

**SPORADIC**

By Richard Dent

Webster's dictionary defines the word as occurring occasionally. A good synonym is infrequently. A good example in a sentence would be: His attendance in my class was rather sporadic which is why his grade was so low.

Why talk about this adjective, sporadic? Well, I think we all might be sporadic a little bit. Sometimes I surprise my wife by washing the dishes or doing something else unexpectedly nice. But I don't do all of the nice things all of the time. Therefore, I must be sporadic at times in my actions.

I am a sporadic writer. It has been too long since I have written an article for our church bulletin or for the OLD PATHS. But here I am trying to put together a string of articles that I hope will be read and enjoyed.

There are some negative things about being sporadic. Attending church services is one of them.

Remember that the writer of Hebrews stated, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25.) Our Lord expects more from us than just an occasional visit on Sunday morning.

I believe our Lord expects us to give some of our material gains to further the Lord's work. Paul reminded the Corinthian brethren "that on the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come." (1 Corinthians 16:2.) Remember that God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7.) In chapters eight and nine of 2 Corinthians Paul reminds us of the Macedonian brethren's willingness to give to help others. That does not sound sporadic to me. Are we giving as we have been prospered

each Lord's Day or might we just be sporadic?

Last, there is an example of a congregation in Revelation that seemed to be rather sporadic in their service to God. Revelation 3:15-16 tells us about Laodicea, which our Lord said was "neither cold nor hot . . . So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth." Let me guess! It appears that their service had become rather sporadic. They were close to spiritual death. Jesus told them what they needed to do (vs. 17-18). We hope they took His advice.

What about you and me? Are we sporadic in our prayer life, our reading of God's word, our attendance at services? There is almost always room for improvement. Perhaps I will try to write more often and not be so sporadic.

— Liberal, KS

**THE MYSTERIOUS RAINBOW**

By Milton Smith

The Bible tells us that after the flood, God gave the rainbow as a token of the covenant which He made with all living creatures that there never again would be a universal flood upon the earth. (Genesis 9:12-17.) The Bible also tells us that before the flood came, the earth was watered by a mist that went up from the earth. (Genesis 2:6.) Could it be that no rain fell from the sky before the flood? Many scientists believe that a "vapor canopy" surrounded the earth during its early history. Some have suggested that this canopy may have collapsed when the "windows of heaven were opened" to bring about the great flood. (cf. Genesis 7:11.) Under these conditions, many scientists concur that it is quite possible that no rainbow was seen on earth before the flood.

Before man discovered that the rainbow is caused by the refraction and reflection of the sun's rays upon raindrops, many superstitions existed about this strange, multi-colored image in the sky (that could never be reached or touched). Most all of us remember the old legend about there being a "pot of gold at the end of the rainbow." Many early cultures believed that the rainbow was a sort of omen that foreshadowed the coming of some future event. In ancient Scandinavian literature the rainbow was presented as a link between the "gods" and man. During medieval times there was a tradition that there would be no rainbow for forty years prior to the end of the world. Because of this belief, many medieval people had a false sense of security whenever they saw a rainbow in the sky,

believing they were guaranteed the world would exist for at least another forty years!

The rainbow is no mystery. We know what causes it, and God set into motion the physical laws that bring about this beautiful phenomenon. It is simply a token and a sign that God has placed in the heavens. We also know that the appearance of the rainbow has absolutely nothing to do with predicting the final coming of Christ. The Lord can return at any time, and we are warned to be constantly ready and watching for this event. (Matthew 24:42.)

If people would take time to simply read what the Bible clearly teaches on matters such as this, silly theories and man-made superstitions would never be taught nor believed.

— Tulsa, OK

**Old Paths**

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*"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)***THE LESSONS OF HISTORY**

By Hershel Dyer

Leighton Pullen, with reference to the church in the second century, makes this observation: "As soon as men and women belonged to the Christian Church because their parents and grandparents had been Christians, and not because they had themselves to make the first break with heathen life, some enfeeblement of the Christian life almost inevitably displayed itself in certain quarters of the church." (The Church of the Fathers, P. 57.)

Almost with unerring accuracy it comes to pass. One generation goes through the battle for the truth, the next takes the truth that has been won for granted, and by the third generation the truth is no longer prized. That enfeeblement by the third or fourth generation may be expected, but it should also be guarded against.

During the first half of the 19th century, the call for a religious reformation was heard far and wide in this land. The greatly divided protestant churches were asked along with the Roman and Eastern Catholic bodies to return to the church as it is set forth in the New Testament. The rapid growth of this plea to go back to "the old paths" and walk therein met with hostility in many quarters. However, even many within clergy gave up their denominational names and offices and doctrines in favor of Bible truth. On the part of both clergy and the common people this required agonizing choices preceded by intensive Bible study. The price they paid to walk with God knows no computation by man.

A few generations removed from these pioneers of the faith, we are losing the zeal to retain the ground they so valiantly won. Although the defense of the faith against enemy attacks will always be necessary, the faith is simply its propagation, the constant preaching of the gospel to the lost. Every soul-winner is a defender of the faith, for every soul that is won to Christ becomes a token that the apostolic faith lives on! - Tulsa, OK

"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 3:14,15.)

**OF BABIES AND BATH WATER**

By Joe Slater

Should we preach the Man or the plan? Do we focus on what God has done to save us, or what we must do to be saved? Is it grace or law? Faith or works? Christ or the church? Is the Bible a blueprint or a love letter? Should we keep the rules or build relationships? Is the important thing doctrinal accuracy or a holy lifestyle?

These questions by no means exhaust the list of volatile issues confronting (and dividing) the church today. Yet with no arrogance in my heart, I can honestly say I have the answer to every one of these questions. Each question has the same answer. The answer is . . . YES!

Yes, we should preach the Man (Jesus); and yes, we should preach the plan (of salvation). Yes, focus on what God has done to save us; and yes, focus on what we must do to be saved. We need not make choices among these things. All of them are important, none of them detracts from any of the others, and not one may be safely omitted.

Some claim we have over-emphasized law, works, obedience, rules, doctrine, etc., and that we should replace these with grace, faith, relationships, holy living, and suchlike. Frankly, I have not seen this supposed over-emphasis on law, works, and doctrine, though my learning and preaching has been among brethren who would most likely be categorized as quite conservative. But suppose that some have over-emphasized certain points. Should we therefore abandon those principles? Shall we react to one extreme by running to the opposite extreme?

Sometimes babies get dirty. When they do, we bathe them. But we don't throw out the baby with the bath water! If we, in the church, need to clean up our act, let's do so! But let us not throw out any of God's truth, even if we perceive that someone has over-emphasized one principle at the expense of another.

Extremism is dangerous no matter from what direction it comes.

— Justin, TX



**“WHEN I AM WEAK”**

By Bobby Key

It is good to acknowledge our weaknesses. We are all weak in certain areas and the devil tempts us at our weakest point. Let us never allow Satan to take advantage of us; we must be fully aware of his schemes. (2 Corinthians 2:11.)

Many times there is strength in weakness! The Lord told Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” The apostle then wrote, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9,10.)

In time of grief, suffering, and struggles, we sometimes ask, “Lord, where were You?” When Lazarus died, his sisters, Mary and Martha, wondered where Jesus had been and why he had not been present when they needed Him. Both sisters said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” (John 11:21,32.) Many sincere souls have asked the same question and made similar statements down through the years.

Jesus prayed for the cup of suffering to be removed. On the cross, he asked, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Don’t be afraid of your weakness, your doubts, your fears. It is alright to feel anxious, empty, lost and alone. Struggling with weaknesses forces one to turn to God for strength.

In 1948 J.R. Baxter wrote the song, “Just a Closer Walk With Thee.” He wrote, “I am weak but Thou art strong. Jesus keep me from all wrong; I’ll be satisfied as long as I walk close to Thee. Through this world of toils and snares, if I falter, Lord, who cares? Who with me my burden shares, if I walk close to Thee. When my feeble life is o’er, time for me will be no more, guide me to that peaceful shore, let me walk close to Thee.”

When life tumbles in and we feel weak and helpless, may we be assured that God is near by. God is always present, and ready to help His children in times of struggle.

— Miami, OK

Editorial . . .

**TIME HAS NO RESURRECTION**

By Dalton Key

Considered from the viewpoint of flesh, life is time and time is life. As Benjamin Franklin once said, “Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of.”

What is life in the flesh but so much time? Is not life composed, comprised of increments of time?

Enough wasted time amounts to a wasted life. Someone has written, “Time and opportunities go hand in hand. Lost wealth may be replaced by industry, lost knowledge by study, lost health by temperance, but lost time is gone forever. Don’t kill time . . . it has no resurrection.”

What really counts is not the number of hours we put in, but rather what we put into those hours! Many a slothful soul has worked twice as long to do one-half the work a more diligent worker will accomplish in short order.

That said, our concern should not be with the wasted hours and neglected opportunities of the past; we should rather focus our attention upon the here and now, upon what we should be doing and could be doing today.

Scripture places a hefty premium on the present. “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2.) “But exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” (Hebrews 3:13.) “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.” (Colossians 4:5.)

We must resolve to begin living each day to the fullest, as our days of flesh are by no means unlimited. “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12.) We must do all we can, with all we have, for as long as we are able.

“Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as men who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as those who do. Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days.” (Ephesians 5:15,16, Philippians.)

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**PREPARING A SERMON**

By Danny Tunnell

Have you ever been called upon to deliver a sermon? If so, how did you prepare your sermon? Some reading this have done it thousands of times. Nehemiah 8:7-8 aptly describes a sermon objective: “. . . the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.”

Jesus was a preacher Who listened to the religious teachers of His time on earth. His parents once found Him “in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers.” (Luke 2:46-47.)

Here are a few points to consider if you are ever asked to preach:

(1) All preaching should be done to the glory of God, never for the preacher’s personal ambition, or so that the preacher may be applauded. Remember John the Baptist said of Christ, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30.) Paul humbly

wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9.)

(2) When you prepare a sermon, have something definite in mind that you want to speak about, or else keep silent.

(3) Ask God for help. “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given him.” (James 1:5.) “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law.” (Psalms 119:18.)

(4) Preach the word. (2 Timothy 4:2.) Do not make up your points, rather find them in the Bible text.

(5) Few ministers can wisely preach longer than thirty or forty minutes. For a person just beginning to preach, twenty minutes is often long enough. Resist the temptation to tell people everything you know. Be selective about what you say, determine what is best for your particular congregation, at this particular time.

(6) Plan your introduction. It’s

always good to catch the attention of the people, even in your very first sentence if possible.

(7) Illustrate your points, but do not over-illustrate.

(8) Your sermon should come to a conclusion. R. A. Torrey (1856-1928) made this interesting observation about closing a sermon. “One can usually learn more as to how to close a sermon by listening to a lawyer in court than he can by listening to the average preacher in a pulpit. Preachers aim too much at delivering a perfect discourse, while a lawyer aims at carrying his case.”

Paul asked a series of questions in Romans 10:14-15: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’”

— Miami, OK

**TRY A LITTLE KINDNESS**

By Joe Dale Wilson

Ephesians 4:32 begins with “and be ye kind one to another.” The inspired Paul added to that in 1 Corinthians 13:4, “love . . . is kind.” Paul listed “kindness” as one of the qualities a new Christian is to “put on.”

Glen Campbell had a real catchy song several years ago that suggested, “try a little kindness, then you’ll overlook the blindness, of narrow-minded people on the narrow-minded streets.” Our world needs kindness. Kindness is the product of our love for others. Love and kindness make the world a better place to live. As Christians, we are in the world to change the world by our wholesome influence. We live with kindness radiating from our words and actions. We teach the gospel,

which is God’s expression of His loving kindness to mankind.

Hatred walks our streets, is seen in e-mails and other sources of communications, bubbles out in our political arenas, and produces wars. Many follow a god of bitterness and vengeance. The world needs the loving kindness of God to be personified in Christians today.

In our day to day dealings we need kindness. People will do things that will disturb us. We can either jump on them with spurs on or reply with kindness. Which one will have the greater influence for Christ? We are here to win them to Christ, not to condemn them to the devil. Our words and actions must be seasoned with the wisdom of kindness.

Every day in the news we hear

of people who are unkind to their fellow man. But every day there are those who go out of their way to show love and kindness to someone who is not in a position to help himself. Christians should be the ones who are more prone to be kind; and in my experience, they are!

If your life has not been marked by kindness, try it - you’ll like it!

— Vernon, TX

“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.)