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THE NEED FOR OBEDIENCE

By Ordell Heavin

When God told Noah to build the Ark, the Bible tells us, "Thus did Noah; according to all God commanded him, so did he." (Gen. 6:22.) For this action, Noah is commended in Heb. 11:7, where the writer said, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." Noah proved his faith in God by doing exactly what God commanded, and for this he was approved with God.

In every thing we do, we need to see the proper standards of authority. For example, a yard stick is not 34 or 38 inches long, but precisely 36 inches. A football team has only eleven men on each side, a baseball team has nine men playing at one time, and each batter is allowed three strikes, and a basketball team has five players, etc. Each of the games are played by a different set of standards or rules. The rules for one type of game do not apply to the others. No one has a problem understanding these points when applied to games, but for some reason many refuse to recognize that Christianity also has standards and rules of authority, which provide the guidelines for living as God desires. Through his word, God has provided the rules necessary to completely furnish us in everything pertaining to the spiritual life, (2 Tim. 3:16-17). When we come before God in the judgment we will each face these rules. Jesus said, "The words that I spake, the same shall judge you in the last day." (John 12:48.) Since we will be judged by his words, and since it furnishes us with all the necessary instructions for living the Christian life, we would do well to put each rule into practice in our daily life.

In the Old Testament, the people who were trying to please God, and live properly, would often preface their actions with such statements as: "What does God say about it?" or "Is there any word from the Lord?" (1 Kings 22; Jer. 17:15). In the New Testament we are encouraged

to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (1 Thess. 5:21.) The New Testament contains the standards and rules by which we, as Christians, are to live. We will be judged by the gospel (Rom. 2:16), and not by how we felt or by what we thought. We will not be judged by the creeds and doctrines of men (Matt. 15:9). To be what God wants us to be we must believe and obey exactly what he teaches us through the gospel.

In 2 Peter 1:3 Peter assures us that everything pertaining to life and godliness has been given through the knowledge of Christ. His will is our divine guideline; our blueprint for living a Christian life, and the only hope we have for salvation. In Heb. 5:9 the writer tells us that Christ is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him. And in Rev. 22:14 the writer states, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter into the gates of that city." Heaven depends on our obedience to Christ, and obedience depends on our following his instructions given through the gospel. It is not enough to claim to have followed him. Notice the Lord's words in Luke 6:46, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the

things which I say?" Also, in Matt. 7:21 Jesus said, "Not every one 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." There is no substitute for obedience. There is no sacrifice one can make that can take the place for obedience. There isn't enough good works one can do to replace obedience. Nor will partial obedience suffice. We must, like Noah, do according to all that God commands us. In James 4:17 we are warned, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." And, too, in 2 John 9 we are warned not to go beyond what Christ has taught us - "Whosoever transgresseth, and abide not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son."

The Christian life is not just living as we feel is right, but is a life guided by the standards and rules of God's word. Unless our faith is expressed in obedience, we will miss heaven. May God help us to be more diligent in following the rules of our Lord, that we might both live as we should here, and that we might be prepared to live with the Lord in glory.

A FATHER'S GREATEST GIFT

By Patrick A. Parnell

Fathers sometimes wonder, "What would be the best gift a father could give a son or daughter? Lots of toys, while they are little? A savings fund for a college education? A modern home? Financial security for life?"

The greatest gift a father can give his children doesn't come with a price tag. The greatest gift a father can give his son or daughter is himself.

Extensive research reveals what should have been known all along - that a father's presence is important in the lives of his children. This is particularly true during crucial preschool years, when sex-role identification, personality, motor

skills, creativity and ability to achieve, among other things, are being molded.

In general, tests show that boys deprived of a father's presence have less chances of growing up to become well adjusted, happy productive adults. Father deprived boys have less self-control and tend to lack social responsibility. They tend to be less independent and to have more feminine patterns of interest and play. Such boys suffer more emotional disturbances and have difficulties in interpersonal relations. And it is a proven fact that father-deprived boys are more likely to become juvenile delinquents.

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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The Heart Needs Grooming Too

By Avis C. Porter

I cast a final glance in the mirror for a complete analysis of my personal grooming. From the reflection I could get an idea of how I looked to others. But, how do I look to God in a spiritual sense? God doesn't see me as man does: for man looks on the outward appearance by God looks on my heart. Notice what God said about Eliab, one of Jesse's eight sons,

when the selection of a king for Israel was being made. "But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on this countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth: for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7).

If I do not keep His commandments, then my heart is not right. How repulsive I must look to God! If our thoughts are evil, then we may be sure that our inside appearance is not pleasing. Jesus said, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thieves, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man." (Matt. 15:18-20.) We must purify our hearts (James 4:8). But how do we accomplish this? We must do God's will. That will influence our thinking. "For as he thinketh is his heart, so is he." (Prov. 23:7.)

In Phil. 4:7-8, Paul wrote, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep (guard) your hearts and minds (thoughts) through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things." When we do this our inward appearance will even surpass our outward one.

established today. It is also hard to imagine a church that is no "kind" of church. But denominations did not exist in the beginning of the church, they came into being centuries later, and they are not a part of the original church anymore than a Ford is a part of a Chevy.

In the beginning of the church we are told that "The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47.) Which church was this? In Acts 8:3 we are told that Saul made havoc of the church. Which church was this? We all know that it was the original church that Jesus promised to build, which he purchased with his blood. It was not some man designed institution. It is in this church that we should all want to be members, because it is God's family and the spiritual body of our Lord.

The Church Pictured in the Bible

By Robert Ball

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised to build his church. By this he meant that he would establish Christianity. In Eph. 5:25 we are told that Jesus loves the church and gave himself for it, which simply means that he died for Christians — the church.

The "church" always means a called out group of people. The Israelites, who were called out of Egypt, were called the church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38); because they were a "called-out" people. When Saul persecuted the church, he persecuted men and women (Acts 8:1-3); because these Christian men and women were the church. Rather than being a material building, the church is a spiritual temple of God, which is made up of "living stones" (1 Peter 2:5). Therefore, when we speak of the church we are speaking of Christians.

In the Bible, people became members of the church by becoming Christians. Those who were saved were added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47); meaning that all Christians were added to the "called-out" group. In Acts 20:28 Paul says that Christ purchased the church with his own blood. This shows that anyone bought with the blood of Christ became a part of the church. Therefore, the church in the Bible was the "called-out", "blood-bought", "saved" people.

In Col. 1:13 we are told that God delivered people out of darkness, and placed them in Christ's kingdom, which evidently is the same as the church. When men were "born of water and the Spirit", they entered into the kingdom (church). In this way they became a part of God's family, which is the church (1 Tim. 3:15). The church is also called the "body of Christ." (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18.) By the Spirit's teachings men were baptized into the body of Christ — the church (1 Cor. 12:13). When one became a

Christian in Bible times, he was added to the body of Christ, the family of God, the kingdom of Christ, or the church. The church was simply all of God's saved people. They were all members of the same body, there were no distinctive "kinds" of Christians.

The idea of "kinds" of Christians suggests differences between them in faith and practice. The differences in their faith and practice identifies them one from another. In the Bible there was no such distinction. Let us look at it this way for a moment. Someone asks, "What kind of car is that?" Another answers, "It is not any kind, just a car." Would this answer make sense to you? No. You cannot imagine a car that is not some kind. You would say that every car must be some kind. This is because there are many different designs of cars. But, this has not always been true. The first, original car was not a kind, it was just the car. It was later that men began designing different "kinds" of cars, but at first there were no "kinds" of cars.

This is also true of the church. In the Bible, there were no "kinds" of churches, rather, there was just the church. Christianity in the beginning had no kinds, it was just Christianity. Original Christianity in the Bible times was not divided. There were no denominations. Denominations are churches that have been designed by men. They are different one from another, as well as being different from the original church pictured in the Bible. We have all been born into a world of many churches. We did not cause these denominations; we did not want them, but we have inherited them. They were here when we were born into this world. And for this reason it is hard to imagine the church as it was originally. It is only natural for people to think that these many churches have always been; because they are well

PREACHING THE GOSPEL

By Glynn V. Purdy

In the opinion of most preachers, Paul was one of the truly great preachers of all times. I believe that the Lord would agree to this. This being true, and most preachers and teachers of the gospel wanting to be as effective as possible, it would seem profitable that we learn as much as possible about what made Paul such a great preacher. Surely, if we do as he did, we can all be more effective.

In I Cor. 2:1-5 Paul gives us an insight as to his effectiveness. He wrote, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." In these words Paul lists several things of importance toward being a more successful teacher.

Paul makes clear that the message is more important than the messenger. He realized that the message was God's power to save, and that he was only a voice by which the message might be heard. When the preacher, or the church, believes that the drawing and saving power is in the wisdom, experience, reputation and the general ability of a man, then the power to save is not present. It is the testimony of God that saves. Paul knew this, remembered this and preached it. He was determined to know nothing else, or preach nothing else. This contributed to his great success in winning souls to Christ. May we all learn and remember where the power is.

Paul learned to lean upon the power of Christ. The preacher must realize that what ever success he may have will depend totally upon Christ and the gospel. Paul realized his weakness and turned to Christ for support. The gospel was created in the mind of God; validated by the death and resurrection of Christ, and revealed by the Holy Spirit. How can any man, realizing the value of the soul and the cost of the gospel, enter into teaching with less

than fear and trembling, knowing his inability to do justice to the proclaiming of eternal truth? No man is able to present the gospel in the ability and spirit of Christ. There will be no preacher who has not been responsible for turning some one away from Christ with his attitude and weakness. We must realize this and live, study, and pray that we will become more effective each day. The preacher and teacher will only be effective in soul winning as long as they rely solely on Christ and the gospel. The preacher must never think that he is "some great one" and the churches must not contribute to this end.

Another thing that Paul realized was that "enticing words of man's wisdom" was not the key to success in winning souls. Remember, God determined that man in his wisdom could not know God. So God revealed himself and his plan of salvation through preaching the gospel to save the believer (I Cor. 1:21-22). Man often looks for signs and worldly wisdom, but God rejects such (I Cor. 1:22-24). The greatest wisdom that man has is only foolishness to God (I Cor. 1:25). Paul was not interested in excellency of speech or in enticing words. The reason he did not want their faith to stand in man's wisdom was because there is no salvation in such. It would be well if we all learned this. Paul wanted men's faith to be in the power of God, which is the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16). We must realize that true greatness and success is found only in Jesus and his word. The preacher is God's instrument, and a soul winner only so long as he hides himself behind the cross, and projects to his hearers, Christ and him crucified. When the preacher gets between Christ and the hearers, and they see and remember him more than they see and remember Christ, then he is hindering the Lord's cause. We must take knowledge that the good teacher has "been with Christ", that Christ "lives in" him (Acts 4:13; Gal. 2:20). Do you want to do some teaching? Do you want to win souls? Do you want to be a servant of Christ, and have his approval? Then try Paul's formula and forget about the wisdom of men.

"Church attendance depends more on desire than distance."

FATHERS

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Less research has been compiled on the effects of father-absence on girls. But conducted studies already show that girls from father-absent homes especially suffer in their ability to appropriately relate to males as they grow into adulthood.

In addition, fathers must realize that they need to spend more than just time with their children. Simply being at home is not enough. The dad who comes home and immediately takes a snooze on the couch, flops down and flicks on the TV set or goes about doing his own thing, to the exclusion of his children, might as well not be home as far as the children are concerned. The quality of fatherly time spent with children is as important as the quantity.

A study of 172 males by psychologists Mark Reuter and Henry Biller discovered that the most well adjusted were those whose fathers were very loving and spent a good deal of time with them. Those whose fathers were unloving, though present, grew up undependable and immature. Those whose fathers were loving, but seldom home, were not well adjusted either.

Another study by Dr. Biller, to determine the importance of father-presence, involved four groups of third-grade boys. The four groupings were these: early father absence before age five, late father absence beginning after age five, low father presence (less than six hours per week), and high father presence (more than two hours of father-child interaction per day). The boys in the high father presence group tested meaningfully higher in academic performance on achievement tests than did the boys in each of the other groups.

The implications of these studies are several. Fathers need to spend time with their children — quality time — teaching, instructing, guiding, loving and playing with them. Children need their fathers. Money can't buy what a father can give. And if a father will sacrifice some of that career and other pursuits for the sake of his children, the reward he'll reap from it in producing a happy, well-adjusted, productive member of society will be well worth it.

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The Conversion of Three Thousand

By Harold Turner

To Christians the book of Acts is recognized as the book of conversions, and the book of history of the Lord's church. Within the book of Acts we have a record of conversions of people from a wide variety of backgrounds, ranging from people who are devoutly religious to people who were grossly immoral. A study of these should impress us with the fact that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9.) Too, from these different examples of conversion, we learn that God has only one plan by which all are to be saved. There are people today who try to make a distinction between the conversion of the Jews and the Gentiles, but the apostle Peter stated in Acts 15:9 that God put no difference between them. And in Rom. 10:12 Paul wrote, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." In Christ "There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3:28.)

Since all people converted in the days of the apostles followed the same pattern, we can learn from these examples exactly what we must do in order to be saved. In his final words to the apostles, Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15,16.) One should be able to see these instructions in every example of conversion following the time they were given.

In Luke 24:47 Jesus told the apostles "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." He further instructed them to "tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:49.) In Acts 1:8 He promised them, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." From these passages we learn that Jerusalem was to be the beginning place for conversion, and the time of this event would be when the apostles received the Holy Spirit, which would direct them in preaching the gospel.

The book of Acts records the fulfillment of the Lord's instructions and promises in Acts 2:1-47. The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and they "began to speak as the Spirit gave them utterance." They are in Jerusalem where the Lord promised them that these events

would take place, and it is here that they first begin to bear witness of him. In vr. 14 Peter said, "Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words." After explaining to the people what was taking place, Peter preached, saying, "Ye men of Israel, here these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death . . ." (vrs. 22-24.) As his sermon draws to a conclusion, he stated, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (vr. 36.) The apostles were doing exactly what Jesus had instructed them; they were preaching the gospel, which centered around his death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4).

This gospel message reached out to touch the hearts of this great multitude. It convinced them of the guilt of their sins, as verse 37 states, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Remember now, Jesus told the apostles "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47). These men have asked, "What shall we do?" What will Peter's answer be? "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . ." His answer followed the Lord's instructions of Luke 24:47.

There are some people who find the answer that Peter gave confusing. Some preach that Peter's answer to "Repent, and be baptized" was to instruct them what to do because they were already saved. Can you believe this? Here are people accused of crucifying the Lord, they are pricked in the heart and ask what to do; can you believe the answer Peter gave them was because they were already saved? Yet, many contend that the expression, "for the remission of sins", means "because of the remission of sins." But, notice what Peter says as he continues in verses 40, 41. "And with many other words did he testify and exhort saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto

them about three thousand souls." Why would Peter tell people who are already saved to save themselves? Remission of sins and salvation are not two separate things. We are saved when we have our sins remitted (Luke 1:77). These people are told to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, to save themselves, and those who gladly received these instructions were baptized. Why were they baptized? Remember, Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark 16:16.) These were baptized in response to the command to save themselves.

Upon responding to the apostle's instruction to be baptized, these people were added to the church. Three thousand souls obeyed this command. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (verse 47.) These people had heard the gospel, they believed and obeyed it, and by doing this the Lord added them to the church. This is the first example of conversion following the Lord's crucifixion. Every other example of conversion follows this same pattern. What Peter preached on this occasion was to be preached among "all nations." If we today will do what these people did then, we will likewise receive the remission of our sins, and the Lord will add us to his church. We will then be a part of the great family of God, and can live in hope of living with him in heaven. If your conversion does not follow the pattern that the Lord gave through the apostles, you need to get back to the Bible pattern. The only way one can be sure of his salvation is by following the pattern preached by the apostles. May each of us give diligence to examine ourselves whether we be in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5).

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