

# VIGIL



*“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”*

*~ I Peter 5:8*

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**Gospel**

## **I AM PERSONALLY RESPONSIBLE TO THE GOSPEL**

**Dale Hubbert**

The gospel of Jehovah’s saving grace is the most profound message humanity has ever been privileged to receive. The burden of sin, the death of the righteous for sinners, and the offer of pardon by a loving God far exceed any message ever transmitted.

Within the framework of the gospel message is a clear and clarion call to those who would benefit from the benevolence of a gracious and just God. This call explains both God’s goodness and man’s responsibility to an offer that must not be refused. While the universal nature of God’s compassion is exposed, the personal accountability of each of us is equally emphasized.

Those who are filled with compassion and thanksgiving will have a burning desire to respond to this gospel initially in the waters of baptism and daily in holy living before our Maker (2 Corinthians 7:1). An understanding of the forgiveness of sins enables us to be keenly aware of an ongoing relationship with the good news we call the gospel (1 John 1:7).

Jesus made plain the

mortification of our former way of living when he stated: “if any man will come after me let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Total commitment to our Lord and Master will motivate each of us to take our relationship and our responsibility to the gospel personally.

There is sadly among some in the church the concept that Christianity is given more to being a spectator than a participant. The critique of the worship, sermon, elders, preacher and work of the church by some far exceed their participation and involvement. The works of teaching, preaching, and serving are done primarily by far too small a percentage of the members of the Lord’s body.

1 Corinthians chapter 12 beautifully and powerfully expresses the truth that all of us have a place in the kingdom. There is work that we all can do and must do in order to please Him who bore our sins at Calvary. Every role and work is important. We are capable and accountable for areas and

opportunities that no one else is able to fulfill.

I am personally responsible to the gospel because Jesus died for ME. 1 John 2:2 declares that Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” I personally have access to all the blessings that are found in Christ Jesus. No one who will become an obedient believer will be excluded from the precious promises God extends to spiritual children (2 Peter 1:4). I am personally responsible for the spreading of the gospel. It is a grave and unbiblical approach to evangelism to assume that all teaching is to be done by preachers, missionaries, and an additional small few. God has designed the truth in a simple way so that every child of God can and should have a part in distribution. The church has been limited far too long because many members have never seen a personal responsibility to the commission of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20. We all are to be fishers of men Matthew 4:19).

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**EDITORIAL**

## I AM NOT ASHAMED

Ronnie Hayes

Paul stated, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). I fear that many do not embrace Paul’s boldness when it comes the gospel of Christ.

The embarrassment of some Christians, in relationship to the gospel, reminds me of a story I heard. There was a father and mother who had a son and it was his desire to go to college. The parents willingly sacrificed to make this dream come true. They worked hard. They would work two jobs and work long hours but they were glad to do it.

At last, graduation day came. They made the long journey. They were not well dressed. The years of hard work showed on their faces. But all of their hard work and sacrifices were worth it. Their son was about to graduate.

As they came on campus, they saw their son. He was walking with friends. They waved at him, but he ignored their wave. They called his name, but he walked even faster. “Who are those vagabonds?” one friend asked. The son answered, “I don’t know.” He was ashamed of his own parents. The truth is he wanted what they gave, but didn’t want the attachment.

Many in the religious world today want what Christ has to offer (cf. Romans 6:23), but are ashamed of their association with Christ. Let’s look at some of the reasons why some are ashamed of Christ.

There are those who wish to be “**Politically Correct**”. Sin is still sin. John wrote, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). James reminds us of the sin of omission. “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it

not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). Isn’t it funny that sin, in many circles, has become a disease; not an omission or transgression of God’s word. And you have some Christians who want to apologize for the truth. Bro. Cox wrote in his book, *A Word Fittly Spoken*, “And when the truth offends (I said: when the truth offends – not when our sarcasm, ridicule, or wisecracks offend) we should not become excited about it” (124). Gospel preachers cannot poll the masses to see what they must preach. Paul told Timothy, “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” (2 Timothy 4:2-4). Gospel preachers cannot allow political correctness to dictate what they preach on abortion, euthanasia, marriage and divorce, homosexuality, and the church. As Paul told Timothy, we must preach the word. Why? Because there is coming a time when man will not endure sound doctrine. You expect this out of the world, but it is sad when Christians are ashamed of the truth.

**Popularity** is another reason why some are ashamed of Christ. Christ said, “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: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13,14). Some would do or say anything for popularity, but not Christ. In John 6, when Christ had said some “hard sayings” (6:60), many of his disciples turned to walk no more with him (6:66). Christ wasn’t ashamed to say what needed to be said and certainly didn’t buckle under the pressure to change for

popularity sake. Oh, how sad it is when brethren give into the pressures of popularity and compromise the truth. It is the popular thing to have special singing instead of that old congregational style (cf. Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). It is the popular thing to allow the expanded role of women rather than doing what the Bible commands (cf. 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Corinthians 14:34). It is popular to have dramas, plays, baby dedications, and even to take of the Lord’s Supper on Thursday, but where is the authority of any of these? I am still amazed at a Christian who is ashamed to stand up and speak up for the truth! If I am the only one who can stand for the truth, then dear Lord, give me the courage to do so. May I never be ashamed of my Lord and His Church simply because it isn’t popular!

Others hide their head in shame because the gospel **Penetrates the Darkness**. I have seen the self proclaimed “Bible Giants” (in their own mind) shrink in horror when the truth is proclaimed. The truth exposes the error of their friends and they certainly don’t want that preached. Some think they can back sinners into Christ. Maybe we can have them in Christ before they know it and if we do, they might stay. Wrong! Paul said, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:11). When we preach the truth, it will expose darkness (cf. Colossians 1:13,14). Instead of being ashamed, may we all be emboldened.

Are you ashamed of the Gospel of Christ? Will you boldly say, “Yes, one must be baptized to be saved?” Does it embarrass you to tell someone of the one Church? Are you one of those “five steppers?” Do you think that modesty still matters? May we never be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

## ITS POWER UNTO SALVATION

Kerry Richardson

As we ponder the general theme of this issue (*the gospel*), it is very appropriate that one of our articles will focus upon the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Today, it seems that religious teachers both inside and outside the church have a diminishing sense of the "power of the gospel." As a result, numerous preachers and teachers have resorted to the use of modern ideas such as "media presentations" and "storytelling" to supplant proclamation of God's good news to man. While it may seem that this phenomenon is a "21<sup>st</sup> Century idea," we recall Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 1:9... "There is nothing new under the sun." The audience Paul addressed in the book of Romans, like many today, was also susceptible to this distorted view of God's word.

The Roman brethren, without question, understood the concept of "power." Living in the "capital city" of the Roman Empire, Paul's audience was accustomed to the discharge of power by the greatest within this vaunted government. In the days of the emperors, an entire nation and subservient countries were subject to the power that emanated from the city of Rome. Whether it was Tiberius or Nero, the edicts of "Caesar" changed policies and guidelines on a very wide scale. Persecution/death resulted if disobedience or defiance was exhibited by those under his rule. "Power," for the Roman brethren, was a concept that was intertwined with people to the point that it could not be separated... the emperor was power and power was the emperor. With this background, one can easily envision the Roman brethren placing more faith in messengers rather than the message. It is interesting that this idea was not something "unique" to

the brethren at Rome... we also detect the idea in the Corinthian congregation as Paul discussed in his first letter to these brethren. According to 1 Corinthians 1:12, there was a division of the brethren into four groups. Some claimed allegiance to Paul while others found common roots in Apollos. Still others claimed close ties to Cephas (Peter) while the final group found origination with Christ. While this obviously seemed to be a case of "favoritism" of preachers/teachers, a careful student of the text realizes that the faith of the brethren at Corinth had become attached to "people" instead of "the message." All of these children of God had obeyed the same message... the good news of Jesus Christ. Yet, there was a great division because of favored individuals. It is no coincidence that Paul, after noting the problem in verses 10-17, would immediately begin addressing the problem in verse 18 with these words: "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." In both the Corinthian and Roman brethren, Paul sought to instill confidence in the *gospel*, not necessarily in the person.

Today, we would do well to learn from the teachings of Paul regarding the "power of the gospel." First, I would suggest that all teachers/preachers guard against a temptation to supplant the proclamation of the gospel message with "media presentations" and "storytelling." To ensure that you understand my point, I am not dismissing the use of media presentations and illustrations in presentations of God's word (I use both tools in my preaching/teaching). The proper use of both tools can greatly enhance the ability to communicate biblical principles to the hearers of the message in such a way that long-term retention results. However, there is a "fine line"

between using these things to enhance our lessons and allowing these things to become our lessons. A good question that might help us to determine how these tools are used in our lessons is, "Do people solely remember my media presentations/illustrations or do people remember a biblical principle because of my media presentation/illustration?"

Another idea that we should glean from Paul's words is that our confidence should not be solely in "people." In 2005, it is apparent that many children of God seem to imitate the Corinthian brethren in regards to "preacher following." Frequently, when a preacher leaves a congregation (*for "non-doctrinal" reasons*), a number of members leave also. Or, it may be that members of a local church become so enamored with a preacher that "all of his beliefs and opinions" are unquestionably accepted and defended. Both things can suggest an overaggressive faith in the "messenger" rather than the message. A good point to remember about all preachers/teachers is that we all are the "earthen vessels that contain the treasure" (2 Corinthians 4:7)... we are not the treasure itself.

A native from a remote mountain village once visited a modern city. Impressed with electric lights, he bought a sack full of light bulbs/sockets/switches and returned home, hanging the light bulbs in front of his home. When night fell, he flipped the switches... but nothing happened. No one had told him about the concept of electricity. Today, the "electricity" for the Christian is the gospel message. Simply possessing "bulbs, sockets, and switches" (*accessory items*) is not enough... we must be "plugged into" the power that is only found in the gospel!

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# THE GOSPEL PRODUCES FAITH

Chuck Webster

There is nothing this side of heaven more beautiful than what happens when the gospel contacts an honest human heart. A conviction is formed, and a simple faith begins to bud. At its most basic level, the gospel produces faith . . . but what is this faith like?

**This faith is an integral part of conversion.** Because baptism's crucial role in God's plan has been distorted by religious people for centuries, gospel preachers often (rightly) emphasize it in their preaching. This emphasis needs to be continued, but not to the neglect of the convictions in a person's heart that lead him to the waters of baptism. At the very foundation of a relationship to Christ is the presence of deep, personal faith in Jesus Christ as God's promised Messiah and Son. Any gospel presentation that has baptism as its sole motivation is misguided. Immersion into Christ will be the natural result when a person gives his heart to the Lord, of course, but that baptism is effectual only when the gospel has already produced faith. Peter's gospel sermon in Acts 2 had as its primary goal creating faith in the hearts of his hearers, as seen by his accumulation of "witnesses" to the deity of Christ (vv. 14-36). The result—their being "pricked in their heart"—suggests that he succeeded with many of those who heard him. This pattern is followed in every conversion account: "And believers were the more added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14). "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. . . . But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, . . ." (Acts 8:5, 12, 13a). Philip's preaching was focused on presenting evidence pointing to the identity of Christ. When the Ethiopian eunuch wanted to

be baptized, Philip sought clarification: "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" (Acts 8:37). He wanted to baptize him into Christ, of course, but he wanted to make sure that the gospel had stimulated faith, without which baptism is meaningless.

**This faith overcomes obstacles.** New Testament believers faced trials as they became Christians. By identifying themselves with the despised Jesus of Nazareth, they made themselves enemies of the established religious hierarchy of first-century Judea and exposed themselves to horrific persecution. Some weak-minded hearers of the first century heard the gospel and believed it, but their fear overcame their faith, and they were unwilling to confess lest they be ostracized (John 12:42-43). Others believed for a time, but when the persecutions arose they began to wilt, fading back into their former religion. The Lord Himself spoke to this weakness in His Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13). Some develop a shallow faith that cannot sustain them when the sun comes up, and they become "scorched" and soon "wither away" (Matthew 13:5-6, 20-21). When the gospel contacts good and honest hearts, however, it produces a more substantial faith that embraces persecution and trials as opportunities for growth (James 1:3-5). These believers face temptation with their eyes fixed squarely on Jesus and consequently refuse to succumb to the world's allurements (Hebrews 12:1-2; 1 John 2:15). Through the myriad difficulties of life, its disappointments and struggles—this kind of faith sustains them, giving them a peace that calms and a hope that sustains.

**This faith is contagious.** The faith of the early church spread like wildfire. The three thousand believers of Acts 2 became five thousand *men* in Acts 4, with the growth thereafter being described with phrases like, "and believers were the more added to

the Lord" (Acts 5:14), and "the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly" (Acts 6:7). This rapid growth can be explained partially by the fact that Christianity was a new religion, and thousands of prospective converts were in Jerusalem for the annual feast. As we look back from our vantage point, however, we must admit that the growth was also related to the genuineness and fervor of the believers' faith. Their convictions led them to form a familial bond of unity that expressed itself in intimate fellowship (Acts 2:42-47) and generous sharing (Acts 4:32-37). This led, at least in part, to the early church's positive relationship with their community (Acts 2:47). Their faith in the face of persecutions impressed those around them (Acts 4:13). They were bold in sharing their faith (Acts 8:4ff).

This should come as no surprise, however. When we are truly convinced that we are sinners and that God robed Himself in human flesh to die as an innocent sacrifice so that we can be saved, shouldn't we be bold in telling others? Shouldn't we stand up to persecution? Shouldn't we be excited about the local family of believers and be diligent in maintaining that unity? When the gospel produces true faith in us, that faith will be the strongest conviction we have. It will permeate every aspect of our lives so visibly that unbelievers around us will want to know more.

Faith is, indeed, a powerful thing. Without it, religion is empty ritual, and life is void of hope. When it consumes a good heart, however, a believer will do whatever his Lord asks of him. His faith will filter over into every corner of his life, and he will live each day in view of one day embracing the One whom his faith has allowed him to see.

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## THE GOSPEL IS FOR ALL

Ben Wright

*“The blessed gospel is for all,  
The gospel is for all;  
Where sin has gone must go His grace;  
The gospel is for all.”*

This is the chorus to the great hymn “The Gospel Is For All” as you well know. When one stops to think about the fact that God, in His infinite grace, has provided a saving message for all people, it staggers the mind. A multitude of people steeped in sin, rejecting God and despising all knowledge of Him (Romans 1:18f), but God still loved them, and us, enough to send His Son (Romans 5:6-8).

Sadly, there are people that teach Jesus did **not** die for all mankind and that the gospel message is **not** for all. There are those that would have us believe that Jesus died only for a certain, preselected group of people and that have no say in the matter and all others have no hope. This, of course, is one of the cardinal doctrines of Calvinism, unconditional election.

What the Bible teaches is completely different from this terribly false doctrine.

Let us, first of all, notice the **proof** that the gospel is for all. Notice what Romans 5:8 says, “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Paul said “we” were “sinners.” We need to ask the question, “Who is a sinner?” Paul answers that question for us in Romans 3:23, “For **all** (emp. mine, BW) have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” All men have sinned and God showed His love to sinners by sending Christ to die for them. This teaches us that the gospel is for all.

One very plain passage of scripture jumps out at us as we notice the proof of the gospel being for all, 1 Timothy 2:3-4: “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have **all** (emp. mine, BW) men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” God

wants every person to be saved that has lived, is living and will live until time is no more.

The “Golden Text” of the Bible tells us that God “so loved the world” that He sent His only begotten Son to die for it (John 3:16). Titus 2:11 tells us that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men. There is no doubt that the gospel is for all. Many other passages could be shown to prove that God’s saving message is for all men.

What **purpose** does the gospel serve? Why is it for all men? Romans 1:16 tells us the purpose of the gospel: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” The purpose of the gospel is to save mankind. The gospel is God’s means of salvation. There is no other message that contains God’s power to save.

Notice Ephesians 3:8-9: “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.” Paul was blessed to be able to preach the gospel among the Gentiles, and all men, which is able to save.

Paul reveals what this mystery, something previously unknown but now revealed, meant for the Gentiles in Ephesians 2. Christ came and allowed the Gentile world to be brought close to God by His blood, broke down the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile and allowed all men to be reconciled to God by His death on the cross. This allowed them to not be foreigners any longer, but saints and part of the household of God.

This gospel message brought to them

by Paul allowed them to be saved. That is the purpose of the gospel and it always will be. It is God’s one and only power to save lost men.

There must be a **plan** for this saving message to get out to a lost and dying world. The plan is simple: Christians must go! “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:16).

Christianity is a taught religion. God intended, and still intends, for those who have heard, believed and obeyed the gospel to tell others the same message. God chose the “foolishness of preaching” to have His message delivered to mankind (1 Corinthians 1:21). It is up to individual Christians to go and spread the gospel. As the book title says, Go Ye Means Go Me. The onus is on us to get God’s saving message out. As the last stanza of “The Gospel Is For All” says,

*“Received ye freely, freely give,  
From every land they call;  
Unless they hear they cannot live:  
The gospel is for all.”*

We have noticed the proof that the gospel is for all, in spite of what the Calvinists say. We see the purpose of the gospel, to save mankind. We know the plan for getting the message out is concerned Christians teaching others. The mission of Christ was to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). His mission is our mission. (Mark 16:15-16) Let us go about getting the gospel to all.

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# THE GOSPEL WILL REMAIN PURE

Ashley Kizer

Men must always strive to have a greater appreciation for the purity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news of the Messiah was inspired by God Almighty, and therefore, we must give respect to its authenticity and unique importance to mankind. The Psalmist wrote, “The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6). Its characteristic of purity seems to be what drew David to the Word of God. Notice Psalm 119:140: “Thy word is very pure: therefore thy servant loveth it.”

Just as God cannot lie, no fault can be found in His words (cf. Titus 1:2). When the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, He gave us a perfect example of a righteous human being (cf. John 1:14). Peter described Him as one “[w]ho did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not...” (1 Peter 2:22-23).

Certainly, the Son of God was able to tame His tongue and use it in such a way that amazed others. People “marveled” at His teachings (Matthew 22:22). As a matter of fact, Jesus was very popular at the beginning of His ministry. Luke wrote, “And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son” (4:22)? Interestingly enough, the same pure words for which He was known made Him infamous a short time later.

The gospel message has the same effect on people today. Those who seek the truth are amazed by the wisdom found therein. However, those who seek to justify wrongdoing and hide from responsibility are troubled by its purity and straightforwardness. The apostle Paul sought to declare unto the brethren at Corinth “the gospel” (1 Corinthians

15:1). He had preached it to them in the past and they had been saved by it, yet they still needed to be encouraged to keep in memory the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (vv. 2-4). Otherwise, their believing would be in vain (v. 2).

The gospel must remain pure. For if it is not pure, then it is not the true gospel after all. In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he mentioned “another gospel,” but he immediately clarified what he meant by saying that it “...is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:6-7). He was very conscientious with his own preaching, determining “not to know any thing” among the Corinthians, “save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). Today’s gospel preachers need to be just that – preachers of the gospel and defenders of its purity! We can learn to appreciate the purity of the gospel by examining a few of its many characteristics.

First we will notice that the gospel is **simple**. Paul was able to present it to the Corinthian brethren in three steps: death, burial, and resurrection. In much the same way, Christians have presented God’s plan for saving man in a step-by-step manner. The power of the gospel is available to “every one that believeth,” so it must be simple enough for everyone to understand (Romans 1:16). Consider the simplicity of God’s instructions to Noah’s family regarding their salvation from the great flood: “Come thou and all thy house into the ark...” (Genesis 7:1). God’s commandments are “not grievous” or complicated (1 John 5:3). Therefore, gospel preachers must preach the word in its simplicity knowing that “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all

churches of the saints” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

We must also point out that the gospel is **stainless**. Peter commanded us to long for “the sincere milk of the word...as newborn babes,” and no one would feed a baby tainted milk (1 Peter 2:2)! Parents feed their babies only that which is pure and without defect. To Paul, the gospel was “the glorious gospel,” and we should look at it in the same way (2 Corinthians 4:4). What other book has withstood the test of time in the same way as the message of Christ? There is no other work of this magnitude because all others have been written by men, and the Bible was written by divine inspiration (cf. 2 Peter 1:21). The word that was “once delivered unto the saints” is complete and perfect, and those that seek to add or take away from it will face dire punishment (Jude 3; cf. Revelation 22:18-19).

Finally, we know that the gospel will remain pure because it is sure and **steadfast**. John was given a revelation from God in which he saw an angel “having an eternal gospel” that was to be preached “to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people...” (Revelation 14:6). The gospel is not just the greatest message to mankind; it was predestined to be told before the foundation of the world! Furthermore, the gospel will exist long after the world is no longer in existence. Then we will find Jesus’ prophetic words to be true: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

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## EARMARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

Hugo McCord

Jesus was the builder of the only true church (Mathew 16:18). His church—his ekklesia, his ‘called-out’ people make up his spiritual “body” (Colossians 1:18). As he had only one physical body, so biblically there is only “one” spiritual “body” (1 Corinthians 12:20; Ephesians 4:4).

So much did Christ love the church, his “called-out” people, he gave himself (yes, his blood, Acts 20:28) for them that he might set them apart, having cleansed them in the washing of the water by the word, that he might present the called – out people to himself in splendor, having no spot or flaw or any such thing, but that they might be unblemished and set apart (Ephesians 5:25-27, FHV).

Those called-out people, his spiritual body, his church are still precious to him, and he is awaiting the Father’s signal to make his second coming to gather members of his church to take them to his home in heaven, for he is the (savior of the body.” (John 14:1-3; Ephesians 5:23).

Since his second coming will not be to save those out of his body (cf. John 3:36; Romans 2:8-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9), every human being ought to have only one chief desire, saying: “I want to get into his body, his church, and then be a faithful “called-out” Christian that I might be ready for the Lord’s coming.”

How can one know which of the hundreds of churches is Jesus’ one true church? Jesus did not look with favor on manmade organizations: “Every plant which my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted” (Matthew 15:13). When Jesus appears in the sky, what are some characteristics, some earmarks by which we can identify Jesus’ church?

Biblically, five earmarks of the one true church are: (1) the identity of the builder, namely, Jesus (Matthew 16:18); (2) where his church was first established, namely,

in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47); (3) when his church was established, namely, on Pentecost Sunday, A.D. 30 (Acts 2:1-47 KJV); (4) the character of church members, namely, dedicated and clean-living people (1 Corinthians 6:11; Colossians 1:3-5) with some hypocrites (Acts 5:1-11; Galatians 2:4); and (5) the namelessness of Jesus’ church.

I used to think that the Lord’s church has several names, and in my preaching I cited book, chapter, and verse, which mentioned them. Then I learned from G.C. Brewer that I was misusing those verses. I was hard to convince, and decided to check every verse that mentions the church. Only then did I realize that one distinguishing earmark of the Lord’s church is its namelessness. I found that the KJV refers to Christians as the “church” 112 times, as follows:

**First**, Jesus calls it “my church” one time (Matthew 16:18), a phrase showing ownership, not showing a name of the church. **Second**, it is called “the church” 95 times (beginning in Matthew 18:17), with no name attached. **Third**, it is called the “church of God” 12 times (beginning in Acts 20:28), a phrase, which denotes ownership: Jesus and his Father are co-owners (John 17:10). **Fourth**, some Christians were called “the churches of the Gentiles” (Romans 16:4), a phrase describing non-Jewish members, not a church name. **Fifth**, the phrase “the churches of Christ” occurs one time (Romans 16:16), a phrase that denotes ownership, not a name for Jesus’ church. In parallel, the phrase “the dogs of John” tells who owns the dogs, not the names of the dogs. **Sixth**, the phrase “the churches of the saints” occurs one time (1 Corinthians 14:33), denoting

the character of Christians, not a church name. **Seventh**, the phrase “the church of the firstborn” occurs one time (Hebrews 12:23). I used to think that the word “firstborn” in Hebrews 12:23 refers to Jesus (as it does in Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:15, 18; Revelation 1:5), but in Hebrews 12:23 the word “firstborn” is plural, meaning the “firstborn people,” a figurative expression describing the elevated position of Christians. The King James translators knew that the word in the Greek is plural, and so they wrote about “the church of the firstborn which are written in heaven” using the plural verb “are.” Thus the phrase “the church of the firstborn” is a complimentary designation of church members, not a church name.

It becomes evident that none of the 112 instances of the word “church” as referring to Jesus’ “called-out” people supplies a church name. Further, that which has a “name or appellation” is a “denomination” (Webster), and I know that the Lord’s church is not a denomination.

When one checks all churches now in existence he finds that none of them can trace its way back historically to Jerusalem in A.D. 30. All of them have earmark number four, good and bad people as members, but all of them were built by the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time to have a connection with Jesus’ church, and they all have names.

To be continued next issue:



Continued from page 42-----I Am Personally Responsible for the Gospel –by **Dale Hubbert**

I am personally responsible to living out the good news in my life. We are called by our Lord to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14). “Only let your conduct be as becomes the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27, NKJV). The way we represent the life of a disciple in the presence of others is a powerful or destructive tool as the gospel is spread or disdained.

I am personally responsible for the preservation of the gospel. It has often been stated that the church is only one generation away from apostasy. If the will of God is to continue to be honored and obeyed for generations to come, I am accountable for the preservation and proclamation of these pure truths. Each one of us is duty bound to take

the things we have learned and commit them to others who are faithful so that the truth may abound long after we leave this earth (2 Tim 2:2).

God has a plan for the church. That plan includes among other things the importance of every member joyfully accepting personal accountability to the gospel. I would fear that few if any congregations would have 100% of the members who meet God’s expectations in this area. Some members appear offended if you call upon them to become personally involved and active in spiritual service. Many if not all congregations are hindered significantly by a lack of participation among the membership. Good goes undone and God is disappointed.

We will be well served to carefully consider the urgency of our discipleship. Our understanding of God’s design prompts us to be active for the cause. Gratitude for our salvation and blessings will inspire us personally to be energetic. Compassion for those headed for hell will spark our motivation to live and spread the gospel.

We need more workers and less spectators. We need more seed sowing and less fussing. God has called each one of us to do the work he has uniquely created us for (1 Corinthians 12:18). I AM personally responsible to the gospel. Am I joyfully and faithfully fulfilling that responsibility?

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