

IF ONE CAN, WHY CAN'T ALL?

By Gus Nichols

If one member of the local church can ignore the church and treat it as of the devil, refuse to assemble and work with the members for its edification and good, then all members of that congregation could abandon such a church and its work and worship, destroying it off the face of the earth and not sin in doing so.

If all the members of one local church could so abandon and neglect the work and worship of that one church and not sin in so doing, then all members of all the churches of Christ on earth could abandon all of them, destroying all churches of Christ, and not sin. This neglect would destroy Christianity off the face of the earth.

Non-attendance is a willful sin, which if not confessed and forgiven will cause one to lose his soul. If one

member could ignore the church and still be a Christian, then all could. If one member could abandon the work and worship of the church for one month, why not for one year? For five years? And the doors would be closed forever.

All members who have quit attending the services and worship of the church have quit the church, unless the absence is unavoidable. Such backsliding should be restored if at all possible. They are God's children, but sure to be disinherited if they die in their sins. "Unto him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James 4:17.)

Those who cannot be taught and restored should be excluded from the fellowship of the church. (2 Thessalonians 3:6.) No one can be a Christian while ignoring the church which cost the blood of Christ. A

fish could as easily live out of the water as a child of God could live the Christian life apart from the worship and service of the church. Almost all apostasy and backsliding begins in neglect of the worship of the church.

(Editor's note: the foregoing article was written many, many years ago by brother Gus Nichols, a well-known and much-respected gospel preacher long since deceased. His point is as valid and relevant now as it was when first penned.)

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." (Hebrews 10:25,26.)

HELPERS AND HINDERERS

By Don Deffenbaugh

In Luke 5:18-26 is found one of the most interesting cases of healing in all the New Testament. Jesus was in a house teaching. Barclay says, "The Palestinian house was flat-roofed. The roof had only the slightest tilt, sufficient to make the rain water run off. It was composed of beams laid from wall to wall and quite a short distance apart. The space between the beams was filled with close packed twigs, compacted together with mortar and covered over. It was the easiest thing in the world to take out the packing between the two beams. In fact coffins were very often taken in and out of a house via the roof." Another interesting thing about this healing was that the man was forgiven and healed because of the faith of others. The friends were the ones who went to the housetop and let the couch down into the midst before Jesus.

Our attention is focused first upon Jesus, the great healer. He was a great healer because he had the power to heal and He was merciful and willing. But Jesus is also the great healer of spiritual disease - sin. He has the power (Luke 5:31-32) and He is willing to heal men and women, boys and girls, of sin.

(Matthew 11:28-30.)

Next we focus our attention upon the helpless. The man was sick of the palsy. McClintock and Strong say that Palsy is "a disorder which deprives the limbs of sensation, or motion, or both; and it is usually attended with imbecility of mind." This reminds us of the fact that sinners too are helpless to save themselves from sin. (Jeremiah 10:23.) It is not that they cannot think a good thought or do a good deed (Acts 10), or understand the gospel message. (Acts 10:5-6.) It is that the sinner cannot be his own savior. (Acts 4:12.) He needs a physician.

Then there were the helpers. These were the men who brought the sick man to Jesus. They were the ones who had the faith. (Luke 5:20.) As these men had sympathy for the helpless and worked so diligently to bring him to Christ so must we, as Christians, work to bring others to Christ the Lamb of God.

Finally, there were the hinderers. These were the curious multitude and the Scribes and Pharisees. The multitude hindered this work by being passive while the Pharisees were active in their

opposition. Our Lord's work is hindered today by those who refuse to become involved and by those who criticize and find fault with the efforts of those who do work.

Be a willing helper in the work of the Lord and the crowd will say, "We have seen strange things today."

— Neosho, MO

Old Paths

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

THE TIME IS SHORT

By Danny Tunnell

A relatively new term has entered our vocabulary. In 2004 the term "bucket list" was used - perhaps for the first time - in the context of things to do before one dies. It is connected with the English idiom "kick the bucket" which is considered a euphemistic term meaning "to die."

The Bible teaches that our time on earth is short and that we have an appointment with death. (Hebrews 9:27.) Even if we live to be one hundred years of age, that's nothing compared to eternity. "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." (Psalm 90:10.)

Let's think about a man who lives 70 years on earth. The first 15 are spent in childhood. 20 years are spent in sleeping. In his final years physical limitations may curtail activities. So he's got about 30 years left. And part of that time he'll spend eating and working.

It is easy to see that there is not a lot of time to fill our "bucket list." James tells us that our life is like a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. (James 4:14.) No wonder we are instructed to "redeem the time." (Ephesians 5:16.)

Jesus said, "I must work the works of Him Who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work." (John 9:4.) Think about what Jesus accomplished in just 33 years upon earth.

All of us has a life span. Every life span is short compared to eternity. We each have the same amount of time in every day - 1440 minutes a day and 168 hours a week.

One of the best ways to redeem the time that we have, to use it wisely, is to read the Bible every day. It doesn't usually take long to read a chapter out of the Bible. If we read only one chapter a day, 5 days a week, for one year, that's enough to read the entire New Testament (260 chapters). If we read 10 chapters a day, that's enough to read the entire Bible (Old and New Testaments) in four months (1189 chapters). Time spent in God's word is not wasted.

Time is short. If you are engaging in the latest trend and finding yourself making a "bucket list," why not make the reading of God's word the number one priority on your list?

— Miami, OK

Thankful For Faith, Hope, and Love

By Joe Slater

When you hear of faith, hope, and love together, you might think of 1 Corinthians 13:13 where Paul wrote that these three things, the greatest being love, would abide even after miraculous gifts ceased. Years before Paul wrote to Corinth, however, he commended the Thessalonians and thanked God for their "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope." (1 Thessalonians 1:3.) And during his first Roman imprisonment Paul once again thanked God, this time for the Colossians and their "faith in the Lord Jesus Christ," their "love for all the saints," and "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." (Colossians 1:3, 4.)

Faith is not mere mental assent of the existence of Jesus; rather, it is our confident, obedient trust in Him. Because we believe He is the Son of God, and because we place our trust in Him, we gladly obey Him. This goes far beyond our initial obedience in repentance, confession, and immersion. As with the Thessalonians, ours must be a faith that works.

In fact, that faith must work "through love." (Galatians 5:6.) Paul wrote that even mountain-moving faith that doesn't have love is useless (1 Corinthians 13:2). He went on to describe numerous things that love does - not that it merely feels emotionally, but that it does actively (e.g. it suffers long, rejoices in truth, bears all things, etc.).

The same confidence in Jesus that motivates us to work also gives us hope. Did not our Savior say He was going to prepare a place for us, and would receive us to Himself, that where He is, there we may be also? (John 14:1-3.) This hope is not mere wishful thinking! Biblical hope is a strong desire coupled with a confident expectation of receiving that which we desire - namely, an eternal heavenly home with Christ. As we anticipate that home, let us have the same "patience of hope" the Thessalonians had.

I am thankful for the work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope shown by my brethren. May God help us to maintain that faith which works through love as we look forward to dwelling together with the Lord forever!

— Justin, TX

THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE BIBLE

By Bobby Key

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

I wonder what this man could possibly have known of Jesus Christ apart from the Bible. Did he have access to a more trustworthy source than the Bible itself? Could he look into his own heart and see a better Savior revealed there than he could see from 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 his way of some new revelation of truth. We cannot help but pity such a sad exhibition and pity a preacher willing to stoop to such cheap and irreverent showmanship.

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 unto 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 as "the faith" has been delivered "once for all." (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 rather condemns him as a sinner. However, the Bible does reveal a way of escape. Christ came to enable us to escape the servitude of sin and Satan. 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 His will - 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 . . .

IN SEARCH OF AWESOME WONDER

By Dalton Key

We still sing the words. But I wonder if they mean to us what they used to. "O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder consider all the worlds thy hands have made."

Awesome wonder is becoming a scarce commodity these days. Slick, synthetic, digitally-enhanced imitations of God's power are too often preferred over the real thing.

Divine fact is devalued while human fiction continues to sell at a premium!

The Creation account once thrilled and amazed those eager souls who heard it. The miraculous stories of Scripture once filled hearts with wonder. But now? The Bible's fact-based miracles, absent the special effects of Hollywood and the promotional push of Madison Avenue, are made to appear almost lifeless when pitted against the media's imaginary, mock miracles.

We are in desperate need of a long-overdue reality check!

A single Bible story told in Bible Class on Sunday morning has little hope of competing for the heart of a wide-eyed child against a relentless, daily dose of super-powered super heroes. I still remember well the question put to me some years ago by my then-five-year-old son: "Daddy, can God do everything Superman can do?"

The problem has only gotten "more so" in the years since. God's real is today made to take a backseat to man's imaginary. But the real will always outlast the imaginary. Truth will always win out over time.

This brings to mind a contest of sorts conducted in an Egyptian court back in the days of Moses. Pharaoh's sorcerers feebly attempted to imitate God's miracle of transforming a rod into a serpent. By some means the magicians pulled off a parlor trick, mimicking the marvel. They no doubt considered, at least for the moment, the powers of Pharaoh as greater than the power of God. But smugness soon turned to wonder as Aaron's rod swallowed up the rods of the sorcerers. God was shown to be the true and the only God and the true and only source of genuine miraculous might.

Men may mimic God but they will never match Him. We must never, ever forget this.

When the TV shows have been cancelled and the movies and comic books have long been forgotten the God of heaven will live on. The heaven's will still declare His glory. There will always and forever be but one I AM!



WHAT ARE YOU SEEKING?

By Milton Smith

Logic would seem to tell us that eternal life should express the desire of virtually every human being on earth. Amazingly, polls show that many people admit that they spend very little time thinking about eternal life, much less "seeking after it." Many will express the attitude that if there really is life after death, then they will "find that fact out" after they die and leave this world. In other words, such people do not truly and actually seek "seek after" eternal life.

Every person born into this world enters with a soul that is free from any sin. The concept that we inherit the guilt of sin from our ancestors is not taught in the Word of God. In fact, the Bible clearly teaches us that "the soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the

son." (Ezekiel 18:20.) To enjoy the bliss of Heaven after we leave this world we must "seek after" eternal life while living our earthly lives. Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from the condemning guilt of sin, and Hebrews 5:9 tells us that Jesus Christ is the author of eternal salvation unto "all those who obey Him." Paul lists several things that will cause a person to lose his soul and fail to inherit eternal life in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. John teaches the same thing in Revelation 21:7-8.

If one does not seek after the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse him of his sins, those sins will indeed keep him out of Heaven.

Jesus has provided a way for the faithful to inherit everlasting life. It is our duty to seek after this precious gift by obeying Him. How sad it is that many do not necessarily deny this fact as much as they choose to

simply ignore it! Solomon summed up man's duty to God in clear and unmistakable fashion: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14.)

Eternal life is real. It is the wise person who will fervently seek after it. — Tulsa, OK

"... God, who will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - indignation and wrath..." (Romans 2:5-7.)

A VERSE HERE, A VERSE THERE . . .

By Dalton Key

COLLECTING DUST

The Bible is a book beloved,
At least we say it's so;
It rests in honor on the shelf
With other books, you know.

And yet its pages seldom read,
Are given little thrust;
We claim to love this
Book of Books,
But it keeps collecting dust!

(DK)

TRUTH MAKES NO RETREAT

When right is wrong and wrong is
right,
With truth turned upside down;
When night is day and day is night,
And candor can't be found;

Has come the time to turn and run?
Should saints admit defeat?
Remember, friend, we've just

begun,
And truth makes no retreat!
(DK)

WOULD YOU?

It's never right to do what's wrong,
I wouldn't have you lie;
But just because a thing is true,
Does not give you the right,
To spew forth words that wound a
soul,
Even though they're true;
The Golden Rule comes into play,
Would you want it said to you?

(DK)

Harbored, hateful unforgiveness,
Seeming harmless at the start,
Soon becomes malignant business,
Like a cancer of the heart.

(DK)

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