

Banner of Truth

"The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

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The Crucial Need for a New Beginning

Having drifted away from the inestimable worth of what Christ began, what he gave us through awful price of Calvary, it is crucial that we pursue A New Beginning

In Paul's letter to "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ," at Colosse, he points out some highly important information about Christ and His church:

And he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence (Col. 1:18).

Two important things which a would-be-Christian must learn, sort of leap right out at the reader. One, Christ is "head of the body." Two, the body is "the church." Just think how this information would do wonders to clear up the spiritually deadly misunderstanding of what the church is and who is her head.

If we really believe God's word, we cannot view the church as a trivial, unimportant thing. Belief in God's word would additionally prohibit any man, such as the Pope, or any group of men, from being the head of Christ's church which He himself built and purchased with His blood (Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28).

Paul's words contain another not so readily seen and comprehended point: Christ "is the beginning." In our discussion we shall give attention to this word, "beginning." It is important to consider what is implied by this word as Paul here uses it. A study of the word will show the significance and value in realiz-

ing the worth of what Christ has done for us. We have noted below some comments on and definitions of the word which will add to our understanding:

1. The following is from *The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary*:

"Here he is announced as the beginning of the new spiritual creation...Of the new moral creation Christ is the source, the principle, the beginning, the fountain of life, purity, goodness, and joy to the souls of men." (The Book of Colossians, p. 394)

2. Speaking of *arche* (beginning), *Vine's* says it "...means a beginning...so also the origin, the active cause, whether a person or thing, e.g., Col. 1:18." (p. 113).

3. *Thayer* says of the same word: "...the person or thing that commences, the first person or thing in a series, the leader: Col. 1:18" (p. 77).

4. *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*, says it refers to "the new life which subsists in the body — the Church" (Vol. 3, p. 471).

What Do We Mean By "A New Beginning"?

Based upon the above definitions of "beginning," we have in mind a *new beginning* of understanding and appreciation for what Christ has done, has begun, for us with regard to our soul's salvation. Christ →

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Continued from Page 1

was indeed the beginning of His church, His gospel and His conditions by which we shall be judged.

A good brother of decades ago used to say, "Brethren, we are drifting." How true that statement was. If we were drifting then, and we were, what would our beloved brother think about the present condition? Our drifting has become so much more pronounced now than then. Those within the church for a short time have no idea how far we have drifted, unless they have studied what has happened in the past. The longer one has been in the church, the more apparent it should be as how far removed we are from what we were fifty years ago. The severity of this drifting is seen, not just that we are different today than we were fifty years ago, but due to the fact that we were then doing a much better job of walking in "the old paths" (Jer. 6:16).

Just How Far Have We Drifted? Space doesn't allow us to do a detailed accounting, but we shall call attention to a few things, which show the serious-

ness of this drifting. Many other things could be named which are matters of fact.

The affinity for denominationalism among our brethren has grown by leaps and bounds. The distinctiveness of the New Testament church has been renounced when a brother will participate in a "Catholic Revival," or join in the meetings of Protestant denominations, which an increased number are doing. There are brethren among us who exchange pulpits, or engage in other acts of fellowship, with people in these man-made churches. Just recently a friend sent me two articles from a newspaper in Florence, Alabama. Those articles were advertisements of joint meetings of the Magnolia church of Christ with a Methodist church. The articles noted several others who had participated in joint meetings with denominations.

Efforts to join hands with the Christian Church in full fellowship are occurring in different places. The use of mechanical instruments and other errors are just being overlooked by those who know better.

Even the teaching of the New Testament on the necessity of baptism for remission of sins, is being called in question by those who are "somewhat" by virtue of their prominence and influence. Salvation apart from scriptural baptism is unknown in the New Testament.

The spirit of reverence, respect and solemnity which characterizes true worship has disappeared in many places. A County Fair atmosphere now prevails, as people ask for more of what pleases them. Many like to be entertained. A "thus saith the Lord" for approval has gone by the wayside.

The kind of preaching we used to hear is seldom heard anymore. The time was that most preachers did what is now some times disparagingly called "book, chapter and verse preaching." Though the apostle Paul called the names of those who taught error; more than a few brethren will no longer tolerate it. Words are often minced, and care is taken not to hurt the feelings of anyone, even though without change they may be on the road to Hell. Oops! I used the word "hell," which people do not like to hear, even though it is used in God's word more than once.

Paul said to the elders at Ephesus, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel

of God” (Acts 20:27). I have known of more than one preacher who was limited as to what subjects he was allowed to preach. From much of the preaching of today, it appears that several are limited, or else they know that they are not to preach on certain subjects. A preacher who would tolerate such prohibitions should not be in a pulpit. It is so refreshing to know of preaching brethren who are willing to preach the whole truth without fear or favor of man. I just recently heard of a case where the preacher was not supposed to preach on a couple of important Bible subjects, but he did so anyway. The preaching caused quite a stir, with some demonstrating their displeasure that God’s word was being used to show the truth on subjects which some did not want to hear. More power to preachers who are willing to preach the truth and nothing but the truth regardless of the cost.

We could give many other examples of where we have drifted from God’s word showing our lack of appreciation and thanksgiving for what Christ did for us in His “beginning.” But we must move on toward the heart of our subject: The Crucial Need for a New Beginning.

An example of a New Beginning in Church History. Apostasy, as noted in I John 4:1, was beginning to show its evil head even at the close of the first century. John said, “many false prophets are gone out into the world.” Apostasy would continue, and in A.D. 606. Boniface III declared himself “Universal Bishop,” or Pope. In the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, a number of people became dissatisfied with the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. Those advocates of change met with stiff resistance from the Catholic Church, many giving up their lives for their cause, killed by the Catholics.

As a result of the opposition to the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church there came into being what is referred to as The Protestant Reformation movement. These people were in a sense engaging in a *new beginning*. They wanted to reform the Catholic Church making changes which would be more in accord with the teaching of God’s word. Though those people were to be commended for wanting to be in greater conformity with the teaching of God’s word, they did not go far enough. Instead of setting out to “reform” the Catholic Church,

they should have had as their goal following the New Testament pattern and restoring New Testament Christianity. Their *new beginning* did not go far enough.

A Restoration Movement. Records have been found which indicate there were those in Great Britain in the 1600s who were worshipping according to the New Testament pattern calling themselves the church of Christ. But in the latter 1700s a great deal of activity was taking place on the part of a number of people to go back to the New Testament pattern for the church. This movement was referred to as the Restoration Movement. The goal of this movement was not to “reform,” but to “restore” the knowledge and practice of the primitive church as established by Christ.

In the late 1700s and the early 1800s there was a great amount of restoration activity in Great Britain as well as in the United States. The goal of those involved in those activities was a *new beginning* in the sense of going back to that which Christ has supplied relative to His church, His gospel, and His all-sufficient word. This *new beginning* of respect for the New Testament pattern was met with great success, as thousands left the ranks of denominationalism. The religious world was being turned upside down in much of the eastern half of the U.S.

In the last half of the 1800s, error began to creep into this effort to restore the New Testament church in this country. Controversy arose with regard to the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship and the formation of the Missionary Society. This conflict centered upon the question of authority of God’s word as a standard for faith and practice. Two camps on opposite sides emerged and the difference between them to the extent that in 1906 the census listed the Church of Christ and the Christian Church as separate religious groups.

We might suggest that on the part of those who remained within the church after the division, there was a *new beginning* to stand by the New Testament pattern for the church. They rejected the use of the instrument in worship and the Missionary Society on the grounds that there was no divine authority for them. That is still just as true today.

The church had great success in part of the →

1900s, becoming the fastest growing religion in the U.S in mid-century. That success, however, was not to continue at the same rate. I can well remember that even in the 1960s sounds of uncertainty began to be heard, as some brethren began to “learn” from our religious friends. Learn, they did, and now more and more are joining hands with them, opting for man’s ways rather than God’s way.

OUR NEED FOR A NEW BEGINNING

Given these matters, we are suggesting that there is “A Crucial Need for a New Beginning.” By this we do not mean a new church or a plan of salvation. Our Lord at such great cost has already provided that. There is no sense in which the Lord’s ways can be improved upon, notwithstanding the fact that a great many are opting for change to suit themselves. By a *new beginning*, I mean a new appreciation and respect for what Christ has provided. We have drifted so far from the shores of the truth which God has provided, that we must do our best to return, if we would expect the eternal salvation promised to those who serve Him acceptably.

We shall list six areas where we have drifted and where there is great need for a *new beginning*. Our aim is to point us back to what our Lord teaches, and show our love for Him by doing His will in the greatest and most efficient way possible. We begin with one of the most important areas:

I. A New Beginning in the Study of God’s Word

We begin here due to the fact that it has much to do with success in the other areas we shall discuss. Since faith comes from the hearing of God’s word (Rom. 10:17), it is imperative that we have the faith which is necessary to the doing of God’s will. True faith is exemplified by doing what God’s word teaches us to do.

We have drifted from the study which used to characterize many more members of the church than it does today. One way to verify this is to teach a Bible class and freely call on the students for answers or comments. It will soon be clear that many in the class know very little about what is being studied. This is an indication that little or no effort has been put forth before class time.

Bible study is not encouraged as it should be. I recall an instance where I suggested to the Bible class that we engage in “daily Bible reading.” The elders did not like

the idea; “It might embarrass some one,” they said. The study of God’s word should not be drudgery, and it would not be if we gave heed to the words of Peter: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby” (I Pet. 2:2).

More serious teaching needs to be done with our young people. Even the littlest ones can learn much more than some imagine, if they are challenged to do so. With many children, more play or fun is the order of the day. Yes, the children like that, but it doesn’t give them the spiritual food they need.

We are not today seeing the outstanding Bible students that characterized the past. The time was that brethren taught themselves, by a coal oil lamp, or in between work times in the day. They became excellent students of God’s word.

II. A New Beginning in Our Worship

By the study of God’s word we can learn what worship is all about, what it is to be like. Christ has set forth the requirements of acceptable worship: “God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship him spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). To worship Him in spirit is to worship in sincerity from the heart, from the inner man. To worship Him in truth is simply to worship in the ways that are authorized in His word. This rules out much of what is being done in worship today. Not only does this rule out the use of the instrument, it rules out a number of other things. Nowhere that I know is there authority for doing things as entertainment in worship, but it is happening in a great many instances.

Something now often absent in worship is a spirit of reverence and respect as exemplified by quietness. Other than that which is necessarily involved in worship which involves sound, there should be quietness. When there is a lot of unnecessary noise, it is more difficult to worship “in spirit,” that is, having our minds centered on what we are doing. This is especially true when observing the Lord’s Supper.

Worship which is insincere, not from the heart, is vain, useless and unacceptable to God. Christ calls attention to what Esaias said of the hypocrites, “This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” (Mark 7:6). It is further pointed out that “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,” is vain (v. 7).

III. A New Beginning in Preaching

We have already mentioned some areas where there needs to be improvement in our preaching, but we shall add a few things. Paul charged Timothy to “Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). A lot needs to be said here as to the type of preaching which should be done today, even as in the time of Paul and Timothy. Some do not want to be reproved and rebuked, but God’s word says, Do it. Paul continues, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall be turned away from the truth...” (vv. 3-4).

Brethren, we had better believe that when all the truth is set forth, the negative as well as the positive, some are not going to like it. But like it or not, if a preacher and or a teacher holds back the truth because someone will not like it, he is not qualified to preach or teach God’s word.

Paul instructs the young preacher, Timothy, to “be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (I Tim. 4:12). Ever since Demas forsook Paul for the love of the world (2 Tim. 4:10), not a few christians in general have likewise shown themselves to be poor examples of God’s servants. It seems to me that now there are more bad examples of preachers than there used to be. Not only do preachers become engaged in sexual misconduct, but they some times beat people out of what they owe by skipping out, or a failing to pay their debts. Some preachers are lazy and do not earn their support. Some are not trustworthy.

There is as much need today, if not more, than there was several decades ago, to preach and teach on such subjects as: the one church, the essentiality of baptism, God’s word as our only authority in the spiritual realm, God’s law on fellowship, divorce and remarriage, our example as salt of the earth and light of the world, and many others. There is no place for pleasing platitudes to take the place of “preaching the word.” There sadly is a demand today for “joker” preachers, who will not step on any toes, and some times are reluctant to preach all the truth one needs to be saved. We need preachers of deep conviction, who are not afraid to speak the truth.

IV. A New Beginning in Modesty and Morality

That *modesty* and *morality* are connected to each other is simply a matter of common sense. Great change has come about in this area over the past several years, not only in society in general, but also within the church. Though modesty and morality cover more than sexual conduct, we are discussing them primarily as they relate to sexuality.

Paul’s instruction to Timothy regarding modest dress was, “that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” (I Tim. 2:9-10). There is no reason to believe that Paul’s words here are any less applicable to us now than when he wrote them. But from what we see now, one might conclude that a great many women see it differently.

When I obeyed the gospel in 1953, women’s dress was far different than what I see today. Women then wore modest dresses, with modest hemlines and necklines. Several years this side of that time, women began to wear pant suits, which were some times a bit tighter than the skin. “Mini-skirts” then came along sometimes even proving to be embarrassing to those who passed the emblems of the Lord’s Supper throughout the assembly. The styles now, however, make these things pale in comparison. Not only have modest dresses gone out of style, but the midriff attire now often reveals the navel and all the way down to exposing underwear. Necklines have plunged in many cases, exposing parts of the breast that used to be covered.

In this, I am not just talking about what is seen among women in society in general, but what is seen many times among members of the church. It appears that it has been forgotten that as christians we may not be like the world when the world is at variance with God’s will. What are parents thinking of when they start dressing their daughters at a very early age in ways to flaunt their sexuality? I wonder if mothers are some times vicariously projecting themselves in the dress of their daughters.

It could not be more obvious that women’s lack of modesty in dress has contributed to sexual immorality. The nature of male and female in the area of sexuality is made clear in God’s word. There is that natural attraction which must be kept under control. Christ →

warns against looking “on a woman to lust after her...” (Matt. 5:28); yet it is obvious that some women dress in such a way as to tempt men to lust after them. This means that the woman is also guilty of tempting a brother to sin.

As a result of drifting away from God’s teaching on modesty and morality, we have seen a drastic increase in out-of-wedlock pregnancies and births among members of the church. So many christian families have been affected by this increase, which, simply put, reflects an increase in sinful sexual activity by members of the church. It should, of course, be remembered that when a child is born out-of-wedlock, some male is as guilty of sin as the unwed mother.

On the subject of modesty and morality, we need to keep in mind that God’s laws apply to men as well as women. It is some times disgraceful the way men show disrespect at worship services by the way the dress.

Who can deny that there is indeed a great need for a *new beginning* of respect for God’s law on this subject? This great need is due, in great part, because we have stopped studying God’s word as we should, and have failed to respect what we do know.

V. A New Beginning Is Needed with Respect to God’s Law on Fellowship

Christians are “a peculiar people” (I Pet. 2:9). This does not mean, as the word *peculiar* is some times used, an odd person, but it rather means we are a possession of God, we belong to Him. Paul says, “ye are not your own...for ye are bought with a price...” (I Cor. 6:19-20). Thus, we are people, in the world, but not of the world. We belong to God, and should act accordingly.

Since we are God’s people, there are certain laws with regard to fellowship, including people of the world as well as unfaithful people in the church. Paul says, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). To the Corinthians Paul said, “Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness: and what communion hath light with darkness” (2 Cor. 6:14). John said, “Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God...” (2 John 9). John goes on to say that if one bids “God speed” to such a person he “is partaker of his evil deeds” (vv. 10-11).

This principle would include fellowship with people of the world as well as members of the church. But there are specific examples of fellowship with unfaithful members of the church. In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians he makes the following statement: “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner: with such an one no not to eat” (I Cor. 5:10). To the Romans, Paul wrote, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). There are other passages which have to do with God’s law on fellowship, but the above should suffice to show us that God does have a law on fellowship, as on many other things.

There is a pressing need today, as there was in New Testament times, to respect God’s law. Yet, the withdrawing of fellowship from any unfaithful member of the church is almost never heard of. But on the other hand, people guilty of virtually all manner of sin are fellowshiped, as though they were in fellowship with God. As we have noted earlier, the frequency of fellowship of our brethren with the religions round about us is a common occurrence.

If we had a *new beginning* in the sense of respecting God’s law on fellowship, it would have good influence upon those who believe we should look to God’s word as the only basis for belief and practice. When we veer from doing what God’s word teaches, people who might accept the truth see our inconsistency. In most cases the religions round about us have not a great deal of respect for what God’s word says, and we shouldn’t fall into the same category by being like them. By a study of God’s word, and a high respect for what we learn, we would have more respect for all of God’s law.

VI. A New Beginning Is Needed in Mission Work

One of the greatest opportunities and responsibilities we have as members of the body of Christ is that of taking the gospel to as many people of the world as we can. Christ’s commands: “Go ye therefore and teach all notions...,” and “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:15), are not to be taken lightly. The greatest favor we can do another is to take the gospel to that person. †

Furthermore, this involves our own salvation. In the early days of the church, the word spread rapidly, even when persecution was present.

After World War II, we saw great efforts being put forth to take the gospel to other countries. There was a great increase in the number of brethren who were willing to go to some foreign country in behalf of the cause of Christ. Many men with families left the luxuries of this country and went abroad. Congregations were planted in many new places. This was something to be thankful for, and the Lord must have been well pleased.

However, in more recent years, the number of our brethren engaged in mission efforts in other countries has decreased greatly. Few are willing to give up what is necessary to go and live in another country. In some instances, when one is willing to go, our brethren are terribly slow to make it possible financially, to go.

That we have sort of lost sight of our need to be engaged in mission efforts is reflected in the fact that in many of our lectureships, little attention is given to mission work. Our minds must be on something else, or we would emphasize the need.

Some mission efforts today are primarily put forth from our own shores. It is a good thing any time the gospel is set forth to those who need it, but there is no way which is more effectual than going to another country, learning the language, and spending more than a little time there.

I do not think we hear a great deal from Bible classes and sermons about "seeking the lost," and I think it sounds sort of hollow when a person who could go preaches on the need to go, but is unwilling to go himself. Someone might ask if the same thing is not true with regard to writing about mission work. God has so blessed me in getting to spend more than five of eighty-one years in teaching His word in other countries. I wish my health would allow for more. Looking back, I should have considered the need to take the gospel to other countries before I did. Not only is mission work important in other countries, it is also important in our own country.

The opportunity for mission efforts in other places is great. In the first place, our brethren have the money to support many missionaries. The methods of transportation are greatly improved over years ago. Many places in other countries have much better medical sys-

tems now than just a few years ago. Communication with family and friends back home is now at one's fingertips.

Can anyone truthfully say that there is not a great need for A New Beginning in our efforts to reach the lost? The opportunity is before us, and where there is opportunity there is responsibility.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to set forth a number of areas of service to the Lord where there is room for improvement. I truly believe we need a *new beginning* of determination to serve the Lord in the greatest way possible. A lackadaisical attitude has swept over too many of us, and the results are measured in a weakening of the church, as more souls are put in jeopardy.

Our concern for our own salvation and others we might influence has simply waned. The example of the apostle Paul is a great example for us in many ways. One which we would do well to emulate is his deep, heart-felt concern for salvation of others. To the Philippians he pours out his heart, as he speaks of those who are "the enemies of the cross of Christ." He said, "of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping..." (Phil. 3:16). To the elders at Ephesus He speaks of the manner he had been with them "at all seasons. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears..." (Acts 20:18-19). Then Paul adds, "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (v. 31). To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears... that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you" (2 Cor. 2:4).

Brethren, is it not time that we shed some tears about the condition of the church today, and get busy with a *new beginning* of determination to serve the Lord in sincerity and truth? Not only are our souls involved at stake, but the souls of our families, friends, and those yet unborn.

Christ, who laid down his life for us said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jno. 14:15). He later said, "Ye are my friends, if you do whatsoever I command you" (Jno. 15:14). We show our love for Christ and the Father by the deeds we do, just as they showed their love for us by what they have done for us.—*Editor*

Are We Set for the Defense of the Gospel?

Roger Scully

A part of Christianity, which is just as important as any other, is defending the truth. One cannot read the pages of the Bible, Old Testament or New, and not clearly see this idea taught and practiced over and over again. What is sad, however, is that members of the church rarely practice this command in our day. It seems that many brethren are eager to compromise the truth instead of defending it, to let the truth fall rather than fight for it. What is the end result of this?

Just look around you. Liberalism is tearing the church apart. Hardly a week that passes that I do not receive a church advertising its singing group, gymnasium opening, monthly fellowship with denominations, children's church, etc. Where is the authority for these things (Col. 3:17)? There is none, yet these things are being practiced anyway. What can we do about it? Well, the only thing we can do is "fight the good fight of faith" (I Tim. 6:12). We must settle in our minds that there is an objective, black and white truth, and in our hearts have the conviction that we have it and are willing to defend it no matter the cost.

Paul, when writing to the Philippians stated, "...because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel..." (Phil. 1:17). "Defense" is the translation of *apologia*, which means a reasoned statement or argument. "Confirmation" is the translation of *bebaiosis*, which means verification or making sure. Thus, Paul is saying that the Philippians were partakers with him in his reasoned defense of gospel truth, and in his verification of the same. How is the gospel verified? When truth is taught and error is exposed.

Paul wrote to Titus of men who are "unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision" (1:10). He went on to explain that they "subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not" (v. 11). This is not a means by which the gospel is confirmed, but to the contrary. Paul said their "mouths must be stopped...wherefore

rebuke them sharply" (vv. 11, 13). By stopping their mouths, which is done by giving a sharp rebuke, the gospel is confirmed, because the truth is placed beside error, and those who are seeking truth will see it and embrace it (Matt. 7:7-8).

Paul wrote of men who were preaching the gospel for the right reason, knowing that Paul himself was "set for the defense of the gospel" (Phil. 1:17). How is it that those who loved the truth and thus preached the truth, knew that Paul was set for the defense of that same truth? They could only know it if Paul had manifested this in his life, which from the book of Acts, we know he did. The Jews of Antioch "spoke against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Acts 13:45). How did Paul respond to this? Did he say, Can't we all just get along? Did he say, Well, you see it your way and I see it my way, so let's agree to disagree? NO, NO, NO. The record says that "Paul and Barnabas waxed bold" (v. 46). "Waxed bold" is from the word *parrhesiazomai*, which means to speak with confidence and assurance. On another occasion Paul said, "Hear my defense" (Acts 22:1).

Not only did Paul practice defending the truth, he also instructed Timothy to "charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (I Tim. 1:3). To "charge" means to give a command or to give an order. What was Timothy to command? That no other doctrine be taught. In order for Timothy to fulfill the command of Paul he had to (1) know what the truth was (Jno. 8:32); and, (2) know the error that was being taught. Does this sound like what many of our brethren are doing today? No, for they are saying things like: "We cannot really know the truth," and "As long as we believe in Jesus, it doesn't matter what is being taught." If Timothy were here today, he would most certainly "charge" them to stop teaching "another gospel, which is not another, but there be some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-9).

Paul was not the only apostle "set for

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Redeeming the Time

the defense of the gospel.” The apostle John instructed his readers to “believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (I Jno. 4:1). And Jude wrote that Christians should “earnestly contend for the faith,” which means to strongly fight for the gospel (Jude 3).

Peter, another apostle of our Lord, instructed those to whom he wrote, by implication all of us, to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is within you” (I Pet. 3:15). “Answer” is not simply to respond to answer a question, rather it is again the word *apologia* meaning to give a reasoned argument. How often is this defense to be given? Always (2 Tim. 4:2). To whom? To every man who requires it, or to anyone who challenges it. Notice carefully the context of I Peter 3. We are not speaking of people who just have some Bible questions, or of people who “speak evil of you” (v. 16). Is it not time that we speak up to those who oppose the truth?

Let us be as bold as Jesus who told the Sadducees, “You do err now knowing the Scriptures” (Matt. 22:29). And, as Jesus warned of the false teachers of His day (Matt. 16:6-12), so must we do the same in our day. “Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them,” is Paul’s command (Rom. 16:17). We cannot sit idly by (2 Jno. 9-11).

—P.O. Box 1756, Morgan City, LA 70380

A Disease for Which To Be Thankful

I am now hearing about a disease which is affecting a great many people. While some might complain, I’m not one of those. In fact, I’m really thankful that I have it. And, I would very much like to have it for another fifteen or twenty years, if the Lord wills.

The disease of which I speak is known as AGE. I don’t know exactly how to identify its beginning, but I’ve had it for a while, I’m quite sure. I’m very thankful that I was not among the number who never came to have the disease. Those who use their time wisely in serving the Lord, should pray that the Lord would bless them with the disease of AGE. —Editor

More attention is probably focused upon *time* at the beginning of a new year than at any other season. Due to this, we are setting forth a few thoughts on this New Year’s day of 1985 trusting that our readers may be encouraged to recognize time as one of man’s most valuable and precious possessions, providing the proper use is made of it. The apostle Paul commanded the proper use of time when he wrote: “See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16). The expression, “redeeming the time,” is also used in a command issued to the brethren at Colosse (Col. 4:5).

“Redeeming the time” carries the idea of making the very best use of the opportunities which are made available by time. The marginal reading of this expression in the American Version is, “buying up the opportunity.” That this is the correct meaning is attested by other authorities. *Redeeming*, as used in Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5, is the Greek word *exagorazo*, which in the middle voice means: “to redeem, buy off, to secure for one’s self or one’s own use; to rescue from loss or misapplication” [*The Analytical Greek Lexicon*]. *Thayer* says of the word: “The meaning seems to be to make a wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good, so that zeal and well-doing are as it were the purchase-money by which we make the time our own.”

REASONS FOR REDEEMING THE TIME

That a great many within the church are not redeeming the time is clearly evident. They either do not see the reasons for redeeming it, or else they do not respect those reasons. At any rate, they are not “buying” the time by seizing its opportunities. To buy the time a price must be paid and that price is the doing of one’s duty. Undoubtedly many have not recognized the true value of time’s opportunities. Otherwise, the crime of “killing time” would not be committed so often. The serious consideration of reasons for redeeming the time should help us to see the urgency of seeking every opportunity for doing good that time offers us. Consider the following reasons:

“BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL.” This is the →

TIME'S OPPORTUNITIES

reason given by Paul in the command to the Ephesians (5:16). If that was a valid reason in Paul's day it is no less so in our day. Evil has been around since the devil appeared to Eve in the Garden of Eden, but at no time in our life time have the days been more evil than at present. That mankind is wrapped up in sin and "love of the world" has become most respectable. So many things are vying for our time, some of which are not wrong within themselves that countless opportunities are passed by. Perhaps one of the most insidious evils of our day is what we might call "respectable worldliness." Most of us are not without some guilt in this area. Like the rich man, we want to "fare sumptuously every day." Therefore, we have little time for "church work." We are too busy "redeeming the time" from a worldly standpoint. We are looking for opportunities to "buy up" bigger houses, finer clothes, more cars, better boats, sizeable bank accounts, and the latest in luxuries. If that heavenly bank account depended upon our spiritual deposits it might very well fail.

TIME IS SO LIMITED. James says of our life, "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jas. 4:14). When life ends, whether it be many years or but a few, time will have run out. When time runs out we shall find ourselves in eternity, where there will be no time to redeem, no opportunities to pursue. Paul indeed spoke wisely when he said, "Behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). If we knew our time would run out in one more day, most of us would not be guilty of wasting that remaining time. We would surely seize the remaining opportunities. But for all we know, we have only one day of time remaining. If we have more than that, some day will not have more than that. But whatever the remaining time, we have no time to waste; we need every opportunity for doing good. We need to be making our "calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10).

TIME LOST IS LOST FOREVER. When our time has come and gone we cannot call it back to seize its opportunities. The idea that there will be a second chance for those who waste life's time by spurning its opportunities is a device of deceit put forth by false teachers. When our time is gone, wasted, we are finished with it forever, except for giving an account of how we used it.

Opportunity seekers in this life generally overlook the greatest ones, those having to do with our eternal, spiritual well-being. As humanism and other Godless *isms* increase their influence upon society fewer are they who seek opportunities relating to another world, a home of the soul. Some who become enamored with the pleasures and sins of this world simply lose sight of the heavenly country, while some who seek it are led astray by the false teachers who conceal time's greatest opportunities. This raises the question, What are the opportunities?

KNOWING THE TRUTH. Jesus said, "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (Jno. 8:32). Jesus told the apostles that the Spirit of truth would guide them "into all truth" (Jno. 16:13). That truth, referred to by Paul as "all scripture" was given by inspiration of God, and will "thoroughly furnish unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Truth is available; we can know it and be made free, unless we choose to waste the time, not redeeming it.

WE CAN KNOW CONTINUAL FORGIVENESS. The Christian cannot live above sin. Therefore, it is necessary that sins committed along life's pathway be forgiven. Provisions for such have been made. John says, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 Jno. 1:7). If one does not have the time to walk in the light he cannot have forgiveness.

WE CAN HAVE ETERNAL SALVATION. The Hebrews' writer says of Jesus that he "became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). That salvation is "in Christ" (2 Tim. 2:10). To get "into Christ" one must have a living faith in God (Heb. 11:6); repent of sins (Acts 2:38); confess faith in Christ (Rom. 10:10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38)

CONCLUSION

Are we walking "circumspectly" and "not as fools"? Are we walking "as wise" by "redeeming the time"? Our time will soon be "cut off" and we will "fly away." It will then be too late to answer those questions in the affirmative.

—Editor

NOTE: This was written New Year's day, 1985. Since then time has has run out for many, as it will for us all.

Readers' Response

"We enjoy so much your 'Banner of Truth.' Hopefully we will be able to send a contribution to you every now and then. We are old though not needy. We have committed most of our money to other missionary and benevolent works. We really want to help you in this great effort of yours and maybe we can soon." – **Bob Cruse**. (*We are gratified and thankful – Editor*.)

"The above address is the right one for the church. Send about eight or ten and that will be fine. And, thanks again for your work." – **Church of Christ at Wood**.

"Dear brother Pigg, We pray God will bless you and your family and that you will be able to continue in your work of Banner of Truth for many years. We look forward to receiving it so much. It is greatly needed. Have enclosed a check to us as you see fit." – **Ted and Vella Harshbarger, NM**. (*Thank you for prayers. At 81, I feel the Lord will bless me with several more years in His work. Thanks for helping make our work possible – Editor*).

"Walter, We really appreciate receiving Banner of Truth. Thanks for the good work that you do for the cause of Christ" – **Jim and Jackie Patchell, AR**.

"Dear bro. & sis. Pigg, Please accept the enclosed check. . . to assist with your personal expenses. The church at Holly Pond appreciates your service in the kingdom and your stand for truth and righteousness. Keep up the good work! If you per chance travel this way, please stop by to see us." – **Charles Clingman, SR., Terry Startley, Phillip Whisenant, for the church, AL**. (*Thanks for having a generous part in our work. We surely enjoyed being with you a gospel meeting, not so long ago. May the Lord richly bless – Editor*).

"We hope that you are able to keep Banner of Truth going, and that bro. Adams will keep it going, when you feel that you can no longer serve as Editor." – **Clarence E. Hall, LA**. (*We wish for you and your wife the very best in the days ahead. Your help in our work over the years has been a great encouragement to us. I know the time will come that I can no longer be editor of the paper. I've just begun the 16th year and sincerely believe that it has been the most effective work that I have done during my fifty-three years of preaching – Editor*).

"I have been given a copy of BOT to read but I would appreciate being on the subscription mailing list. 'Thanks' for the articles of Truth so needed this Date" – **William G. Fields, Jr, TX**. (*Happy to add your name – Editor*).

"I've enjoyed your publication Banner of Truth thru-out the year so much. I'd like to renew it for the year 2007. I've included a little extra so your publication expenses and your desire to reach the lost will continue on in your firm commitment of stand up for the truth. Thank You." – **Randy Gruenewald**,

CA. (*Thank you. You will continue to receive Banner of Truth – Editor*).

"We thank the almighty God for the good work of the Lord that you are a part of. I have been receiving BOT and am very thankful for the great and doctrinally sound articles. December I had four baptisms. These articles have been very useful in edifying the brethren. But I want you to know that I have moved to another congregation where I'm conducting school ministry. Going to different secondary schools on every Wednesday and studying with them, so have changed address." – **Charles Ogutu Mwanga, Kenya, Africa**. (*We are so thankful that BOT is worthwhile in your work. Even though I am not making trips to foreign countries any longer, I am thankful that I can have some influence through the printed page – Editor*).

"Dear Hickory Grove Church of Christ. On behalf of the Ward Boulevard Church of Christ located in Wilson, NC, we wish you well. We would like to ask to be included on your mailing list for future issues of Banner of Truth. We do not have a building to meet in, but if we could received a bundle of 20 copies, it would be very much appreciated. If you can, please mail to my home address. . . . Thank you for your consideration and God bless you for this valuable work!" – **Mark Mitchell, NC**. (*We will gladly put you on our mailing list for twenty copies of BOT. May the Lord bless you in your efforts to serve Him in the days ahead – Editor*).

"Dear brother, I hope and pray that everything goes well with you and yours! Thank you for the December issue of BOT about the 'Leadership in Congregations without Elders,' which I received this January 2007. Almost all the congregations here in our province in Pangasinan, Philippines have no elders and deacons. The issue will be a great help to us as leaders of the congregations on how to effectively efficiently lead the congregations in the absence of elders and deacons. Please continue to send me BOT publication. God bless us all in all of our efforts to serve Him faithfully!" – **Roberto Q. Indong, Philippines**. (*We're thankful that BOT may be of some help to you. I have made a number of trips to the Philippines in years gone by, and enjoyed very much associating with the brethren there. I would like to go again for a visit but due to my age and health feel that I should not go. The last time in the country I had a very severe medical problem and am thankful I survived – Editor*).

"I appreciate the good work you do through 'Banner of Truth.' The church in many places is weak and falling into liberalism. Whatever we can do to stem the tide is a necessity. . . ." – **V. Glenn McCoy, CA**. (*Many thanks for the copy of your book Return To The Old Paths. This is a book that is greatly needed by most members of the church.*

Readers' Response continued in March BOT.

—Editor

A Wall of Fire for a Firewall

[NOTE: This article was in a flyer used in a doorknocking effort leading up to the *Fifteenth Annual Laborers Together With God Lectureship*. The lectureship will be history at the receipt of this issue of BOT. Contact the Milestone church of Christ, 4051 Stefani Road, Cantonment, FL 32533 for a copy of the book of lecture outlines. The material is timely and designed to help people focus on how to protect their homes.]

We might call the Book of Acts the *Church Manual*. Paul sent to Ephesus and “called to him the elders of the church” (20:28). He speaks of “the church of God which he purchased with his own blood” (20:28). Landing at Caesarea he “saluted the church” (18:22). For the full picture, back up to the first several chapters where we read of the first church which was in Jerusalem and comprised solely of Jews who had obeyed the gospel (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 1Peter 4:17). Things were tough on the church back then. Stephen was murdered and there arose “a great persecution against the church” (8:1). Who were these people called “the church”?

The “Lord added to the church day by day those that were saved” (2:47). It was on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost that Peter preached a convicting sermon concluding, “let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified” (2:36). The sermon pierced the hearts of many who asked “what shall we do?” (2:37) They were told, “repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins” (2:38). Peter continued to preach and push saying, “save yourselves” (2:40). Those who “received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls” (2:41). The next few verse describe this new community, body, of people whom the Lord “added to the church.” Years later, the same gospel was preached to non-Jewish, Gentile, people who responded the same way and were added to the church.

The church is a spiritual body or community of people who have in common the same obedience to the same gospel of the same Lord Jesus Christ. They are bound together by the “unity of the Spirit...one body...one

Spirit...one hope...one Lord...one faith...one baptism...one God and Father” (Ephesians 4:2-6). This is the basis and belief for and of the Milestone church of Christ.

God used his relationship with the nation, the kingdom, of Israel to symbolize the deeper spiritual relationship he desires with all men. Israel’s religion, law, tabernacle, temple, high priests, and sacrifices were all a “copy and shadow of the heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5). The “law” of Moses was a “shadow of the good things to come” (10:1). Those “heavenly” or “good things to come” are Christ and his church; in other words, christianity.

The church is described in Old Testament terms. It is a “kingdom” (Matthew 16:18,19; Colossians 1:13), not of “this world” (John 18:36), ruled by Christ, the “son of David” (Matthew 22:42) who came from David’s “loins” (Acts 2:30) and whom God has set “upon his throne” (verses 30, 32). The church is “the temple of God” (1Corinthians 3:16), “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20) and made up of people who “fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord” (verse 21). She is also a “spiritual house” made of “living stones”; a “holy priesthood...offering up spiritual sacrifices” (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

The church is also a city; more specifically it is the “Jerusalem that is above [and] free” (Galatians 4:25-26); it is on “mount Zion”; it is “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Hebrews 10:22).

Peter called the age or period of the church or christianity “these days” (Acts 3:24), and he said that “all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days.” One of the prophets who “told of these days” was Zechariah. In a vision Zechariah saw a man who was going to “measure Jerusalem” (Zechariah 2:2), but it was explained to him that such a measure would be impossible because “Jerusalem shall be inhabited as villages without walls, by reason of the multitude of men and cattle therein” (verse 4). The future Jerusalem, the church, cannot be walled in like the old physical city; but she still has a wall because: “I, saith Jehovah, †

will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and I will be the glory in the midst of her” (verse 5).”

Computer and internet users are familiar with *firewalls*. They are security devices which typically control what we trust to access or function as a server on our internet. In a neat sort of twist, we have God as a wall of fire serving as a firewall to protect his church.

The church is the “house” or “family” of God (1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 3:15). God is the spiritual “father” (1 Thessalonians 1:1) and Christians are the “children of God” (John 1:12). Jesus is both “son” and “firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29); his church consequently is “the church of the firstborn” (Hebrews 12:23). We are his “brethren,” “children,” “heirs of God,” and “joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). In short, Christ is elder brother to those in this spiritual family. That relationship starts when sinners have “purified” their “souls” in “obedience to the truth” (1 Peter 1:22), and in this process they are “begotten again...through the word of truth” (verse 23); in other words, they are “born again” (John 3:3, 7).

Not only is the church a spiritual household or family, but it is also made up of, and very concerned with the families or homes in this world.

Husband and wife are to strive for the relationship that Christ has with his church (Ephesians 5:22-25). Children are to “obey their parents in the Lord” (6:1). “Children” and “grandchildren” are to “show piety towards their own family,” particularly as it concerns those with widows (1 Timothy 5:4). No less than the great preacher Timothy started his life well because of the “unfeigned faith” that was “first” in his “grandmother and his “mother” (2 Timothy 1:5). The proving ground for spiritual leaders in the church—called elders, bishops, or pastors—is the home where a prospective leader must have shown that he “knoweth...how to rule his own house,” and is thereby qualified to “take care of the church of God” (1 Timothy 3:5).

God clearly cares about our homes. Homes are not only closely tied to the church, but they are also the fabric of any society. As goes the home, so goes the neighborhood, the community, the city, even the world. Right now, things are not going well with neighborhoods, communities, cities and so on, because things are not going well with homes.

The Bible teaches the existence of a powerful being,

Satan, the Devil. He has “wiles,” a “snare,” and “devices” (Ephesians 6:11; 1 Timothy 3:7; 2 Corinthians 2:11); he is our “adversary” (1 Peter 5:8). He has “children” (1 John 3:10) and “ministers” who are capable of pawning themselves off as “apostles” or even “Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). He is the “deceiver of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9), and he wants *access* and he wants to be a *trusted server* in our homes.

Every year at this time, the Milestone church of Christ has a *lectureship*. This is not some sort of stuffy seminar for only certain types of people. Quite to the contrary. We invite twenty-eight seasoned Bible students to preach on a variety of topics. This year each of these lessons is designed to discuss a specific attempt of Satan to *access* our homes, or to be a *trusted server* within our homes.

He wants to destroy the traditional, the biblical, roles of husbands, wives and children. He wants to normalize sexual deviancy. He wants Moms, Dads, and children to get comfortable with fornication in all its forms: premarital sex, homosexuality, and other deviations from God’s design. To accomplish this, he uses pornography, provocative styles of dress, television, movies, music, and the internet. More and more, he is even using the government and its laws to force our American society to accept homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle. Satan knows that adultery and free and flagrant divorce and remarriage will ruin homes and cause a multitude of problems for society in general.

He wants to convince homes that the way to happiness is through more and more “stuff,” causing people to sink themselves into debt, even turning to gambling.

He wants us to set so involved in our fun, games and other pursuits that we have little time for spiritual things, particularly little time for Bible study, the church, and Christian service.

He wants us to escape life and its pressures through alcohol and other drugs.

He wants us to be ignorant, non-thinking people, who fall at the feet of everything “called” science. He knows that ignorant people will just accept that we: the universe, the world, and all in it, just happened.

Our homes are under merciless attack, under siege. We need God’s “wall of fire” as a firewall for our homes. Come, listen, learn, and you may “download” this indispensable firewall and use it to protect your home.—AA

Striving To Excel In Cedar

Imagine how Jeremiah felt when Jehovah said, “Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, And say, Hear the word of Jehovah, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates” (Jeremiah 22:1-2).

This Old Testament preacher’s work spanned an era which began during the time of Josiah the reforming king, and extended through the reigns of three of Josiah’s sons: Jehoahaz, Jehoikim, and Zedekiah, with the reign of Josiah’s grandson, Jehoichin, falling between those of Jehoichin and Zedekiah. Not a one of them was like Josiah; they were all bad. The sermon of which our verse above is a part was delivered in the beginning of Jehoikim’s reign.

Verses 13-14 show Jehoikim’s lust for luxury and opulence that regal power might bring him—“I will build me a wide house and large chambers, and cut...out windows; and *it is* ceiled with cedar, and painted with vermilion.” They also show that he was willing to step all over people to get what he wanted—“[he] buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; *that* useth his neighbor’s service without wages, and giveth him not for his work.” Then the question is asked, “Shalt thou reign, because thou strivest to excel in cedar?”

“Shalt thou reign” is not a question about the future, rather is rhetorical and carries the idea of: Is this what you think about reigning or being a king? Then follows what Jehoikim thought about what it takes to be a real king: “because thou strivest to excel in cedar.” The KJV has, “because thou closest thyself in cedar.” The Hebrew word *tacharah* means “to emulate, to rival” (*Gesenius*, p. 303). It’s the idea of competing with, closing with an adversary. The question then is this: “Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar” (RSV)? Perhaps Jehoikim was thinking about the great “Solomon in all his glory.” Let’s see: Solomon was a great and respected king; he

had big houses with lot’s of cedar. If I have big houses with lot’s of cedar I’ll be a great king too. A classic case of unwarranted connections and conclusions. He had the cause\effect thing all mixed up. Jeremiah raises Jehoikim’s father, Josiah, as an opposite example, “Did not thy father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? then it was well with him.” Let’s borrow Jeremiah’s formula—Do you think you are, because...?—and ask:

1. Do you think you will be happy and successful because you have more and better stuff? Read Luke 12:13ff; I John 2:15-17; I Timothy 6:6-10.
2. Do you think you are a good preacher because you can smile and cry at will? because you can run the scale of voice modulation? because you can be theatrical and dramatic? Read II Timothy 4:1-8; Matthew 23:5-6; I Corinthians 1:21 (Note: “the preaching,” not the preacher); John 7:24; II Corinthians 11:13-15.
3. Do you think yourself a successful preacher because everybody likes you? Read Luke 6:26; Galatians 1:10. Or,
4. Because you have you have shocked or offended lots of people? Read Colossians 4:6; II Timothy 2:24-26.
5. Do you think you are a good elder because you are good at business and have lots of money? because you are good at telling other people what to do? Read I Timothy 3:2-7; I Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28.
6. Do you think a local church is good and successful based on its physical facilities, size and variety of its “staff,” what it provides for the youth, etc.? Read I Timothy 3:15; Revelation 2-3 (compare especially the Smyrna church and the Laodicea church).
7. Do you think yourself a heavenward bound christian because you “go to church” sometimes? Read I Corinthians 15:58; II Timothy 2:15.

Jehoikim had mastered self-deception. He connected things which have no connection. Let us beat back the Jehoikim that might be in us. Let us see things as they are seen by God (I Samuel 16:17). —AA

Of Trash and Treasure

This pretty well explains the phenomenon of yard sales. People drag out things that they will either throw away, or someone will buy at a yard sale. Sometimes people will even rummage through and take things others have tossed in the dumpster. I once read about a young American who was living in Tokyo which is perhaps the most expensive place to live in this world. This young man said that he had completely furnished his apartment with furniture and things that local residents had left on the sidewalk as refuse. I specifically remember his telling about finding a small, but nice, color TV which he took to be his own. People's concept of value can be quite relative; and truly, one man's trash can become the treasure of another.

Jehovah speaks of the "woe" of he who "striveth with his Maker," and describes such a foolish person as "a potsherd among the potsherds of the earth" (Isaiah 45:9). "Potsherds" refers to pieces of broken pottery, such as fragments of the red clay flowerpots we so commonly use now. About all one can do, when he drops something like that is sweep up the pieces and throw it out.

What is interesting here is that in reading about Archaeology, it's pretty common for someone to talk about having found writing on "sherds," or sometimes they use the word "ostraca." I've read about archaeologists finding everything from tax receipts to Bible verses written on broken pieces of clay pottery. One archaeologist explains that "the potsherd was a writing medium for the poorer classes, being the cheapest writing material available—it was simply a matter of going along to the nearest rubbish heap and selecting one's own 'paper' on which to write. Ostraca were there for the taking" [Wilson, Clifford. *New Light on New Testament Letters*. p. 35]. Wilson goes on to say that in light of the fact that "the writings on many of these potsherds are Bible verses...it becomes clear that the gospel was in the hands of everyday people. Even the christian who was poverty-stricken in Egypt could have part of the Word of God written down" (pp. 35-6). He quotes Adolph

Deissman as having said, "On worthless castaway potsherds a poor man writes the imperishable words that are the heritage of the poor" (p. 34).

Imagine that. Something for some people destined for the trash pile, becomes for another something on which to write "the words of life." We have God's Word in Dickson Study Bibles, Thompson Chain Reference Bibles, Bibles bound in supple materials, and printed in a variety of fonts and on fine paper. But, do we treasure it? Do we study and meditate upon it? Do we bend our wills to bring our lives in harmony with it? Stand two pictures side-by-side: The picture of a poor christian centuries ago, so desiring the Word that he would rummage for a piece of a pot on which to write Bible verses; and, the picture of christians today, though surrounded with Bibles, yet willfully ignorant of their contents and woefully lacking in desire to do what is taught therein. Come to think of it, for what good or use many make of their Bibles, they might just as well toss them out like so many "potsherds."

On the other hand, did you ever think that your treasure might in reality be trash? There is "evil treasure" (Matthew 12:35). "Sin," "for a season," has "pleasures" "to enjoy" (Hebrews 11:25). There is a "reward" that ultimately is no reward (Matthew 6:2,5,16). There is profitless "profit" (Mark 8:36). And, there is the danger of "loving" that which "passeth away" (1John 2:15-17).

What was once treasure to Paul—"what things were gain to me" (Philippians 3:7)—he had come to "count...as loss." It's interesting to read (vv. 4-6) the list of things once valued by Paul, but now considered by him to be but mere "refuse [rubbish]" (v. 8) fit only to be tossed out. On the other hand, Paul knew the need for discipline in life, saying, "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage: lest by any means, after that I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected [ἀδόκιμος: proven false, therefore worthless]" (1Corinthians 9:27)

We need more precise thought in this matter of treasure and trash. Perhaps we need to expand our definition of "trashy" people.

—AA

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**Theme: The Crucial Need for and
Basis of Optimism within the Lord's
Church**

Confirmed Speakers as of Feb. 6, 2007 —

Alan Adams	Lloyd Gale
Robert Alexander	Richard Guill
Jimmy Bates	Virgil Hale
Jeff Bates	Lenard Hogan
Ken Burleson	Rick Knoll
Roger Campbell	David Lemmons
Jacob Campbell	Walter Pigg
Caleb Campbell	Garland Robinson
Leon Cole	Rusty Stark
Paul Curless	

Subjects will be announced in next issue of BOT

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