



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

COMPETING VOICES

Cody Westbrook

What should have been an overwhelming victory turned into a terrible tragedy. God's command to King Saul was simple—"utterly destroy" the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:1-3)—but he did not heed the voice of the Lord (1 Sam. 15:1; 19-20; 22). Instead, he listened to his own voice (1 Sam. 15:17), and that of the people (1 Sam. 15:24). He left king Agag alive, along with other spoils of war, which he claimed were to be sacrificed to the Lord (1 Sam. 15:8-9; 21). He did his will—not the Lord's.

Because of his pride, Saul listened to all the wrong voices and it cost him the throne of Israel (1 Sam. 15:22-23). He stands as a tragic reminder for us, that we live in a world full of "voices" that desire to compete against the only voice that matters—God's. Through scripture, Jehovah's voice rings loud and clear today just as it did then. His word is still just as authoritative and His expectation is still the same—complete obedience. But, "voices" around us call us to turn our attention away from the Lord and heed them instead of Him. Consider for a moment what these may be.

- The voice of compromise calls us to throw away our conviction especially in matters that may be controversial like homosexuality or abortion.
- The voice of materialism calls us to focus upon worldly riches instead of spiritual.
- The voice of satisfaction calls us to stop growing spiritually. It wants us to be satisfied with where we are and become stagnant in our faith.
- The voice of convenience calls us to do whatever is easiest at the time. Is it more convenient to skip worship on Sunday night or observe the Lord's Supper once a month instead of weekly?

- The voice of peer pressure calls us to follow the crowd. If it is popular then it should be done.
- The voice of pride calls us to do whatever we want instead of what God wants.

Though Satan calls us to be like him, we must focus our attention on the Lord. As Thomas Chisholm wrote in the well beloved hymn, we are "dead to the world, to voices that call me, living anew obedient but free. Dead to the joys that once did enthrall me, yet tis not I, Christ liveth in me." As we begin a new year, our desire is to turn away from the voices of the world and focus on the voice of God. Therefore, this edition of the Christian Worker is designed to examine some of the voices that compete for our attention. Our plea is simple—"O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord" (Jer. 22:29).

Competing Voices

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Editor

Cody Westbrook



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

This month we are excited to share the news of a new work by our brother and sister, John and Carla Moore. We hope that you will pray for their success and read the following article about their work for the kingdom.

-Cody

BIBLE PASSAGES

Defending the Faith, Guiding Souls to Jesus

John W. Moore

Souls are precious. People are hurting. Many are dying, and Christianity is under attack. Our world is in turmoil, and lives are being devastated by sin—time is of the essence. We must work while it is yet day, for the time comes when men shall work no more and then stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Like the apostle Paul, my desire is to warn every man, and to preach to every man “that we might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:28). The world is now populated by over 7 billion souls, all of whom must be reached. God isn’t willing that any should perish; He wants all to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). How, then, can you and I begin to make a significant difference in reaching those souls? I believe the new work of *Bible Passages* can help.

Every day over 350,000 new souls enter the world; all of whom need to know the message of truth. However, beginning the Christian journey, navigating the rocky shoals of temptation, and advancing toward the goal of heaven requires the help and guidance of others (Gal. 6:2). Just as the Ethiopian nobleman needed Philip to guide him through scripture, *Bible Passages* is likewise dedicated to guiding souls to Jesus and aiding them in their understanding of the Bible (Acts 8:30-31). We are focused on training preachers, equipping the Saints, defending the faith, and guiding

souls to heaven. Our work also involves providing long-term informational and training resources for the evangelistic and educational needs of the church, but our guiding mission is tell others about the matchless love of God and His glorious Kingdom.

The concept of *Bible Passages* gradually evolved over the course of a 30 year ministry; a ministry that has taken my wife (Carla) and me from the college campus, the mission field, to schools of preaching, and into the pulpit. What began as a dream many years ago has now developed into a reality, and God has opened for us a door of opportunity to begin this new ministry that has the capacity of reaching millions. Some of the elements associated with this ministry have already been active and ongoing for several years through World Video Bible School. Over 1.3 million *Searching for Truth* DVD’s and books have been distributed, and now our most recent endeavor of *Bible Land Passages* continues to develop and expand.

In the kingdom God has charged evangelists, shepherds, and teachers with the responsibility of equipping the saints for the work of ministry for the building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12). Building and equipping is what congregations must learn to do well; the growth and strength of the church is dependent upon it. The key to growth is to engage more people in the work of ministry. This is accomplished by doing four things: (1) Investing deeply in the lives of people through discipling and mentoring; (2) developing leaders; (3) feeding members with the word of God; and (4) equipping them with the tools they need for Bible study and for personal growth and development. A part of that growth and development can be acquired through the newest phase of our work called *Bible Land Passages*.

Bible Land Passages (a work of *Bible Passages*) is

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dedicated to helping others know that the Bible and its message of salvation are rooted in a historic and geographic setting – a real time and a real place in history. The Bible’s reliability and credibility is dependent upon evidence that corroborates its claims. New Testament scholar C.H. Dodd said “Some religions can be indifferent to historical fact, and move entirely upon the plane of timeless truth. Christianity cannot” (*History and the Gospel*). Bible Passages is dedicated to showcasing those historical facts through the *Bible Land Passage Video Series*, and the Bible Land Passages website. These educational tools are designed to help others better understand and appreciate the Bible, and thereby deepen their faith in both God and the sacred text.

Bible Land Passages, however, does more than just defend Christianity and its historical roots. We are also dedicated to examining and showcasing the lands of the Bible and its environs to provide our viewers and students with a window into the ancient past. By sifting through the archaeological data, by traveling down the pathways of the Bible lands and by traversing through the passages of its ancient cities, trade routes, and caves we come to not only better understand and appreciate the challenges of life faced by our religious forbearers, but we also come to see how God used the historical and geographic settings of the Bible lands to refine and develop their faith. Those same real places and same real settings - when examined in our modern era - can likewise become a passage for us in developing greater faith and devotion for God. *Bible Land Passages* is therefore all about helping connect people to God and encouraging others in their own personal walk of faith.

Whether it is in training preachers, defending the faith through Bible Land Passages, or in the work and development of the *Searching for Truth* materials, we believe Bible Passages is a valuable resource for the church. To aid a soul in learning about salvation or to strengthen a new convert in the fundamentals of the faith, have them visit www.searchingfortruth.org. For educational resources, videos for edification and a better understanding of the Bible, visit www.bible-landpassages.org. If you would like to study the Bible in the land of Israel on a special 12 day journey visit www.biblelandpassagestours.com. If you would like to know more about the work of *Bible Passages* overall, or would be interested in supporting our work, please visit

www.biblepassages.net where you can obtain a detailed list of our goals, objectives, and overall ministry plan. The existence of this work is dependent upon the kindness, generosity, and prayers of concerned Christians like you. We would be so honored and thrilled if you could join with us in this great work of glorifying God and guiding souls to Jesus.

CW

FAITH VS. DOUBT

Jason Jackson

Faith does not need to avoid doubts; it deals with them. If we understand where uncertainties come from, we will be better prepared to deal with them. We are not the first to wrestle with faith issues.

As the tomb news reached the apostles, “these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:11, ESV). Afterward, the Lord appeared to them and said, “Peace to you!” (v. 36). They were shocked and afraid, and Jesus asked them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” (v. 38).

Questionings (ASV) entered their minds, but the Lord’s question for them was: “Why? What is the basis for these uncertainties?” How is it that their questions were stronger than his resurrection promises (cf. Matt. 16:21)?

The Gospel accounts reveal several reasons. One, they were severely distressed. Two, they were terribly confused. And three, they were without any point of reference.

First, consider their distress. Just the talk about Christ “going away” distressed the disciples (John 14:1ff). Later, their grief overwhelmed them with exhaustion in Gethsemane (Luke 22:45). And the betrayal, denial, trial, and crucifixion were as yet only ideas. If they were overcome with sorrow already, what kind of distress filled their hearts when the taste of death filled the Savior’s mouth (cf. Heb. 2:9; Luke 24:17)?

Grief tests faith. Elijah experienced this (1 Kings 19:14), and so do we. Suffering is hard to understand, but trials should not nullify our trust in God. Jesus promised a third-day resurrection, and he rebuked

the disciples for their lack of trust. Never doubt God's promises or love, no matter what (cf. Rom. 8:31–39).

Second, the disciples were terribly confused. The Jews stumbled over a crucified Messiah (1 Cor. 1:23). Unverified beliefs leave the heart exposed. Gideon saw his trials as irreconcilable with the promise of divine presence (Judg. 6:13). The disciples also assumed that Jesus as the Messiah was incompatible with the cross (Matt. 16:22). How could the nation's hero die at the hands of his enemies?

False Messianic assumptions complicated their faith. Once corrected, the apostles realized that the slaughtered Lamb of God would reign over death and sin (Luke 24:26; cf. Isa. 53). We also need to check our beliefs honestly and thoroughly against God's word, otherwise we may experience unnecessary doubts from unsupported assumptions about the nature of God, Christ, suffering, sin, the plan of salvation, and other matters of faith. This is why personal Bible study is so important, and regular participation in Bible study at our local congregations is vital. We may find ourselves with questions, but they can be resolved by looking carefully at who Jesus is and what he has done for us (cf. Matt. 11:1ff). His divine power and love guarantee that his great promises will be fulfilled.

Third, note their lack of a reference point. The disciples had no previous experience like this. Their understanding of the Lord's promises were being tested in real time for the first time.

Some demand a walk of sight before believing. Doubts will arise when we, like Zechariah, have a hard time believing what God says (Luke 1:18–20). If we desire to believe God only when it makes sense to us, we are going to be disappointed. Walking by faith necessarily means believing in what God has said about what we have never experienced or seen. We have to trust God—that He is able and willing to do as he has promised (cf. Rom. 4:20–21). We do not need an experiential point of reference to test God's trustworthiness. He demonstrated all that we need to know when he gave his Son to die for our sins (cf. Rom. 5:6–11).

By confronting our doubts with God's undeniable existence, his awesome power, and his infinite love, the Father will help us develop such a faith as this: "Let God be true though every one were a liar" (Rom. 3:4). Personal distress, confusion, and our human

weaknesses and limitations need not obscure our hope of living eternally in his presence (cf. Rom. 5:1–5).

CW

COMPROMISE VS. CONVICTION

Kevin Cauley

The church is not a democracy. Sometimes, however, we treat it that way when it comes to practicing leadership. Instead of seeking out the word of God and how it might apply to our decisions, we listen to the voices of people, practically giving them the same status as God. Instead of turning to the Lord in prayer, we turn to the opinions of worldly experience. We say to ourselves, "we must have made the right decision since it was the popular thing to do," and in triumph we declare, "We have performed the commandment of the Lord!" In the meantime, the Lord is smacking His head at our rationalistic refusal to follow His simple commands or help those who are trying.

King Saul found himself in such a situation in 1 Samuel 15. God had given him some very simple instructions.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.' (1 Samuel 15:2-3)

Did Saul and the people do what God said to do? The text says, "But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed" (1 Samuel 15:9). In other words, they destroyed what they thought was worthless, but they kept what they thought was valuable. (They were going to save them some money!) They "obeyed" God's word as it pleased them, but when it didn't, they didn't; such isn't obedience.

Leaders must not listen to others when they have a command from God. Their only task is to carry out

the command. Any other act on the part of the leader is already compromise. Instead, leaders should be concerned with facilitating God's commands, that is, making it easier for others to obey, not making it more difficult, which they often do by putting roadblocks in the way of good works in the name of saving money, or some "good" thing. We need to get ourselves out of the way and do God's will instead of following our own justifications as to why we can't do God's will.

Oh, but we have good intentions! "Good motives" do not count when we are frustrating God's commands. Really, so-called "good motives" are just rationalizations for why we don't have to obey God. I'm sure the people and king Saul thought they had good motives. They saved all the good things, but that is not what God wanted. He simply wanted them to obey. (God has His own good motives!) King Saul even added an additional good motive, "We will sacrifice these animals to the Lord!" (1 Samuel 15:21). A person cannot justify his disobedience to God by saying that he will do something good with his disobedience.

God's response to Saul's rationalizations was complete rejection. "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king" (1 Samuel 15:22-23). Today's church leaders should take note: The church has a chief shepherd to which shepherds' must answer—Christ Jesus (1 Peter 5:4). They better be answering to Him right now instead of waiting for the day of judgment. It will be too late to change the decision then, and they will be completely rejected like Samuel. Leaders can find all kinds of reasons to compromise. Instead, let's be convicted with the word of God, and do what God says.

CW

SIN VS. REPENTANCE

Pat McIntosh

The Bible indicates that we have numerous things in common. We all need companionship (Gen. 2:18). We were all created with the same drives.

We all get hungry and thirsty so that we will eat to nourish and hydrate our bodies. We were created with a sexual drive to procreate (a drive that is valid within the proper confines – Heb. 13:4).

However, there is another thing we all have in common – we have sinned (Rom. 3:23). The result of that sin is man's separation from God (Isa. 59:1-2). The good news is that a cure for this sin has been provided, but only in God's redemptive plan. There are numerous aspects of and roles played in that plan, none more important than that of repentance.

Repentance is a prominent theme in the preaching of the gospel. Whether we are examining that which was expressed by Christ (Luke. 24:46-47), Peter (Acts 2:38-39), or Paul (Acts 17:30-31), repentance occupied an important role in the early preaching of the gospel.

This emphasis upon repentance is often neglected in the denominational dogma of our day. Many in the religious world focus on the "faith only" theology born in the Reformation movement in the efforts of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Once, when my dad was studying with my aunt about baptism, she concluded the study by closing her Bible and saying, "Just turn your heart over to Jesus and everything will be all right."

The plethora of "how-to" books flooding the market today indicates that people are willing to learn to do things in which they have little or no experience or ability. One can learn how to do things ranging from how to improve your golf swing to building your own backyard storage building. There is apparently a great interest in learning to do better with that which is difficult.

The Bible provides such information as it relates to the difficult task of repentance. It is difficult as is seen in the fact that we all struggle with it. There are times we do those things we should not or do not do the good things we should. We might even find ourselves continuing to struggle with the same issues, though we regret having done them. How can we turn from those things in our lives that separate us from God? Let us look at two things (among many) that will help us in this endeavor.

One of the first involves acknowledgement of our situation. As a defense mechanism, we are prone to rationalize our situations. Rather than looking at things as sin, we tend to belittle them, enabling us to

better deal with them. We didn't sin; we just "slipped up." As stated earlier, to overcome sin we must realize that these are not just "indiscretions;" rather, they are actions and attitudes that will separate us from God. They are not "little things." The removal of them from man involved and required the death of Christ on the cross (John. 3:16; Matt. 26:28; Rom. 5:8). Acknowledging that we are sinners is the first step down the path that God has provided for us to deal with the sin in our lives.

Having acknowledged our sin is just the beginning. This can be illustrated by examining the situation of one who is sick. Realizing that we are sick because of the symptoms we have is one thing. However, that realization will not make us any better unless we seek that which will cure the illness. We have already seen that Christ and His blood are the remedy for sin. One may read that and believe it, but still not act upon it. To have one's sin removed requires repentance (turning from that which is wrong to that which is right) and baptism, the point in which one comes into contact with Christ's shed blood (Rom. 6:1-6; Gal. 3:27). In other words, we must both acknowledge that we have sinned, and take the steps required to rectify the situation.

May we encourage people to be honest with themselves in such matters. The salvation of their souls depends upon handling such things correctly. God has provided the cure. May we tell others how they may be cured.

CW

COMPLACENCY VS. FERVENCY

Jon Williams

Last year, as I was deleting some old messages from my email account, I scrolled over to the side bar and saw a folder (that I rarely used) titled "Notes." I had about seven files recorded in that folder, all dating back to 2012; one of those files was labeled "Things I need to work on." Curious since I did not remember typing those notes, I opened the file. To my surprise, and my shame, it was a list of challenges I struggled with spiritually that I had written down for me to improve. This was a very humbling find, since I still struggled with those same challenges four years later, with little improvement. The voice of my

conscience had suddenly rung loud at the revelation of my complacency.

Christianity is a growth process. Being baptized into Christ washes away sin, but it does not necessarily wash away former habits, desires, temptations, or other spiritual struggles. We need time, practice, and patience to grow and mature ourselves as God's people. I believe the Lord understands this, as the Bible describes some Christians as "babes" needing milk, and others as matured ones who should consume "strong meat" (1Pet. 2:1-2, Heb. 5:12). However, while God does not expect us to go from "0 to 60" in an instant, He does expect growth and progress.

On the contrary, the voice of complacency is so attractive. It says, "You are fine where you are. There is no need to go further. You do not have to do anything else. You have arrived!" But, a Christian ought never to believe they have perfectly mastered the image of Christ. We certainly do the best we can at each interval of our lives, but never can we say that "We have arrived," or, "We have done enough." You may not have a list that you made some time in the past like I did, but if you think back two to four years ago, can you say that you have matured as a Christian in that time? Are you spiritually older and wiser? Or, are you still in the same place, with the same challenges and the same shortcomings? Your answers may suggest that you have listened to the voice of complacency.

I encourage you to make spiritual goals for your personal spiritual maturity. Start off small, with simple tasks that you can achieve on a daily basis. If you are lacking in your prayer life, write down a daily goal that says, "I will pray first thing in the morning before I get out of bed and right before I go to sleep; as well as before meals." If you have been stagnant in your Bible study, get on a daily Bible reading program to have a passage each day that you can feast on. If there is a particular sin that you cannot seem to overcome, try sitting down and brainstorming over the problem, as well as possible solutions. "What generally happens right before I start engaging in this sin? Is that the cause, or a factor, in my bad habits? What does the Bible say about this particular transgression? What have I done to try and stop myself from engaging in this? What can I do differently in the future? Is there someone I can talk to and seek counsel from?"

Listen to the voice of the unprofitable servant,

So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what is our duty to do." (Luke 17:10 NKJV)

Listen to the voice of Paul that says, "Your race is not finished until the breath of life has exhaled from your nostrils" (2 Tim. 4:7). Listen to the voice of progress that asks, "Do I pray more than I did a year ago? Do I still struggle with the same sins that I did two years ago? Has my knowledge of the Bible increased in recent months? Am I stronger Christian today than I was when I first obeyed the Gospel?"

Listen to the voice of fervency that says, "Do more. Give more. Sacrifice more. Love more. Forgive more. GROW MORE!"

CW

SELFISHNESS VS. SELFLESSNESS

Rick Brumback

One evokes images of children fussing over toys never thought to be shared. The other is redolent of a mature individual—perhaps a parent—placing the needs of another above self, perhaps even at great personal peril. The former is off-putting; the latter is refreshing, even inviting.

From its Founder to its newest disciple, the Christian faith summons us to elevate vision beyond the simply self-concerned and instead to consider the needs and wants of those among whom we circulate. Perhaps this sense of selflessness is best epitomized in the words of Philippians 2:4—"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

Consider the precedent established by Christ Himself (Phil. 2:5-8). The Word, part of the Godhead, enjoyed all the prerogatives of heaven. When Isaiah cast his gaze upon God seated on His throne (Isa. 1:1-6), the Word was present; this is confirmed with the remarks of John 12:39-41. Yet the Word descended to earth, embracing human nature and becoming Jesus (John 1:14). He became subject to the directives of heaven as every human is called to be (Ecc. 12:13), and He remained faithful to God's expectations (2:8). Why was this done? Because of humanity's need for salvation.

Similarly, Paul was willing to sacrifice himself in

order to serve the needs of the Christians in Philippi (2:17). The apostle intended to dispatch Timothy to Philippi to be of assistance and encouragement, another example of selflessness, saying of him, "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" (2:20-21). Finally, a lesser-known disciple named Epaphroditus was mentioned by Paul as one who had nearly died in order to be of service to Paul and the Philippians (2:25-30). All four of these individuals have been lastingly remembered for embodying the plea of 2:4.

Selfishness is associated with another brand of character. It is linked with the likes of Ahab and Jezebel, hardly paragons of virtue and compassion. Figures like Hymenaeus and Alexander, making shipwreck of others' faith (1 Tim. 1:19-20), or Diotrephes (3 John 9-11), aggrandizing self, are among the most egregious examples of selfishness. But this negative attitude can also materialize among faithful brethren: at times even the apostles concerned themselves with establishing some selfish pecking order (Matt. 20:20-28).

When we are selfless, we take time to reflect upon what others need or desire. We might ask ourselves such questions as these:

- Will my actions help my loved one or friend overcome a particular problem?
- Will my actions create unnecessary hard feelings or difficulties with my loved one or friend?
- Have I thoughtfully considered the wants or wishes of my loved one or friend, remembering that I have the power to help them find joy?
- Do I demonstrate a concern for others like what Jesus manifested for me (Phil. 2:5)?
- Do I have to have my way on this matter, or should the other person have their preference?
- Have I considered what the other person must be feeling or thinking in this situation?
- How would I want the other person to behave if our positions were reversed?

When we reflect on these questions, we position ourselves to make good decisions or choices that take others into account. When we manifest a heart of selfless love for others, we are imitating Jesus even while inviting others to be similarly selfless.

CW



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