

christian

WORKER



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

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WHAT MEAN THESE STONES?

Ronnie Scherffius

And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch [set up] in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever. (Josh. 4:20-24)

Much like our *Vietnam Memorial* in Washington D.C., the memorial would cause children to ask, "What mean these stones?" and provide an opportunity for their fathers to instruct them in the ways of God.

There are other occasions in Israel's history where we find special emphasis placed on teaching children about God (Exod. 12:26; Deut. 6:7, 20; Psalm 78:3-6; Isa. 38:19), and we ourselves have received an admonition from the inspired apostle to do the same (Eph. 6:4). As a people of God, are we taking heed to this grand admonition to teach our children of the God of heaven? Are we seizing every opportunity to cause them

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Israel's crossing the Jordan River was a memorable event in the nations history. It marked another chapter in the fulfillment of God's promise to give the land to Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:6-7; 17:8; 26:3; et al), and the circumstances surrounding their crossing (Josh. 3:14-17) served as a declaration to the Canaanites that the people of God had arrived (Josh. 2:1-11). The crossing of the Jordan River has also been an inspiration to songwriters. How familiar are the words: "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand, and cast a wishful eye; To Canaan's fair and happy land, where my possessions lie" (Samuel Stennett, 1787).

So grand and meaningful was that day, that Joshua ordered twelve stones be set up, both as a memorial of the event itself and to serve as a means to teach future generations of God's power and faithfulness.

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Editor

Cody Westbrook



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

THE CHARACTER OF FALSE TEACHING

Cody Westbrook

In Acts 14 and 14 Luke recorded how Paul and Barnabas preached Christ in the Gentile world with great power and conviction so that the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region, including the province of Galatia (Acts 13:49). Sadly, the Devil wasted no time in attacking the young congregations established in the area. After Paul's departure Judaizing teachers came in and began preaching "another gospel" (Gal. 1:6-10). The Galatian epistle provides Paul's inspired response to those teachers and their teaching, including a significant section dedicated to exposing the danger and characteristics of false doctrine. It is important for the church today to understand what false doctrine seeks to accomplish so that we may recognize and avoid it—just as the Galatian Christians should have done so long ago.

False teaching causes one to ignore what they know to be true (Gal. 3:1-4). Paul bases his first argument in the doctrinal section of Galatians on the experience of the Galatian Christians. He asked four rhetorical questions in order to remind them of things they knew to be true.

Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? ... Having begun in the Spirit are you now made perfect by the flesh? ...Have you suffered so many things in vain? ...He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?

Again, each one would have known the answer to each of the questions, but they all imply that, by buying into the teaching of the Judaizers, they turned away from what they knew to be true. Such emphasizes the

power falsehood has to blind hearts to truth. Paul told the young preacher Timothy to "avoid the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is *falsely called knowledge*" (1 Tim. 6:20). False teachers are skilled deceivers (2 Pet. 2:14) and excel in exploitation (2 Pet. 2:3). A silky-tongued orator peddling a devious message can quickly convince a person that up is down and green is purple. The Galatian Christians knew that the blessings of Christianity came as a result of obedience to the gospel and not to the Law of Moses, yet the Judaizers successfully persuaded them otherwise. Their example serves as a sobering reminder for us all that though we may know the truth, error can convince us that we do not.

Additionally, the desire to change or override truth remains a dangerous characteristic of false teaching. Consider Paul's argument in Galatians 3:15-18. God's promise to Abraham, referenced in Galatians 3:6-9, pointed to Christianity, so that all people would be saved through obedience to the gospel of Christ—not the Law of Moses. Yet the false teachers in Galatia had replaced the gospel with the Law, which in effect threw away God's promise to Abraham. In Galatians 3:15-18 Paul argues that just because the Law of Moses came into effect 430 years after the promise was made did not mean that God had forgotten or nullified either the promise or His eternal plan (cf. Eph. 3:9-11; etc.). Like the Judaizers, false teachers today do what they can to change or replace truth. Wolves disguised as sheep never preface their sermons by saying, "I am here to devour you so ignore everything that I say." They use "deceptive words" (2 Pet. 2:3) and mix a little error with a little truth in order to convince the gullible. Remember when the Devil changed the entire course of human history by adding the word

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“not” to God’s command (Gen. 3:4)? Again, this truth should stand as an important reminder for us to be like the Bereans and study our bibles carefully so that we can see through the chicanery of falsehood.

Regardless of the century, false teaching ultimately leads to spiritual bondage. In Galatians 4:1-7 Paul reminded the brethren of the benefits of moving from slavery to sonship. Then in 4:8-11 he lamented the fact that, though they had escaped the world through their obedience to the gospel, their acceptance of false teaching had put them right back in it. The Gospel of our Salvation (Eph. 1:13) has the power to break the chains of bondage to sin (Rom. 6). When we obey its commands the old passes away and all things become new (2 Cor. 5:17). But leaving the truth in exchange for error puts the shackles back on. Peter wrote,

For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning (2 Pet. 2:18-20).

False doctrine can scratch the itchiest of ears (2 Tim. 4:3) with grandiose promises of prosperity and happiness, but the only power it truly has is the power of enslavement. So we must be on guard for fabricated doctrines of men, to expose and defeat them. We must “stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

CW



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DEALING WITH DISCOURAGEMENT

Clay Bond

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalms 46:1)

Many of us know how it feels to be discouraged. We have experienced that feeling of disappointment, disheartenment, loss of hope, and lack of confidence. At times discouragement is so severe that we feel like we’re drowning. Everything feels so hopeless and we see no way to escape.

The danger of discouragement is that if it is not dealt with properly, it leads to depression and despair. If we allow ourselves to continue in a state of despair, we are soon unable to function as healthy, happy individuals. Our thinking becomes irrational; we begin to make life altering, even life-ending choices. Judas is a sad example of one who so immersed himself in his depression that he ended up taking his own life (Matt. 27:5).

Whether it is due to illness, material loss, emotional trials, or guilt over sin, discouraging circumstances are part of life. Job said, “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). To lose your job and consequently lose everything you have worked for can be disheartening. Having your marriage end in divorce or experiencing the death of a loved one can be incredibly discouraging life changes. Facing the reality of the hurt your sin has caused and the separation it brings between you and God can cause feelings of deep despair (Is. 59:1-2).

Often we try to deal with life’s disappointments on our own and become even more discouraged when our efforts fail. The Bible records many examples of real people who experienced the same life struggles we have and it also records how they dealt with discouragement. King David is a prime example of one who faced discouragement from every source imaginable; loss of loved ones, failed relationships, betrayal, his own sin, David faced it all! Naturally, there were times that David was discouraged (Ps. 27:13-14), but the one thing David knew was who to turn to for help; “Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts” (Ps. 119:173). He believed that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1).

Our feelings of disappointment, disheartenment, depression and despair can only be remedied with God’s

help. When our heads are hanging low, when things are not going well, and when everything seems to be falling apart the Lord can lift up our head (Ps. 3:3). Jesus said,

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

If we are going to allow the Lord to help us through our hardships, we must be willing to come to Him in humble obedience and learn how “He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:8), how He, by the grace of God, tasted death for us (Heb. 2:9), and how He suffered for our sins, “the just for the unjust...” (1 Pet. 3:18). Like Jesus humbled Himself to obey the Father, we must be humble enough to hear and believe His gospel (Rom. 10:17; Mark 16:15-16), repent of our sin (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30), confess that Jesus Christ is the son of God (Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37) and be baptized into Christ (Gal.3:27; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21). In Christ we have access to some amazing spiritual blessings like being added to His church (Acts 2:47), having our sins washed away (Acts 22:16), experiencing unity with other Christians (Eph. 4:1-6) and having fellowship with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3).

The truth is, we will experience trouble and face discouragement as long as we live. There is no escape from the difficulties of life, but we can face all that we must face without losing heart or being overwhelmed by discouragement. We can turn to the Lord for help, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). As Christians we face the same problems and challenges as the rest of the world, but we have the comfort of not facing them alone (Heb. 13:5-6). We can do “all things through Christ which strengtheneth” us (Phil.4:13).

CW



Southwest School of Bible Studies
2nd Quarter begins November 5

GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

Carl McCann

Being familiar with my morning routine, the brethren at the Fruitvale church of Christ, will routinely send me an early morning text or email. Very rarely will one of them call early in the morning and on the rare occasion when they have, it is generally not to report good news. However, on the morning of December 29, 2017, It was a community member who called and informed me that the meetinghouse of the Fruitvale church was on fire. As I thanked him for the phone call, I must admit my heart sank.

Fast forward some 6 months. We had been meeting in the school cafeteria, the work of the church continued, and in some ways we were seeing growth-not numerically but spiritually. So to my surprise, following a Sunday morning sermon, a dear sister approached me and stated, “I’m glad to see you’re back, your passion was evident this morning.” Needless to say, I was unsettled a bit by her statement, but upon further introspection, I came to realize she was absolutely correct; I had been going through the motions! And therein lies the danger, for I was unaware of my lackluster effort in service and worship of the God of heaven.

Going through the motions, I said the right things. As preachers we are commanded to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2) and “speak the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11). To the best of my ability I was trying to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5). However, at least to one, it was evident that something was missing. As I ponder that reality, I admit that the events of December 29 had settled upon me and I settled into a “funk” of which I was unaware. When I consider what was missing, it is ironic that a fire put out my fire (Jer. 20:9)! I had lost my zeal - but I was still saying the right things.

Going through the motions, I was still doing the right things. As Christians we are commanded to study (2 Tim. 2:15), pray (Luke 18:1), worship (John 4:24) and work in the kingdom (Matt. 5:16). All of these things I did, yet because of the mental state I was in, did I do them in a truly beneficial, God glorifying way? Going through the motions, I was still doing the right things.

Reflecting upon this time in my life, I pray that now I am more cognizant of those in the church, who are saying the right things and are even doing

the right things, but may have lost their zeal. Admittedly, it is difficult to stay on the mountaintop of spirituality. The devil is constantly trying to pull us away from God and devour us (1 Pet. 5:8), so we need to be constantly reminded that the one in us is greater than the one in the world (1 John 4:4).

Difficulties and trials in life are a part of our existence here (Jas. 1:2-4), but there is tremendous benefit in overcoming these difficult times. Having experienced these trials certainly places us in a better position to help those enduring such trials (2 Cor. 1:3ff; Gal. 6:2). I am indebted to a wonderful sister, who recognized I was “going through the motions” and lovingly brought it to my attention. Had I remained in this state, there is no telling how much damage I may have done to myself and to others, spiritually speaking. God deserves our very best, and just “going through the motions” indicates a loss of focus and dedication, whether intentional or not. I pray that all of us will be aware of this attitude in ourselves and in others as well, helping ourselves and them to return to God with a fire in our bones.

CW

THE DANGERS OF TECHNOLOGY

Ross Haffner

Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, Mary Shelley, Isaac Asimov, Steven Spielberg, James Cameron, and Christopher Nolan. All of these have thrilled and fascinated millions with the dangerous idea: What if technology takes another leap forward to the point that it has advanced beyond our control? What dangers lie ahead with the next tech boom?

While science fiction is fun to think about there are some very real dangers technology provides that need to be considered by Christians. God’s word provides principles that apply, even to the latest gadgets. So many of these advancements can be used to promote the cause of Christ in an authorized way if we avoid the potential pitfalls.

Technology provides instant access to information. I’m happy to see tablets in the worship assembly. While I often prefer to literally turn the pages of my Bible I’ve enjoyed the benefits provided by an electronic copy. Some find the tablet helpful to increase the font size of

the sacred text or to utilize a search bar to find the desired verse, and the study helps available in some Bible apps are incredibly useful! But beware of distractions from messages and emails pushed to the front while you are worshipping God. Concordances and lexicons are okay, but focus on the sermon and do your in-depth study at home. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

How is it then, brethren? When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying (1 Cor. 14:26).

Technology provides excuses to forsake the assembly. The ability to stream a worship service online has so many benefits. Sickness or unavoidable circumstances can keep the Christian from the assembly, which removes the saint from his family and from spiritual nourishment. While it is good for the Christian who is home sick to listen in or watch worship services online, no one should think that this is an adequate substitute for faithful attendance. You cannot be a part of the assembly or teach and admonish the brethren through the computer screen.

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

Technology provides opportunities to speak before we think. Social media can allow you to encourage and edify quickly. Such should be used to the glory of God. However social media is constantly asking the individual, “What are you thinking right now?” We might be tempted to post before we think and disobey the command, “Do all things without murmurings or disputings” (Phil. 2:14). If we “share if you agree!” without checking the facts we become talebearers (Lev. 19:16). “Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him” (Prov. 29:20). The truth of the matter is that we are better communicators when we use our facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice along with our words. It is very difficult to express your true feelings with words alone and so a seemingly harmless post too often turns into a needless argument.

It needs to be the prayerful consideration of every Christian that we use this technology for the good it offers while avoiding the dangers. Our words, actions, and thoughts must be by faith, authorized by the Lord (Rom. 14:23; Col. 3:17; Phil. 4:8).

CW

PSALM 33

Steven Lloyd

“**S**hout for joy,” (v 1), “Give thanks to the Lord,” (v 2), and “Sing to him a new song” (v 3). Psalm 33 is a song of praise. Most songs of praise begin with a call to praise the Lord. Then they give us reasons for doing so. The focus of this particular call to praise is on “the word of the Lord:” its character, its power, and its counsel.

First, the psalm emphasizes the praiseworthy quality of the faithfulness of “the word of the Lord.” His word is faithful because He is faithful. “For the word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in faithfulness. He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord” (v. 4, 5).

Second, the power of the word of the Lord is emphasized by considering its roll in creation.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses (v. 6,7).

In response to the display of the Lord’s powerful word in creation, the poet sings:

Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm (v. 8, 9).

We can add to the trio of exhortations in verses 1-3 the exhortation to “fear the Lord.”

The third emphasis on “the word of the Lord” is on His counsel. Notice how the “counsel of the nations” is contrasted with the “counsel of the Lord” in the following verses.

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands

forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage! (v. 10-12).

The poem moves from the faithfulness of God’s word to the power of His word in creating the world, and then to the counsel of the Lord. The poet elaborates on the Lord’s interaction with the kingdoms of men and the plans they make.

The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by his great might it cannot rescue (v.16, 17).

In v 18, we return to the theme of fearing the Lord—mentioned first in v 8—and to the real source of deliverance.

Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love, that he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine.

Based on the faithfulness of the Lord’s word, His steadfast love, the power of His word and sovereignty, the question of where we place our confidence is obvious. The call of the psalmist is to “shout for joy in the Lord,” “to give thanks to the Lord,” “to sing to him a new song,” “to fear Him,” “to stand in awe,” and to “wait for the Lord.”

The poem ends:

Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you (v. 20-22).

We witnessed the rise and the fall of many in last year’s election. The plans of some came to naught, and the hopeful plans of others have been announced. We are to pray for those in positions of power to the end that we might live a peaceful life and that the course of the gospel is not hindered (1 Tim. 2:1-7).

In the past, my attention on Psalm 33 has typically been on v.6-9. A reading of the entire poem has enhanced my appreciation for its breadth. And, because of last year’s election, v. 10-12 seem particularly important.

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the

plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage (v. 10-12)!

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to remember the faithfulness of God and the sacrifices of the Savior? Better still, are we "setting up stones" that will create opportunities for us to build up a faith in our children so that they might fear the Lord God forever?

Can our children ask, "What mean these stones" when we fail faithfully to insure they are regularly given opportunities to hear about the spiritual matters? Do we bring them to Bible classes, worship services, and involve them in youth activities? And what about gospel meetings—not only ours but those of sound congregations in the area? Remember when families travelled to attend gospel meetings? Today, families spend more time on the ball field, basketball court, or vacation than feeding on the Word of God.

Many curiosities and questions arise in the minds of youth when hearing such inspired accounts as the creation, the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, the global flood, the ten plagues, Israel's crossing the Red Sea, and

the fall of Jericho. What great questions arise in the hearts of our children when they observe their parents partaking of the Lord's Supper, giving of their means every Lord's day, or hearing the gospel proclaimed from the pulpit! What golden opportunities are missed when we fail to set up stones by faithfully providing opportunities for our children to hear the Word of God!

Can our children ask, "What mean these stones" if we do not live before them daily the Christian life and make decisions that focus their attention on spiritual matters rather than worldly? Imagine the great opportunities to teach the fear of the Lord when asked such questions as, "Why do we not go to the beach?" or "Why do we always go to a *private beach*?" "Why am I not allowed to go school dances?" "Why can I not go swimming when both girls and boys are present?" "Why do you not drink alcohol like Johnnie's parents?" "Why do we attend worship services even when we are on vacation?" "Why do we not watch that television program, everyone else does?" "Why do I have to miss ball practices/games when it is scheduled on Wednesday night?" How can our children ask, "*What mean these stones?*" if we fail to set up memorial stones of faithfulness to God in our own lives?

And IF our children ask, "What mean these stones," will we be able to give a Bible answer to establish them in the faith of God's Word? The Hebrews writer rebuked his readers saying, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5:12). We ought rather to be as Abraham, of whom the Lord said, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Gen. 18:19). How can we bring our children up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" if we ourselves are destitute of Bible knowledge and lacking in spiritual understanding? "What mean these stones?" Brethren, let us purpose in our hearts and prepare ourselves to be able soundly to teach our children, to live a life before them that is characterized by godliness, and to provide for them opportunities to study and to learn about their Creator. Let us set up, not stones of stumbling, but rather memorial stones that will direct their hearts and minds to their Savior and King.

CW



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