

SERVICE AND SACRIFICE

By Mark Lindley

People often wonder what the church can do for them. It seems that everyone wants to be part of a large congregation that has immaculate facilities, lots of activities for the young and old, children of all ages, and a large contribution. When someone is looking for a congregation to attend, these may be some of the criteria used to find the "right church." Most do not look for a congregation where they are needed "to" serve. Rather, folks frequently look for a congregation where they can "be" served. This self-serving attitude seems to be at odds with the spirit of Christianity and the example of Christ, Himself.

Consider these words describing the ministry of Christ: "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom

for many." (Matthew 16:26-28.) This passage shows that Jesus, the founder of Christianity, did not come to be served; He came to serve.

Christianity is built upon this principle of service and sacrifice. Paul wrote, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:5-8.) Notice that Jesus took upon Himself the "form of a bondservant." As a servant, Jesus gave Himself for the sins of the world. (1 John 2:2.) There could be no greater example of sacrifice than the one made by Christ.

Yet, those seeking to be followers of Christ today, often do not seem to have this same selfless, sacrificial

spirit. The question at the forefront seems to be, "What can the church do for me?" rather than asking, "What can I do for the church?"

I cannot imagine Jesus, Paul, or Peter saying, "I am placing membership with congregation B because they have nicer facilities and greater financial resources than congregation A." I cannot envision Christ or His apostles saying, "I am hoping to find a church that meets my needs." I do not believe the Lord or any of His apostles would say, "I am choosing to attend the services of this congregation because they have more social gatherings." I am persuaded that Jesus, Paul, and Peter were too busy serving to think about being served. I think they were too busy spreading the gospel and trying to save others to think about themselves. They were servants. We should be as well.

— Ripley, MS

"SOMEBODY OUGHT TO DO IT"

By Hershel Dyer

There is a legend of an ancient king who became weary of the complaints of his subjects. As always, there were many things to be done but each one seemed to feel that someone else should do them. Then, as now, they were always ready to say, "Let George do it!"

To cure his people of this bad tendency, the king had a huge stone placed in the midst of a main thoroughfare leading into the city. All of the travelers passed by the stone, grumbling and complaining that someone should move the stone. After a time, the king called his subjects together and showed them a bag of gold which had been placed under the stone for anyone willing to have moved it.

In the perpetuation of a church or congregation in any place there are many things to be done. We can nearly always see some things which

are needful but are being neglected. It is easy to complain about these and continue to say, "Somebody ought to do it!"

The building in which we meet must be opened and later closed by someone. There are floors to be mopped and carpets to be vacuumed. There are chairs to be set up in the classrooms, the baptistry to be filled and kept ready for use. There are classes to be taught, songs to be led, communion trays to be prepared, etc., etc. There are also the sick and shut-ins that need our loving ministries, the visitors to our services to be called upon, funerals that require singers and grieving families who need our sympathetic attention, etc., etc.

The foregoing along with other numerous good works require dedicated volunteers. There are generally too few for the many tasks. We can often see and even admit that "someone ought to do it."

When the Lord said to Isaiah, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?", Isaiah immediately responded, "Here am I! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8.)

The church can use a lot more like Isaiah!

— DECEASED

"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:9,10.)

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58.)

Old Paths

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

DO NOT BE DECEIVED!

By Danny Boggs

I was deceived! Years ago on a cold, December trip, we pulled in to a McDonald's parking lot for a break. On the window was a big, alluring sign. A larger than life, steaming cup of white chocolate mocha, "creamy and sweet," topped with whipped cream and made with whole milk, beckoned me. I ordered. I paid. I sipped. Then I knew: it was coffee! And it tasted like coffee (which tastes like liquid acorns). I love white chocolate. Whipped cream is a treat. Whole milk is milk the way God made it. But dress it up and play it up, coffee will always be coffee. The agony of deceit.

Four times the New Testament warns with these words: "Do not be deceived."

"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9-11, ESV here and throughout article.) When we Christians are tempted to be what we used to be and do what we used to do, warning bells should ring loudly in our minds. Unrighteousness will keep us out of the kingdom of God. Don't go back. "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Corinthians 6:11.)

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company ruins good morals.'" (1 Corinthians 15:33.) Even secular people will sometimes admit it; Paul quoted a playwright. The surprising thing in 1 Corinthians 15 is that the bad company is people with bad doctrine. They were not irreligious, but they didn't believe in the resurrection - not Christ's or anybody else's. Bad doctrine easily leads to bad living. (1 Corinthians 15:32,34.) It matters what you believe.

"Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." (Galatians 6:7,8.) It works that way in nature, and it works that way with lifestyles. If you think that eternal life comes despite investing in your sinful passions, you are deceived. If you think that devoting yourself to the Spirit is worth it, you are right.

"Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers." (James 1:16.) That's what James said after he explained the way sin works. God never makes us sin or tries to get us to sin. We have only ourselves to blame when we do it. (James 1:13-15.) God only gives good gifts. He wants us to be our best and to be His best. (James 1:17,18.) Do not be deceived!

— Neosho, MO

THE INFLUENCE OF THE GOSPEL

By Milton Smith

Speaking of the unique human relationship created by the church, Paul wrote in Colossians 3:11, "There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." In the first century, Jews and Gentiles experienced almost no interaction, much less fellowship. As a matter of fact, the Jew was forbidden to eat with a Gentile or even enter his house. The Gentiles felt much the same toward the Jews, regarding them as inferiors. The Lord's church brought together both Jew and Gentiles into the one body of Christ. This was truly an amazing accomplishment!

The barbarians and the Scythians were considered uncultured by the Greeks, Romans, and Jews alike. Of the two, however, the Scythians were seen as the worst. According to the 5th century Greek historian, Herodotus, the Scythians "drank the blood of the first enemy killed in battle, making a napkin of his scalp and a drinking vessel of his skull." The Jewish historian, Josephus wrote, "The Scythians delight in murdering people and are little better than wild beasts." Origen wrote that there were no laws more impious than the laws of the Scythians. Yet Paul told the early church that all people (including the barbarians and Scythians) were to be accepted on equal terms in Christ.

Aristotle called the slave "a living tool." Slaves were thought of as nothing more than human objects. But when a slave became a child of God, he became an equal brother in Christ with his Christian slave owner! A slave might even serve as an elder, deacon, or teacher in the local congregation where his slave owner might attend. This caused Christians to begin viewing slavery in a much different light. Many scholars believe that Paul's letter to the slave owner, Philemon, regarding his runaway slave, Onesimus, might have been the most astounding social document written during the first century.

Truly amazing is the deep impression the gospel made upon the world. No other institution in history has affected mankind as has the Lord's church. Every Christian should rejoice to belong to such a Divine institution!

— Tulsa, OK

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:28,29.)

FROM THE OVERFLOW

By Dalton Key

It may go without saying, but allow me to say it anyway: Those who proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ should have a good, working knowledge of the subject at hand. With respect to teaching and preaching, the ancient axiom, "Know thyself," might well be modified to urge, "Know thy subject!"

Winston Churchill once described one of his opponents as "one of those orators who, before they get up, do not know what they are going to say; when they are speaking, do not know what they are saying; and when they have sat down, do not know what they have said." Sadly, this aptly describes much that passes for teaching and preaching in far too many churches today.

The apostle Paul urged young Timothy to take a more serious, and studious, approach. "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." (1 Timothy 4:13-16.)

Few scenes are as painful to witness as that of an unprepared, disinterested teacher or preacher feebly attempting to "use up his time." The results of such may provide bushels of boredom and a foolproof cure for insomnia, but precious little else; and certainly nothing by way of biblical knowledge or spiritual motivation.

The teacher or preacher of the Bible should possess a deep and discernible love for both God and His Word. He should be able to say, with the Psalmist of old, "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day." (Psalm 119:97.) As the most eager and avid student in the room, he should thoroughly immerse himself in the inspired text and splash about freely in the invigorating truths of Holy Writ.

Of the beloved preacher B. C. Goodpasture it was said, "He impressed his audiences that he knew what he was talking about and that he knew more than he was telling." Gus Nichols, another beloved preacher of the same era, referred to this kind of consummate preparedness as "preaching from the overflow." These men, along with countless other teachers and preachers of their generation, loved the Bible, knew the Bible, and were neither afraid nor ashamed to proclaim the truths of the Bible. They were able to proclaim it because they knew it; they put in the required time and effort to know it because they loved it.

Those of us following in their footsteps would do well to "go and do likewise."

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

THE LORD'S DAY

By Dalton Key

Just whose day is it anyway?

Sunday, the first day of the week, is meant of heaven to be more than another busy, pleasure-filled, weekend play day. This day deserves better than serving as opportunity for sleeping in or lounging about the house. Surely it should be seen as more than mere extra time for watering the grass or washing the car. The first day of the week is not ours; it is the Lord's, and from New Testament times this special day has been divinely designated as a day for worship.

The apostle Paul lingered seven days in Troas, until "the first day of the week," when he met with the saints of that city in an assembly of worship. (Acts 20:6,7.) John, that "disciple whom Jesus loved," wrote, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." (Revelation 1:10.) Early saints would regularly "come together as a church . . . on the first day of the week." (1 Corinthians 11:18; 16:2.)

Is it any wonder why? Our Lord rose from the dead on the first day of the week. (Matthew 28:1-6.) The church was established on Pentecost Day, always a first day of the week. (Acts 2.) This day, the Lord's Day, is more than ordinary. It is special.

Justin Martyr, one of the early and reputable historians of the early church, referenced the worship of Christians near the beginning of the second century: "On Sunday a meeting is held of all who live in the cities and villages . . . They rise together and send up prayers." These ancient disciples faced tremendous persecution in assembling together for worship on the Lord's Day, yet they continued to do so despite the danger. According to John Fox in his Book of Martyrs, many of these Christians "were burnt alive, others were dragged through the streets naked until they expired; some were scalded to death, many stoned, and a great number had their brains beaten out with clubs." Fox further reports that Nero ordered some saints to be "dressed in shirts made stiff with wax, fixed to axletrees, and set on fire in his gardens, in order to illuminate them."

And what of us? As today's more modern saints, too many of us have become lax, finding it difficult - facing no threat of persecution - to rouse ourselves from sleep on Sunday morning and drive the new car down a four-lane, paved highway to a comfortable, climate-controlled building for a closely-timed period of worship, all the while whining as did those indifferent worshippers of Malachi's day, "Oh, what a weariness!" (Malachi 1:13.)

By the way, what are your plans this coming Lord's Day? After all, it is His day.

**2 CORINTHIANS 10:12**

By Danny Tunnell

Lord gave him. Spiritually he did as well as the man who had a lot bigger number.

The reason we should never compare ourselves with someone else to see how we're doing is that we don't know what God has given to that other person.

Suppose someone has a small sports car and decides to compare it with a friend's dump truck. The dump truck has the capacity to haul a large load. But you can hardly fit anything in the back of a small sports car. On the other hand, a dump truck can't take a curve like a sports car. One is graced to do a different job from the other, and comparing the two is foolish. One way or the other you'll come up on the short end of the comparison. Someone may say, "My sports car is not worth anything because it won't haul 1000 pounds like the dump truck!"

That kind of comparison is foolish. It's not wise because you are comparing two things that are not alike. And no two people are exactly alike. God made us all different. Who is graced just like you? Who

has exactly the same background that you have? Who has exactly the same opportunities you've had?

Don't compare yourself to other people. Don't compare your congregation to another congregation. Don't compare your ministry with another ministry. Why? If you do that, you'll come to a wrong conclusion. With your comparison you're either going to feel inferior or superior, and either way it is not the right attitude to have, no matter which way you come out. If you decide you're doing worse, you really don't even know. If you decide you're doing better, you don't know that either. Why? Because you don't know what you are comparing. And you are not going to be accountable for what God gave somebody else.

The Holy Spirit through Paul said we don't dare do this. We are not to live our lives with a competitive attitude of comparison. It's a bad attitude. It's not being wise.

— Miami, OK

REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD

By Joe Slater

"In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:14.)

Ever since Eden, sinful humans have needed redemption. To redeem something is to buy it back; in many cases, it is the equivalent of a ransom. We enslave ourselves to sin; once we have done so, how can we ever be free again? We have nothing with which to redeem ourselves. All the good works we could pile up in a thousand lifetimes couldn't pay the first penny of interest on our sin debt. The price is too high! "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23.)

Fortunately for us, our loving God doesn't want us to suffer the penalty for our sin. While we cannot redeem ourselves, He paid the price Himself, giving His precious Son to die on our behalf and in our place. The blood Jesus shed on the cross purchased our redemption. He freed us from the slavery of sin!

Redemption from sin includes

forgiveness, also known as remission. To forgive means to "send away." First, our sins are sent away - we no longer have to bear them. Under the Mosaic Law, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest put his hands on a goat's head, confessed Israel's sins, and sent the goat away. We commonly call it the "scapegoat" (one who takes the blame for another's wrongdoing). Jesus literally did for us what the scapegoat symbolically did for Israel.

But second, we ourselves are "sent away," not in the sense of being banished, but being released. God no longer holds our sins against us. (see Hebrews 8:12, 10:17.)

We are forgiven!

Only "in Christ" is redemption found. Are you "in Christ?" (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27.)

— Justin, TX

"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from

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