

## THE WRATH OF MAN

By Joe Dale Wilson

James tells us to be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” for a purpose. (James 1:19.) If we are good listeners it will remove confusion and misunderstanding. Recently, I was sent from one hospital Emergency Room to another’s Emergency Room because someone did not listen to the doctor in the first one and what he was telling them. This caused me to be delayed in getting to a hospital where I could have been put in line for surgery, which caused me a day in getting to the surgery I needed. Listening is an art. It is imperative for a person to listen carefully in order to communicate correctly. Parents sometimes do not listen. In the workplace many do not listen. At school students do not listen to the instructor. Listening is the most

important part of communication.

If we hold our tongue it gives us time to reflect and contemplate our response. That will allow us to choose our words and season them with the salt of grace. (Colossians 4:6.) For our words to be fitly spoken they need to be well thought out. Most yelling, threatening and hollering contain words that have not come in contact with grace. Many people have given others a piece of their mind so many times that they have none left to use for their own daily life! Words are important. Speaking up is important, but speaking with words that build up and have the appropriate influence is even better.

God does not want us to have a short fuse and blow up at anything

that happens. Our text continues in verse 20: “For the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God.” When we explode rapidly we are not doing the will of God with our words, whether the words are spoken or written.

A veterinarian while dehorning 300 pound calves once became very angry toward one of them and began beating her with the dehorner. He was grabbed and asked, “Did that make it better or worse?”

His temper did not improve his situation, nor will our temper improve ours. Things will go wrong, things will be said, and an outburst of temper will not aid in our being a positive influence for Christ.

— Vernon, TX

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## THANKFULNESS AND CONTENTMENT

By Danny Tunnell

An instructor at a preacher training school told his students: “You may be an ‘A student’ here. When you graduate, you may go to a place where the work is so hard and the community just does not seem very interested. You may go for months without converting anyone. But you notice one of your fellow classmates at another place. You made all ‘A’s’ while he was a ‘C student,’ but he is converting people in bunches like bananas! Don’t become bitter or envious, but rather rejoice with him!”

The wise instructor was saying, “Don’t make those kind of comparisons.” Paul said, “Those who compare themselves among themselves are not wise.” (2 Corinthians 10:12.)

Paul was right. It is not wise to make comparisons. Frequently, when we compare our lives with other people, we come up short. We wonder why we are not as good looking as they are. Why don’t we know as much as they seem to know? Why don’t we own as much as they seem to own?

Paul talked about being content with what we have, even if it’s only food and clothing. (1 Timothy 6:8.) He said godliness with contentment is great gain.

Isn’t it interesting that Satan never points out what others don’t have, only what they do have that we don’t. How many people that Christians envy may not have any real peace of mind? Jesus talked about leaving His followers His peace; not a peace that the world gives. Then He said, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27.)

Others may have some things that we don’t have, but we also have some things they don’t have. Jesus asked, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mark 8:36.) If you have salvation and someone else is lost, how could you possibly envy that person?

God has equipped each of us with just what we need to fulfill His will in our lives. If you feel like you are

lacking something, it may be because you don’t need it, or it isn’t the right time for you to have it. Just be thankful that God knows better than you do about such matters. Don’t begrudge it; instead, “enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good.” (Psalm 100:4,5.)

The truth is that other people are not the standard as to what should happen to us. Each person is different. We even have a unique set of fingerprints. The Lord has individual plans for each of us, even if we don’t understand what He is doing or why He is doing it.

Let’s keep our eyes on Jesus. That frees us from the agony of comparisons and competition. God does not want us to be overly concerned about what we don’t have or can’t do. But He does want us to be thankful for His blessings.

— Miami, OK

# Old Paths

Vol. 39, No. 9 September, 2015

“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

## THOUGHTS ON THE INVITATION

By Joe Slater

We customarily offer an invitation toward the close of each meeting. Anyone who wishes to obey the gospel, or to confess sin and be restored, or to receive help with some other spiritual need, is invited to come to the front while an appropriate song is sung. Those responding are then assisted as the situation calls for.

While this invitation is a tradition that is not mandated in Scripture, it is entirely in harmony with God’s word. Certainly we ought to urge people to believe and obey the gospel: “Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men. (2 Corinthians 6:2.) One way we may encourage prompt response to the word of God is by singing. In fact, one of the stated purposes for singing in the New Testament is “teaching and admonishing one another.” (Ephesians 5:19.)

One of the drawbacks to having this traditional invitation is that we may grow so accustomed to it that we think folks can respond to the gospel “only” when an invitation is extended at the close of a meeting. I hope all of us realize that the Lord’s invitation is “always” open! We have rejoiced to see people baptized on Monday afternoon, Friday evening, and other times throughout the week. It is always right to believe and obey God without delay, regardless of the day or hour. In fact, in the New Testament examples of conversion to Christ, not one person ever ate a bite, drank a drop, or slept a wink from the time he understood the gospel until he obeyed it. The Ethiopian eunuch didn’t wait for a meeting of the church or a formal invitation— he was immersed out in the middle of nowhere, with no other mortal to see it except Philip (who immersed him), and perhaps the chariot driver. (Acts 8.) The Philippian jailer and his household were immersed in the wee hours of the morning; and Lydia and her household were immersed in a river on a Saturday. (Acts 16.)

Have you been thinking about obeying the gospel? Or have you already been baptized, but have strayed away and want to return to the Lord? Have you delayed because you’re embarrassed to respond during the invitation song? Please realize that you can become right with God without coming to the front of the auditorium at the close of an assembly.

Offering an invitation and singing an invitation song toward the close of each meeting is a good tradition. Let us not detract from it by acting as though it is the only possible time for an acceptable response to God and His word! — Justin, TX

## PLANTING CORN AND EXPECTING WHEAT

By Wes McAdams

Imagine if a farmer planted an entire field of corn. He then spent several months fertilizing, watering, and keeping the weeds out of the field. Then, one day when the stalks were fully grown, he went out to the field. He plucked and peeled back the husk on an ear of corn. He then stormed in the house and tossed the ear of corn onto the kitchen table, angrily asking, “Can you believe this?” His wife asked, “What’s wrong with it?” Raising his eyebrows, he said, “You know that I wanted wheat, but this is corn.” Confused, the wife asked, “But didn’t you plant corn?” Disgusted, the husband replied, “What’s that got to do with anything? I really wanted wheat, but all I ever seem to get out of that field is corn!”

Obviously this scenario is ridiculous, but how often do we do the same thing in our lives? Specifically, I’ve seen people do this concerning their relationships. They want deep, strong, meaningful relationships, but they aren’t sowing what is necessary to reap a harvest of good relationships.

When you sow jealousy, bitterness, gossip and the like, you shouldn’t be shocked when you don’t reap a harvest of good relationships. If you want to have good friendships, you have to work hard at planting the right things: things like patience, kindness and selflessness. In addition to that, you have to make sure you’re not planting seeds of envy, boastfulness, arrogance, rudeness, irritability or resentment. (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-6.)

We see the same principle throughout Scripture and in our lives: “Whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” (Galatians 6:7.) — Abilene, TX

## DESTRUCTION BEFORE CONSTRUCTION

By Bobby Key

“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.” (Malachi 3:1.) John the Baptist was that messenger. His job was to make a way for the Lord and he did his job well. “Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist.” (Matthew 11:11.)

Highway building is destructive before it is constructive. It requires blasting and demolition. The wrecking crew precedes the construction workers. John, like Elijah before him, was a troubler of Israel. He disturbed the peace.

Perhaps we could use an upheaval in our world today. This might wake us up. “It is high time to awake out of sleep.” (Romans 13:11.)

When a highway is put through a town some residents have to move, some are irritated and complain. You cannot put a highway through a community without commotion.

How can we expect to clear a way for the Lord when we sit in church on Sunday morning with “Please Do Not Disturb” written all over our faces? The Word of God is called a hammer, a fire and a sword. You just cannot use these three things without disturbing somebody.

What would our country do with John the Baptist today? Here was one preacher who did not use an anesthetic! He dug right in and removed the trouble: the sin in the lives of the people. “In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’” (Matthew 3:1,2.)

We could use a few more preachers like John the Baptist today!

— Miami, OK

Editorial . . .

## WORDS MISSPOKEN

By Dalton Key

Have you ever spoken out of turn? Have you ever suffered the embarrassing “foot in mouth” disease? Have you ever wished later you hadn’t said what you said sooner?

If so, you have a good deal of company. All of us have stumbled over a too-busy tongue. It would seem that some of us have made a hobby of it. In the words of one such babbling, “I am most fond of talking and thinking; that is to say, talking first and thinking afterward.”

One of our Lord’s apostles, Simon Peter, was often found “talking first and thinking afterward.” He was the one who enthusiastically suggested building three tabernacles, one for Moses, one for Elijah, and one for Christ, thus lowering Christ to the level of a mere prophet among prophets. The very voice of God thundered from heaven’s heights, correcting the presumption of Peter. (Matthew 17:4,5.)

On another occasion, Peter rashly boasted to Jesus, “Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble.” (Matthew 26:33.) Yet before the final crow of the cock that very night, Peter not only stumbled, but publicly and loudly denied even knowing his Lord, not once, but three times!

And then there was the time sometime earlier, when Peter went so far as to rebuke the Christ, resulting in this stern rebuke: “Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” (Matthew 16:2.)

Peter was made to learn by experience, what all of us need to know. We have been blessed of heaven with two ears and but one mouth. That ought to tell us something about the comparative use of both.

Inspiration directly admonishes, “Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” (James 1:19.) Later in the same inspired letter, the tongue is described as “an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.” (James 3:8.)

Could we be guilty of wagging our tongues and wasting our words, when we should be using instead our heads and our hearts? Don’t believe the lie of the old “sticks and stones” line; words do hurt. And we should all be more careful in our use of them.



## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SPIRITUAL

By Mark Lindley

It is rather popular in our day for a person to be “spiritual.” One might ask, “What does it mean to be spiritual?” The answer(s) to that question will vary from person to person.

If you ask the “experts,” you will find that being a spiritual person could involve anything from practicing yoga to caring for animals. It might also involve loving the planet, daily meditation, and loving yourself.

It seems there is no general consensus among the “spiritual advisors” about what is involved in being spiritual.

However, there is one thing upon which the experts agree— being spiritual does not involve a belief in the Bible. In fact, some seem to have an agenda to separate faith in the Bible from spirituality. In their writings, those who push this agenda warn: “Believing in the Bible and going to church do not make a person spiritual.” In fact, some imply that faith in the Bible and attending church services are

hindrances to “true” spirituality. Being “spiritual” is considered as being “cool,” enlightened, sophisticated, and modern; believing the teaching of the Bible and going to church services are for those who are “religious” at best and ignorant at worst.

But consider this. Why is there no agreement among the “experts” about the definition of a spiritual person? It seems to me that there is no agreement among them because there is no objective standard being used to determine what it means to be spiritual. In the absence of an objective standard, one person may claim that being spiritual is “becoming one with nature,” and another person might claim that it means to do yoga exercises. In essence, being “spiritual” is defined individually and is based on nothing more than fallible human opinion.

It is at this point that Christians have an advantage in defining true spirituality because the Christian has

an authoritative standard, the Bible. The Bible has a lot to say about being spiritual: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1.) “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” (Romans 8:6.)

According to the Bible, a spiritual person is one who “sows to the Spirit.” (Galatians 6:7-9), lays up “treasures” in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21), and sets his affections on things above. (Colossians 3:2.) A spiritual person, therefore, focuses on things of a spiritual nature: God, the Word, the church, going to heaven, the value of souls, and salvation from sin.

Let the “experts” say what they will, but true spirituality is defined by God and not by men. Are you spiritual?

— Ripley, MS

## THE BLESSED WORD OF GOD

By Milton Smith

In an oft-quoted passage, Paul was quick to remind young Timothy that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and that it is to be used for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. (Cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.) Earlier in the same epistle, Paul wrote that the Scriptures are able to “make one wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The greatest wisdom in the world is found within the pages of the Bible. Only the wisest of people know the Word of God and follow it. But we notice that the Scriptures are not only able to make us “wise,” they are able to make us wise “unto salvation.”

It should not surprise us that the expression “thus saith the Lord” is found several hundred times throughout the Bible. James tells us in James 1:21 that the Word of God “is able to save our souls.” We learn in Acts, chapter 11, that the angel of the

Lord told Cornelius that Peter would tell him words whereby he and his household “shall be saved.” We should also note that Paul told Timothy about the profitable nature of the Scriptures in the passage noted earlier.

Some preachers today tend to ignore these inspired words. How? They actually teach that things such as reproof, correction, and doctrine are not all that important. When these dangerous teachers make such reckless assertions they are blatantly contradicting what an inspired apostle told his most trusted follow-laborer.

But we also notice that Paul tells us that the Bible is “complete.” To further emphasize this fact, let us notice that Peter, another apostle, wrote by his inspired pen, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” (1 Peter 4:11.) Still another inspired apostle plainly told us that Jesus, Himself, made it clear that His very words will “judge us in the last

day.” (John 12:48.)

The Bible is to be respected, honored, studied, believed and obeyed. Anything less than this will never please our Creator. — Tulsa, OK

### Old Paths

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Tulsa, OK. 74120

On a nonprofit basis.  
Published monthly and supported by Churches of Christ and individuals.

Dalton Key Editor

“Subscription Free;

Prayers Requested;

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