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## A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS:

The first issue of GROW magazine was published in July 2017. This issue marks the beginning of our 5<sup>th</sup> year! We're thankful to all our subscribers for your interest in this quarterly e-publication and appreciate the words of encouragement we receive from time to time. Also, a huge thanks to our growing list of writers who continually give us articles which are biblical and relevant to the pursuit of GROWing in the faith.

Friends, if you believe the material herein is helpful, we encourage you to share it with others. Forward the notification email, post our information on social media, or print this file and pass a hard copy along.

Now, come GROW with us!

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



## The Divine Nature: 2 Peter 1:3-7

CHADWICK BREWER | RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Peter's preamble is poignant and powerful. Everything that follows is predicated on God's divine power granting us all things that pertain to life and godliness (v. 3). It is God who moves first to establish a relationship with man. It is not man that starts to build that relationship. In fact, man cannot.

God has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness by revealing knowledge of Himself (v. 3). Since we are purpose-built in His image, it logically flows that God demonstrates all things needed for life and godliness in His character and nature. To know God is to know about how to live properly and be godly. To not know God is to be devoid of these things.

We all have been called by God, through the revelation of Him (by the person of Jesus and His divinely inspired word), to very great and precious promises (v. 3). These, again, He granted to us. These are not promises that we earned or achieved ourselves. Peter presses us to see just how much God has done for us. God's actions ought to make our drive to action supremely imperative.

The Divine has allowed us the option to escape the corruption in the world by becoming partakers in His divine nature (v. 4). But what is this divine nature? I would suggest that it includes at least two things. First, it includes the new birth, being born of the Spirit (John 3:6). In this new birth of the Spirit, we are granted eternal life. We become heirs of the kingdom and are called children of God. In this way, we become partakers in the divine nature. Second, once we are born of the Spirit, we have to walk by the Spirit to produce fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26). In these ways, we can be partakers in the divine nature.

Since we have been given this very precious promise, and the ability to partake in the divine



1 via Ulleo | Pixabay.com

nature, we should make every effort to partake in the divine nature fully (v. 5). We have begun to partake in the divine nature by being born of the Spirit through faith. Still, we must continue in the divine nature by walking according to the Spirit and adding to our faith. Faith that leads to salvation is a wonderful start, but we have been granted the ability to partake in the divine nature by growing to be more Christ-like. God has given us the tools and the ability to partake in the divine nature by keeping in step with the Spirit. Why would we not want to add to our faith?

**Virtue/Moral excellence.** This is the same word used in verse 3 to describe God in calling us to Himself. Virtue is a characteristic of His nature in which we are invited to share. We are called to be virtuous or morally excellent like He is virtuous. As Peter wrote in his previous letter, we are to be holy in all of our conduct as He is holy. This virtue or moral excellence can mean that we must hold a high moral standard. This excellence stands in sharp contrast to the moral standards that are held by the world.

**Knowledge.** Since God has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him, it logically follows that growing in knowledge about Him will aid us in all things pertaining to life and godliness. More knowledge leads to more faith, aids in being more virtuous, provides self-control, builds one up for more steadfastness, helps us

understand and apply love, and certainly helps us be more godly.

**Self-control.** Partaking of the divine nature must include an escape from corruption. To escape corruption is to live self-controlled and refrain from the temptations of the flesh. If we are born of the Spirit, then we must have our minds on the Spirit and walk according to the Spirit. Remember that God has given us a spirit of power and self-control!

**Steadfastness.** As we live in the new life, we will face trials and temptations that will tear at us and cause us to wrestle with our faith and our core values. Now that we have started to live by the Spirit, we must continue to walk according to the Spirit. We must have the steadfastness to meet those trials and temptations, lest we fall back and our later state be worse than our first.

**Godliness.** Godliness can be described as practicing virtuous moral standards, as previously mentioned. There is a progression, an addition, from virtue to godliness. One must first raise their moral standards and then strive to achieve those standards. One cannot achieve godliness without raising moral standards, nor does raising moral standards grant godliness automatically. One first raises the standards they hold for themselves in their heart, and then they strive towards that standard by a steady exercise of those standards in daily life.

**Brotherly love.** Brotherly love calls us to look outside of ourselves and towards the larger community of Christians. It goes beyond the ideas of self-control and steadfastness. It

demands selfless actions towards those who have become members of ourselves. We are to look out for the interest of other Christians and count them as more significant than ourselves, just as Christ Jesus looked after our interest before His own. The divine nature puts others before self.

**Love.** Love is the next step in the progression above brotherly love. There is a shared kinship and bond between those of like-faith that does not exist outside of the church. Love for our brothers and sisters should come naturally to us since we are fellow heirs of the kingdom. But the divine nature calls us to have love for those outside of the body of Christ as well. We are called to grow to be truly selfless in loving those who currently are not a part of us.

If these qualities are ours and are increasing, they will keep us from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge that has been granted to us pertaining to life and godliness. Lacking these qualities makes us nearsighted to the point of blindness. Knowledge, true knowledge, that puts things into practice, gives us sight. However, knowledge that does not put what it knows into practice is blindness.

God has given us more than we can ask or imagine by giving us the ability to partake in the divine nature. Therefore, make every effort to be fruitful in the new life of the Spirit. Be all the more diligent in making your calling and election sure!

# The Bride Of Christ

WAYNE GOFF | KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

## THE UNION

Ephesians 5:25-33 describes the relationship of the church (God's people) to Jesus Christ (Head). While comparing this relationship to an earthly marriage, the Scriptures teach us that Jesus Christ is the Head of His bride and Savior. The corresponding obligation of Christ's bride is to be subject to Jesus Christ in everything. This obligation is explained further (vv. 25-27) to be due to the tremendous sacrifice Jesus made for His bride! He loved her, and He died for her. He cleansed her with His blood through the washing of water by the word. If these sacrifices were not enough, Paul states even further that Christ sacrificed Himself for her that He might present her to Himself a glorious, spotless bride that is holy and without blemish!

All of these descriptions in Ephesians 5 have tremendous spiritual meaning, but the comparison for our earthly minds of the husband-wife relationship is especially helpful. Perhaps we should stop and reflect on why Jesus Christ would want to marry us, His bride, in the first place! We were without strength, ungodly, and sinners (Romans 5:6-8)! That does not sound like a beautiful, desirable mate, now does it? Upon further reflection, it becomes obvious that Jesus joined us to Himself in marriage to do for us what we could not do for ourselves! He washed us from our sins and made us clean, pure, and sanctified. We could now come into a pure relationship with Him. Furthermore, He "loved" (agapē) us (Ephesians 5:25), which is His unselfish motive for looking out for our best interests even at His own expense! What kind of person would do that? A loving, giving, selfless person full of a multitude of spiritual, benevolent riches. He not only is the Groom, but He is also the Savior!

Now that we have obeyed the Gospel and are



2 via Sixteen Miles Out | Unsplash.com

washed, cleansed, and sanctified, we not only have every obligation to be in submission to Jesus by obeying His every wish and command found in the New Testament (see Matthew 28:18-20), but it is in our own best interest to do so! In my sermons about the family, I have often said that if every Christian husband acted toward his wife as Christ did to His bride, then there would be few real issues in the home! Jesus joined Himself to us, His bride, to make us better and to lift us up to a higher position and plane than we could ever have done on our own. Husbands should make their wives better for having married them.

The Lord's bride, the church, is obligated to be faithful to her Husband. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." Every Christian and every local congregation should feel this moral obligation of faithfulness in their existence! The context of this statement shows us what Christ expects of us. Do not go after "another Jesus" (2 Corinthians 11:4), do not believe "a different gospel," and do not partake of a "different spirit." The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)

is evidenced in the life of every faithful Christian and every faithful local congregation. She exhibits the spirit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control! What man would not want to be married to such a beautiful bride?! Yet our behavior is begotten by our Husband, Jesus Christ. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19)! The reciprocal relationship of Husband-Bride is seen in this perfect marriage. Christ loved and sacrificed for His bride. His bride loves and obeys Him because of it.

### **THE DANGER OF UNFAITHFULNESS**

It has often been said that “absence makes the heart grow fonder ... for somebody else!” And so it is with Christians who the world has enticed. Or by local churches who have looked longingly to pseudo-brides (denominations) for their conduct! The Groom, Jesus Christ, is in heaven, and our relationship with Him is fostered by constant communication through studying His Word (“love letters?”) and by fervent prayer. The church or the Christian who loses their love for the Groom then looks longingly to others who are easily viewed by sight and not by faith. How sad that this should happen, but it happens often! James said, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (James 4:4)! Once again, we look to the context of this statement to find “unfaithfulness” to Christ includes worldly pleasures, lusts, unbridled covetousness, and selfishness (James 4:1-3)! How many Christians and churches have succumbed to such worldliness?! While professing great love for their spiritual Husband, their worldly priorities tell a different story! You see the material wealth of houses, cars, vacations, and retirement plans pursued at the cost of neglecting their spiritual obligations in the local church and to their fellow brethren. The excuses that “I don’t have time!” or “I can’t do that!” or “I will when I’m not so busy!” are used to overlook their neglect. There is nothing of the material world that will draw one closer to Jesus Christ. Only a heart full of love for Jesus

will cause one to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33)!

The solution to this unfaithfulness is penitent grief (James 4:8-10)! Jesus will take back His unfaithful bride if only she will humble herself, resist the devil, and draw near Him once again (James 4:6-8)! The loving, intimate relationship of husband-wife is desired by God, and it should be by us! Dear brethren, do not be blinded by the glitz and glamour of this world — its fading beauty lasts only for a while (see Hebrews 11:25; 1 John 2:16-17)!

### **THE BLESSED REUNION**

Though our spiritual Husband is away for a time in heaven, one day He will return to claim His beautiful, faithful bride! “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.’ And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!”’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true sayings of God” (Revelation 19:7–9). In Revelation, the marriage of Christ to His beautiful bride takes place after the horrific persecution of the first century! Those who remained faithful to Jesus through suffering and persecution were adorned with “fine linen, clean and bright” because it is “the righteous acts of the saints!” Today, Christians and the Lord’s bride, the church, continue to be persecuted by the world. Satan is alive and well, going about like a “roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). The naive bride may easily be deceived and led astray by an evil, self-serving paramour. Be warned, my beloved brethren!

John describes the beautiful, eternal marriage of Groom and bride at the end of time in Revelation 21:2, 9-10 — “Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband... ¶ Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the bride,

the Lamb's wife.' And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God." The beautiful description of an eternal relationship in heaven follows (Revelation 21:11-27). And though the figure changes from "bride" to "city," the angels have explained already that the bride is the city of God! One second in heaven, one second viewing that beautiful home of the soul will make all the sacrifice on this earth worthwhile!

Participation in this spiritual marriage and its ultimate eternal feast is still available for those who will only trust and obey! "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). So, dear reader, come to the wedding to the perfect Husband, Jesus Christ, by faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. Remain faithful until the end of time, and enjoy the blissful wedding feast forever to follow!

## “Lord, Teach Us To Pray”

JESSE FLOWERS | COOKEVILLE, TENNESSEE

Without question, prayer is a major Bible doctrine and subject referenced throughout the Scriptures. It is one of the greatest spiritual blessings the child of God is afforded to enjoy in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). How wonderful and incredible that our loving and caring heavenly Father has provided to His children this means of communication with Him!

Christians of every age are instructed to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). So to the saints in Ephesus, Paul exhorted them, saying, “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18). Since this spiritual activity and form of communication with God is a regular part of a Christian’s life, we must know how to pray. And even if we already feel confident that we know how to pray, no doubt all of us can grow more in this area of our walk with God.

I am very thankful that during the earthly ministry of Jesus, some of His disciples requested of Him on one occasion, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). Jesus’ disciples were Jewish men who undoubtedly were taught by their parents to pray when they were children, and now as grown men, often prayed. But they still recognized a deficiency in their knowledge of prayer and perhaps their ability to do so effectively. So who better to teach them or us, regarding the subject of prayer, than the Son of God Himself?

So, how does the Lord, and the inspired men who wrote His commandments (1 Corinthians 14:37), teach us to pray? First, let us briefly consider some important ways the Lord teaches us to pray.

- **Reverently.** The very first aspect of prayer that the Lord teaches us is who we are addressing when we pray and how we



3 via Naassom Azevedo | Unsplash.com

address Him. “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name” (Luke 11:2; Matthew 6:11). The meaning of “hallowed” carries with it the idea of venerated, sacred, someone to be revered. Certainly, the Creator of all things, the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present God, is to be addressed reverently whenever we pray to Him. So, let us be careful not to become nonchalant and casual about how we address the One who holds our very breath in His hand (Acts 17:25). Since He is the One to whom we must give account (Hebrews 4:13) and the One to whom we are to serve, we must approach Him “acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28).

- **Humbly.** In His parable, Jesus taught about two men (Pharisee and tax collector) that went up to the temple to pray; one thing is made abundantly clear: God favorably hears and receives the prayers of the humble, not the haughty (Luke 18:9-14). “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6). As the LORD said of old through His faithful prophet Isaiah, “But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word” (Isaiah 66:2). King David understood, “The sacrifices of God



are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart-these, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). So, “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6).

- **For our Physical Needs.** When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, one of the key things that He emphasized to them was to make the request: “Give us day by day our daily bread” (Luke 11:3; cf. Matthew 6:11). Expressing our need for food in this way, “day by day,” reminds us of our dependence upon God and His goodness to provide us with what we need. Jesus would go on to teach in the text of Matthew 6 that the focus and priority of His followers was to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (v. 33), and not worry about food, drink, and clothing. Our heavenly Father knows that we need these things and will graciously provide them (Matthew 6:25-34; cf. Acts 14:17). But it is important to be reminded often that though we may work extremely hard to provide for our own household, it is God still who “gives to all life, breath, and *all things*” (Acts 17:25, emphasis mine, jf).
- **For our Spiritual Needs.** Of course, as always, our Lord is primarily concerned with our spiritual needs. So He instructed His disciples to pray: “And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Luke 11:4). Our sins against God (Romans 3:23; 1 John 3:4) are accurately described as “debts” (Matthew 6:12). They are a debt owed that we cannot possibly ever pay or “make up for,” thus, we are fully relying on God’s mercy and grace to take our debts away. For the child of God, this is to be done by confession, repentance, and prayer (1 John 1:9; Acts 8:22). Jesus also makes it abundantly clear that God’s willingness to forgive us is dependent upon our willingness to forgive those who sin against us (Matthew 6:12, 14-15). Prayer to God is also vital in resisting and overcoming the temptations of the evil one. Paul exhorts saints to put on the whole

armor of God, as well as “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18). And Jesus instructed His disciples in the Garden to: “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41).

- **For the Spread of the Gospel.** In what is often referred to as the “Lord’s Prayer,” Jesus taught His disciples to pray “Your kingdom come” (Luke 11:2; Matthew 6:10). At the time, the “kingdom” (i.e., the Church) was “at hand” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17), but still future. But now the kingdom, the Lord’s church, has been established (Matthew 16:18; Mark 9:1; Acts 2; Colossians 1:13). Members of the household of God should continue to pray for the Lord’s church – for the gospel to be preached near, far, and wide – for the borders of the spiritual kingdom to expand – and for precious souls to continue to be added to it by the Lord (Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Paul wrote to churches, exhorting them to pray for more opportunities to spread the gospel. He said, “meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Colossians 4:3-4). “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you” (2 Thessalonians 3:1). The harvest of lost souls is plentiful, but the laborers are few, so let us “pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:38).
- **Filled with Praise.** Jesus ends His instructive prayer with these words of praise, “For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen” (Matthew 6:13). Our prayers ought to be filled with praise to God (Hebrews 13:15). Paul penned to the saints in Philippi, “Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Philippians 4:20). As he wrote to Timothy, “Now to the King eternal,

immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17). As Peter declared to the saints: “that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:11). Jude ends his short epistle with these words: “To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen” (v. 25). “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 150:6).

- **Through Jesus Christ.** Jesus taught His disciples “that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you” (John 15:16; cf. 14:13-14; 16:23-24, 26). The apostle Paul declared: “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). How fortunate we are that we have “a merciful and faithful High Priest” (Hebrews 2:17) who can “sympathize with our weaknesses” (Hebrews 4:15); therefore, we can “come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). And what a blessed and reassuring truth that our Savior “lives to make intercession” for the saints (Hebrews 7:25)!
- **According to God’s Will.** Jesus also teaches us to pray to God, saying, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Luke 11:2; Matthew 6:10). Seeking the will of His Father in heaven was always at the heart of what Jesus did (John 5:30; 6:38; Matthew 26:39, 42), and so must it be with us in our lives and expressed in our prayers. Our prayers are not to be centered around our will, wants, and desires, but rather God’s perfect will. When we remember to focus our prayer requests around the will of God, the Bible tells us that we can have great confidence in God hearing and answering our prayers. “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1

John 5:14-15).

- **With Faith.** No matter how well-expressed, eloquent, and lengthy our prayers may be, they are voiced in vanity if they are void of faith. In the New Testament book of James, we read: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. **But let him ask in faith, with no doubting**, (emphasis mine, jf) for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (1:5-8). Did you catch what James stated here? If we ask things of God (such as wisdom) with doubts within us (i.e., lacking in faith), we will not receive anything from Him! As Jesus taught His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ it will be done. And whatever things you ask in prayer, **believing**, you will receive” (Matthew 21:21-22, emphasis mine, jf). So let us pray with confidence, trust, and faith!
- **Steadfastly.** Those who first obeyed the gospel on the day of Pentecost are described as “continuing steadfastly...in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Paul instructed the saints living in Rome: “continuing steadfastly in prayer” (Romans 12:12). The Greek word for steadfastly literally means: “to be earnest towards, that is, (to a thing) to persevere, be constantly diligent...to adhere closely to” (Strong’s Hebrew & Greek Dictionaries). This is exactly what Paul was exhorting the brethren in Thessalonica to do when he wrote to them to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Even when the odds seem to be against us, we must continue to pray to God and not lose heart (Luke 18:1), remembering that we are praying to the One “who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20).

- **In Righteousness.** James declared: “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16). Notice that James did not state that the prayer of just anyone can accomplish much, but the effective prayer of an upright man or woman certainly can! After all, as Peter penned: “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil” (1 Peter 3:12). For example, remember that Peter warned husbands that their prayers to God could be hindered if they were not treating their wives in a godly manner (1 Peter 3:7). We cannot expect a holy God to hear and answer the prayers of people living unholy lives (cf. Isaiah 59:1-2). Dear Christian, if you want your prayer to be received by Almighty God, then strive to consistently walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:5-6).
- **For Those in Authority.** Paul exhorts Christians to pray for those who are in positions of authority in civil government. God Himself has ordained the governing authorities (Romans 13:1). He calls upon saints to pray for their leaders regardless of their politics and policies. “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Notice the reason the apostle gives for why Christians are to pray for all who are in authority. He states, “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.” It is for our benefit that we would remember them in our prayers.
- **When Filled with Anxiety.** Whether one is reading in the Old Testament or the New Testament, the message of Scripture is clear, God does not want His children to be filled with anxiety. At times in our lives, anxious thoughts will multiply within us (Psalm 94:19), weighing our hearts down (Proverbs 12:25). The inspired apostle Paul tells the Christian that praying to our heavenly Father is a wonderful solution in taking away our anxieties and replacing it with the peace of God. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). The God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3) wants us to cast all our anxieties upon Him because He cares for us so deeply (1 Peter 5:7).
- **When we are Suffering.** James asked, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray” (5:13). He said if any brethren were sick, they should summon the elders of the church to pray over the one who was sick (5:14-16). Paul prayed to the Lord when he was suffering with a thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). He pleaded with the Lord three times to remove it. The answer that he received was: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul humbly accepted such an answer and said: “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” David rightly declared: “The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all” (Psalm 34:17-19).
- **With Thanksgiving.** I am afraid a key element often left out of our prayers is remembering to give God thanks. But when you stop and look at the prayer Scriptures in the New Testament, you will notice how often “thanks” and thanksgiving” are included. Of course, the book of Psalms is saturated with prayers and songs of thanksgiving to the Lord. Let us recall that Paul wrote: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, **with thanksgiving**, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6, emphasis mine, jf). “Continue earnestly in prayer,

being vigilant in it ***with thanksgiving***” (Colossians 4:2, emphasis mine, jf). How important is it for the Christian to remember to give God thanks? Paul tells us in Ephesians 5:20 and 1 Thessalonians 5:18. “giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” and “in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” As the psalmist declared, “Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” (107:8).

“Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). He will, and He does if we are willing to learn from Him and then put His teachings about prayer into practice in our day-to-day lives.

# The Dangers of Not Growing

REAGAN MCCLENNY | LUFKIN, TEXAS

2 Peter 1:5-7 describes “adding” important qualities to our Christian character. Some people describe this list as a ladder with each quality as a rung, but that can leave the wrong impression. These are not qualities that we work on one at a time and leave one “complete” to move on the next. Instead, a better image is of a single instrument playing, and another and another are added in perfect harmony until a full orchestra is playing. So, when all the instruments are added, is the process complete? I would suggest that the process is only beginning in earnest! A high school orchestra has (basically) all the same instruments as a professional one. The primary difference in the quality of their performance is a matter of growth.

As the father who cried out to Jesus, “Lord I believe, help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24), there is still growth to be had with each quality even if we possess some measure of all of them. Peter makes this truth clear as he continues.

2 Peter 1:8 “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing...”

Peter is describing growth in these areas and emphasizing that growth is a prerequisite to everything he will speak of next. Of all the issues we might have in our Christian walk, we might not view lack of growth as a major concern compared to more explicitly “sinful” problems. Still, this text tells us that the dangers of not growing are real and serious!

Think of lack of growth as a spiritual heart attack. It is not a singular, isolated incident but is caused by and reveals several things in our spiritual health. First, there are the immediate symptoms that tell us something is wrong. Then there are the underlying causes that we must address. Finally, there is the future prognosis about any changes we may need to make.



4 via Russell Yan | Pixabay.com

## The Immediate Symptoms:

Lack of Growth Makes Us Ineffective and Unfruitful in the Knowledge of the Lord Jesus—“they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (v8b)

It stands to reason that if these things are NOT in us and growing, we WILL be barren and unfruitful (even in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ).

Peter has made it clear already at the beginning of this epistle how important the “knowledge of the Lord Jesus” is to our Christian life (v 2-3). He will go on to warn about false teachers who subvert this knowledge and lead people astray with deceptive words, even those who have “escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2:20).

This knowledge, as incredibly powerful and important as it is, is not enough on its own. Amazingly, even if we “know” all about Jesus, we will still be worthless and unfruitful if we stop growing. Vines defines “barren” as “idle, yielding no return, because of inactivity.” A suggested synonym is “unemployed.” We

aren't DOING anything in our service to God because we've stopped growing! God always wants us to be effective and productive in His service, and He provides the tools necessary for that continued growth (Matthew 13:20-23; Luke 13:6-9).

Isn't that what Peter is saying in 2 Peter 2:20-21? Instead of growing, progressing, and producing, these brethren regressed to what they were before they were Christians. They had the knowledge, so what was the problem? The main problem was that they didn't grow to the point that they could see the emptiness of the false teachers' allurements and resist them. As a result, there was no "adding to" and "increasing" in their faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love!

While lack of growth is dangerous in and of itself, it is also symptomatic of other, deeper problems. Thus, it becomes diagnostic of other dangers.

The Underlying Causes:

1. Spiritual Blindness and Nearsightedness —"For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind" (v 9a)

Much has been made of Peter's unusual word order here, but I suggest it fits with the progression of Peter's thoughts regarding the inability to see.

When we are blind, we can't see our current condition. Spiritually, those who aren't growing have stopped seeing themselves the way they really are. They have a perception of their own righteousness based on the past ("I have become a Christian," "I've worked for the Lord before," etc.), but they don't see their present weakened condition. A lukewarm, lackadaisical approach to our spiritual life, where we rest on our laurels of perceived faithfulness, causes us to stop growing (Revelation 3:15-17).

When we are nearsighted, we can't see very far off. If we have nearsighted eyes, we can only see what is right in front of us. If we have nearsighted hearts, we can only see the physical things of this earth (that are right in

front of us) and not things of a spiritual nature. We can't see things that are afar, things that are coming, the things in the future.

Growth inherently looks to the future. We ask questions like, "How can I get better?" and "What can I do next in service to the Lord?" but Christians who stop growing stop looking to the future. If we stop looking to the future, we don't consider what we should be doing next, what is coming next, or even the judgment (which is spiritual in nature). After describing this coming judgment later in the epistle, Peter says, "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; (15) and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation..." (2 Peter 3:14-15).

But it's not just that we can't see the present or the future when we aren't growing; we don't see the past clearly either.

2. Spiritual Forgetfulness—"...having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins." (9b)

When we are forgetful, we are "blind" to the past. Specifically, we forget the cleansing of our sins that came as a result of God's grace! We forget what Jesus has done for us. Peter's letter was all about "reminding" these brethren of what they should have already known (2 Peter 1:2-4, 12-14). His final reminder is about growing in grace and knowledge instead of forgetting that Jesus is our Lord and Savior and the Christ!

2 Peter 3:18 "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen."

By this grace, we have escaped the corruption, depravity, and pollution of this world (1:4, 2:20). We have escaped from those who live in error through the knowledge of Jesus Christ (2:18). Not only does God's grace provide an escape, but we are also given "entrance" into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord (1:12).

Spiritual forgetfulness causes us to lack any gratitude for God's grace. Look at what God

has done for you! Remember it well. Such gratitude is one of our strongest motivators for growth.

Not growing isn't just dangerous and revealing; it is also predictive. It invariably leads to something else if left unchecked.

The Future Prognosis:

Continued Lack of Growth Precedes A Coming Fall from Our Calling and Election—"Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall." (v 10)

Again, the opposite is true. If we DO NOT do these things, we WILL stumble and fall! Literally, "suffer a reverse." I was a faithful Christian, but I reversed course and went back to sin (as in 2 Peter 2:18-20, above).

2 Peter 3:17 "You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked..."

Thank God Peter does not just express growth in terms of danger but also in victory! If we grow in the qualities Peter lists in 1:5-7, we will NEVER STUMBLE with a spiritual perspective and an appreciation of God's grace. Only growing Christians can achieve such lofty heights and obtain such precious promises!

## A Tale Of Three Cities

SEAN CAVENDER | WICHITA, KANSAS

It is curious how one person can preach and teach the same thing in various places yet yield many different responses from their audience. This frequently happens in the New Testament, especially in the apostle Paul's preaching. In Acts 17, when Paul was on his second missionary journey, he departed Philippi. He came to three cities in rapid succession:

Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. Although Paul was forced to leave those cities because of persecution, he made the best use of his time by preaching the gospel of King Jesus. Paul varied his approach based upon who his audience was. He would speak to Jews differently than to idolatrous Gentiles. Yet, the gospel was unchanged: salvation was through God's appointed Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 17 is easily be outlined and summarized in this way:

- Thessalonica: some Jews believed, several Gentiles and women believed, but many Jews were jealous
- Berea: many Jews and Gentiles believed
- Athens: many Gentiles were curious, but few were obedient

### THESSALONICA

First, Paul went to the Jewish synagogue in Thessalonica. He was there for three Sabbaths, reasoning with them from the Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed God's Anointed One (Acts 17:1-3). One of the pieces of evidence Paul used was the crucifixion of Jesus. Passages in the Old



5 via [ulrichw](#) / Pixabay.com

Testament such as Isaiah 53 prophesied about the brutal death of God's Servant or Psalm 22, which spoke of the mocking and excruciating anguish that the Messiah must suffer. The crucifixion of Jesus certainly fulfilled these Old Testament prophecies — and some in the Jewish synagogues became convinced and believed. Acts 17:4 states that "some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas."

Along with these Jewish converts, several of the Gentiles were persuaded by Paul's preaching. Luke records that a "large number

of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women" came to faith, thanks partly to Paul's reasoning from the Scriptures. As a result of these open-minded believers, a church was established in Thessalonica. Paul wrote a couple of letters to the Thessalonian Christians that we can read in the New Testament.

In three short weeks, Paul formed a local church in the city. Nevertheless, several were angered because of Paul's preaching. The majority of the Jews did not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and became jealous. They created an atmosphere that was antagonistic to Paul's preaching. The unbelievers formed a mob and started an uproar in the city marketplace, leading to an attack on Jason's house (Acts 17:5). These unbelieving, angry Jews accused Paul of "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). The angry mob wanted the city authorities to be on their side, so they accused Paul of subverting the Roman Empire and suggesting another was king, Jesus (Acts



17:7). This accusation was misleading. While it is true that Jesus is King over His kingdom, Paul was not encouraging a revolt from the Roman authority. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world; it is a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36). The unbelieving Jews were deceptive, trying to turn the local authorities against Paul and Silas.

The pressure tactic worked to some degree. Jason paid off the ransom that the attackers were demanding. The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away in the middle of the night (Acts 17:9-10).

### **BEREA**

Upon their arrival in Berea, Paul and Silas went to the Jewish synagogue to preach that Jesus was indeed the Christ. Luke describes the Jewish synagogue in Berea as being "more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica" because they were eager to receive the word of God, and they examined the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11). The truth of the gospel fell upon the good and honest hearts of those Jews in Berea. The Bible says "many of them believed" (Acts 17:12). Also, a good number of Gentile women and men were converted. The Bereans are an excellent example that shows us the importance of being open-minded and fair in our hearing. They demonstrated a willingness to examine God's word every day and a desire to repent to be right with God. These Bereans had been following Judaism, but they came to believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

Of course, the devil will always seek to uproot what God has planted. The wicked and unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica heard about Paul preaching the gospel of Christ in Berea, so they came to Berea to turn the crowds against Paul and Silas. These persecutors again forced Paul to leave Berea and to separate the preaching team (Acts 17:14).

### **ATHENS**

The third and final city Paul visited in Acts 17 is the city of Athens. Paul arrived there and first went to the Jewish synagogue (Acts 17:17). He quickly began to engage with the Gentiles and

Greek philosophers (Acts 17:17-18). While we do not know everything Paul said, he was preaching the gospel — the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 17:18).

In the Greek city, it was not unusual for new teachings to be discussed openly and debated. Many people seemed to enjoy the discussions and dialogue about new ideas (Acts 17:20-21). Paul's sermon in Athens is an incredible example of how to begin a conversation with people's initial understanding and then introducing them to new ideas by teaching them the truth. Paul's approach was different in Athens than in Thessalonica, but the content was the same. These people needed to believe in God and Jesus, repent of their sins, and be ready for the final judgment (Acts 17:30-31). It is apparent that once they heard Paul speak about the concept of resurrection from the dead, they were completely turned away. Their many questions and curiosities had been satisfied. Some said they would hear him again, but whether or not that happened is left unstated (Acts 17:32-33).

The city known for debating new ideas and engaging with various philosophies proved to be a place with very little interest in hearing the gospel of Christ. There may have been many inquiring minds, but very few people were interested in letting that message change their hearts and mind. Yet, there were a few people who believed (Acts 17:34)! For example, one of the members of the Areopagus court, Dionysius, who heard Paul became convinced of his message. Dionysius proved to be an honest hearer of the gospel. Also, a woman named Damaris was among the converts in Athens.

We don't know what happened to these believers after Paul left the city of Athens. However, it is comforting and encouraging that even a few people in that city full of idolaters heard the gospel and committed to following Jesus Christ.

### **THREE CITIES. ONE MESSAGE. MIXED RESULTS.**

In Acts 17, it is apparent that we can share the

same message of Jesus Christ yet have challenges, successes, and even failures. Our approach can shift to address what people need to hear, but they can still reject God's truth. On the other hand, we can be engaged with people who appear interested, answering their questions, and they still want nothing to do with the gospel and the Lord's church.

In the city of Thessalonica, some people believed, but many grew envious of Paul. In Athens, many people were interested, but very few were invested in making changes in what they think. In Berea, people were eager to learn and study God's word.

Evangelism would be a lot easier if we were guaranteed positive results every time we told someone about God's plan of salvation through Jesus.

A few weeks ago, I heard an interview with a college baseball player who said, "baseball is a game of failure, not a game of success." He pointed out that someone is considered a great baseball player even if they strike out 7 times out of 10 at-bats. He went on to comment that what determined success in baseball was how you responded to failure. He said baseball is about the process of growth and maturing. A good baseball player learns how to get a quality at-bat, especially when things are difficult. For example, when he has two strikes on him, he has to foul off some pitches or hit it in the gap to get on base. The batter's thinking and approach are what set him up for success in any at-bat he may have, no matter the circumstance.

I think this kind of attitude would help us in our approach to evangelism. We tend to define successful evangelism in terms of the results that we see. Three out of 10 hits might be good results in baseball — and evangelism — but perhaps our focus should not be on the results. Instead, we should look inwardly to develop the best quality times and opportunities to study the Bible with our non-Christian friends and family.

Evangelistic results are going to vary. Jesus understood that the gospel would draw people

to Him, or it would drive people away. He knew people would reject Him (Matthew 21:42-43; John 6:66). More importantly, Jesus prepared His disciples for facing the disappointing results of rejection when He gave the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1-25).

Nevertheless, Jesus was never deterred by disappointing results. He associated with sinners because He came to seek and save the lost. He came to heal those sick in sin. Jesus found motivation not in the results but in actually doing the work God had sent Him to do. He told His disciples, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work...Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest" (John 4:34-35). There is always work to do. There is always someone who needs to hear the gospel of grace and forgiveness.

Shifting from a results-driven model of evangelism to a work-driven model must have been how Paul approached his evangelistic efforts. If he had focused on the results, it would have been tempting to quit preaching at the first sign of trouble. Paul stayed the course. He did not change the message. Even if he was discouraged because of people's attitudes and rejection of the gospel, he continued to preach.

Our mission is to share the gospel with others. We cannot determine nor control the results. But just as a good baseball player develops quality at-bats, we can create quality opportunities for sharing the gospel. Below are a few suggestions:

1. Talk to your friends/family/neighbors about a specific study and discussion at church in a sermon or a Bible class that helped encourage you.
2. Talk with others about mundane and everyday events by adding a question or comment about God. This can set up follow-up questions or opportunities to study. [This happened to me a few weeks ago. I was outside chatting with a brother in Christ who serves as a deacon at the local congregation where I preach. We were

talking about the sunset that evening, and he then said, "I wonder what Jesus thought about seeing the world and His own creation while He was down here on earth." We took a normal conversation and then talked about the profound, biblical concept of Jesus and the incarnation.]

3. Make a connection with people. Find out something about them and their beliefs. Ask them questions and create a dialogue. That's what Paul did in Athens. The person could be someone who takes your food order at a restaurant or coffee shop. In a world where people are more attached to their phones, tablets, or laptops, making a deep, personal connection will undoubtedly stand out.
4. Answer questions when people ask you something about the church or the Bible. Perhaps they will be open-minded and be willing to listen. Maybe they only want information without a commitment like the people in Athens. However, you never know when you will meet a Dionysius and Damaris (Acts 17:34).

5. Use online tools at our disposal. A Bible study used to require meeting up in the same physical location. Now there are opportunities to share sermons and classes via YouTube, Vimeo, or other services. There are websites with articles to read. Video conferencing software (e.g., Zoom and Google Meet) makes global studies possible. Churches need to develop an online presence, and individual Christians must point people to those online tools.

We will face challenges in evangelistic efforts. We may grow discouraged because of people's negative response to the truth. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to learn from Jesus' teaching and Paul's example. We need to keep doing the work. Develop and cultivate as many quality opportunities to share the gospel with as many people as we can. Plant the seed and allow God to give the increase (1 Corinthians 3:7). All glory belongs to God!

# Counterfeit Christianity

WILLIAM STEWART | KINGSTON, ONTARIO

*Caveat emptor* is an old maxim regarding the acquisition of goods. It is Latin for “let the buyer beware.” Charlatans and swindlers are always ready to take advantage of unsuspecting patrons. If we are not careful (and sometimes even when we thought we were careful) we can be cheated by forgeries and bogus items, whether it be artwork, sports memorabilia, clothing, electronics, nutritional supplements, or even food products. The prevalence of online shopping today has opened a massive opportunity for con artists to dupe buyers. Indeed, *caveat emptor*! Some may not use cash anymore, but there is always the possibility of coming across counterfeit currency for those who do. 2018 statistics from the Bank of Canada indicate over 33,000 counterfeit notes were detected in circulation, about double what was discovered in 2015. One encounter with a counterfeit bill is enough to make anyone appreciate the high cost of counterfeiting. The bank will take the fake note off your hands, removing it from the marketplace, but you receive nothing in return. They cannot and will not reimburse those who have had the misfortune of receiving a bogus bill. To do so would encourage criminal activity and undermine the value of authentic notes. A \$5 bill may not hurt much, but imagine losing \$20, \$50, or even \$100 to counterfeit. Ouch!

As troubling as buying a knock-off item or losing cash due to counterfeit currency, there is a more serious deception defrauding the world. Sadly, it is one to which most people pay little or no attention. It is not a scam that affects our pocketbooks – worse – it reaches to the very core of our being, to our eternal soul. Would you believe that counterfeiting is more of a problem in the religious world than it ever has been or will be with money and merchandise? A common perception among people, whether religious or not, is that it really does not matter – Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism,



6 via [Sammy Williams](#) | [Unsplash.com](#)

Hinduism, etc. They are simply different ways to the same end, right? Not so! These various religions present different doctrines, different hopes, and different philosophies. A prophet of God wrote many years ago, “Can two walk together unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3) The prophet speaks of the agreement needed between God and those who will serve Him. There are not as many ways to God as there are religions in the world. We must come to God according to His will, not our own. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). Any religion which excludes Jesus as the source for which eternal life is blatantly counterfeit.

Even in the realm of what is commonly called “Christianity,” we must be cautious. Just because something calls itself “Christianity” does not make it so. We need to seek authentic Christianity. Counterfeit churches have become a powerful tool for Satan. We hear and read statements such as: “Attend the church of your choice,” or “One church is just as good as another,” or “It really doesn’t matter what you believe, so long as you believe.” These statements all proceed from the one whom Jesus identified as “the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Counterfeit Christianity has been a source of frustration for many, causing multitudes to give up on “organized religion.” Let me say bluntly – the denominational mess which surrounds us is contrary to God’s will. The apostle Paul specifically taught against sectarianism (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). Jesus prayed for His followers, that “...they all may be one...” (John 17:20-21). Jesus came to establish ONE church (Matthew 16:18). The apostle Paul likewise spoke of just ONE church (Ephesians 4:4; cf. 1:22-23). If Jesus only built ONE church, and yet there are thousands of different churches with widely different doctrines, we have a problem. So, how do we know which church is the Lord’s church?

The importance of finding the Lord’s church and being added to it cannot be overstated. Acts 20:28 tells us Jesus purchased the church with His blood. Which church? His church. He did not purchase a host of pseudo-Christian groups. He did not die for an assortment of denominational organizations. Various denominations may use the Bible, have uplifting worship services, and the people may be wonderful. But “...unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it...” (Psalm 127:1).

Some things are obviously erroneous and thus not a huge concern. For example, when you see a cheap pair of Abidas shoes, you know to leave them alone – the authentic brand is Adidas, not Abidas. However, some counterfeits (and this is true in religion) bear a striking resemblance to the real deal. So we need to be observant and discerning. If what is taught and practiced in the church we go to seems “good,” but we cannot legitimately support it from the Bible, we are in the wrong place. If the church we are a member of was started by someone other than Jesus, it is not His church. Just as there are identifying marks for authentic products, there are identifying marks for the Lord’s church. We’ll consider ten here.

1. **ORIGIN.** The church was built (Matthew 16:18) and bought (Acts 20:28) by Jesus. It began in Jerusalem in the first century (Acts 1-2). Any church which claims a different

place, time, or person of origin is not the Lord’s.

2. **NAME.** Juliet’s “What’s in a name” speech notwithstanding, names are important. Have you ever received a cheque where your name was misspelled or amiss in some fashion? Legally, you cannot cash the cheque. The church of the Bible gives glory to the Christ (Romans 16:16) and to God (1 Corinthians 1:2). A church wearing a name to exalt someone or something else is not His.
3. **STRUCTURE.** Jesus is the only head of His church (Ephesians 1:22-23). He does not share this position with anyone, nor has He appointed anyone on earth to function as the head of the church. Each congregation is to have or be working towards qualified bishops and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-16). Elevating men with titles is condemned (Matthew 23:6-10). Men are to take leadership in the public assembly (1 Timothy 2:11-12). A church that claims some earthly head or sets aside the role and qualifications of leaders, or which exalts men with flattering titles, or which has women exercising leadership in the assembly cannot be the Lord’s.
4. **MORALITY.** God redeemed His people to be holy (1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:15-16). A church that flaunts their acceptance of sin or is soft on moral issues cannot be the Lord’s church.
5. **SALVATION.** The church that Jesus built preaches the same gospel which He announced after His resurrection (Mark 16:15-16), which Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38), which Philip taught to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39), and which Paul declared to the Macedonians (Acts 16:13-15, 30-34), Romans (6:3-5), Galatians (3:26-27), and in every other place where he proclaimed Christ. Therefore, any church preaching a “faith only” gospel or any other gospel (Galatians 1:6-9) is not the Lord’s.

6. **AUTHORITY.** The church built by Jesus follows His word, seeking biblical authority for what is done (Colossians 3:17). A church that ignores the need for authority in practice and doctrine, which freely goes beyond or falls short of God's word, is not His.

7. **WORSHIP.** The church established by Jesus engages in biblical worship. Biblical worship includes observation of the Lord's Supper and the collection for the saints on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2), praising God without the use of instrumental accompaniment (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), and sharing together in prayers and the apostolic teachings as revealed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:42). If a church is not following the Bible pattern for worship, it is not the church for which Jesus built and died.

8. **DOCTRINE.** The Lord's church abides in the doctrine of Christ, the New Testament or New covenant, which was established in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is for our learning (Romans 15:4) but is not our law. Paul taught that we must "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), not slicing and dicing it to find support for various -isms and schisms that find their origin in the mind of man. If a church does not hold to sound doctrine but simply teaches what people want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3), it is not the Lord's.

9. **PURPOSE.** The church which Jesus established has God-ordained objectives.

Those objectives include a focus on worshiping and exalting the Lord (Acts 17:23-28), spreading the message of salvation to others (Luke 19:10; Matthew 28:18-20), encouraging and building one another's faith (1 Corinthians 14:5, 26; Ephesians 4:12), and ministering to needy saints (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32, 34-35; 2 Corinthians 8). The church Jesus built is not a social club or a family life center; it was not established as an entertainment and social hub in the community.

10. **FELLOWSHIP.** Biblical fellowship is companionship and union with God and others, grounded in the things mentioned above. John says we can have fellowship with one another and with the Lord if we walk in the light (1 John 1:3, 7). However, we are not to give the hand of fellowship (Galatians 2:9) to those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11). A church that receives and stands for things that the Lord does not, that church cannot be His.

There are certainly more identifying marks of authentic Christianity, but these will suffice for this article. We need to be focused on the truth. Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Again, in prayer to the Father, Jesus said, "Sanctify them by Your word. Your word is truth" (John 17:17). The truth of God's word is authentic and authoritative. If we follow it, we can have the assurance we are legitimately walking in God's way. Don't fall for the devil's deceptions.

# OCTOBER 2021 PREVIEW

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## EXPOSITORY ARTICLE

Genesis 3:15 speaks of the enmity between the serpent and the Seed of the woman. Jeremy Diestelkamp will dig into this text for our benefit.

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## CHURCH ARTICLE

Prayer is essential among God's people. It is important for us as individuals, but also as a collective. Keith Sharp will focus on the need for a church to pray together.

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## WORSHIP ARTICLE

Does it matter what day we worship on? Should it be the seventh day (Sabbath) or the first day of the week? Sean Cavender will open the Scriptures for us about what day the Lord commands His people to assemble for worship.

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## APPLICATION ARTICLE

In 2 Timothy 2:3-6, Paul addressed our service to the Lord with three illustrations – soldiers, athletes, and farmers. Brian Sullivan will look at how these widely different people are emblematic of the Christian character.

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## EVANGELISM ARTICLE

In Nehemiah 3 we read about the rebuilding of the wall at Jerusalem following the return from the Babylonians captivity. Josh Welch will discuss the people from many walks of life who came together to get the job done as an example for our work of evangelism.

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## BEYOND THE BASICS

How does Israel fit into God's plan? William Stewart will focus on why God selected physical Israel and their role in God's plan to save mankind.

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