke. (John 7:46.) He was tempted in all points, just as we are, and yet without sin. (Hebrews 4:15.)

Jesus handled interruptions wisely. He was not locked into a schedule or routine from which He refused to deviate. He didn’t miss God-arranged opportunities to help others. He never sinned by omission. “He that knows to do good, and doesn’t do it, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17.)

Jesus didn’t do things for others in response to guilt, pressure or manipulation. It doesn’t help a lazy

person to do his work for him. We don’t want to enable someone to sin because we feel guilty. For example, a drug addict may say, “I need food for my child.” So we give him money and he buys dope with it. We are not giving food to the child, we are just enabling a drug addict to be a drug addict. That’s not wisdom and it’s not God’s way.

In Mark 5 a multitude met Jesus at Capernaum. Jesus would have taught the people immediately if He had not been interrupted. Jairus begged Jesus to heal his daughter. So Jesus left the multitude to help that one child. (vs. 22-24.) On the way to Jairus’ home, Jesus was interrupted again! A woman with an issue of blood touched the hem of His garment and was healed. (vs. 25-34.)

Jesus never missed a God-arranged opportunity to help someone. Unlike us, He had no regrets and no missed opportunities.

We are told to do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10.) Paul asks us to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, “It is

more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35.)

— Miami, OK

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” (Acts 10:38.)

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