

Fulton County Gospel News

"The Churches of Christ Salute You"

Publication No. 211780

Second Class Postage Paid at Mammoth Spring, AR

Volume 24

Mammoth Spring, AR 72554

November, 1990

No. 11

"ABSTAIN FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL"

I Thessalonians 5:22

by Allen Webster

Before this day is over you will have influenced someone to be closer to God or further from Him. Influence is defined as "that invisible force in one's personality that causes others to act."

While we do not have a choice as to having influence, we do have a choice in the kind of influence we exert. Not only do we have a choice, we have a RESPONSIBILITY to be a good influence on others. Some "Christians" rebel at the thought of being held responsible for words and actions that cause others to think bad of Christ, but it is the case nonetheless.

I Thessalonians 5:22 should be constantly on the minds of faithful Christians because it gives a principle by which to live. THIS VERSE SHOWS THAT...

(1) WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT OTHERS THINK OF US.

To the best of our ability we are to have a good reputation among those of the world. "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15). Notice this principle, "Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:8).

We must be careful about what people think of us, because what they think of Christians is what they think of the church of Christ.

(2) WE MUST AVOID THE QUESTIONABLE.

Some seem to delight in seeing how close they can come to sinning without

going over the line. This "flirting" with sin is wrong! We are to "abhor" evil (Rm. 12:9) and "eschew" (flee) it (I Pet. 3:12), not "adhere" to it and pursue it! This principle applies, "And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rm. 14:23).

The conscience cannot be offended without sin being committed. Yet, one cannot go solely by the conscience because it can be hardened and must be educated by the word of God (Rm. 10:17). Things such as gambling, dancing, R-rated movies, immodest clothing, mixed swimming, smoking and social drinking should be avoided for this reason (among others).

Additionally, we must be careful that our liberties as Christians do not offend those weaker in the faith. "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended, or is made weak" (Rm. 14:21). "And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" (I Cor. 8:11-13).

We should not knowingly do anything that offends our brethren because each soul is worth more than all the world. (Mt. 16:26).

The Christian's influence is described as salt (Mt. 5:13), light (Mt. 5:14-16), personal (I Cor. 7:14,16), honorable (I Tim. 6:1), beneficial to others (I Pet.

2:11-12), soul-saving (I Pet. 3:1,2) and permanent (Heb. 11:4). With these thoughts in mind, let us guard ours closely and use it fully!

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HELL

Mt. 25:46

by Wade Lee Webster

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Mt. 25:46). Christ clearly taught that there is either eternal life or eternal punishment awaiting us. Most everyone thinks about heaven and its many joys. However, many today have put the thought of eternal punishment and hell out of their minds. As Paul wrote, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18). Although the world and many weak-kneed preachers may be silent on the subject, the Bible is not. Biblical writers speak often of Hell. The Biblical doctrine of hell can be studied by answering three general questions.

First, IS HELL A REALITY? Many in today's world deny that hell is a real place. Even among those who claim to be religious, many deny that hell exists. Some contend that when a righteous person dies he goes to heaven, but that when a wicked person dies he is annihilated (John 5:28-29). Others contend that an all loving God could not send anyone to Hell (Rom. 11:22). However, God's word lends no support to these erroneous suppositions. The Biblical writers speak of hell as a very real place. David wrote, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all nations that forget God" (Psa. 9:17). David believed that hell was real. Daniel wrote, "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). Likewise, Daniel believed that some were

Continued on page 2

FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS
P. O. Box 251
Mammoth Spring, AR 72554
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Publication No. 211780

going to be lost for an eternity in hell. Our Lord believed that there was a hell. Matthew records, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28). When people deny that there is a hell, they are denying that which our Lord taught. They can try to deny it, and try to place it out of their minds, but that doesn't change the fact that it exists. Hell is a reality!

Second, WHAT IS HELL LIKE? The Biblical writers not only picture the beauty of heaven, they also picture how horrible hell will be. (1) Hell is often described as being a place of fire. It is described as: "the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15), "a furnace of fire" (Mt. 13:42), "everlasting fire" (Mt. 25:41), "flaming fire" (II Thess. 1:8), and "unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:12, cf. Mk. 9:44). (2) Hell is described as a place of torment. Luke writes concerning the rich man: "And in hell (hades) he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now is he comforted, and thou art tormented' " (Lk. 16:23-25). John wrote,

"And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name" (Rev. 14:11). (3) It is described as a place of darkness. Christ said: "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 25:30). Peter writes, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (II Pet. 2:4). (4) It is described as a place of destruction and separation. Paul writes, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (II Thess. 1:7-9). Someone has well said that: "Heaven will be heaven because God is there, and hell will be hell because God is not there." Hell means separation from God. The picture that the Bible paints of hell should cause everyone to seriously think of his condition, and to live in such a way that heaven and not hell will be his home.

Third, WHO WILL BE IN HELL? The Bible names a number of different people that will be in hell. They are: (1) The devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41; cf. II Pet. 2:4), the wicked and nations that forget God (Psa. 9:17), those who know not God (II Thess. 1:8), those who obey not the gospel (II Thess. 1:8), those not written in the book of life (Rev. 20:15), the unprofitable servant (Mt. 25:30), those who have sin in their lives (Rev. 21:27), the fearful, the unbelieving (before death, all will be believers after death), the abominable, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars (Rev. 21:8). Imagine what hell will be like with such horrible people. Many people today feel that only a few of the most terrible people will be in Hell. However, the Bible teaches that the majority of people will be lost. Matthew records, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate,

and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat" (Mt. 7:13). Sadly, the majority of people are going to be lost and not saved.

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Mt. 25:46). Our Lord plainly taught that the righteous would be rewarded, and that the wicked would be punished. He taught that either heaven or hell will be our eternal home. We must choose where we will spend our lives in eternity. Marshall Keeble often said, "God votes for you, the devil votes against you, and you hold the deciding vote." Which will it be, Heaven or Hell?

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"A CAKE WITH FLOUR ALONE"

by Eddy Gilpin

To many individuals the Bible is a mysterious relic of some superstitious age past. It is viewed by them as a collection of writings too hard to understand (thus, they do not try), or so full of mystique that it must be read by the flame of a single candle as one lies prostrate on cold mother earth clad only in tattered rags and a sullen disposition. The Bible is the revealed will of God for mankind. Though it is to be revered, it was never intended to be the object of worship itself, nor the source of some esoteric aura. It has been graciously given by God to man. Because of this fact it is evident that it was intended to be understood by man and, thus, can be understood by man. Not only that, but it can and must be understood by all alike, or else it is misunderstood.

The Bible should be handled much the same as any other literary work. Many of its masterful accounts can be read in the same manner in which one would read the morning newspaper. Just as one absorbs the events that are making headline news, he can also understand those events that have made Bible history. It should be studied in detail as one would involve himself in the intricacies of a technical instruction manual. It should be read on

occasion for the beauty and comfort its poetic expressions convey, just as one would peruse a book of prose. It should be examined for its words of warning just as one would inspect the label of a volatile substance for such cautions therein contained. One should consider its phrases on the basis of the speaker, the audience, the context and the time element in much the same manner as he would examine a play or the script for a movie. Another item involved in a study of God's word is a recipe. Psalm 119:160 says, "The sum of thy word is truth" (ASV). Thus, just as one would combine all the ingredients of a recipe in the precise order prescribed in order to arrive at the desired completed product, so must he search the scriptures in order to obtain the "sum" or totality of God's teaching on every subject.

The word of God is nowhere contradictory. Hence, when a single subject is examined in accordance with Psalm 119:160 and two or more seemingly different commands are found to be given concerning that subject, one can rest assured that all of the stipulated commands must be obeyed in order to the obtaining of the promise accompanying that obedience. Just as one must combine the prescribed ingredients of a recipe in the proper manner in order to obtain the desired product, so must one also obey every command of God that is conjoined with a related promise in order to receive the blessings of that promise. One can no more obtain the blessing of God by leaving off stipulated commands than he can obtain a desired product of a recipe by leaving off ingredients required thereby.

As an example of this principle, notice two items appropriately addressed by the aforementioned—one, a recipe for a cake, and the other, the subject of salvation. The recipe requires milk, eggs, flour, butter, sugar and various flavorings and spices all in ordered and apportioned amounts. The recipe details the order of combination of these ingredients. The subject of salvation likewise contains many "ingredients." The Bible reveals that one obtains salvation "by grace...through faith" (Eph. 2:8); "by works" (Jas. 2:24); "by hope" (Rom. 8:24); by "calling on the name of the

Lord" (Rom. 10:13; Acts 22:16); by belief (Acts 16:31); by obedience (Heb. 5:8,9); by repentance (Lk. 13:3; Acts 2:38); through doing good (Jn. 5:28, 29); by baptism (Mk. 16:16; I Pet. 3:21); by faithfulness (Mt. 24:13; Rev. 2:10); and other things as well (Mt. 10:32; Rom. 5:9; etc.). What then should be done with these two items? Should they be treated differently? Certainly not. Just as the ingredients of the recipe must be combined in order to produce the prescribed cake, so must the "ingredients" of salvation be present and properly combined in order to obtain that end. With this thought in mind, notice some applications of this principle to modern thinking.

Many individuals adhere to the erroneous doctrine of "faith only" (Methodist Discipline, Art. IX; Standard Manual for Baptist Churches, 1951, p. 62). In doing so they in essence look to the aforementioned list and "pick" one item (that of faith) from that list and feign production of salvation by it. Such is just as invalid and pretentious as picking one item (flour) from the list of ingredients of the recipe and claiming the production of the cake. One can no more obtain salvation by "faith alone" than he can produce a cake with flour alone! One is just as ludicrous as the other (Cf. Jas. 2:14-26).

Again, many contend that baptism is not essential to salvation (Standard Manual for Baptist Churches, 1951, p. 20). Many of these same individuals and groups teach that one "should" be baptized, but that such baptism occurs after salvation. The New Testament connects baptism and salvation together in only five verses. In *every single verse* baptism precedes salvation (Note Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:4; I Pet. 3:21). In order to say that baptism follows salvation one must reverse the order of these scriptures and, thus, rearrange God's word. Doing such is like saying that one can bake the cake and then add the flour after its completion! Neither of these can be done with the expectation of receiving the end product (Rev. 22:18,19).

Further, some contend that repentance precedes faith. In looking to the two verses that so state these two commands in this order (Mk. 1:15; Acts 20:21), one

must take note of the individuals therein addressed. Here were ones who already believed in God. Their need was to turn back to God (repent) and have faith in the gospel (God's new plan). However, this order is not only irrelevant for the alien sinner today, but also an impossibility. Both faith and repentance must have a basis. The basis of faith is God's word (Jn. 20:30, 31; Rom. 10:17). The basis of repentance is faith. How can one repent (turn from one way to another) if he has neither knowledge nor faith in an alternative system (the gospel) to which he can turn? It is impossible to turn to this avenue in which one has neither knowledge nor faith. Repentance must be preceded by the foundation of faith, which is preceded by the basis of knowledge. Thus, the question of Acts 2:37 was answered by the command to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38) since the basis of faith had already been established through the message preached (Acts 2:32-37). Hence, to reverse the order of these two stipulations is to go beyond the realms of authority and possibility. In order to produce the cake in the previously mentioned recipe, one must combine the prescribed ingredients in the stipulated manner. To add to, take from or modify the stated procedure might produce a cake, but not the cake. In like manner, to alter the stipulations of the gospel (by reversing faith and repentance, or any other way) might produce another gospel, but not the gospel. Paul addressed such modifications thus: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto *another gospel: which is not another*; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 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. 1:6-8). Therefore, alterations in the divine plan do not produce "the gospel", or even "a gospel", but the will of man.

There are many kinds of cakes and corresponding recipes for those cakes. One can choose any that best suit his taste. But, there is only one eternal salvation and one corresponding "recipe" (gospel) for its procurement. There is no liberty

that allows for choice concerning it. One either accepts and obeys "the gospel" (God's plan) or he rejects God altogether. The "ingredients" must be combined in the proper manner in order to arrive at the desired result. One cannot produce a cake with flour alone. Neither can he be saved eternally by any deviation from God's plan. "The sum of thy word is truth."

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A prime temptation of the Christian worker is to be like the tailor: Always taking the measurement of the other man...and never taking his own.

The real size of a man is measured from his chin up, not from his chin down. Keep your chin up, and grow tall.

MONEY - The mint makes it first, and it's up to us to make it last.

MOTHER - A boy's best friend, and if he comes home late enough, he may just find her there.

No man is too big to be courteous, but some are too little.

Truth only hurts where it should.

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; Revelations 2:10).



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