

BOLDLY DECLARE WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

By Danny Tunnell

In Ken Burns' documentary on the national parks, he mentioned that Abraham Lincoln set aside land for all the people. Burns commented, "It is uniquely American that all our citizens are awarded equal ownership of the national parks at birth." Every U.S. citizen owns a part of the 84 million acres of the most stunning landscapes anyone has ever seen!

How many Christians are aware of what they received from God when they were born again or born from above (1 John 3:1-8) and what they have "in Christ." Are they acknowledging every good thing which is in them in Christ Jesus? (Philemon 6.) Do they know the things that are freely given to them of God? (1 Corinthians 2:14.)

Arthur Way (1847-1930) was a Greek scholar and translator. He said, "The key to the gospel is in the prepositions. Little words like: for, with, in, through, and by. These are things you have in Christ." We are not struggling to make it happen but are given by God's grace.

Our identity in Christ is defined by the word of God; things that we are

and have in Christ.

If reading what the Bible says you are in Christ is a drudgery to you, it's because you don't believe it. If you believe it, you will be excited about it! When you really believe what the Bible says you are in Christ, you will rejoice with joy unspeakable (inexpressible) and full of glory. (1 Peter 1:8.) It's always good to read scripture and then act like the Bible is true, because it is true. Everything God says is right, and He does everything He says.

Consider just a few of the over 130 references Paul makes in his letters of how God sees you in Christ. Begin to see yourself as God sees you.

You are an heir of God and a joint-heir with Jesus. (Romans 8:17.) You are strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. (Ephesians 6:10.) You are an over-comer in Him. (1 John 5:4.) In Christ you are a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17.) You are the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21.) You are more than a conqueror through Him. (Romans 8:37.) You have eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

(Romans 6:23.) You have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:14.) You have the exceeding riches of His grace. (Ephesians 2:8.) You have the peace of God. (Philippians 4:7.) You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. (Philippians 4:13.) God always causes you to triumph in Christ. (2 Corinthians 2:14.) In Christ, when you confess your sins, you are forgiven. (1 John 1:9.) You are not condemned. (Romans 8:1.) You are a victor in Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57.) You are created in Christ Jesus unto good works. (Ephesians 2:10.)

Certainly, in Christ Jesus, God has a good plan for your life. (Jeremiah 29:11.) Every time Satan sees a Christian, it reminds him of his defeat.

Anytime we see the words "in Christ," "in Him," "through Him," these are identifying words for the Christian. We need to boldly declare who we are in Christ! Boldness is a confidence with an awareness of Jesus; arrogance is a confidence without an awareness of Jesus.

— Miami, OK

FOREVER BORED?

By Milton Smith

This may sound a little strange to some, but I have actually had the question posed to me on more than one occasion: "Can we live forever and not become bored?" To man's way of thinking, it would be next to impossible to live "forever" and not experience some sort of boredom. It is, of course, imperative that we understand that life on the other side of physical death will be dramatically different than our lives here on earth.

To begin with, there are two main words used for "life" in the Greek. One is bios. We get our word "biology" from this word, and it simply means "alive" as opposed to being dead. It is mainly a technical term used to designate something that has not yet experienced death. Jesus once said, "And this is life eternal, that they might know you as the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." (John 17:3.) Interestingly, the word used here by Jesus for "life" is the Greek word, zoe. Scholars tell us that this word is the nobler of the two

words generally translated "life," and that it is used to express the highest and best of living. Obviously, eternal "zoe" will be exciting, abundant, and thrilling for all those who experience it.

Eternal life is not related to physical time. For example, God is eternal. He has always been. Consequently, there is no sense of time from God's perspective.

Are we to believe that God could ever say, "I'm bored with my own existence?"

The life we will experience on the other side will be a quality of existence that we have never experienced in this temporary, earthly walk. We will never be bored with eternal life any more than God could be bored with his own eternal existence.

There are obviously some things about eternal life that we know nothing about, but we can all rest assured that "boredom" will never play a role in that abundant, never-ending life that

awaits the faithful in Heaven.

— Tulsa, OK

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also . . . I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:1-3, 6.)

"And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'" (Revelation 21:3,4.)

Old Paths

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

WHEN THE COWS WOULDN'T COME HOME

by David Deffenbaugh

Where in the world does a phrase like, "till the cows come home" originate? And what if the cows never do come home? What then? Well, one time they didn't come home and people knew exactly what it meant.

The Philistines, archenemies of Israel for many years, had won a great prize, or least so they thought. They had captured Israel's Ark of the Covenant in battle. There simply was no greater spoil in this longstanding strife. So proud were they of their prize that it went on display in the house of their god, Dagon. After a series of embarrassing incidents with Dagon, a very uncomfortable plague, and a number of deaths, they decided maybe the Ark should return to Israel.

Just to make sure they were not mistaken about the timing and source of this series of misfortunes, they devised a plan that would either verify or falsify their preliminary conclusion. They placed the Ark on a new cart (along with some peculiar golden objects in a box) and specially selected two head of cattle to pull the cart. These cattle were cows that had never been broken to work under a yoke and they had calves still milking. They separated the cows from their calves, hitched them to the cart and pointed them down the road in the direction of Israel.

There's no question what will happen if these cows simply follow their natural instincts; they will bolt back to those calves as quickly as they can, fighting that yoke the whole way. But they didn't. Instead, "the cows went straight in the direction of Bethshemesh along one highway, lowing as they went. They turned neither to the right nor to the left." (1 Samuel 6:12.) There was only one reason those cows didn't come home and the Philistines knew it; instead of following their natural instincts, they were under the direction of God.

Would that more people were more like those cows! Those cows "did not turn aside to the right or to the left." While that was literally true for them, that language is usually reserved in Scripture to describe one who is being faithful to God and His word. It was what God charged Joshua to do as he took the reins of leadership following Moses' death and what Joshua then charged Israel to do near the time of his own death. (Joshua 1:7; 23:6.) It is following one's own instincts and desires that leads a person to the right or the left of God's word.

While God easily overcame the natural instincts of those two milking cows, He does not deal with us the same way. We have to make the choice to submit to God's will and God's direction.

Those cows didn't come home and they wound up a sacrifice to God. (1 Samuel 6:14.) When we overcome our own selfish desires and give our lives over to God, we too become a sacrifice, a living sacrifice, "holy . . . acceptable to God." (Romans 12:1.)

— Paragould, AR

DO YOU HAVE A SALTY TONGUE?

By Richard Dent

Our Savior recognized the importance of salt. In Matthew 5:13 He said, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men."

Remember our speech is to be seasoned with salt. (Colossians 4:6.)

What does this mean for us or our listeners? Note the following characteristics of salt:

1. Salt saves. Before the invention of refrigeration or the practice of canning, salt was used for the preservation of fresh meat and fish. Spiritually, if any saving influence is to come through our speech, we must guard our lips carefully. If we utter a smorgasbord of tasteless trashy words with foul expletives, how can we reach people for God?

2. Salt flavors. Someone said, "Salt is what makes things bad when it isn't in them." Salt can take a bland dish and make it tasty. So it is with our speech. When we belong to Christ, our words can be wholesome and tasteful rather than flat, ugly, and dull.

3. Salt cleanses. Elisha threw salt into the Jericho spring to cleanse it and make the water pure. (2 Kings 2:2-22.) Our speech needs to be cleansed as well. God cannot be pleased with a dirty mouth!

4. Salt de-ices. When ice freezes on a road or sidewalk, we use salt pellets to melt it. So it is when a hard heart interacts with the melting salt of kind words. No wonder Jesus said, "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?" (Mark 9:50.)

5. Salt operates internally. When salt is mixed into food, we can't see what happens. We just know our food tastes better. The change takes place from the inside. Thus, our speech must be controlled from within to be effective. From our thoughts flow our words. Someone put it well: "What you say reveals much . . . what you don't say reveals much more."

A wise man of old said, "Be careful of your thoughts for they may break into words at any time." Solomon wrote, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips." (Proverbs 4:23,24.)

Other tidbits of wisdom: "Every time you speak, your mind is on parade." "Words are like medicine; they should be measured with care, for an overdose may hurt." "When your thoughts run riot, your tongue is apt to join the crowd." "Many things are opened by mistake, but none so frequently as the mouth."

— Liberal, KS

PETTING A PORCUPINE

By Dalton Key

Would you consider yourself a kind person? one who encourages rather than discourages? one who builds up rather than tearing down? one who forgives and forgets rather than bitterly holding on to past grudges?

Far too many of us feel rejected and lonely simply because we have wasted a lifetime building walls instead of bridges. Is it any wonder why find ourselves distant and disconnected from everyone surrounding us?

Have you ever tried petting a porcupine?

All healthy relationships thrive in an atmosphere of understanding and mutual forbearance, but continual, carping criticism does nothing but destroy. Pettiness and selfishness can easily drive deadly spikes into the very heart of any otherwise-cooperative effort.

The Bible instructs, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31,32.)

And again Scripture admonishes, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:8,9.)

And still again, "With all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:2,3.)

In short, as God's children, we are expected to get along with one another; to be kind and forgiving towards one another; to have genuine compassion for one another; to forbear with one another "in love."

We get along best when we're less selfish and more selfless; less critical and more understanding; less like the world and more like Christ.

And what is this, but the "golden rule" in practice? (Matthew 7:12.) We would have others show kindness to us. We would have others minimize our weaknesses and instead emphasize and encourage our strengths. Should we not then treat others as we would have them treat us?

Christian brother and sister, show a little kindness! It costs nothing and pays the richest of dividends.

EDITORIAL . . .

OF EMPTY KETTLES AND EMPTY HEADS

By Dalton Key

Inspiration affords no sympathy for the self-inflated ego. Of heaven's seven abominations, a "proud look" heads the list. (Proverbs 6:17.) The first of the Lord's Beatitudes commends those who exemplify a Christ-like poverty of spirit. (Matthew 5:3.)

Scripture, both Old and New, is clear: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18.) "If anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." (Galatians 6:3.) "Love does not parade itself, is not puffed up." (1 Corinthians 13:4.) "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5.) "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion." (Romans 12:16.)



No one enjoys the company of overbearing, self-absorbed know-it-alls, the conversation-stealing blowhards so inflated with self-worth that little oxygen is left in the room for anyone else and who seem unsure how the world managed to operate before they came along; the type of self-aggrandizing braggarts who feel certain that had they not been born, everyone else would have been left wondering why!

Lord Chesterfield, in his oft-quoted work, Letters To His Son, offers this wise, yet seldom-heeded advice: "Never seem more learned than the people you are with. Wear your learning like a pocket watch and keep it hidden. Do not pull it out to count the hours, but give the time when you are asked." This goes hand in hand with the inspired wisdom of James, who wrote, "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." (James 1:19.)

Yes, wisdom comes from learning when to be silent as well as when to speak up. Just as an empty kettle clangs the loudest, so an empty head rattles on and on . . . and on . . . and on.

Live like Jesus, the Son of Man who was "gentle and lowly in heart." (Matthew 11:29.) Stay humble. "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips." (Proverbs 27:2.) And never forget: those people who resort to constantly selling themselves usually market a pitifully poor product.

CRAVING APPROVAL

By Joe Slater

We like to be liked and love to be loved. It's normal. And like most normal things, we can carry it to unhealthy extremes. How many "likes" did I get on my Facebook post? Only fourteen? Woe is me!

The earliest Christians in Jerusalem were "praising God and having favor with all the people." (Acts 2:47.) The general population looked on those disciples approvingly as they saw them living reverently before God and taking care of the needy. (2:42-45.) Does our example today encourage our community's approval? "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16.)

Before long, however, those positive feelings turned into bitter opposition and persecution. Proclaiming the risen Jesus as the Messiah didn't set well with the

religious elite. How disappointing! Our ancient brethren, however, didn't despair, nor did they modify their message or their conduct. Even when beaten, they thanked God for the privilege of suffering for Jesus. (Acts 5:41.)

When the world looks favorably upon you as you do right, that's icing on the cake! But don't allow yourself to develop an unhealthy craving for people's approval. Remember these words from Jesus: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets." (Luke 6:26.)

"For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10.)

— Justin, TX

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is

not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:15-17.)

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2.)

FORGIVING AND NEEDING FORGIVENESS

By Joe Dale Wilson

One of the greatest needs of mankind is to be forgiven. All of us sin and come short of God's glory. (Romans 3:23.) The wages of our sins separate us from God, but God's amazing grace brings forgiveness. (Romans 6:23.) It should move the world to learn of the great love that God has shown us. (Romans 5:8,9.)

Yet there is a problem in man receiving forgiveness from God. Jesus simply put it, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14,15.)

Jesus wants us to know that our forgiveness is conditional. Just because Jesus died for everyone does not mean everyone is forgiven. If we are not of a forgiving nature, then we will not be forgiven. We can give our time, money, and our talent to the Lord's Cause and not be saved because we have been bitter and held grudges against our neighbors or family. We can attend worship services every time the doors of the church house are open, but if we have not forgiven others from our heart we will not be forgiven. (Matthew 18:35.) Jesus even

tells us if we are worshipping God and remember that someone has something against us, we are to be reconciled before our worship will be accepted. (Matthew 5:23,24.) He also told us if our brother/neighbor has done us harm we are to go to them alone to work it out. (Matthew 18:15.) If both people believe the Bible and practice Matthew 5 and Matthew 18, they will meet halfway between their houses!

Without forgiving others we will never be forgiven! The inspired apostle Paul wrote, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32.)

Many people in our world are mean to those they have not forgiven. They allow anger to grow to malice and malice to vengeance or even murder. God says, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." (Romans 12:19.) He really brings the point home through John: "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3:15.) The American Standard uses "hate" with "eth" on the end of it to convey the idea

of the original language, "continue to hate." If there are people with whom a person cannot be with in the same room, or walk on the same side of the street, or speak civilly, then there is a problem in the forgiveness practice of the person with the bitter feelings. It is not a matter of "rights" but a matter of doing right by forgiving.

Do yourself a big favor health-wise and spiritually-wise by forgiving. Jesus' attitude should be our attitude: "Father, forgive them . . ." (Luke 23:34.)

— Vernon, TX

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