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OUR APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

by Hardeman Nichols

"Can two walk together except they be agreed?" Knowing the obvious negative reply which would come to his elliptical question, Amos did not even stop for the answer. It is certain that those who walk together must agree on the vital and fundamental truths involving their united activity. In Amos 3:3 is one of the most forceful arguments for unity to be found in all the Bible.

Some who are now promoting the divisive doctrines of men have felt the force of this Scripture. They have sought to nullify its demands by appealing to more modern translations of the passage. One of these objected to the King James rendering and said, "It doesn't mean two can't walk together except they be agreed." The more accurate translation is "Do two walk together, unless they have made an appointment?" RSV

However, the force of truth is not changed in the least by such recent versions. Two cannot walk together except they make an appointment on at least four vital matters.

Two of these, place and time, are involved in most all types of appointments whether walking, going to the doctor, or serving the Lord. There must be mutual acceptance of a mutual meeting place. Deciding on the same place, however, will not mean walking together unless they agree to meet at the place at the same time. If one comes to the chosen location at 8 a.m. and the other shows up at 8 p.m. they will not walk together.

The place to meet religiously is set by the Lord. He promised Israel in the Old Testament, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee." Exodus 20:24. Under the New Covenant, the place he has selected is in Christ. He is the way, the truth and the life. No man can come to the Father except by Him. John 14:6. Making an ap-

pointment with God means that we as penitent believers agree to be "baptized into Christ". Galatians 3:26, 27. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk ye in him." (Col. 2:6). By agreeing to "walk in the light, as he is in the light" we have fellowship with one another. I John 1:7.

The time to meet is today. Delay and procrastination can be fatal. "Now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation." II Cor. 6:2. Besides the agreement on a place and time, elements found in most all appointments when the matter of walking is involved, there must be a meeting of minds on the direction we shall travel. If one goes east and the other goes west, the two cannot walk together. "You go your way, and I'll go mine, and we'll both walk the road together" is false on the surface of it, and through and through as well. In religion, we can't walk together unless we agree in the di-

rection we travel. This is accomplished by each agreeing to follow Christ--he said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me" Matthew 16:24. Walking after MEN and following their precepts is the wrong way to do. Christ was warned, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" Matthew 15:9. True unity comes in obeying Christ.

We must also make an appointment on the speed we travel. If two met at the arranged place, at the same time, and started in the same direction, they could not walk long together if one went two mph and the other ten. Jesus sets the speed, "Follow me," therefore, we sing, "And run not before him, whatever be-tide." To be presumptuous and to run ahead where he has not directed is divisive and fatal. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God" I John 9.

WE NEED SOUND PREACHING NOW!

by G. F. Raines

There has never been a time in the history of mankind when the world was more urgently in need of wholly consecrated gospel preachers to proclaim the word of God without fear or favor than now.

Many false teachers today stand before their deceived and indifferent congregations and grossly pervert the gospel of Christ for popularity and financial gain.

Paul, the great evangelist and apostle who endured untold tribulations in zealously taking the true gospel to Asia Minor, Greece, and Rome, says:

"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all

men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:26, 27).

"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8).

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Tim. 4:2-4:2-4).

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EDITOR Mike Pace

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THE MAKING OF HABITS

by Walter Buchanan

A wise old man was taking a stroll through a forest with a shiftless youth by his side. The man suddenly stopped and pointed to four plants close at hand. The first was a tiny sprout just coming out of the earth. The second had rooted itself quite firmly in the fertile soil. The third was a small shrub; and the fourth had grown into a well developed tree.

The old man said, "Pull up this plant." The youth pulled it up easily with his fingers. "Now pull the second," said the man. With slight effort the plant came up, roots and all. "And now the third," continued the man. The boy pulled with one hand, then the other, but it would not come. Then he took both hands, and the plant yielded to all his strength. "And now," said the man, "try the fourth." The youth grasped the trunk with all his might, but hardly a leaf shook. "I cannot move it," he exclaimed. "Just so, my son," said the wise old man, "with our bad habits. When they are young and small we can cast them out, but when they are fullgrown, they cannot be uprooted."

"Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit . . ." So begins a familiar old saying. Habits begin with thoughts. In view of that, may I recommend Philipians 4:8 where Paul exhorts us to think upon things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report!

"Speak well of your enemies — you made them."

Sorrow is Better than Laughter

by Dennis R. Smith

Sometimes there are passages from the Bible that are most difficult to understand. The heading for this article is taken from Ecclesiastes, seven and three, and falls into the category of difficult passages. Let's look at it in its entirety: "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." (Eccl. 7:3)

Most of us prefer to be happy and if we had anything to do about it, we would like for our whole life to be the proverbial bed of roses. But life is not like that! Even the song suggests that, "into each life a little rain must fall." Since this is true—since sorrows come in spite of our precautions—God has so set things in order that each of us can—and if we find some degree of happiness and good from each thing that happens to us. Time is a great healer as well as a great factor in understanding what is meant by the above. Our immediate sorrows are not in any way better than laughter. Can you imagine a person waiting in a hospital corridor for a loved one struggling between life and death and compare that hour to some previous occasion when the warmth and laughter of the family was abundant, and then say that sorrow is better than laughter? Let us not be absurd! What I am saying is this: We have hidden meaning in all scripture and we must look for these messages—but they are there we can be sure.

The second part of this passage is a clue to understanding the whole: "for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." Perhaps it would be easier to understand if we used a simple illustration: Sadness and sorrow do for the human life what seasoning does to cooking. It adds another dimension to our life. It molds us and mellows us so that we, not only will be more understanding of others problems, but that we each will not, ourselves, be so hard-hearted and stand the chance of missing heaven in the afterwhile.

Facing up to the various sorrows of our lives is most difficult, but the promises that are made to those who are Christians are such that we can find a deep sense of peace even when these sorrows occur. It is that man or woman who

has difficulty accepting whatever life offers who becomes so burdened down that physical, mental and spiritual strength is in jeopardy. There are two great forces that constantly vie against each other. The force of sin and sorrow whose fountain is the devil and the force of good and kindness whose fountain is God. There are times when it seems that God has been defeated and, in our own lives, we are ever so low, but we must keep in mind that God does not allow faithful Christians to be burdened with loads greater than they can bear. For this reason we (Christians) have to look for deeper and greater sources than this world has to offer. We must understand that, "God's ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts," and in so doing we give him praise and glory in our lives regardless of what comes or goes. Christians must never lose faith in God regardless of what life dishes out. They have to seek for the hidden messages such as we are discussing in our text. "Sorrow is better than laughter," says the preacher of old, and, in like fashion, he says, "A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth." (Eccl. 7:1)

While sadness and sorrow, when accompanied by death, is seemingly total defeat, it is the only means by which we can pass from this life of heartache unto the land of promise. But even here the condition of the heart is of vital importance. If a person faces death without giving God his heart, then all seen so far is in vain; but when the heart has been mellowed over the years and when previous sorrows have brought an abundance of countenance, and when the heart has been moved to respond to the great invitation of God, then many wonderful things lie in store. To that end our sorrows work to our advantage! Of all the laughter in the world—of all the fun and games which we have enjoyed—of all that this world has pleased us with—none can lift us up and bring us closer to God than the sorrows which we are called upon to bear. Before one can realize his need for God, it is necessary for him to know just how important God is. Before we can make room for him in our lives, we first have to push out all the laughter (fun-games-thrills-pleasures) and become

HAVE YOU CHECKED YOUR EYES LATELY?

by Ordell Heavin

Blindness is one of the greatest handicaps and afflictions that mankind must endure. What a tragic loss if one cannot see. But spiritual blindness is worse, for it has to do with our eternal welfare. We ought to have our eyes examined regularly to protect our sight. But so very very more important, is that we check our spiritual vision by the word of God daily, so we can see the things that really matter, so we can keep that spiritual sight in line with truth that is the only thing to save our souls. We are warned about trying to get the motes from our brothers eyes and leave the beam in ours (Matt. 7:3-5) Have you had a spiritual eye examination lately? How well do you see? Spiritual blindness affected the Jews. "Woe unto you, blind guides". "Ye fools and blind": (Matt. 23:16-19). They were blinded by traditions, ceremonies, and high positions. This even came over into the church, and caused trouble. Paul warned, "I would not that ye should be ignorant . . . that you should be wise in your own conceit: that blindness in part is happened to Israel, unto the fullness of the gentiles be come". (Rom. 11:25) He continued about their blindness in verses 15-16. Their blindness could be cured by accepting Christ and His word even today. Blindness affects many today! Paul said some, "Having, understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their hearts" (Eph. 4:18). Jesus said: "For this peoples' heart has waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at anytime they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them". (Matt. 13:15) Of course the devil is interested in spiritual blindness! Listen to the explanation of him in 2 Cor. 4:4: "In whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them that

believe not, lest the glorious gospel of Christ, who the image of God, should shine unto them". The saints improve their eyesight by focusing in on the right things. "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (2 Cor. 4:18). Thus the Child of God must be "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Many with near sightedness! After listing what is commonly called the 'Christian graces', Peter wrote, "But he that lacketh these things are blind and cannot see afar off". (2 Peter 1:5-10). That sounds paradoxical, doesn't it? But this is just another kind of blindness. Some people can see that which is very near, but cannot see things afar off. We have members like that. They can see material things like

stocks, bonds, dividends, and bank accounts, but can't see lost souls. So many, in fact, too many can't see that need. Some can see an increase in a local bank account: but can't see laying up treasures in heaven, (Matt. 6:19-21). Some can see the very best secular education for their children, but they can't see the need to bring them up in the fear and admition of the Lord, (Eph. 6:4). The short sighted man can see all the worlding things in clear perspective; but can't see the day of judgment, and what will come after. Some can see only what is near at hand, but fail to look at the clamity of an eternal life in a place of destruction. Banished forever from the presence of God He can't see the results Jesus asked about and warned about, when he said, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?"

"A real friend is like the inside pocket of our vest, we may not often need them, but we know they are there."

"The best way to ease our own burden is to bear the burden of another."

"When you get to the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on."

"Before you find fault with the house another has built, build a better one."

"People don't always believe everything they hear, but they often repeat it just to be on the safe side."

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As a guide, the Bible is without a rival. It gives a calm peace in believing, and a firm hope of the future.

serious for a moment. It is (often) that one moment of sadness which brings us closer and closer to God that is by far better (for us) than all the laughter this world has to offer. And . . . to that end . . . "sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." (Eccl. 7:3)

IS MAN TOTALLY DEPRAVED?

By Harold Turner

In the manual of one of the leading denominational churches of our nation the following statement is made under the caption of what this church believes: "We believe that man is totally depraved. He is a sinner by nature as well as by choice, and as such has incurred not only physical death, but also spiritual death, which is separation from God."

What exactly does it mean that man is totally depraved? Total depravity is defined as: "The Calvinistic doctrine of a hereditary depravity which corrupts all parts of man's nature without necessarily corrupting the whole of any part." Now let's break this down a little more. Man's nature is defined as his inborn or inherent character, which is not acquired by experience. Depravity is defined as being characterized by corruption; perversion; or evil. Hereditary is defined as that transmitted as a constitutional quality or condition from parent to offspring. The idea of total depravity then means that one is born with a nature which is corrupted by means of what has been inherited from the parents.

Four passages of Scripture have been given to support the teaching that man is totally depraved: these are Romans 3:12, 23; 6:23; 5:12. These Scriptures state: "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (3:12.) For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (3:23.) For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (6:23.) Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Does any of these passages imply that man has inherited a corrupt nature from his parents? Look at Romans 3:12 again. It does not state that all are born out of the way, but all have "gone" out of the way. It does not state that men are born unprofitable, but that they have "become" unprofitable. It does not state that man is not born good, but that none "doeth" good. Romans 3:23 does not state that man is born with a corrupted nature, but rather that all have sinned. What is sin? Have babies sinned at their birth? We will look at these questions later. But what about Romans 5:12? Does it teach that we have inherit-

ed Adam's sin? Look at it. Sin entered into the world through Adam. God placed the penalty of death upon sin. Now, from Romans 5:12, why did death pass upon all men? The verse states that it was because all have sinned. Therefore, none of the Scriptures offered to support this doctrine imply that man has inherited a corrupt nature from his parents, or from Adam.

What does the Bible say about inherited sin? In Ezekiel 18:20 the Bible states, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." This passage makes it clear that the son does not inherit the iniquity, nor does the child bear the guilt, of his father's sin. Ezekiel makes it clear that each person is responsible for his own sin. The child is not born spiritually dead because his parents sinned. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Isaiah wrote in 59:2 "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Notice, it was not "your father's iniquities" that had separated them from God, but "your" iniquities. They were personally responsible by their own actions.

But what about the statement, "For all have sinned"? Does this include babies? or is it limited to responsible people? The answer to this depends upon the definition that one attaches to sin. If we accept the Bible definition, then it certainly does not mean that babies have sinned. There are three passages that give a definition to sin. In 1 John 3:4 the Bible teaches that "Sin is the transgression of the law." In 1 John 5:17 the Bible teaches that "All unrighteousness is sin." And in James 4:17 it states, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Can babies sin in any of these ways? Have they transgressed any of God's laws? If so which one, and how? Are they guilty of unrighteousness? Unrighteousness is defined as acting unfairly, unjustly, or doing that which is not right. Can babies know what is good and evil? Surely no one would accuse babies of being in violation of God's laws.

In Matt. 19:13-14 people brought little children to Jesus, "that he should put his hand on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." If the kingdom of heaven is like little children, what is the kingdom like? Is it corrupt and depraved in some way? In Romans 14:17 Paul said that the kingdom is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Now, since little children are such as the kingdom, how does Romans 14:17 describe little children? Little children are righteous not corrupt. In Matthew 18:3 Jesus said, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." To enter the kingdom man must be forgiven of all his sins. He must become like a little child. If little children are sinful and totally depraved, why would Jesus say that we must become like little children in order to enter into the kingdom? The idea that man is totally depraved is as opposed to the teachings of the Bible as darkness is opposed to light.

"The tip of the roots of trees are so sensitive that, almost as if by instinct, they turn away from spots where there is no nourishment and spread themselves in places where they can gather sap and life. Men of prayer have also this power of discernment. By unerring intuition, they turn away from fraud and illusion and find the reality on which all life depends."