

BLESSED FELLOWSHIP

By Milton Smith

We often read of incidents in the Bible that involved the sending forth of certain men for different reasons. One of the things that intrigues me is the fact that it was a rare occurrence when a person went alone. When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent *two* of his disciples to the Lord to inquire if he was, indeed, the promised Messiah. On another occasion, Jesus sent *two* of his disciples to fetch the donkey that he would shortly use to make His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem. When Jesus appointed the seventy, he sent them out "two and two." When Tabitha died, the disciples heard that Peter was nearby and sent "two men" to find him. Most will recall that Joshua sent two men to spy out the Promised Land. It seems that the Bible strongly emphasizes the need for human companionship - even if that companionship consisted of only one other person.

After Paul's conversion, we are told that he "assayed to join himself to the

disciples" at Jerusalem. He obviously desired their fellowship! Shortly after the establishment of the church, we are told that the early disciples "continued steadfastly" in "fellowship." When we read through the book of Acts and Paul's epistles, the blessed fellowship shared by the early church is clearly present. Those oft-persecuted men and women found great solace and comfort in the fellowship they shared with each other. All of God's children need good Christian fellowship. This is why membership at a congregation is so important. We need each other! And how blessed it is to gather together with those of "like precious faith" during times of public worship. Those who choose to go without this wonderful fellowship are cheating only themselves. God didn't create men to be alone; this is why God made sure that Adam had a special companion in the Garden. I'm reminded of this clever little poem that speaks of the sadness of being alone:

I had a little tea party, this afternoon
at three;
T'was very small - three guests in
all,
Just "I, myself and me."
Myself ate all the sandwiches, while
I drank the tea;
T'was also I who ate the pie, and
passed the cake to me.

Do yourself a favor: come and be
a part of the wonderful fellowship we
share together during regular services
of worship!

"Let us hold fast the confession
of our hope without wavering, for He
who promised is faithful. And let us
consider one another in order to stir up
love and good works, not forsaking the
assembling of ourselves together, as is
the manner of some, but exhorting one
another, and so much the more as you
see the Day approaching." (Hebrews
10:23-25.)

THE NOBLE EXAMPLE OF JOSHUA

By Bobby Key

The destiny of a nation is bound up in its leaders. This is no less true of the church. Very seldom can a congregation rise above its leadership. Men by nature follow the examples of this about them. Relatively few think for themselves or decide, rationally, on their course of conduct. For the most part we all like to play "follow the leader." This should be a sobering thought for those who stand in the place of divine leadership.

Joshua, who in earlier years was the servant and minister of Moses, led the people across the Jordan River into the promised land. It was Joshua, supreme head and leader of the people, who read God's law from Mount Ebal. There was never any doubt as to where this godly man stood. He called on the people to make a choice that would determine their destiny and the destiny of their children's children. They had but two alternatives: Serve Jehovah

God or serve either the gods of their fathers which were "on the other side of the flood" or "the gods of the Amorites." Joshua's example inspires us all: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Joshua 24:15.)

"And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old." (Joshua 24:29.) At this point his life was ended but not his influence. We are not surprised to read from Judges, chapter two, verse seven: "So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua."

No greater tribute could be paid Joshua than this. His faithful life of devotion and service to God led an entire nation in the right direction. Not only did he influence the people for good during his life but during the days of the elders that outlived him as well.

He was dead, but his works continued to live on. (Revelation 14:13.)

It would be impossible to over-stress the importance of godly leaders. If those who speak for God fail to be steadfast in doctrine and moral purity, what may God expect of the people in general?

Joshua, God's servant, lived the way he preached. - Deceased

"Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'" (Revelation 14:13.)

Old Paths

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

OUTLIVING OUR LOVE

By Danny Boggs

The true story is told three times in Scripture - in 2 Kings 20, 2 Chronicles 32 and Isaiah 38 and 39. King Hezekiah did not outlive his health. He did not outlive his mind. But he may have outlived his love for God.

King Hezekiah brought sorely needed religious reform and restoration to Judah. When he fell sick, God's prophet Isaiah told him that his time was up. He was only 39 years old! "Thus say the Lord, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die; and not soon recover.'" Hezekiah was as rattled as you and I would be by such news. He wept bitterly, and he prayed fervently. Graciously, God sent Isaiah back with a promise of fifteen more years as a result of Hezekiah's prayer.

In his prayer, the king asked God to remember how he had walked before Him in faithfulness and with a whole heart and how he had done what was good in God's sight. He vowed to walk in humility all of his days if he was allowed to recover.

God answered Hezekiah's prayer, but Hezekiah did not keep his promise. In foolish pride, he showed off his wealth to foreigners who would come back as greedy enemies. Three years after his desperate prayer, Hezekiah's first son was born to him. What joy! But that son, Manasseh, would become king at age 12, reign for 55 years, and lead the people "astray to do more evil than the nations had done whom the Lord destroyed before the people of Israel." And to think he never would even have been born if Hezekiah had died at 39. Isaiah came back to warn Hezekiah about how bad things would turn out in his family and his country after he died. The only bottom line that Hezekiah cared to see was that "there will be peace and security in my days."

I don't know what the original illness was that threatened his life, but by now Hezekiah had a serious heart condition. I hope that he did not die with it, but it seems like Hezekiah lived too long.

What would you do if death was knocking hard on the door? If you prayed, and God responded with assurance of a specific bonus span of time to your life, what would you do with that extra time? Would you spend it selfishly or give it back to God in faithful and grateful service?

Here's the real question: what are you doing with the life God has given you today?

Think about the rest of your life this way: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit' - yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." (James 4:13-17.)

Pray like Bernard of Clairvaux did: "O make me thine forever, and should I fainting be, Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee."

— Neosho, MO

WHY DID JESUS CRY?

By Richard Dent

"Jesus wept." (John 11:35.) What do we remember about this verse? Let's see . . . oh yes, it is the shortest verse of the Bible. But why did Jesus cry? Let us explore this a bit further. Jesus loved people. He loved the poor, the sick, those afflicted by age, children, and even sinners (not the sin, but the persons). He performed miracle after miracle to prove his love for people. Jesus was even willing to go to the cross for us. But he especially loved a man named Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. (John 11:5.)

He had spent some time in their home no doubt. Remember that He had no house of his own. He once said that foxes have holes and birds have nests but the son of man has not a place to lay his head. (Matthew 8:20.) Maybe He had been given some rest at Mary's house. Yes, Jesus loved that family.

We remember that Lazarus got sick and word was sent to Jesus about that sad fact. Jesus told his disciples that Lazarus was asleep (John 11:11) and that He needed to go to him to awaken him. His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." (vs 12.) Then Jesus told them that Lazarus was dead and that he was glad for their sakes. (vs. 14-15.) Why?? Because Jesus knew what He was going to do.

As they came closer to the home of Mary and Martha they saw many people trying to comfort them at the loss of Lazarus. Martha said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." (vs. 21.) Just a little later, Mary came to Jesus and said the same thing. (vs 32.) Jesus was caught up in the emotional expression of pain and anguish on the faces of Mary and Martha and the people surrounding them. Scripture states that Jesus "groaned in the spirit and was troubled." (vs. 33.)

We know how the story ends. Lazarus was brought forth from the burial tomb. He lived to laugh and love his friends again. That would include Jesus.

Does Jesus shed tears over you and me today? Perhaps, when He sees our weaknesses, knows our sins, or knows when we lose a loved one. Would Jesus shed tears for you or me? I remember the words of that old gospel hymn, "When the road is rough and the way is dim, Jesus knows, Jesus cares." In my mind I can still imagine the tears Jesus shed over Jerusalem. (Matthew 23:37-39.)

Yes, John 11:35 is a special scripture that shows our Lord loves us, just like He loved Lazarus and his sisters. Let us remember that God so loved the world that He gave Jesus to be our Savior so that we might have eternal life. (John 3:16.)

— Liberal, KS

ARE WE TAKING THINGS FOR GRANTED?

By Mark Lindley

The question that serves as the title of this article is a question all should consider. I am persuaded that everyone at some point and to some degree, either has or is taking things for granted. We do not intend to, but it is so easy to take certain things for granted.

To take something for granted means “to fail to value something properly,” or “to assume that you will never lose something.” Usually, it is only after we have lost something of value that we can realize that we have been taking it for granted.

If the stars were to appear only once a year, most everyone would set aside time to go outside and gaze into the beautiful heavens above. However, because the stars are visible nearly every night, we hardly ever notice this wonderful display of God’s power. We take such a beautiful sight for granted. The following are other things we frequently take for granted:

1) We take for granted the precious gift of life. All life springs from the Lord, the giver of life. (Acts 17:24-26.) A near-death experience or failing health may cause us to realize that this life is “a vapor, that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.” (James 4:14.) We should live each day to the fullest, and recognize that time is quickly passing. (Psalm 90:12.)

2) We take for granted friends and family. The Scriptures teach that there is to be deep, abiding love, respect, and appreciation within the family. (Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4; Psalm 127:3-5; Ephesians 6:1-3.) Nevertheless, we sometimes take our spouses and children for granted. We fail to show love and appreciation, assuming that there will always be a later time for expressing ourselves. Rather than showing love and respect, we sometimes speak to our friends and family members with harsh, angry words. What if you spoke to your spouse or child in an abrasive and rude manner, and those were the last words he/she heard you say? Surely we would not want the last words spoken to a friend or loved one to be bitter, angry words. We should never take for granted that there will always be “tomorrow” to apologize or express love and appreciation to friends and family.

3) We take salvation for granted. God sent His only begotten Son that we might be saved from sin. (John 3:16.) However, we will be saved only when we choose to obey the gospel of Christ. (Romans 6:16-18; 3:4.) Some put off obedience to the gospel, believing there will be a time in the future for receiving God’s forgiveness. Yet there is no guarantee that such an opportunity will be available. (Luke 12:16-21.) Today is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2.)

Let us resolve that we will always appreciate the gifts of life, friends and family, and salvation from sin. Never take such blessings for granted!

— Ripley, MS

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

KNOWING JUST ENOUGH TO BE DANGEROUS

By Dalton Key

Mark Twain may have been short on grammar, but he was long on wisdom as he observed, “It ain’t so much the things that people don’t know that makes trouble in this world, as it is the things that people know that ain’t so.”

It’s true. And too many folks these days know just enough to be dangerous!

In many cases, and concerning many subjects, possessing just a small dose of knowledge may leave us more confused than living in complete ignorance. Consider these well-worn words of Alexander Pope: “A little learning is a dangerous thing; drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring; there shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again.” Solomon highlighted this very danger in advising, “A wise man will hear and increase learning.” And Peter likewise admonishes us to abound and grow in knowledge. (2 Peter 1:5,8; 3:18.)

The following tale is much older than I am yet still continues to make the point: A small boy was once asked by his Bible School teacher to tell, in his own words, the parable of the Good Samaritan. He answered, “There was this good Samaritan going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among thorns they sprang up and choked him and left him half dead. And he said, ‘I will arise,’ and he arose and came to a tree and he got hung on the limb and he hung there for forty days and forty nights, and the ravens did feed him. Delilah came along with a pair of scissors and cut off his hair and he fell on stony ground. He said, ‘I will arise,’ and he came to a wall and Jezebel was sitting on the wall and she mocked him and he said, ‘Throw her down,’ and they threw her down. He said, ‘Throw her down seventy times seven,’ and they threw her down seventy times seven and great was the fall thereof and of the fragments that remained they picked up twelve baskets full. And whose wife will she be in the resurrection!”

Too many half-hearted students of Scripture are nearly as confused with their smattering of Bible knowledge as was this misguided boy! Some know just enough about the Bible to know that God is a God of love and mercy, and yet knowing nothing of His justice and judgment, swallow the false teaching of Universalism, the doctrine which holds that God will eventually save everyone. Others know a few passages on the importance of faith, and yet know nothing about the Bible’s teaching concerning obedience, thus making themselves vulnerable targets for those espousing the “faith only” error. Examples such as these are both legion and evident.

Faithful disciples will never be satisfied with a mere smattering of Bible knowledge but will show an eagerness, diligence, and open-mindedness to search out and accept ALL of what the Bible says on any subject! Paul was content to declare nothing short of the “whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), and we, as students of God’s Book of Books should be content with learning nothing less ourselves.



STORMY MARRIAGE

By Danny Tunnell

right. And when we do slip up we need to repent right away and forgive one another.

It is so easy to be selfish at home. In public people may judge us or even reject us when we act inappropriately. There are more restraints in public, especially if we’re concerned about our reputation. But we know that our family has to put up with us.

We may even think that what we do at home doesn’t really count. But it does count, it counts a lot! Enjoyment of life hinges on having good relationships, and home life and marriage are at the forefront. Those that trouble their own house will inherit the wind. (Proverbs 11:29.) The people at home are the nearest and dearest to us. If we are at odds with them then our whole life gets off course. Even if things go well at work, life is still miserable without a good home life.

A bad relationship between spouses hinders prayer. (1 Peter 3:7.)

Those with the right kind of

relationship will never be bothered by divorce. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:14-16), and many who have experienced divorce don’t care for it much either! When husbands and wives love each other, they don’t want to leave each other; they want to be together. They want to keep enjoying one another’s company.

You may be experiencing what some call a “stormy marriage” or a “rocky marriage.” It’s still intact, but in danger of dissolving. There is still hope for improvement. I like what Mike Bowling wrote, and what Ronnie Hinson sings, and I want to apply it as good marital advice: “Storms may come and winds may blow, and rock this ship of mine. But the reason my ship has never sank and it’s still afloat - my compass is His precious word and Jesus pilots my boat. I won’t sail these stormy seas no more, unless Jesus leads the way. I won’t ever drift too far from the shore (that) I can’t hear what He has to say.”

— Miami, OK

Simon the Samaritan Sorcerer

By Joe Slater

Obedying the gospel doesn’t make you immune from temptation. The case of Simon the Samaritan Sorcerer clearly illustrates the life-long tug-of-war between sin and righteousness, pride and humility, faithfulness and disloyalty.

All we know about Simon from Scripture comes from Acts 8:9-24. Before hearing the gospel from Philip, Simon practiced sorcery (literally “magic” – not cute tricks like pulling a rabbit out of a hat, but occult magic). Simon proudly claimed to be someone great, and the astonished people of Samaria proclaimed that he was “*the great power of God.*” (Acts 8:10.)

When Simon saw Philip performing real miracles, he grasped the difference between true miracles and the fraudulent ones he had used to deceive people. Having heard Philip preaching the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, Simon humbled himself enough to believe and submit to baptism (immersion). (Acts 8:13.)

Satan wasn’t finished with Simon, though. When the apostles Peter and John came, Simon saw them laying their hands on the new Christians to impart supernatural gifts. He offered the apostles money if they would enable him to give miraculous gifts through the laying on of his own hands. (Acts 8:18-19.) His prideful craving to be seen as someone great had returned!

Peter rebuked Simon, telling him to repent and pray for forgiveness. (Acts 8:20-22.) Note that he didn’t tell him to be immersed for the remission of sins again; nor did he tell him that he had never been saved in the first place. Simon humbled himself and pleaded with Peter to pray for him. (Acts 8:24.)

We aren’t immune from temptation. When we yield to it, then we, like Simon, must repent and pray.

— Justin, TX

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins,

He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.” (1 John 1:8-10.)

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