

# February 2016

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(unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp)



- Questions from Liberia
- Be Careful As You Travel (Angel Brown)
- Helpers (Jefferson David Tant)
- Created ... for Good Works (Pat Farish)
- Is Islam compatible with Christianity? Pt. 2 (Tommy Thornhill)
- Sin - It's Consequences (Jim Mickells)
- How to Get Godly Children (Chuck Richardson)
- Carnivals and Church (Mike Thomas)
- The Heavenly Places (Sean P. Cavender)
- Some Thoughts on Abortion (William J. Stewart)
- Is Mark 16:9-20 Scripture? (Keith Sharp)
- Be Converted (Keith Sharp)

Finally, brethren

**WHATEVER  
THINGS**

are true

are noble

are just

are pure

are lovely

are of good report

IF THERE IS ANY VIRTURE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –  
**meditate on these things.**

PHILIPPIANS  
4:8

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at [christistheway.com](http://christistheway.com).

## Questions from Liberia

### Question:

I bless for the article on christian dress which prompted me to write you people. I got the article from this website [www.christistheway.com](http://www.christistheway.com). Not many churches are teaching holiness in our dress and appearance. For this reason I want to know about your church. I am from Liberia West Africa and I run a young holiness organization (non-denominational) that preacher inward and outward holiness. I will like to be contact with your church for the advancement of the kingdom. I have few questions to ask. Are you post-tribulation or pre-tribulation? what is your view on baptism of Holy Ghost? is holiness possible in this life? should christian use wedding rings? for time sake you can give a summary since the questions are many. Hope to hear from you soon.

### Answer

Thanks for writing. I appreciate your questions and will do my best to answer them from the Scriptures.

I certainly believe Christians must and may live holy lives. "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness,

without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). "But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15-16). "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame" (1 Corinthians 15:34). But the simple fact is we all have sin (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8,10; James 3:2) and must depend upon the blood sacrifice of Christ for our salvation (Romans 3:21-26). Even Christ was tempted to sin in all the ways common to man (Hebrews 4:15), and we all continue to be tempted to sin (James 1:14-15).

The "great tribulation" is mentioned three times in the New Testament (Matthew 24:21; Revelation 2:22; 7:14). The "great tribulation" Christ prophesied took place in the generation to which He spoke (Matthew 24:34), and the "great tribulation" John prophesied took place soon after John wrote Revelation (Revelation 1:1, 3; 3:11; 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20).

Baptism with the Holy Spirit was only promised to the apostles of Christ (Acts 1:1-5). Cornelius and his household were also baptized with the Holy Spirit as proof God accepts Gentiles on the same basis as Jews, by obedient faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 11:15-16; 15:7-9). There is only one baptism in effect today (Ephesians 4:5), and it is water baptism (Acts 10:47-48).

The use of wedding rings is a custom the Scriptures do not address. We may follow the innocent customs of the society where we are (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

By the way, the only organization the Lord has authorized to do the work of the church is the independent, local church (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Cordially,  
Keith Sharp

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## Be Careful As You Travel

Angel Brown | Barbados

*"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17)*

It's been raining a lot in Barbados making my frequent travel on the road one of caution. The road conditions have worsened making travel difficult and in some areas there are breakaways.

Peter reminds us (Christians) we are on a spiritual journey. He urges the believers as we sojourn we should do so in awesome respect of God. The usage of the word "sojourning" highlights we are just temporarily residing here in this world and there is a journey we are taking for a permanent residence.

Peter further emphasized the point "we are just pilgrims passing through" (1 Peter 2:11). It is our Almighty Father who has created us and has placed us on a spiritual journey with a road map to heaven. As one song writer puts it "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through."

The faithful Christian's spiritual home and final residency is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).

However, as we travel we must be careful to observe the path we take and the conditions of the path if we are to make it to heaven.

The Devil is raining down fiery darts at the faithful believers, making the journey more challenging. These darts affects our visibility, hampering the amount of light we normally see. We begin to see the gloom and darkness of this troubled world and not the light and hope of God. This is why it is important for us as Christians to be properly equipped and ready for the road conditions that maybe ahead of us (Ephesian

6:16).

## Questions to Ask Ourselves as We Are Making the Journey

### Is the path we're on Broad?

*"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to" (Luke 13:24).*

The Broad Path requires no denying of self, commitment or faith in contrast to the narrow path, which Christians are called to take (Luke 9:23). It's easy and is concerned only about satisfying what self thinks is right.

We must remember we are guided by a higher authority and it's His way that will lead to life everlasting (John 14:6). Traveling the broad path is life in the fast lane! Pushing yourself to the edge in the pursuit of financial gain to the neglect of God. It can be considered the risky life, having no boundaries, pleasure-seeking and self gratification.

### Is the path busy with traffic?

*"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matthew 7:13).*

The narrow way will require some bending, shifting and not many are willing to make this sacrifice. So the traffic on the broad path to destruction will be filled with many. Be careful of the lifestyle of those who want to drink up, party and satisfy the desires of the flesh. The common mantra today of the world is 'We have one life to live let's live it anyway we feel.' Be careful of following the crowd as it chases after physical gratification, greed, and extravagant lifestyles (1 John 2:16)

### Is the path paved with only Good Intentions?

*"If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them" (James 4:17).*

Are you finding yourself with desires to do the right thing, promises of one day I will? Wishful thinking alone will not get us to heaven but the actual decisions we make day to day. While God desires within us a heart of Good Intent, our Good Intentions should be based on what God wants for our lives. Jesus said our real love for him is manifested in our willingness to obey his instructions John 14:15.

### Do I need to stop?

*"This is what the LORD says: Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask which paths are the old, reliable paths. Ask which way leads to blessings. Live that way, and find a resting place for yourselves" (Jeremiah 6:16)*

We may have been traveling down a path for very long but it is never too late to stop and make a U-Turn if needed. Let us pause today and check our spiritual compass and see if we are on the right path.

Do our actions and attitudes demonstrate we are traveling in the direction God wants us? Have we skidded off path in the midst of raining darts? Are we choosing to let fear or pleasure-seeking allow us to stay with the crowd and not with the minority for Jesus? The Lord wants us all to come to repentance and choose the correct path to heaven. (2 Peter 3:9, 2 Corinthians 7:10)

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## Helpers

Jefferson David Tant | Roswell, Georgia, USA

"And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:28).

Perhaps you have noticed that people are different—different in personalities, appearance, talents. Evidently God designed us that way, and Paul acknowledged this when he wrote the Corinthians. While some attract more attention, Paul does not set any above others. Obviously, the apostles and prophets have a more prominent role, but in another sense, they are all the same before God, “for there is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2:11) .

Yes, some are worthy of respect for their service, as Paul requested “that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work...” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

Yes, some stand in the pulpit, teach the class or lead singing, but there are others. But in the end, all are simply “fellow workers.”

*“What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).*

Paul and Apollos were just servants.

“The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains” (2 Timothy 1:16). We are not told what Onesiphorus did. Perhaps he just encouraged imprisoned Paul. In Romans 16:3-16, Paul names over 20 individuals, plus others, who in some way rendered service.

*“Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers..., who for my life risked their own necks, Epænetus, Mary, who has worked hard for you. Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and...fellow prisoners,... Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and Stachys my beloved. ...Apelles, the approved in Christ. Those...of the household of Aristobulus. Greet Herodion, my kinsman...those of the household of Narcissus... Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord...Persis...,who has worked hard in the Lord...Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.”*

This shortened version does not mention what they did, whether great or small, but they helped.

When Flora and I were newlyweds and working with a small church in Pushmataha County, Oklahoma among the Choctaw Indians, we had an elderly couple in the church, Pappy and Mammy Osborne. There was not a lot they could do, but Mammy insisted on inviting people for Sunday dinner. Pappy took it upon himself to greet every visitor, and replace all the songbooks in the racks after the service.

There was Dorcas, who helped the widows. Timothy and Erastus ministered unto Paul. Four men carried a paralyzed man to be healed by Christ. Phoebe was commended as a servant of the church. Rhoda was a servant-girl who first greeted Peter when he escaped prison. Paul mentioned various ones who spent time in prayer. There were the men who held the rope so Paul could escape those seeking to kill him.

So what’s the point of all this? You don’t have to be an elder, deacon, preacher, song leader, or “what-have-you,” to render service in the kingdom. In the midst of those listed in this article’s first sentence, “helps” is included among apostle, miracle workers, etc.

Maybe you prepare the communion, greet visitors, pick up trash, replace song books, give hugs, repair plumbing, teach the infants’ class, commend the one who taught, trim the bushes, or invite a neighbor. Perhaps you are limited in what you can do, but your very presence is an encouragement, for we are told in Hebrews 10:24-25a: “and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...”

We sing

*“There is room in the kingdom of God, my brother, For the small things that you can do: Just a small kindly deed that may cheer another is the work God has planned for you...Just a cup of cold water in His name given may the hope in some heart renew...There is work that we all can do.”*

We all belong to the “Honorable Order of Helpers.”

*“For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” (Romans 12:3).*

Great talents also require great humility.

Remember Paul’s words to Titus: “Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful.” (1:14) For what “help” will you be remembered at the Judgment Day?

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## Created ... for Good Works

Pat Farish | Lancaster, Texas, USA

The Ephesians’ conversion is described in Ephesians 2:8-9 (and lay alongside that the history recorded in Acts 19:1-5). In Ephesians 2:10 the apostle unfolds the next step of faith, with the words “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” It is thus God’s intention that the Christian be active in doing good: he was “created ... for good works.”

“Good works” are described in Ephesians 2:10 as “prepared beforehand by God.” The same note is sounded in Second Timothy 3:16-17 when Paul describes the inspired Scripture as making the man of God “complete, equipped for every good work.” Christians are to “bear fruit in every good work” (Colossians 1:10), even to “abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). Christians, the people of God, are “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).

“Good works” are seen in the lives of Christian women as their adornment (1 Timothy 2:9-10). The godly know that Jesus spoke of “treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal” (Matthew 6:19). Knowing this, they seek to be “rich in good works”, thus “storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future” (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

### Motivation for Good Works

Jesus said, do not practice “your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from our Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 6:1). He also said, do not do benevolence to be seen of me (6:2-3); nor pray, to “be seen by others” (6:5); nor fast so that their fasting may be seen by others (6:16-17). The scribes and Pharisees who behave in this way are motivated by the description in Matthew 23:2-5, especially verse 5, “They do all their deeds to be seen by others.” And also, “they have received their reward” (Matthew 6:2, 5, 16).

The difference between Jesus’ prohibitions in Matthew 6, and His direction in Matthew 5:16, “In the same way let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” is not hard to see: in Matthew 6 he is working to be seen of men; in Matthew 5 he is working for the glory of God.

### Some Examples of Good Works

In general, by good works your light shines, and God is glorified, Matthew 5:16. Thus we are to be “ready for every good work” (Titus 3:1). It is humbling to think that by our frail efforts we can cause God to be glorified!

It is a good work to provoke others to good works; so the writer in Hebrews (10:24-25) says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." This is one of the advantages of assembling with the saints on every occasion, you will encourage them; and they will encourage you.

It is obvious that it is a good work to restore a brother or sister who has drifted from the way of the Word (Hebrews 2:1). So James says, "My brother, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (5:19-20). In Galatians 6:1 Paul writes "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." There seems to be a strange sort of casualness among the "spiritual" regarding the condition of some wandering, caught in transgression. As fellow members of the body we should be as sensitive to the needs of other members as we perhaps expect them to be of our own needs.

Colossians 1:10 calls on us to be "bearing fruit in every good work"; Titus 3:14, "and let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful." We have all kinds of opportunities for good works, in the most humdrum sort of circumstance. We might, in a case of some family crisis ("urgent need"), mow our neighbor's lawn; or wash his car; polish his/her shoes; clean the house; do the laundry; prepare meals; care for children; wash dishes – can you add to the list?

Good works are opportunities, they do not demand a great deal from us, just desire to help the neighbor, and glorify God.

And who is my neighbor? Luke 10:25-37.

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## **Is Islam Compatible With Christianity? No. 2**

Tommy G. Thornhill | Etna, Arkansas, USA

While Islam is not very prevalent in this area at this time it is a movement that is affecting other areas of America, and it will eventually have an effect here. There is an old saying "to be forewarned is to be forearmed," which holds true only if people heed the warnings. That is why I am writing on the subject at this time.

Islam must not be ignored. We cannot underestimate its growing power. Even though Muslims are still in the minority in America they are rapidly becoming more and more influential in the everyday lives of Americans. As a result of their ever increasing power and influence there is a definite need for some basic teaching of the danger Islam poses to America's freedom and democracy. But even more importantly to Christianity itself.

In order to show why we oppose Islam we need to understand what their system is all about. It is a religious system designed to control every aspect of a Muslim's life, legally, politically, economically, militarily, socially as well as religiously. In every country governed by Islam, the government is either dictatorial or autocratic, and to a great extent (if not completely) its people are governed by Sharia Law. The Islamic religious leaders (Imams and Mullahs) exercise great power over the people. Muslim children are taught only from the Koran (Arabic- Qur'an). There is little, if any, religious freedom. Non-Muslim schools and churches, when allowed to exist at all, are closely watched, and only non-muslims can attend. Any Muslim caught associating with non-believers (infidels) is considered guilty of a crime punishable by death and may be killed. We have seen recent examples of this happening even here in America.

If you think the previous paragraph is an exaggeration, let me insert this quote from a radical Muslim leader, showing Islam's intolerance of any who do not adhere to their way of life.

*"Before I was nine I had learned the basic canon of Arab life. It was me against my brother; me and my brother against our father; my family against my cousins and the clan; the clan against the tribe; the tribe against the world, and all of us against the infidel (non-Muslims – t.t.)."*

– Leon Uris, 'The Haj'.

(This is from Peter Hammond's book, **Slavery, Terrorism and Islam, The Historical Roots and Contemporary Threat**. This is from a secondary source so I do not have the book at hand - T.T.)

Why does Islam pose such a danger? The religion of Islam leaves no room for criticism. In countries where the Qur'an and Islam rule, any criticism of Islam is considered blasphemy and carries the death penalty. Muslims say they want to be accepted into American society, but when one learns the true objectives it can readily be seen to be very dangerous to both our form of government and Christianity.

One learns the truth of Islam from The Koran (Qur'an), the book they revere as their guide book. The Koran teaches that a Muslim can lie to a "non-believer" if they think it helps Islam. It also teaches that any contract a Muslim makes with a "non-believer" does not have to be honored. It further teaches that it is the duty of all Muslims to attempt to convert non-believers. After 3 attempts to convert them, if they won't convert, it is the duty of all good Muslims to kill the nonbeliever. There have been instances where more moderate Muslims have tried to change these teaching of the Koran, but instead of being listened to, they were beheaded for their efforts.

Islam wants to become the universal religion. Its avowed aim is to convert all mankind to the worship of their god, Allah, as pictured in the Qur'an. They will do it peacefully by persuasion if possible, but if not, they are more than willing to use force to obtain their goal of universal domination.

Islam wants a universal Islamic state. Their avowed objective is to replace all forms of government that do not have the Qur'an as their primary constitution. Their aim is to dominate the entire planet. They will do this through peaceful means or through conflict. Past history, as well as the Qur'an reveals this. The present ferment and turmoil we see daily coming from the Mideast is a harbinger of their aim to rule the world. "Islam was born in bloodshed, nurtured on violence and matured in conquest. It thrives when militarily challenged" (Ney Reiber, "A Resource..." 1).

The adherents of Islam believe that when world domination happens, they will have established a "Caliphate." Then the prophet Mohamed will return and there will be 1000 years of peace. Doesn't this sound a lot like the false premillennial doctrine of some false teachers who teach that Christ will return and set up an earthly kingdom? His throne will be established in Jerusalem where He will sit and reign on this earth for 1000 years.

Islam wants to govern all affairs in one's day to day life by imposing their Sharia law on all people, politically and religiously. They want a society based upon Islamic morals since they view their culture as the perfect society.

In opposition, Christianity seeks to convert and govern people out of love, not force. Christians teach people the precepts and commandments of Jehovah through the Bible. The choice is then left for man to obey or disobey out of conviction, not force. (continued next issue when we begin to study Islam's false doctrines).

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## **Sin - Its Consequences**

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

The word of God has much to say about sin. It is a universal problem which all who are accountable to God must deal with (Romans 3:9-10, 23). The Bible defines sin for us (Romans 14:23; James 4:17; 1 John 3:4 & 5:17, etc.). It also gives us several lists of sins to help us identify and avoid violating the commands

of our Father (Galatians 5:19-21; Colossians 3:5-9). We are also instructed how sin affects our relationship with the Lord (Isaiah 59:1-2) and what will happen to those who continue to practice such (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21). Instruction is also furnished by Jehovah in helping us to avoid committing such acts (Psalm 119:11; Ephesians 6:11; James 4:7). The great news for all is that Jesus suffered and died to free us from the bondage of our sins (Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2).

The Lord will forgive us of our transgressions when we meet His terms of pardon. To the one who has never contacted the blood of Jesus, an alien sinner, they are to be taught the word of God (John 6:44-45), they must have faith in Jesus as Lord (John 8:24), repent of their sins (Luke 13:3, 5), confess Him with the mouth (Romans 10:9-10) and be buried in the waters of baptism for remission of sins (Acts 2:38). As Christians, who are now raised from this watery grave, they are to walk in newness of life, having crucified the old man of sin, and are now new creatures in Christ (Romans 6:4-7). This does not eliminate the temptation to commit sin, even though we are now children of God (1 John 2:1-2). The Father has also made provision for erring Christians to be forgiven of any evil they are guilty of as well. They are told to repent, confess their sin, and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7-10), thus receiving the benefits of the blood of Christ.

Yet there is an aspect of sin, it seems to me, that many either don't see or maybe they don't want to see it until it is too late. Sin has consequences that God does not always remove. Let me illustrate with the life of King David. He had committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed her husband Uriah the Hittite, as we read in 2 Samuel eleven. In chapter twelve, Nathan the prophet is sent to the king, who makes David aware that God knows of the great sin of which he was guilty. He acknowledges to the prophet that he had sinned against the Lord (12:13). Though Jehovah forgave his iniquity the consequences remained. The child that Bathsheba gave birth to died (12:14-18), and the prophet also told the king the sword would never depart from his house (12:10).

Notice the words of the wise man, "Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on hot coals, And his feet not be seared?" (Proverbs 6:27-28). Sin is not something for one to play with. It can leave scars which will never be healed. The Psalmist said, "For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me" (Ps. 51:3). The heading in my Bible for this Psalm says, "A Psalm of David when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." The high cost of sin!

May the Lord help us to think soberly and seriously before violating any of His laws! The consequences of even one sin can be devastating. What about the man or woman who has a one night stand with someone, their spouse puts them away and they have to spend the rest of their lives apart from their family? The individual who takes one drink, which leads to another, and then he becomes an alcoholic? I have heard that one out of every fifteen who takes the first drink becomes an alcoholic. Even if the statistics are much higher than this, is the risk worth it? This is especially true when we look about us and see the havoc that alcoholism causes in the lives of so many. God will forgive but will He restore the health of one who is dying with cirrhosis of the liver because of his drinking? I think you know the answer to this question.

Sin brings pleasure (Hebrews 11:25), yet it also has consequences. The dangers of any transgression of God's law are real. Let us never be guilty of taking it into our bosom lest we be burnt by it.

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## **How To Get Godly Children**

Chuck Richardson | Corinth, Mississippi, USA

*(Chuck and Jeannie Richardson are the parents of seven godly children - K.S.)*

Godly children, even among Christians are scarce these days. Parents often don't understand why their children are not faithful; after all, they "took them to church regularly!" For many it may very well be said that they took them every time the doors were opened. Is this enough? Living as an example is very



important, but is it enough? Maybe you read from the Bible regularly and attend services regularly. This is good, but I am certain it is not enough. To cultivate godly children, we must be diligent in so much more than just our example. Some parents are satisfied with their example as a teacher, after all, we are free moral creatures. "Behold, all souls are Mine; The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4). Parents solace themselves, knowing that even great men of the Bible had ungodly children. How many sons of Israel were godly? (Genesis 37) Is this the way we are to approach the thought of ungodly children? Are we to be satisfied with the status quo? The Bible teaches much about the principles of godly child rearing, and we need to listen.

The application of the instruction requires diligence and perseverance in prayer and study. There are combinations of things we must practice consistently to get godly children. Will some depart anyway? Yes. Does that change or stop your work as a parent? Since the answer is obvious, we need to find our work from God and get busy.

**Love your children** But Jesus said, Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). When you consider Jesus' declaration of the souls who will reside in heaven, it should impress on us the gravity of our responsibility to love our children. As a general rule, most do not hate their children in the commonly applied way, but social and spiritual neglect is no less hatred. Too many parents give nurturing attention to their jobs, hobbies, and other such things to the neglect of their children. **What we give our devotion to is what we love, and what we love, we give our attention to.**

My friend, this is the true measure of our love for our children. How much time do you spend with your children in any capacity? Providing for their physical needs is not sufficient provision for their development. The Holy Spirit says love never fails (ceases) (1 Corinthians 13:8). Love can have tremendous results for the giver and receiver, but it must be the love from God. "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three: but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love that is eternal in nature is needed so desperately if we are to have godly children (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). I am certain none would say they want the worst socially and spiritually for their children, but I am afraid too many believe their children will turn out alright if they, themselves, are generally good persons. They may develop good moral character and grow spiritually despite our attention; but this is not the rule, it is the exception. Still, more parents will not pursue the path of devotion to God, and leave their children bankrupt spiritually. These children will typically neglect their children in the same way they were neglected. We generally practice what we are taught. Those who love their children despite their own parents neglect, again are the rarity, and are the example of the capacity of man to learn (Psalm 94:12). Love goes beyond natural affection and general welfare if it is the love that produces children of God (Hebrews 12:5-6).

Still, more parents will not pursue the path of devotion to God, and leave their children bankrupt spiritually. These children will typically neglect their children in the same way they were neglected. We practice what we are taught. Those who love their children despite their own parents neglect, again are the rarity, and are the example of the capacity of man to learn (Psalm 94:12). Love goes beyond natural affection and general welfare if it is the love that produces children of God.(Hebrews 12:6)

**Teach your children** "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). Crucial to the spiritual strength of our children is our personal instruction. Mothers, if your husband is not a Christian, this work falls on you. In many ways your work may be more difficult in this area, but God will bless your efforts if you stay true to the course. Enlist the help of Christian men in studies with your children when possible, and remember you will be held accountable for teaching and admonishing your children. Why is this the most neglected part of parenting? I submit to you that it is because of the necessary effort. This requires time, personal study, and patience, but too many parents are not willing to commit to the work. Selfishness is the root cause of such a n attitude. (My time is more precious to me than my children's growth. And so are my works and hobbies.) Parents, and fathers in particular, must become selfless to be blessed with godly children.

The Holy Spirit calls this **your reasonable service** (Romans 12:1). You may not know where to begin your work or feel inadequate for the task. My exhortation is to begin with Bible lessons for Bible class and daily reading. At some point, incorporate memorization of Scriptures and you will become more comfortable with discussion of Bible topics. Your children hunger for attention and will seek the opportunity to interact with you; it will not be difficult to teach your children the lessons of God. For those with adult children, pursue time for study with your children and God will bless you. Start today!

Do not wait for a more convenient time; it will never come.

*“And these words which I commanded you today shall be in your hear. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).*

**Discipline your children** “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Proverbs 13:24). Two generations of parents have spared the rod and our society is reaping the whirlwind for their negligence. The Bible is replete with examples of the admonishment and benefits of discipline (Proverbs 10:1; 12:1; 13:1; Ephesians 6:1-4, Colossians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 2:11-12; 1 Timothy 3:4,12; Titus 1:6). Parents, and fathers in particular, we must discipline our children promptly and consistently if we want godly children. It is sad when you think of the number of wicked and abused children in and out of the home. This tragedy can be avoided if we listen to God. Contrary to popular opinion, a parent must spank their children from time to time. Discipline administered to our children emulates God’s discipline of His children (Exodus 20:1-6; Hebrews 12:5-11). Do you want godly children? Discipline! Spank!

**Encourage good works** “**But be doers of the word**, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). If God expects work from his children, what do you think He wants parents to expect? Our children will learn valuable life lessons by the work they perform. What works do you suppose fall under the heading of good works? Train and encourage your children to work in the home for the family, to perform works for the elderly and indigent, and look for opportunities to teach God’s word to others. Live as an example in all these ways and direct your children in the same, and you will get godly children (Colossians 1:10).

#### **Assemble with the saints**

*“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of the ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:23-24).*

Parents if you want godly children, attend the services of the saints. Our children know if we are sincere in our worship to God and they will know if our absence is acceptable before God. Attend and bring your children and show them **worship that is in Spirit and Truth!** (John 4:24)

**Regulate their friendships** “Do not be deceived: **Evil company corrupts good habits.**” (1 Corinthians 15:33) If this principle is true for the child of God, how is it any less true for our children? I am afraid in this area, parents are naïve. Parents, do you believe that because your child’s friend is not an adult, they’re without ungodly knowledge? Just as your child is a product of your teaching (purposeful or not), their friends are the same of their parents or guardian. Parents, for this reason, you need to know what your children’s companions’ parents practice on a host of issues of life. Whom they associate with will have a determined affect on your work to teach and admonish them in the Lord. After all, you need to decide where, with whom, and how much time they spend outside the family. Parents, direct and encourage wholesome and moral friends for your children, and you will have godly children.

*“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”*

*“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of the warrior, so are the children of one’s youth” (Psalm 127:1a, 3-4).*

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# Carnivals at Church

Mike Thomas | Beaver Dam, Kentucky, USA

If Jesus returned to earth today would He be surprised to see what is considered Christianity? Would His apostles be shocked at how churches are more like carnivals and concerts than the churches they established? Honestly, would Jesus even be welcomed in churches that claim to serve Him?

The apostle Paul would have something to say about the social gimmicks used to get to people to services and the “bait and switch” approach to evangelism. I say that because he did not lure people to Christ with things that appealed to their carnal senses, then sneak in the gospel at the end. He said, “For our exhortation did not come from error or uncleanness, nor was it in deceit...For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness” (1 Thessalonians 2:3-5). I know people mean well in offering free food and games to get people to church, but they are doing exactly what Paul condemned. He preached the truth in love and let it be the drawing power to Christ – “that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:5). Hosting a carnival never even crossed his mind. And the one time a church in the New Testament tried to incorporate social activities as part of their purpose, he told them: “What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?” (1 Corinthians 11:22, 34). The work of the church is “not food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Romans 14:17).

The gospel is too important and sin is too serious to make the Lord’s church a place where people are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4). If the message of the cross and New Testament preaching are not enough to win people to the Lord, they won’t be won with food and entertainment either (John 6:26-27).

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# The Heavenly Places

Sean P. Cavender | Raymore, Missouri, USA

The epistle to the Ephesians is a wonderful and encouraging epistle that explains our fellowship with God through His Son (Ephesians 1:3-5), the salvation we enjoy (Ephesians 2:8, 9), the enlightenment we have through the gospel of our faith (Ephesians 1:9, 13, 18), and the riches of God’s mercy (Ephesians 1:7). The epistle also explains to us how we should live in accordance to the grace of God and how to maintain unity in the church, the bride of Christ. One of the most interesting and unique phrases in Scripture is also found in the book of Ephesians.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,”* (Ephesians 1:3)

By observing how this phrase is used in the epistle, we will be able to learn and appreciate the blessings we have obtained through Christ, the leadership and victory of our Savior, and our spiritual warfare.

In Ephesians 4 the apostle Paul describes the unity of the church and the necessity we have in preserving that unity that has come as a being a part of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1-6). Then the apostle quotes the 68th psalm, “When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men” (Ephesians 4:8; Psalm 68:18). This verse refers to the victory of God and how a victor of warfare will take of the spoils of his enemy. In context of the book of Ephesians which shows the blessings and riches we have through our Lord Jesus Christ, we may wonder where did these blessings come from? Why have we received such blessings? Are we worthy, or entitled, to this kind of benevolent treatment? No; it is by the measure of God’s grace that we receive these good blessings (Ephesians 2:4).

In the context of Ephesians and in Psalm 68, we see God and Christ as victorious warriors. Christ is the victor and He has taken of the spoils of the spiritual warfare that He is engaged in, and He has given those spoils to His church for its own benefit. He has given us the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and

teachers who equip the saints for edification (Ephesians 4:11-13). The Lord has conquered the evil one, the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2).

The Lord proved His might against the devil by defeating Satan when sinners were busy serving the devil, fulfilling the lusts and desires of the flesh (Ephesians 2:3). “Even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...” (Ephesians 2:5). The divine plan of the ages was consummated, the devil was defeated, and Christ was victorious.

This victory did not result in a cruel dictatorship, but in a loving, caring, sacrificing, and benevolent king. Jesus is the head of the church “in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:20-23). We can read of the extent of Christ’s love over His church in Ephesians 5:25-30. Those who were once dead in sin are now made alive to Christ, and have been “raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). Just as the Lord was victorious over the devil, we have been made victorious over sin, death, and the devil. We enjoy a fruitful fellowship with Christ our Lord and King.

As the children of God, we now enjoy fellowship with Christ “in the heavenly places” by being a member of His body, the church (Ephesians 5:30). How is the love, mercy, and grace of God (Ephesians 1:4-7) manifested and made evident? Through the church, the bride of Christ. “So that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:10)

The plan of salvation is proven to be wonderful and marvelous. Paul is in awe of the wonder and amazement of this plan in Ephesians 3:17-19. The wisdom of our God is evidenced through the defeat of our adversary. Satan must have been convinced of his victory when we “walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air...” (Ephesians 2:2). When it appeared that we were doing Satan’s bidding, the Lord extended to us redemption and forgiveness of our sins (Ephesians 1:7). Now, we are in fellowship with the Lord and engaged in the spiritual warfare for the One who is certain to be victorious!

*“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12)*

The apostle Paul exhorts us to be strong in the Lord and to put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10). We must be prepared to fight against the devil and all the agents that he will use and manipulate in a feeble attempt to gain victory. We have been raised up and seated “in the heavenly places” and now our warfare is “in the heavenly places” – we are not engaged in a carnal battle. Our battles are against the devil and his will. The promise of God is that we will be able to stand firm and resist the devil in this fight (Ephesians 6:13).

It is interesting to look at the book of Ephesians and how it ends, showing us that as the children of God, we are in a spiritual warfare. However, it is at the beginning of the epistle that we are made fully aware of the certainty of victory and how we can obtain that victory. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ...” (Ephesians 1:3). There are no questions nor doubts pertaining to who is victorious and how we can become victorious. We must choose Christ! We must seek the redemption that is found in His blood (Ephesians 1:7) and we must believe the gospel of salvation (Ephesians 1:13)! The salvation of the Lord is given freely by His grace and through our faith (Ephesians 2:8, 9). We can enjoy the benefits and blessings of being “in the heavenly places” when we trust and obey.

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## **Some Thoughts on Abortion**

William J. Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Some folks watch the Super Bowl for the game, others tune in for the commercials. Doritos has a history of clever and entertaining Super Bowl ads, and their spot for Super Bowl 50 did not disappoint (see the ad here). That said, not everyone liked it. Folks at NARAL (National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws) spent the evening commending or condemning ads, and tweeted the following:



NARAL @NARAL · Feb 7

#NotBuyingIt - that @Doritos ad using #antichoice tactic of humanizing fetuses & sexist tropes of dads as clueless & moms as uptight. #SB50



425



395



How sad, how completely unhuman to be angered by someone "humanizing" unborn babies. What is a fetus if it is not human? Merriam-Webster.com defines fetus as "*an unborn or unhatched vertebrate especially after attaining the basic structural plan of its kind; specifically : a developing human from usually two months after conception to birth.*"<sup>1</sup> To do anything but humanize a human fetus is to live in delusion. Upon conception, all the genetics that make the child a distinct person are present. What do the genetics say about the fetus? It is 100% human. The fetus is not a growth like a cyst or a tumor inside the mother's body - it is a distinct life, with its own distinct DNA. Consider some facts about the unborn child <sup>2</sup>:

- At week 6, the baby has a heartbeat and brainwaves that can be recorded;
- At week 8, the child's fingers and toes have developed;
- At week 10, all the internal organs are completely formed and fully functioning;
- At week 13, the baby is able to swallow and suck (ie. thumb in the mouth), and has a distinct fingerprint;
- At week 17, the child has finger nails, toe nails, eyebrows and eyelashes;
- At week 23, the baby will startle and jump at loud noises;
- At week 26, the unborn child can distinguish between voices.

Medical advances have revealed these and many more astounding facts about the development of a child in the womb. Those who maintain that a fetus is not a human are ignorant. They have not, and perhaps will not, consider the evidence showing that a fetus, though wholly dependent upon the mother, is a distinct person.

Science has simply confirmed what was already known by those who know and respect the Creator of life itself. Tertullian, a second century Christian apologist penned:

*To prohibit the birth of a child is only a faster way to murder; it makes little difference whether one destroys a life already born or prevents it from coming to birth. It is a human being, who is to be a human being, for the whole fruit is already present in the seed.*<sup>3</sup>

In a society where abortion was legal and accepted, Tertullian and other writers affirmed the sanctity of life. Abortion advocates, whether those of antiquity or our contemporaries dehumanize the unborn child. In the pro-choice perspective, abortion is not the murder of an innocent life, but simply the termination of a fetus or pregnancy. Speaking with softer and deceptive terms doesn't change what is taking place. A spineless preacher might caution people about the place which is not pleasant to speak about. His attempt to minimize the condemnation of hell does not lessen the truth about hell. Hell is hell, and abortion is abortion.

According to the World Health Organization, there are an estimated 40-50 million abortions worldwide each year.<sup>4</sup> That is about 125,000 children being killed each day before they have an opportunity to take a single

breath. That is about 5,210 babies killed every hour of every day; almost 100 children killed every minute!

Think with me for a moment. Do you suppose the international community would turn a blind eye if someone simply wiped Kenya (pop. 38 million) off the map? What if a year later, Argentina (pop. 40 million) was snuffed out? And then the next year Tanzania (43 million) is destroyed? Ukraine (45 million)? Spain (46 million)? Columbia (48 million)? South Korea (48 million)? South Africa (50 million)?<sup>5</sup> You get the picture. People would be outraged and condemn these annual genocides, and demand that the perpetrators be held accountable. And yet every year the killing of 40-50 million unborn children is tolerated, even celebrated by some, as a woman's right to choose.

Though the Bible does not specifically address the issue of abortion, it certainly does supply information which necessarily infers that God is opposed to the killing of an unborn child. Psalm 139:13-16 and Jeremiah 1:5 reveal that God knows us from before our birth, even before our conception. We are not just a clump of tissue in a woman's body, but a person known and created by God. Exodus 21:22-25 shows that God values the life of an unborn child, equating it to the life of a grown man.

The United States Congress enacted the Unborn Victims of Violence Act in 2004, otherwise known as the "*Laci and Conner's Law*." It recognizes a child in the womb as "*a member of the species homo sapiens, at any stage of development*,"<sup>6</sup> and thus a legal victim if they are injured or killed in a list of over 60 federal offenses. In addition to the federal law, at least 38 states have fetal homicide laws, and at least 23 of those apply to the earliest stages of pregnancy.<sup>7</sup> Just recently, a member of Canadian Parliament has introduced a private member's bill described as "*Cassie and Molly's Law*" (Bill C-225)<sup>8</sup> that would recognize violent crimes that cause the injury or death of an unborn child. As good as it is to have such laws in place or being brought before law makers, it does make one wonder. What is the difference between the unborn child killed by a violent criminal act and the unborn child killed by a conspiracy between the mother and a doctor? The determining factor is whether the child is wanted or not. Two children, both 3 months along in the womb; both are killed, the murder of one is prosecuted for his crime, the murderers of the other are protected by laws that allow unwanted children to be murdered. If we applied the spirit of these same laws to the rest of society, it would be legal to murder someone, so long as it could be demonstrated that the person was unwanted. I imagine most would be appalled at the very suggestion. Oh, that folks would find it equally appalling to kill any human, wanted or not, in the womb or out.

Sources:

1 [merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fetus](http://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fetus)

2 [babycenter.com/fetal-development-week-by-week](http://babycenter.com/fetal-development-week-by-week)

3 Tertullian, Apology 9 (via Tertullian.org)

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## Is Mark 16:9-20 Scripture?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

The **English Standard Version** and the **New American Standard Bible** are excellent, modern, essentially literal translations. More and more Christians are using the **ESV** as their primary study Bible. Some New Testament passages found in the **King James Version** and the **New King James Version** are not in the **ESV** or **NASB**. This is because the New Testament in both the **ESV** and the **NASB** are primarily based on Greek manuscripts discovered centuries after the translation of the **KJV**. The **NKJV** simply updates to modern English the **KJV**.

The **ESV** and **NASB** each exclude both Acts 8:37 and 1 John 5:7-8, from the phrase "in heaven" through

the phrase “in earth,” and both translations question the genuineness of John 7:53 - 8:11 and Mark 16:9-20. Should Mark 16:9-20 be included as part of the inspired word of God?

I am writing to Christians, so I insist on two principles that underlie this investigation. The Bible is not just another ancient book. It is both verbally inspired (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13) and providentially preserved (Matthew 24:35; 1 Peter 1:22-25).

The chief problem with Mark 16:9-20 is that the two oldest, relatively complete manuscripts of the New Testament, the *Vaticanus* and the *Sinaiticus*, both believed to be from the fourth century, do not contain the passage.

But that’s not the whole truth on the evidence from these two manuscripts. Each page of *Vaticanus*, the older of the two manuscripts, contains three columns. The copyist of *Vaticanus* invariably began a new book of the New Testament on the next column after the completion of the book before it except in one instance. The column after Mark 16:8 and before the beginning of Luke is left blank in *Vaticanus*. It is apparent the scribe has left out text, but why is a matter of speculation. This constitutes unclear evidence. Furthermore, since *Vaticanus* and *Sinaiticus* are from the same family of manuscripts (Alexandrian), textual critics must view them as just one witness. They send a confusing message. Obviously the scribe of the *Vaticanus* has copied from an older manuscript which contained material at the end of Mark that for whatever reason he chose to leave out but leave proof of his knowledge of its existence.

What testimony is there to support Mark 16:9-20 as genuine? *Codex Alexandrinus* (*Codex A*) and the Freer Manuscript (*Codex W*), both close to the antiquity of *Vaticanus* and *Sinaiticus*, contain Mark 16:9-20.

Several of the so-called “Church Fathers” prior to the Council of Nicea (325) testify that Mark 16:9-20 is genuine Scripture. Justin Martyr (A.D. 151) quotes Mark 16:20 as Scripture, Irenaeus so quotes Mark 16:19 (ca. A.D. 180), Hyppolytus (190-227) quotes Mark 16:17-18 as Scripture, and Vincentius quotes from the passage in the presence of 87 African bishops in 256.

The early versions are translations of the Greek New Testament into languages of early Christians. The *Peshitta* (*Syriac*), the version used by Syrian Christians of antiquity, contains Mark 16:9-20 in manuscripts from as early as the third century. The *Vetus Itala* (Old Latin), from the 2nd century contains the passage.

All three of the other gospel accounts record appearances by Christ to the apostles after His resurrection and recount the Great Commission. If Mark’s record of Christ Jesus ends at Mark 16:8, it not only leaves out the appearances and the Commission, it ends with this statement:

*“So they went out quickly and fled from the tomb, for they trembled and were amazed. And they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”*

Why would the evangelist leave out every one of the appearances of Christ after His resurrection, which are the primary proof He was raised, eliminate the Great Commission, which gave him the reason to pen his account, and end the “good news” of Christ with such words of fear and discouragement?

Mark 16:9-20 is genuine Scripture, and we should gladly accept it as the inspired Word of God.

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## Be Converted

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

### What Is Conversion?

*Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18:2-3)*

The Lord clearly declared that conversion is essential to salvation. To “be converted” means to “turn to” God. Peter commanded an audience of Jews, “Repent therefore and be converted” (Acts 3:19), whereas Paul commanded Gentiles to “repent” and “turn to God” (Acts 26:20). The phrases “be converted” (Acts 3:19) and “turn to” (Acts 26:20) are translated from the same Greek word, *“epistrepho.”* Thus, we must do something to be converted.

“Conversion” is a general word covering the entire process of the salvation of the sinner (Acts 15:3). God is involved in our conversion from first to last (Acts 3:26). But we are active in our conversion. We exercise free will to decide whether or not to come to God in the way He directs (Revelation 22:17; John 5:39-40), and we must act from understanding (Matthew 13:15-16).

### **What Causes Conversion?**

Why are some people converted to Christ whereas others remain eternally lost in sin? First there is God’s part in our salvation. The Master taught:

*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me* (John 6:44-45).

If we are to be converted, God must draw us. How? “‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.” This is the reason the Lord commanded His apostles, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15, **New American Standard Bible**). And Christians must do the same today (Matthew 28:19-20). This is because God “desires all men to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

But each person’s attitude will determine whether or not he hears, believes, and turns to Christ (Matthew 13:14-16). Do you have “an honest and good heart”? (Luke 8:15)

### **A Change of Heart**

To form a life-long marriage bond, a man and woman need to have a change of heart. They need to develop a deep love for each other. To bring Lydia to salvation, “the Lord opened her heart” by the preaching of the apostle Paul (Acts 16:14). Our hearts must be changed from unbelieving to believing. Peter declared that God put no difference between Jews and Gentiles, “cleansing their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:9).

But a man and woman may be deeply in love and not be married, and you may believe in Christ and not be converted. Love is essential to a good marriage, but it takes more than love to be married. Faith is essential to conversion, but it takes more than faith to turn to Christ. “And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). Turning to the Lord follows and is in addition to faith. Faith is essential to salvation, but it takes more than faith to be saved.

### **A Change of Life**

To begin a successful marriage, a man and woman need to change their lives. They need to spend time together to learn how to get along with each other. To be converted we must have a change of life.

Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 18:2-3).

We change our lives by repenting of our sins. The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah (Matthew 12:41). This means they “turned from their evil way” (Jonah 3:10). We too must turn from our evil ways to be converted and to be saved.

But a man and woman may spend all their time together and still not be married, and we might live righteously and yet not be converted or redeemed. Repentance is essential to conversion, but there’s



more. Peter commanded, "Repent therefore and be converted" (Acts 3:19). Conversion follows and is in addition to both repentance and faith.

### **A Change of Loyalty**

To form a life-long marriage bond, a man and woman need to change their loyalty. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). That change of loyalty is stated before witnesses when the man and woman each pledge "to forsake all others until death do us part."

To turn to the Lord we must change our loyalty from the world to the Lord. Paul commended the Thessalonians because they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). We state that change of loyalty when we confess before witnesses our faith in Jesus Christ. "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10). As Peter, we must profess before witnesses our conviction that Jesus is "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16).

But when a couple profess their loyalty to each other, they have not quite completed the journey to marriage. And when we confess our faith in Christ, we're not quite converted. Confession is "unto," in the direction of, salvation.

### **A Change of Relationship**

The final step in forming a marriage bond between a man and a woman is changing their relationship by meeting the legal requirements for marriage (cf. Romans 13:1). And to turn to Christ we must comply with the requirement the Lord has set for leaving the world and coming into Him. We must be "delivered ... from the power of darkness and conveyed ... into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (Colossians 1:13).

We enter Christ by being baptized into Him. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3) "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

A couple may change their hearts, lives, and loyalty, but until they change their relationship, they're not married. You may believe in Jesus Christ, repent of your sins, and confess your faith in Him, but until you're baptized for the remission of sins, you haven't been converted to Christ. Peter commanded, "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38, **KJV**) and later enjoined, "Repent therefore and be converted" (Acts 3:19). To be baptized for the remission of sins is to be converted. Baptism is the final step of conversion by which one leaves the world of sin and gains entrance into Christ.

### **The Results of Conversion**

When a sinner is converted to Christ, his sins are forgiven. Peter commanded, "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away..." (Acts 3:19, **New American Standard Bible**). Forgiveness is an act of executive pardon which takes place in the mind of God. The Jews were correct when they asserted that none but God can forgive sins (Mark 2:7). A criminal in prison may feel like he's forgiven, but unless the governor issues a pardon, the prisoner is still a felon. You may sincerely, deeply feel like you're forgiven, but unless you've met the divine requirements for conversion, you have no evidence the Lord has pardoned you.

A couple may feel like they're married, but if they live together without meeting the legal requirements for matrimony, they're committing fornication (cf. Hebrews 13:4). They need to have changes of heart, life, loyalty, and relationship.

You may feel like you're a Christian, but until you believe in Jesus Christ, repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him, and are baptized for the remission of sins (Romans 10:10; Acts 2:38), you're not in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27). "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away..."



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