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Almo, KY 42020-9332

Return Services Requested

Sunday Services: 9:00 a.m.
Bible Classes 6:00 p.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday: 7:00 p.m.
Bible Study

will be married, and happily so, you must will it to be so.

Are you ready *emotionally*? Husbands are to “dwell with [their] wives according to knowledge, giving honor unto the woman, as unto the weaker vessel” (1Pet. 3:7); and, wives are to learn to “love their husbands, love their children” (Tit. 2:4). The countless scriptures which speak of kindness, tenderness, and affection would most assuredly apply to marriage. If you are a person who has trouble with “feelings” and their expression, then maybe you need to study, pray and practice awhile before you enter marriage which demands all of these.

Are you ready *spiritually*? Are you a christian? Is the person you are considering for marriage a christian? If not in either or both cases, how can each of you possibly understand all that marriage requires, when Inspiration says that the husband/wife relationship is to mirror that of Christ and the church? (Eph. 5:23ff). Non-christians can indeed get married; and, marriages of christians and non-christians are no less marriage (cf. 1Cor. 7:10-14); but, these marriages by their very nature must always be wanting. People who have “first...[given] their own selves to the Lord” (2Cor. 8:5), are in a far superior position to give themselves to each other in marriage.

Marriage can and doubtlessly will throw you some curves; but if you enter it having seriously considered whether you are ready in light of these things and others, the success and rewards of your marriage are solid. It is so easy to say, I do; but when you do, it is done. Say you are ready, because you are ready. —AA

FOR YOUR ADDRESS BOOK

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The Great Rewards Of A True and Faithful Christian Life

Are the rewards, which are in this life and in the world to come, and are beyond comparison with any other, worth striving for? The wise think so, but the foolish do not.

For the most part mankind has been concerned with that which is desired to make man happy or fulfill his desires. Though the emphasis has generally been upon things in this life, it is interesting to note from history that most people, including pagans of every stripe, have had some interest in a life after this earthly one. To the American Indians, it was the “Happy hunting ground.” Today, people in most nations have some concept of another life, and though it is not based directly upon the teaching of God’s word, I believe this idea of another life originally came from God and His word.

In God’s word, both earthly and eternal values are often discussed. Although there is a sense in which selfishness is condemned, there is overwhelming emphasis upon the personal rewards for faithfully serving God, our Creator. It is not wrong for us to ask, “What will my reward be for living a true and faithful Christian life?” In fact, we

should keep that question before us continually. The rewards for doing so are found on many pages of God’s written word. At the same time, the consequences for failure to live that faithful life are often set forth by the same Author that reveals a home in heaven. The rewards, if received, mean that the punishment reserved for the disobedient will be avoided.

In our following discussion we shall be giving attention to the nature of The Great Rewards, and the meaning of a true and faithful christian life. Let us first, though, consider,

I. A WANING OF INTEREST IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND ITS REWARDS

What does the average person look for in life? Is it not a comfortable living blessed with many material things; a good place to live with all the conveniences, and a good retirement? We might add to that a whole heap of today’s luxuries. Some may ask, “What is wrong with that?” →

BANNER OF TRUTH

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Continued from Page 1

The wrong commences when these things are made the uppermost goal, to the neglect of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Things which are right within themselves become wrong when they interfere with serving God.

The overwhelming part of our society is not looking for an eternal reward on the basis of which that reward is promised. This involves two categories of people. One, there are those traveling through life with little or no thought given to God and spiritual things. This number is growing rapidly as greater and stronger efforts are being put forth to remove virtually every vestige of God's influence from society. These efforts are being put forth in many areas of society. Many younger people have not seen this as I have. If they had, our times might look at least a little brighter. Two, there are those who are trusting in man-made religions. This would include the many pagan religions of today, but also those who are so-called Christians. This latter group is growing rapidly with

new groups coming on the scene almost too often to keep count.

Both of these categories are contributing to the waning of interest in the christian life and its rewards. Society is now so conducive to trusting in outright secularism, and the rapid increase of man-made religions takes away interest in true Christianity. Man-made christianity often offers what man wants rather than what God wants and demands and that with little or no effort on man's part.

II. A LACK OF INTEREST IN THE REWARDS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE WITHIN THE LORD'S CHURCH

It should be obvious that unbelievers and those have no interest in God and spiritual things, are not going to strive for something in which they do not believe. But with those who have obeyed the gospel of Christ and have become true Christians, it should be altogether different. But this is not always the case. There are many warnings against falling away from the faith, or becoming unfaithful in serving. Those in the church at Laodicea had become so indifferent that they evidently had no need for the Lord. Christ said to them: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold or hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16). If a church in New Testament times could drift that far away from the true faith, so can congregations do the same in our time. In fact, some congregations have completely departed from the faith, and there are yet many that are going headlong in the same direction.

In congregations which have not departed from the faith, there are often those individuals who have become lukewarm, no longer having the Lord's approval. This may be shown in various ways. The failure to attend and participate in the meetings of the congregation is a good example. However, that is by no means the only sign of weakness. When it comes to work to be done, some cannot be counted on. When it comes to proper dress and the language used, some do not qualify as faithful christians. Many other signs of weakness can be observed.

Christians like these make it clear by their actions that the great rewards of the christian life are not

Continued from p. 9 —

The aspects of marital readiness, which are most pressing, are those which relate to our ego, our will, and our spirit. We shall examine these areas, but let us first consider,

THE RELATIVITY OF READINESS

Bible teaching as to the essentials of marriage is objective: love, loyalty, subordination, sacrifice, etc. (cf. Eph. 5:23ff). Whether, however, a person is ready to practice these things in a marriage is relative to 1) his knowledge of what these ideas mean, 2) his knowledge of himself, and 3) his personal honesty as he assesses himself.

Other than God, you know yourself better than anyone. In order to be ready for marriage, you surely must read and know what God says about marriage; but, you must also "commune with [your] own heart [and by your own] spirit make diligent search" (Psa. 77:6). Only you may finally "try" and "prove" yourself (2Co. 13:5). Other than with God, the one with whom you will have most difficulty being honest is yourself.

Now, we move to consider,

THE ESSENTIALS OF READINESS.

When posing the question — How do I know whether I am ready? — let us ask:

Are you ready *egoistically*? We are all unique centers of personality, and depending on how we were raised, we will be more or less self-centered. You are not ready to get married if your happiness depends on things revolving around you. Just think, if it is a general moral imperative that we "esteem [others] better than [ourselves]" (Phill 2:3), that must surely be true in marriage. Many people are not ready to get married because they cannot imagine counting anyone, even a mate, better than themselves.

Marriage involves "rendering[ing]...due benevolence" (1Co. 7:3), and transfer of personal "power" (v. 4) to another.

Jesus said we are to "leave" and "cleave" (Mar. 10:7). We are to respectively "submit" and "cherish" (Eph. 5:22, 28, 29). Marriage is about transition. Two people become one; they make babies, and form a household (cf. 1Tim. 3:5). Overly self-centered people will be frustrated in these and more areas of marriage.

Do you get angry and sulk if you do not get your way? Are you frustrated by change and accommodation to the needs of others? If the answer to any of these is, Yes, you are not ready for marriage.

Think about what the Spirit says about a "wives [being] in subjection unto your own husbands as unto the Lord" (Eph 5:22); and, "husbands...[loving] your wives as their own bodies" (v. 28). Subordinating your will to that of another person; or, putting the interests and needs of another person above your own are not things done easily by anyone much less a self-centered person.

Are you ready to get married? You know how you were raised. Have you spent a lifetime of others catering to you? Did Mom and Dad let you grow up thinking you are the center of the universe? Be honest, and you can answer the question: Am I ready?

Are you ready *volitionally*? Do you have will power? Are you a trustworthy person who gives and keeps his word? Are you a temperate person in control of his emotions? Are you a person with will power; or do you react to circumstances? If the going gets tough, do you get going, or just pull up and pull out? You know you. If you are a person whose life is littered with things started but never finished, you are likely a person who is not ready to get married.

When people get married, Jehovah is "witness between [a man] and [his] wife" (Mal. 2:14). A wife is a "wife of thy covenant," and God takes a dim view of a dealing "treacherously" against her (ibid); in fact, Jehovah "hates putting away" (Mal. 2:16). It is a command that a man "rejoice in the wife of [his] youth" (Prov. 5:18). If you →

Preachers Do Not Grow on Trees

Preaching and preachers are bound up in God's scheme of things. The promise of the ages — "Who-soever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom 10:13) — is integrally connected to preaching. The "whosoever" message cannot be heard and believed without a "preacher" (v. 14), and preachers cannot preach except they be "sent" (v. 15). God "sent" preachers during Patriarchy (2Pet. 2:5), and He sent the great Old Testament preachers. He also sent the apostles and other preachers who "announced" "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow them" (1 Pet. 1:10-12). He no less sends preachers now, and the "feet" of those who "bring glad tidings" are no less "beautiful" (Rom 10:15). "Faith" still "cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (v. 17), and that "hearing" is still made possible by preachers.

Through the "foolishness of the preaching," it is God's "good pleasure to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:2 1). Preachers, in the local assemblies of Christians (Cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 14:4) "preach" so as to edify the church." They are devoted to "preach [ing] the word [whereby they] reprove, rebuke and exhort with all long-suffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2).

We say all this to say what we already know: Preachers are essential. But, what is not so often emphasized is that preachers must be trained.

During the infancy of the church preachers preached by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven" (1 Pet. 1:12), through the means of such as the Spirit-given gifts of "prophecy" and "tongues" with "interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:4, 23-24, 27-31). Even then, though, the apostle Paul was very much involved in preacher training as evidenced by his God-breathed epistles to Timothy and Titus. He alludes to mental training — "give attendance to reading"; moral training — "showing thyself a pattern of good works"; and, the mission of the preacher — "work of an evangelist" (1 Tim. 4:13; Tit. 2:7; 2 Tim.4:5).

With the cessation of the temporary Spirit-endowed" gifts" (1 Cor. 13:8-13; cf Rom. 1:11), the need to train preachers has since that time become, and remains, even more significant. This need then is the

mandate for the existence and work of the Northwest Florida School of Biblical Studies. The Milestone church of Christ expends great effort, time and resources, not because we just think having a school is a neat thing to do, rather because we actually deeply believe that preacher training is an essential part of God's will.

In the area of mental training, the school views deep training in the Scriptures as primary. Corollary to this supreme task are studies in geography, languages, history, philosophy, and logic.

Moral training flows from emphasis on Bible teaching together with experience, wisdom, openness and consistency in the lives of those who have presumed to don the mantle of teacher.

To help equip aspiring preachers effectively to do their work and fulfill their mission, studies in English, public speaking, writing, logic and debate are a part of the curriculum, as well as opportunities for practical application of pulpit preaching and evangelism.

As noted, NWFSBS is the work of the Milestone church of Christ. This church, out of "love [for] the brotherhood," makes great sacrifices to provide this intense, two-year, tuition-free environment where men can devote themselves to preparation in the areas mentioned above.

We make no comparisons of superiority, but our claim is to offer competent curriculum and teachers. We have what it takes to get the job done. There are already "out in the workplace" several graduates of NWFSBS whose work and ability testify to legitimate grounds for our claim; and, we have more coming.

Yet, the Milestone church cannot go it alone. Numerous sister churches and individual christians give financial support to make this great work possible. Many help in recruiting prospective students. As our student body grows, our need for help in these and other areas grows.

Will you consider helping us? For more information, write: 4051 Stefani Road, Cantonment, FL 32533; call: 850-474-9257; or, email: <kenwb@nwfsbs.com> See also our website: <www.nwfsbs.com> —AA

of a high priority with them. They, by their failure to live a faithful life, imply that those rewards are not worth striving to obtain.

Have we lost our sense of values? As the world in which we live goes, so goes the church to some degree. Society has changed to a degree which I would have thought impossible at one time, though I should have known better in view of all the warnings given in God's word. It saddens me to say it, but in some ways I have seen changes just as great take place within the church. This is evidence that we have to a great degree lost our sense of values.

I have lived in times when most people, though perhaps irreligious, were basically honest. They had a moral standard which ruled out lying and stealing. They did not expect to be fed, clothed and housed by those who were willing to work for a living, while they whiled away their time doing nothing. Things have changed drastically during the past few decades. This has had its effect upon the church.

It seems that we as parents have, in far too many instances, lost some of our sense of values. The virtues of honesty and integrity are not as highly prized as they once were. This is being reflected in our children. What children see in their parents they are likely to duplicate. When parents fail to teach their children the proper sense of values, they are keeping from them something they deserve. Nowadays, many children are not taught that it is an honorable thing to work in order to have the things we need and want. Consequently, a lot of time doing nothing encourages participation in things which are not conducive to the kind of life christians should live.

We have allowed the present sense of values, which are so often based on material things, which are only temporary, to crowd out those higher values, which make for treasures laid up in heaven. There are stark reminders of this, which it seems we have largely forgotten. Paul reminds us that "the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). This clearly has reference to material things and spiritual things. As rank materialism has flooded our society it has also affected the church. This is seen in the growing practice of emphasis within the church on the providing of material things and the neglect of spiritual things. One

of the direst warnings against trusting in worldly things, which includes material things, is that by the apostle John. If hearing were believing, many would avoid this danger with all their might, for this has been heard over and over, time after time. But this is not the way it always works. People often hear and do not. Note again what John said:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. (1 Jno. 2:15-17).

If we would reap the rewards of a faithful Christian life, we must indeed "fight the good fight of faith," not allowing the devices of Satan to pull us away.

Elders often feed contaminated food. Over the years it has become evident that some desire to wear the designation of "elder," but in many instances do not want to do the work of an elder. This is being seen more and more as flocks are being allowed to eat the food which causes serious problems. The food may taste good, but it is contaminated. Instead of bringing about spiritual growth, as would "the sincere milk of the word" (1 Pet. 2:2), it brings about spiritual weakness, which in many instances turns out to be terminal, and some times contagious to others. When this occurs, the victim's desire for the great rewards wanes and indifference prevails.

The influence of preachers. God has ordained that men preach His gospel, all over the world. But He has stipulated that the preaching meet certain qualifications. An example of that is seen in Paul's command to Timothy: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). This authorizes the preaching of "the word." In too many instances today, little of the word is preached. The regrettable thing is that too many love to have it so. A sobering fact is that in our present day, a preacher is more likely to be fired for preaching the truth than for preaching error. The time was that the opposite was true. Presently there is a demand for preachers who are →

good story tellers and jokesters. Another desired qualification is to go softly not stepping on any toes, and by all means not calling the names of any false teachers in the sense of condemning their error.

Our worship services. If anything in living the faithful life should have our most serious attention it is our worship services. This is indeed a high and exalted privilege, available only to God's true servants. For this privilege we should be exceedingly thankful. Yet, some times our worship services are characterized by a lackluster attitude. This is seen in various parts of our services.

By this I mean that it appears as though our hearts are not really in what we are doing. Our singing is some times low and slow, lacking any vibrancy when the song calls for it. It is not uncommon for people to interrupt the song service in various ways, as though the song service is not worship.

When God's word is being read, it should be revered and respected; it is God speaking to us. When God's word is being preached, it should be respected with as few distractions as possible. Too often worshippers have their minds far removed from what is going on. When such is the case, God's word is not receiving the respect it deserves.

Prayer is another privilege reserved for the children of the Father. Christ gave us a model prayer (Matt. 6:9-15), which can be helpful to us as to what a prayer should include. In the first place, prayer must be from our hearts. This tends to rule out repetition of trite phrases and words. Prayer is to be addressed to God, not the people in the assembly; though they should concur with what is said, if it is a scriptural prayer and is loud enough to be heard. A prayer need not inform God of what He teaches; He knows it already. A prayer is not for the purpose of instructing others, but rather the offering of thanks and making requests known.

Nothing should take our minds back to the sacrifice made by Christ for us, more than the observance of the Lord's Supper. When Christ instituted His supper, he used the "bread" to represent His body and the "cup" to represent His blood. The apostle Paul reveals to the Corinthian brethren what the Lord had revealed to him concerning the Lord's Supper. We should read this often as well as the records in the

Gospels. Paul said,

For I received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus in the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner he also took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew he Lord's death till he come. (I Cor. 11:23-26)

Could anything be due greater respect or call forth our true emotions of praise and thanksgiving than the Lord's Supper? Yet, it seems that some times our hearts are not truly in the observance of that most significant memorial the world has ever known.

Sometimes brethren read a passage of scripture relating to the occasion, and call attention to the purpose of the observance. This is helpful in calling our attention to what we are doing, and if our most serious attention is to be called to anything, would it not certainly include the Lord's Supper? Yet, some times whoever is leading serving as the head of the table utters not a word. We surely could be at least be reminded that Christ said, "This do in remembrance of me." Some times something is said about the contribution and its purpose, but nothing is said about the Lord's Supper. Does this not convey the idea that the Lord's Supper is just something we do out of habit?

These things are written with the hope that they might cause us to think more seriously about our worship.

Perhaps I should add that reference to a "lackluster attitude" does not mean I in any way uphold the hullabaloo that passes for worship in a great many congregations. Hullabaloo does not indicate sincerity; to the contrary, it shows a lack of reverence and respect in our worship. Some are making of the worship a period of entertainment where various antics may be brought in to please the people. This type of thing is mockery rather than worship.

Before discussing the rewards of a true and faithful christian life, which is the main point of our dis-

FELLOW-HELPERS

April – July 2007

Berea church of Christ	200.00
James W. Smith	50.00
Barbara A. Kist	100.00
Pine Ridge church of Christ	250.00
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Pilot Oak church of Christ	25.00
Ledale Simpson	50.00
Anonymous	50.00
Total contribution	<u>3,004.00</u>

"That we might be fellowhelpers to the truth" (3 John 8).

Our sincere thanks to those who continue to make our work possible. You are having a part in getting God's word to thousands of people, including hundreds in other countries where few of us could go. Response from our readers nearly all positive. But we expect some negative.

—Editor

FINANCIAL REPORT

April — July 2007

Balance on hand April 1, 2007	9,406.36
Contributions for above period	3,004.00
Total funds available	12,410.36
Total Expenses:	
Postage and mailing B.O.T.	3,363.01
Mailing labels	99.45
Phone	7.10
Supplies	64.67
Total Expenses	<u>3,534.23</u>
Total funds available	12,410.36
Less total expenses	3,354.23
Balance on hand July 31	<u>8,876.13</u>

Note: This report does not include the mailing expense for July, since, due to my accident, we have been unable to mail it as of writing.

The postage increase which took effect May 14, adds at least \$200.00 to the expense of each issue. All the mail which goes to foreign countries now must go first class. A single BOT now costs 90 cents. A bundle of one pound costs \$10.10. It is still worth the cost to get the word to those who want and appreciate it.

—Editor

Videos and CDs of Seventh Annual B.O.T. Lectures

Contact Jim Green at 2711 Spring Meade Blvd., Columbia, TN 38401. Phone: (931) 486-1364. Email: jgreencoc1986@yahoo.com

Would you help us?

Somewhere I saw that families move on the average of once every seven years. That includes many of our readers. You could be a great help to us by letting us know of your change of address. Not only do "returns" cost us 41 cents each, it adds to our work of keeping up with address changes. And, if you appreciate Banner of Truth, we do not want you to miss a single issue.

—Editor

he has prepared to lead this crucial ministry with families.” Laster goes on to say Spivy, in her previous work at the North Atlanta Church of Christ, a congregation of 1,500 in worship, “coordinated large-scale events, such as VBS, Easter Egg-stravaganza, service projects and Fall Festival.”

That Spivy’s work is not just with children is made clear by Laster’s statements: “Dana’s intention is to build a first-class ministry over the next few years with the more than 200 children and their families in this LifeStage, which totals 27 percent of our RCC families. As a LifeStage Minister, Dana will intentionally mentor and shepherd families into deeper discipleship, authentic community and meaningful ministry.”

From the above we see two serious steps of apostasy, the use of instrumental music, and a woman in a leadership role as a “mentor and shepherd.” Actions like this depict a group of people who no longer care for or have any respect for “the old paths.” Rochester College, formerly Michigan Christian College, dropped the word “Christian” because “it scared people off.” The Rochester Church only once in a while adds “of Christ.” Could it be that they fear using “church of Christ” might scare people off? People who love God’s truth and the church which Christ purchased with his blood should fear “Rochester Church.”

When we see such things happening as the above, with many of the larger congregations, and most of our schools, are we deeply concerned? Do we stop to think of the extent of this falling away from the truth? What will our children and grandchildren face? Will they, in so many instances, be unable to find a congregation which still stands for New Testament Christianity?

This drifting away from the distinctiveness of the Lord’s church began in the late 1950s. That drift was first noticed among the larger congregations; but, that has now changed in that the same drifting away from the truth is being seen within much smaller congregations. Where will it end? It might be well for us to reflect on what happened to the church in the First Century and soon afterward. John said, “...many false prophets are gone out into the world” (I John 4:1). That was about 90 A.D. What happened then can happen now.

—Editor

Readers’ Response

“The family of Fred Wreck acknowledges with deep appreciation your kind expression of sympathy. On a Wreck Stop the Lectures Thanks.” (*This is typical of some people, especially those who do not have courage to let one know their address. We can be thankful that there are only a few such people. It is sad that such a person claims to be a Christian* – Editor).

“I enjoy the paper so much. We go to the New Brick Church of Christ in Franklin County, TN. There are three of us who would like to receive the paper....thank you so much in advance. Your Fellow Christian servants, **Ron & Gail Anderson.**” – TN.

“Would you please send Banner of Truth to....We were getting it, then it just stopped coming. It was the best bulletin we ever did get. (*Name misplaced* – Editor).

“Thanks for your paper you send to the church. We enjoy them. We have about 35 families. Hope this check helps, **Mt. Jude church of Christ**” – AR. (*Your check is greatly appreciated. It is brethren like you that make our work possible. Good to have you as fellow helpers.* – Editor).

“Thank you for standing firmly on the word of God. So many are drifting away from Teaching. Here is a small contribution to help with mailing cost, **Linda Sydnor.**” – TN. (*Thank you so much.* – Editor).

“Hello my devoted Christian families. I want to drop you all a sincere blessing and praise for all of you for such a wonderful and blessed publication, ‘Banner of Truth.’ I love reading Banner of Truth and have been blessed in so many ways. Keep the truth coming and God bless you and yours, **Tommy Jones.**”

“I would like to receive your publication (Banner of Truth) Please send me information on how to receive it, **Fran McCarty.**” – KY. (*BOT is free. It is made possible by individuals and congregations. If you know of others who would like to receive it, send their names.* – Editor).

“Thank you for sending the bundle of Banner of Truth to be used at the Riverview church of Christ. They were appreciated very much. It was decided that when it was read it would be brought back and another person would do the same until everyone had a chance to read one. You are to be commended for the articles in the publication because they are needed so badly. Again thank you and may you be blessed with good health, **Joan Yarbrough.**” – MI. (*Thanks for your comments. If more copies could be used, just let us know* – Editor).

“Please add me to your mailing list. If you have any extra copies since Sept. 2006, send me each of them. Thank you, **James R. Smith.**” – TN. (*We do have copies of many back issues, which we send on request.* – Editor).

cussion, we need to turn our attention to the meaning of a true and faithful christian life.

III. WHO IS A TRUE CHRISTIAN?

If one were to ask twenty people on the street to answer this question, there would be a variety of answers, and possibly not one answered in accordance with what God’s word teaches. That reveals a very serious problem. God’s word being true, there cannot be a multiplicity of correct answers. Truth understood, does not give conflicting answers to serious questions, such as the one under consideration. In the absence of a truthful answer to this question, there are no great rewards to be received.

To learn the truth as to who is a true Christian, one must go to the source of truth, God’s word. The word *christian* is used three times in the New Testament: “And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26); “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a christian” (Acts 26:28); and, “if any man suffer as a christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (I Pet. 4:16).

Vine’s defines the word “christian” as an “adherent of Jesus.” (p. 193). *Thayer’s* definition is “a follower of Christ.” (p. 672). It is God who “called” the disciples “christians.” The name is an honorable one, giving “the preeminence” (Col. 1:18) to Christ. Isaiah said, “And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name” (Isa. 62:2).

Multitudes of people call themselves christians on the basis that they are professed followers of Christ, but there is more involved in being a true christian than simply professing to follow Christ. Our Lord makes this very clear when He said, “Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). The “will of the Father” certainly includes the qualifications which constitute being a true Christian.

True christians are “in Christ.” When a person is in Christ, that one is also in the “body of Christ,” which is the church. Paul says that God “gave him [Christ] to be the head over all things to the church,

Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). When people obey the gospel of Christ, as in Acts 2, the Lord adds them to the church (v. 47). It is in Christ and his body that “all spiritual blessings” are found (Eph. 1:3). Paul said Timothy had known the “holy scriptures” from a child, “which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15). Those “in Christ” and His body, the church, are the only true Christians; there are no ones outside of Him.

Seeing that the only true christians are in Christ, where all spiritual blessings, including salvation, are found, it becomes doubly important as to how one gets into Christ.

The conversions recorded in the Book of Acts show the process by which one becomes a christian. We note that certain steps were taken, in accordance with the teaching of God’s word. That first step in the process of becoming a Christian is faith in God, Christ and the Gospel (Heb. 11:6; Jno. 8:24; Mar. 16:15,16). This faith i leads one to repent of sins. That is a change of mind, which will be shown in actions. This now penitent believer must then confess faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10). At this point one is a proper subject to be baptized “into Christ” (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27). The baptism, at which point one gets into Christ, is a burial in water for remission of sins, of one who is old enough to have faith or believe in Christ. People get into Christ in no other way.

Those who have not taken these steps are not “in Christ,” and therefore are not true christians. This means that nearly all those who profess to be christians are not. Sincerity or lack of knowledge does not change the fact. The faith that comes from the hearing of God’s word (Rom. 10:17), enables us to know that we are true christians.

The fact tha one has become a true christian, however, does not rule out the possibility of his becoming unfaithful in serving the Lord; and faithful service is necessary to receive the great rewards. In fact, there are many warnings set forth in the New Testament regarding the danger of falling away from the faith. Many have done so, and it could happen to anyone. It is due to the fact that though a person may obey the true gospel of Christ and become a true →

Christian, that person could become “unfaithful,” that we discuss the following:

IV. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN?

It is popular to believe that it is impossible for a christian to fall away or become unfaithful in serving Christ. This doctrine, however, cannot be found in God’s word; it is a false doctrine which has come from the minds of men. If this doctrine were true, why in the name of common sense is so much of the New Testament devoted to warning christians against the danger of being led astray by false teachers, the love of the world, and many, many other evil things? In God’s word, there are various examples of those who were guilty of error, and there is the plain teaching that error is not going to go into heaven. Paul said, “whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4). Will those who have fallen from grace go to heaven?

Just think of all the emphasis given to serving the Lord faithfully. Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians is a great example: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Note that Paul uses the word “always,” which would mean throughout life. Our Lord also makes it clear that living the faithful life is necessary. He said, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt.10:32). That this applies to the manner of living, and not just a statement, is evident from the fact that for just anyone to confess Christ, does not mean Christ would confess that person before the Father. If one stops “confessing” Christ by the manner of life, Christ would not confess that person before the Father.

Now that we have considered what it means to be a faithful Christian, another important subject of discussion has to do with the rewards for being such.

IV. THE GREAT REWARDS

These rewards are great because they include rewards in this life and eternal rewards in the world to come. The value of these rewards is far beyond comparison with any other rewards. The rewards in this life do

not begin to measure up to the eternal rewards, but they are great nevertheless, and should not be overlooked by any means.

Rewards in this life include a living hope which is necessary to live a good and worthwhile life. The Spirit, speaking of the hope “set before us,” says it is that “hope [which] we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast...” (6:19). Why is a true hope such a blessing? Just stop and think, if you will, of the countless and growing number of people who are drifting through life with no worthwhile purpose. They are on every hand, and resort to all manner of things which are detrimental to a worthwhile life. Growing numbers turn to alcohol and a variety of other drugs, which bring about all manner of evil, to feed their habit. Many murders, suicides, rapes, robberies, automobile deaths and injuries, and others, have a connection with drugs. Those who are living without a worthwhile hope are the most likely to engage in such as the above.

A faithful christian life generally brings a longer, safer and more enjoyable life. The faithful christian does not engage in many things which are likely to bring on health problems. The faithful christian will not die from tobacco-induced diseases. The faithful christian will not die due to the use of alcohol and illicit drugs. The faithful christian will have a better family life than the average. He will provide for his family. He will not engage in unlawful things that invite harm, even loss of life.

From a purely pragmatic perspective, the christian life fares better in this life than the non-christian. The christian would not face a lot of problems which the non-christian faces. I well remember a good friend of mine, who many years ago came to the decision that he wanted to obey the gospel, or go through the acts. His reason was that the christian life would be much better than the non-christian life. I explained to him that that was certainly true, but there was a greater reason for becoming a christian. It was perhaps a year later that he was baptized into Christ, and became a real servant of the Lord and very active in the Lord’s church.

The blessings for the faithful christian in this life are indeed great and are an added blessing to that greatest of all blessings, that which is in the world to come ↴

“humble and contrite”? If so, what and how does God answer their prayers?

You ask what I would have told Cornelius. Had I been there to tell him, I would have said something like the following: “Cornelius, you have been a righteous or just man, and God has been pleased with you, but now the gospel has been made available to you and you have the privilege and responsibility to obey it, so that your relationship to God can continue to be acceptable. You can no longer live under patriarchy. It has come to an end, and now there is the one gospel of Christ for all mankind, and to be saved one must obey it.

As for Saul of Tarsus, once again, we do not have any situations like that today. Jesus appeared unto him for a special purpose. When Ananias was told to contact Saul, he said he had heard of much evil done by him, but notice the Lord’s response: “But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Ac.9:15). No, we will not see such instances as that now.

You say of the “humble and contrite,” that “God will always listen to that person.” In other words, if a person is humble and contrite, God will hear that person, even though he is not a Christian? Again, what and how does God not only hear such people, but how does He answer?

Dennis, thanks again for writing. —*Editor*

A PERSONAL NOTE

With the coming of July, it was my plan to get the July issue of BOT printed and in the mail. That would mean I had reached a long-time goal of catching up. But things do not always go as planned.

On July 3, I lost my balance on a rocky bank of the lake. My left arm had one broken bone a few inches from my wrist. I also injured my side and had a lot of pain from that. This has now been about six weeks and I am told it will take another four to six weeks for my arm to completely heal. I am trusting that I may be able to run the press by Aug. 20 or before, depending on if I can use my arm. Typing with one hand has been a very slow go. I am now waiting on the plates for the July issue.—*Editor*

ROCHESTER CHURCH

In the June B.O.T. we ran an article by Chris Dawson entitled Rochester College Promotes Women’s in the Church and in the Home. In order to see the connection between the college and the Rochester Church, sometimes called Rochester Church of Christ, we are calling attention to some activities of the church.

A member of the church from that general area sent some information, after having attending a service at the Rochester Church some time ago. That person said, “When I arrived, I was handed a worship bulletin by a woman. We sang acapella, with a ‘praise team’ (male and female) on the stage leading us. I heard clapping during the faster songs, and saw raised hands during the slower ones.”

From clippings sent me concerning activities at the Rochester Church, two things really stood out, in that they are an example of the growing apostasy which is engulfing the Lord’s church at a rapid rate. The first thing was a clipping, beginning at the top of the page. In a shaded box, containing darkened hands the following words appear:

REFUGE

An instrumental worship gathering
for all ages.08

Refuge Worship Focuses On God’s Loving Shelter

by *Chris Lindsey*

The article explains what this *refuge* is, and in conclusion says:

“So, once a month, we invite everyone to join us for an instrumental praise and worship experience. All ages are welcome!

“Mark your calendars and join us for the installment of Refuge on July 28 at 7 p.m. in the Hub (Youth Room). And bring a friend!”

The second thing about the Rochester Church is the arrival of Dana Spivy, as headlined: “To Join Staff As Minister For Families With Children.”

John Laster says of Dana Spivy, “For over a year we have been in various stages of praying and searching for God to direct Rochester Church to the individual →

A Response from a Reader

“Brother Pigg, I appreciate receiving ‘Banner of Truth’ and agree with most of its content. But I question your remarks in the short article entitled ‘Will God Hear the Prayer of sinners?’

You define ‘sinners’ as ‘those who have not obeyed the Gospel of Christ.’ You then say ‘There is no evidence in the Bible that God will hear the prayers of such people.’ You also say ‘The righteous would be limited to those who are Christians.’ You then say that Cornelius ‘had a good relationship with God before the Gospel was offered to him.’ You also said ‘It must be shown that Cornelius was a sinner before Peter brought the gospel to him.’ You later said Cornelius was described as ‘a just [righteous, ASV] man and one that feareth God.’

My question: Was Cornelius saved and a Christian before Peter brought the gospel to him? Before he obeyed the gospel was he a sinner? (as per your own definition). If the righteous is limited to those who are Christians then how could Cornelius be righteous before he became a Christian? If Cornelius was not a sinner before Peter brought the gospel to him, what was he? Was he a Christian?

No, Cornelius’s prayer did not save him, but God did hear his prayer—verse 31 says: “Cornelius, your prayer has been heard.’ Was it heard before he became a Christian?

The only way we can say that Cornelius had a good relationship with the Lord before the gospel was offered to him is because he was open and receptive to truth when he heard it. He was humble and contrite, and God will always listen to that person. (See Isa. 66:2; Psa. 34:18; 51:17; Matt. 5:3).

Brother Pigg, would you have told Cornelius that it would do no good for him to pray because he was not a Christian and God would not hear him. What about Saul of Tarsus? God heard him praying before he obeyed the gospel. Praying did not save him or Cornelius, but they prayed and God heard them because He knew that they would obey when they heard the gospel because their heart was humble and contrite. Therefore, I must respectfully disagree with some of your statements because I see them as being contradictory to what the Bible states. Brotherly, Dennis Abernathy, 205 Pinewood St., Gladewater, TX 75647.”

Dennis, I received your response to the article, “Will God Hear The Prayer of Sinners?,” which was in the June issue of B.O.T. We invite our readers to respond to what we carry in the paper, whether they agree or disagree.

I wrote the short article as a request from a reader. I addressed the question as it is usually used in our time. I think it will help to notice the first line of the article: “The word sinners *generally* means those who have not obeyed the Gospel of Christ.” So, when you say, “You define ‘sinners’ as ‘those who have not obeyed the Gospel of Christ,’” that is not entirely accurate. I used the word “generally” for a reason, and it would have been best to have quoted the statement as said.

With regard to the “righteous” being limited to those who are Christians, I said that with reference to I Pet. 3:12. I did not see anything to uphold your position that this includes sinners as well. I do hold to the position that in our time only the Christian would fit that category. I mentioned Cornelius from the standpoint that some try to use that example to prove God hears the prayers of the non-christian. That cannot be proved; but if it could be, Cornelius is not the place to prove it. We have no circumstances like that of Cornelius now.

Cornelius, at the time, was not a Christian, the gospel not having been brought to him. This, though, is not to say he was a sinner, as you evidently believe. It is God’s word that describes Cornelius as: “a devout man, and one that feareth God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.” The angel told Cornelius his prayers had come for a memorial before God. Cornelius is also described as “a just [righteous, ASV] man and one that feareth God.” If Cornelius did not have a good relationship with God, then the above descriptive words do not mean much.

Do you believe that there were no Gentiles who had a right relationship with God before the Gospel was brought to the Gentiles? From the giving of the Law of Moses until the Gospel, were there no just or righteous Gentiles? Were all the Gentiles lost during that time?

Do you believe that today God will hear the prayers of those who are not Christians but are ↴

The eternal blessings might be considered as that which is included in “eternal salvation.” Speaking of Christ, it is said, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he came thee author of eternal salvation to them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9). We see then that these blessings are contingent upon obeying Christ.

Rewards in the world to come. With all the descriptive language used in God’s word, man is still unable to fully comprehend those heavenly blessings. The very thought of timeless existence is incomprehensible, since we never experience that in this life. Even the very best things in this life end with time. As we mentioned earlier, nearly all people have some concept of a life after this one. But God has given us the greatest picture that we can understand in human terms. In that we can trust.

Abraham, “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb. 11:10). A city built by God, would be the greatest, we know. In Revelation 21, we learn that the walls of that city are made of all manner of precious stones. The gates are each a pearl. The streets are pure gold. And, as for light, “The glory of God did lighten it” (v. 24).

As great as the glory of the city is, that does not compare with the blessed state of existence there. While the beauty of material things is to be appreciated, that which is to be appreciated more is the state or condition which exists in that eternal abiding place we call heaven. Listen to the voice John heard:

And I heard a great voice out of heaven, Saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Rev. 21:3-4).

We simply cannot imagine such a wonderful existence, since we have never experienced anything like it, and do not know of anyone who has. Yet, our un-failing faith in God tells us it is real.

The population of heaven will not include any that

should not be there. John said, “And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 21:27). Just think what a comfort that will be, since in this life we must live in the midst of a world made up of every type of evil people.

Much more that could be said about the wonderful things in store for God’s faithful people; but, we have pointed out enough to convince any thinking person that heaven, as we some times sing, will “surely be worth it all.” But it is so sad that most people are not willing to seek the great rewards which God offers, which were made possible by the death of His only begotten Son.

V. WHY DO PEOPLE THINK FOOLISHLY?

God’s word has much to say about “wise” and “foolish” people. Mountains of evidence show that the distinction between the two classes is made on the basis of whether or not God’s word is believed, respected and obeyed. A good example of this is found in the Sermon on the Mount. After pointing out that “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21), our Lord says, to emphasize that fact, “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (v. 25). The house of that wise man stood firm; but not so with the foolish man. “And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand” (v. 26). The foolish man’s house did not stand.

The example of wise and foolish builders sets fourth a principle which is found in many places in God’s word. That principle is simply that those who do God’s will are wise and those who do not God’s will are foolish. Another good example is that of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-13). The “wise” made preparation for the wedding when they had the opportunity but the “foolish” neglected to do so, and were thus dubbed foolish. Does not this principle apply to people in our time as it did when Christ was on earth? →

Paul speaks of God's wrath against the Gentiles. He said, "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:21-22). To the Ephesians, Paul said, See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Eph. 5:15).

In the parable known as The Rich Fool, Christ said of the man who had not room to store all that his ground produced, and said he would pull down his barns and build greater, "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Lk. 12:20). Then Christ adds, "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (v. 21).

We have never seen a time when so many people put their trust in material things, which are only temporary. Rank materialism has hurt the church so much within the past few decades, but God said that is foolish.

During my tenure in poor places in India and Thailand, I have noted that the interest in spiritual things seemed greater than countries which had more material things. Even though, in most instances, this spiritual interest was not based on God's truth, nonetheless the trust in material things was not as great as in other countries.

Powerful forces in our present society are bent on doing away with God's influence. When God is out of the picture, trust in material things becomes much greater. We are fast becoming a purely secular and materialistic society.

We have referred to New Testament statements about fools; there are also many references in the Old Testament. There are dozens of references in the book of Proverbs, and many in other places. In most cases where the word fool or foolish is found, it has reference to something which is contrary to God's will.

One of the most noted references to a fool in God's word is that found in Psalm 14:1. "The fool hath said in his heart. There is no God..." It is a fact that from the beginning of the human race there have been both foolish and wise men.

The number of those whom God calls "fool" is growing rapidly. Let us bear in mind that God knows the minds of people, and that includes all of us, and it is He who labels people fools in so many instances. Paul speaks of "perilous times." and we are in such times today. Why so? Various factors are involved, but none has had a greater part to play than outright indifference. If ever there was a time when God-fearing people ought to be doubly concerned, it is now.

V. SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

One thing which is of great concern to me, and has not been emphasized, is the denominational trend within the Lord's church. The concern is great because of the effect it is having in keeping our brethren from being recipients of those great rewards we have been discussing. Remember that Christ said, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man, which built his house upon a rock" (Matt. 7:24). The builder who failed to do so is called "a foolish man." There is a growing number of those among us who are fellowshipping the man-made churches, and adopting their errors, and denying the distinctiveness of the one true church which Christ purchased with his blood. God's word being true, such brethren cannot qualify for those great rewards.

As we grow older our lives are often encumbered with things which take away some of the joys of life. But there is something to which you and I can look forward when our time here ends. How dismal it would be if we had no hope for the future; yet, just think of the multitudes that are in that very condition. They do not have to be; but, in so many instances it is simply a matter of individuals thinking the great rewards are not worth striving for.

May the Lord help us to realize what is wise and what is foolish. He has informed us, but it is up to us to hear the sayings of Christ and do them. Failing to do according to what the Father and the Son have revealed to us in the word makes one a fool.

To fail to receive the great rewards is the greatest of all losses; but, that is by comparison not the worst thing. There are only two eternal abiding places, Heaven and Hell. To fail to receive the former is to end up in the latter. Do not be foolish. —Editor

Marital Readiness (1)

Expressing the depth of their love for and commitment to Jesus, two great men forcefully declared, "I am ready" (Luk. 22:33; Acts 21:13). Peter was "ready to go both to prison and to death"; Paul was "ready...to be...bound...[and] to die..." Peter subsequently denied Jesus; Paul clearly was prepared to die. Though the claim of each was equally sincere, one was ready; the other was not. Readiness, then, involves more than intent and declaration.

Next in importance to our relationship to Jesus is the relationship which is sustained when a man "shall cleave to his wife," when God "hath joined [them] together" in marriage (Mark 9:6-9). Despite the fact that people freely willingly declare before God and man that they are "ready" to "have and to hold, in sickness and health," and so on, subsequent unhappiness and even divorce imply that they were not "ready."

It is fair to say that many are not ready to get married, but they do it anyway. The inviolate nature of marriage — "let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6, 9) — however, complicates the matter of marital readiness: in other words, when it comes to people getting married, the rule is: Ready or not, here I come. It is far better, obviously, that a person be "ready" to get married.

How does one know he/she is ready to get married? With many of our young people already of "marrying age," and many heading into it, it behooves us all to think about marital readiness.

One does not have to lay claim to be an expert about marital readiness, because the God we serve has given us many guidelines, which if followed could prevent a lot of heartache.

Let us then make an attempt at viewing marital readiness from various aspects.

THE VARIABLENESS OF READINESS

There are variable, albeit important, external aspects of marital readiness — education, job, money, et al. These things are important primarily as they relate to a man's, a husband's, obligation to "provide...for his own...specially his own household" (1Ti 5:8); however, it is not the case that successful marriage depends on education, career and money, many great marriages started with very little.

It is more important, though, to see that a willingness to work is inseparable from readiness to marry (cf. Eph 4:28; 1Thess 4:11). A man who will not work is not ready to get married; this is no less true of "women," who are to "love their husbands...their children...[and be] workers at home..." (Tit 2:3-5).

Marriage also has an obvious physical aspect with peculiar needs and requirements; we speak here of the unique passion and intimacy reserved for marriage. The "bed is undefiled" (Heb. 13:4); and, it is "better to marry than to burn" (1Co. 7:9). This is one area where most people, especially young people, are obviously "ready" to get married — "if they have not continency, let them marry" (*ibid*).

As important as this is, though, it is ultimately the least important aspect of marital readiness. There is a spiritual aspect to marital intimacy that few, to their sorrow, ever grasp (1Co. 7:1-9).

Speaking of looming trials awaiting himself and his disciples, Jesus said, "the spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mk 14:38). In the case of marriage, I fear that too often the *flesh* "is ready," but the *spirit* "is weak."

Marriage is certainly about emotions as well; but, emotions, like physical passion, are subject to fluctuation. The emotional "high" leading up to marriage will not always be there. —Continued on p. 15