



HAMBURG PIKE

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# The Worker

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## Pressing on to Know God

Do you ever think about why we fall short of God? What causes Christians to hit roadblocks in their spiritual walk with God? It is without question that the Christian individual has to face trials and temptations. James 1:2-4 plainly states that Christians will be tested, but that the testing is to prove endurance over Satan. These roadblocks, when recognized early, are easier to overcome. But when a roadblock isn't avoided early it is more difficult to eliminate. These sins come in the form of addictions, lies, false doctrine, bad influences-you name it!

Anything contrary to goodness and righteousness is sin ( James 4:17). This world is a marvelous creation by God, but like anything else, excess use of it or devotion to it is bad. Remember, this world is a wonderful gift from God, but it isn't heavenly. Putting faith into the things or people of this world is useless. Those things not of God are going to pass away.

How does one find comfort in knowing that this world is sinful? Striving to know God and lean on the eternal presence. "So let us press on to know the Lord, His going forth is as certain as dawn; and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth."- Hosea 6:3. God is forever. Why not strive to know, understand, and follow a permanent Creator rather than His creation? The bible says that those who trust God are as a mountain abiding forever ( Psalm 125:1).

Sin hurts the hearts of friends, family, and most important the Lord. These roadblocks that Christians encounter are easy to overcome if we fight this fight against Satan and keep on the course of eternity (2 Tim. 4:7-8). "Keep your eyes on the prize!"

The concept of eternity is beyond what the human mind can comprehend because its Creator is greater than what a human can comprehend. Live within the world and shine the light that is Christianity, but do not conform to the works of man, leaving God out of the equation ( Romans 12:2). Let us encourage one another to find understanding and peace in a Christian life. Let us press on to know God!

Chet Duke <http://www.mtjuliet.org/sermons/archives/003450.html>

## She Did What She Could

David Wright

When Kirsten and Robby Stocksdale had a yard sale two or three weeks ago, Nora set up a lemonade stand. But she wasn't selling. She was giving. And refreshing drink was not her only gift. Nora offered every customer a copy of Searching for Truth, the DVD written and hosted by John Moore.

Last weekend an older gentleman approached the Stocksdales' house. He wanted to know if he had found the home where the yard sale was recently held. Then he explained his reason for stopping by. The man had enjoyed the DVD so much that he wanted to share its message with others. Could he have some additional copies? The Stocksdales gladly honored the request and invited their new friend to visit Hamburg Pike. I fervently hope that he accepts their invitation. But if he doesn't, it won't be Nora's fault. She did what she could.

In his sower parable, Jesus describes four soil types: "A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell along the path, and was trodden under foot, and the birds of the air devoured it. And some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some fell into good soil and grew, and yielded a hundredfold" (Luke 8:5-8). The busy farmer scattered his seed everywhere. But only the good soil was truly receptive. That receptivity is the Lord's unique responsibility. Of his ministry in Corinth, Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6).

Nora Stocksdale is only seven years old. But her seed sowing is an excellent example for people many times her age. We are all proud of you, Nora. Keep up the great work!

### Scripture

*<sup>11</sup> Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup> The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. <sup>13</sup> And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. <sup>14</sup> And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. <sup>15</sup> As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.*

Luke 8:11-15

## *The Joy of Christianity*

**God's Institution of Marriage** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh," (Genesis 2:24).

God established marriage at the very dawn of time as He said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him," (Genesis 2:18). God not only created the first couple, Adam and Eve, He also served as matchmaker for what would be the first marriage. Try as they might, governments and societies do not have the *de facto* ability to redefine marriage because nature and nature's God have given it but one immutable definition: the joining of one woman and one man in the strongest union that can be found within humanity. The recent history of our country demonstrates the superiority of marriage over other family arrangements, as it is only in recent decades that the rise of numerous societal ills have vastly increased coincident with the increasingly weakened family unit.

As just one example, in 1940 there were 38 births outside of marriage for every 1,000 babies born; today the ratio is approximately 400 per 1,000 babies, a 10-fold increase. Whereas in the past, bearing a child out of wedlock was often a source of great embarrassment to the mother and her family, there is a trend today for single women to choose to have multiple children without marriage to the father(s). These kinds of so-called lifestyle choices have consequences and costs, not only for the individuals involved, but for society as a whole. Marriage, on the other hand, has significant and demonstrable benefits—for the family and society—that exceed those of any other form of living arrangement, as is borne out by statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, and countless research studies:

- **Prosperity:** Marriage creates greater wealth for most people compared to life without it. Married families experienced an 8.8% poverty rate in 2010, compared to a 40.9% poverty rate for single-mother households. However, single, unemployed mothers in poverty who marry the father of their children reduce the likelihood of being in poverty from 100 percent to 35 percent.
- **Personal safety:** Married women with children suffer far less abuse than single mothers. In fact, the rate of spousal, boyfriend, or domestic partner abuse is twice as high among mothers who have never been married as it is among mothers who have ever married (including those separated or divorced). Married women are less than half as likely to be victimized by violent crime as are those who are single and living alone, or with a boyfriend. A study in Great Britain in the 1980's demonstrated that marriage is the safest relationship for raising children. The fatality rate of children from in-home violence where the mother cohabitated with a boyfriend was 73 times higher than for children living with their biological parents.
- **Health:** Children of divorced parents are much more likely to smoke than those whose parents stay together. In a study of 5,000 children, those whose parents divorced were twice as likely to have a dependence on Ritalin compared to those from intact families. A University of California at Berkeley study found that overall health of children was affected by "very significant stress" related to divorce.
- **Education:** A University of Wisconsin-Madison study in 2011 found that children of failed marriages are more likely to suffer low self-esteem, stress and anxiety, and often lag their classmates in social skills and math. Such children are also more likely to drop out of school before graduation.

Rather than learn from past mistakes, it appears that many are prepared to run with reckless abandon toward different forms of "marriage" that will compound those errors. The possibilities for calling various and sundry living arrangements "marriages" are limited only by society's imagination. But there is a better way. When God's plan for marriage is embraced and implemented, it is vastly superior to any other plan that frail humanity may devise, which comes as no surprise to those who know the Scriptures: "It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps," (Jeremiah 10:23).

Although no marriage partner or marriage is perfect, the design of marriage *is* perfect and has a number of distinct attributes, all of which must be present in order to obtain the greatest blessings from this relationship:

- It is monogamous, per the Genesis texts cited above. There are but two individuals, a male and a female, involved in this union.
- Marriage is to be, as is commonly stated in many marriage vows, for "as long as you both shall live," (Romans 7:2). "For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," (Malachi 2:16). Jesus taught that only in the case of marital infidelity may the innocent partner divorce and remarry (Matthew 19:9).
- It has a hierarchical arrangement in which the husband is the "head" of the wife and the wife is to submit to her husband (1 Corinthians 11:3 and Ephesians 5:22). Far from being a dictatorship, however, this arrangement is intended to result in gentle leadership enhanced by love and kindness.
- Within marriage and marriage alone are couples authorized by God to enjoy sexual intimacy. "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge," (Hebrews 13:4). The white wedding

dress has symbolized the purity of the bride in some societies, which corresponds to the portrayal of the chaste bride wearing white in Revelation 19:7-8.

- The home is to be a refuge of mutual love and respect between the married couple and their children. “Admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children,” (Titus 2:4). Numerous studies have demonstrated the essentiality of a father and mother in the home to nurture children. Mothers and fathers bring very different, but complementary, strengths to raising the kinds of children who will become solid, productive members of society.
- The home, not the school or “village,” is where children should be taught the most profound and fundamental moral precepts. “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord,” (Ephesians 6:4). Children are to be taught to obey and honor their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3) among many other necessary life lessons.

Marriage is a Divine blessing; it can and should be used as it was intended to derive the maximum benefits from it for the married couple, their children, and society at large.

Jerry Wright

*Purcellville Church of Christ, 604 Yaxley Drive, Purcellville, VA 20132 [www.purcellvillecoc.org](http://www.purcellvillecoc.org).*

## Was It Worth It?

By John Gross

Any time the congregation spends effort and money on any project we have to stop and ask: "Is it worth it?" Whenever we have a project like Vacation Bible School there will be literally hours each teacher spends getting ready for their class. There is the time and money spent on advertising not to mention working to have the facilities looking good for those who visit. Add into that the extra cost of air conditioning during the hot weather and all the other costs associated with VBS we have to ask ourselves if our efforts were wisely spent.

How do you judge such a thing? Will our efforts be worth it if we have large numbers attend? Will it be worth it if we have a new family place membership? What will be the standard we use to determine if all of our time and money was worth what it cost? I found an old box of papers that has been pushed back and ignored for years. In that box I found a certificate where I attended VBS when I was eight years old. I have not been a member of that congregation since 1969. I wonder if the efforts of the congregation in Jerseyville, Illinois were worth it?

I remember sitting in an old wooden theater style seat with my feet dangling, far from the floor. Charlie Scoggans was preaching that day, and I could not have been more than five years old. I still remember thinking that when I grew up I wanted to be a preacher just like Charlie. Perhaps he wondered if his sermon was worth anything that day.

It was December 1965 when Burl Price shook my hand after the morning services and said: "Please come back to our young people's class tonight." He had to put up with an ornery kid, but he was patient, and he immersed me into Christ July 15, 1966. He spent time with me in Bible study and helped me start my library. Perhaps he too wondered if it was worth it.

I wonder if all the efforts of the congregation are worth the sweat, hard work, and money we put into it. Perhaps the best way to judge such things is with the inspired words of the Apostle Paul: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (I Corinthians 3:6 ESV).

We will not know the answer to our question until the day of judgment. We cannot know how our efforts have touched the mind of a child or adult. We can only do our part and depend on God to bless our efforts.

*- via the weekly bulletin of the Central Church of Christ in Paducah KY.*

## Let's Run Together!

Caleb Hambelton

The cross country teams at the high school in West Plains, Missouri, are known statewide for their excellent program. But in 2004, the school's success was exceptional. At the state cross country meet, the Lady Zizzers received a perfect score. A perfect score is earned when five runners on the same team get first through fifth places. Obviously, this big win depended on great talent and discipline.

But I remember hearing of another factor that contributed to the record score. In the middle of the race, four of the Lady Zizzers realized that one of their scoring teammates was falling behind. So, they turned around and went back to encourage her. Because of this selflessness, the straggler placed with the others for the winning finish.

As Christians we are also expected to help each other with our problems. Paul says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:1-2). Many of us struggle with things that others have already been through (1 Cor. 10:13). One of the greatest benefits of being a Christian is having brothers and sisters who can help you through various trials and temptations.

As in the story I heard about the Lady Zizzers, overcoming troubles depends on the help and encouragement of others. Our game plan must not be "Let me get through this!" but "Let's do this together!" Of course, our ultimate help comes from Christ. The author of Hebrews urges us to look "to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

### Scripture

*<sup>1</sup> Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. <sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup> For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup> But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup> For each will have to bear his own load.*

*<sup>6</sup> Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. <sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

Galatians 6:1-10

## The Gift of Tongues

David Wright

Paul told the Corinthians that “love never ends; as for prophecy, it will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away” (1 Cor. 13:8). What are “tongues”? The only narrative in the Bible describing tongues in detail was written by Luke: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. [...] And they were amazed and wondered, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?’” (Acts 2:4-8). The apostles spoke in tongues. The apostles spoke native languages that they had never studied or learned. The gift of tongues is the miraculous ability to speak in languages foreign to the speaker but known to the inhabitants of the region where the language is commonly used.

Based on Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians, charismatics define “tongues” in terms that contradict Luke’s plain narrative. But their misinterpretations arise from a failure to acknowledge the context in which the apostle’s instructions appear. For example, Paul said that “if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). Does this mean (as some claim) that tongue-speakers can preach in a heavenly language? No. This is hyperbole. In the very next verse Paul said that “if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (v. 2). Did gifted Christians in Corinth literally remove mountains? No. Did they literally speak in the tongues of angels? No. Hyperbole is an exaggeration used for emphasis. To speak “in the tongues of men and of angels” is to be highly gifted and eloquent.

Another misinterpreted text appears in 1 Corinthians 14. Paul said that “one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit” (v. 2). Supposedly, this means that a

person speaking in tongues is communicating in a language not known to humankind. Not so. At Corinth the brothers were interrupting each other, talking at the same time, and speaking languages unknown to the audience. If I delivered a Chinese sermon in China, the language would be known to my audience. But if I presented the same message in Jeffersonville, my audience would glean nothing from it. I would be speaking “not to men but to God.”

However tongues may be defined (as gibberish or native languages), the Bible says that this gift “will cease” (1 Cor. 13:8). Somehow, the gift of tongues is inferior: “For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away” (vs. 9-10). That is, the knowledge and prophecy of the infant church were incomplete.

In what sense was this true? Did the Holy Spirit fail to communicate truth essential to the salvation and growth of the infant church? This possibility is unthinkable. Jesus told the apostles that “when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). Surely, it was the method of communication that could be improved upon. One translation reads: “For we only know bit by bit, and we only prophesy bit by bit; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will be superseded” (1 Cor. 13:9-10, Moffatt). The Corinthians were conceited about their spiritual gifts. But the shortcomings of tongue-speaking as a mode of communication in the assembly were apparent (1 Cor. 14:26-40). Besides, what the church needed more than all else was love (“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [...] Make love your aim (1 Cor. 13:1, 14:1)).

Prophecy will pass away. Tongues will cease. Supernatural revelations will end. But when? The Bible says that “when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away” (1 Cor. 13:10). But what is “the perfect”?

## When the Perfect Comes

David Wright

Concerning spiritual gifts Paul says that prophecy will pass away, that tongues will cease, that supernatural revelations will end (1 Cor. 13:8). But when? The apostle explains that “when the perfect comes, the imperfect [spiritual gifts] will pass away” (v. 10). But what is “the perfect”?

The most common explanation is that “the perfect” in some way refers to the perfection of heaven. This theory allows for the continuance of spiritual gifts in modern times. But the last verse of 1 Corinthians 13 presents a serious problem for this view: “So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (v. 13). In this chapter Paul contrasts the temporary nature of spiritual gifts (v. 8) with the abiding nature of these three great Christian virtues. Now here’s the problem for charismatics: Faith and hope will not continue in heaven. As long as we are away from the Lord, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). But when we are at home with the Lord, we will surely walk by sight, not by faith. And hope? In hope “we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?” (Rom. 8:24). In heaven we will rejoice not in hope but in its fruition.

Thus, “the perfect” cannot in some way represent the perfection of heaven. The “bit by bit” revelations were soon coming to an end (1 Cor. 13:8-10, Moffatt Translation), but faith and hope were to continue as long as the earth would. “The perfect” comes to replace the partial while the church is still in this world, still experiencing the blessings of faith and hope.

What, then, is “the perfect”? “The perfect” (Greek *to teleion*) can mean “the complete thing.” For this reason some understand “the perfect” as a reference to the completion of the NT writings. Paul himself speaks of the coming fullness of knowledge: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood” (1 Cor. 13:12). The metal mirrors of Paul’s day reflected images poorly. Perhaps he is suggesting that the church will see the big picture more clearly at the completion of the sacred writings.

It’s certainly true that the author of Hebrews speaks of the age of spiritual gifts as if it were passing away. “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” he asks. “It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will” (Heb. 2:3-4). Here the Bible speaks of the revelation of the Gospel as occurring in at least two stages. First, Jesus preached it. Then eyewitnesses declared what they had seen and heard. The Holy Spirit confirmed their words by giving them miraculous gifts. Perhaps the past tense verbs in this chapter point to a third stage that was soon to come—the completion of the NT writings and the accompanying end of the age of spiritual gifts.

“The perfect,” therefore, may be the completion of the NT Scriptures. A weakness of this view is that spiritual gifts almost certainly did not end instantly at the completion of the Bible in AD 96 (the year Revelation was written on Patmos). However, nothing in 1 Corinthians 13 demands an abrupt end of spiritual gifts. The supernatural revelations could easily have ceased in a gradual manner.

Is there, then, a more convincing explanation of “the perfect”?



## **The End of an Era**

Thursday, May 25, marked the end of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) as a moral force in guiding boys into manhood.

### **On My Honor, I Will Do My Best**

Writing these words brings no joy. My background in scouting runs deep – serving in turn as a den leader, Cubmaster, assistant scoutmaster, troop chaplain, troop committee chair, national jamboree chaplain, and Venture crew advisor.

I have completed the comprehensive range of scout leader training and have received many recognitions and honors. I serve on the board of Members of Churches of Christ for Scouting and am a father of two Eagle Scouts.

### **To Be Morally Straight**

From its founding, the BSA has regarded homosexuality as inconsistent with scouting's commitment to morality – most recently reaffirming this prohibition in the summer of 2012.

Following months of pressure from liberal groups, the BSA executive committee in February 2013 intended to lift the ban on homosexuals, both as adult leaders and youth members. This intent leaked to the press, creating a firestorm and causing the national leadership to back down temporarily and to put forward a new proposal.

The compromise now embraced by a majority of the full voting membership forces all scouting units to accept homosexual youth into packs, troops and crews. The prohibition on homosexual leaders remains in place. This new openness to homosexual youth goes into effect Jan. 1, 2014. My exit from scouting will be Dec. 31.

My problem with this change is on two fronts. First, morally, accepting homosexuality as a permissible option and, further, forcing all scout groups to accept homosexuals without regard to the moral principles of the religious groups sponsoring most scouting units destroys the foundations of traditional decency.

Second, practically, permitting open homosexual youth to participate is corruptive to young men going through the challenging time of adolescence. The BSA placed in their new policy a cynical prohibition against sexual activity of any kind by youth. They imagine this fig leaf will cover the perversity of their pretense.

Imagine, in working with a mixed group of teenage boys and girls, if we were to set a policy prohibiting sexual activity but then permit these boys and girls to sleep in the same tents and to shower in the same bathhouses. The very idea is vulgar. Why is it, then, acceptable to insinuate open homosexuals into such proximity with other boys?

Young men in their teen years are sorting through how to address their sexual desires appropriately. They need guidance in understanding the morality of traditional relationships between men and women. They do not need the confusion brought on by open homosexuals engaging them romantically – or even sexually.

### **A Scout Is Trustworthy**

I am not leaving precipitously. In anticipation of scouting's abandonment of morality, I have been resigning my various responsibilities. Yet there are young men who are counting on me to help with their advancement throughout the next few months, and I will not let them down.

I know many devoted men and women of faith who are remaining in the scouting program, and I wish them well. Other than church and family, the friends I have made in scouting have been the best people I know.

I intend to continue to help individual scouts in any way I can, but from outside the program. I will be glad to help the young men with Eagle projects and to attend their courts of honor. We will continue to buy popcorn from the boys, even as we have continued to buy cookies from the girls.

But I will not serve as an advocate for a program I believe scouting sold its birthright for a bowl of liberal stew. I will always treasure the blessing scouting has been in the past and will always regret the travesty it has now become.

*The author, Gregory Alan Tidwell, is Editor of the Gospel Advocate  
"Reprinted with permission of the Gospel Advocate." July 2013*

## **When Maturity Comes**

David Wright

Concerning spiritual gifts Paul says that prophecy will pass away, that tongues will cease, that supernatural revelations will end (1 Cor. 13:8). But when? The apostle explains that "when the perfect comes, the imperfect [spiritual gifts] will pass away" (v. 10). But what is "the perfect"?

The Greek phrase translated "the perfect" (*to teleion*) can mean "the mature thing." This understanding of the term is supported by the immediate context in 1 Corinthians 13: "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways" (v. 11). In AD 55 (when 1 Cor. was written), the church was in its infancy. But in time the church would reach a more mature stage of development.

Does this mean that the church would be free of immature members? Of course not. But with some history under its belt and a complete written revelation of God's will in its hand, the church is in a better position to sustain lasting growth and resist the battering winds of false teaching. Didn't Paul say this very thing in Ephesians 4:7-16, a passage strikingly similar to 1 Corinthians 12:1-14:40?

Both of these passages written by Paul speak of the church as the body of Christ. Both mention the gifts equipping the early church for service. Both emphasize the need for building up the church. And both indicate that spiritual gifts were intended for a designated period: "And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers [...] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11, 13). But isn't Paul speaking of the church's perfect state in heaven? He can't be. The maturity Paul had in mind was to protect the church from corrupt people, "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles" (Eph. 4:14). Will the cunning of deceitful men threaten the church in heaven? No. The maturity Paul was thinking of, the maturity that would see the end of spiritual gifts, was to appear while the church was still on earth.

In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul doesn't specify what "the perfect" is. Probably, the Corinthians had heard him speak of it in person and thus knew a little bit more about the subject than the modern Bible reader does. However, comparing 1 Corinthians 13 with Ephesians 4 leads to the conclusion that spiritual gifts were given in the church's infancy and were to be withdrawn as the church matured in experience and knowledge. The completion of the NT writings at the end of the first century greatly facilitated this maturation.

### **Forsake Not The Assembly**

We see that the Christians in the first century "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them" (Acts 20:7). The Christians were steadfast and faithful in their worship of God together.

When we were baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of our sins in order to be saved "we were baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13), the church. It was then that "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Act 2:47). We then became a member of "the house of God which is the church of the living God" (1 Timothy 3:15). In being part of the house of God, the church, we are God's "children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). We then received "an inheritance...reserved in Heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4).

But we are warned that we can lose our inheritance in Heaven. "Let no one cheat you of your reward" (Colossians 2:18). One of the ways to lose our inheritance in Heaven is to disassociate ourselves from the house of God, which is the church, by forsaking the assembly. We are warned in Hebrews 10:25-27, "Not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries."

The command is not to forsake the assembly as some were doing then, and as some are doing today. Those who forsake the assembly are sinning willfully. If they will not repent but continue in their willful sin of forsaking the assembly, "there no longer remains a sacrifice" that will remove this sin. Even though one may be a good person, if one continues in the sin of forsaking the assembly or any other sin, he will face a certain fearful judgment and a real fiery Hell forever and ever.

Why is it sinful to forsake the assembly of the church for which the Lord shed His blood and died? The Bible says that by forsaking the assembly one "has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace" (Hebrews 10:29). By forsaking the assembly one is saying that he no longer cares to be a part of the church for which Christ shed His blood and died. What will happen to one who continues to forsake the assembly? God says "vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord...it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:30-31). By forsaking the assembly one throws away his inheritance in Heaven and will inherit the eternal torment of Hell.

By forsaking the assembly one is likened to, "a dog returns to his own vomit, and a sow, having been washed, to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:23). It is sickening to the Lord to see one, for whom He died, reject His salvation and go back into sin. Christ is only the saviour of the body, the church (Ephesians 5:23).

Going to Heaven should be our number one priority in this life. Jesus says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). After we are baptized, how do we continue to get forgiveness of sins we commit so we can go to Heaven? "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). To continue to be cleansed from all our sins as Christians we must walk in the light and have fellowship with one another. By forsaking the assembly we are not having fellowship with one another and will not continue to be cleansed of our sins. If we are not being cleansed of our sins, we will die in our sins and be lost (Romans 6:23). We must serve the Lord faithfully which includes our faithful attendance if we want to go to Heaven. Jesus promises us, "Be faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Ron Boatwright [http://www.netbiblestudy.net/bulletin/new\\_page\\_61.htm](http://www.netbiblestudy.net/bulletin/new_page_61.htm)

## A Good Example

Caleb Hambelton

In school coaches, teachers, and invited speakers sometimes talk about being an example. Their message could be summed up like this: “You need to be a good example.” The results are emphasized, but the how is rarely explained fully.

My understanding of “good example” was improved one day by a conversation with my father. Whenever we drove to the farm, we almost always discussed things. On this particular morning, I commented about something that scared me: “If I ever get married and am blessed with children, I might say or do something that would drive them away from God.” My father replied, “Your mother and I have tried to teach you and your siblings that it’s okay to follow us when we are right; but when we are wrong, you need to have the courage and understanding to follow Christ.”

Peter says that Jesus left us an example so that we could follow it (1 Pet. 2:21). Christ is our ultimate example, but we can also imitate others. If a Christian sees someone with godly qualities, imitation can help him come closer to the image of the Lord. Paul tells Timothy to “let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Timothy was an imperfect man, and yet he was to set a worthy example. We must do the same. Even of himself Paul says, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. [...] Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (Phil. 3:12, 17).

## Scripture

*<sup>2</sup>We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, <sup>3</sup>remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup>because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup>And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup>so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup>For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. <sup>9</sup>For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

1 Thess. 1:2-10

## An old farmer's advice

- Forgive your enemies. It messes up their heads.
- Do not corner something that you know is meaner than you.
- If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop diggin'.
- Life ain't about how fast you run, or how high you climb, but how well you bounce.
- If you get to thinkin' you're a person of some influence, try orderin' somebody else's dog around.
- Live simply. Love generously. Care deeply. Speak kindly. Leave the rest to God.

### **“Preparing for Eternity”**

Eternity! Men have attempted to capture the essence of eternity, but their attempts are weak at best, and completely inadequate. Here is how someone sought to describe eternity:

“If you can, imagine an ant marching around a steel globe the size of this planet. How long would it take that ant to wear a path one inch deep in that steel globe? How long would it take to wear a path one foot deep? Ten feet? The time it takes is only an inkling of eternity.”

But, friends, even that illustration measures activity related to time. In eternity, there is no time. How can we even begin to grasp the concept of eternity? If we could but capture its essence, it would be but for a fleeting moment, for we are quickly drawn back to the temporal—the here and now.

But will you, for just a moment, imagine yourself standing before the judgment bar of God, as you hear the sentence pronounced, “Depart, I never knew you.” Now will you try to imagine that you find yourself, like the rich man who refused to give unto Lazarus the things which that beggar lacked, opening your eyes in “torments.” And so begins the punishment that you must now endure forever, time without end. If your punishment were to be for a million years, you might be able to bear it, for after that first year you would know you have only 999,999 years to go. There would be a ray of hope that someday, though far, far removed, you would eventually be released from that torment.

But, my friend, in hell there is no hope; no release to be expected; no cessation of the punishment that you will receive for your disobedience to God. Oh, what despair! No longer will that television program have any importance. How you did in the stock market will be completely insignificant. The closing balance of your bank account will seem so little, regardless of the dollar figure the bottom line might show. Those things that we placed so much importance on in this life will seem so trivial, so completely unimportant.

When Sir William Russell was sentenced to die, someone recorded that along the way to the scaffold, he handed his watch to a friend and said, “Will you kindly take my timepiece and keep it? I have no use for it. I am now dealing with eternity.”

When the time comes for us to enter eternity, there are a lot of things we will no longer need. One second my heart beats its last beat, and I breathe my last breath, I will realize that much of what I valued in this life will pale in comparison to what I will value in the life to come. One drop of water was of great value to the rich man; but, alas, he could not obtain it. And while he fared sumptuously every day while living upon the earth, he was a pauper the other side of death.

Let us keep our priorities straight in this life; and when it comes time to depart the walks of this earth, may each one of us calmly and victoriously cast off those things that we cannot take with us, with the glorious expectation that we shall embrace that which is of lasting value when once we cross over the Jordan River into that eternal abode that awaits those who are faithful in this life.

*Tom Wacaster via [http://bulletingold.com/goldvol13\\_6.html](http://bulletingold.com/goldvol13_6.html)*

### **Remember This...**

Nothing else ruins the truth like stretching it.

If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.

A closed mouth gathers no foot.

When searching for faults and flaws the best place to start is with a mirror

A truth is a truth even if nobody believes it. A lie is a lie even if everybody believes it.

## **Have I Slandered the Spirit?**

David Wright

At some point in his or her Christian experience, a tenderhearted disciple (especially a person battling anxiety) is apt to worry about the Lord's denunciation of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Have I committed this grievous error? Am I guilty of an "eternal sin"?

One day Jesus healed a blind and mute man possessed by a demon. The people were delighted and astonished. "Can this be the Son of David?" they asked (Matt. 12:23). When the Pharisees overheard this honest question, they responded with a slanderous attack on the Lord's Messianic claim. They charged that Jesus was casting out demons "by Beelzebub, the prince of demons" (v. 24). To this vile insult, Jesus replied: "Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (vs. 31-32).

A proper interpretation of this stern warning depends on an acknowledgment of the following observations. First, slandering the Spirit meant attributing the work of God to Satan. Nothing else was intended--period. After relating the Lord's blasphemy comment, Mark explained: "For they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit'" (3:30). Second, Jesus was not singling out the third Person of the Trinity for special reverence. The Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) was understood at that time by neither the Pharisees nor Christ's own disciples. Speaking a word against the Son of man—because of his humble birth or native city—was one thing. Reviling the miraculous work of God was quite another. Third, anyone who slandered God had a stubborn and rebellious heart. "You stiff-necked people," Stephen said, "uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51).

If I'm worried about having slandered the Holy Spirit, my tender conscience is itself proof that I have never been guilty of this sin.

Mark 3:22-30 <sup>22</sup>And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." <sup>23</sup>And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup>If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup>And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup>And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. <sup>27</sup>But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. <sup>28</sup>"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, <sup>29</sup>but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— <sup>30</sup>for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

## **In For the Duration**

The Apostle Paul wrote, "I have fought the good fight." He had, with the Holy Spirit's help, fought against Satan and had come out the victor.

"I have finished the course." He did not detour the hard places, but kept his eyes on the Savior.

"I have kept the faith." He always preached and taught "the whole counsel of God." He never compromised the Holy Word! Can we say the same?

## Why Do People Sin?

We are free moral agents. God could have made us as robots, but He didn't. We have a choice in the matter. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). There are several reasons why people sin.

People sin because, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Romans 3:18). They have no respect for God, our Creator. But the "whole duty of man" is to "fear God and keep His commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Before we can keep God's commandments we must know what they are. But God says, "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). We must study God's word because, "Your word, I have hidden in my heart that I might not sin against You" (Psalms 119:11). We must develop an awesome respect for God and His word so we will not sin against Him.

People sin because we are deceived by sin. We are to, "Exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). We can even deceive ourselves by denying we have sinned. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Because of the deceitfulness of sin, we are to, "Beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked" (2 Peter 3:17). We are warned, "Let no man deceive you with vain words" (Ephesians 5:6). Yes, sin is deceiving.

People sin because there is temporary pleasure in sin. Moses chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). Because of the pleasures of sin, we are tempted and enticed. "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin, and sin when it is finished, brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

People sin because, "The soul of the wicked desires evil" (Proverbs 21:10). Jesus asks, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?" (Matthew 9:4). People sin because they "love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking righteousness" (Psalms 52:3). And because of this they "call evil good and good evil" (Isaiah 5:20).

People sin because they are deceived by false doctrine. "If anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9). If one wanders away into the sin of denominationalism, he will be lost. "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God" (1 John 9). We must be faithful to God and His word.

People sin because of the influence of the people with whom they associate. "Do not be deceived: evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33). We must carefully choose our associates. To protect ourselves from sin we must, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

We also sin when we don't do what we should do. "Therefore, to him that knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17). One of the things some people fail to do is they fail to assemble for worship. But we are not to "forsake the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some...for if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin" (Hebrews 10:25-26). If we continue willfully in our sin and don't repent, we will die in our sins and be lost (John 8:24). Let us not be deceived by sin, because the wages of sin is spiritual death in Hell forever (Romans 6:23).

Ron Boatwright

## Letter of Recommendation

David Wright

Tom Reynolds started an auto parts manufacturing company in Detroit. Five years later the business employed more than 300 people. But one day Tom's own human resources department sent him the following email: "Mr. Reynolds, according to our records you have never submitted letters of recommendation, something required of everyone in the company. Please verify that you are qualified to serve in your current position as President and CEO of Reynolds, Inc."

In the real business world, of course, no HR department would dare to offer such a preposterous insult. But my fictitious story illustrates exactly how the Corinthians treated Paul. The church in Corinth was big (Acts 18:10), and he was the missionary who "planted" it (1 Cor. 3:6). Paul not only established the Corinthian church but also gave proof of his apostleship by performing mighty miracles in the city (2 Cor. 12:12). After Paul left Corinth, though, his critics began to question his authority and ability. They said that other preachers had letters of recommendation. Where were Paul's letters? To this affront he replied: "Do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? You yourselves are our letter of recommendation" (3:1-2).

Perhaps all of us are occasionally guilty of the very thing that offended Paul. God has stamped evidence of himself all over creation—in the spider's web, in the bird's nest, in the grace of a fleeing deer. And yet at times we question whether he even exists. "Lord, could you reveal yourself in just one more way? Could you send a letter of recommendation?" God has showered his love on us in a myriad of ways—in the smell of flowers, the laughter of little children, the taste of good food, the beauty of sunsets, the joy of friendship, the love of family, the atoning death of Jesus. But one thing in our life goes wrong, and we wonder whether God even cares about us. "Lord, there's something missing from your file."

### Scripture

*<sup>1</sup>Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you, or from you? <sup>2</sup>You yourselves are our letter of recommendation, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all. <sup>3</sup>And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

*<sup>4</sup>Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, <sup>6</sup>who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.*  
2 Cor. 3:1-6