

“FEAR NOT”

By Danny Tunnel

As a child, did your parents ever tell you, “Don’t be afraid?”

Some things are exact opposites of one another. The opposite of life is death. The opposite of blessing is cursing. The opposite of love is fear. In fact, perfect love casts out fear. (1 John 4:18.)

Fear seems to be one of the most natural things in this world. The world is absorbed in it. It is something that is taught from birth. Our parents taught us how to speak, and we had no way of knowing one way from another. We just said what they said. If they were fearful, then we learned to be fearful too.

Our country recently noted the passing of President George H. W. Bush. He often said, “My parents inculcated character within me.” Unfortunately, many parents have also inculcated fear within their children. We need to imitate God in the same way children are prone to imitate their parents. We need to hear what our heavenly Father is teaching us.

When Jesus was born, the shepherds were told, “Fear not.” (Luke

2:9-11.) One translation says, “the shepherds were terrified.” The first words of the angel to those shepherds were, “Fear not.”

Four times in the Bible accounts concerning the birth of Jesus, the angels use the expression, “Fear not.” Zechariah was filled with fear when he was told that he would be the father of John the Baptist, who would be the forerunner of the Messiah. The angel told him, “Fear not.” (Luke 1:13.) Mary was told she would have the awesome privilege of bearing the Son of God. The angel said, “Fear not, Mary.” (Luke 1:30.) When Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, he was told, “Fear not . . . for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 1:20.) And the angels came to the shepherds, and said, “Fear not.”

We live in the natural world that God created. And we are not very much different from the people who lived in the time the Bible was written. The tendency, then and now, is to fear the supernatural.

God does not want us gripped and enslaved in the wrong kind of fear. Yes,

He is holy and all-powerful. Respect for Him is the beginning of wisdom. However, we are not to cringe in fear of the problems we face in this world. Jesus said the things He said that we might have peace. He said, “In the world you have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33.)

Knowing Jesus is always with us should help us overcome the fear of loneliness. (Matthew 28:20.)

Fears are real. All fears and phobias are in some variation a fear of death. The fear of dying, what if something goes wrong?

At the time of Jesus death, the angel said, “Fear not . . . for He is risen.” (Matthew 28:5,6.) Christ is the answer to the fear of death. He promised, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you: not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

— Miami, OK

When Truth Hurts

By Joe Slater

Paul asked the Galatians, “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” (Gal. 4:16.) Sometimes truth hurts! It requires us to face our faults and change our ways, both of which may be painful.

Error in the Galatian churches left the apostle no choice but to speak bluntly. Promoters of a false gospel are accursed! (That is, liable to eternal destruction, 1:8- 9.) Those believing that false gospel were fools, as if under a spell. (3:1.) Everyone being justified by the Law cut themselves off from Christ and fell from Grace. (5:4.)

Ouch! That hurts!

But Paul didn’t just routinely use such sharpness, nor should we. Some people justify being verbally brutal by saying, “I’d rather hurt your feelings than tell you lies.” In fact, however, those aren’t the only two choices! Truth

can, and usually should, be spoken gently but firmly. Sometimes, as with the Galatians, extreme circumstances require sacrificing gentleness. But even then, Paul made his affection clear: “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you.” (4:19.)

Jesus Himself spoke bluntly in some cases. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” (Matthew 23:13 and six additional times.) “Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of Hell? (23:33.) But again, this was not the norm for our Lord. The hypocritical Pharisees needed to be jarred to face their sin, but Jesus used a far different approach with sincere seekers, even when they were ignorant and sinful.

Sometimes the doctor has to hurt us to make us well; but most will try

to minimize the pain. Just so, speaking the truth may hurt some people’s feelings. Let’s be sure it’s the truth that hurts, and not our unnecessarily rough manner.

— Justin, TX

“That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things, into Him who is the head - Christ.” (Ephesians 4:14,15.)

Old Paths

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*“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)***BIBLE READING: A GREAT NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTION**

By Dalton Key

Bible reading, once a regular practice for Christians, a daily pastime for families of the Lord’s people, and, further, a personal and daily regimen of the masses, has more recently fallen upon hard times. Sadly, the reading and study of the Bible is now too-often ridiculed as amounting to nothing more than the wasted efforts of those with small minds and even smaller intellects.

The ablest leaders and most brilliant minds in history would beg to disagree.

Sir Isaac Newton, renowned scientist, mathematician, and philosopher, once confessed, “I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever.”

William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, declared, “The Scriptures contain a declaration of the mind and will of God. They ought also to be read, believed, and fulfilled in our day. We accept them as the words of God Himself.”

Martin Luther, whose determination sparked the early fires of the Reformation, was a man in love with God’s Word. Though we believe him wrong on many counts, he was “spot on” in observing, “Holy Scripture is a sweet-scented herb, and the more you rub it, the more it emits its fragrance.”

Our country has been blessed with leaders at the highest levels of government professing deep respect for the Bible. George Washington once said, “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible. He is worse than an infidel who does not read his Bible and acknowledge his obligation to God.” John Adams stated, “The Bible is the best book in the world.” Thomas Jefferson declared, “I have always said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume will make better citizens, better fathers, better husbands. The Bible makes the best people in the world.” And Abraham Lincoln, perhaps the most admired and loved of all past presidents, once acknowledged, “I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible,” further advising, “Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better man before God.”

Today’s Bible scoffers are on the wrong side of history!

Why not resolve now, at the beginning of this new year, to make the reading and study of the Bible a dedicated priority in your daily routine! The time to begin is now!

SPENDING TIME ALONE WITH GOD AND HIS WORD

By Wayne Burger

Spiritual gurus and modern day cults have given the idea of meditation a bad connotation. Actually, meditation is a Biblical idea and a wonderful means for spiritual growth. To meditate means to spend time in deep thought about a particular subject.

Jean Fleming suggests another reason few folks do much meditating. “Our practical, materialistic society so values action over meditation, study and prayer that we often feel guilty when we stop to think, study or pray.” (Between Walden and the Whirlwind, p. 47.)

“Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening.” (Genesis 24:63.) When Joshua took over leadership of the nation after Moses’ death, God instructed, “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night.” (Joshua 1:8.) Several times in Psalm 119 David said that he meditated (v. 15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99.) Even though we do not have a specific mention of Jesus meditating, it is implied in that He spent time alone. (Matthew 4; 14:13, 22-23; Mark 6:31; Luke 6.)

Of course our goal should be like the righteous man in the first Psalm and it says of him, “But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.” (v. 2.)

Somewhere I’ve come across a statement which should be our challenge: “In the midst of our chaotic lives of activities, demands and responsibilities, it is possible to retreat, reflect and read and by so doing to feed the inner man, to grow in our spiritual lives, while remaining intensely involved in a very needy world.”

Let’s find the time, even if it is just a few minutes a day, to meditate on God’s word.

Each one must find his special spot and time. Isaac’s time and spot was evening and in a field. (Genesis 24:63.) David said that he meditated during the night watches while in bed. (Psalm 119:148; Psalm 63:6.) Some folks prefer morning, others prefer evening and some during the day. The time matters to no one except you. What’s best for you? Hopefully, you can find a time when you can be alone with your Bible and your God.

Great blessings await us when we meditate.

— Littleton, CO

“Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” (Psalm 119:97.)

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.” (Psalm 1:2.)

FROM THE ARCHIVES . . . GOING HOME

By Bobby Key

When we leave this world we are not leaving home but going home. This is what our faith is all about. We live in time but we live for eternity. This world is not our home. We are pilgrims and sojourners passing through this world. Why are we tempted to live primarily for time with little thought of eternity? We spend our time in this world preparing for the next world. This world is a sea of troubles preparing our soul for life in the next world.

Our hope for a better country or a heavenly city goes all the way back to the patriarchs. Abraham lived in tents in the land of Canaan. He lived in a foreign country all the while waiting for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:10.) Canaan was not his home. Through the eye of faith Abraham was allowed to see the heavenly city, made and prepared by God Himself. The heroes of faith found in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews had the same vision. These all died in faith, not having received the promise. The thing promised was seen afar off. They embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. They had a desire for a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God was not ashamed to be called their God, for He had prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:14-16.)

Our citizenship is in heaven. (Philippians 3:20.) Jesus was aware of the vision of the patriarchs when He said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he saw it and was glad." (John 8:56.)

Jesus knew where home is; He was closer to it. To the penitent thief He said, "I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43.) He made the promise, "I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am there you may be also. (John 14:2-3.)

Since Christ has risen we have a hope that reaches beyond this world. To be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8.)

When the spirit of a saint leaves the body it goes home.

"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1.)

EDITORIAL . . .

I CHOOSE TO BELIEVE GOD

By Dalton Key

For those of you old enough to remember . . .

. . . It's been nearly 20 years since the Y2K panic, when we were told the world was sure to collapse due to unprepared technology.

. . . It's been 40 years since the gas shortages and accompanying long lines at the gas pumps, when we were told the world was just a few years away from depleting its reserves of fossil fuel.

. . . It's been nearly 60 years since the Cuban Missile Crisis, when we were told the world was on the very brink of a looming nuclear holocaust.

The point? Many of us have lived our entire lives, scuttled by scare-mongers from one promised peril to the next, always assured that our best days were behind us and our worst nightmares were lurking just around the next corner.

And yet, somehow, by some means, we survived.

Fear sells. Fear is contagious. For some, fear is even fun. But fear was never intended to be the default setting for those created in the image of the Almighty.

Open the Bible at random. You'll be just a short distance from one of God's admonitions, one of His invitations, to leave our fears at the feet of the One who made us. "Fear not," is a message permeating both Testaments and spanning all three Bible dispensations.

What did God tell Abram? "Do not be afraid." (Genesis 15:1.) What did he tell Isaac and Israel and Moses and Joshua and Gideon and Isaiah and Jeremiah? "Do not be afraid," "do not fear," "fear not." (Genesis 24:1; 46:3; Numbers 21:34; Joshua 1:9; Judges 6:23; Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 1:8.) What did Jesus tell his disciples? "Do not be afraid." (Matthew 10:28, 31; John 14:27.) What do the inspired writers of the New Testament tell us? "Be anxious for nothing," "do not give way to fear," "do not fear," "do not be afraid." (Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:6,14; Revelation 2:10.)

One unbreakable law of the universe is as follows: As faith grows, fear recedes; as fear grows, faith recedes. Jesus understood this reality as he admonished the fearful among his hearers with the words "O you of little faith." (Matthew 6:30.)

The world promises calamity. It always has. God promises - and provides - spiritual peace and inner calm.

I choose to believe God. How about you?



JOINING FAULT-FINDERS, INC.

By Steven Prine

A math teacher worked ten problems on the chalkboard for the class to see. From the beginning, she heard giggles as she continued writing. By the time she had finished, giggles had turned to laughter and ridicule. Putting down the chalk, she turned around and asked the class, "What's so funny?" One student said, "You got the first problem wrong!"

The teacher responded, "I know, and I did it on purpose. I wanted to show by example that all of you focused on what was wrong. No one bothered to see that the other nine are correct!"

Christians live in a fishbowl. Jesus said to let our light shine. (Matthew 5:14.) We all make mistakes in judgment at times, lose our tempers, etc. It's too easy to criticize a work being done, a lesson taught, no one visited the sick, etc.

I wonder if we get so caught up in expecting perfection in others performing the works of the church that we don't notice the good being accomplished. What catches our eye is the mistake or less-than-expected result. We complain about what could've been done better, or what should've been done. Perhaps the task at hand could've been done better if we had pitched in and contributed our talents!

Worse yet, we complain about our fellow-Christians' flaws in their work or character to someone who isn't a Christian. How many times have I seen that? And we wonder why our neighbors and friends have no interest in listening when we talk about God!

Yes, we are in a fishbowl. The world will see our good; but the bad can overshadow our good. We must all work together, encouraging each

other, "exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:25.)

Let's focus on encouraging each other, not on joining Fault-Finders, Inc.

— Turlock, CA

"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.)

TURNING BACK TO THE GRACIOUS HAND OF GOD

By Milton Smith

A falling object of most any size can be dangerous. If we walk near a construction site we might see signs posted to warn us of potential "falling objects." Why? Because an object of any size that falls from any distance is capable of bringing serious injury (or even death) to the person who might be unlucky enough to be struck by such an object.

But without a doubt, the most dangerous and deadly thing that can "fall away" is the eternal soul of a person in rebellion to God. To fall a way from the grace of our Lord is so dangerous the Bible contains many warnings about such a terrible fate.

We have many examples in God's Word of people falling from grace. One does not need to turn many of the Bible's pages before reading the story of Adam and Eve and how they sinned and brought about their own downfall. The Jews, as a nation, often went into captivity because of their rebellion against God and His Divine Law. In the book of Revelation,

the letters to the seven churches of Asia provide examples of entire congregations being warned that they were in danger of falling away from God. Paul even warned the Galatians, "Christ is become of no effect unto you; whosoever of you are justified by the law, you have fallen from grace." (Galatians 5:4.)

One can fall from the security of God's grace by yielding to worldly influences, failing to do what is right, a lack of diligence, or failing to overcome temptations. It is important to recognize the dangers of falling away so that we might protect against such a terrible thing from happening. But we rejoice over the fact that the Bible also contains examples of people who were guilty of falling away, but soon recognized their dilemma and turned back to God. Peter would be a classic example of this. As the Psalmist has written, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delights in His way; though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for

the Lord upholds him with His hand." (Psalm 37:23-24.) We later read in this same Psalm, "Depart from evil and do good, and dwell for evermore."

The erring Christian will always find the gracious hand of God extended to him any time he is ready to repent and turn back to Him.

— Tulsa, OK

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