

# THE LOWER LIGHTS

Alan Jones, Editor  
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**"Brightly beams our Father's mercy  
from the lighthouse evermore;  
But to us He gives the keeping  
of the lights along the shore."**

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## RESOLUTIONS \* 2002 \*

"Happy New Year!!" No sooner than we heard these words of celebration, we heard talk of "resolutions". Perhaps we made a few ourselves. Advertisements for weight loss and exercise paid for all the bowl games, as these businesses tried to cash in on the viewer's commitments.

What prompts people to think more about themselves and their lives, to see changes that need to be made, and to resolve to change them at New Years? I believe this is caused by a combination of two things, 1) a realization that time is passing by, and 2) the desire to improve oneself (in appearance, health, or behavior) in order to live a better, happier life. Let God's Word show you how that these motivations should cause you to make the most important resolutions of all, spiritual resolutions.

### Time in a Bottle?

The classic song "Time in a Bottle" makes a wish and then explains the reason for the wish:

"If I could put time in a bottle, the first thing that I'd like to do, is save every day 'til eternity passes away just to spend them with you. You know, there never seems to be enough time to do the things you want to do once you find them..."

The author of these words recognized that time was getting away from him and that there just wasn't enough of it to devote to what he found fulfilling. He wished to be able to put time in a bottle and then spend every day with the woman he loved, since in her he found supreme happiness.

No matter how much we wish to store time in a bottle, we cannot contain it and it gets away

from us. 2001 is gone. We used that year up and we'll never have it to spend again. An even more sobering thought is that time will keep passing until we have no more time left to spend. Cemeteries all around us point out that time cannot be "bottled". Time has run out for many. It is running out on us. Let us ask this prayer of God, "Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the extent of my days, Let me know how transient I am." (Ps 39:4).

### True Happiness?

You cannot even begin to live wisely until you realize that your days are numbered (Ps 90:12). Only then will you make and carry out plans to make the most both of yourself and your time. Have you been making decisions and living your life in view of your approaching death? If not, isn't it about time to start?

Solomon, with God's guidance, wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, a book about how to live life to the fullest, to be happy. He wanted to make the most of the brief time, which he had "under the sun". He was well aware that there is a "time to be born, and a time to die" (3:2) and his desire was to find the most fulfilling way to spend his time (2:13).

The King searched for true happiness in wisdom (1:16-18), entertainment (2:1-2), possessions (2:4-11), and work (2:18-22), but all of these things he labeled "vanity" because trying to find fulfillment in them was like trying to catch the wind. He was left frustrated and empty. Above all else, it was death, which made the joy of these pursuits hollow.

(Continued on the back page)

Do you realize what Solomon realized? If your happiness is in learning, have you thought that you will die as the uneducated man? Who will remember how smart you were? (2:15-16) If you're living for the weekend and entertainment, what will those laughs do for you after you're dead? (2:2) If you're looking for satisfaction in possessions, will you ever have enough? (5:10), what will happen if you lose them? (5:13-14), and when you die, will you be able to take them with you? (5:15-16). If work is your "life", you may work hard with great genius, but for what? To leave it to someone who hasn't worked for it and may foolishly squander it? (2:18-21).

Solomon's desire to live life to its fullest led him to God. He concluded, "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole of man. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it be good or evil." (12:13-14).

By respecting your Creator and living, as He would have you to live, you, too, will find true happiness now which will last beyond the grave. You will be spared the disappointments and sorrows, which come from turning your life into a game of "trivial pursuit". You will see that the secret to happiness is God-satisfaction, not self-satisfaction.

## Resolve?

As you begin this new year, you may have plans to change and enrich your life. You may have committed to diet and exercise your physical man. You may be intending to further educate your mental man. You may be planning to make new friendships and to strengthen existing ones for your social man. But, what are you doing for your spiritual man, the part of you that will go on after the physical man has returned to the dust, the mental man has studied his last book, and the social man has severed all earth-ties?

Won't you resolve to study the Bible and obey God in 2002? You will truly enjoy a Happy New Year, regardless of what may happen to you physically, mentally, and socially.

We would like to invite you to take a Bible study course by mail to aid you in your resolution to give some much needed attention to your soul.

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Write to us at: P.O. Box 86-233  
Westland, MI 48186

E-mail us at our website: [www.prchurchofchrist.org](http://www.prchurchofchrist.org)

There is no cost or obligation. Or, if you would prefer to invite us into your home for a personal Bible study, we would be delighted to come.

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## I STAND AMAZED

If you have never heard the story of Jesus, you will find it simply amazing. If you have heard the story of Jesus a million times, you will be amazed once more as I tell it to you using a medley of Scripture:

**Jesus Came Into the World As a Man.** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being... Although He existed in the form of God, (He) did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself...being made in the likeness of men... Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself also partook of the same... The Word became flesh and dwelt among us., and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (Jn 1:1-3, Phil 2:6, Heb 2:14; Jn 1:14)

**Jesus Suffered and Died for Man.** The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many... And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross... He knelt down and began to pray, saying, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done."...And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground... And they (the Jewish council) all condemned Him to be deserving of death. And some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, "Prophecy!" And the officers received Him with slaps in the face... And wishing to satisfy the multitude, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and

after having Jesus scourged, he delivered Him to be crucified... And they (the Roman soldiers) dressed Him up in purple, and after weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on Him; and they began to acclaim Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" And they kept beating His head with a reed and spitting at Him, and kneeling and bowing before Him. And after they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, and put His garments on Him. And they led Him out to crucify Him. (Mt 20:28; Phil 2:8; Lk 22:41-42,44; Mk 14:64-65; 15:15, 17-20)

**Jesus Died for Sinners.** For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God... He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed... For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man, someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (1 Pet 3:18; Isa 53:5; Rom 5:6-8)

How amazing it is that Jesus came- even more that He suffered and died- but the ultimate amazement is that He died for unworthy sinners like you and I!! As songwriter Charles Gabriel wrote,

"I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene, And wonder how He could love me, a sinner, condemned, unclean.

How marvelous! How wonderful! And my song shall ever be: How marvelous! How wonderful! Is my Savior's love for me!"

## WHAT EFFECT SHOULD THE STORY OF JESUS HAVE ON YOU?

The story of Jesus should not only amaze you, it should move you. Several years ago, I went to a woman's home once a week to show her some Bible filmstrips. One night I showed her a filmstrip which vividly portrayed the death of Jesus. As we looked at a frame which pictured Jesus' outstretched arms on the cross, we heard the sound of the nails being driven into his hands. The filmstrip soon ended. The woman turned on the lights and, without a word about what we had seen and heard, began serving popcorn and drinks. The "show" was over and it was time for refreshments and socializing. I shuddered at how anyone could be so unaffected by Jesus' sacrifice.

Before His death, Jesus said that His death would be like a magnet to draw men to Him. As He indicated the kind of death He was facing, he said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." (Jn 12:32-33). The death of Jesus cries out for man to respond! Jesus' demonstration of love should compel men to love Him back. As John simply put it, "We love because He first loved us." (1 Jn 4:19)

What should a man's love for Jesus motivate him to do? Paul wrote, "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." (2 Cor 5:14-15) He de-scribed his own grateful surrender to Jesus this way, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life

which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me." (Gal 2:20)

Anyone who truly appreciates the magnitude of the love of Jesus will find that they are left with no other choice than to surrender their will and their life to Him. How can they do any less?

A eunuch from Ethiopia was reading a passage of Scripture which he did not understand, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; as a lamb before its shearers is silent, So He does not open His mouth. In humiliation His judgment was taken away; who shall relate His generation? For His life is removed from the earth." Philip began at this Scripture and preached to him Jesus. The eunuch then understood it was Jesus who went quietly and without protest to His death, and that Jesus had died for him. As soon as they came to some water, he was baptized, to receive the forgiveness provided by Jesus' death. He buried the old man of sin in water and rose to walk in newness of life, surrendering his will and his life to the One who delivered Himself up for him. (Acts 8:26-39; Acts 22:16; Rom 6:3-4)

What about you? Has the story of Jesus been just heart warming entertainment to you? Won't you let it be the life-changing message God intended for it to be? As the eunuch did, respond with love to Jesus who first loved you. Make a lifetime commitment to live for Him who died for you. Then spend a lifetime learning the length, height, and depth of Jesus' love. (Eph 3:18-19)

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## JESUS AND THE SCRIPTURES

How should we view the Scriptures? How should we interpret the Scriptures? According to a poll taken by LIFE magazine in December of 1998, 67% of Americans believe that the Scriptures are nothing more than the words of men. With the percentage so high, obviously many "Christians" share this view. Surely it is no wonder then that there is not a great deal of concern about interpretation of Scripture among "Christians" and the prevailing view is that one interpretation is as good as another. Why should interpretation matter, if the Scriptures are not from God, but men anyway?

However, all within "Christianity" claim to be following Jesus. Therefore, they should be prepared to imitate His view of the Scriptures and His manner of interpreting them. If not, they should give up any pretense of following Him at all.

Jesus believed that O.T. writers such as David did not speak for themselves, but spoke "in the Holy Spirit" (Mk 12:36). So which "Christian" will maintain that the Scriptures are purely a product of the pens of men?

Since Jesus believed the Scriptures were inspired, He believed they were true. He taught that Jonah being swallowed by a whale was an historical event (Mt 12:39-40). Which "Christian" will say that all accounts of miracles in the Bible are myths?

Jesus also accepted another logical consequence of the Scriptures being spoken from the mouth of God- that they therefore speak to men with the authority of God. When He was asked various spiritual questions, He referred men to the Scriptures for THE answer (e.g. Mt 19:3-6; Lk

10:25-28). Which "Christian" then will say that one's "Church", creed, priest, preacher, or family is the place to turn for spiritual direction?

As Jesus answered men from Scripture, He used the "book, chapter and verse", "proof-text" approach to establish God's will on a matter. He hung arguments on one word (Mk 12:35-37, "Lord"; Jn 10:33-36, "gods", and even on the tense of a verb, "I am", Mk 12:18-27). Which "Christian" will call such an approach to the Scriptures "technical", "nit-picky", or "legalistic"?

Finally, Jesus taught the harmony of the Scriptures. He showed the Devil that his interpretation of Ps 91:11,12 must be incorrect because it contradicted Dt 6:16 (Mt 4:5-7). By this, He pointed out that the "context" of Scripture was crucial to its interpretation and that the "context" of any Scripture includes all the rest of Scripture. Which "Christian" will uphold an interpretation of a passage which contradicts another passage?

So, though we live in a society where most do not believe the Scriptures are the Word of God may we view the Scriptures as Jesus did, as inspired and therefore true and the authoritative answer to every question. Though our neighbors may say that interpretation does not matter, may we, as Jesus, "hang on every word", understanding it in the context in which it was said and the context of all Scripture.

Let us either truly follow Jesus or stop pretending that we are, when in reality, we are not. May we truly be "Christians" or stop using and abusing His Name.

## LENT FISH SPECIALS

Restaurants all around metro Detroit are offering fish specials to attract those who, in observance of Lent, must abstain from "meat", but are allowed to eat fish. Many questions come to mind beginning with, "Who said fish is not meat?", Why aren't "Christians" allowed to eat meat?, and "What is Lent?"

Neither Lent nor the "holy" day of Easter which it precedes are found in Scripture. Therefore, they came from men and not Christ. The origin of Lent dates back to the A.D. 300's when a period of fasting and repentance for forty days before Easter was introduced. It was hoped that Lent would prepare the worshipper for Easter and have some lasting effect throughout the year. The restriction of food was designed to help the "Christian" subdue his sinful appetites.

Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, foretold that men would "advocate abstaining from foods" (1 Tim 4:3), such as required by the Catholic Church and some Protestant Churches at Lent. Paul was very plain in his condemnation of men who would impose such dietary requirements:

**They have fallen away (apostatized) from the faith** (1 Tim 4:1). The New Testament is meant by Jesus to be the one faith (Eph 4:4), once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Lent is not part of the faith. Those who added it and those who observe it are doing so outside the authority of "the faith" and thus have left it.

**They have paid attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons** (1 Tim 4:1). Simply put, Lent and its laws are from the Devil and not God.

**They are hypocritical liars with seared consciences** (1 Tim 4:2). For men to command something which God has not commanded is for them to lie, for they issue their laws in His Name, when He has not spoken! These men are hypocrites, for their actions are supposedly out of respect for God, when, in reality, they are the height of disrespect! And, they have the gall to speak "for God" without feeling guilty about it for their consciences are seared.

The Holy Spirit tells us the truth about eating meats. God has created all foods to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. Nothing is to be rejected. All food is set apart for man's use by God's Word and by man's prayer of thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:3-4).

"Do not taste" rules appear to have wisdom, but do nothing to suppress man's sinful appetites. They are commands of men and not God and Christians should not submit to them (Col 2:20-23).

It is not the foods that go into a man which defile him, but the words and actions which come out of his evil heart. Therefore, it is his thoughts, not his diet which must be changed if he is to repent (Mk 7:18-23). Eating fish specials during Lent will not draw a man closer to God and righteousness

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**No 10**

**DEADLINE: APRIL 15<sup>TH</sup>**

I don't have to explain the title of this article. This deadline is all too fresh in everyone's mind. As usual, the main post offices extended their collection hours until midnight for the many tax filers who waited until the last minute to submit their returns. The 11 o'clock news, as they do every year, showed a steady stream of cars at the post office.

Why do you suppose the Internal Revenue Service sets a deadline for tax filing? If they didn't, how many tax returns would still not be filed come April 16<sup>th</sup>? The IRS understands what we all do, that men are procrastinators. Deadlines have to be set as motivators to action. If deadlines were not set, when would customers pay their bills? When would students prepare their term papers? When would invited guests R.S.V.P?

God created man, so He knows Him well. He gives man the spiritual motivator of a deadline. Jesus said, "We must work the works of Him that sent Me, as long as it is day; night is coming, when no man can work." (Jn 9:4). Yes, death is a certain as taxes. What is will happen then? Judgment. "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes the judgment." (Heb 9:27)

Sam Walton, founder of Walmart, was one of the richest men who ever lived. Yet, he died. Money couldn't stop him from keeping this appointment (cp. Ps 49:6-12). David prayed, "Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the extent of my days, let me know how transient I am" (Ps 39:4). Moses prayed that since life is short (70-80 years), God might teach man to live wisely (Ps 90:10,12).

Those who go through life sometimes denying death, at other times fearing it, live a most miserable and purposeless existence. Those who accept God's deadline and prepare for judgment find what the whole (purpose) of man is, to fear God and keep His commandments. Therefore, they are able to find happiness in a world that is otherwise vain (Eccl 12:13-14; read the whole book!)

God has set another deadline and it is possible that it, rather than death, might end our life on earth. Jesus is coming and when He does "the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up" (2 Pet 3:10). When Jesus brings this world to an end, judgment will occur. Those who haven't obeyed His gospel will be eternally separated from Him and His glory. At the same time, His saints will glorify Him, as they begin an eternity of marveling in His presence (2 Thess 1:7-10; Mt 25:31-46).

How can we be so certain of this deadline? The same *word* God spoke to create the world and destroy it with a flood is the *word* which He has spoken concerning the world's destruction by fire and the destruction of the ungodly men (2 Pet 3:1-7). Also, the *resurrection of Jesus*, which is backed by abundant evidence, is God's "guarantee" that His Son will be the world's Judge (Acts 17:31).

You face a deadline as certain as April 15<sup>th</sup>. Either your death or the coming of Jesus will end your activity on earth and bring you to judgment.

## **THE DEADLINE IS REAL; THE TIME OF IT IS UNKNOWN**

The farmer had it all planned. He had raised a bumper crop. In fact the harvest was so great, his first priority was to build new barns to hold it all. Once the harvest was stored, he would just kick back, relax, and take it easy for many years. So he thought. He never built the barns. He died! Jesus illustrated by this parable, not only the folly of putting great stock in riches, but also the uncertainty of life (Lk 12:16-21). Life is not only limited, but no one knows how much time they have (Eccl 9:12).

Although generally we may expect to live 70-80 years, this may not be true of us individually. Who has not known personally of the death of a child? What are you doing about your relationship with God? Like the rich farmer, this night your soul could be required. Will you be left in the position of the man on a life insurance commercial who said to the angel taking him from the earth, "I always thought I would have more time!"? The uncertainty of life should cause our relationship with God to become a pressing matter, a priority. Who knows

when your deadline might come? Or mine? Surely God has designed it this way to keep us from following our natural tendency to procrastination.

The deadline of Jesus' coming is equally uncertain. What thief sends notice to the property owner of his planned break-in? What woman knows the moment when her labor pains will begin? Suddenly, with surprise, as a thief and as labor pains, Jesus will come to end the world and bring you and all men to judgment (1 Thess 5:1-3). We must live in a constant state of readiness (Mt 25:1-13)

Are you prepared for death? For Jesus' return? If the deadline of April 15<sup>th</sup> and the possibility of financial penalty is enough to motivate you to file your tax return, shouldn't God's unknown deadline and the penalty of suffering eternally far from His presence in hell cause you to do something **immediately** to prepare your soul for judgment?

**We invite you to hear sermons preached by**

**Larry Curry of West Lafayette, IN**

**which will help you to prepare for your deadline:**

**Sunday, April 28<sup>th</sup> @ 10 AM**

**Monday- Friday, April 29<sup>th</sup> – May 3<sup>rd</sup> @ 7:30 PM**

**We continue to offer Bible study to you in your home, by mail, or on-line @**

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Volume 1

May, 2002

No 11

## GOD-FEARING MAN LOST!!

### *YES, IT IS POSSIBLE!*

There is a widespread belief that you just have to be a good moral person to go to heaven. If on the one hand you don't lie, steal, drink, cuss, or run around on your spouse, while on the other hand you are a good worker at the factory or at home, a good husband or wife, a good parent, a good neighbor, and a good citizen, some day you'll walk through the pearly gates. However, notice what the Scriptures say concerning a Roman centurion named Cornelius (Acts 10 and 11).

Cornelius was a devout man- that is, one who had reverence for God and expressed it in his daily life. He led his family in such a way that they, too, had reverence. This centurion gave money to the needy and prayed constantly. His prayers especially caught the attention of God and were a continual reminder to Him of this good man. His servants described this Gentile man as righteous and God-fearing, well spoken of by the whole nation of the Jews (Acts 10:1-2, 4, 22, 33).

However, this good man was warned by an angel of God in a vision to send for Peter to hear words by which he and his family would be *saved* (Acts 10:3-6, 22; 11:14). Yes, *Cornelius was lost!*

### *LOST MAN HEARS THE GOOD NEWS*

Cornelius was lost because he was a sinner, just like all men (Rom 3:23). As good as he was, he was not "good enough" to be saved. The centurion needed forgiveness just as much as Saul, the persecutor of Christians (Acts 9). But, because of

his devotion to God, Cornelius was privileged to be the first Gentile to be offered salvation in Jesus.

Because Peter also had a vision from God, as well as instruction from the Holy Spirit, he went to Cornelius' house. When Cornelius then related his vision, Peter concluded, "God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him". He then began to preach to the eager audience of Cornelius and his family and friends the same "good news" which God sent to the Jews (Acts 10:33-36).

Peter gave eyewitness testimony to Jesus' miracles. He then described how Jesus was crucified by the very Jews who had seen Him work these miracles. However, Peter testified, God raised Jesus from death three days later. The eyewitness recalled how the risen Jesus commanded him and the other apostles to preach that Jesus is the God-appointed Judge of all men. Finally, Peter showed that Jesus had fulfilled the predictions of the O.T. Scriptures about the Christ (King). He said all who believed in Him (in view of the above evidence) would receive the forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:37-43)...(see p. 2)

### *LOST MAN SAVED*

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came upon the listening Gentiles as He did upon the Jews earlier (Acts 2). This was the ultimate proof to Peter, the other Jews who witnessed it, and to the Jews who heard about it that "to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18).

Since God had given the Gentiles the same gift which he had given the Jews (Acts 11:17), Peter asked his fellow Jewish brethren, "No one can forbid the water, can they, that these should not be baptized?" (Acts 10:47). There was no objection and Peter commanded them to be baptized (Acts 10:48). Cornelius and his family were good moral people, but still they, as Saul, had to be immersed in water to wash away their sins (Acts 22:16).

### *WHAT ABOUT YOU?*

Undoubtedly, most of you who are reading this are good people. If you did not have any interest in God or His Word, you would have already filed this bulletin in the trash can. You probably are good to your family, your neighbor, and your country. You have some respect for God and may even pray to Him and attend church services.

However, you must realize that, as good as you may be, you are not perfect. One sin will cause you to fall short of a totally righteous and holy God. Therefore, you stand in need of His grace and mercy.

God's grace and mercy has been extended in the "good news" of Jesus Christ. Have you studied and considered the evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?

If not, take the time to discover and meditate on the salvation of God, prophesied in the O.T., fulfilled and revealed in the N.T., centering around the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

When you come to accept and appreciate the gospel story, as Cornelius, you will see that your goodness is not good enough. Your sin put Jesus on the cross. Your hope is not in your works, but in His forgiveness. Stop trusting in yourself and place your trust in God and His Son. If you have never trusted in Jesus enough to be baptized, you are lost. Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins. Good people will not go to heaven- only those who, as Cornelius, in faith accept God's grace by meeting His conditions of forgiveness- who wash their robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:13-17).

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If we can serve as Peter to you and explain the gospel of Christ so that you may believe, be baptized, and be saved just as Cornelius, please get in touch with us:

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## RELIGIOUS SURVEY: WHY DO YOU GO TO YOUR CHURCH?

**IT IS THE CLOSEST CHURCH TO MY HOUSE \_\_\_\_\_**

**I REALLY LIKE THE PREACHER- HE HAS A GREAT PERSONALITY \_\_\_\_\_**

**THE PREACHER HAS AN EXCELLENT SERMON DELIVERY \_\_\_\_\_**

**I ENJOY ALL THE CHURCH SOCIAL ACTIVITIES \_\_\_\_\_**

**THE CHURCH TEACHES WHAT I BELIEVE \_\_\_\_\_**

**I'VE GONE THERE ALL MY LIFE \_\_\_\_\_**

**PARENTS OR OTHER RELATIVES ARE/WERE MEMBERS THERE \_\_\_\_\_**

CHECK AS MANY ANSWERS AS YOU LIKE AND THEN READ BELOW

## CHURCH SHOPPING

It is commonly accepted that men are free to join the church of their choice. So, men often shop for a church like they shop for groceries. People looking for a grocery store look at such things as price, quality, service, and convenience and choose a store that has what they are looking for. Or perhaps they simply choose to buy their groceries where their parents buy/bought them. They go there out of habit and because they are familiar with where everything is. Some people shop for the church which has what they are looking for. Others just stick with the one that they've grown up in, where their family is, and where everyone and everything is familiar. Let's examine the choices in the survey above in light of the Scriptures.

Should I choose a church because it is close to my house? Jeroboam knew that men loved convenience. So when he changed the worship of Israel from the worship of golden calves, he put one

in the northern part of his kingdom (at Dan) and one in the southern part of his kingdom (at Bethel) and then told the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem." They went to these more convenient sites and "this thing became a sin", a sin which eventually led to the destruction of Israel (1 Kgs 12:28-30). The question must not be, "Is the church convenient?", but "Is the church worshipping and teaching in a way which is right with God?"

Is the magnetic personality of the preacher what should draw me to a church? To follow men instead of Jesus is folly. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church who had wrongly set their preachers up on a pedestal, "Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor 1:13). Substitute your preacher's name for Paul's in these questions and the answers will be the same. One should not be a part of a church because of any man. (Con't on Back Page)

## "CHURCH SHOPPING" CON'T

My preacher is such a dynamic speaker. Should this be the basis of my choice of a church? Paul said he was not a great orator, but stood before men with fear and trembling. The power of his preaching was not in how he spoke, but in what he spoke about- Jesus and Him crucified, that his hearer's faith would not rest on his wisdom, but on the power of God (1 Cor 2:1-5). He warned of smooth talkers who would deceive people into believing something other than the gospel (Rom 16:17-18). We must look for a church where the preacher delivers God's truth. How he delivers it is not of importance.

Should I look for a church which has a fellowship hall in which to eat dinner? A gymnasium/family life center in which to play basketball or watch plays? A bus in which to ride to the amusement park? After Jesus miraculously fed 5000, they came looking for Him. They did not come because His miracles had made them believers who wished to be His disciples. Jesus said that they came because they "ate of the loaves and were filled". (Jn 6:26) How sad it is that many do not desire to be a part of a church because they want to be Jesus' disciples, but because they want "the loaves" of the social activities which churches offer. And, it is even sadder that churches offer these worldly promotions to draw people in rather than letting the Cross be the drawing power to true discipleship. (Jn 12:32).

If one doctrine is as good as another, wouldn't it be alright if I just found a church which

agreed with what I believe? This would be true, if doctrine did not matter. But, it does!! John wrote, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God" (2 Jn 9). Paul warned that the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine, but would shop for teachers who would teach what they wanted to hear (2 Tim 4:1-4). I must not look for a church which fits my belief, but a church which teaches sound doctrine, the doctrine of Christ.

Perhaps I'm not shopping for a church at all. I am content to stay where I've gone all my life. My parents brought me to the church and they still attend there. The people, the church building, the worship and teaching are all familiar. Everything is comfortable. But, should I be there? Is the worship and teaching according to sound doctrine? I need to find out. If it is not, then I need to have the courage to leave my "comfort zone", the courage which Paul showed in forsaking the traditions of his fathers when he found out that they were wrong, in order to gain Christ (Phil 3:4-8).

Men are not free to join the church of their choice. If you are shopping for a church, let sound worship and teaching draw you to a sound church. If you are content in the church where you are at, should you be shopping? Perhaps a study of Jesus' teaching will show that you should go elsewhere. In any case, let the teaching of Christ and not any other consideration be the basis of your decision!!

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# THE LOWER LIGHTS

Alan Jones, Editor  
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**"Brightly beams our Father's mercy  
from the lighthouse evermore;  
But to us He gives the keeping  
of the lights along the shore."**

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**No 1**

## **OUR AUTHORITY: THE NEW TESTAMENT**

As Jesus was ready to ascend to His Father in heaven, He told His apostles, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you..." (Mt. 28:18-20). Since Jesus was obedient to death, even death on a cross, the Father raised Him from the dead and highly exalted Him as Lord and Christ (King) (Acts 2:36, Phil 2:8-11).

Jesus' exercises His authority as King through the "word of the Kingdom" (Mt 13:19), the collection of books which makes up His new covenant or testament which went into effect when He shed His blood on the cross of Calvary (Lk 22:20). In His gospel, we find the commands that all His disciples are to observe. This is the "one faith" for Christians to follow (Eph 4:5), "the standard of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13). Paul told the church at Thessalonica to "stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us." (2 Thess 2:15). As Christians faced teachers who taught doctrines contrary to the word of the King, Jude exhorted them to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." (Jude 3)

In His New Testament, Jesus warned that those who professed to be His disciples would reject Him and His word as the authority and would follow men instead. Paul tearfully warned the elders of the Ephesian church that from among themselves men who arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them (Acts 20:30-31). He solemnly charged the young preacher Timothy to preach the word in season and out of season because the time would come when men would not endure sound

doctrine, but would find teachers who would teach what they wanted to hear and they would turn aside from the truth (2 Tim 4:1-4).

The situation we find in "Christianity" is exactly as Jesus predicted it would be. Men profess to be followers of the King, but pay no attention to His law, following their religious leaders instead. Numerous creed books have been written (and continue to be re-written) as the standard of faith and practice for various denominations. Councils, conventions, and synods meet on a regular basis to determine Church teaching.

Important questions call for answers now as they did in the time of the early church: "What must I do to be saved?", "How should I live- what is wrong and what is right?", "How should I worship?", "How should a congregation of disciples be organized and what is the work which they should be doing?" So many different and conflicting answers to these questions have been given by the councils and creeds of men. Many are confused, wondering if there are any answers. Others have accepted that one answer is as good as another- it doesn't really matter- Jesus doesn't care what His disciples do, He will accept them and take them to heaven.

However, the right answers to the above questions and to all questions are in the King's book, the New Testament. Once a preacher was speaking on the creeds of men. He had several stacked on the pulpit. One fell off. Someone in the audience said, "They all fall!" "That's right," said the preacher, as he knocked the rest of the creeds to the floor. Let Jesus and His word be your only authority. Do not reject Him and His word, for His word will judge you at the last day! (John 12:48)

## OUR NAME: CHRISTIAN

The disciples of Jesus were first called "Christians" in Antioch. It is no wonder that disciples of Jesus came to be called "Christians". The Lord was preached, people turned to the Lord, were added to the Lord, and were encouraged to remain true to the Lord (Acts 11:19-26). It was very evident that these individuals had allegiance to the Christ (King) and so were called by His name.

Later, King Agrippa told Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." He recognized that Paul's intentions were to make him a follower of Christ. Paul then expressed that he didn't care how long it took, but he wished that not only Agrippa, but that all who heard him that day would become like he was (a Christian), except for his chains (Acts 26:26-29).

Finally, the third and final mention of the name "Christian" in the New Testament was by Peter when he wrote, "If anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name." (1 Pet 4:16). Evidently the name "Christian" had become a very despised name in society, a name used to mock and belittle Jesus' followers. But though persecutors had so misused and abused the name "Christian", Jesus' disciples were to wear it with pride, for it reflected their allegiance to Jesus, the Christ, and so glorified God.

Today, the name "Christian" has come to mean so many things that it means nothing. Several years ago, I was asked to give a name to a Bible

study group in a prison where I was teaching. I said to call us the "Christian" study group. The response was that this name was too "generic". Now when people hear "Christian", they want to know, "What kind?"- Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc., as men, because of their peculiar doctrines (see page 1), have given themselves names to identify their belief and their allegiance to a certain group of churches (denomination). These names also serve to distinguish one belief and denomination from another among "Christians". These names do not glorify God and foster and perpetuate division among believers, who Jesus said should be one (Jn 17:20-21).

Barton Stone said of these "party" names, "A party name is a strong bond of union in all the sects, by which a person wearing it is judge, friend or foe, approved of or disapproved, loved or despised, received or rejected, by those who wear a different name. All these party bonds must be broken and forgotten, or Christian union will never be known on earth and party union will stand as a mountain in the way of the world's salvation".

If you have not done so already, why not lay aside your denominational name at the same time you lay aside your allegiance to your denominational organization and its teaching? As you take the word of King Jesus, the New Testament, as your only creed, signify that your allegiance is only to Him by wearing His name. Wear the name "Christian" and in this name glorify God.

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# THE LOWER LIGHTS

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## QUALIFYING FOR SALVATION

A few years ago, while I was living in Kentucky, I bought a cordless phone. The reason that I bought that particular phone was because of the \$5 rebate that came with it. This rebate made the phone cheaper than the other phones that were comparable to it.

I placed the rebate claim form on my desk where it soon found itself buried and lost. One day when I was cleaning my desk I found it and I decided that I would mail it in. As I picked up the claim form, I noticed written in bold capital letters- **"IMPORTANT- TO QUALIFY FOR THIS REBATE YOU MUST:"**- so I read the conditions. I needed my original sales receipt. Amazingly enough I had already found it. The receipt and the claim form were still together on my desk. But, I discovered that I had to have the UPC from the box in order to get the rebate. I figured the box had been thrown away and so I stopped preparing the claim form.

Later, to my surprise, I found the box and cut out the UPC. I laid it with the claim form and my receipt on my desk. "I'll get it out later", I said to myself. "I have until the end of April to get it in." Once again the desk swallowed my paperwork. I found it again on April 28<sup>th</sup> (a Friday) and, thinking it was not too late, I started to prepare it. But, on close examination, I found that all claims must be received by April 30<sup>th</sup> (a Sunday). The form had to reach Michigan by the deadline and so I was sunk. Instead of a rebate, all I had left was an illustration.

We can understand that my rebate claim would have been rejected without a receipt and a UPC, or if it had been received on or after May 1<sup>st</sup>. All

conditions of an offer must be met in order to receive what is promised. God has offered man salvation through the blood of His Son Jesus (Col 1:19-22). This offer is conditional, however. And, it is unreasonable to believe that God will give us the salvation that He has promised if we have not qualified for it by meeting all of His terms.

Many go through life ignorant of what God's conditions are because they have not read the terms, they have misread them, or they have been deceived about them. God lays down these conditions in order to be saved from sin: (read them for yourself!)

- 1) Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 8:24)
- 2) Confess your believe in Jesus with the mouth (Romans 10:9-10)
- 3) Repent of your sins (Luke 13:3)
- 4) Be baptized (immersed) in water to wash your sins away (Acts 22:16)

Which of these conditions can be left out and the blessing of salvation still received? None of them. Many would say baptism. But it is no more possible to be saved without baptism than it is to receive a rebate without a UPC if it is required.

The saddest story will be told about those who understood the conditions of salvation, but put it off until the deadline of death (Heb 9:27) or the coming of Jesus (1 Thess 5:1-10) made it impossible to take advantage of the offer. Knocking on the door of heaven after the deadline will do the same amount of good as my turning the rebate form on May 1<sup>st</sup>. It will be too late. The offer of salvation has expired! (Mt 25:10-13). Won't you meet God's terms and qualify for salvation before it's too late?!!

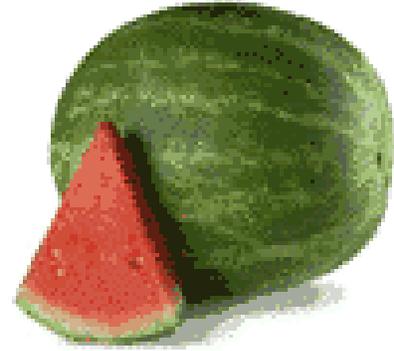
## SEEING GOD IN A WATERMELON

*As you eat one of summer's best treats, you would do well to think of God. Paul wrote, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). Meditate on the following words of the famous statesman, William Jennings Bryan. Can you see a watermelon and not see God? Truly there is no excuse for not believing in God and for not giving Him the worship and obedience He deserves. There is no denying an Awesome, Wise, and Powerful Creator.*

"Once, when I was going to Columbus, Ohio, I stopped to eat in a restaurant and ordered a slice of watermelon. I took the seeds home with me to plant in my garden.

That night a thought came to my mind. How many watermelon seeds would it take to make a pound. The next day I weighed them and found that it would take about 5,000 dried seeds.

A few weeks later, I planted just one of the little seeds. Under the influence of sunshine and shower, that little seed had taken off its coat and gone to work. It gathered from somewhere two hundred thousand times its own weight and forced enormous weight through a tiny stem and built a watermelon. On the outside it has a covering of green and within that rind of white and within that a core of red; and then it had scattered through the red many little seeds, each one capable of doing the same work over and over again.



What architect drew the plan? Where did the little watermelon seed get its strength? Where did it find its flavoring extract, and its coloring matter? How did it build a watermelon?

Until you can explain a watermelon, do not be too sure that you can set limits to the power of the Almighty. The most learned men in the world cannot explain the watermelon, but the most ignorant man can eat a watermelon and enjoy it."

*"O Lord, how many are your works! In wisdom You have made them all!"  
"I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being."  
Psalms 104:24, 33*

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## THEY DIDN'T CARE!!

Imagine living in a world where all men and women thought about was evil all the time. Noah did (Gen 6:5). The earth was filled with violence (6:11). But, there was a root to this wickedness, a problem that prompted God to flood the world, sparing only Noah and his family.

Lot lived in the city of Sodom. This righteous man was tormented every day by all the evil that he had to see and listen to (2 Pet 2:5-8). Most notable among the sins of Sodom was homosexuality. Lusts so controlled the citizens of this city that when new men (actually angels in the form of men) came to town, ALL the men of Sodom turned up at Lot's door and demanded that he turn them over to them so that they might fulfill their lusts (Gen 19:1-11). But, there was a root to this wickedness, a problem that prompted God to rain fire and brimstone on Sodom, saving only Lot and his two daughters.

Jesus used the world of Noah and the city of Sodom to illustrate what the conditions would be in Jerusalem when He came against it in judgment (Lk 17:26-30). When we read His comments, we see what was the common underlying problem in the societies of Noah and Lot. At the time when the flood came, just what were men doing? "They were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage." Up to the day when God destroyed Sodom, just what were the men of that city doing? "They were eating, they were

drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building."

Our first reaction to Jesus' statements about their behavior might be, "So what were these men doing wrong? They were just busy with the ordinary things of life." But, that was exactly the problem. Men were so consumed themselves with the daily cares of life that they had no thoughts of God. Judgment was impending, but they were busy "living", unconcerned about their standing with God. They took no time for reflection to see if repentance might be in order. So, God's judgment came and found them unprepared.

The attitude that these two societies showed by occupying themselves with only the worldly details of life was at the root of their wicked behavior. Man's journey away from God begins when he leaves God and His standard of righteousness out of his thoughts. When men live as though God does not exist, the result is a world of low morality. Sin runs rampant and unchecked. (Rom 1:18-32)

If men do not acknowledge Him, God gives men over to their lusts (Rom 1:24,26,28). From minds who did not acknowledge God came the violent acts that filled Noah's world and the unnatural sexual desires which consumed the men of Sodom (Rom 1:18-32). In one word, what destroyed these two societies? Indifference. When it came to God, His law, and His judgment- they didn't care!!

## DO YOU CARE?

Our world, not unlike the societies of Noah and Lot, is a very busy place. As the saying goes, everyone's "got places to go, people to see, and things to do."

The young are occupied with their education, video games, and soccer matches. Eventually, they choose and pursue a career. Most also pursue that special someone in order to "marry" or to be "given in marriage".

The middle-aged are devoted to work and the raising of a family. There is much "buying and selling, planting, and building" going on to provide the best life for the present and to save money ahead for the children's education and retirement.

Older men and women find that after they have retired their schedules are just as full as before. Most still are busy with things that could be called "work". Some attain the ideal in the world's eyes and fill their days with "eating and drinking", as they tour the country in their Winnebago.

Lost in all this is God. Too many are busy "living" while God is forgotten from the cradle to the grave. And, the more this is the case, the

more immoral society becomes. Do you wonder why we see all the horrible things people in Metro Detroit do to each other every night on the news? The same word that applied to the societies of Noah and Lot applies to ours as well- indifference. We refuse to have God in our knowledge. We live anyway we want. We do not think of His judgment, much less, fear it. We're busy "living". We just don't care!!

What about you? Do you think of God, His standard of righteousness, and His judgment? Or are you just busy "living", doing as you please and thinking nothing of it? Learn from God's judgment the world of Noah and the city of Sodom. You must not get wrapped up in the ordinary cares of life, missing the very reason you are living on the earth- to fear God, keep His commandments, and prepare for His judgment. (Eccl 12:13-14). Pay attention to God and the gospel of His Son before it is too late, His wrath comes on you and you are eternally separated from Him in hell (2 Thess 1:7-9).

## THERE IS A HELL

A survey taken by *Life* magazine and reported in their December, 1998 issue found that 72% of Americans believe in heaven, while 56% believe in hell. This survey is similar to others I have seen. More people believe in heaven than believe in hell. Just over half believe in hell.

Why do people believe as they do about heaven and hell? The answer is clear when you see how the same people answered another question, "Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God?" Only 33% said, "yes". This means that most people's "belief" about heaven and hell is just their opinion, rather than their Bible-based conviction. Since they do not hold the Bible to be from God, they do not look to it as the Authority on heaven, hell or any other question.

If the Bible is the Word of God (as abundant evidence shows that it is), then there is a heaven. Jesus said, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am you may be also." (Jn 14:1-3)

If the Bible is the Word of God, then there is also a hell. The same Jesus, who assured men that there is a heaven, solemnly warned that there is a hell. He said, "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched." (Mk 9:43-44).

Jesus goes on to say that it would also be better to lose a foot or an eye, than to go to hell (Mk 9:45-48). None of us would like to do without a hand, a foot, or an eye, but Jesus says that men should take extreme measures, that they should do whatever it takes, to avoid this place of terrible and never ending suffering.

Why do more people believe in heaven than in hell? Certainly, when you consider what people would want to believe, a "dwelling place with God" would be much preferred to "unquenchable fire". But, beyond this, many people have the wrong idea about God. They believe that He is much too loving to send anyone to hell. Again, their idea comes from their opinion rather than their Bible-based conviction.

The Bible tells us that God's acts of judgment in the past guarantee that men will be sent to hell as a punishment for their sins. God committed the angels who sinned to pits of darkness, He destroyed the ungodly of the ancient world of Noah with a flood, He reduced Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, and He caused the Israelites who left Egypt for the promised land of Canaan to die in the wilderness (cp. 2 Pet 2:4-9, Jude 5-7).

These examples of God's wrath against sin, of His justice, assure us that, if we accept the Bible as the Word of God (as the evidence compels us to), then there is a hell that awaits all men who have sinned and who have not been forgiven of those sins.

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## MOST MEN ARE GOING TO HELL, BUT WHO CARES?

Even many who believe in hell may be of the opinion that it is reserved only for men who have done very evil things such as Adolf Hitler, Osama Bin Laden, or Saddam Hussein. But, what does the Bible, the Word of God, say? What does Jesus say? Jesus said, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." (Mt 7:13-14).

Jesus said that most men are going to destruction- to hell. Why will the majority of men go to hell? They will go to hell because they went through the wide gate and walked on the broad way. It is easy to get on the road to hell and it is easy to walk there. There are no restrictions. Anything goes. Indulge yourself. Satisfy yourself. Don't worry about God's law.

Few men are willing to meet Jesus' conditions of forgiveness so that they may enter the gate that leads to life. They will not believe that He is Christ, the Lord and confess their belief in Him with their mouth (Rom 10:9-10). They will not repent of their sins and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Some go through this gate, but do not stay on the narrow road that leads to life. They say that they are Jesus' disciples, but they do not keep His commandments and live like Him (1 Jn 2:3-6). They will be in hell, along with those who never went

Most men are going to hell. But, who cares? God, the Father cares. He so loved the world that He gave His Son so that men would not perish, but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16). His desire is that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4). He has not yet destroyed the world because He does not wish for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9).

Jesus cares. "We know love by this, that he laid down His life for us." (1 Jn 3:16) No amount of silver and gold could save us from hell, but only the blood that He shed while bearing our sins in His body on the cross (1 Pet 1:18-20; 2:24).

The Holy Spirit cares. He revealed the "good news" of the love of the Father and the Son. He urges men to come and drink of the water of life so that they may not be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death (Rev 22:17; 20:15; 21:8).

Are you walking on the broad way that leads to hell with the majority of men? Do you care? God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit loved you enough to create a way to prevent you from being punished for your sins in hell. If you go to hell, it will not be their fault, but yours. You will have chosen to pay for your own sins instead of letting Jesus pay for them with His blood. Won't you set aside your will and obey the will of Jesus? Enter the small gate and walk on the narrow way and be among the few who find life.

The Lower Lights October 2002

through the gate.

## BUILD ON THE BEST

I once had a neighbor who worked for a company which specialized in laying foundations.

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## A SLOW TURTLE FROM RICHMOND

Nineteen years ago I had a Bible study with Danny Suttles, who lived near Cambridge City, IN where I was preaching at the time. Danny saw his need to obey Christ in order to be saved from sin and get ready for judgment. However, Danny did not become a Christian. He expressed his thinking about the judgment this way, "It's like a slow turtle coming from Richmond."

Though Richmond is about 20 miles from Danny's house, even a slow turtle has had plenty of time to make several round trips between Richmond and his house. The end of Danny's life and the judgment are surely closer now than in 1983, yet Danny still has not made preparation.

One of the Devil's greatest tricks is to let you acknowledge the need to do something about our soul's condition and then tell you to put off your obedience to Christ until later. He was successful in this regard with Felix who trembled after Paul's sermon on "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come". He told Paul to "go away for the present, and when I find time ("when I have a convenient season-KJV) I will summon you" (Acts 24:25).

As time went by, it was obvious that Felix no longer trembled at the thought of standing unprepared before God. He kept Paul in prison and he sent for him quite often, not in the interest of hearing and obeying the gospel, but in hopes of receiving a bribe to let Paul go (24:26-27).

Your conscience is designed by God to produce pain leading to immediate action. If you don't pay attention to your conscience, it becomes hardened (Eph 4:17-19). Your guilt goes away and you are able to live day after day, no longer pricked and prodded by your conscience to make your life right with God.

Life and the coming of Jesus are two uncertain to delay your obedience until tomorrow (Js 4:13-15; I Thess 5:1-3) and, while the Devil deceives you into thinking the Judgment Day is a "slow turtle from Richmond", it inches ever closer- days turn into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years. The pain of conscience that once could have led to your salvation fades away. The ground of your heart becomes as hard as the road and the seed of the gospel can no longer penetrate it. The Devil flies away with the knowledge of the gospel you once had, as a bird flies away with seed from the road (Mk 4:3, 15). Your sins remain unforgiven, and eternal separation from God in hell awaits you after the Judgment.

Do you know that you need to obey the gospel? Don't delay any longer. Take advantage of the good news. Jesus bled and died for your sins. "Why do you delay? Get up and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name" (Acts 22:16). The turtle crawls on. Judgment draws near.

## PLAYING BY THE RULES

This Fall the University of Michigan handed down strong sanctions against its basketball program. The “Fab Five” era with all of its glory is as though it never happened. The incredible number of wins achieved by the “Fab Five”, as they dominated the hardwood, have been forfeited and are now counted as losses. The championship banners no longer hang proudly in their gymnasium. Any reference to the accomplishments of this great basketball team will be forever removed from the history books of the University of Michigan. The current U of M basketball team will also suffer by being banned from tournament play. Why? Most of the “Fab Five” did not play by the rules. These amateurs received a large amount of money as loans while they played basketball for the college team, a violation of NCAA rules.

Though we may not like these sanctions and though we may not agree with what has been imposed, surely we understand and agree with the principle that to win you have to play by the rules. As a society, we see this principle in sports, but we do not see it in religion. The common thinking is that one can believe, live, teach, and worship as he pleases and still make it to heaven.

However, when Paul explained to Timothy how he should live as a Christian, he said, “If anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules.” (2 Tim 2:5). To the church in Corinth, Greece, where the Isthmian Games (second only to the Olympic Games) were held every three years, he wrote, “I discipline my

body and make it my slave, so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” (I Cor 9:27). The word for “preached” comes from a Greek word meaning “to announce the rules.” Paul realized that he could spend a lifetime announcing the rules to others, but if he did not live by them himself, he would be disqualified from receiving God’s prize. Therefore, he practiced great self-discipline to live within the rules.

The gospel, the New Testament, is the Rulebook men must live by and one day be judged by. Paul spoke plainly about living by the Rules when he said about the Judgment Day, “on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ.” (Rom 2:16). Jesus said that many will profess to Him at the Judgment that they did many good things in His name, but He will tell them to depart because they have practiced lawlessness (Mt 7:21-23). They did not do the will of His Father. They did not follow the Rules!

Since our society thinks that God may be served anyway one chooses, most do not spend time closely examining the Rules to see what they are. They see no reason to discuss the Rules and even condemn debating the Rules. And, they put forth no conscientious and concerted effort to keep the Rules. How sad it will be one day when, expecting to receive the reward of heaven, they are disqualified, sent by Jesus to hell, the lake of fire- the ultimate sanction for breaking the Rules- to suffer endlessly. Won’t you give yourself to careful study of the Rules and strict obedience to them that you might receive the prize of heaven?!!

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## COOKIES AND COFFEE IN THE CHURCH BASEMENT

A radio commercial for a Lutheran financial group says "It takes one to know one." The ad tells how Lutherans can recognize fellow Lutherans. A monotone woman reads off a list of upcoming activities in the church. At the end of each one she says, "There will be cookies and coffee in the church basement." The financial group promises great service to Lutherans and "no basements." The commercial would be funny, if it were not so true.

How sad it is that religion has been reduced largely to social groups with religious trimmings. "Cookies and coffee" have replaced "conviction" as the distinctive mark of not only the Lutheran church, but of the majority of churches.

Martin Luther was not a "cookies and coffee" kind of guy. With great zeal and courage, he stood for his convictions and suffered because of them, as did many denominational founders. Surely, if they could, they would "roll over in their graves" to see the condition of their churches today. The "fellowship" of their day was based on faith, not food. When you hear the word "fellow-ship" today in a "church" conversation, you can almost smell the coffee. It is the social life that brings and binds people together. Many do not even know or necessarily believe the doctrine of their church, much less have the ability and the zeal to explain and defend it.

Social activities among Christians have their place. But, they are not to be confused as "church" activities. They are to be enjoyed by individual disciples in the home. The first Christians in Jerusalem continued "with one mind in the temple, and they were breaking bread (eating meals-AJ) from house to house" (Acts 2:46). There was a time and place for socializing. It was not in the temple where Christians gathered for worship and study, but rather at home.

The Corinthian church made a social meal rather than a spiritual memorial out of the Lord's Supper. Paul rebuked them, saying, "What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink?... So then my brethren, when you come together to eat (the Lord's Supper-AJ), wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment." (1 Cor 11:22, 33-34). Paul did not tell the Corinthian church to eat their "cookies and coffee" in the church basement, but rather at home.

O, for a return to the old days when churches were known for their spirituality, not their shows; their doctrine, not their donuts. Then, with open Bibles, we could do as they once did- sit down privately to discuss or stand up publicly to debate what the truth of Jesus really is. This will never happen as long as churches exist as social clubs, where belief is unimportant, and members sip coffee and crunch cookies in the church basement.