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KEEPING THE HEART

By Erwin Cowen

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

(Proverbs 4:23.)

Although this was spoken during the Mosiac age, the admonition is still very true today. Its relevance to the human race, and especially the Lord's people, will never cease. This is true because of what the heart is. When we think of the physical being, we understand the heart to be the center of our being, and also the organ responsible for the life of the body. Apart from the functions of the heart, life would be impossible. The heart is responsible for distributing the blood throughout the body, and "The life of the flesh is in the blood." (Lev. 17:11.) So then, by means of comparison, we can easily see why the heart is referred to as the center of our moral and spiritual being. Just as the flow of that which is responsible for the physical life goes forth from the physical heart, likewise all of our moral and mental activities have their origin in the spiritual heart. Our acceptance or rejection by the Lord depends upon the center of our spiritual life, the heart.

The spiritual heart is the source of all our intellectual activities, emotional activities, volitional activities, and also those of the conscience. In order to make it easier for us to understand the idea of the spiritual heart, we might list the functions of the heart in the following manner.

First, the heart is that with which we think. In Matt. 9:4, Jesus asked, "Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?" In Mark 2:8, Jesus asked, "Why reason ye these things in your hearts?" In Romans 10:10 Paul said, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." From these we see the heart as the intellect, that with which we think, reason and believe.

Second, the heart is the seat of our emotions. In Matt. 22:37, Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . ." In John 14:27 Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." In John 16:22 Jesus told the apostles, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice." The heart is also the seat of hate and bitterness, Psalm 105:25; James 3:14. From these we see the heart as that from which

we love, rejoice, or hate; the seat of our emotions.

Third, the heart is the process of the will. In Acts 11:23, Barnabas exhorted the church, "That with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." In 2 Cor. 9:7 Paul wrote, "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give . . ." In Prov. 16:9 the Bible states, "A man's heart deviseth his way." From these passages we see the heart as that with which we plan and purpose our activities; the seat of our will.

And fourth, we see the heart as the conscience, which may be cut, pricked, or stabbed by something said or done. In Heb. 10:22 we read, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed in pure water." In Acts 2:37 when the Jews heard the gospel they were "pricked in the heart." Their conscience was pricked by the words of the apostles.

From the above passages we can see that the heart includes the intellect, the emotions, the will and the conscience. We are to diligently keep the heart from wrong thinking, from the wrong kind of emotions, we are to keep the conscience pure, and our purposes in harmony with God's will. We must put forth all efforts to keep the heart free from all impurities. David wrote, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." (Psalm 66:18.)

In becoming a Christian the heart is made new. In 2 Cor. 5:17 Paul wrote, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." We must believe with all the heart (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:10), our heart must be turned from sin to the Lord (Luke 1:17; 1 Thess. 1:9), and we must obey the gospel from the heart (Rom. 6:17-18). Our whole nature is changed because the center of our spiritual and moral being has been changed. And by the response of the heart to the gospel of Christ we enter into a "new and living way" which Jesus consecrated for us (Heb. 10:20). Let us give diligence to keep our heart right with God that we might serve him acceptably.

OBEYING THE GOSPEL

By Robert Ball

In Romans 10:15 Paul says, "As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" Also in Rom. 1:16 Paul tells us, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." From these two verses we see that those who preach and teach the gospel bring glad tidings of good things.

The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ. It is the power of God unto salvation. In 1 Cor. 15:1-2 Paul said, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also we have received and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved." Our salvation depends on the gospel.

The word, gospel, literally means good news. But good news about what? The good news that Jesus Christ came to this world and laid down his life for us in order that we through him might be saved. We are promised salvation when we obey the gospel. But, how do we obey the gospel? Naturally we would first have to hear it. Upon hearing the gospel we must believe it to the point that we place our complete trust and faith in Jesus and what he has promised to do. In 2 Tim. 1:1, Paul said that he was "An apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus." Now notice verse 12, where he said, "For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." Paul had the faith to commit himself completely to Jesus. This is the kind of faith needed for salvation. We must have faith (Heb. 11:6). In Romans 1:17 Paul says "The just shall live by faith." And in Romans 10:17, he said, "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." We must hear about something before we can believe

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BE A WINNER

By Donnie F. Mangrum

In life people seem to be interested in winning, yet we often forget that winning is sometimes preceded by losing. To explain this in another way, we temporarily give of our time, money, and self, and it returns to us a richer, more pleasing feeling about ourselves. Therefore, we have lost in time and material things, but we have gained in self-satisfaction. Life can only be measured by self-satisfaction and things eternal, since death allows none of us the opportunity of taking material things with us. In 1 Tim. 6:7 Paul wrote, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

Giving provides us the opportunity to help three persons at once. First, the one given to is aided from his distress or material needs. In Acts 4:34-35 we read of this type of help. The Bible says, "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." Of course this is not suggesting that one is to sell the house he lives in, but rather his excess which was really not necessary for his survival. Early Christians were extremely liberal in giving to aid those in need, and we should be the same.

Second, giving of money or self provides an opportunity to uplift the one who does the giving. No honest person can actually say that he doesn't enjoy seeing people happy. When people are distressed with needs, the one who gives to relieve this distress experiences great joy and self-satisfaction. It should be no

Should Christians Attend School Dances?

By Larry Corbett

Since school is back in session, the teenage Christian has an important decision to make regarding the school activities: especially whether to attend the High School dances or to take a stand against them. It is easy to go along with the crowd and participate in such activities, but the Christian has a commitment to God to refrain from evil, and to be set apart from the world.

The Christian life is a changed life. The child of God must set his affections on things above and not on things of this earth (Col. 3:1,2). The Christian life is also one of self denial and self modification (Luke 9:23; Col. 3:5).

Dancing is often associated with evil. It is associated with night clubs, taverns, discos and other places of vice and iniquity. There was a time when dancing was associated only with these places, but for many years now it has been "elevated" to the school and colleges as a wholesome activity. However, to change the environment does not change the nature and character of the dance. Paul said that Christians must "Abstain from all appearances of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22). He also stated that we "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." (Eph. 5:11.)

Dancing is a work of the flesh: certainly it is not a work or fruit of the Spirit. In Gal. 5:19-21 Paul lists a number of works of the flesh, among them he listed revelling. Webster's New International Dictionary defines revelling as "Entertainment provided for feasts, etc. . . as dances, pageants, and masques." Lidell and Scott define revelling as "A jovial festivity with music and dancing; a revel or carousel, merry making." You will note that dancing is included in revellings. Paul said that "they which do such things shall not

inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal. 5:21).

Paul also listed lasciviousness as a work of the flesh. Lasciviousness is defined as, "Inclined to lust; wanton or lewd, inciting to lust or wantonness." Can a teenage boy honestly say that he will not be enticed and drawn to lust while engaging in the modern dance steps? A teenage girl may be able to dance with her partner without being aroused, but can she be sure that she is not arousing the passions of her partner, or other bystanders? When we do things intentionally that are known to create lust in others we are also guilty of lasciviousness. The apostle Peter wrote, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11).

The ultimate test a Christian can make before engaging in any activity is to ask himself a few questions. Would Christ engage in this activity? Would Christ dance? What condition would my soul be in if I had to face the judgment while participating in such an activity?

We as parents and teachers need to assure our teenagers that dancing is not a Christian activity. We should encourage them to unite in abstaining from such activities. We should also play and encourage wholesome Christian activity for our youth. It is our responsibility to guide young Christians and to set a Christ-like example before them to follow. Dancing has led to the downfall, hurt, and disgrace of many a teenager. It can happen to you. Because of this we urge all young and older Christians to keep their heart, life and influence pure. "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works . . . that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." (Titus 2:8.)

surprise to us that this is the feeling one gets from giving. In Acts 20:35 Jesus said "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

And third, and most important of all, when we give to those less fortunate than we are, Jesus is pleased. In Matt. 25:34-40, Jesus said, "Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungered, and fed thee: or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick,

or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." This third reason for giving of our self and our money is the most beautiful of all aspects in giving. It is the opportunity to do something for Jesus.

One of the problems we have today is that we have convinced ourselves that our government is to supply for all those in need, and we don't have the obligation as Christians to do this today. Without a doubt we are wrong if we think this way. The Christian has not been relieved of the responsibility to help those in need. John wrote, "But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, continued on page 4

THE REMISSION OF SINS

By Harold Turner

In Matthew 26:28 Jesus said, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The writer of Hebrews tells us, "without shedding of blood is no remission." (Heb. 9:22.) In his final message before ascending back into heaven, Jesus instructed the apostles, saying, "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." (Luke 24:47.) And in Luke 1:77 it is said that John was to go before the face of the Lord to prepare his way, "To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins."

The above passages, along with many others, stress the importance of the remission of sins. It was for the remission of sins that Jesus shed his blood. The apostles were commissioned to preach the remission of sins among all nations. And salvation is accomplished by the remission of sins. Therefore this subject certainly needs to be understood by all.

In studying this subject, let us first consider the definition of the word, remission. Webster defines remission as: "Forgiveness of sin; forgiveness or pardon, as of sins or crimes; cancellation of or release from a debt, tax, penalty, etc." W. E. Vine defines the Greek word, 'aphesis', from which remission is translated, to mean, "a dismissal, release from, is used of the forgiveness of sins." Both of these definitions are in harmony with the Scriptures stated above. Remission of sins is the same as forgiveness of sins, or the salvation from sins. This action is accomplished by the blood of Christ. He shed his blood "for the remission of sins." (Matt. 26:28.) And he "washed us from our sins in his own blood." (Rev. 1:5.) Other similar expressions are used to give us a clear meaning of this. In 1 John 1:7, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Heb. 9:14 states that "the blood of Christ . . . purge(s) your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." And in Col. 1:14, Paul, speaking of blessings in Christ, stated, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." These passages clearly show that remission of sins is equivalent to forgiveness, redemption, purging, cleansing, washing, and salvation.

It should be clear from these numerous passages that remission of sins is made possible by the blood of Christ. Without his blood there can be no remission (Heb. 9:22). How, then, do we receive this benefit of his blood? We know that his blood remits sins because the Bible states it, and we believe it to be true because we believe the Bible is true, but obviously there is more to it than this. There must

be some action on the part of man to receive this benefit of Christ's blood.

Remember in Luke 24:47 Jesus said, "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." In order to find out how remission of sins is received by man, we can begin at Jerusalem. In Acts 2 the apostles have been waiting in Jerusalem as Jesus had instructed them in Luke 24:49. They were waiting to receive "power from on high." In Acts 1:8 Jesus promised them that they would "receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." In Acts 2:4 we read where the Holy Ghost comes upon them and they begin speaking "as the Spirit gave them utterance." In verse 14 Peter said, "Ye men of Judea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words." At this point Peter began preaching unto this multitude in Jerusalem. He preached unto them that "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Verse 36.) Upon hearing this message, which convicted them as guilty of sin, they asked, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Why this question? They had heard a convincing message about Christ, and have come to realize that they are guilty of sin. They asked this question because they believed what the apostles had preached unto them. Are they saved at this point? They have heard the gospel, they now believe that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, and they are convinced of their guilt of sin. Obviously they didn't feel that they were saved; for they asked what to do. Peter, speaking as the Spirit gives his utterance (verse 4), now does what Jesus commissioned in Luke 24:49. He can now preach repentance and remission of sins. This would have meant nothing if these people had not come to the point of seeing their guilt of sin. Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . ."

What did Peter mean, "for the remission of sins"? As you look at the context of this statement, did he mean "because of", or "in order to receive" the remission of their sins? The word, for, can be used either way. If you discipline a child for disobedience, you naturally discipline him because of his disobedience. On the other hand, if you send a child to the store for a loaf of bread; obviously you send him in order to get the bread, and not because he already has it. One could use such illustrations to prove the meaning of "for" to mean, because of, or use it to prove, in order to. But illustrations are not the proof of anything, but used only to make the meaning clearer. Again, in

Matt. 26:28 the same expression is used as in Acts 2:38. Jesus shed his blood "for the remission of sins." And Peter preached, "Repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins." Did Jesus shed his blood "because" of remission of sins? Surely no one would believe this. Peter has convinced the people of Jerusalem that Jesus is the Christ, and that these very people are guilty before God. At this point they ask, "What shall we do?" The Spirit's answer was, "Repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins." Then, to prevent misunderstanding of this, "with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves . . ." Now this is spoken to the same people who were told to Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins." If they were already saved, why exhort them to "Save themselves?" And the Bible states, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls . . . And the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved." (Acts 2:40, 41, 47.) In response to his command to save themselves, they were baptized, and added to the church by the Lord.

Remission of sins was made possible on the Lord's part by the offering of his blood. It is received on the part of man by expressing his faith in obedience. In Romans 6:17, 18 Paul shows that man is made free from sin when he obeys the gospel. Peter said, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth . . ." (1 Peter 1:22.) In Heb. 5:9 we learn that Jesus is the Savior of all who obey him. When we obey Christ, he will remit our sins with his blood.

Since remission of sins is by the blood of Christ, obviously we must contact that blood in a spiritual way to be cleansed. To help us see the relationship between Christ's blood and baptism, let us look at two other passages. First in John 19:33, 34 we read where the soldiers upon finding Jesus dead, pierced his side and "forthwith came there out blood and water." His blood was shed in his death. Now notice Rom. 6:3, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" His blood was shed in his death, and we are baptized into his death. What conclusion can be made from this? That we receive the benefits of his death by being baptized into his death. His blood was shed "for the remission of sins." We are to be baptized "for the remission of sins." When we are baptized into his death, his blood remits our sins. Too, it might be observed from Rom. 6:3 that we are "baptized into Christ." Are we saved outside of Christ? Salvation is only in Christ

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So then we must hear the gospel of Christ before we can believe it.

Now after we hear the gospel and believe it, what are we to do in order to be saved? Can we go on living just as we are? No, we must turn away from our sins, that is, we must turn from our former way of living, and turn to the Lord. The decision to turn from sin to God is repentance. Jesus said, in Luke 13:3,5, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." In Acts 17:30, Paul said that God "now commandeth all men every where to repent." Before we can be saved we must repent. Too, we must confess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ before others. In Matt. 10:32 Jesus said, "Who-soever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." In Rom. 10:10 Paul said that with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. So, we must confess Christ in order to be saved. In Heb. 9:15 the writer tells us that Jesus is the "mediator of the new testament." In other words, he pleads our case for us. A mediator is someone who is equally committed to both sides. The word, mediate, means to settle or bring about a settlement by mediating or connecting. We are connected to our Father through Jesus Christ. So, the only hope we have is that Jesus confess us to the Father.

Obedying the gospel also includes being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Rom. 6:3; Acts 2:38). In Co. 2:12 Paul wrote, "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Too, in Rom. 6:3-4 he wrote, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death; Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." These verses show that we are buried in baptism, and that the operation of God takes place at this point. Too, they show that baptism is the act that puts one into Christ.

In Acts 2 we have recorded the first gospel sermon preached after the death of Christ. In this sermon Peter preached unto the people Jesus as Christ. What was their response to this gospel message? "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter

said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Peter continued with many other words urging them to "save themselves", and "they that gladly received his word were baptized."

So then, how do we obey the gospel? We must first hear it and believe it with all the heart, we must then repent of our sins, confess our faith in Jesus Christ before others, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of our sins. This is the entrance into a new life and relationship with our Lord. We must then continue faithfully until death.

This same gospel which was preached by the apostles is that by which we will be judged. In Rom. 2:16 Paul said, "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." In the judgment we all will face the gospel, whether or not we have obeyed it. Listen to what Paul wrote in 2 Thess. 1:7-9, "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."

The gospel will be the book of judgment when we face God. Let us then obey all the commandments of our Lord, and thereby show our love for what he has done for us. In John 14:15 Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

BE A WINNER

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and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (1 John 3:17, 18.) And Paul wrote "As we have therefore the opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:10.) The church that Christ established followed these teachings, see Acts 2:45-47; 4:34-37; 11:28-29. We must not take the Scriptures and sort out what we desire for our own use and ignore the balance of them (Rev. 22:18,19).

Let us learn to share our life and good blessings with those in need, and be a winner both in this life and in the life to come. Remember, "God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7.)

THE REMISSION OF SINS

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(Acts 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:10). Too, Rev. 1:5 stated that Christ washes us from our sins in his own blood. Notice Acts 22:16 where Ananias told Saul to "arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." The blood washes away our sins; baptism also is said to wash away our sins. How can this be? Because we are baptized into the death of Christ where his blood was shed.

Nothing is more important than our response to Christ in order to receive the remission of our sins. He shed his blood to make this possible. We express our faith and appreciation for his death by humbly submitting ourselves to him in obedience to his word. If we will do as those in Acts 2, the Lord will remit our sins and add us to his church, where if we will live faithful to his word we will receive even a greater salvation than the remission of sins, we will be saved from eternal destruction. If you are not saved, we urge you to study carefully the words of Christ, and eagerly obey them while you have the opportunity.

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