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WHAT WILL WE LEAVE BEHIND?

by Allen Webster

If the Lord delays His coming, none of us will get out of this world alive. We have an appointment with death (Heb. 9:27), when we hope to meet our angelic guide to Abraham's bosom (Lk. 16:22). Tear-dimmed eyes will last view our casket, and lonely mourners will follow the trail of tears to the silent city of the dead where our bodies will wait for resurrection morn' (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

All desire to leave something worthwhile behind. We want our families left financially secure and to be remembered for making some contribution to society. From Methuselah, who, though he lived the longest, accomplished the least (Gen. 5:26-27), we learn that it is not the length of our lives that counts, but what we do with them. Jesus, though He lived only 33 years, made the most of them. So should we.

WHAT SHOULD WE LEAVE BEHIND WHEN WE DIE?

A Record Of Good Deeds. When they visit the funeral home, will our friends reminisce about the good that we have done like Dorcas' friends did (Acts 9:36, 39)? Will the preacher's eulogy be long and full? Hopefully, they can remember our kindness to widows and orphans (Jas. 1:27), the food we gave the hungry (Mt. 25:35), the clothes given to the cold, visits to the sick (Mt. 25:36), flowers for the bereaved (Jn. 11:19), comfort for the hurting (Phile. 7) and the encouragement we gave the downtrodden (Acts 9:27). When the kingly line of Herods died, they must have cheered (Mt. 2:16; Acts 12:1). They were not remembered for their good deeds. But we wonder what was said at Barnabas' funeral. He left a trail of good deeds (Acts 4:36-37; 11:22-24; 11:25-30; 13:2; 15:22-31). Let's do the same.

A Good Name. When we pass, will they say, "He was a good man," or "She was a fine Christian"? "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches..."

(Prov. 22:1). We must be honest in our dealings (cf. Acts 5:1-2), fair with others (Rm. 12:17), above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2, 7), and morally pure (Gal. 5:19-21). Joseph was a man who kept a good name, even under trying circumstances (Gen. 39:1-10). He was a man fondly remembered (Gen. 50:25-26; Ex. 13:19).

A Faithful Family. We will leave a mourning family behind on that sad day, but will we leave a faithful one? Will each be on his or her way to heaven? We are not able to make decisions for them, but we will have a great influence on each, especially our children (Prov. 22:6). Sarah left a godly man to mourn (Gen. 23:2); Abraham left faithful sons behind (cf. Gen. 18:19; 25:8). Zebedee and Salome gave the world James and John; Lois taught Eunice, who molded Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). If we would leave such a family, we must start now, because the years may come when they will not listen (Eccl. 12:2). No greater legacy can be left than faith in God and faithfulness to His church.

A Strong Church. Will our congregation have an empty seat, two less busy hands, two fewer listening ears, a silenced tongue, and two fewer bowed knees when we are gone? Will they be able to say, "He really built up this church," or "She is irreplaceable because of her tireless work." Think what must have been said at Peter's funeral, when he laid down his battle-scarred armor, after serving as an apostle and elder. (Mt. 10:2; 1 Pet. 5:1). What of Aquilla and Priscilla, who were always an asset to the church (Acts 18:26)? Did the Colossian church miss Philemon, Apphia and Archiphus (Phile.; Col. 4:17)? Some of God's greatest New Testament servants were "just church members" who lived faithfully till death (Rev. 2:10). May those who knew us be able to say that at our funerals.

Saved Souls. When Paul went home, the devil must have sighed in relief. He was a soul-saving man. Of all who have followed the Savior, what man was more tireless in reaching the lost than the peerless Paul (Rm. 9:1-3; 10:1-3; 1 Cor. 9:20-21; 2 Cor. 11:23-38)? His grave was probably surrounded by his spiritual children (1 Tim. 1:2), and heaven will be more populated because of him (Acts 16:15, 33; 18:8). May there be people at our gravesides who can say, "I am a Christian because of him/her." Won't it be wonderful to meet one in heaven who says, "I am here because of you."

As that day draws near may we be able to quote Paul: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Let us strive to have a legacy worth leaving!

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WHERE THERE IS NO VISION

by Terry Claunch

There has been and forever will be the need of proper planning. We often fail because we do not "think a thing through." Jesus taught that we should think about the future, "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish' " (Luke 14:27-30). Proverbs 29:18 is often used to teach the need to have "vision" in making plans for the future. But is that what

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the verse is really teaching?

Consider the use of the word "vision" in the Old Testament. "And the child Samuel ministered unto the LORD before Eli. And the **word of the LORD** was precious in those days; there was no open **vision**" (1 Samuel 3:1). "Thus saith the LORD of hosts, 'Hearken not unto the **words** of the prophets that prophesy unto you; they make you vain; they speak a **vision** of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD'" (Jeremiah 23:16). "The **vision** of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom: 'We have heard a rumor from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen; Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle'" (Obadiah 1). "The burden of Nineveh. The **book of vision** of Nahum the Elkoshite" (Nahum 1:1). "And the LORD answered me, and said, 'Write the **vision**, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that **readeth it**'" (Habakkuk 2:2).

"Where there is no **vision**, the people perish; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he" (Proverbs 29:18). This verse teaches that without God's word we will fail.

One will perish without faith. "But **without faith** it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. So then **faith** cometh by hearing, and hearing by the **word of God**" (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17).

People cannot be saved without the

Bible. "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the **engrafted word**, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). The plan of salvation as taught in the word of God is **belief** (John 8:24), **repentance** of past sins (Luke 13:3), **confession** of Christ before men (1 Timothy 6:12), and **baptism** for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

Parents will fail without God's word. "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the **way of the LORD**, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Genesis 18:19).

Worship is a failure if not based on the word of God. "God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in **truth**... Sanctify them through thy **truth**; thy **word is truth**" (John 4:24; 17:17).

Christian growth is impossible without the scriptures. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere **milk of the word**, that ye may **grow** thereby... Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the **word of truth**" (2 Peter 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:15).

We need to see the importance of the Word in the decisions we make. If we want to succeed in life we must rely on the scriptures. The quickest way to failure is to ignore the Bible.

ARE "PRO-LIFE" AND "PRO-CAPITAL PUNISHMENT" POSITIONS INCONSISTENT?

by Gary W. Summers

Recently, a "talk-show" host voiced a comment about pro-life people that has often been mentioned before. Although the following quote is a paraphrase, the gist is accurate: "A lot of pro-life people also believe in capital punishment, so..." The implication is that it is somehow inconsistent to want to save the lives of innocent children and at the same time consent to criminals like Jeffrey Dahmer being put to death for their crimes. Anyone who fails to understand how a vast majority can hold both views must not have been listening very closely to what we have been saying for the past twenty years. Furthermore, such

an individual must be fairly ignorant of what the Bible teaches on these subjects (which, by the way, is largely why society is in such a mess). People either don't know what God's will is, or they ignore it.

Actually, pro-life and pro-capital punishment views (far from being inconsistent) spring from exactly the same motive - respect for human life. Let's look at how the Bible presents both subjects.

Pharaoh was far ahead of his time; today he would have been given awards by Planned Parenthood and the ECLU (Egyptian Civil Liberties Union). He wanted the Hebrew males destroyed at birth (because he lacked the technology to do so any earlier). Pharaoh ordered this wholesale slaughter for purely practical and selfish reasons - he didn't want the Hebrews rising up in rebellion against him. Such would be most inconvenient. The midwives (unlike many doctors today) "feared God... and saved the male children alive" (Ex. 1:17). Because of their **respect** for human life, "God dealt well with the midwives" (Ex. 1:20). [How do you think He will deal with the abortionist on the day of judgment? If the blood of Abel cried out to God from the ground (Gen. 4:10), what will the blood of tens of millions of babies slain for silver do?]

That a human being is in the womb (and not "a blob of tissue" or a non-descript "fetus") can be seen easily in passages such as Jer. 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you," and Psalm 139:13-16, "For You have formed my inward parts; You have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed, and in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them." (Quotes are from the New King James Version.)

That God recognizes the unborn as a child is easily seen in that the Holy Spirit who inspired Luke caused him to use the same word for the individual both in and out of the womb [**brephos**, in the Greek] (see Luke 1:41 & 44 and Luke 2:12 & 16). Since God designates the unborn a "babe," we can do no less.

We must respect human life even before it enters the world.

But what about criminals? Doesn't killing them violate God's law? No, rather it upholds it, especially in the case of murder. God set forth the truth of the matter quite clearly in Gen. 9:5-6. Observe:

"Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man's brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man's blood, By man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God He made man."

There is no mystery here. Plainly, a murderer must be put to death because he has killed someone made in the image of God. Because life is precious to God, no one is allowed to extinguish another's life with impunity. To permit such a person to live would be to devalue the life of the innocent person whose blood was shed undeservingly.

God is Sovereign as well as our Creator. He and He alone has the right to remove a person's life (which He has personally done on occasion). He also authorizes civil governments to act in His behalf (Rom. 13:4). Capital punishment, therefore, exists so that we will respect life. The murderer is not allowed to live because without Divine approval he chose to end the life of a fellow human being made in the image of God.

Now that we have shown that both of these positions are in fact consistent with the Scriptures, perhaps those who are pro-abortion and anti-capital punishment will explain to us their rationale. Why do they insist that innocent children (made in the image of God) be put to death, while defending vigorously those who have murdered their fellow human beings unjustly? Can they explain to us how these positions are consistent and rational? They should also tell us, if they can, whose value system they use to arrive at such conclusions. We are using the objective standard set forth in the Holy Scriptures; who is their authority?

We have been challenged to explain our position, and we have done so. Now we ask for our opponents to reciprocate. Will they please do so? Can they do so?

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PUTTING GOD FIRST

by Ted J. Clarke

It is fairly easy to read and even memorize Scriptures. It is more difficult to understand some passages than others (2 Peter 3:15, 16). Probably the greatest difficulty we face is applying to our lives some of the Scriptures that are the easiest to understand! Perhaps we only think that we understand what the verse is saying, but we really do not comprehend the impact of what it requires. Or, maybe we do understand fully what is commanded, but we do not think about it often enough to apply it to our daily situations.

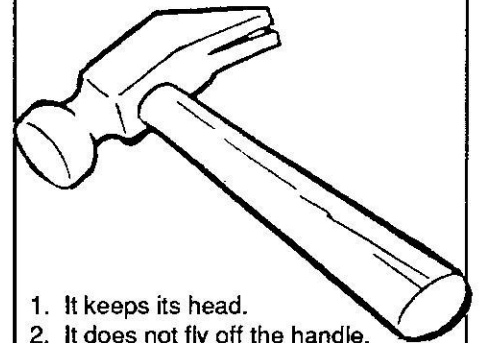
For example, take Matthew 6:33, where the Lord said, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things (the necessities of life) will be added unto you." That verse is not hard to understand, but it appears to give many of us great difficulty in applying it. Putting God first means that whatever has to be done to make **pleasing God our number one priority** is what we will do, whatever the costs or sacrifices that we have to make! We can be very inventive and ingenious when we want to **arrange** our time to do things that we want to do. We will juggle schedules, cancel appointments, call baby-sitters, call someone to provide transportation for us, go without sleep, miss work or make it up later, **whatever we have to do, so that we can do what we want to do.** Now, let me ask a probing question, "If we refuse to do the same in regards to things that we know will please God, are we really seeking 'first' God's kingdom and righteousness?" Of course we are not!

Putting God first means that He should get the best of all we have to offer. Israel fell into the habit of trying to give God less than their best, their leftovers. God asked them, "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?" saith the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 1:8). Because of their practice of **not giving God the best**, He said, "I have no pleasure in you," saith the LORD of hosts, 'neither will I accept an offering at your hand' " (v. 10). It is possible to neglect God to the point where He will not accept what you do offer!

Let's look at our worship attendance.

Do you put God first in this effort? Here is a simple test to help you answer correctly. Do you attend every service? if no, do you do something more important? Do you do something absolutely necessary that you could not possibly do at any other time? Do you try to do everything you can to **rearrange** your schedule so that you can attend each service? Brethren, remember Hebrews 4:13. God knows all. At the judgment can you say, "Lord, you were **first!**"?

LESSONS FROM THE HAMMER



1. It keeps its head.
2. It does not fly off the handle.
3. It finds the point—and drives it home.
4. It looks at the other side.
5. It succeeds by continuous pounding.
6. It makes mistakes, but when it does, it starts all over again.

There is no right way to do a wrong thing.

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AN UNBELIEVABLE RECORD

by Steve Higginbotham

One of the greatest baseball players who ever played the game was a man by the name of Lou Gehrig. Among many qualities that Gehrig possessed, consistency was the most noticeable.

On June 2, 1925, the New York Yankees' first baseman, Wally Pipp, took a day off because he had a headache. A young ball player by the name of Lou Gehrig was put into the lineup to take his place. And take his place he did!

For the next 2,130 games, Lou Gehrig started first base for the Yankees. This consecutive game streak is believed to be baseball's most unreachable record.

To help put this in perspective for you "non-baseball fans," Lou did not miss a game for 14 straight years! On July 9, 1986, Dale Murphy ended the longest consecutive game streak currently going in baseball. It ended at 740 consecutive games. If it had not ended and Murphy had played in every game for the next eight years, he still would have been 95 games short of breaking Gehrig's record. Truly, this is an unbelievable record.

On June 2, 1941, exactly 16 years to the day from when he replaced Pipp, Gehrig died. For his incredible endurance, Gehrig became known as the "Iron Man of Baseball."

As a Christian, I believe we can learn something from this story. I wonder what kind of "consecutive streaks" we have going? How many services have you attended without forsaking? How many days straight have you read your Bible? How many days straight have you prayed? How many years straight have you attended every night of your congregation's gospel meetings? How many years straight have you been a faithful, dedicated Christian?

Christianity demands consistency! The church needs men and women who are in the Lord's lineup every day! God needs some "Iron Men" on whom he can always depend. Are you willing to rise to the occasion? Can God depend upon you?

Christianity is daily bread, not cake for special occasions.

Rootage is necessary to fruitage.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2,3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

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