

WHAT TYPE OF SOLDIER?

by Joe Dale Wilson

There is a story I heard about a member of a congregation that was leaving the church building after services and the preacher asked him if he could have a word with him. He asked, "Will you enlist in the Lord's Army?" The man replied that he was in the Lord's Army. The preacher said, "If so, why is it that we only see you on Christmas and Easter?" The man replied, "It is a secret; I'm in the Secret Service."

I have to wonder - did the fellow ever read, "For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14), or "For the things which are done by them in secret it is a shame even to speak of" (Ephesians 5:12)? This verse is talking about immoral conduct, and isn't lying to God and one's self immoral?

I understand the man in the story though he was being cute but at the same time he was telling the preacher,

"I am not going to be someone that you can count on regularly, but if I need you, I will call." It revealed a lack of commitment!

Paul often complimented his co-workers and never mentions any Secret Service. The classic example is Epaphroditus. His name in Greek meant, "lovely," and in Latin, "handsome." Paul described him as "my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier." (Philippians 2:25.) All Christians are soldiers in the Lord's Army. The soldier puts on the armor of God. (Ephesians 6:11-13.) Christians have weapons of war that are not like those of earthly soldiers but are spiritual. (2 Corinthians 10:4.) The weapons are the word of God, prayer, praying for others, and being alert to all of Satan's devices. (Ephesians 6:10-18.) Christians who do not study, pray, worship, and love the brethren in their struggles enough to pray and share in their concerns are not prepared for

battle. Good soldiers are not AWOL during informative meetings but are present so that they with others will be prepared for the battle ahead. Each of us must ask ourselves if we are reliable and dependable as good soldiers of the cross should be.

Epaphroditus was there with Paul in the prison ministering to him so that he could carry on the great work of teaching, writing, and converting souls to the Lord's Army. He was very faithful at his post in caring for the old soldier's needs. What if there had not been a reliable soldier to help Paul? Who would have written the prison letters teaching today's soldiers how to conduct themselves as members of the Lord's Army?

— Vernon, TX

Preparing To See The King

By Joe Slater

Persian king Ahasuerus banished his queen and sought a new one (see the book of Esther). I hope none of us would approve of what he did or how he did it. How degrading to demand that Vashti flaunt her beauty before the king's drunken nobles! Then he selected his new wife based almost entirely on her physical attractiveness. But why would we expect anything else? The king was a pagan and behaved in typical pagan fashion. Despite all of this, God worked through those events to deliver His people.

Hadassah (Esther), a young Jewish girl, went through a solid year of beauty preparations before her interview with the king. (Esther 2:12.) Please don't think ill of her! She didn't make the rules. She made the best of a less-than-ideal situation.

We serve a King infinitely superior to Ahasuerus. Esther diligently prepared to see her king. Let us take a cue from her by preparing to see King Jesus!

This has nothing to do with physical attractiveness or lack thereof! Nor am I concerned here with wearing a coat and tie to the assembly. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to inspire the apostles to emphasize inner spiritual beauty. "Rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit." (1 Peter 3:4.) In contrast to flashy, costly garments, Paul urges being clothed "with good works." (1 Timothy 2:10.)

Revelation 7:13-14 pictures faithful Christians as dressed in robes they had washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. They had gone through fiery trials without yielding.

They were inwardly beautiful!

Does inner beauty qualify you to meet your King? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

— Justin, TX

"Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to

Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne saying, 'You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.'" (Revelation 4:9-11.)

Old Paths

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

HIS YOKE IS EASY

By Danny Boggs

"Come to Me, all 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 humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30.)

We don't have to suffer under sin's wearisome load anymore! Jesus gives rest.

But what is a yoke doing in the middle of an invitation to rest? A yoke pairs two beasts of burden. It fastens around their necks so they can plow together. A yoke usually symbolizes submission and bondage. A yoke doesn't typically suggest rest.

The truth is, every one of us is locked in a yoke before we come to Jesus. Jeremiah wept in behalf of his people: "My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by His hand they were fastened together; they were set upon my neck; He caused my strength to fail." (Lamentations 1:14.) Everyone is either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. (Romans 6:16.) When we are yoked to sin, the yoke is iron, and sin does not pull its share of the load.

Trudging through life without Christ is the worst of burdens.

As we keep working toward the end of life's row, the choice is not whether to be yoked, but which yoke to wear. We can stay yoked to sin and its dead weight, or we can be joined to Jesus. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He is a workhorse!

Drawing on His power for the work, and enjoying His gentle and humble company until the work is finished, we can rest in that yoke.

— Neosho, MO

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:3-6.)

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:12-15.)

GOD'S CALLED OUT PEOPLE

By Milton Smith

Ekklesia is the Greek word that is translated into our English word church. It is derived from the very ekkaleo which carries the meaning "to call out." The word, in its simplest form, refers to any "group" of people who might be called forth or assembled together for any particular purpose. Thus, as one reads through the New Testament he will notice that Ekklesia is used in more than one sense.

First, this word is used to refer to an assembly of people in a most general way. For example, we find ekklesia being used to refer to a gathered assembly of citizens (Acts 19:39), Israel as a group of people who were called out of Egypt into the wilderness (Acts 7:38), and, of course, people gathered together for religious worship. (Hebrews 2:12.) Thus, we find that this word is used in the New Testament in a general sense of a group of people gathered together for any special purpose. But we quickly notice that this word is used to refer to an assembly of Christians in a local area. Thus, we read of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), the church in Antioch (Acts 11:26), the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 1:1), and the church at Corinth. (1 Corinthians 1:2.)

But we notice that this same word is used in the plural to refer to congregations that assembled at different locations. When Paul addressed "the churches of Galatia" (Galatians 1:2), he was referring to congregations that assembled in different areas of Galatia. Likewise, the apostle John was instructed to write to "the seven churches of Asia" in Revelation 1:4; a reference to seven churches located in the region of Asia Minor. But this same word is also used to refer to the collective body of Christ. (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18.) In other words, every Christian in the world belongs to the spiritual body of our Lord. No greater honor can be bestowed upon a person than to belong to this particular body. All Christians should rejoice every day that our Lord has given to us the privilege of belonging to His body, His special "called out people."

— Tulsa, OK

"And He put all things under His feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all." (Ephesians 1:22,23.)

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (1 Peter 2:9,10.)

ACCEPTABLE WORSHIP AND MAJORITY RULE

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. (1929-2018)

"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 of deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Colossians 3:16,17.)

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your Name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:21-23.)

EDITORIALLY SPEAKING . . .

EDITORIAL . . .

UNLEARNING WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

By Dalton Key

Paul encouraged Timothy to continue in the Scriptures which he had previously learned. (2 Timothy 3:14,15.) The apostle likewise urged the Corinthian brethren to hold fast the word he had preached to them. (1 Corinthians 15:1,2.) Peter wrote the Christians of his day, reminding them of things they already knew. (2 Peter 1:12-14.) And why? Because all of us have a sad tendency to forget.

When asked what learning was the most necessary, Antisthenes replied, "Not to unlearn what you have learned." The Greek philosopher had a point. Remembering what we have already learned, what we should already know, is imperative. But it can also be frustrating. In the words of one wit, "A man's memory is what he forgets with."

Consider the Bible. Many of us have heard and read and studied the Bible for years. It has been a regular and important source of our instruction. Yet how much of this marvelous book do we remember? How many of the great events of the Old Testament can we recall? How many rich, New Testament texts can we locate? Can we show someone the plan of salvation as laid out in Scripture?

Paul writes of the gospel, "by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain." (1 Corinthians 15:2.) The King James uses the words, "If you keep in memory what I preached unto you." How well do we "keep in memory" the sacred truths of God's word?

You say you can't remember the Bible? Don't blame your brain. Researchers have calculated the brain's storage capacity to be in the range somewhere between 10 terabytes and 2.5 petabytes. One terabyte is equal to 1000 gigabytes; one petabyte is equal to 1000 terabytes. Without getting into matters of higher mathematics, let's just say that the brain has plenty of space for whatever Bible knowledge you'd like to store there.

Yet you still say you can't remember the Bible?

I wonder? could it be that we remember what we have a deep and intense interest in? Don't we tend to remember best what we love most and spend the most time with?

The Psalmist wrote, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You." (Psalm 119:11.) God's word was not merely in his home, or on his shelf. It was in his heart. And how was this possible? "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day." (Psalm 119:97.) The Psalmist remembered what he loved!

Let's not unlearn what we have learned of God's word!



LET'S TALK ABOUT JESUS

by Danny Tunnell

David said in Psalm 19:14, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers." Peter's words from 3:10, "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit." James tells us that the tongue can be an unruly evil and full of deadly poison. (James 3:8,9.) Death and life are in the power of the tongue. (Proverbs 18:21.) Jesus tells us, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34.)

It behooves us to heed these inspired teachings, especially during social gatherings. A fellow told a true story about his family. When the children became adults, they returned home for the holidays. As they gathered around the dining room table for a meal, if the conversation began to go in the wrong direction, perhaps into

an argument, or concerning scandalous behavior of people not present, or the latest gossip or rumors, the mother would redirect the conversation by singing the song, "Let's Talk About Jesus."

Let me share some of that song with you. "Let's talk about Jesus, the King of Kings is He, the Lord of Lord's supreme, throughout eternity. The great I Am, the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Door, let's talk about Jesus more and more. Let's talk about Jesus, let all the world proclaim, the power and majesty of such a wondrous name. Let's talk about Jesus, the Bread of Life is He, the Savior of the world, the Man of Galilee. Let's talk about Jesus, the Prince of Peace is He."

Jesus said, "When the Spirit comes, He will not speak of Himself, but rather He will glorify Me." (John 16:13,14.) Paul told the brethren, "I did not come with excellency of speech or of wisdom. I determined not to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:1,2.)

What a great way the lady chose to change the conversation! After a while, everyone seemed to get the message and the talk became more gracious and civil.

Years later, this dear mother was in the hospital. A neighbor lady came by to visit her there. As the neighbor began to engage in gossip and rumors, the mother just seemed to ignore what she was saying and began to sing, "Let's Talk About Jesus." As the neighbor lady walked out the hospital room she said to the son with much anguish, "Your mother is losing her mind!" To which he replied, "No. She isn't losing her mind. She just doesn't like what you were saying."

The mother had found a unique and effective solution to an all too common problem. Oh, that we all could be so wise! "Whoever guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble." (Proverbs 21:23, God's Word Version.)

— Miami, OK

"DESPISING THE SHAME"

By Joshua Ortiz

"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2.)

Jesus is the author (founder) and finisher (perfecter) of our faith. "The joy that was set before Him" was God's redemptive plan for mankind. The plan to open heaven's door for people was Christ's joy. But in order for that joy to become a reality, He had to suffer and endure the cross.

The word "despising" is the participle that connects to the verb "endure." This means at the same time He endured the cross, He despised the shame.

The crucifixion process was reserved only for the lowest criminals. How shameful was it to die on the Roman cross? The cross was considered so shameful that Rome did

not allow its own citizens to bear it. Although there were possible isolated incidents, it was not allowed. People who were crucified were either slaves or foreigners. To the Romans, the Jews were a lower class of people. Thus, in the eyes of the Romans, Jesus fell in the class of those who qualified for crucifixion.

The Jews considered Jesus even lower than themselves, so when they rejected Jesus and scoffed at Him, they seized the opportunity to demand that the Romans crucify Him.

Throughout this shameful and undeserving process, Jesus had done, and did, nothing wrong.

Why did Jesus willingly suffer the shameful crucifixion process?

He did it for us.

Are you living for Jesus, the one who endured the shame?

— Lebanon, MO

"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:6-8.)

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