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GOD'S REQUIREMENTS

by Gary W. Summers

How do you view God? Would you chiefly characterize Him as a lawgiver, a God of love, or as One who is not particularly interested in what mankind is or what he does?

Many people picture God as a kind of legalistic tyrant, a killjoy of the first order. How often have you heard the line repeated, "Everything I like is illegal, immoral, or fattening"?

Mankind wants to be free from restrictions, concluding that he will be much happier if free to do whatever his heart desires. This philosophy has proven unworkable, even disastrous. Remember that just before the flood it is said of man that "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5)?

Unrestricted freedom leads to unwarranted license, which in turn leads to social and moral chaos. People choose sinful activities, thinking that somehow they will escape being accountable for their actions, but such a day always comes, much to their embarrassment and sorrow.

What does God require of us? Deuteronomy 10:12-13 presents a good answer to that question. Consider these two verses carefully.

"And now, Israel, what doth the Lord your God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes which I command thee this day for thy good?"

Each of these requirements is important and will be discussed, but we want to emphasize the last phrase especially. First, however, let's begin with "fear the Lord thy God," which means to honor, respect and revere Him. Why? Because

He created us and has more power than our poor imaginations can grasp. Furthermore, He is morally pure, holy, righteous and just. He extends His grace, love and mercy toward us though we continually prove ourselves to be unworthy. We owe Him reverence.

To "love Him" is not difficult. The more you realize the things God has done for you, the easier it becomes. He provided for you a universe, including this well balanced earth, along with life, breath, etc. At great cost to Himself, He sent Jesus to redeem you. No one is more worthy of your love than God.

"To walk in all His ways," "to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes" stresses obedience. "I knew it was coming," you say. "That's the point I always get hung up on. All that obedience stuff. Gotta watch my step. Can't do this; can't do that. Can't have any fun."

Wait a minute! There are several things we need to understand here. First, God never denies people having a good time. The Bible does not prohibit smiling, chuckling, or even laughter—just sin. Second, one does not have to sin to have a good time.

"I don't care what you say. God doesn't want me to have a good time; so He gave us a bunch of rules to keep us miserable." Wrong! He requires obedience—that we walk in His statutes for our good! Did your parents ever say, "Don't touch the stove; you'll get burned"? Sure, and if you touched it, you got burned. Were they trying to keep you from having fun? Were they trying to restrict your freedoms? Well, yes, but only for your good. You could touch dozens of other things and play with a multitude of items, but those that might have caused harm were forbidden. (They probably kept poisons out of your reach, too.)

Some "freedoms" are not productive of good; thus they are denied. Morally, God restricts us. Why? To punish? No. To protect. It is not in our best interests to steal, kill, commit adultery, bear false witness, covet, etc. "But that should be my choice!" It is your decision. But be sure you understand that the real choice is: "Should I listen to God, who created me, and knows me thoroughly, or should I listen to the irrational ravings and urgings of my lustful desires?" Who has proven to be the most trustworthy?

"Good point, but many Christians just go through the motions, outwardly appearing righteous and not really meaning it." If so, then Christian service will do them no good. Remember, the text says, you are "to serve the Lord with all thy heart and with all thy soul." Doing the right things but having no heart for it does not profit; Jesus denounced the Pharisees of His day who were guilty of such attitudes (Matt. 23). The ungodliness of hypocrites will not somehow make you righteous. You must answer for yourself. Do you love and fear God? Are you obedient from the heart? That's what's important. You have to answer for you, not anyone else.

Do you think God created mankind to watch him live in misery? If so, He had a funny way of beginning—putting man in a Paradise. Satan is the one who wants you to be miserable, not God. Satan ruined Paradise; Satan promises liberty but causes people to become enslaved to sin (Romans 6:11-23). Satan told Eve that God was unduly restricting her. "Eat the forbidden fruit; you'll be like God (Genesis 3:5).

God restricts for our good; Satan allows for our harm. Freedom has become misdefined as "doing whatever I feel like doing" and "recognizing no boundaries of any kind." That's not freedom; that's slavery which leads to death (Rom. 6:23). God wants us to enjoy this life now (John 10:10) and later on to experience eternal life. Obedience (following His ways which He commanded for our good) will accomplish both.

1 Jeffery Drive
Columbia City, IN 46725

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Ted J. Clarke EDITOR
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A CURE FOR LONELINESS

by Ted J. Clarke

There are five billion people on earth! We have so many activities to do, plus countless kinds of entertainment and recreation. All of us know, at least casually, dozens of people. Most of us have some family and friends. Yet, loneliness is possibly the most widespread affliction in our society. Nearly everyone has suffered from loneliness at some point in their lives. With some, loneliness is their most constant companion.

The feeling of loneliness comes from having certain human needs go unfulfilled. We have needs to love and be loved, to communicate to and with others and to associate with others in mutually enjoyable activities. When one or more of these needs go unfulfilled, there is a feeling of loneliness.

For the believer in God there is a cure for this general problem of loneliness. First, trust that God exists, that He cares about what happens to us and that there is a real sense in which He is always with us. Second, faith in God's word, the Bible, will help you to know that you are **never really alone**. Read Psalms 27:10; 46:1-3. In Hebrews 13:5 God says, "I will never leave you or forsake you." James 4:8 tells us that if we "draw near to God...He will draw near to you." If the whole world should forsake you, remember these Scriptures! True Christians are **never really alone!**

Also, God knows that we have the basic need to associate with other

human beings. Partly because of this need, God's wisdom brought into existence the church of our Lord. In Acts 2:36-47 we see baptized believers added by God to a fellowship with Christ and fellow believers. This community of Christians shared their love, association and material goods with the Lord and **each other**. Both their spiritual and social needs were met, in a large measure, within the circle of the "called out," the church.

If you are lonely, perhaps you should consider your need to be a part of the church which the Lord established. We would like to help you overcome your loneliness and have the Lord add you to the circle of Christians who meet with us. Attend the church of Christ nearest you. Call us or someone that you know is a member of the church of Christ if you want a visit to discuss your spiritual needs, or if you need transportation to worship services. There is a cure for your loneliness. It is the sweet love of Jesus and fellowship with Him and His followers in the body of His church (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:21-23; 5:23, 25). Christ died to purchase the church! Don't ignore the blessings in it!

THE FAITH THAT SAVES

by Floyd Bailey, Jr.

The scriptures are literally filled with verses that teach us that we are saved by our faith. Jesus said in John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life..." In Romans 1:16, Paul stated, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." He also wrote to the Galatian brethren, "For ye are sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus." You may also cross reference John 3:16; 20:30, 31; Mark 16:16; Acts 15:9; Acts 16:31; Romans 5:1, et. al.

Since we find that we are saved by faith, we must ask the question, "What is faith?" Hebrews 11:1 says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." In other words, faith is where sight ends, though evidence and reason do not end. Faith is that which allows us to associate with spiritual things. But, there is more to it, according to the scriptures. In First Thessalonians 1:3, we read, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith." From this verse we find that there is a work associated with faith.

Notice also, Galatians 5:6 and John 6:29. What is this work? What must we do to manifest our faith? Jesus said in Luke 6:46, "Why call ye me, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" He also 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" (Matthew 7:21). Faith can never stand alone. It is an essential ingredient for salvation, but it must be accompanied by obedience to God's will. It must be accompanied by works, making our faith manifest. Let us notice James, chapter two. In verse 14, James asks, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?" He then gives an example of a brother or sister asking for clothes and food and we say, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," and yet we do not give him or her what is needed. He asks again, "What doth it profit?" (verse 16). He then makes a statement which should affect us all, saying, "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" Some claim that these verses have nothing to do with faith in God, but let us notice further. Verses 19-20, "Thou believest there is one God, thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know; O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" James continues the context by addressing their belief and reiterating that belief alone (i.e., faith) is not enough. The devils not only have faith, they tremble because of their knowledge.

Surely, we all see that works must accompany our faith. Not works of boasting (Ephesians 2:9), but works of obedience. We must obey the commands to repent (Acts 17:30), to confess Christ (Romans 10:9-10), to be baptized (Acts 10:48) for the remission of our sins (Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16; I Peter 3:21) and the command to live faithfully unto death (Revelation 2:10). Remember, "The faith that saves is the faith that obeys!"

1968 Dean Road
Jacksonville, FL 32216

Optimism is the cheerful frame of mind that allows the teakettle to sing though it is in hot water up to its nose.

One nice feature of old age is that you can whistle while you brush your teeth.

Prudent people pause to pray.

"WHO IS AT THE CONTROLS?"

by Allen Webster

If life is a flight through time, who is in the cockpit? If life is a joy-ride, who is behind the steering wheel? If life is a voyage, who is at the helm?

Decisions determine direction (Jos. 24:15). Will we ascend or descend at the judgment? Direction determines destiny (Mt. 7:13-14). Who makes our decisions?

"ME"

Many say, "I make my own choices—nobody tells me what to do." Bible examples abound of those who had "me" on life's throne. Note the personal pronouns of a certain rich man: "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" And he said, "This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater... there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, thou has much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry'" (Lk. 12:17-19). God called him a "fool" (12:20). Another rich man had the "me" philosophy and awoke in torments (Lk. 16:23).

Self-will took Nebuchadnezzar from his throne (Dan. 4:30-37) and kept Moses from Canaan (Ex. 20:8-12). Felix trembled at the thought of giving control to Christ (Acts 24:25); Agrippa came close, but not close enough (26:28).

Self-will would disqualify a man from the eldership (Tit. 1:7), as it would one from being a Christian (Phil. 2:3-5). The Jews were guilty of "going about to establish their own righteousness" because they had not "submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rm. 10:3).

The man who says he is in control of his life is mistaken. The devil allows him to think so, but serving self is sacrificing at Satan's altar. There are no free men in sin's death camp (Rm. 6:17). When we were young, our fathers allowed us to "drive" while sitting in their laps. We felt we were in control, but when the car veered from the road, dad quickly took over. Many are sitting in Satan's lap, "steering" their lives to a lake of fire.

"MEN"

Others are not in control of their lives because they allow public opinion to

make their decisions. Pilate wanted to set Jesus free, but he was a weak-kneed, people-pleasing politician (Mt. 23:4, 16, 22, 24). Among the rulers many believed on Jesus but would not confess Him "for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (Jn. 12:42-43; cf. 5:44). Even Barnabas gave in to peer pressure and disassociated himself from Gentiles (Gal. 2:13).

Adam gave in to Eve (Gen. 3:6); Abraham feared Abimelech enough to lie (Gen. 20:11); and Aaron made a golden calf at public demand (Ex. 32:21-24). How many should make Saul's confession? "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (1 Sam. 15:24).

Paul wrote, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). Jesus said, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Lk. 16:15).

Christians must learn not to conform to the world's mold (Rm. 12:1-2) but be a peculiar people, zealous of good works (Tit. 2:14). Evil companions are bad for good morals (1 Cor. 15:33), so stay away from them as much as possible (1 Thess. 5:22). Pitching tents toward Sodom's materialism has left behind the smoking ruins of many families (Gen. 13:12; 14:12; 19:16, 24, 26, 36). Anyone who loves the opinion of father, mother, wife, children, brethren, or sisters, more than Christ, cannot be His disciple (Lk. 14:26; cf. 18:29, 30).

"MESSIAH"

A third choice is to allow Christ to rule our lives. His truth sets men free (Jn. 8:32); His rule is not grievous (1 Jn. 5:3). Joshua gave God his life (24:15), and never regretted it. Paul gave Christ his heart and never looked back (Acts 9; 2 Tim. 4:6-8; cf. Lk. 9:62).

Christ stands knocking at the door of every heart (Rev. 3:20), but He will never force His way in (cf. Lk. 24:28-29). He wants free-hearted service stemming from hearts overflowing with love (Mt. 22:37; 2 Cor. 5:14). One who comes to Jesus must renounce all, take up his cross, and follow closely in the Master's steps (Lk. 14:26-27; 1 Pet. 2:21-22).

John wrote of those who "loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11).

Truth is "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other" (Lk. 16:13). Who is at the controls of your life?

Rt. 1 Box 38
Tiptersville, MS 38674

ANGER

by Bill McFarland

The prophet Amos declared God's judgment upon Edom "because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever" (Amos 1:11). This thought-provoking statement testifies to the awful consequences of the wrong kind of anger.

We must avoid the tragedy of unchecked anger. The principle by which Christians are to live is, "Be ye angry, and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). Three things are necessary in handling our anger without sinning.

1. Do not let anger come quickly into your heart. Crossness and irritability and bad temper have no place in Christian character. A mature Christian will be "not soon angry" (Tit. 1:7). James said, "But let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (Jas. 1:19-20)."

(Continued on page 4)

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2. Control anger when it is present. A Christian is to exercise self-control over his anger just as with every other emotion. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32). "A fool uttereth all his anger; but a wise man keepeth it back and stilleth it" (Prov. 29:11).

3. Forget your anger after you have dealt with it. Work through it by confronting the problem and forgiving where necessary. The Lord "retaineth not his anger, because he delighteth in lovingkindness" (Mic. 7:18). Try to be like him. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath; neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:26-27).

Aristotle is said to have written, "Anyone can become angry. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not easy." It is not easy, but, with the help of God and the guidance of His word, it is possible.

2148 North National
Springfield, Missouri

Quiet people are not the only ones who don't say much.

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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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