

OF DRAGGING DOWN AND PULLING UP

By Ron Stough

I once read the story of a young boy sleeping beside his basket of freshly-caught crabs. A passerby awakened him and told him his crabs were climbing up the sides to get away. "Mister," said the boy, "You don't know crabs! Just about the time one crab is ready to crawl out, all the other crabs start dragging him back down."

Isn't that the way human beings act sometimes? They try to drag down those around them. Often their actions are prompted by envy. When a person resents the good fortune of another he will too often criticize, slander, and attack in order to pull the successful person back down.

Envy and cruelty go hand in hand. Proverbs 27:4 tells us "Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" The cruelty suffered by Joseph from the hands

of his own brothers was the result of envy. "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him." (Acts 7:9.)

In fact, envy is credited with the most heinous crime of all time - the death of the Son of God. In Matthew 27:18 Pilate recognized the reason the people had delivered Jesus over to him: "For he knew that for envy they delivered Him."

Envy's companions are dark and sinful as well. Titus 3:3 speaks of "malice and envy"; Galatians 5:21 mentions "murder and envy"; and Romans 13:13 talks of "strife and envying."

Envy destroys innocent people, but it ends up making the envious man miserable as well. Proverbs 14:30 says, "A sound heart is the life of the flesh;

but envy the rottenness of the bones."

Let's make sure that envy is not a part of our thinking, and that we are pulling others up from the depths of sin rather than back down into it.

— Duncan, OK

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails." (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a.) "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous." (1 Peter 3:8.)

A MATURE CHRISTIAN IS HUMBLE

By Danny Tunnell

There is a difference between what Jesus did for us as an example, and what He did for us as our substitute. He set a great example as a servant when He took a towel and a basin of water and washed the disciples' feet. (John 13:4,5.)

The sign of maturity in Christ is humility. Without true humility you just get older as a Christian, but you don't ever mature in Christ.

It's really not a matter of trying to be humble; true humility is a matter of just being honest and trying to get the story right. True humility is just being honest about yourself. It's recognizing the mercy of God, and not bragging on ourselves.

God blesses those who walk in humility. (Micah 6:8.) God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5.)

Paul tells us what he was called to do, to be an apostle; but he also tells us what he is . . . a servant. (Romans 1:1; Philippians 1:1.)

The highest position you can have in the kingdom of God is servant. Jesus took upon Himself the form of a servant. (Philippians 2:7.) When Jesus

talked about serving others He was not talking about an event that happens every once in awhile. He was talking about a lifestyle where you live to help others, where you are always looking for ways to serve others. You have an attitude of service and you're always glad to do it.

When you serve others never look for people to pay you back or even to say, "Thank you." Don't expect applause or for people to cheer you on! Don't expect anything in return, but always be thankful and grateful.

It takes a big person to serve; when you do something for someone else, even though you don't have to do it, and not one would fault you if you didn't do it, but you do it anyway. When you serve others with the right attitude, you don't feel drained, you feel replenished.

In Philippians chapter three, Paul listed all of his credentials, and then told us what he thought about them. (Philippians 3:4-8.) In this context, the word "dung" in the King James Version is actually the closest meaning to the word in the Greek. It's closer than just saying "rubbish," or "trash"

as new versions say. Paul is saying, "You know all these accolades I have? All this schooling, all this background I have? It's just dung. It's dung compared to knowing Christ! It doesn't mean anything to me!"

As a Christian matures he should become more and more humble. If a Christian becomes prideful with time then he has a real problem. Why? Because he is not getting closer to Jesus; he's getting farther away from Jesus.

As Paul matured in Christ he became more and more humble. He went from saying he was the least of the apostles (1 Corinthians 15:9), to being the least of all the saints (Ephesians 3:8), to being the chief of all sinners. (1 Timothy 1:15.)

Paul got progressively more and more humble. He realized who he was without Christ and as he matured in Christ, his assessment of Christ went up and up while his assessment of himself went down and down. May we all follow Jesus' example, and Paul's as well.

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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

Turn From, Turn To

By Joe Slater

Conversion means change. Conversion to Christ means major change! Conversion from worshiping false gods to serving Jesus makes that 180° turn even more obvious.

Acts 17 records many conversions as Paul and Silas preached in the synagogue at Thessalonica. But Paul's first letter to that congregation indicates conversions from the pagan population as well. Even in far-away places people had heard "how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." (1 Thessalonians 1:9.)

"Turn" is the very same word as "convert" in New Testament language. Note that there was a turning from and a turning to. The Thessalonians turned from idols to God. What motivated them to convert (turn)?

First, they recognized the difference between fake gods and the living and true God. Turning from Apollo to Zeus would have been in vain; but converting to the one true God meant forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life!

In addition, they wanted to "wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead." (1 Thessalonians 1:10a.) They knew Jesus would return and raise all the dead; how much better to anticipate His return with joy than with dread!

Indeed, that same Jesus "delivers us from the wrath to come." (1 Thessalonians 1:10b.) No doubt Paul had proclaimed the doom of the lost in contrast to the happiness of the saved. The Thessalonians opted for happiness!

You may not have carved images from which to convert: an idol can be anything that comes between you and God. You must turn away from them as you turn to God. Serve the living and true God. Wait for His Son from Heaven.

Only He can deliver you from the wrath to come!

— Justin, TX

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30.)

A WISE CHOICE

By Milton Smith

For all accountable adults, there exist two households upon earth. One belongs to Jesus Christ and the other belongs to Satan. Those who do the will of God belong to His household, but those who obey Satan belong to his. But who would dare "obey" Satan? In a very real way, those who refuse to obey God are obeying Satan. When a person knows what God expects of him but chooses rather to ignore such instructions, he is actually choosing to follow Jesus' adversary. The Bible often emphasizes this fact.

When Eve chose to rebel against God's clear instructions regarding the famous tree, whom did she choose to follow? When Judas made the decision to betray his Lord, who was behind that decision? John 13:27 tells us that Satan actually "entered" into Judas. But what does this mean? Obviously, Satan found a quick entrance into this man's corrupt heart and took full advantage of it. When Ananias and his wife Sapphira chose to lie to the church, who do you suppose was behind this evil decision? Acts 5:3 tells us that Peter told Ananias that it was Satan who had "filled his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit." When Simon the sorcerer offered money to the apostles in an attempt to purchase the ability to give the Holy Spirit to others, Peter said to him: "Your money perish with you, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money . . . your heart is not right in the sight of God, for I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." In other words, he was under the influence of the dark side. When Jesus said to Peter, "get behind me Satan," it seems obvious that He knew who was influencing Peter's words. (Matthew 16:23.)

It is easy for a person to know which household he belongs to simply by observing whom he chooses to follow. All faithful Christians are heirs with Christ. His riches become our riches and His joy becomes our joy. In the same manner, His character should become our character. But to follow Satan is to develop his characteristics. To secure eternal life we must remain faithful to the Lord. Those who reject eternal life are choosing to remain faithful to Satan. The promise of eternal hope belongs only to those who make the personal choice to remain faithful members of Jesus' household. To those who make this wise choice, the death of the physical body is merely the beginning of life eternal.

— Tulsa, OK

“I SURRENDER ALL”

By Bill McFarland

Maybe you have heard the story about the farmer who told the preacher he had “got religion.” The preacher replied, “That’s fine, but are you sure you’re going to put aside all sin?” “Yes sir,” said the farmer, “I’m through with sin!” And are you going to pay up all your debts?” asked the preacher. “Now wait a minute,” said the farmer, “You ain’t talking religion, you’re talking business.”

It is unfortunate that we so often, like this man, want to suppose that we can be Christians only in part of our lives. Many seem to think that we can have Christ in our “spiritual” lives while we reserve the right to please ourselves in “secular” things. Scripture makes no such distinction.

A Christian is to follow Christ every day. Jesus said, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23.) No days are left out in this matter of following Christ.

A Christian is to honor Christ in everything. The Scripture says, “And whatsoever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (Colossians 3:17.) No conversations nor actions are exempt from the claim of Christ.

A Christian is to live for Christ with all his being. The apostle wrote, “I beseech you brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12:1.) There is no part of our lives which we should not see as belonging to God.

If Christ is Lord, there can be no corners of life where His lordship is not recognized. One’s loyalty to Christ will make a difference in his home, his work, his business, his play and his talk. A Christian is to mean it when he sings, “All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give. I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live.”

— Springfield, MO

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians 3:13,14.)

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

PETER GREW AND SO CAN YOU!

By Dalton Key

When the Bible encourages us to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,” and also to “take heed how (we) hear” (James 1:19; Luke 8:18), you might be thinking, along with so many of us, “That’s easier said than done!” And you’d be right.

A young Simon Peter often struggled in this area of speaking and hearing. He was usually the first among the apostles to speak up, on most any subject, at most every opportunity, but too often he spoke when he should have been listening.

When Peter, along with James and John, witnessed the remarkable Transfiguration of Christ, he should have felt content basking in the glory of the moment, with eyes and ears open and mouth firmly shut. But, alas, this was not Peter’s way of doing things! He just had to say something, even something glaringly wrong. His impetuous speech, demoting God’s Son to the level of mere men, was so grievously in error that heaven’s reproof came thundering forth from a cloud. Had the apostle been more interested in listening than in speaking, he not only would have avoided divine correction; he almost certainly would have learned something as well. (Matthew 17:1-6.)

This wasn’t the first time the apostle had created such a problem for himself. Just a few days earlier, Peter had actually rebuked the Lord, resulting in this curt and cutting correction: “Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matthew 16:23.)

And yes, this was the same Peter who would later rebuff his Master by blurting out, “You will never wash my feet!” (John 13:8.) And shortly after making that misstep, Peter foolishly dismissed the words of Jesus, brashly boasting, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble . . . Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” (Matthew 26:33,35.)

The good news? Peter changed. Peter grew. He became a tremendous force for good in the early New Testament church. Whose inspired words reached the hearts of obedient souls on the day of Pentecost? Were they not Peter’s? (Acts 2:14-41.) Who stood boldly before the council, defying orders to desist in preaching Christ and proclaiming, “We ought to obey God rather than men.” Was it not Peter? (Acts 5:29.)

Peter had learned a valuable lesson: there is a huge difference between having something to say and having to say something.

Peter changed. Peter grew.

And so can you!

**HAVE YOU READ YOUR BIBLE TODAY?**

By Dalton Key

Bible reading, once a regular practice for Christians, a daily pastime for families of the Lord’s people, and, further, a personal and daily regimen of the masses, has more recently fallen upon hard times. Sadly, the reading and study of the Bible is now too often ridiculed as amounting to nothing more than the wasted efforts of those with small minds and even smaller intellects.

The ablest leaders and most brilliant minds in history would beg to disagree.

Sir Isaac Newton, renowned scientist, mathematician, and philosopher, once confessed, “I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever.”

William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, declared, “The

Scriptures contain a declaration of the mind and will of God. They ought also to be read, believed, and fulfilled in our day. We accept them as the words of God Himself.”

Martin Luther, whose determination sparked the early fires of the Reformation, was a man in love with God’s Word. Though we believe him wrong on many counts, he was “spot on” in observing, “Holy Scripture is a sweet-scented herb, and the more you rub it, the more it emits its fragrance.”

Our country has been blessed with leaders at the highest levels of government professing deep respect for the Bible. George Washington once said, “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible. He is worse than an infidel who does not read his Bible and acknowledge his obligation to God.” John Adams stated,

“The Bible is the best book in the world.” Thomas Jefferson declared, “I have always said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make better citizens, better fathers, better husbands. The Bible makes the best people in the world.” And Abraham Lincoln, perhaps the most admired and loved of all past presidents, once acknowledged, “I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible,” further advising, “Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better man before God.”

Today’s Bible scoffers are on the wrong side of history!

Why not resolve now, at the beginning of this new year, to make the reading and study of the Bible a dedicated priority in your daily routine! The time to begin is now!

FISH AND FISHERMEN

By Richard Dent

I love to go fishing. My daddy got me hooked on fishing early in life. It has been my pleasure to pass it on to the grandkids.

Just about everyone has heard the story of Jonah. You MUST read the book. Jonah was a prophet that did not intend to go fishing but ended up as the bait. God protected him until the great fish spat out the bait. Then Jonah did God’s bidding.

The New Testament is full of stories about Jesus and His apostles and fish. Let’s look at some of them.

When Jesus first called His disciples, guess what? Peter, James, and John were fishermen. They had been fishing all night but had caught nothing. (Luke 5:1-10.) Jesus asked Simon Peter to cast his net out again, so he did, and guess what? They caught so many fish that their nets were breaking and the boat was about to sink. Peter’s partners had to come to

his rescue. For his lack of faith, Peter said, “Depart from me for I am a sinful man.” (Luke 5:8.) Jesus told them that He would make them fishers of men. (verse 10.) What a catch!

Then there is the story in Matthew 14 where Jesus fed a multitude of people with just five loaves and two fish. (verse 19.) The purpose of miracles was to create faith in those who witnessed them. That must have been a real eye-opener to those there. In just a few verses down we find that Jesus was walking on the water. (Matthew 14:25.) Peter said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” Jesus did and Peter took a step or two before beginning to sink. Of course Jesus reached out and saved him.

Jesus wants to save us also. Will we let Him do so?

— Liberal, KS

“Therefore He is also able to save

to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” (Hebrews 7:25.)

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