

Why?

Why publish THE STRAIT WAY? (1) We have a desire to help others, to do good and no harm. (2) The writing of several men will give variety to the material which will be contained herein. Each one has his own subject area. He will write twelve articles to be published in 1999. In 2000, another group of men will write on another set of subject areas. We think this material will help every thoughtful reader. (3) Many young men have dedicated their lives to proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ. To encourage as many as we can in this noble work is our prime purpose. Young preachers should know there are older Christians who appreciate them and are concerned about them, not jealous of them. If the churches of our Lord are to chart a course within the "strait and narrow," they need young preachers who are willing to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Who are more interested in advancing the cause of Christ than anything else. (4) There is truth to be defended and error to be exposed.

If you know of someone who would profit from being on our mailing list, send name and address to THE STRAIT WAY, P. O. Box 39, Colmesneil, TX 75938. To the recipient, the paper is free. Send address corrections to the same address.

The writers will appreciate your questions and comments. My thanks to them, to some fellow Christians in Colmesneil, Texas, and to our son-in-law in Buckhorn, MS, for helping make this work possible. God bless each one.

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AN ARABIC PROVERB

All sunshine makes a desert. The eternal God, whom we serve, knew that long before men "...for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mt. 5:45). God sends both sunshine and rain, there must be a balance.

Is it possible that in spiritual matters some brethren do not understand this principle? Many seem to think they should be able to go to worship feeling good and leave worship feeling good. The "spiritual fur" must always be rubbed the right way.

Is it possible that some preachers feel it ought to be that way? When preachers always know how to approach every subject in a way that will never make anyone unhappy or when they never deal with subjects on which there are differing positions, one wonders.

How did the Holy Spirit view this matter? The young preacher, Timothy, was commanded, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine..." (II Tim. 4:2,3a). The Holy Spirit wants a balance in preaching -- reproof, rebuking, and exhorting.

While we do not want any preacher to be a wet blanket, we are thankful that some preachers believe *All sunshine makes a desert.* --Glenn Melton

"But speaking the truth in love...I am set for the defence of the gospel" (Eph. 4:15; Phil. 1:7). "As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus...that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (I Tim. 1:3). "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly...some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils...If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives' tales, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness...Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (I Tim. 4:1,6,7,16). "...earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God" (II John 9a). "Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith" (Tit. 1:13b). "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:6).

Word Studies

I have been invited to participate in publication of The Strait Way by writing a brief word study for each issue. Some would probably feel that "word studies" may not be a very appealing topic, but word studies are important for several reasons, and I hope that the readers will not only learn from the studies presented, but will also be encouraged to study more carefully all the words used by inspired men.

Our Creator in His infinite wisdom has revealed His will unto man in a message transferred to us through human language. As Paul the apostle wrote, "...It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." (1 Cor. 1:21). Words are the vehicles of thoughts and ideas. A man with the most profound ideas cannot share them with his fellow man without using words commonly understood. Paul emphasized the importance of words in God's revelation: "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." (1 Cor. 2:13). The Holy Spirit compares spiritual "things," or ideas, with spiritual words, and thus reveals the mind of God to men. That being the case, it is incumbent upon us to study carefully the words chosen by the Spirit and thereby to understand more fully and precisely God's ideas.

A major hurdle for man to overcome in understanding God's message is that of translation from the biblical languages to our own. We are fortunate to have several good translations of the Bible in the English language, but it is important that we recognize that no two languages can be made to match perfectly. Because a language is the product of the culture that uses it, something is often lost or gained in putting an English word or phrase for a Hebrew or Greek word. The best translators cannot precisely convey all of the heritage that words have behind them as they translate. Thus, we often help ourselves to a richer, clearer understanding of God's message by looking more carefully at the heritage of Bible words.

The words of extant languages change their meanings with time. Our dictionaries must be under constant revision not only because new words come into use, but also because old words take on new meanings. The biblical languages are long dead, but their words varied in meaning over the centuries that they were used. Take, for example, the Greek verb, "psallo," which is translated "making melody" in Ephesians 5:19. Its appearance there has been cited often as providing authority for instrumental music in worship, for the word at one time conveyed the idea of playing a stringed instrument. A careful study of the word, however, reveals that at the time the New Testament was written, the word no longer implied use of an instrument, therefore Paul did not enjoin worship by mechanical means, but "in the heart."

Word studies are valuable tools in Bible hermeneutics. May the Lord bless us as we attempt to know more precisely His revealed will.

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What Does Luke 11:13 Teach About Praying For The Holy Spirit?

"If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" It should be obvious even to the casual reader that someone could pray to God the Father for the Holy Spirit with expectation of receiving what God promised. Whose privilege was it to so pray? What did God promise?

Joel 2:28-32 is the Old Testament background to New Testament teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. Joel wrote in verses 28 and 29, "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit." Peter referred to this prophecy in Acts 2:16 when he explained the events of Acts 2:1-13, "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel..." then quoted the entire statement (Joel 2:28-32). With the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Joel's prophecy began to be fulfilled (Acts 2:1-4).

In the gospels and Acts 1:1-26, there are several references to the Holy Spirit, which point directly to Pentecost and are concerned with the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

An early reference to the Holy Spirit which looked to Pentecost (Acts 2) is Mt. 3:11 where John the Baptist said concerning Jesus Christ, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost...."

John chapters fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen were spoken by Jesus to His apostles. In John 14:26; 15:26; and 16:13 Jesus made specific promises concerning the Holy Spirit's work with the apostles, which began to be fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2).

The promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit to the apostles (Acts 1:5) was fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Did not Acts 1:8 begin to be fulfilled at the same time?

Now let's return to our consideration of Luke 11:13. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" To whom was Jesus speaking? Please read Luke 11:1-13 and the parallel statements in Matthew 6:9-15; Mt. 7:7-12. Jesus was talking with His followers: those who had confidence in Him. Surely, He was not speaking to those who rejected Him. If He was speaking to those who had confidence in Him, for what did He instruct them to pray? Did He not desire that they pray for the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy? Had Jesus not taught them to pray, "Thy kingdom come" (Lk. 11:3)? And since Jesus later taught that the kingdom was coming with power (Mk. 9:1) and the power was coming with the Spirit (Acts 1:8), when they prayed for the Spirit (Lk. 11:13) as instructed by Jesus, were they not praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit which occurred on Pentecost (Acts 2)?

Luke 11:13 stands between Joel 2 and Acts 2: it looks back to Joel 2 and forward to Acts 2. In arriving at the meaning of Luke 11:13, this position must be taken into consideration. Any rejection of that context is going to be misleading. That leads us to the conclusion that Jesus was not instructing men today to pray for the Holy Spirit in any way or for any purpose? This was another way of teaching His followers to pray for the coming of His kingdom. --G. Melton, 322 Gray, Henderson, TX 75652, (903) 657-9089.

Issues Among Brethren
THE LORD'S CHURCH IS UNIQUE!

Unique is defined as: "one and only; different from all others; having no like or equal."

With this definition before us we can understand the thought behind the title of this article. The Lord has but one church. It is different from all others. It has no like or equal. This is the clear teaching of the Bible.

In spite of the message of the Bible false teachers would lower the Lord's church to the same level with man-made churches. To them the Lord's church is just one denomination among hundreds. Denying the uniqueness of the church they rob her of the glory and power which God has given her. She no longer provides special blessings and benefits for sinful man.

To refute such an idea let's notice two Bible truths which magnify the uniqueness of the church and place her in a class by herself.

First of all, the Lord's church is unique because God made her that way. A reading of Eph.4:4-6 reveals that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God the Father. A reading of Col.1:18 reveals that the "one body" of Eph.4:4 is the Lord's church. Just as there is but one Holy Spirit, one Lord Jesus Christ and one God the Father, there is but one church which is a part of God's plan of salvation for sinful man. If the Lord's church is not unique, neither are the three Persons of the Godhead. To put the Lord's church on the same level with man-made churches is to lower the three Divine Beings to man's level.

Another thing which makes the Lord's church unique is her Head. God has given that prominent position to Christ, Col.1:18. In contrast to the churches of men which might have a pope, or a president, or a Joseph Smith, or a Mary Baker Eddy and on and on, God has given Christ "to be the head over all things to the church." Only the saved, those obedient to the gospel of Christ, are added to the Lord's church, Acts 2:47. Only Christ has the power to save His church eternally, Eph.5:23; 1 Cor.15:24.

Let no man deceive you. The Lord's church is different, unique. Be added to her by obeying the gospel of Christ. Be a faithful, dedicated member and be eternally saved.

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First Principles
MORALITY AND FAITH

The morality of any person or of a society is determined by the standard of conduct to which it appeals. Apart from some standard, there can be no convictions of right and wrong. When a society, such as ours presently, is experiencing moral chaos, it reflects the people's lack of adherence to a noble standard of conduct, notably the Bible, the word of God. There is a relationship between faith and morality which is worthy of our exploration.

The word "walk" is used in Scripture to refer to the whole of one's conduct, behavior, or manner of life (Eph. 2:2, 10; 4:1,17; 5:2,8; 15). Of both Enoch and Noah it is said they "walked with God" (Gen. 5:24; 6:9). That is a divine commentary on the uprightness of their manner of life. God called upon Abraham to "walk before me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1).

Using faith in the sense of conviction (cf. Heb. 11:1, ASV), it should easily be apparent that one's "faith" affects his "walk." Genuine conviction begets a courage to act in a way becoming the conviction. Paul explained that he was able to endure the many trials that abounded in his ministry because he possessed the spirit of faith of which the psalmist wrote, "I believed and therefore I spoke, we also believe and therefore speak" (2 Cor. 4:8-14). His belief "that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you" begot within him a courage to stand and not lose heart in the most difficult of circumstances. He considered what he endured as a "light affliction" borne by a perishing outer man while the inner man enjoyed daily renewal as he looked to the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (vs. 16-18). Verily, what one believes affects his walk, his conduct, whole manner of life. In Paul's case, what he believed about God ("He who raised"), Christ ("the Lord Jesus Christ"), and the hereafter ("will also raise us") affected his walk. Just as surely, your or my conviction about God and life to come will be the determinants of our manner of life. If I don't "believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6), my life will show it. The downward spiral of ancient Gentile society and why it occurred is shown in Romans 1:21-31. They knew God but ceased to glorify Him as God. Nor were they thankful. The resulting gross moral degeneracy is vividly described.

Changing one's convictions will bring a change of life as Paul shows in I Cor. 6:9-11. Just look at what they were. Look at what they became. The change was wrought by their hearing the gospel, believing and being baptized (Acts 18:8). Truly, faith (conviction) affects morals. What does your life reflect?

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Personal Work

One of the great needs in the church today is personal work. Little of the burning passion for men's souls as seen in Jesus and the early Christians is to be found among Christians today. In most churches there are only a few that do personal work. Every concerned Christian wants the church to grow both spiritually and numerically. But, it seems to me that not many are willing to do anything about it. They want someone else to do the work. If someone else can do your personal work for you, then they can go to heaven for you. I don't believe that many realize the seriousness of being unfaithful to the commands of the Lord. There is more to Christianity than being faithful in attendance.

By personal work, most think of visiting the sick, providing for our families, household chores, helping the needy, comforting the distressed etc. That is true, that is personal work, but so is personal evangelism also. "Personal" means that which is done by the individual rather than the group. There are some duties we have, not just because we are part of a group, but because of our personal relationship to God.

The need to teach the Word to others is seen by the value God places upon a soul (Matthew 16:26). Just think of the value of all the land and buildings in the world and add them together until they stagger the imagination! Yet one soul is of far greater value than all these. Nothing is to compare in grandeur and priceless value with that which has been created in the image of God - the soul of man. When we realize the true value of the soul, then we will be interested in saving our own soul as well as the souls of others.

Why are we not growing like they did in the first century? We have better means of transportation and communication than they had. We are just not using them for the glory of God. We are so busy with the things of this world that we don't take time to do the Lord's work. We lack commitment. Read the book of Nehemiah when the Israelites return from captivity to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. "What these people did was to totally commit themselves to God. But the commitment did not sustain itself in future generations. Brethren, if that does not frighten us what will? We can definitely see such a failure in commitment right now in this generation. We have become too busy with our hobbies, as well as with our work, with our friends, and with many other selfish pleasures, and have no time left or set aside to do the Lord's work. Can't we see that what makes the situation ever worse is that we are communicating what we PRACTICE, and not what we profess? It is impossible to communicate values that we can only speak of as being important but never put into use. (Some of this came from a sermon by Rodney Miller).

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Evidence THAT GOD IS

Our English word evidence comes from a compound Latin word meaning to clearly see. Video, a recent word to our language, lurks in the word. Evidence appears 7 times in 6 verses of the KJV and 10 times in 9 verses of the NASV. Five of the KJV verses are in Jeremiah 32:10-16 and refer to that which is written. The KJV calls these written documents "evidence" whereas the NASV refers to them by the legal title of "deeds." WRITTEN EVIDENCE is vital, dependable and required by the old and new testaments. Christ appealed to the scriptures, John 5:39 is an example, in challenging the religious leaders of his day. Daniel knew the 70 years of captivity were drawing to a close. Jeremiah's writings were his evidence in Daniel 9:2.

Hebrews 11:1 in the NASV has "conviction" where the KJV has "evidence" in explaining the subjective, active faith of the ancients. Acts 17:3 records Paul's arguments concerning Christ which were based on the scriptures. The KJV says he "alleged" things concerning Christ, the NASV says he offered "evidence." In the 19th Psalm the scriptures call attention to the concrete evidence of the universe as ample testimony that God is: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork," and in the 8th Psalm: "For thou hast made him {MAN RLL} a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour." The physical world of His creation stands as unimpeachable evidence that God is.

Prima facie evidence of God's existence is found in God's spiritual creation, that is, in those who obey His word. This evidence, to my mind, is not adequately expressed in most sermons on evidences. This series will deal with the physical creation, but the bottom line will always be to emphasize the evidence of the spiritually minded. Saints have submitted themselves to God's written word and control their spirits according to God's word. This assertion finds proof in passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:33: "And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets," and verse 37: "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." A saint's reputation and conduct are evidence that God is. Jesus did not refer to those of the beatitudes as lights for naught. The gospel revealed and believed is made evident by practice in the lives of saints. A Christian walking "by faith" is the strongest evidence that God is. Paul's life in the flesh was according to the faith arising from the gospel of Christ. See Galatians 2:20.

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