

A FAITH THAT WILL NOT FAIL

By Milton Smith

On one occasion, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan desires to have you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed that your faith will not fail . . .” (Luke 22:31,32.) We clearly recall how Satan did, indeed, “sift” Peter to the point that he denied his Lord three times. Satan also tried to go after Job, but the great patriarch was able to stand fast against Satan’s assaults.

Satan loves to go after God’s faithful servants. This, of course, means that if you are a child of God, Satan desires to have you as well. It is a most unsettling thought to think that Satan actually wants to sift us as wheat! In other words, he wants to agitate us. It is an effort on his part to drive us from our steadfastness.

It is interesting that Jesus told

Peter that He would be praying that his faith would not fail him. In a way, Jesus was informing Peter that even though he was a chosen apostle, he would not be exempt from Satan’s attacks. But his main protection from this dark adversary would be an unyielding faith, and for this kind of steadfast faith Jesus would be praying.

Paul once likened our faith to a spiritual shield that enables us to “quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” (Ephesians 6:16.)

But what exactly is Satan’s goal when he attempts to sift us as wheat? The answer is rather obvious: he wants our faith to fail us. And this enemy from the dark side can tell when his goal is being met. When we begin to drift away from the church, he is winning. When we neglect to

read the Bible, our adversary counts this as a great victory. When we get out of the habit of praying, Satan rejoices. When we lower our moral standards and begin to blend with the world, Satan is delighted. All of these things are clear signs of a weakening faith.

From his own unpleasant experience, Peter later warned us readers to be “sober” and “vigilant,” because our “adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8.)

Many centuries ago, God’s faithful prophet Amos spoke of Jehovah’s coming judgment on the drifting children of Israel with this simple warning: “Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.” (Amos 6:1.)

— Tulsa, OK

ADMITTING WRONG

By Roger Johnson

You probably have not heard that phrase very frequently . . . especially among politicians. Oh, they might when they have been caught red-handed in something. It makes you wonder if they would have continued doing the wrong if they had not been caught.

I was taught that wrong is wrong, even if you are not caught.

I suppose it’s human nature, but we don’t like to admit that we have been wrong about anything. Consequently, we tend to rationalize and, in other ways, seek to justify ourselves. We put the best twist we can on something in order to make ourselves look good.

Admitting that we have been wrong, that we have sinned, is the most difficult challenge in becoming a Christian. Yet repentance is a requirement before one is baptized into Christ. Before repentance can

take place, a person must realize that he has sinned, admit it, and have a change of heart and mind that results in a change of life. On Pentecost, believers were told to repent and be baptized. (Acts 2:38.) Simon the sorcerer, a baptized believer, was told to repent and pray that the intention of his heart might be forgiven him. (Acts 8:22.)

A notable example of people who failed to repent, but attempted to cover up their transgression and deceive others is that of Ananias and Sapphira. The apostle Peter said that in doing so, they lied to God. (Acts 5:4.) They paid the ultimate penalty for doing so. You may deceive yourself and others, but you cannot deceive God. He knows what is in man. (John 2:25.)

Whether we ever admit it or not, wrong is still wrong. We might rationalize the wrong in our own mind and say it is okay, but just

because we think something is all right doesn’t make it so.

Non-Christians need to repent and be baptized. Fallen Christians need to repent and pray. - Columbus, GA

“He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” (Proverbs 28:13.) “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9.)

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

TRUTH AND LIES

By Danny Tunnell

During His trial Jesus made this statement: “For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears My voice.” (John 18:37.)

That prompted Pilate to ask, “What is truth?”

The Bible forever settles that question. God’s Word is truth. (John 17:17.) The Bible tells the truth. It tells the truth about God, about man, and about the devil.

Jesus called Satan a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44.) We must always be careful to never side with the devil’s lies instead of God’s truth. We live in a world in which Satan is the god (2 Corinthians 4:4) ; a place where the vast majority see truth as a lie, and lies as the truth; a place where many accept the lies of the devil.

What are some of the devil’s lies?

The devil lies about the wrong use of sex. To many, he makes sex outside of marriage appear attractive. He doesn’t mention Solomon’s words, “Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can he walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared? (Proverbs 6:27,28.) “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled: for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” (Hebrews 13:4.)

The devil also lies about the wrong use of drugs. The words “drugs” and “witchcraft” come from the same root word in Greek. Satan tells people they can have a great, wonderful experience using drugs. But drugs only lead to trouble.

Jesus always told the truth about sin. He said, “Evil thoughts proceed out of the heart.” (Matthew 15:19.) Sin starts within the heart, and that leads to war. Family tensions and problems start in the heart. We are told to keep our heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. (Proverbs 4:23.)

Jesus told the truth that God loves you - a love beyond any human love, a divine love. (John 3:16.)

Jesus told the truth about judgment. He warned people to “flee the wrath of God.” (Matthew 3:7.) God is angry with the wicked every day. (Psalm 7:11.) Jesus said, “Every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.” (Matthew 12:36.)

Jesus told the truth about repentance and conversion. He said, “Unless you repent, you will perish.” (Luke 13:3.) He said, “Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

In summary, Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” One correct answer to his question: “God’s Word is truth.” Another correct answer is: “Jesus is truth.” Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6.)

— Miami, OK

SPIRITUALLY MINDED

By Joe Slater

God has always wanted the allegiance of the heart, not merely rote obedience. Some have erroneously said that in the Old Testament people’s hearts did not have to be devoted to God, as long as they outwardly kept the commandments. However, the Old Testament itself said that loyalty of heart was indispensable: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

(Deuteronomy 6:5.)

Still, the Old Testament dealt much more with material and carnal things, while the New Testament has a greater emphasis on spiritual matters. For example, under the Old Testament, God’s people often engaged in carnal warfare to advance the Lord’s cause. Under the New Testament, “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal.” (2 Corinthians 10:4.) Rather, our sword is a spiritual one, the Word of God. The rest of our armor is also spiritual. (Ephesians 6:13-17.) We strive not to physically kill others, but to put to death the old man of sin so that a new man in Christ may come forth. (Colossians 3:3-10.)

An earthly, political kingdom characterized much of the Old Testament era. Beginning with King Saul, dozens of kings reigned over God’s chosen people. Jesus is our King today, but He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36.) His throne is in heaven, not upon the earth. And His kingdom knows no geographical boundaries, for He reigns within the hearts of His subjects.

Worship in the Old Testament centered around a temple in Jerusalem. Today, God’s spiritual temple is built, not of literal stones, but of his people as “living stones.” (1 Peter 2:4.) Similarly, in contrast to the various sacrifices of the Old Testament, we “offer up spiritual sacrifices” (1 Peter 2:4), such as “the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” (Hebrews 13:15.)

The singing of God’s praises was accompanied in the Old Testament by numerous instruments: trumpet, harp, lute, timbrel, flute, cymbal, etc. (Psalm 150:3-5.) Under the New Covenant, however, we pluck not the carnal strings of a harp, but the spiritual strings of the heart. (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16.) To return to playing musical instruments in worship would be no more fitting than the restoration of animal sacrifices.

Let us be thankful for the emphasis the New Testament places on spiritual matters. And let us worship God “in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24.)

— Justin, TX

CHRIST IS COMING AGAIN

By Bobby Key

While our Lord was yet among men, He promised, "I will come again." Though many centuries have come and gone, this promise still echoes through the ages, bringing comfort to the suffering saints. "So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him he will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." (Hebrews 9:28.) Over three hundred times in the New Testament our Lord makes the promise, "I will come again."

Yes, our King is coming - not to be crowned and begin His reign, but rather, to end His reign and receive His own! Let us notice some of the characteristics of His coming.

1. It will be majestic. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory." (Matthew 25:31.)

2. It will be sudden. "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." (Matthew 25:13.) "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect." (Matthew 24:44.)

3. It will be the end of preparation. "And the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats." (Matthew 25:32.) "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25:46.)

4. It will be the beginning of supreme joy for some. "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" (Matthew 25:34.)

5. It will be the beginning of great sorrow for others. "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" (Matthew 25:41.) - Miami, OK

"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." (Hebrews 9:27,28.) "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17.)

Editorial . . .

(ATTENTION: For the past few years, support of this little paper has been steadily declining, with its very survival coming to depend each year upon contributions received during the months of December and January. I am once again leaving matters in the hands of you, the reader. I hope those of you who have been contributing to this work during this time of year will continue to do so and that those others of you who have not helped, as of yet, will be able and willing to do so this time. Once again, thanks so much to all of you who believe in the OLD PATHS and the good we are attempting to accomplish!)

OF SLINGING MUD AND GETTING MUDDY

By Dalton Key

Some folks just can't seem to get along with anybody. And more than a few of these trouble-makers are proudly wearing the name of our Lord. Forgetting or ignoring Peter's admonition to "love as brothers," these Christ-less Christians continue to cause "divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which (they) have learned." (1 Peter 3:8; Romans 16:17.)

Will we never learn that battling among ourselves most always creates more problems than it solves? Such fights are seldom won. The apparent victor too often compromises integrity in the heat of battle to such an extent that victory becomes hollow at best and an outright defeat at worst.

It's hard to sling mud without getting yourself muddy.

Because Christ deeply loves His church, He desires unity among her members. (Ephesians 5:25; John 17:20,21.) He taught the futility of a house divided against itself and charged His disciples to love one another. (Matthew 12:25; John 13:34,35.) Paul described the united church as a body: "But now indeed there are many members, yet one body . . . so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." (1 Corinthians 12:20; Romans 12:5.)

Personal differences between individuals have many times led to major divisions within the entire congregation. One scripturally united body is always more desirable than two separate and warring groups meeting together under the same roof while scarcely speaking to one another. With this kind of internal division, it is usually not long until a visible split takes place. And the split splinters the body into more than just two groups and does damage far beyond that felt by the original parties involved. In the words of the late Lloyd Connell, "There is the group that stays in the church building. There is the group that starts meeting in another place. There is the group that scatters to other congregations. And then there is the group that is disgusted about the whole matter and falls by the wayside, ceasing to attend anywhere."

Doctrine is one thing and opinion another. While division born of sincere insistence to obey the Lord and follow the teachings of the Bible is often unavoidable, tearing the Lord's body asunder over matters of opinion or personality is unconscionable.



HIDING BEHIND THE CROSS

By Dalton Key

heaped upon him.

Herod Agrippa had this same problem as well. Luke records the king's sad story: "So on a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat on his throne and gave an oration to them. And the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man.' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died." (Acts 12:21-23.)

Cicero and Herod, falling for the flattery which swept over them, both succumbed to that "proud look" which heads the list of those things hated by the Lord. (Proverbs 6:16-19.) When Scripture admonishes that we "be clothed with humility," it further reminds us that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5.)

Those of us who teach and preach are especially - and continually - in need of such reminders. While many young preachers have been

discouraged and decimated by unwarranted criticism, many others have been spoiled and ruined by well-meaning, but overblown, praise.

While we should not believe all the bad that may be said about us, neither should we foolishly accept as fact all the good! Every sermon is not a home run, preaching is not a competitive sport, and none of us are "superstars" within the brotherhood.

We would be wise to steer clear of the bad examples of Cicero and Herod and follow the humble Apostle Paul instead: "Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others . . . But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (1 Thessalonians 2:6; Galatians 6:14.)

In keeping with so many prayers of yesteryear, may we as gospel stewards "hide behind the cross" as we proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ.

THE WORLD'S MOST VALUABLE TREASURE

By Milton Smith

Did you know that many people in this country look for lost treasures each and every year? Today, these so-called treasure hunters often utilize very sophisticated equipment to seek after such valuables. They will hunt in caves, old houses, open fields, underground, and sometimes even under water. I remember reading about a man a few years ago who discovered nearly 200 silver bars buried in the floor of an isolated cave in Texas. Back in the late 1970's, some hunters discovered the sunken treasure of a long-lost ship. What they found was estimated to be worth nearly 50 million dollars.

Between the 16th and 18th centuries, Spanish merchant ships carrying valuable cargo were often attacked and boarded by roving pirates who roamed the Caribbean Sea. Pirates of the Caribbean were notorious robbers of ships on the high seas. This period of time has often been fictionalized and romanticized by Hollywood. Today, many treasure hunters are convinced that valuables taken by pirates can still be found

buried along the Spanish Main - a coastal region of the Caribbean Sea. Some believe that notorious pirates stole and buried priceless treasures in this area back when they roamed the high seas. There are also popular TV shows dealing with "treasure seekers." Shows ranging from men traveling throughout America looking for valuable collectables to programs about artful and shrewd shop owners hoping to purchase valuable "treasures" from their customers.

Treasures! Many seek for such precious fortunes. Amazingly, the greatest treasure of all is easy to find. It is called eternal life, and is available to all who will turn to Jesus Christ. It was Jesus Himself who once said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupts, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrupts, and where thieves cannot break through and steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be

also." (Matthew 6:19-21.) It is the wise man who spends his life laying up eternal treasures in Heaven. Jesus even once said that the kingdom of heaven is like a "treasure hidden in a field." (Matthew 13:44.) This treasure is the most valuable in the world; historically, it has only been sought after by the wisest of treasure seekers!

— Tulsa, OK

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