

GIVING GLORY TO WHOM GLORY IS DUE

by Danny Tunnell

Every good Bible student knows about Herod's oration in Acts 12. "And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration. And the people gave a shout, saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man." And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and he died." (Acts 12:21-23.)

Contrast that with Paul, who was humble and gave all glory to God. He spoke of himself and Apollos as ministers or servants. He said, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planted anything, neither he that waters; but God who gives the increase." (1 Corinthians 3:5-7.)

Every Christian needs to pray, "Lord bring me to a place of humility and broken-heartedness where I can see the danger of pride." How can we have pride in ourselves when it is God Who enables us?

Sometimes we may be tempted to have pride when someone says, "You are so wonderful!" Or, "Oh, you did preach well tonight." Or when men and women are applauding, shaking our hand and saying, "Now we have the greatest teacher, or elder, or deacon there is!"

One talented preacher said, "I cannot leave a place without having 500 people tell me how wonderful I am." He has no desire for that adulation. He tries as much as he can to avoid it. Wouldn't it have been better if those singing his praises would have been thankful in their hearts? Although it is not easy, if the preacher is pure in heart, he will let extravagant comments about his performance be like water off a duck's back.

It is a temptation of Satan for a Christian to take the credit. Satan is not depicted in the Bible as a big ugly monster. Instead he comes as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14.)

He may come at a time when you've done well, and he tells you about it. He may come to exalt you.

What can a Christian do? Turn your eyes away from Satan's tactics, and look at the Master. He was rich, and yet He became poor. (2 Corinthians 8:9); He was in Glory, yet He took upon Himself the form of a servant. (Philippians 2:6-7.)

May God give us the mindset of Christ in the Beatitudes . . . blessed are the poor in spirit . . . blessed are they that mourn . . . blessed are the meek . . . blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness . . . blessed are the pure in heart. Then we will be broken and humble. Instead of raising ourselves up, we will let God raise us up.

— Miami, OK

Two Blinded Men!

by Joe Slater

Whenever and wherever the gospel is preached and people are believing and obeying it, Satan will use sinful people to oppose it. Great multitudes in Jerusalem became disciples of Jesus; Satan used Saul of Tarsus to lead unbelieving Jews in persecuting the believers. Ironically, Saul himself became a Christian and experienced the same type of opposition he had formerly inflicted upon others.

Saul (i.e. Paul) encountered one opponent of the gospel who resembled him in many respects. On his first missionary journey, Paul spoke the word of the Lord to Sergius Paulus, the governor of the island of Cyprus. One of the governor's advisors, Elymas, argued against Paul and tried to discourage the governor from obeying the gospel. In response, Paul sternly rebuked Elymas and struck

him blind. (Acts 13:6-11.)

Like Paul, Elymas was a Jew. By contrast, however, Paul (Saul) had sincerely tried to be faithful to God, while Elymas was a sorcerer. Had the Mosaic Law been enforced, Elymas would have been stoned to death!

Both Saul and Elymas stoutly opposed the gospel. Saul sincerely believed he was serving God by so doing. Elymas, though, was simply protecting his income. After all, why would a Christian governor want a sorcerer as one of his advisors?

Both Saul and Elymas were struck blind. The Lord Himself struck Saul blind on the Damascus Road. Ironically, Paul himself struck Elymas blind – of course it was by the power of the Lord. Saul's blindness was caused by "something like scales" over his eyes. (Acts 9:18.) In Elymas' case, a dark mist fell upon him. (13:12.)

Both men needed someone to lead them around due to their temporary blindness.

Saul reacted to his blindness by humbling himself before the Lord and learning and obeying the gospel. He faithfully proclaimed salvation in Christ for decades, eventually giving his very life for Jesus' sake. Regrettably, we have no indication that Elymas the sorcerer ever repented.

Why don't more people strenuously oppose the gospel today? To our shame, we are not militantly proclaiming it as we should. While God is not giving people today the ability to strike opponents blind, we can overcome opposition to the gospel simply by continuing to proclaim it. God's word is powerful as it produces faith in the hearts of those willing to hear it.

— Justin, TX

Old Paths

Vol. 41, No. 7 July, 2017

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

"TILL THE COWS COME HOME"

by David Deffenbaugh

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

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

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

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

Would that more people were more like those cows!

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

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

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

— Oklahoma City, OK

WE KNOW WHO HOLDS THE FUTURE

By Cecil Burch

The traveler asked, "What kind of weather are we going to have today?" The old shepherd replied, "The kind of weather I like." "How do you know it will be the kind of weather you like?" the traveler scoffed. The shepherd answered, "Having found out sir, that I cannot always get what I like, I have learned to like what I get. So I am quite sure we will have the kind of weather I like."

We read of another shepherd in the Old Testament, named David, who said, "This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:24.)

The Apostle Paul did not allow himself to be discouraged even though he knew he would face imprisonment, and he refused to let it affect the preaching of the Gospel. When he was on his way to Jerusalem he stopped at Miletus and met with the elders from Ephesus. After he had given them instructions he also told them, "I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there . . . but none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy." (Acts 20:22,24.) When Paul came to Caesarea, the prophet Agabus took the apostle's belt and bound his own hands and feet and said, "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt." They pleaded with him not to go. Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 21:13.)

In this world of wars, conflicts, and heartaches that try the very depth of our souls we can still say with confidence that we do not know what the future holds but we know Him who holds the future! - Amarillo, TX

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling." (Psalm 46:1-3.) "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6,7.)

WE NEED THE BIBLE!

by Bobby Key

Several years ago a denominational preacher hurled his Bible across the church building before the eyes of his startled congregation. He then shouted, "If this book is going to keep me from Jesus Christ, there goes my Bible!"

I wondered what this man could have possibly known of Jesus Christ apart from the Bible. Did he have access to a more trustworthy source than the Bible itself? Could the man have looked into his own heart and seen a better Savior revealed there than he could have seen on the pages of the New Testament? Surely this preacher had become vain in his reasonings and his senseless heart had become darkened. He was afraid the Bible would stand in the way of some new revelation of truth.

We cannot help but pity such an exhibition and pity any preacher who could stoop to such cheap theatrics.

The Bible is certainly the word of God, the medium through which the will of God is revealed. By it the man of God is completely furnished to every good work. (2 Timothy 3:15-17.) We can know nothing of the real Jesus outside of what the Bible says about Him. We have no further revelation today. (Jude 3.) The Lord has already given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. (2 Peter 1:3.)

There is not one solitary thing a man needs in religion that he cannot find in the Bible. It is indeed all-sufficient.

It is true that the Bible does not flatter man, but condemns him as a sinner. However, the Bible also reveals a way of escape. Christ came to enable us to escape the servitude of sin and the devil. He came to make us free. The whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments. (Ecclesiastes 12:13.)

As I see it, the only thing left for me to do is accept God's sin offering and completely submit myself to the will of God - and all I know about God's will is what I read in the Bible.

— Miami, OK

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12.)

Editorial . . .

QUALIFIED FOR THE ELDERSHIP

by Dalton Key

The qualities expected of elders in the Lord's church may be found in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and in Titus 1:7-10. Much has been said and written over the years concerning the proper interpretation of these attributes and the strictness with which they should be applied. The issue has at times produced heated word-wars among us, in some cases dividing brethren and splitting congregations.

One view insists upon an ultra-rigid, unbending treatment of the qualifications, requiring near, if not total, perfection from prospective candidates on every point. And because no one is without some faults, some weaknesses, no one is ever seen as altogether qualified.

Another view, at the opposite extreme, sees the Bible's requirements as little more than toothless suggestions, to be modified or even ignored altogether, in order to suit the will and whim of the members.

It is true that some of the requirements are both firm and permanently "set in stone". Either a candidate is the husband of one wife or he isn't. He either "rules his own house well," "having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination," or he doesn't. Is he "not given to wine?" Is he true to the Scriptures, "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught?" Many of the qualifications are "either, or," "yes, or no" matters.

Other attributes are often more difficult to navigate. A man must be "not self-willed, not quick-tempered," but to what degree? How hospitable must he be? How many years of Christian service are required to move him past the "novice" stage?

In such areas of degree, one's ability to lead and put forth a worthy example should be considered. Elders serve as spiritual leaders, as "examples to the flock." (1 Peter 5:3.) A man may not be (as no one is) perfectly perfect in these areas, but the question should be: does he serve as a Christ-like example with respect to them? Is he a man the congregation can safely and comfortably follow?

If a man can't be looked up to, as a real-time example of Christianity, what right has he to lead or oversee the body of Christ? And what effectiveness would he have if selected?

Further, a few requirements are clearly self-evident. Elders must be "elders," older men of sufficient age and maturity to warrant respect. Leaders must be capable of leading. And they must be leading a body willing to follow them. Leadership absent fellowship results, finally, in either impotency or tyranny.

The church needs - as never before - qualified men who desire and are willing to serve in this noble service.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Men, make plans now to attend the Old Paths Men's Retreat, September 14-16, on the site of Flint Hills Christian Camp, just outside Sedan, Kansas!)



THE PUBLIC INVITATION

by Milton Smith

person's life ended before Sunday?

Often - as I have extended the invitation - I have stated from the pulpit that a person can "respond" anytime he/she wishes to do so. I hasten to add that to eliminate such a public call to respond would certainly not be a sinful act; we cannot even say that such would be inappropriate because we have no scriptural reason to make such an accusation.

So why do we practice this public call to respond?

I have always viewed the invitation as simply taking advantage of the opportunity! A person might attend the worship service on a particular Sunday (or Wednesday evening), with no intention of getting his life right with God; but something might be said during the service that might cause this person to seriously reflect upon

his spiritual condition. In this case, a public call to respond might be the final encouragement that this soul needs to get his life right with his Savior. I have known of such cases in which a person is touched by something said and comes forward that very day.

The key word here is "opportunity." Because there is nothing unscriptural about a public invitation, to offer such a call to respond can (and often does) prove expedient. Again, one can respond any time, but what better time to do so than "today," and this certainly includes those times when the church assembles together publicly.

"Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation . . ." (2 Corinthians 6:2.)

— Tulsa, OK

AS THINGS GET WORSE AND WORSE

By Dalton Key

The decadence of our day reminds us of the sordid conditions, the "perilous times," described by Paul in 2 Timothy 3. Among the apostle's warnings, note these ominous words: "But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:13.) From all appearances, evil men and imposters are, even now, alive and active and intent upon deceiving all souls within their ability to deceive.

We may as well admit the obvious: things are getting morally and spiritually worse nearly everywhere you look.

As God's children living in a benighted world fraught with ever-increasing levels of depravity, we seem to be sharing an unwanted kinship with Lot, of Old Testament days, who while living in Sodom, was "oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among

them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds). (2 Peter 2:7,8.)

Lot's soul was tormented "from day to day" in "seeing and hearing," and he didn't even have access to the internet!

The problem of sin is neither new nor novel. There was sin in the Garden of Eden. There was grievous and widespread sin in the days of Noah. There will be sin around us until the end of time. The world has never been inclined toward God and godly behavior.

But the good news is found in heaven's promise: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33.) "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4.)

And remember fellow "sojourners and pilgrims," we're not yet home! (1 Peter 2:11.)

Old Paths

829 S. Rockford Ave. ,
Tulsa, OK. 74120

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

Dalton Key Editor

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