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## In This Issue...

**3 | EXPOSITORY ARTICLE | Sean Cavender**

God's Mercy To The  
Unrighteous : "Therefore,  
Repent and Live"

**6 | CHURCH ARTICLE | Jacob Hudgins**

Effective Bible Classes:  
The Student's  
Responsibility

**9 | WORSHIP ARTICLE | Tim McPherson**

Preparing For Worship

**12 | APPLICATION ARTICLE | Jason Lankford**

All In His Name

**15 | EVANGELISM ARTICLE | Mike Stephens**

Do The Work  
Of An Evangelist

**18 | BEYOND THE BASICS | William Stewart**

The Scriptures Cannot  
Be Broken

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS:

We appreciate our writers for devoting time to the preparation of a wonderful collection of articles for us this quarter. We are also very thankful for your interest in GROW magazine and hope this issue finds you healthy, both physically and spiritually. It is a different and unprecedented time for our generation as the world deals with the coronavirus pandemic. There are many uncertainties about the spread and containment of Covid-19, among them, even the assembling of brethren together. Online resources cannot replace fellowship with the saints, but nonetheless there are many online activities going on that you may find beneficial (prayer meetings, lectureships, sermons, interactive studies, etc.).

You can watch pre-recorded lessons from Sean Cavender [here](#). You can watch a live-stream sermon from William Stewart [here](#). You can participate in interactive classes with William Stewart [here](#)

If you find this digital periodical to be useful, please share it with others. Forward the notification email to others, post a link on social media or print an article or the entire issue to hand to someone.

Now, come GROW with us!

Cordially,  
*Sean P. Cavender*  
*William J. Stewart*



# God's Mercy To The Unrighteous: "Therefore, Repent and Live"

SEAN CAVENDER | BALD KNOB, ARKANSAS

## INTRODUCTION

The prophecies of Ezekiel are some of the most fascinating in the Old Testament. He wrote during the exile of Judah to Babylon. He was a contemporary of Daniel, yet Ezekiel's primary message was to Judah themselves, explaining why God was punishing them.

One of the most discouraging, yet vivid scenes, in the book of Ezekiel, is found in chapter 10. Ezekiel describes God's glory as leaving the temple. The temple had served as a sign to Israel that God was with them. The temple was where sacrifices were made, and the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement were held. The Most Holy Place was in the midst of the temple. God could not literally be held within the temple, He was far too great to be confined to one location like that, but the temple was a symbol of God's care, grace, and covenant with Israel.

However, Israel had sinned. They were wicked and evil. They had exchanged the worship of the true and living God for idol worship. This was the reason the ten northern tribes had been taken captive by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. History was repeating itself. The two remaining tribes who formed the nation of Judah were now in exile at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.

The nation as a whole deserved much of the blame because they followed Judah's ungodly kings, wicked prophets, and evil priests. One of Ezekiel's most poignant prophecies was against the shepherds of Israel — her leaders (Ezekiel 34:1-10). God brought judgment against Judah because of the rampant immorality resulting from idolatrous worship.

Ezekiel helps explain why God is doing all of



1 via StockSnap | Pixabay.com

this. Judah had sinned against God Almighty. The book of Ezekiel also has prophecies against other nations. God is not going to let other countries behave wickedly without answering God in judgment. The Lord holds all nations — and all people — accountable for their sinful choices. God is fair and righteous. He will not judge one nation for their sins and ignore the sins of another. Neither is God going to give preferential treatment to Israel and Judah because they had the temple, law, and covenants. God seemed to hold them to a higher standard. They should have known better.

Not only does Ezekiel reveal God's judgment, but he also shows how God desires and encourages repentance. Ezekiel offers a message of hope, too. Ezekiel 18 is probably one of the most well-known passages in all of Ezekiel. Chapter 18 touches on all of these themes and tries to bring them together, offering reason and explanation for God's judgment upon the guilty. It explains who is responsible for the wickedness of the nation, and it provides a message of repentance, grace, and forgiveness. It is a beautiful chapter with which we want to be familiar!

## BLAMING THE WRONG PEOPLE

Ezekiel is building a case against Judah. They are guilty of sin, and God is holding them accountable. The temple was empty and would soon be destroyed. Judah stood condemned. So, who were they to blame?

A proverb had become common during those days, quoted in Ezekiel 18:2, *“The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children’s teeth are set on edge?”* God declared this proverb should no longer be used in Israel. The proverb illustrated a mindset that was avoiding the responsibility of sin. In quoting this proverb they were blaming previous generations of Israelites. The reasoning behind this proverb was, “Surely we are facing captivity and exile because of the sins of our fathers. We have not been the cause of God’s wrath.” Judah was trying their best to avoid their guilt and responsibility in the judgment upon Jerusalem and its temple.

When confronted with sin, people will often shift the blame to others. Shifting blame is an age-old problem since sin first entered the world. After Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, he blamed Eve, while indicting God as well. Eve blamed the serpent (Gen 3:12-13). Neither of them accepted the responsibility that they had failed to obey God’s law.

So, Ezekiel 18 corrects the mistaken behavior of shifting blame to others. We must be careful not to blame others for our sins. That is unacceptable in God’s sight, and it sorely displeases the Lord. Therefore, Ezekiel wants readers to understand three related points:

- 1) individuals choose to sin, and thus bear responsibility;
- 2) as a result of their sin, individuals spiritually die; and
- 3) individuals must repent.

### **INDIVIDUALS CHOOSE TO SIN, THUS BEARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN SIN.**

According to the proverb in Ezekiel 18:2, the Jews tried to shift the blame and not accept that they had a part to play in God’s

punishment upon them. Individual Israelites were guilty of sin. The nation had sinned because individuals had been influenced by the failed leadership of Judah’s kings, priests, and prophets. Hosea, prophesying to the northern tribes, condemned both the people and the priests. He said, “like people, like priest” (Hosea 4:9). The people behaved like the priests and the priests behaved how the people wanted them to act. Thus, they showed disregard for God and His law.

So Ezekiel’s message is that all souls belong to God, and it’s the soul who sins who will die (Ezekiel 18:4). There may be influences that affect us negatively and lead us to sin (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:33), but we each bear the responsibility for our sinful choices.

We do not sin because we have inherited a sinful, depraved, corrupted nature that was marred from Adam’s sin. God says that the son does not bear the iniquity and punishment of the father; neither does the father bear the iniquity and punishment of the son (Ezekiel 18:20).

Ezekiel beautifully illustrates how the individual bears responsibility for his or her choices. He uses the example of three generations: a father, a son, and a grandson. The father was righteous and did what was pleasing to God (Ezekiel 18:5-9), but his son is an evil, wicked, and idolatrous man (Ezekiel 18:10-13). Then that son has a son who is a servant of God and lives by the law of God (Ezekiel 18:14-17). The righteous men were not righteous simply because they were from the nation of Israel; they were righteous because they obeyed God. The unrighteous man was not sinful because he inherited guilt from his father; he committed grotesque sins before God, and because of that, *“his blood will be on his own head”* (Ezekiel 18:13). Notice the condemnation was upon his “own” head. He made his choices. Thus he bore his own guilt.

Our sins are upon us, and God will judge us for the things that we have done. We each must bear our own responsibility.

## **DUE TO THEIR SIN, INDIVIDUALS SPIRITUALLY DIE.**

As Ezekiel continues to explore the idea of individual responsibility and individual guilt, because of sins, he states it is the person who sins who will die (Ezekiel 18:20). This death is not a reference to physical death; this is a reference to spiritual death. Death is being used to describe a separation. As physical death is the separation of the soul and body (James 2:26), spiritual death is the separation of the individual and God (Isaiah 59:1-2). Transgression and violation of God's commands cause us to be separated from God. Separation and death have been the result of sin since the Garden of Eden when God warned Adam that if he ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he would die (Genesis 2:17). Adam did not physically die on the day he ate of the fruit of the tree, but he did not have communion with God any longer. We see this in the question that God asked, "where are you?" (Genesis 3:9). Adam had been separated from God and was spiritually dead (Genesis 3:9). The apostle Paul observes that spiritual death is a spiritual and universal problem because "all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

Because all have sinned, it points to the need for a solution that is made available to all people. That is the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:18-21).

### **INDIVIDUALS MUST REPENT OF THEIR SIN OR SUFFER ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD.**

In Ezekiel 18, God pleads with Judah to repent of their sins. While there are physical consequences to their sins (Babylonian captivity), there is still hope for them if they repent and turn back to God!

We must not assume that the righteous individuals in the chapter were sinlessly perfect. The apostle Paul taught that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). The righteous individuals in Ezekiel 18 are those who have turned away from their sins and have been forgiven. Notice what Ezekiel says:

*"Again, when a wicked man turns away from his wickedness which he has committed and practices justice and righteousness, he will save his life" (Ezekiel 18:27, NASB95).*

Ezekiel 18 is a wonderful text which shows human beings have free will. The Bible does not teach "once saved, always saved." Ezekiel says a righteous person can turn to wickedness (Ezekiel 18:24-26). When a person turns to wickedness, they will be judged for their wickedness. They will suffer spiritual separation from God if they do not repent. And in contrast to that, a wicked person can become a righteous person and live! Some may not like these teachings; God acknowledges that some might find fault with God (Ezekiel 18:29). But God will judge each one for their sin (Ezekiel 18:30).

But make no mistake: God does not enjoy judging sinners and condemning them for eternity (Ezekiel 18:32). He desires for all to repent (2 Peter 3:9). God is imploring, through Ezekiel His prophet, that the unrighteous and wicked must repent. If they do not repent, they will suffer eternal separation from God — the second death (cf. Revelation 20:14-15). God will show no mercy to those who refuse repentance.

## **CONCLUSION**

The message of Ezekiel 18 is a serious one. It is a message warning us of the severe results of our sins. We cannot escape the judgment of God; each of us must bear our guilt and our personal responsibility. Just as no one else forced you to sin, no one else can fix your sins and repent on your behalf. You must bear the responsibility, and you must turn back to God.

But if we will repent and turn to God, we can live (Ezekiel 18:27, 32). God created us so we could enjoy life and fellowship with Him. He wants to restore your soul from sin. He wants to give you a new heart, a new spirit, and a new life. Will you repent at the pleadings of God, or will you remain hard-hearted and in sin? The choice is up to you and you alone.



# Effective Bible Classes: The Student's Responsibilities

JESSE FLOWERS | BAYTOWN, TEXAS

Bible classes are a great environment for Christian growth. Yet we often struggle to get meaning and benefit from classes. We blame teachers (or workbooks or fellow-students) for the disconnect and rarely consider ourselves.

As a student, what can I do to make Bible classes great?

## AM I EAGER?

The Jews in Berea, *“were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so”* (Acts 17:11). The eager spirit views Bible study as a privilege, not a drudgery. *We get to hear from God!* Studying His word is an exciting occasion! Eagerness means that we will not just be killing time until the session ends. We are here to learn from God. If there is preparatory work that will make us readier to learn, we will do it ahead of time.

New Testament Christians were excited to hear from God. *“And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers”* (1 Thessalonians 2:13). This passage shows us that Bible classes are never about the teacher or the material or the setting. They are about the God whose words we are digesting and understanding. God has spoken; am I eager to hear him?

## AM I PATIENT?

It is important to note that hearing from God in this way means there will be some impediments. *This teaching will happen through people – and people require*



2 via Aaron Burden | Unsplash.com

*patience.* Sometimes that means that the teacher will not be eloquent or exciting. Paul – although possibly overstating his case – reminds the Corinthians that *“I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom ... so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 2:1, 5). Paul seems to go out of his way to not be impressive in his speech or thinking. Yet this is purposeful: he wants their faith to be in God, not him. *If God expected the Corinthians to see past Paul’s verbal shortcomings to the truth he preached, he certainly expects us to do the same with our teachers.* Am I patient with teachers who are less than scintillating?

Part of patience with classes is the willingness to review truths with which we are already familiar. Paul argues that *“to write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you”* (Philippians 3:1). It is OK for us to hear the same things from God again and again. Peter writes late in his life for the express purpose of *“(reminding) you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in*

the truth that you have” (2 Peter 1:12). He knows they know these things; he wants them to remember them. Many Bible classes have the same purpose.

This patience also means that we are aware that *we are not the only person in the class*. In any Bible class, there are wide varieties of spiritual experience and depth. Some people are probably hearing these things for the first time. Some people may be challenging a previous understanding. Some of us are trying to find something deeper in the text than we did on an earlier reading. All of these goals and perspectives deserve my respect and patience. Being bored with previously studied material is easy; am I willing to be patient?

### **AM I HUMBLE?**

As a student, *I must come to the Scriptures to learn, not to teach*. Bible classes are a time to “*receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls*” (James 1:21). It is time to listen. Meekness is the spirit that freely submits to God. We are ready to be instructed. We are willing to have our thoughts and paradigms challenged. We want to see ourselves for where we are and where we should be. We want to learn what God thinks of us. We are not here to argue but to follow God.

The challenge of humility in Bible classes is due to a universal quirk by which we find it easier to apply God’s word to others than ourselves. “*Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?*” (Matthew 7:3). When we read of God’s frustration with a particular behavior, we think of other people who do it and not ourselves. We criticize them (“look at that speck in their eye!”) without even considering ourselves. Jesus corrects us: “*You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye*” (Matthew 7:5). Humility – and application to self – must precede any other effort to apply the Bible to others.

This has direct application in Bible classes. We cannot condemn a behavior or teaching in

denominations until we have first examined our hearts and lives. We cannot criticize someone else for being unforgiving until we have cleared our accounts with others. We cannot critique someone else’s prayer wording until we have examined our own. Great Bible classes do not lambaste people who are not present. Great classes consist of people who are honestly examining their hearts in light of words from God. As a student, I help others learn by bringing a spirit of meekness that is ready to be corrected and instructed, even if it is painful.

### **AM I OBEDIENT?**

Bible classes do not end when the bell rings. When we have heard from God, patiently focusing on his message to us, and received it with meekness, the real work begins.

*“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing”*(James 1:27).

James focuses on one universal danger: we hear from God, like what he says, and then promptly do nothing. This person, even though he “*looks intently*” into God’s word, “*at once forgets what he was like.*” He thinks the mental exercise is the only important part of studying. James has us pegged. We often think that the whole goal of Bible study is Bible study. We now know more than we did before. *But Bible study is never an end in itself. The Bible is always meant to be lived out* in our lives. When we emerge from a time of considering contexts and historical settings and root words, the burning question is still there: what do I do now?

As a student, we make Bible classes great by maintaining a passion for obedience. When we learn something from God, we must be



willing to practice it. How can we serve someone? How are we doing with coarse talking? Who are the people we struggle to feel compassion for? How can we encourage a brother who is struggling? What will we do this week to make this section of God's word come to life in our lives?

Teachers sometimes neglect this aspect of teaching. As students, we can ask questions to help spur the class toward better obedience: "Do you have any suggestions for how I can do better on this? Would such-and-such be a good example of that? What have you found helps most in living this out?" We can make

notes for plans of action to overcome deep-rooted sins or tendencies in ourselves. We can sketch out questions to contemplate in quieter moments to discern how we can obey. But if we have looked into the law of liberty and seen ourselves lacking, the worst possible response is to shut the Bible and walk out of class because the time is up. Am I obedient?

Bible classes are a great environment for Christian growth. Still, we must take responsibility for our part in making them great. Am I eager? Am I patient? Am I humble? Am I obedient?

# Preparing For Worship

TIM MCPHERSON | BOUNTIFUL, UTAH

Exodus 16:5: “And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”

## INTRODUCTION

To sustain a practical life, we prepare. Can you imagine the chaos without preparation? Think about your morning routine. What if you did not set your alarm clock, wash your clothes, or did not brush your teeth? What if you did not bathe/shower? What if you hadn't gone to the grocery store for days? Think of the problems you would have in your morning routine if you had not prepared. You would wake up late, have dirty and wrinkled clothes, foul breath, dirty teeth, body odor, bed-tossed hair, and have no breakfast. Yes, living without chaos involves planning, arranging, and designing every day. We think beforehand and purpose for what is ahead of us.

## GOD ILLUSTRATES HIS ABUNDANT PREPARATION

In matters of our salvation, we are overwhelmed by the amount of preparation by God. The scheme of redemption was not by happenstance. God did not make last-minute decisions. First Peter 1:20 states, “*He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world but was manifest in these last times for you.*” God purposed, planned, and executed a blueprint in sending His Son. This plan involved a bloodline, a nation, a land, many “types,” foreshadowing the true to come, promises, patterns, and prophecy. God revealed what was ahead. His preparation in the work of salvation makes us rejoice even more as we see the intent and purpose of God



3 via ulrichw / Pixabay.com

throughout the ages of time. I stand in awe when I see what God accomplished, leading to His ultimate goal. I see tremendous planning and preparation.

I could mention story after story of the need for preparation. Noah, in building the ark (Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20), David prepared a place for the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:1,3,15), John the Baptist “preparing” the way of the Lord (Malachi 3:1; Matthew 3:20). Search in a computer Bible program the word “prepared” and you will see

case after case (99 references) on that word alone and “prepare” in 78 verses. Commands cannot be fulfilled without preparation. Jesus’ disciples stated there must be preparation for the Passover. That preparation required a place (Matthew 26:17). When Jesus was preparing His disciples for His departure, He spoke of His plan to send the Comforter. He went on to say that he was going to prepare a place for you (John 14:2). I am forever comforted by Jesus’ preparation.

## THE OLD TESTAMENT SABBATH TAUGHT PREPARATION

Let’s get down to the purpose of this article: preparation for worship. The Old Testament was written for our learning (1 Corinthians 10:11). Friday evening began the Old Testament Sabbath day (7th day) in which Jews rested and praised God. It was a Jewish holy day (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:3). Such resting on the Sabbath meant no work that whole day. Remember, their Sabbath

began on Friday evening was called “the Preparation Day.” On that day, Jews prepared for the Sabbath. They had to get ready to observe the Sabbath.

Let me quote from a modern Jew and their preparation for the Sabbath:

*“In anticipation of the Friday night meal, observant Jews tend to eat lighter meals during the daytime on Friday. There is also much to do. In fact, the more observant you are of the details of Shabbat, the more you have to prepare before it arrives. The late eminent scholar Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik used to say that the true mark of a pious Jew is not that he or she is a Shomer Shabbat (a Sabbath observer) but is Shomer Erev Shabbat (one who properly prepares on the eve of the Sabbath).”*

*By traditional Jewish law, one cannot shop on the Sabbath, so marketing is usually done during the day on Friday. Cooking is prohibited on the Sabbath, so that must be done in advance, too. Foods prepared beforehand can be kept warm on a hot plate or on the stove, a condition that has led to a preference for certain hearty dishes like a meat-bean-and-potato stew called cholent. In our home, we try to give our children special Sabbath eve responsibilities. Of course, there’s cleaning up their own rooms, but we also divide up family responsibilities like sweeping, or setting up the Sabbath candles.”*

With the very first mention of the Jews observing the Sabbath in the Old Testament, God initiated preparedness (Exodus 16:5). God knew people would have to prepare to keep the Sabbath. It became customary to mention it as “Preparation Day” (John 19:14,31,42).

Christians are under the new covenant and worship on the first day of the week, which is Sunday (Acts 20:7). However, do we consider its preparation? Sunday is even more special than the Jewish Sabbath because this is the true “Lord’s Day,” the remembrance of our Savior (Revelation 1:10). Our thoughts and

minds must plan and purpose for this day on which the saints gather to worship God.

## **PREPARE YOUR HEART AND MIND**

How do we prepare for worship on Sunday? First and foremost, we must make every day of our lives holy. Sunday is not the only holy day in our lives. Some people might think that Sunday is “the” only day that is holy (set apart, sanctified), but this is not so! Holiness should embody our lives every day (1 Peter 1:15-16). Christians meditate and think about God daily. We continually serve and do His will. We pray, read the Bible, and honor God every day of the week. However, is it possible that Sunday worship has become less important because we have not focused on our hearts and prepared ourselves throughout the week? Maybe God has been crowded out by everything else. How can we suddenly switch gears to worship God when our heart and mind has only absorbed worldly things?

*I came across a statement of a Jew who said, “One prepares for the Sabbath all week.” And another statement, “Most Jewish people look forward to Shabbat all week. They see it as God’s gift to his chosen people of a day when they take time out from everyday things to feel special. Shabbat is a time with no television, no rushing to the demands of the telephone, or a busy work schedule. People don’t think about work or other stressful things. it’s an oasis of calm, a time of stillness in life.”*

Yes, it is good that they look forward to a day of rest to get away and find solitude. But what alarms me is the constant bombardment of this world. Christians, have we become so caught up in the affairs of this life that Sunday is the last thing on our mind until it arrives? Has our spiritual focus been choked out because we have allowed the world to encroach upon us, up to the very last minute? I’ll give you one example. One young man got upset that the preacher spoke a little over the allotted time. Why? Because he had his hunting dogs already loaded in the back of his truck (in the church building parking lot), with all his hunting gear, and couldn’t wait to get out to go hunting.

Let's think about those activities on Saturday and step away to set our minds heavenward. Do not let Saturday become jam-packed with overwhelming activities, staying up with others, playing video games, or watching TV late into the evening. Are we tired and not getting adequate rest for Sunday? Our minds need time to focus and contemplate (Psalm 1:2). *"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Colossians 3:2). We will anticipate Sunday worship if we let loose of things that interfere on Saturday before worship. I am mindful of the great priest and prophet Ezra. Ezra 7:10 states, *"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments"* (KJV).

### REVERENCE REQUIRES PREPARATION

Ironically, after being asked to write this article, we visited my son and his family in Ohio. I attended worship service at the Knollwood Church of Christ. That morning Heath Rogers preached on this very subject. I suggest you listen to his excellent sermon to accompany this article ([listen here](#)).

One point he made was that without proper preparation, we are not adequately reverencing God. God is to be feared, revered, and held in awe. Think about it: we are presenting ourselves before the throne of our Almighty Creator. There is nothing more honorary than to be able to sit with the King of kings. Have we taken this for granted?

Psalm 95:6 (NKJV), *"O come, let us worship and bow down; **Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.**"*

Psalm 42:2 (NKJV), *"My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. **When shall I come and appear before God?"***

Psalm 29:2, *"Give to the LORD the glory due His name..."*

When Moses stood before the burning bush, he soon realized that this was no common ground. God told him to take off his sandals for the place where he stood was holy ground. Are we contemplating Sunday as a special day

where we gather together with our Savior to break bread? Our Lord is participating with us (Matthew 26:29). This memorial is not a common feast. It was instituted by Jesus, the Son of God, to remember His most precious blood and body sacrificed for our sins. We should not appear before God tired, haphazard, or irreverent. With a mindset on our great God and "how great thou art," we come not casually before Him. I have to commend the Jews for their approach to God with the Sabbath.

Again, quoting one Jewish source, *"People dress up for Shabbat and go to considerable trouble to ensure that everything is organized to obey the commandment to make the Sabbath a delight."*

Brethren, remember our reverence before God. 2 Samuel 12:20 (NKJV): "So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes, and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped..."

Some suggestions for preparation:

1. Always keep God at the forefront of your mind.
2. Look forward to Sunday, when we honor and praise our great God.
3. On Saturday, remember to rest and think of participating in worship to the great "I AM."
4. Honor and present yourself in a manner worthy of standing before our King and Creator.
5. Give God your best. Be ready to sing, praise, and glorify God. Be prepared to engage in spirit and truth. Readiness requires preparation.

We must always be prepared. Closing with this verse:

"Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this until thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." (*Amos 4:12, KJV*)

# All In His Name

JASON LANKFORD | CONWAY, ARKANSAS

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do *everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” (Colossians 3:17)

One of the most commonly quoted verses I have heard in my life is Colossians 3:17. And for a good reason, considering these words have such great implications in our lives as Christians. How so? Let’s unpack the main aspects of this passage and shed light on the manner of life Paul is calling us to have in Christ Jesus.

## ALL OF WHO WE ARE

We must first realize that whatever is meant here in this text is intended to affect every aspect of who we are. We often tend to compartmentalize our lives, separating certain things from other things that are seemingly unrelated. Paul’s statement in Colossians 3:17 should affect every single compartment; we should be completely transformed. This verse is all-inclusive; there is nothing that lies outside its intended control. “Whatever you do” is synonymous with “in ALL that you do.” Our full self, even our words, and deeds, are to continually be bearing witness to the name of the Lord Jesus.

Before clarifying what Paul meant by “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” let’s make sure we have accepted this one point. **The very heart of the Gospel teaches us that in Christ Jesus, we are someone completely new.**

2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” If you look just before that in verse 15, Paul writes, “and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.” In



4 via Gerd Altmann | Pixabay.com

Christ, our whole perspective on life is to change. Our direction, our purpose, everything is affected by our being created new in Christ. If we have not come to terms with the fact that Christ intends to take over completely, then we’ve not yet understood the nature of the Gospel. Or maybe it is that we realized it when we first committed our life to the Lord but have become callous towards the idea. Will you soften your heart once again to let the love of Christ take control (2 Corinthians 5:14)?

## SO WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

What does Paul mean by saying all that we do should be “in the name of the Lord Jesus”? Let’s first note that “in the name of” is a common phrase throughout the Old Testament. The High Priest was one who ministered “in the name of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 18:5). A prophet was one who spoke “in the name of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 18:22; Jeremiah 26:16). David fought Goliath “in the name of the Lord” (1 Samuel 17:45). People put their trust “in the name of the Lord” (Psalm 20:7; Psalm 124:8). The phrase, “in the name of the Lord,” was an appeal to the power and authority of the Lord their God.

Consider in the New Testament the account in Luke 20:1-8. The religious leaders came to

Jesus, saying, “Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority” (verse 2). As they heard Jesus speak, watched him perform signs and even observed him “cleanse the temple,” they wanted to know “who are you acting on behalf of?” Their hard hearts blinded them to the fact that He was acting on behalf of the Father they too claimed to represent. Jesus responded with a question of his own in verse 3, “I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?” You know how the rest of that account unfolded, but the point I want you to consider is that Jesus sets his question up as a parallel to their own. Their asking him “by what authority” is the same as Him asking, “where did it come from? What is it’s source?” Acts 4:7 helps us connect the question posed to Jesus and what Paul writes in Colossians 3:17 because the people asked Peter and John the same question with slightly different wordage. They asked, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” Now we start to understand what Paul means in Colossians 3:17. The phrase “in the name of Jesus” is a reference to his Lordship and authority. Paul is telling the Colossian brethren, and us today, to let all that you say and do come from God. Is God the source of your living? Do your words and actions point to Him?

This passage is important to consider because it’s a text that says something about Christ’s position as Lord, and it also says something about our relationship to Him. We are a representative of the Lord. When I do or say something in His name, I’m acknowledging that He is Lord and that what I am doing is a representation of His Word. For example, in 1 Samuel 25:9, David sends his men to go and speak with Nabal about provisions for him and his men, and the text says that the men “said all this to Nabal in the name of David.” They were speaking to Nabal as a representative of David. They were speaking his words, not their own. They were faithful representatives. The NLT (New Living Translation) translates Colossians 3:17 in the following way: “And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.” Are you a

faithful representative of the Lord? Are you honoring Him as Lord? Being a faithful representative of Christ **demand**s that we accurately represent Him, that we speak, and do by what He has declared true.

Are you actively living in the name of the Lord Jesus? Did you honor Christ as Lord in the way you spoke with your neighbor, co-worker, spouse, or children today? Did you honor Christ as Lord at work or at school? How about while doing your taxes? Did you show honesty and integrity even though it meant some sacrifice? Did you honor Him by forgiving someone who had wronged you? Did you honor Him in how you worshiped? Do you honor Him in how you come into His Word, seeking to hear His voice and follow only those things that you know to be true? How about in your purity and your faith? If you notice the context of Colossians 3, you will see that Paul spends a good bit of time telling Christians that being in Christ demands us to put to death certain conduct (verses 5-11). Then, Christians must put on holy conduct (verses 12-16). **Don’t let Satan convince you that there’s a part of your life that Christ doesn’t intend to change!**

### **Don’t Neglect the Thankful Heart**

Let’s not conclude without honoring the last part of what Paul says in Colossians 3:17: “giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” There’s a certain kind of heart that God desires behind the words and deeds. Have you ever had a job you just absolutely hated? A position you held just because you needed the money, but you didn’t care about the company, its success, or your boss? On the flip side, have you ever had a job you absolutely loved? The company stood for something respectable, and it made its success with integrity. The company made more than adequate provisions for you, and it was a joy to work for your boss. Because of that, it made you want to come to work each day with a commitment to doing your best because you appreciated the opportunity given to you. Have you ever known that? Yes, the Christian’s life is to be a life full of good and Christ-honoring words and actions. But behind those actions should be a heart overwhelmed with joy and gratitude

because of the realization that in Christ Jesus we have been snatched out of hell's grip and "translated into an eternal kingdom of life" (Colossians 1:13-14). That reality far surpasses the value of a respectable company and a kind boss. What Jesus has done for us

has eternal implications. That you and I have hope in him speaks of God's immeasurable grace. Are you thankful for that? Yes? Good. Let that thankfulness bear fruit by honoring Him as Lord in all things.



# Do The Work Of An Evangelist

MIKE STEPHENS | WELLANDPORT, ONTARIO

*“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.”*

(2 Timothy 4:1-2, NKJV)



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What would we say when either by divine revelation or just being aware of circumstances, we knew our time on earth was soon over?

That was the perspective of the Apostle Paul as he wrote 2 Timothy. Can we hear the passion when Paul said, “I CHARGE YOU...” that commands Timothy to pay attention to his words?

Paul contrasts the faithful preacher with someone who wants to please the people (v 3-4). He then comes back to his charge in v. 5 when he says, “But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Do the work of an evangelist? Is that a single job? Is there one long list with boxes to check? Is there a finish line? What did Paul intend to include in doing the work of an evangelist? The answers are broad, and we will only scratch the surface.

As in most of Paul’s writings, he had a way of stating and re-stating his points. Each phrase in his long sentences can be woven together to get a more precise meaning. Preach the Word by being ready. Preach the Word to convince, rebuke and exhort. Preach the Word with all longsuffering and teaching.

Similarly, do the work of an evangelist by being watchful. Do the work of an evangelist by enduring afflictions. Do the work of an evangelist and fulfill your ministry.

Paul’s example in preaching can explain many of these job descriptions. “In season and out of season” contrasts two different times when the evangelist must preach.

The evangelist must be

ready to preach when it’s easy and convenient, and when it’s difficult and unwanted. The message will bring a mixed reception. Every day will be different. Consider Acts 16. One day Paul celebrated open hearts obeying the gospel; days later, he was beaten with rods and locked in the stocks for preaching the same message. Then late that night, still wounded and sore, the penitent jailor gathers his family for Paul and Silas to teach them. I wonder if those “stripes” were open and throbbing while Paul was teaching? Being ready to preach the Word included times when it was “not a good time” for the preacher. Be ready anyway. Longsuffering will occasionally be rewarded with “same hour of the night” studies that finish with baptisms.

Paul’s description in 2 Timothy 4:2, “Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” also illustrates the ‘ready for all occasions’ attitude an evangelist must possess. With this command, Timothy was to preach what was appropriate. The use of sound and careful judgment in our approach is essential. If someone knows what they are doing is wrong, then a rebuke may be needed. If someone is un-taught on a matter, then



appeal to the correct way (such as Aquilla and Priscilla with Apollos) may be more appropriate. If someone is discouraged and vulnerable to stumble, then patient, gentle encouragement may be what is needed. The New Century Version says, *“Be ready at all times, and tell people what they need to do. Tell them when they are wrong. Encourage them with great patience and careful teaching.”*

The way Paul lived also illustrates the work of an evangelist. Every epistle has some reference to Paul’s “night and day with tears” concern for all the churches. In Acts 20, he reminds the Ephesian elders, *“I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”*

Of course, Paul’s example always pointed back to Jesus. *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11:1). The apostle Paul, like Jesus, never taught anything that he was not willing to do himself. Paul’s words to Timothy are powerful. He wrote, *“If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed”* (1 Timothy 4:6). Also, *“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity”* (1 Timothy 4:12). Preaching without love leads to noise instead of being preachers of the Word.

Paul’s work as an evangelist focused on clinging to the Word, holding fast the pattern, practicing what you preach, instilling it in faithful men, and continuing to do these things.

After Paul’s first missionary journey was complete, Acts 15:36 reads, *“Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.’”* This example may be the most exceptional display of the work of an

evangelist. It includes teaching the gospel to the lost as well as doing what we can to maintain those saved souls. Even after being stoned and left for dead by the Jewish mob, Paul said, *“Let’s go back and see how our brethren are doing.”* Paul’s letters show this also, as he wrote the church in Philippi, *“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you, it is safe”* (Philippians 3:1). Repeat, repeat, repeat.

It should also be noted that without that, “Let’s go back” spirit, Paul may not have ever met Timothy in Lystra on that second journey.

The final part of Paul’s charge, *“Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry,”* begs the question, when does that happen? When is ministry fulfilled? It is evident in Paul’s letter by the next paragraph that the evangelist’s work is never over. It is only completed after he is “poured out,” “departed,” finished with “the good fight,” and “finished the race.” While there is still breath in our body, there is still a job to fulfill. There are still souls to teach; there are still scriptures to study. There are still brethren “to see how they are doing” and encourage them.

Going by the dates in my study Bible, Paul met Timothy early in his second journey around AD 52. Acts 16:1-2 says Timothy was *“a disciple ... well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.”* From that point, Timothy is a traveling companion of Paul, a messenger, and an evangelist. Paul gives Timothy and others responsibilities. Paul left him at local churches to help the brethren, and even appoint elders where they were lacking. By AD 62 (10 years and two journeys later), Paul writes, *“But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel”* (Philippians 2:19-22).

Paul wrote Second Timothy around AD 67. At this point, Timothy had been serving in some capacity as an evangelist for fifteen years. While younger than Paul, “young Timothy” wasn’t that young anymore. And yet Paul’s final charge to him (2 Timothy 4:5) is so similar to all the other words of admonition Timothy had heard for years. *“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them,*

*for in doing this, you will save both yourself and those who hear you”* (1 Timothy 4:15-16).

IT WAS STILL TRUE! And others need it too. And Paul still had the same passion in his last letter to encourage Timothy.

Stick to the Word, hold fast the pattern, practice what you preach, instill it in faithful men, and repeat, repeat, repeat. *“Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”*

# The Scripture Cannot Be Broken

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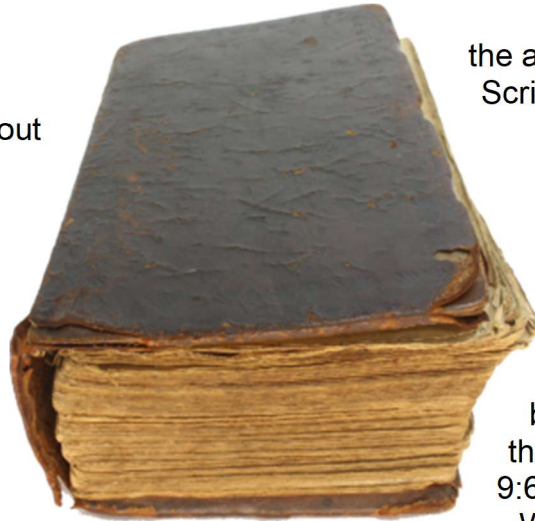
Jesus entered the temple during Hanukkah (John 10:22) and was accosted by the Jewish leaders about whether He was the Christ or not. They demanded, *“If you are the Christ, tell us plainly”* (John 10:24). He had not been ambiguous about His identity. There were two problems at play here. First, the religious leaders did not believe (John 10:25-26). Second, since they had failed to seize Him and put Him to death on previous occasions (John 5:17-18; 8:58-59), they sought another opportunity against Him.

After a short discourse in which He contrasted the unbelief of the Jewish rulers with the faith of His disciples, He affirmed, *“I and My Father are one”* (John 10:30). This phrase sent them into a frenzy. They took up stones, ready to put Jesus to death (John 10:31). What was the charge? They explained, *“...for blasphemy, and because you, being a Man, make Yourself God”* (John 10:33).

Jesus appealed to the Scriptures to defend His claim as the Son of God. His response relied upon the inerrancy of the Scriptures. He reasoned,

*“Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, ‘You are gods?’ If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’”* (John 10:34-36)

What a powerful phrase – *“the Scripture cannot be broken.”* Jesus’ defense against His accusers, ready to stone Him, depended upon



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the accuracy and reliability of the Scriptures.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE STATEMENT

*“You are gods,”* is a quote from Psalm 82:6. Please understand, Jesus’ point is not that the word “god” can be used of men. If that were the case, Psalm 45:6 or Isaiah 9:6 would have been suitable. We understand Psalm 45 to be messianic, but the sons of Korah wrote it as a

composition about King David (v 1). Though we see the messianic implications of Isaiah 9, the Jewish mind would count this to be accolades of a future (fleshly) king. Jesus is not arguing that He, as a man, can be called “god.” He is not playing word games with their accusation; He is supporting His claim (v 30).

How did Psalm 82:6 justify His claim? What made it different from Psalm 45 or Isaiah 9? The key is to understand who is being referred to as “gods” in the text. Commentators tend to view them as human judges and magistrates. If this is the case, the Lord’s argument would be reduced to this “If your wicked civil leaders could be referred to as gods in Psalm 82 because they were given authority, then I can be called a god too.” Again, He is not arguing semantics.

So who are these “gods” in Psalm 82? Several texts in both the Old and New Testaments infer angelic beings had authority over the nations (see Job 1 & 2; Daniel 10:4-21; Ephesians 3:10; Colossians 1:16; 1 Peter 3:22; etc.). Deuteronomy 32:8 speaks of separating the sons of Adam into nations. The NKJV (among other translations) states, *“...He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the*

*children of Israel.*” This verse is an odd statement. What does the number of people in Israel have to do with the borders of nations in the world? Consider a different translation of Deuteronomy 32:8, this from the LXX: *“When the Most High divided the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God.”* This rendering of the text agrees with the list of texts cited above, which speak of angelic beings set over the nations.

Angels had sinned and were accountable before God in judgment. And if angelic beings were called “gods,” then surely “Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world” could identify Himself as “...the Son of God” (John 10:36). Of Jesus’ use of Psalm 82:6, brother Pickup wrote:

*Jesus purposely chose to cite a passage that addressed wicked beings by this term, and He contrasted himself with these beings to refute the charge of blasphemy. So Jesus’ argument hinges upon His dissimilarity with the ones addressed in the psalm as much as similarity with them.*<sup>1</sup>

As always, the Lord found the perfect words to say in response to His opposition. In this case, citing a text which employed the Hebrew *‘elohiym*, not of men like kings and judges, not of the Father, but of spirit beings set over and dwelling outside our earthly existence. His argument hinged on the use of a single word.

### **THE MEANING OF THE PHRASE**

Our English word “broken” comes from the Greek *luo*. It is defined as *“...to loosen, undo, dissolve, anything bound, tied or compacted together ... to annul, subvert, to do away with, to deprive of authority...”*<sup>2</sup> Jesus not only knew the Scriptures were inerrant (and thus unable to be broken), He affirmed them to be the words of God (Matthew 22:31-32, 43; John 6:45). Jesus did not think the Scriptures were man’s representation of what God might have said. Furthermore, Jesus acknowledged the Scriptures to be historically factual and accurate, unlike some of today’s theological

elite. Jesus spoke about Jonah’s three days and nights in the belly of a great fish as a real occurrence and used it as a parallel for His death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 12:40). Jesus gave witness to the creation account, speaking of *“...He who made them at the beginning...”* (Matthew 19:4). In the same breath, He affirmed God’s plan for marriage – one man, one woman for life (v 5-6). In Luke 17, the Lord spoke of the flood in Noah’s day (v 26-27) and the destruction of Sodom in the days of Lot (v 28-29), using both as a shadow of the judgment to come “when the Son of Man is revealed” (v 30-31). In John 3:14, Jesus referenced Numbers 21, where *“...Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness...”* to provide healing from a plague of fiery serpents among the children of Israel. In like manner, He stated, *“...even so must the Son of Man be lifted up...”* speaking of the healing which would be available as a result of His crucifixion. These Old Testament events actually took place, as did the events which Jesus likened to them (His crucifixion, His burial, the judgment).

When God’s word addresses historical data, it is accurate. Skeptics once chided the Bible for its many references to the Hittites, believing they were just a Bible myth. Archaeology knew nothing of these Hittite people, that is until Hugo Winckler uncovered a sizeable library in 1906 which documented the Hittite Empire. When the Bible speaks prophetically, it will be fulfilled. Perhaps no prophecy of Scriptures is as detailed as Daniel 11. The text chronicles approximately 400 years of history from the heyday of the Persian kingdom to the death of Antiochus Epiphanes in 164 BC. Set beside the record of history, we see a perfect correlation from start to finish.

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PHRASE**

Jesus’ statement, *“...the Scripture cannot be broken...”* is a guarantee. It is a certification of the absolute reliability of the Scriptures. If God has said it, it is true. It can be trusted.

Paul tells us, *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...”* (2 Timothy 3:16). God’s Spirit was directly involved in the transmission of the Holy Word to the Bible writers, both Old

and New Testament (2 Peter 1:20-21; Ephesians 3:1-5; Galatians 1:12; etc.). That being the case, we can have confidence in the flawless nature of the original documents, even if we don't have access to the original documents! We are using translations of copies of copies of copies. How can we be assured that the Scripture hasn't been broken? How can we have confidence in the Bible we pick up and read today?

Jesus used and trusted a translation of copies of copies of copies. Archer and Chirichigno's "Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament: A Complete Survey" lists 340 places in the New Testament, which cite the Septuagint (LXX, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures). By way of contrast, they list only 33 occasions where the Masoretic Text (Hebrew) is cited in the New Testament. The unbreakable nature of the Scriptures is not limited to the original documents. God's word has been preserved through the ages and continues to have the same authority and power it had when first spoken.

In declaring, "...the Scripture cannot be broken..." Jesus has said that ALL SCRIPTURE will be fulfilled. Biblical inerrancy is demonstrated time and again through the fulfillment of prophecies. We see a small snapshot of this in the events surrounding Jesus' arrest and trial (Matthew 26:54-56), in the casting of lots for His garments (Matthew 27:35), in the safeguarding of His bones on the cross (John 19:36-37), in His death, burial and resurrection (Luke 24:45-47), and in the demise of and replacement of Judas among the apostles (Acts 1:16-17, 20-23). God's word came to pass.

### THE APPLICATION OF THE PHRASE

The Lord expects us to believe in the accuracy and certainty of God's word. Hear His portrayal of the pedestrian attitude the Jewish leaders had of God's word:

*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of*

*Me ... Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is one who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trust. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words? (John 5:39, 45-47).*

The 17th-century Swiss clergyman Louis Gausson wrote:

*...there are in the Christian world but two schools or two religions: that which puts the Bible above everything, and that which puts something above the Bible. The former was evidently that of Jesus Christ; the latter has been that of the rationalists of all denominations and of all times. The motto of the former is this: the whole written Word is inspired by God, even to a single jot and tittle; the Scripture cannot be destroyed. The motto of the second is this: there are human judges lawfully entitled to pass judgments on the Word of God. Instead of putting the Bible above all, it is, on the contrary, either science or reason, or human tradition, or some new inspiration, which it places above that book. Hence all rationalism; hence all false religions.<sup>3</sup>*

We need to believe the Bible, without reservation. It is the divinely inspired and wholly inerrant word of God. The Scripture cannot be broken.

1 Pickup, Martin, God So Loved, "Old Testament Citations in the Gospel of John"

2 Thayer, Joseph, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.

3 Gausson, Louis, The Divine Inspiration of the Bible.

# JULY 2020 PREVIEW

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<b>EXPOSITORY ARTICLE</b>	What does God want of you? <u>Jeremy Woodman</u> will use Micah 6:8 to unravel the answer to this great question.
<b>CHURCH ARTICLE</b>	A follow-up article on how to make our Bible classes effective. <u>William Stewart</u> will focus on what teachers can do to improve learning in Bible classes.
<b>WORSHIP ARTICLE</b>	Working from Colossians 2:16-23, <u>Sean Cavender</u> will address the dangers of self-made religion.
<b>APPLICATION ARTICLE</b>	<u>Scott Long</u> will use Titus 3:8 and related verses to shed light on the Christian's responsibility to maintain good works.
<b>EVANGELISM ARTICLE</b>	Jesus told us to "Go into all the world." <u>Keith Sharp</u> will urge us to be active in sharing our faith based on this statement of Jesus.
<b>BEYOND THE BASICS</b>	<u>Brian Sullivan</u> will use Colossians 1 to highlight the importance of prayer in our lives.

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