

AN HONEST MAN WHO TOOK A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE LIFE OF PAUL

By Milton Smith

The life of Jesus Christ cannot be accurately explained short of a concession that He proved that He was the Son of God. Any explanation that attempts to deny His deity will always come up lacking. Similarly, we should consider the life of the apostle Paul. Back in the 18th century, two unbelievers, Lord George Lyttleton and Gilbert West determined that they would expose Christianity as fraudulent. They decided that the best way to do this was to expose the lives of Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul. They decided to divide their work; West would demonstrate the fraudulence of Christ's resurrection and Lyttleton would expose the conversion of Paul. When these men met once again, each had been convinced of the truth of Scripture by his own study.

It was the year 1747 that Lyttleton made public the results of his intense study. He concluded that there existed

only four possible positions concerning the claimed conversion of Paul: (1) Paul falsified his Damascus road vision; (2) he mistakenly thought that he saw a vision and heard a voice; (3) Christians deceived him; or (4) he told the truth. The first possible position was immediately rejected by Lyttleton because he reasoned that Paul had no motive to falsify this incident and then subsequently die for such a lie. Lyttleton insisted that the second explanation must likewise be rejected because Paul seemed to be a person of reason and discretion, always analyzing facts. It must also be remembered that those who journeyed with Saul "stood speechless" as they likewise "heard" this voice from heaven. (cf. Acts 9:7.)

Lyttleton reasoned that the third explanation had little merit, considering the fact that the first century Christians were not generally viewed as

people who would purposely deceive. But even if such had been the case, Saul (as Paul was known at this time) would not have believed them.

After eliminating all these possible alternatives, Lyttleton became convinced that Paul saw a miraculous vision of Jesus. It was the only rational explanation to account for the amazing change in the life of such a strong-minded, driven man; a man who went from persecuting Jesus to giving his very life to Him.

Other unbelievers such as Adolph Deissmann, Sir William Ramsay, and General Lew Wallace were likewise brought to a faith in Christ after - among other things - examining the life of the apostle Paul.

This is just another example of the amazing evidence for the Christian faith!

— Tulsa, OK

HUMILITY

By Danny Tunnell

"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18.) Solomon continues, "It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud." (Proverbs 29:23.) Peter instructs us to be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. (1 Peter 5:5.) Grace means "unmerited favor," and provides "divine enablement."

As a teenager some 50 years ago, I was visiting with a dear friend who served as the vice-president of a company. Some 50 years prior to our meeting (about 100 years ago now), the gentleman had lost his beloved wife during childbirth. They had been married a short time. She was the daughter of the local Baptist minister. He never remarried. He carried her loss with him his entire life.

As we were talking, for some reason, Billy Graham, the famous Baptist preacher, became the topic of our discussion. He mentioned the big meetings Graham had conducted in huge stadiums, all over the world.

Then he said something interesting, something that has stuck with me over all these years. He said, "You know, Mr. Graham would have never been able to do what he has done if he wasn't humble."

Many people disagree with Billy Graham's theology, but still admire him as a person. His own words: "I've had enough trials, tribulations, persecutions, troubles, criticisms, and sicknesses to always keep me down before the Lord. Anytime I think I'm anything, the Lord has a way of pushing me right down and saying, 'Billy, you are dependent on Me.'"

David Ackman, a writer for Time Magazine, wrote, "Billy Graham's overwhelmingly single most prominent moral quality, his supreme virtue, has been his humility."

Paul Harvey, a radio broadcaster who grew up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, said, "I used to worry about Billy. When he started out, there was all that adulation. I was worried he might be tilted off balance by it. But then I met Ruth, his wife. Then I

relaxed, knowing he had that strength on which to lean."

It would not be humility for Mr. Graham to say in false modesty, "I can't speak." Humility is recognizing that our gift comes from God, whereas pride is confidence in self.

Mr. Graham has said, "If God should take His hands off my life, my lips would turn to clay. I'm no great intellectual, and there are thousands of men who are better preachers than I am."

Mr. Graham is within two years of his one-hundredth birthday. Part of his legacy is well worth emulation. A humble person is someone who depends on God. A proud person thinks that his abilities, experience, and education are what brings him success. An humble person gives all the honor and glory to God.

— Miami, OK

(Editor's Note: One need not agree with all of Billy Graham's teachings to respect his character. Among his many preaching peers in the denominational world, he all but stands alone.)

Old Paths

Vol. 41, No. 6 June, 2017

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

THE POWER OF OUR DECISIONS

By Glen Walton

Decisions have tremendous implications for our lives. I read somewhere of a young man who was planning a medical career who had to make a decision one evening about studying or attending a ball game. He attended the game and the next day made a low grade on the test. It so happened that the low grade kept him out of medical school, and made it necessary for him to change his plans for the future.

At times, what seems to be an innocent choice is fraught with grave consequences.

A man named Lot once made what seemed to be an innocent choice. Strife arose between his herdsmen and the herdsmen of his kinsman, Abram. In order to avoid even more serious problems, Abram thought it best for them to separate, but gave Lot the privilege of choosing whatever land he desired. Lot chose the plain of Jordan and journeyed east. He "pitched his tent toward Sodom." (Genesis 13:12.) What seemingly was an innocent choice led to disaster. In Sodom his righteous soul was vexed, and he lost a part of his family. Even in fleeing the tragedy continued. His wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Afterward, his daughters, contaminated by the immorality of that wicked place, made their father drunk and conceived children by him. Moses, in Genesis 18-19, shows us the real ugliness of this innocent but unwise decision.

But there are better examples in the book of God. "By faith, Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." (Hebrews 11:24,25.) Moses chose God and His people, and became God's great leader and lawgiver. As long as the world stands, his influence for good will abide.

May God bless us in our decisions. These are very important to the worth of our own lives and the lives of those around us. Undergirded by good moral principles, and with our attention focused on things eternal, we can make decisions which are sound and good.

— Amarillo, TX

"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18.)

"YOU MAKE ME THINK OF GOD"

By Hershel Dyer

Phillips Brooks was one of the most noted of Protestant preachers during the last quarter of the 19th century. He was very impressive in his appearance, quite large in physical form and of a fine countenance. In visiting Boston during those days, multitudes of the great and small would seek to hear him preach. One of his frequent hearers wrote him a letter which reveals a great side of the preacher.

"Dear Dr. Brooks: I am a tailor in a little shop near your church. Whenever I have the opportunity I always go to hear you preach. Each time as I hear you preach I seem to forget all about you, for you make me think of God."

As for religious television, the screen is dominated by some of the most self-aggrandizing men ever to place themselves before the public. There have always been some of this type, even long before television. However, these in our day have access to the masses through television which could never assemble in any hall or coliseum ever built. And, to enhance their personal appeal and prestige, they seem to imply every stratagem and artifice of which the human mind is capable. The attention they draw to themselves though all sorts of grooming, mannerisms and showman techniques are quite amazing to behold. In response to all of this the great crowds wave their hands and shout their acclamations as the preachers work the excited pitch higher and higher!

A man who professes to represent the spirit of Christ in the pulpit should be ashamed of drawing such attention to himself. Every such man should strive for the effect which was felt by the humble tailor when he heard Phillips Brooks. To make our hearers "think of God" and not ourselves should be our aim.

— Tulsa, OK

"Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God . . . For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bond servants for Jesus' sake." (2 Corinthians 4:1,2,5.) "I have been crucified with Christ; 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 gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20.)

THE SEED AND THE CHURCH

By Bobby Key

When Jesus was on earth, He taught the parable of the sower. In His explanation of the parable He said that the word of God is the seed of the kingdom. As the apostles and evangelists and members of the early church went forth preaching, their message was nothing more than the Word of God. It was, therefore, the seed of the kingdom; and wherever this seed was sown and an increase given, it produced the kingdom of God, or the church. The church of the first century was the model church for all ages to come.

Those of us who believe that God has given a sufficient pattern for all ages seek to restore the old church - that is, the church as it was built by the Lord.

To restore the church simply means to go back to the church as it was before men departed from the faith by planting other seed than God's Word. When men began to sow new seed, they produced a great monstrosity of a plant that had no resemblance to the Lord's plant. The reason there are so many denominations today is because such a variety of seed has been sown over the years.

The Bible alone must always decide every question involving the nature, the character or the designs of the church. Hence, to restore the church, one simply must return to the New Testament. To become members of the church people must obey the Lord; they must believe, repent, confess Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins. When one does this God forgives his sins and adds him to the church.

The Word of God produces nothing but the church of Christ.

We do our best to plant the old seed, believing that it will produce after its kind. It will produce the kingdom of heaven.

— Miami, OK

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers . . . And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:37-42, 47b.) "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized." (Acts 8:12.)

Editorial . . .

OURS IS BUT TO SOW . . . AND KEEP ON SOWING!

By Dalton Key

The gospel of Christ, as the seed of the kingdom, wields tremendous power upon those honest and good hearts which receive it. This remarkably potent seed has power to convict, to convince and to convert. It has power to transform the vilest of sinners into saved and sanctified children of God. "The seed is the word of God . . . The sower sows the word." (Luke 8:11; Mark 4:14.)

Paul felt the urgency of preaching the gospel, in sowing this seed, describing its message as the very "power of God unto salvation." (Romans 1:16.)

Peter spoke of the gospel as the incorruptible seed by which God's children are begotten. (1 Peter 1:22-25.)

Centuries have passed and much in this world has changed since the time when Paul and Peter proclaimed the gospel's powerful message. Both men have long since left the scenes of this life.

But the seed lives on. Wherever and whenever the gospel seed is planted in "honest and good hearts" (Luke 8:15), its life-giving effects are still realized. The same seed by which Christians were begotten in the first century is alive and active and able to do the same in the twenty-first century.

Not all hearts are honest; not all ground is good ground. But regardless the condition of the soil, the seed always retains its power!

Those who sow the kingdom's seed face times and circumstances, both "in season" and "out of season." There will be those times when many hearers simply "will not endure sound doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:2,3.) But through it all, good times and bad, the word must be preached. The seed must be sown.

We may not always see the results we would like to see. We may appear to be making no progress in extending the borders of the kingdom. But we should not, we must not, lose heart. We can't possibly know all the good that may come or all the fruit that may one day develop, through the years and across the globe, from the precious seed we sow today. Our business: sowing the seed; God's business: giving the increase. (1 Corinthians 3:6,7.) And in the end, when all is said and done and the dust of history has settled, His word will not return void. (Isaiah 55:11.)

Never forget: We may fail and men we admire may fall; times may change and the hearts of many hearers may become hardened. But the seed of God's gospel will live on. Ours is but to sow . . . and continue sowing the seed of the kingdom!



Fruit, Sticks, and Other "Little Things"

By Joe Slater

Little things matter. Our Lord Himself said, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much." (Luke 16:10.)

In Eden, it was simply fruit. Sure, God said not to eat that particular kind (Genesis 2:16, 17), but who's going to get all worked up over a piece of fruit? Is fruit really that important to God? You might want to check with Adam and Eve on that; they have first-hand experience. But don't look for them in Eden. It seems God expelled them from their paradise home – something about eating forbidden fruit . . .

In the wilderness it was sticks. Sure, God told Israel not to perform ordinary labor on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:12-17), but who's going to get all worked up over a few sticks? Are sticks really that important to God? We could ask

the man in Numbers 15:32-36 if only we could find him under that pile of rocks . . .

Those today who are bent on restructuring the Lord's church into an evangelical denomination claim that the changes they are making are really no big deal. Matters such as gender roles, instrumental music in worship, and the frequency of the Lord's Supper are "non-issues" according to them – they just don't matter and are not even worthy of discussion. We who insist on strict adherence to God's word in these and all other areas receive disdainful looks and change-the-subject comments like "just tell the lost about Jesus," or "feeding the hungry is what's really important."

Jesus certainly did say that some matters are "weightier" than others. (Matthew 23:23.) He illustrated this fact in the very next verse,

denouncing His critics "who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" However, corrupting the worship of God and disregarding his teaching regarding gender roles can scarcely be classified as "gnat" issues! The New Testament's instructions on gender roles have their basis in the creation itself (1 Timothy 2:12-14); and worship throughout both testaments has always been a crucial matter where reverence for God precludes any tampering.

Put a frog in a pan of water and place it over a very low flame. In time, the water temperature goes up one degree. The frog doesn't even notice. It goes up another degree . . . and then another . . . Long before he catches on, the poor frog is dead!

Little things matter!

— Justin, TX

BUILDING BRIDGES INSTEAD OF WALLS

By Dalton Key

Far too many people, and not a few brethren, feel rejected and lonely simply because they have spent a lifetime building walls instead of bridges. And is it any wonder why they find themselves so disconnected from everyone surrounding them?

When was the last time you tried petting a porcupine?

Any healthy relationship will thrive in an atmosphere of understanding and mutual forbearance, but continual, carping criticism does nothing but destroy. Pettiness and selfishness too often drive deadly spikes into the very heart of what would otherwise be a healthy and thriving union.

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

And again Scripture admonishes,

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

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

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

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

And what is this, but the "golden rule" in practice? (Matthew 7:12.)

We would have others show kindness to us. We would have others minimize our weaknesses and instead emphasize and encourage our strengths. Should we not then treat others as we would have them treat us?

It's always the right time to be kind!

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

"Subscription Free;

Prayers Requested;

Contributions Appreciated."