

FIRECRACKER CHRISTIANITY

By Richard Dent

By the time you read this we will have celebrated another 4th of July in America. Almost every kid from childhood to adulthood enjoys watching a beautiful fireworks show. Have you ever considered that some people behave like fireworks? Here are a few examples:

1.) The Screamer - when lit up they make an awesome loud sound and eventually explode. As Christians, we don't want to be making obnoxious noises and threats to our friends or neighbors. Colossians 3:13 states that we ought to bear with one another, "even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do." James warns us to watch the use of our tongues.

2.) The Dud - this person fizzes out; it never quite goes off. What a disappointment! It reminds me of the one talent man in Matthew 25 who refused to use his talent. This also reminds me of James 2:20-26 where it states that faith without works is dead. Let's not be a dud!

3.) The Chaser - this firework might slide after you on the ground. As a kid, I was afraid of this kind of firework; you never knew what direction it might go or how fast it would travel. Of course, at the end it exploded also. Beware! The devil is our chaser; he is after you and me like a roaring lion. (1 Peter 5:8.)

4.) The Sparkler - Now, here is one that appeals to little children; they come in colors and are a special treat. The gospel should appeal to the young at heart; it is beautiful to find children who know the story of Jesus. "Tell me the story of Jesus; write on my heart every word." Jesus loves the little children. (Matthew 19:13,14.) A child's eyes often sparkle at the story of Jesus. Such is the kingdom of heaven.

5.) The Roman Candle - my personal favorite because it shoots colored balls up into the air. Christians are to be lights unto the world. (Matthew 5:14-16.)

6.) The Fountain - this displays

beautiful colors of fire; so go on for quite some time. David said, "For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light." (Psalm 36:9.) Christians must go on for some time in life. Often the firecracker fountain saves the best for last.

7.) TNT - the bomb - this firework is often used at the beginning or the end of a show. I like to think of TNT as being the New Testament. It helps us reveal the works of darkness and can blow them up. It is God's spiritual sword or weapon for us to use against Satan. Remember that the writer of Hebrews 4:12 states that the word of God is powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. Now that's powerful.

So next time you enjoy a display of fireworks, whether on Independence Day or New Year's Day, think about God's spiritual fireworks. The Bible is totally awesome.

— Liberal, KS

PRAISING AND THANKING GOD

By Danny Tunnell

Praise celebrates what is written and thanksgiving celebrates what is happening.

Do you express thanks to God before eating a meal? Have you ever stopped to think where that originated? It is found nowhere in the Bible before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Jesus started that, every time before He broke bread. He gave thanks. (Matthew 15:36; Mark 8:L6; John 6:11.) By doing so Jesus taught us that even daily provision is from God.

In Luke 17, Jesus met ten men who were lepers. They asked Him for mercy. Jesus told them, "Go show yourselves to the priests." As they went they were cleansed. (Luke 17:11-14.) One of the ten glorified God for his healing. He fell down on his face, giving Him thanks. (Luke 17:15-19.)

Worship is giving God thanks. That very simply is what worship is. It's thanking God after receiving something from Him. It's expressing gratitude to God. True, genuine love is always expressed.

It's impossible to worship God if you are not grateful. "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise. Be thankful to Him,

and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations." (Psalm 100:4,5.)

The leper said, "Thank you," after he had received his healing. He was grateful.

You say, "Thank you," after you receive something. But you can also praise God in advance. You read the promises of God in the Bible, and you anticipate receiving them in your life. You should actually praise God for them in advance. By faith you're ready to receive them because you know God is true to His word. You do that by faith as Abraham did. "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform." (Romans 4:20,21.)

Abraham must have known that God watches over His word to perform it. (Jeremiah 1:12.) Ezekiel 12:25 says, "I am the Lord: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass." God is always true to His word, and it is impossible for Him to lie. (Hebrews 6:18.)

We can praise God over His promises in His word even before they materialize in our lives. For example, go ahead and praise Him for His promise of heaven! (John 14:1-3;

2 Corinthians 4:18-5:1; Revelation 21:1-5.) Faith is expecting God to keep His promises. We praise Him by faith. Then we thank Him after we receive as the leper did.

How often do you praise and thank God on a typical day? Do you say, "Praise You Father, Thank You Lord Jesus," on a regular basis? It's a good habit to develop.

"His praise shall continually be in my mouth." (Psalm 34:1.) "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised." (Psalm 145:3.) "God inhabits the praises of His people." (Psalm 22:3.) "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High." (Psalm 92:1.) "Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for His is good! For His mercy endures forever." (Psalm 107:1.) "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thessalonians 5:18.)

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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

LOVING GOD AND LOVING HIS WORD

By Milton Smith

Bible study is not optional; it is expected of every Christian. A common phrase found numerous times throughout the Old Testament is the promise that Jehovah God will show mercy unto those who love Him and "keep His commandments." Deuteronomy 30:16 speaks of the duty of His people to "love Jehovah" and desire to "walk in his ways, keeping His commandments, statutes, and judgments." Most all are familiar with Jesus' words in John 14:15: "If you love me, keep my commandments." But Jesus also said in John 15:10, "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love." It was the aged apostle John who wrote in his first general epistle that all Christians should love God and keep His commandments. (1 John 5:3.)

Clearly, God expects us to keep His commandments! But how can this be done if we choose to remain ignorant of God's Word? This is where good Bible study becomes a must. I'm often asked what things might be helpful to insure profitable Bible study. Whatever my suggestions might be worth, I'm happy to offer them if they might be of any help. To begin with, any study of the Bible must be done reverently. Respecting the Bible as the Word of God is an absolute must. Any irreverent, haphazard attempt to study God's Word will always fall short of what is needful. The student must always have a desire to learn. This means that the reader must approach the Bible with an open mind and a willingness to do what the Book says to do; even if it means giving up previously held ideas that are not found in the Bible - no matter how cherished those ideas might have been.

Prayer should always accompany good Bible study. This does not mean that God will give us a "new" revelation as we study (for such is not promised to us today). But we can pray - as I have often done - that God might provide us with clear minds and pure hearts as we venture into our study. It is always important to consult other scriptures that might relate to a particular subject that the reader is studying. For example, the gospel writers will often give complimentary information regarding certain events in the life of Christ. One should honestly desire to understand what a passage is saying, love the Word of God, respect it for what it teaches, and live by those teachings. After all, Jesus once said, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge . . . in the last day." (John 12:48.)

May each of us study our Bible every day and respect it for the great truth that it contains!

— Tulsa, OK

"Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in your way. Establish Your word to your servant, who is devoted to fearing You." (Psalm 119:36-38.)

Up To You Or Up To God?

By Joe Slater

Who determines where you dwell eternally? Is it up to you, or is up to God?

The short answer is: "Yes!"

That salvation from sin and the resulting eternal life are a gift cannot be denied successfully! Romans 6:23 couldn't be clearer: "For the wages of sin is death, but **the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" We call Jesus "Savior" for a reason - if we could provide for our own deliverance from the guilt and penalty for sin, we wouldn't need a savior. But obviously we cannot!

Unfortunately, some have erroneously concluded that since we cannot save ourselves by ourselves, we must be totally passive. They believe God unconditionally picked and chose certain individuals to be saved and exercised irresistible grace toward them regardless of any faith or obedience.

Others have bought into the equally mistaken idea that by working really hard we can "almost" save ourselves, and God's grace just gives us a little nudge over the finish line. Such a notion ignores the fact that good works can't wash sins away - only Jesus' blood does that.

The bird lady in "Home Lone - Lost In New York" was wrong: a good deed doesn't erase a bad deed. Not even at Christmas!

The fact is, a gift is given on the terms of the giver. Complying with God's terms to receive the gift of eternal life isn't meriting or earning salvation! In no way does it deny the grace of God. And we have the free will to decide whether to comply with God's terms or to refuse them. God elected (chose) Jesus to be our Savior, and He elected (chose) to save those who trust and obey Jesus.

So, is it up to God or up to you? Yes!

— Justin, TX

"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.'" (Mark 16:15,16.)

"Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:38.)

OBSESSED WITH SNAILS

By Dalton Key

I once heard a tale about a crane, busy with searching for snails along the muddy bank of a small farm pond. A beautiful swan alighted by his side. "Where are you from?" asked the crane. "From heaven," answered the swan. The swan then began to excitedly expound upon the beauty and splendor of the celestial realm. The crane showed no interest. Not long after the swan had begun his heavenly description, the crane interrupted with a question. "Are there any snails there?" When the swan answered, "No, there are no snails in heaven," the crane turned away, refusing to hear anymore. He had no interest in anything - even heaven - that didn't include snails.

Aren't we all a little bit like that foolish crane? We become so involved in living here that we lose interest in living with the Lord "over there," beyond death's valley of the shadow. We come so engrossed with our snails of temporary power and pleasure and possessions in this life that we forget about the eternal joys of the better life God has promised to those submissive to Him and saved by His grace. How sad.

Jesus taught, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33.) When we get our priorities in line with the Lord's, when we begin putting first things first, God will see to it that our physical needs are provided.

We live in a carnal world but we must never, as God's children, become carnally minded. "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." (Romans 8:5,6.)

Our treasure is not to be laid up here, but in heaven. (Matthew 6:19,20.) As those risen with Christ, we "seek those things which are above," and set our minds "on things above, not on things on the earth." (Colossians 3:1,2.) We are but pilgrims here. (1 Peter 2:11.) Our citizenship is in heaven. (Philippians 3:20.)

Our hope, both sure and steadfast, is laid up for us in heaven. (Hebrews 6:19; Colossians 1:5.) This is the reason why we seek and set our minds on things not of this earth. Note the words of heaven: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1.)

How is your spiritual appetite? Do you have a wholesome hunger and thirst for the things of God (Matthew 5:6), or are you obsessed with the snails of this world?

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

GOOD PEOPLE ARE HONEST PEOPLE

By Dalton Key

Does anyone feel the need to tell the truth anymore? Has honesty disappeared completely?

I once heard about a math teacher, seasoned by years of real-life classroom experience, who would always make a little speech before handing out his tests. He would look seriously at the students and say, "I'm giving two tests today - one in mathematics and the other in honesty. I hope you pass both of them. But if you can pass only one, be sure it's the test in honesty. There are a lot of good men and women who don't know anything about algebra or trigonometry, but there are no good people who are not honest."

What a sad commentary on our times that the word "honesty" is most often prefaced with the adjective "old fashioned." While honesty is still - as always - "the best policy," it appears lately to be a policy more admired (from a safe distance) than required.

When Dad lies about where he's been, Mom hides the truth of who she's been talking with, and the kids, when caught red-handed with their hands in the cookie jar blurt out "we didn't do it;" and when such subterfuge is considered by all parties as completely normal, something has gone wrong with society. When truth is jettisoned from family life, what hope is there for the world? "Truth in advertising?" Forget about it. "Honesty in politics?" You've got to be kidding. "Lying to get into a prestigious university?" Why not?

We've become masters at rebranding. We speak of white lies, half-truths, and clever spinning of the truth, but we might as well call things what they are. A lie is a lie, period. Whether we cheat on a tax return, perjure ourselves before a Grand Jury, or purposely deceive our spouse, a lie is a lie; and all dishonesty is inherently, undeniable wrong. Read Revelation 21:8 as proof.

The liar imitates the devil, who "is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44.) The one who lies possesses a tongue which is "an abomination" to the Lord. (Proverbs 6:16,17.) The Bible reveals lying to be a loathsome, disgusting practice which runs completely counter to the nature and desires of the God Who made us. Hebrews 6:18; Titus 1:2.)

Scripture instructs, "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor.'" (Ephesians 4:25.)

Why? Because there are no good people who are not honest. Old-fashioned or not, this world could use a healthy dose of true Christ-like integrity. The world may blindly lie its way into the corner of oblivion, but disciples of Christ know - and practice - the truth: honesty is the best policy.

Let's go about living what we know.

(NOTICE and REMINDER: Old Paths Men's Retreat, September 15-17, on the site of Flint Hills Christian Camp just north of Sedan, Kansas. This year's theme: What Love Looks Like. I hope to see many of you there!)

**SOLID ROCK OR SINKING SAND?**

By Caleb Boggs

In the year, 1884, North Cove, Washington became a community intended to be a luxurious beach destination. Dozens of homes, a schoolhouse, a lighthouse, a Coast Guard station, and many other brick buildings were erected alongside North Cove's Cape Shoalwater. These structures have since been swallowed up by the sea.

Washaway Beach, as the strip has come to be known, is the fastest-eroding place on the West Coast. For the past century, coastal erosion has stolen a yearly average of 100 feet of shoreline. Over 150 homes have been claimed by the water. Even to this day, the homes and livelihoods of many North Cove residents are threatened by the waves of Washaway Beach.

Recall the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:24-29: "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does

them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Where have you built your house? Wherever it's been established, rain will find it. (Matthew 5:45.)

In spite of this, you have reason for peace of mind if you hear Christ's words and do them. If your house is built on the Lord Jesus Christ, if your faith is founded upon the rock, it is stronger than any storm.

However, if you hear Christ's words and do not put them into

practice, grab a raincoat. A person whose faith is founded on anything other than obedience to Christ is doomed to witness their housing fall with a great crash.

"On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand."

— Neosho, MO

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22-25.)

CONCERNING THE INSTRUMENT

By Bobby Key

A preacher of some renown was asked, "May a church use a piano in its worship service and be pleasing to the Lord?" He replied, "I do not know; it would depend on the feeling of the majority of the members and the decision of the elders."

This answer is completely out of harmony with the doctrine of the New Covenant. Enoch had this testimony that he pleased God. (Hebrews 11:5.) This man walked with God, and he did so by faith. In order for one to please God today, he must walk by faith. (2 Corinthians 5:7.) Faith comes by hearing the word of God. (Romans 10:17.) Thus, to please God, one must walk in faithful obedience to the word of God.

The word of God teaches Christians to sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.) Quoting from the 22nd Psalm, the author of Hebrews says, "I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praises unto thee." (Hebrews 2:12.)

I know of no act of worship acceptable to God unless the Bible authorizes that act to be done. Christians are told to sing. I know of no passage of Scripture in the New Testament that talks about mechanical instruments of music in New Testament worship. Therefore, I can have no faith on this subject. "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:23.)

Since when did God allow the majority in a congregation to determine the kind of worship that pleases Him? When did He ever give elders the authority to legislate concerning the type of music to be used in New Testament worship?

The only way we can know what pleases God in the New Testament age is by reading what God has revealed in the New Testament. It is never wise to speak where God has not spoken.

"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. And whatever you do in word or

deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Colossians 3:16,17.) "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep my words." (John 14:23,24.)

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