

COMMENDABLE CONFIDENCE

By Joe Slater

Who can you trust? Politicians pad their pocketbooks instead of performing their promises. Preachers prey on the vulnerable rather than praying for them. Even dearest friends let you down now and then. Is there anyone, or anything, you can trust?

Some cynically decide to trust only themselves. But this, too, leads to disappointment. The Pharisees "trusted in themselves" resulting in a sickening, hypocritical self-righteousness. (Luke 18:9.) However untrustworthy others may be, we ourselves are also unreliable. Paul and his companions knew "that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God . . ." (2 Corinthians 1:9.) Even as an apostle, Paul knew that he, personally, was inadequate. His trust was "through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our

sufficiency is from God . . ." (2 Corinthians 3:4, 5.)

Material wealth also receives abundant trust that it doesn't deserve. Jesus once exclaimed, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23.) But merely being wealthy isn't the problem, as shown by the next verse: "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God." (v. 24.)

The fact is, we tend to trust our possessions. When the bank balance is high and our payments are current, we feel confident. But this trust is misplaced! Paul instructed Timothy to "command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy." (1 Timothy 6:17.)

By their very nature, riches are uncertain. Jesus spoke of moth and rust corrupting them and thieves

stealing them. (Matthew 6:9-11.) Those who experienced the Great Depression saw how suddenly wealth can become worthless. Besides, there is the ever-present possibility that you will not be here to enjoy your wealth. God's words to the rich fool ring forth: "This night your soul is required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?" (Luke 12:20.)

You will never be disappointed by trusting in God. Trust not yourself, but God! Trust not your riches, but God who gives them! Especially in matters of salvation, "trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." (1 Timothy 4:10.)

"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!" (Psalm 34:8.)

— Justin, TX

THE BELIEVER IS NOT HELPLESS

By Danny Tunnell

The Bible speaks of the devil as a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8.) We need to resist him "steadfast in the faith."

Satan does not destroy anyone at will; the Bible says he is seeking those whom he may devour. In other words, he may devour some, and some he will not be able to devour.

Those in Christ actually have authority over the devil. He is already a defeated foe. When Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead, He triumphed over sin, death, the grave, and the devil. "Through death He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil." (Hebrews 2:14, KJV.) The American Standard Version says, "Through death He might bring to nought him that had the power of death." The Twentieth Century New Testament says Jesus rendered Satan "powerless." Williams translation says that Jesus died that He might put a stop to the power of Satan. Berkeley's translation says that Jesus died that He might "neutralize" Satan. Goodspeed says Jesus

died to "dethrone" Satan. Ratherham translates it "to paralyze." Moffatt says, "to crush Satan."

"Now thanks be unto God which always causes us to triumph in Christ." (2 Corinthians 2:14.)

Someone reading this might be thinking, "It's not that easy! After all, isn't Satan called 'the god of this world?'" (2 Corinthians 4:4.) How can he be a defeated foe when he is having such a negative influence?"

Certainly, the last thing the devil wants Christians to learn is that they have authority over him. If Christians really understood that authority, the devil's heyday would be over.

The value of any authority rests in the power that is behind that authority. We are told to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. (Ephesians 6:10.) The Scriptures are not telling us to be strong in ourselves. They tell us that greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4.) We need to believe those verses by faith.

Satan did have rule over us before we became new creatures in

Christ. Then God delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. (Colossians 1:13.)

Unfortunately, many Christians have more faith in Satan's power than they have in God's power. Jesus once gave His disciples power (authority) over all the power of the enemy (Satan). (Luke 10:19.) Christians are told not to give any place to the devil. (Ephesians 4:27.) Satan cannot take any place or advantage in your life unless you give him permission to do so.

If we listened to many Christians talk or hear some preachers preach, we'd get the impression that Satan must be bigger than everybody and is running everything. It doesn't have to be that way at all. The reason so many Christians are having problems with the devil is because they are trying to defeat him in their own strength. Instead they should be thanking God for providing all the help they need to triumph over Satan.

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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

OUR REST, AND THE BEST, IS YET TO COME

By Milton Smith

Few words in the English language have the appeal of that little word "rest." Rest is something we all seek after in a variety of ways. Perhaps a person might engage in physical work and afterward enjoy resting from such exhausting activity. Virtually all of us enjoy a good night's sleep following a day that has perhaps physically, mentally, or emotionally taxed us. In a variety of ways, rest is a welcomed period in our life.

I find it most interesting that the Bible emphasizes the importance of rest. The Jews - under the Old Law - rested on the Sabbath, and did so by God's clear and explicit command. (Exodus 31:15.) After taking the land of Canaan, Israel rested. Rest is often expressed in the Bible. But in Hebrews 4:9, the Holy Spirit speaks of a special future rest that all of God's people look forward to. This rest is not promised to evildoers who refuse to believe God's commandments. (Hebrews 3:18.) This eternal rest is promised to those who learn of Christ (Matthew 11:28-30), come to Christ (John 6:44), and live a life of obedient faith. (Hebrews 4:3,11.)

This rest is lovingly promised to those who "die in the Lord." (Revelation 14:13.) I have often used this passage at funeral services in an effort to bring comfort to family members who have lost a loved one who was a faithful child of God.

But do we have this "rest" now? No. The Bible is clear that we will enter this rest when our earthly work has ended. (Hebrews 4:10.) This occurs after death (Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 14:13), and will take place in the fullest sense after Judgment Day. (Matthew 25:31-41.) Heaven is that future rest that is promised by God to all those who choose to faithfully follow Him in this life. As Paul assured those persecuted Christians at Thessalonica, ". . . and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels . . . when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe . . . Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling . . ." (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-11.)

The devoted Christian lives each day to secure this eternal rest that awaits all of God's faithful servants.

— Tulsa, OK

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4.)

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

By Dalton Key

The promise of Jesus to build His church (Matthew 16:18) was kept, as recorded by the inspired Luke in the second chapter of Acts. On this Pentecost Day the gospel was preached in its fulness for the first time, hearts were affected by the message, souls were obedient to it, and the church was established. At the close of Acts, chapter two, we read of the Lord adding to "them" (ASV) or to "the church" (NKJV) those who were being saved.

Several years later, Paul wrote his young son in the faith, Timothy, ". . . that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15.) And again, Paul wrote the brethren in Ephesus, reminding them that the church is Christ's body, that Christ is the body's head, and that the body is therefore subject to Christ. (Ephesians 5:22,23.)

From these few passages alone, it may be clearly seen, (1) that the church was to be, and in fact was, built by Christ, (2) that it was established on Pentecost Day, as recorded in Acts' second chapter, (3) that those souls obedient to the gospel message were added, by the Lord, to it, (4) that the church is God's house, and as such, supports the truth, and (5) that Christ is head over the church, His body.

Observe: Christ promised to build His church, not churches. He promised to build the church, not a denomination. His church was established on or about A.D. 33, as recorded by inspiration in the second chapter of Acts, and not at some later date. His church was comprised, and still consists, of those added to it by the Lord, and not of those deciding to join, dependent upon a favorable number of votes from the membership. This church is to be active in the business of upholding truth, and not the doctrines, judgments or opinions of men. And, further, the church of Christ looks to Christ, its one and only head, for authority in all matters of faith and practice; not to anyone else.

Does this describe the church of which you are a member?

"The churches of Christ greet you." (Romans 16:16.)

THE DOCTRINE OF STEWARDSHIP

By Bobby Key

God is the sovereign creator and owner of all things. God created all things, upholds all things, and gives all things.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1.)

“The earth is the Lord’s and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.” (Psalm 24:1.)

“The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,” says the Lord of hosts.” (Haggai 2:8.)

Of course we Christians belong to God not only because He made us and cares for us, but also because He redeemed us, and because we have voluntarily and gladly given ourselves to Him. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” (1 Corinthians 6:19,20.)

We are stewards or trustees of what we have and what we are. There is a difference between ownership and possession. As between man and man, we may claim to own things; but as between man and God, we own nothing. God owns all things. We may use those things we possess, temporarily, but ultimately all will be returned to God and an accounting must be rendered.

God has never given a deed to any of us for anything. We brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out, hence we are not absolute owners of anything.

The doctrine of stewardship is taught from Genesis to Revelation. The words “steward” and “stewardship” may be found over twenty times in the King James version of the Bible.

“Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:2.)

— Miami, OK

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.” (Revelation 4:11.) “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” (1 Timothy 6:6-10.)

Editorial . . .

LEADING WITHOUT LORDING

By Dalton Key

Regarding elders and their authority within those congregations over which they serve, the New Testament is both forthright and unambiguous. First, they wield such authority; and second, they are warned against abusing it. A great many problems have plagued otherwise peaceful churches as a result of members failing to recognize the elders’ authority; or, just as often, because of elders ham-fistedly pushing matters too far, behaving less like shepherds and more like dictators.

Do elders have authority over the congregations they serve? “Remember those who rule over you . . . Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive. . .” (Hebrews 13:7, 17.) What clearer words could heaven have used?

Is it possible for this authority to be abused? “The elders who are among you I exhort . . . Shepherd the flock of God . . . not by compulsion, but willingly . . . nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1, 2, 3.) Again, this message, this warning, is as clear as language can make it.

Elders appear to have authority in two major areas of the local congregation, first, in the doctrinal feeding and spiritual protection of the church (Titus 1:9; Hebrews 13:17), and second, in directing the congregation in various matters of judgment as they “shepherd the flock of God.” (1 Peter 5:2.) In both areas, they should serve as worthy examples.

Concerning doctrine (what the church teaches and is taught; what it stands for; and how, based upon New Testament teaching, it conducts itself) there is little room for discussion. The Bible says what it says and elders must, regardless the views of the members, insist upon God’s Word being followed. But in areas of judgment, while elders do have the final say, they would be wise to encourage and consider the input of those souls they lead. They would be best served, not by “driving” the church as cattle, but in “leading” the church as sheep.

Though possessing God-given authority, God’s shepherds should never forget they are still bound by the same “Golden Rule” that governs the flock! (Matthew 7:12.) Wisdom has learned when to stand firm and when to bend. One definition of meekness concerns that power possessed, but held in reserve.

The best leaders know when and how to pick their battles, and most importantly, when and how to work with people.

Elders would do well to follow the Lord’s example. While living among us, Jesus was the Son of God, yet presented himself as the son of man; He was the great “I AM,” yet will be forever known as one “meek and lowly of heart.”

Who wouldn’t want to follow a leader like that?



MORE COMFORTABLE, LESS FAITHFUL

By Wayne Robbins

When I was a boy growing in eastern Oklahoma, we went to worship God under the most trying circumstances, especially in the winter. Our old car did not have a heater in it and we had to bundle up in blankets to keep warm. When we got to the church building, it wasn’t much better. We had a wood stove in the middle of the room and only those who got there early could receive any warmth.

And still, everyone’s feet froze!

The first place that I preached full time was more modernized; we actually had a gas stove! However, the building was still terribly cold during the winter months. On those cold winter Sundays, the blizzard winds came whistling through the cracks in the floor. The holes in the floor were so large that you could see the earth beneath. Putting rugs on the

floor did very little good since they just danced a jig on top of the floor.

Our seats were made of planks, and rough planks at that. Ladies’ hose did not last long. Comfort was out of the question.

Yet with all the discomforts and inconveniences, that building was full every Sunday morning.

By comparison, consider things today. Ah! today. We have fine, comfortable meeting places in which to worship, comfortably heated in winter and cooled in summer. You would think that with all that comfort we could get even more members interested in showing more regularity in attendance and worship.

But by and large, today’s church members are less faithful now, with more, than members were then, with far less!

This just goes to show that

CHEATING ON GOD

By Mark Lindley

Marriage is a wonderful blessing given by God. God wants those who are married to treasure this blessing by staying together and keeping the commitments they have made. On their wedding day, a couple promises to be faithful to each other. However, “cheating” within marriage, though always wrong, is fairly common. Infidelity ruins relationships and devastates the person that one has vowed to love and cherish.

There is another type of cheating that is common in our day - cheating on God. The Bible teaches that one may commit the sin of “spiritual adultery.” This occurs when a child of God puts some thing or someone in the place of God. The Lord is worthy of first place in the lives of His people. Choosing other “gods” of the world is to commit spiritual adultery.

Perhaps no book of the Bible emphasizes this more than the Old Testament book of Hosea. God instructed the prophet, Hosea, to go and take a wife who was given to harlotry: “When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to

Hosea: ‘Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.’” (Hosea 1:2.) The immoral woman Hosea married was a fitting representation of how Israel had “cheated” on God. Notice in the last part of the Lord’s statement to Hosea: “for the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.”

But how had Israel been unfaithful to God? The answer is found in Hosea 4:17: “Ephraim is joined to idols, Let him alone.” “Ephraim,” in this verse, stands for Israel. The problem was that Israel had turned from the true God to idols. Serving these false gods made Israel guilty of spiritual adultery; guilty of cheating on God.

Spiritual adultery is very prevalent today. The true God who loves all is often ignored and rejected for things of the world. Money, recreation, earthly possessions, sensual pleasure, and selfish interests often take God’s place. There is no room for God, no time for being faithful to Him.

comfort does not guarantee faithfulness.

Genuine faithfulness is produced only by love and dedication to God and to His Son, Jesus Christ!

— Arkansas City, KS

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?’” (Matthew 16:24-26.)

“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10.)

The Lord who provides each breath, gives life and every blessing is given second place!

God was long-suffering and patient with Israel, but in time He “put her away.” (Jeremiah 3:8.) God is still patient. However, we should learn from the unfaithful nation of Israel that spiritual adultery will not be tolerated forever

— Ripley, MS

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