

MULE MORALS

By Richard Dent

One of my elders told me a story about his experiences with mules when he was a young man. Royce was one time working a young mule on some very wet ground. He got too close to the edge of a hill and the mule fell over the edge. The mule became buried in the soft, wet ground below with his feet sticking up. Now Royce knew enough about mules that he knew it would die rather quickly in this precarious position. Royce ran about half a mile to get a shovel and came back and dug the mule out. Here is the moral of our story: sometimes when we are down and out - our legs kicking up in the air - we need a brother to help dig us out. (see Galatians 6:1,2,10.)

Another time Royce was watching another fellow trying to work a team of mules. Not much was going right. It became apparent to Royce that the team

was unequally matched up. He made a quick suggestion and the mules on the inside were switched to the outside. This resulted in proper movement of the team. Moral: sometimes we have to make directional changes in life. (see Romans 12:1,2.) Another lesson from this is the importance of teamwork. One mule cannot haul a whole load; it takes Christians working together to get the job done. Consider Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 12:14,27 concerning the parts of our human body working as a team.

— Tyrone, OK

“For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all

the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them . . .” (Romans 12:3-6.)

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” (Philippians 1:27.)

PREACHING THE TRUTH AS IF IT'S FICTION

By Danny Tunnell

The Bible says that the preaching of the cross is “foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18.)

A story is told about a famous stage actor who sold out theaters. People came from far and wide to see him. They marveled at how he brought characters to life. Once day, a local preacher approached him. He asked the actor, “How is it that you can pack the theaters, but I'm preaching to empty pews?”

The actor replied, “Because an actor acts as if fiction is true . . . while a preacher may preach the truth as if it is fiction.”

The message of the cross is still foolishness to many today. To some folks, the whole preaching profession is foolishness. Agnostics and atheists don't understand why we teach and rely on the word of God. To them it is foolishness.

Think about the Apostle Paul in Athens. The unbelievers called him a “babbling.” (Acts 17:18.) They thought

what Paul said was foolishness. They must have thought, “This Paul, he can't be very bright; he must be an idiot; he's just babbling.”

Why would they think that way? Paul's preaching, the gospel message, made no sense to them. But it really doesn't matter what they thought, does it? God's truth and His word will stand forever. (Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:34; 1 Peter 1:25.) It may be foolishness to the unbeliever, but it is life to those who believe. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel he preached. (Romans 1:16.)

Some in Paul's day looked upon the gospel he preached as absurd. They may have thought, “The reason that the Romans crucified Jesus was because He must have been a criminal.” They couldn't understand why Paul wanted to worship Him.

Yes, the gospel is foolishness to an unbelieving world. The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Corinthians 1:25.)

Giving is a good example. The

unbelieving world doesn't understand why Christians give away money as they do. Why would Jesus say, “It is more blessed to give than to receive?” (Acts 20:35.) We reap what we sow. (Galatians 6:7.)

Many have trouble believing the miracles of the Bible. They seem to defy logic. Some scoff at the idea that Jesus turned water into wine, or that the tomb was empty, or that an angel would say, “He is not here for He is risen!” (John 2:1-11; Matthew 28:6.)

The actor replied, “A preacher may preach the truth as if it's fiction.” Let's not do that! Let's preach and teach it as it is, as truth. It is the life-changing, transforming power of God, the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls. (James 1:21.)

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

Redeeming The Time

By Joe Slater

Let's hear it for Daylight Saving Time! Now we have an extra hour of daylight in the evening. I like that! Of course, we surrender that hour in the morning. I don't like that so much. In the final analysis we save nothing.

Paul exhorted the Ephesians, “*See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*” (Ephesians 5:15-16.) His word for time isn't chronos (as in chronometer; a watch or clock). It's a different word that has more to do with opportunity, as in “this is a good **time** to patch the roof.”

We ought to take advantage of opportunities as they come up. It might be an opportunity to “*do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*” (Galatians 6:10.) It might be an opportunity to set a wise example before unbelievers, as in Paul's encouragement for Christians to “*Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.*” (Colossians 4:5.) It might be an opportunity to evangelize. Just before urging the Colossians to redeem the time, Paul asked them to pray “*that God would open to us a door for the word*” (4:2-3), a metaphor for opportunity to speak about Jesus.

An old cliché says opportunity knocks only once. That may not always hold true, but often it does. Who among us hasn't regretted squandering an opportunity? It's frustrating enough in the material realm; how much more so in spiritual matters of eternal consequence! King Agrippa II heard the word from Paul and had opportunity to obey. He said he was almost persuaded! Whether that was sincere or mockery, the fact remains that opportunity was his. If he never trusted and obeyed, he will have all eternity to regret it.

What opportunities has God placed before you? Are you taking advantage of them, “redeeming the time?”

— Justin, TX

“I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (John 9:4,5.)

“AS FAR AS THE EAST IS FROM THE WEST”

By Milton Smith

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” (Psalm 103:12.)

In this world, nothing could be farther removed than the “east is from the west.” And as the poet has written, “never the twain shall meet.” This is how far God has removed a person's sins from him the moment he stands pardoned through Christ's blood. Other passages in the Bible declare that our sins are cast behind God's back, cast into the depths of the sea, and remembered no more. In other words, they are gone!

Charles Spurgeon once wrote: “Our sins are removed from us by a miracle of love. What a load to move, yet it is removed so far that the distance cannot be measured.” A person could never lift the burden of sin from off his back by his own power and volition. Only God can perform this task. Yet each person's sins are his own doing. It has been said that one's sins are the only thing that are truly his own. If man could remove his own guilt of sin, the death of Jesus would have been the most futile and useless act in history (not to mention a waste of time). As the prophet Isaiah looked to the coming of mankind's Redeemer, he wrote, “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him . . . and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:5,6.)

Paul wrote in Romans 5:8, “But God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The prophet Isaiah knew this, and though he lived many years before Christ's flesh, his inspired pen anticipated Jesus's saving work as though it had already been accomplished. In the same manner, the psalmist wrote, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” (Psalm 103:12.)

Through the Lord's death, He satisfied all the demands involved with perfect forgiveness.

To sinners everywhere, Jesus says, “Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28.) The removal of the guilt of sin is the most beautiful and peaceful rest a human being can experience in this life.

— Tulsa, OK

TRUE TREASURE

By David Deffenbaugh

Economic and financial specialists talk about “economic indicators” that tell us whether things are going to get better or worse. Did you know that Jesus also talked about investing and economic indicators? Really. Jesus warned about falling stock markets and failing corporations. No, not in exactly those words. Instead, He spoke about thieves, moths and rust. (Matthew 6:19-21.) Those were the threats to financial investments in His day just like corporation executives and panic-driven stock markets can have a devastating effect on mutual funds and 401K’s today.

Jesus said that a much better, much safer investment than treasures on earth are treasures in heaven. Just exactly how does one invest in heaven. What’s the ticker symbol on the New York Stock Exchange for heaven? (HEAV?) Let’s just say this is a unique investment opportunity. There’s not another like it. A stock broker won’t be able to tell you about it either.

The Bible, though, explains it quite clearly: “. . . give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” (Matthew 19:21.) “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, not to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come.” (1 Timothy 6:17-19.)

Using one’s earthly treasure to care for those in need and to do good is how treasures are laid up in heaven. Is that really a good investment? Let’s talk about return on investment. How about worth that exceeds all the world’s wealth combined? (Matthew 16:26.) How about a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? (2 Corinthians 4:17.)

This also serves as an economic indicator. It is the location of our treasure that identifies our heart’s home. (Matthew 6:21.) We may say or claim or wish that our heart is in the right place, but one sure-fire way to find out is to see where our treasure is going. Our heart will follow our treasure.

How’s that for an economic indicator?

— Paragould, AR

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:19,20.)

EDITORIAL . . .

ENOUGH WITH THE NONSENSE!

By Dalton Key

With all the confusion these days about the meaning of words, the shifting sands of pronoun usage, and what anybody really means by the language they choose to use, it might seem that truth no longer matters - if it even exists at all. But never forget: truth does exist, still; and it can be understood and agreed upon.

When Jesus promised, “you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” He provided the much-needed answer to so many questions troubling us today. (John 8:32.) These few words from the lips of our Lord make it clear that truth - absolute truth - exists and can be known.

It may seem odd, at least in light of more modern philosophy, that Christ did not speak of this ideology or that ideology. He spoke openly, unabashedly, of truth; and of truth which is available to be understood.

The inspired writers of the New Testament continued this same attitude toward truth. To the Ephesian brethren Paul wrote, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” (Ephesians 5:17.) He commended the early spiritual training of Timothy, his own son in the faith, by urging, “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:14,15.)

Take note of Peter’s words as well. He allowed little sympathy for those “untaught and unstable people” who were twisting the inspired Scriptures “to their own destruction.” (2 Peter 3:16.) Though Peter recognized there were in God’s Word “some things hard to be understood,” he nonetheless expected his readers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:16,18.)

Inspired New Testament writers did not pen their letters as discussions of this interpretation compared with that interpretation. They wrote, and wrote of scriptural truth which could be learned, understood and agreed upon.

Paul never suggested that we all have the right to handle truth as we choose; he never spoke of truth as being absolute while our understanding of it ever remaining relative; he never sacrificed truth at the altar of the latest poll-tested, politically correct propaganda. No, the peerless apostle expected workmen in the “word of truth” to rightly divide it, to handle it aright. (2 Timothy 2:15, NKJV, ASV.)

Truth, and absolute truth at that, could be learned and understood, known and handled aright in the first century. Are we to believe the same is not possible for those of us living in the twenty-first century?

For those in love with freedom, only the truth will suffice. Enough with the nonsense! Let’s all insist upon, and unite upon, the truth!



HAS EVANGELISM FAILED?

By Hardeman Nichols

On the heels of such fantastic results came the chilling effects of persecution, which caused the Jerusalem church, except for the apostles, to scatter in search of refuge elsewhere. Jesus had forewarned, “because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.” (Matthew 24:12.)

Some may have concluded, “Evangelism has failed!” Evangelism does not fail. In the parable of the sower, it was not the seed that failed. The seed was “incorruptible.” (1 Peter 1:23-25.) The trouble was the soil. (Luke 8:11-15.) If those who hear fail to obey, the failure is theirs, not that of the seed. The Bible urges, “receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” (James 1:21.)

Our duty is to evangelize. “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mark 16:15.) In giving this commission, Jesus knew some would reject it so He added, “He who believes and is baptized will be

saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

Evangelism does not fail. It is more imperative that we do not fail in evangelism! God has assured, “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth the bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:10-11.) - (1928-2022)

There have been times when the Gospel did not produce the desired results. Instead of large numbers turning to the Lord, the opposite occurred. People heard and walked away unmoved or worse yet, they rejected the truth and persecuted the ones who came to teach them the saving message of the cross.

The apostles knew occasions like that. Not all of their preaching resulted in three thousand being baptized as on the day of Pentecost. For a while, everyone in the church was praising God as they were “having favor with all the people.” (Acts 2:47.) That favor no doubt made it easier to have the marvelous harvests on that great beginning.

Soon, “believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.” (Acts 5:14.) Luke says, “The word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:7.)

OUR SPIRIT REQUIRES SPECIAL ATTENTION

By Wayne Robbins

In Hebrews chapter twelve and verse nine we are told that God is the Father of spirits. That of course refers to the divine spirit that dwells in each of us, given to us at our creation. Now, like begets like. So, our spirits bear the image of God, our creator. For instance, God is eternal (1 Timothy 1:17), so our spirit is eternal. God has reasoning capabilities; we too can think, reason, know, and make choices. (1 Corinthians 2:11.)

When we die, where does our spirit go? We are told that “. . . the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7.) What will God do with our spirit? He will judge it. (Hebrews 9:27.) That means that we have this short time on earth to get ready for our spirit’s return back to God for judgement.

Our spirit’s image must bear the image of Christ in order to be judged worthy of heaven. (1 Peter 2:21; Galatians 2:20.) Therefore, we must give special attention to the spirit and set our affections on things above, seeking the things of the Spirit. (Colossians 3:1-2.) We must read and study the Holy Spirit’s word to be transformed into the image of Christ. (2 Corinthians 3:18; Rom. 12:2.) If we live by the words of the Spirit, we will be judged worthy to live with God eternally. (Rom. 8:13.) But if we live by the flesh we will be condemned to a fiery pit in outer darkness. (Matthew 25:30.)

Therefore, let us give special attention to the spirit within.

— Arkansas City, KS

“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is

life and peace.” (Romans 8:6.)

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