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THE THIEF IS COME...

by Terry Claunch

"The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy" (John 10:10). Is it not true that thieves take from those that have much to offer (have an abundance or are wealthy)? Do they steal from people, houses, and businesses which have nothing?

In the context of John 10 Jesus has reference to a spiritual thief. Jesus said that he was come "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). The Christian is not given just life, but an abundant one. Therefore, spiritual thieves see the Christian as one from whom they can rob.

Time is valuable. What did you pay to have fifteen minutes of the doctor's time? What did it cost you to have the time of a plumber? What do you charge others for your time? The Christian, above anyone else, should know the value of time. "What is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14). Ben Franklin said, "Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that is the stuff life is made of." Paul exhorted that we "redeem the time". With time being so expensive, the thief will surely try and steal it. Will you allow him to do so?

The thief would also like to steal your talents and abilities. Christians should seek to find their place in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12). Paul desired that the Romans "present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God" (Romans 12:1). Paul says this should be one's "reasonable service". This is in relationship to our being in the church or body of Christ (Romans 12:4 and 5). The thief has one tool in particular that he uses to steal talent, and that is fear. How many use fear as an excuse not to do the Lord's work? The thief used it on the one talent man.

He said, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth" (Matthew 25:25). Are you going to permit this thief to rob you of your abilities?

This thief is concerned about your money. He won't rob you like some pick-pocket or robber would. He steals by convincing you not to give to the Lord and his church as you should. The thief has stolen your contribution when you don't give as you've been prospered (1 Corinthians 16:2). He robs you of the joy of giving when he makes you feel like giving is a necessity (2 Corinthians 9:7). He wants you to think that you can buy everything you want and then give to the Lord out of your remaining money. You wouldn't allow a thief to take money out of your wallet, would you? Will you permit this thief to take the Lord's money?

This thief wants to deprive you of your worship to God. He is even willing to give you something in exchange. He'll gladly give you a few hours of sleep if you'll skip Bible class. He will provide you with a nice stringer of fish if you'll forsake the assembly. He has much to offer if you're willing to accept. We must not and cannot allow him to deceive us into accepting something worthless as compared to the value of true worship. Jesus wouldn't take the "kingdoms of the world" to worship Satan. We shouldn't take anything the world has to offer to the neglect of our worshiping the Lord our God. Is he robbing from your worship?

If this thief if permitted to steal your love he will have gotten your most valuable possession. If he gets this he gets all of your other valuables as well. How one spends his time depends on what he loves. How and where one uses his talents reflects his love for those things. How one spends his money definitely reveals his love(s) in life. Who or what one

worships presents an object of love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). Has the thief entered your heart and stolen your love for God?

Thieves commit their crimes when they are least expected. They use disguises so they are not recognized. They are at times armed with weapons. Christians are to "watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6). One should not allow his heart to be deceived by the masks of the thief (Romans 16:18). The Christian has the ability to defend himself from the robber. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

Satan the thief is willing to steal small bits and pieces of your precious and value spirituality. If he keeps getting these he will finally "kill" you spiritually. His aim is to completely "destroy" you. God, however, will not let him pluck (steal) them out of his hand. God will not permit him to cause any to perish (be killed). God will not allow him to take eternal life (be destroyed) from them. The question remains, "Who are the ones that God will protect from this thief?" Is it not those who are willing to enter the "door of the sheepfold"? To enter the door one must believe, repent, confess Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins. After entering the door one must be willing to hear, follow and obey the voice of the Great Shepherd (John 10:27-29). Are you faithfully following the voice of the Savior?

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*God knows best what is best for me;
Why should I worry or anxious be
Trying to fathom the course I take,
Grasping at bubbles
that fade and break?
One step is all I have need to see;
God knows best what is best for me.*

-Unknown

FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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IS THERE SUCH A THING AS ONE TRUE CHURCH?

by Allen Webster

This is one of the most important questions which could be asked. If the answer is "no", then one need not be concerned about "church affiliation". If it is "yes", then one must find the true church to enjoy spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3), including salvation (II Tim. 2:10).

How may one determine the answer to this inquiry? If he asks for opinions, no justified conclusion will be reached. If he consults creeds, he will not find a trustworthy answer. If he looks to his forefathers' traditions, he may well find mistaken practices. Where can one turn?

Each must look to the Bible alone to find reliable answers. It is inspired (II Tim. 3:16), true (Jn. 17:17), and worthy of being followed (II Pet. 1:3). It claims to be the authority in spiritual matters (Isa. 8:20; I Pet. 4:11).

WHEN WE ASK OUR QUESTION OF THE BIBLE, IT REPLIES...

"ONLY ONE CHURCH WAS PROPHESED." The Old Testament contains many promises of the coming kingdom or church (cf. Isa. 2:1-4; Dan. 2:44). One beautiful picture of it is a shepherd and his flock (Ezek. 37:22). God predicted that He would set one Shepherd and King over all His followers (both Jews and Gentiles). This was fulfilled in the church, where Jesus is both the Shepherd of the flock and King of the kingdom (Jn. 10:11, 16; I Cor. 15:24-26).

"ONLY ONE CHURCH WAS PROMISED." Jesus said, "...upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18). He never promised to build many churches; He promised only one. It follows that this one would be the one true church. It was established on the first Pentecost after His resurrection (read Acts 2), and one can read of its history, doctrines and practices in all the epistles (Romans - Jude).

Someone might object, saying, "I thought all the different churches made up the one church He promised to build." No, this cannot be because His church was not to be divided. He prayed for all His followers to be "one" (John 17:20). He rebuked those who were divided (I Cor. 1:10-13), commanding them to "speak the same things" and be of "the same judgment". Churches wearing different names, teaching different doctrines, obeying different plans of salvation, and worshiping in different ways, cannot make up the one church that Jesus promised.

"ONLY ONE CHURCH WAS PRODUCED." Following that eventful Pentecost day, one reads of only one church. It met in different localities, but all God's followers taught and practiced Christianity in the same way (Acts 2:42-47).

Paul even wrote that there was one church. He first identified the church as being the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), and then affirmed "there is one body" (Eph. 4:4). Notice further that Jesus is said to be the head of the "body", not "bodies" (Eph. 5:23). Read Eph. 5:23-30 and underline each time the words "the", "a", and "it" (all singular) are used in relation to the church. This proves that there was one church in the first century.

Now we must contemplate if there is one true church today. In order to determine if the true church exists today, one must simply compare what the pattern (New Testament) says with what is being taught and practiced. When he finds the one church that measures up to the pattern in such essential matters as: how to be saved, how to worship, and how to live the Christian life, he knows that he has found the right one.

Since the denominational concept is unscriptural, any church that claims to be a denomination cannot be the one true church. Further, any church whose name is not found in the Bible cannot be the true church (cf. Romans 16:16). Any church that demands more or less than faith, repentance, confession, and immersion for salvation, cannot be the true church (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38, 8:37).

Any church which teaches that one cannot fall from grace is not the true church (Gal. 5:4). Any church that does not worship by singing, praying, studying, giving, and partaking of the Lord's Supper each Sunday (Acts 2:42; Col. 3:16), cannot be the Lord's church.

Please consider these matters carefully and do not let anyone tell you what to believe. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). May the Lord bless you in your search for truth.

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EPHESIANS 5:11

by Victor M. Eskew

The verse which titles this article involves a simple, straight-forward command from the pen of the apostle Paul. "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

Two commands are to be found in this passage of Holy Writ, one negative and one positive. The negative command is "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness." The positive command is "reprove them".

Fellowship involves sharing and joint participation. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament defines "fellowship" as "association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse" (p. 352). The opposite action is to be practiced by the Christian with regard to the unfruitful works of darkness. He is to have no association, no community, no communion, no joint participation, no intercourse with such.

"But rather", to use the terms of the apostle, the child of God is to reprove them. Thayer defines this word in several ways: "To convict, refute, confute, generally with a suggestion of the shame of the person convicted...by conviction to bring to light, to expose...to find fault with, correct...to reprehend severely, chide, admonish, reprove" (pp. 202-203).

These two commands are not the most simple commands to be practiced. Fellowship involves togetherness, acceptance, warmth, hospitality, and the kindest of the emotions. It is shared with all of God's faithful children. These children include our closest friends, as well as, family members. No one enjoys having to break such ties. No one rejoices in the loss of all that is wrapped up in fellowship.

In addition, reprovng error is most difficult. This command places one on the offensive. It makes one the aggressor. Others come to view the one who is reprovng as an unloving, evil individual. He is thought of as a troublemaker and a faultfinder. One is seldom thought of as the loyal, obedient servant of Jesus Christ when he obeys this command.

There was a time when only the first half of Ephesians 5:11 was obeyed. Individuals would refuse the association of those who walk contrary to the light of God's word. They would separate themselves from the evil ways and unholy practices of those in darkness. They, however, would not reprove sin and rebellion. Their mouths would remain shut even though they could not be partakers of the evil.

Today, though, times have changed. We are finding more individuals who are attempting to obey the latter part of Ephesians 5:11 while omitting the first part of the verse. These individuals can be found living, worshiping, and dining with those in error. They laugh, shake the hands of, and partake the Lord's Supper with those in sin and iniquity. Their justification for their actions is that they are reprovng the wrong. In other words, in Bible classes or in business meeting they "express their concern" over some "items" which are bothering them.

Dear readers, the command by the pen of the noble apostle is clear and involves two things: no fellowship and reprovng. Unless both aspects of the command are obeyed, the entire passage is being violated. It is not possible to be faithful while refusing fellowship, but not reprovng. In like manner, it is not possible to be obedient while fellowshiping darkness, even though reproof is being carried out.

Let us obey the entire command, as difficult as it may be. In doing so, we will save ourselves. We will also save some of those who hear our reproof. And we will be pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Let us mind that which is our work and leave to God that which is His. To be troubled about events, fretting about the success of things, is to take God's work out of His hands and neglect our own.

Wasted time means wasted lives.

IS DANCING SINFUL?

by Johnie Scaggs, Jr.

The question is often asked, "Is dancing sinful?" One would think that after many years of discussion on this subject, that it would by now be a topic which no one would seriously consider a wholesome practice. However, it seems that each year, about the time when students go back to school, this subject raises its ugly head once again.

Webster defines dancing as such: "A series of rhythmic and patterned bodily movements performed to music".

When two people of the opposite sex come together in the act of dancing, their bodies naturally make movements that are enticing to each other. School dances such as homecoming, prom, and others are no exception.

Some of the well-known psychologists defend the dance on the grounds that it is a partial satisfaction of the sex urge. Such arguments as this should prove that dancing and the such like should be avoided. The Bible decries that such is not becoming a Christian, "They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts thereof" (Gal. 5:24).

As one looks at the idea of whether or not dancing is sinful, there are at least three words in the New Testament which must be considered. First, the word "REVELLING" - revelling is defined as "boisterous merrymaking or festivity or festivity with dancing, masking". God's children must not engage in the such like. Paul said, "How the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21). Paul states that "revelling" is a work of the flesh and that Christians must not be engaged in such activities. Furthermore, those who do CANNOT inherit the kingdom of God. Second, the word, "WANTONNESS" - this word means "acts or manners, such as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females". Once again Paul writes, "Let us walk honestly, as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:13). Those who engage in wan-

tonness are not walking honestly, but rather they are making provision for the flesh and not for the Lord. It must be admitted that dancing is covered by the word "wantonness"; if not, why not? (cf. II Peter 2:18) The third word is "LASCIVIOUSNESS" - which is defined as "conduct and character that is unbecoming, indecent, unrestrained, shameless". (cf. II Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19). In all cases where the latter two words are used, they are always classified as being sinful. If these words do not prove to your satisfaction that dancing is sinful, then the phrase, "and such like" (Gal. 5:21) most certainly would cover dancing and thereby prove beyond any doubt that dancing is sinful.

In Exodus 32:129 Moses could see that dancing was sinful, for it was because of their dancing that they became naked, (ver. 25). John the Baptist lost his head because of a dance (Matt. 14:6; Mark 6:22-24).

Among so-called heathen people, the modern dance is regarded as very shocking. These people recognize the power of dancing to arouse human passion as a prelude to sexual contact.

Based upon the evidence which has been presented, why would a Christian desire to be involved in any kind of dancing? Think about what Paul said, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thess. 5:22).

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The "I Am's" of Jesus (Jesus supplies every need)

by Larry D. Mathis

1. "I am the bread of life" (Jn. 6:35, 51). Jesus is the sustainer of life and the supplier of the soul's needs. What bread is to the physical body, Christ is to the soul.
2. "I am the light of the world" (Jn. 8:12). Without physical light man is in serious trouble—how much worse to be without spiritual light? Through Jesus, the light, the lost traveler can "see" how to go to heaven.
3. The Great, "I Am" (Jn. 8:56-59). Jesus was anterior to Abraham. Here is a remarkable claim of deity.
4. "I am the door" (Jn. 10:9). There is absolutely no other way to heaven for sinners but through Christ. See Acts 4:10-12.
5. "I am the good shepherd" (Jn. 10:11) As the good shepherd, he leads, feeds and protects his sheep. This good shepherd leads us to heavenly blessings.
6. "I am the resurrection and the light" (Jn. 11:25-26). Jesus has power to banish death forever; it is his enemy. He said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell (hades) and of death" (Revelation 1:18). Paul wrote, "For he (Christ) must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Cor. 15:25-26).
7. "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14:6). As "the way" Jesus is the answer to man's "lostness". As "the truth" Jesus is the answer to man's "ignorance". As "the life" Jesus is the answer to man's "mortality".
8. "I am the vine" (Jn. 15:5). Jesus is the source of vitality and strength. How soon a severed branch withers and dies! Be baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27; Romans 6:3), and abide in him.

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We can no more turn to God without a change of heart than we can be reconciled to people without an apology!

We cannot stumble when we are on our knees.

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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