

StraitWay



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Overseeing The Flock Part Two (Some things elders have to wonder about)

Elders have to wonder how those that attend worship once or twice a month decide when to attend? Just what makes them decide when they get up in the morning to say, “This is the Sunday I will go to church?” “I haven’t been in about a month now and I suppose it is time.” Just what is different about that particular Sunday compared to all the others they miss?

Elders have to wonder how one chooses which headache is a church headache and which one is a work headache? How do some people determine that a headache is not bad enough to miss work, but yet it is bad enough to miss worship? Do they think God will overlook their absence, but their employer will not? Maybe there needs to be aspirin labeled, “children, adult, extra strength, and church strength.” (There is no need for “work strength” because very few headaches cause one to miss work).

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is...” (Heb 10:25)

Elders have to wonder what folks are thinking when they look in the mirror before going to worship and see their top half almost exposed because their top is too low cut, sleeveless, or backless? And, when they look at the hem of their dress and see that when they sit down it will uncover their thigh, do you suppose they have some special thoughts? Do they think I will really look good to my brothers and sisters? Do they think this attire will help me to be in a better frame of mind to worship? Or, maybe it will encourage a brother or sister to obey the gospel. What are parents thinking when they purchase shorts, skimpy tops and other indecent clothing, for their children and themselves?

“In like manner also, the woman adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array....” (1st Tim. 2:9)

Elders have to wonder what Christians are thinking when they rent an “R” rated movie? Have you wondered what they were thinking when they were telling you how bad it was, and how it would have been better if certain parts had been left out? Are they thinking they are doing you a favor by telling you so you won’t make the mistake of renting it? Why should they have been surprised when they were exposed to nudity, foul language, and violence? That is what “R” rated movies have in them, and it is no secret. None of us need anyone to tell us not to rent an “R” rated movie. Christians should know better.

Elders have to wonder how so many of the brethren know the names of all the soap stars? How do they know so much about the so-called comedies that have plots exploiting drinking, sex, divorce, adultery, and homosexuality? Yet, many of these same folks can’t remember who many of the Bible characters are and what they did.

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Phil. 4:8)

Preacher Training The Program Itself

In this series we're looking at the training of preachers from the standpoint of a congregational effort. In our last installment we talked about why such a program is both Biblical and expedient. This time I'd like to offer a few comments on the program itself.

There are any number of ways that preacher training programs are being carried on today. Many churches have engaged in summer training programs. This allows some writing and bulletin work as well as some time in the pulpit to hone speaking skills. There can also be study and reading assignments, reports, visiting, or help on a local vacation Bible School effort. Not a bad way to spend a summer if a young man already has some personal and/or speaking skills and just needs some practice. The time constraint of this effort however, usually does not allow a great deal of time for starting from "scratch" or ironing out doctrinal matters or personal conflicts. Although it is about enough time to learn the names of the members in a large group, 10 to 12 weeks is just not much time for any serious pursuit in any single area. There's not much time for talking with elders, working through discipline problems, or making mistakes and correcting them.

I know of a two week program where I'm guessing literally hundreds of men have attended and profited by a short, intensive fellowship of daily classes, lectures, and assignments. There are probably more separate pieces of the work of preaching covered in that two weeks than any series of its kind. As good as it is, the down-side of this can be pointedly shown, I believe, by asking any high schooler how much they remember when they 'cram' for a test. Do they learn? Absolutely! Do they learn as much as they would have if they had studied their lessons, and reviewed their lessons, and then gone over them again for their tests? Not hardly.

Among summer programs, two week intensive programs, semester class sessions, etc... do I have a favorite? You know that I do. I believe that a year long program is one of the best choices for accomplishing the goal of preparing a man for this work. A Paul-Timothy arrangement for a year is both biblical and expedient. As stated above, in three months a man will pretty much know all the members in a large congregation, but in 6 months he will "begin" to know the problems they wrestle with. In nine or 10 months there is an excellent chance that he would have been involved enough to even help some through a difficult time. In this amount of time he could have had numerous discussions with several elders to get their viewpoints. He could have studied issues out under the guidance of an older preacher and then talked it out again, before committing to a stand or preaching on it and sticking his foot in his mouth. He has time to study, meditate, pray, consider, get counsel, and then act.

A final viewpoint I'd like to share is a personal observation. I like the working aspect of an "intern" relationship in this matter of training. An intern in a hospital is one who definitely is a doctor, but he is supervised. He is a doctor, but he doesn't have the independent responsibilities of doctor. In congregations where I have been blessed to participate in an effort of this kind we always had an agreement. The young man was an "intern". Was he a gospel preacher? Absolutely. Not a youth minister, not a junior minister or assistant preacher. He was introduced for a year as "the other" preacher in a two man arrangement. Nevertheless he was an "intern". In one area, he did not bear the full responsibilities of a preacher. That was in the area of criticism and correction. We always had an arrangement that if anyone had a problem with him, they were NOT to go directly to him, but to me. And if the young man had a problem, he was NOT to jump up and preach about it, but come to me. The congregation working with a young man knew their job was to encourage him and build him up while he was with us, and my job was to correct him. If there was correcting to be done (and there was!) then I could do that privately, over a cup of coffee, on Monday morning. That kept self-appointed guardians from dissecting him at the back door each Lord's day. It also kept him from using the pulpit to address something that perhaps he really didn't know enough about yet.

More on the "pieces" of a training program next time.

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Passing The Sword Introduction

This is the second article under this heading.

I have been asked to use 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus in my articles. So, with this in mind, I think I will begin my articles with an overview of these three books and their authors.

TIMOTHY WAS A SERVANT OF GOD FROM HIS YOUTH.

Solomon says that we should seek the Creator in the days of our youth, Eccl. 12:1. It seems that the older we get the more set in our ways we become and our hearts lose the flexibility that they once had. Timothy was born in the area of Lycaonia, of the Roman province of Galatia, now known as Turkey, in the city of Lystra, in are about 25-30 A.D. His father was a Greek or Gentile and his mother was a devout Jew, Acts 16:1. Even though his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, are named, his father nor grandfather are.

The first mention that we have of Timothy is found at the beginning of Paul's second journey, Acts 15:40,41; 16:1. Paul and Barnabas had been to Lystra on the first journey, when many notable things happened to them, Acts 14:6-23. This first journey took place between 46 and 48 A.D., which would mean that Timothy would have been in his early 20's at the time. It seems that Eunice and Lois became Christians at that time and Timothy possibly a little later, if not at the same time. This is borne out by their being called believers and a disciple in Acts 16:1.

It seems that Timothy had progressed well during the intervening time between the first and second journeys, Acts 16:2. This could be expected since he had been well-taught from his early childhood by his mother and grandmother, 2 Tim. 3:14,15; 1:3-5.

When Paul and Silas came to Lystra on the second journey, about 49-52 A.D., Paul wanted Timothy to join him in the work of the Lord, Acts 16:1-3. No doubt, Paul could see qualities in this young man that would be of great service to him and to the Lord in the days to come. From what we learn from the writings of both Luke and Paul the choice was certainly a good one.

As Paul traveled and worked for the Lord, he recruited and trained many young men for the service of the Lord. Seemingly, Timothy stands out as one of the very best, Phil. 2:19-23. Paul refers to him as: "my beloved son" and "my true son in the faith". We will continue this study of the lives of Timothy and Titus in our next article.

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(Continued from Facing Page)

Sundays were days of joyful worship to God! When meeting for worship in Belize, we assembled outside. It was hot, humid, and uncomfortable. On a number of occasions I had to preach over the noise of a rainstorm and wind. Mosquitoes are a BIG problem! Add to all of this the fact that brethren are willing to sit on unpadded pews made out of 2 x 4's with straight backs – for 2-3 hours at a time! And yet, not one complaint! Everyone was happy! A love for God and brethren was evident to all! Some brethren walked or rode their bicycle as many as 5-10 miles to worship services – getting up very early in the morning to make it in time for worship! This can revitalize the preacher who must constantly absorb complaints from his American brethren for preaching 5-10 minutes *overtime*, or hear people say our padded pews are too uncomfortable for people with back problems or older people in order to justify poor attendance at worship.

Finally, I learned that we must possess a *sense of urgency* when it comes to foreign work. There is potential for long term spiritual growth in many foreign fields! As we were conducting Bible studies, many asked, "Why is this truth just now coming to Belize?" Others asked, "Why weren't you here years ago teaching the gospel so my parents could have obeyed?" How many others across the world are asking the same questions? **The time for action is now!** I was constantly reminded of what Paul must have felt like as he spread the gospel message in the first century. Brethren, the pure and simple gospel is in need of being spread all over the globe! There are so many people who will obey! Those who do obey are often willing to go to great lengths to remain faithful – despite the sacrifices! We've just got to get the gospel message to them!

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The Deacon's Work Responsibilities

In Philippians 1:1 Paul addresses the letter to the church, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." This passage shows us that the deacons are set apart from or addressed differently than the other saints and the elders. If they are addressed differently I believe we can see that the deacons have different qualifications and responsibilities than the elders or the other saints. In this article we want to look at some of the responsibilities deacons have that are different than other saints. In looking at these I'm sure we are going to see some overlapping areas with others in the church. We still would like to look at areas of responsibilities I believe are placed upon deacons because of their office.

The first responsibility is one of being a leader in the congregation. A deacon does not have authority over others in the church and others are not to submit to deacons as they are to elders (Hebrews 13:17). Deacons are themselves subject to the elders in accordance with this passage. Deacons, though, are leaders of another sort. Deacons must be leaders in their example. These men are to meet certain qualifications as spelled out in 1 Timothy 3:8-12. They are looked to as examples by the other members of the congregation as well as members of the community. Deacons should be examples to these people in various areas. I believe the most important area the deacon should be an example is in submission to, or support of the elders. If the deacons do not support or submit themselves to the elders how will they persuade the others in the church to be submissive? This does not mean the deacon will always agree on every decision the elders make on matters of judgment. Yet this does mean that once a decision is made the deacon has a responsibility to stand behind the elders and give one hundred percent in implementing the idea or project involved. If a deacon cannot put his feelings aside on these matters and support the work that is done, he will be a deterrent to church growth. If a man is not going to give full assistance to the elders in getting the work of the church done he should not be in the office of a deacon.

Another area where the deacon should be an example is in attending the gathering of the saints. The New Testament is full of passages that tell us we should meet together and build each other up (Hebrews 10:24-25; Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). It amazes me that some members of the Lord's church don't see the need to gather and worship with the saints. The deacons and the elders have to show by their example that worshiping with and edifying one another is a priority in their life. If the leadership of a church does not find it necessary to assemble on Sunday night worship or midweek bible study why would we expect the members to make it a priority in their life? Some might think it elementary and unnecessary to write about this but I have heard of places where this is not the exception but the rule. One member told me that in the denomination he used to be a member of the church leaders were rarely there on Sunday night. If the leaders do not find it important enough to attend why should the members? We have to do better than that. Deacons must show by their example of attendance and interest that edifying the saints is important in their life.

Another area that deacons must be an example is in completing the tasks that are assigned to them. There are some tasks that a deacon is given to do that will require him to have others help to complete. A deacon should not think that he must do all the work by himself, but on the other hand a deacon's work is not to have others do everything for him. When it is required for a deacon to have help in fulfilling his function he should take the lead and show others a willingness to work in order to have others work with him. A deacon who wants to delegate everything that is assigned to him is not fulfilling his responsibility.

I would again like to emphasize that deacons do not have oversight or are not charged with shepherding the flock. This is the responsibility of the elders. Deacons do, though, have a responsibility to lead the congregation in their example. We have looked at three areas that they can lead in this way. I believe you could also take this principle and apply it in other areas as well. Deacons are held to a different standard than the other members and that is why they must meet certain qualifications in order to serve as a deacon. We will begin looking at those qualifications next time.

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“Home” God's First Institution

The Bible (I write with the assumption that our readers believe the Bible to be God’s word) begins with these words: *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”* (Gen 1:1). Later in the chapter (v. 27) are these words: *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”* Then the text says: *“And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet (suitable for him or his counterpart jlh) for him”*(Gen 2:18). Verses 19 and 20 informs us that God created every creature and Adam gave them names, *“but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.”* Later when God gave the Law to Israel the practice of bestiality is expressly condemned (Lev 20:15,16; Deut 27:21). So, since there was not found a help “meet” for man among all the creatures on earth, God made from one of Adam’s ribs a woman and *“brought her unto the man.”* (v 22). Now, note Gen 2:23, 24: *“And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”*

The statement in Gen 1:24 indicates the commitment that is made in the marriage relationship. The word “therefore” indicates reason or purpose, that is, because woman was made as man’s counterpart. So, because she is his counterpart or “help meet”, the man is to leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. Gen 1:25 refers to this first couple as *“the man and his wife”*, that is, they became one flesh. Adam had no father and mother to leave, since he and Eve were created by God and did not come into this world through the natural birth process. These instructions, therefore, are for all mankind from that time forward. Therefore we must understand what is meant by the words *“leave”* and *“cleave”*

In leaving father and mother there is a relationship that must be severed, the man/woman are no longer under the authority of father and mother. The word “leave” means to forsake completely, “to abandon”. Certainly, this does not negate the command to “honor” father and mother (Matt 15:4), but rather, emphasizes the need for one who takes a mate to renounce the “rule” or “authority” of their parents over this new “home” or “household” being brought into existence. One author compared this to the cutting of the umbilical cord when a baby is born. A baby cannot grow and develop until the umbilical cord is cut. A marriage cannot grow and develop as it should until there has been a real leaving of father and mother. When they “leave” father and mother, they “cleave” to each other. This is the commitment they make to be faithful to each other. The word “cleave” comes from a Greek word which means: 1) to glue upon, glue to; 2) to join one’s self to closely, cleave to, stick to (Thayer). This emphasizes the permanency of marriage, it is until death parts them (Rom 7:1,2; 1Cor 7:39). When this “leaving” and “cleaving” takes place, the man (husband Gen 3:6) and his wife become one flesh, that is, they are joined together by God; and Jesus, in his discussion of this permanent relationship said: *“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”* (Matt 19:6).

Earlier in the creation story (Gen 1:28) God had told them to: *“. . . Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. . .”* and remember this instruction was given BEFORE they sinned and were cast out of the garden. So, from the beginning, God’s intention for husband and wife was that they bear children fulfilling his plan in establishing the home (family). This flies in the face of the humanist teaching that monogamy is: not a good idea; a societal invention and not divine in origin. You will also notice that nowhere in the Bible did a home (family) ever consist of two males or two females and their offspring. In the first place two of the same sex coming together in an effort to form such a union is an abomination to God. (Lev 18:22; 20:13); and in the second place it is a physical impossibility. Thus God’s first institution consists of a husband (male) and wife (female) producing children as a result of their becoming one flesh. This involves many and varied responsibilities as shall be discussed in later articles.

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Foreign Evangelism Rekindling The Fire

I have become convinced that there are not many more things that can energize an evangelist in his work than foreign evangelism. I encourage all young preachers to jump on the opportunity when it is presented! Fields are ripe for harvest all over the world – from North America to Australia! One does not have to look hard to find those opportunities! They're there! Don't count yourself out because of your young age and/or limited experience! (Everyone has to get started at some point – the sooner one gets started, the better!) My first trip abroad was made at the "tender age" of 24 – and now at 29 I am in the process of preparing for a trip to Ukraine in the summer of 2003. 1998 was a tough year in my work as a preacher. As many young preachers find out, there are some things that must be learned "the hard way." As that year dragged on, there were times I seriously considered whether or not I needed to be preaching. During the summer and early fall, men close to me encouraged me to help out with work in Central America. Looking back now, I know they had faith that this would "rekindle" the fire within me. I raised support in a short time and by November was on my way to Belize. What I would experience during that trip has galvanized my work as an evangelist. How?

I learned and experienced the true power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. While opportunities in America are still plentiful – and we must work to take advantage of them – after teaching the gospel in Belize not once did I hear, *that's just your interpretation* or *we're all trying to get to heaven – your way is OK and so is mine*. How refreshing! For the most part, I found people to be humble. They understand the Bible is of God and they know to be pleasing to God one must do what the Bible says. They are **hungry** for Biblical truth! Many recognize the confusion of denominationalism – and we have the opportunity to point the way out of it! Several men and women we studied with had lives full of sin. Some had multiple marriage partners; others were battling drugs, alcohol, and immorality. After teaching them from God's word they realized their condition before God. (Isa. 59:1-2) We showed them that obeying the gospel is the only way to get out from under the weight of sin. (Jhn. 14:6) **I found very few people who argued against what the Bible says.** Over the course of seventeen days, **eight** souls were baptized into Christ!

I learned that the approach many institutional brethren use in spreading the gospel does not work. Brethren in institutional congregations have done well in baptizing people into Christ in foreign fields all over the globe. In one town in Belize they have baptized over 300 people over a period of 30 years! But yet, their congregations average only 10-15 people per week in attendance. While many have been baptized, there has not been much emphasis on keeping Christians faithful. Institutional brethren have championed the building of private schools in hopes of attracting people to the gospel. Numerous efforts such as food banks, medical campaigns, and other social programs have been attempted. Although good is accomplished with the health and welfare of the people, not much is accomplished on the spiritual front. I found many amazed that I was not there for a vacation, but there solely for the purpose of teaching and preaching God's word! We must realize the *power of the gospel is not in medical campaigns, food banks, and social gatherings, but in pure and simple bible teaching!* At the time of my visit, with only two years of work by the located evangelist there had been 45 baptisms. At the time, at least 50% of those brethren were still faithful!

I conducted more personal Bible Studies over seventeen days in Belize than some do over the course of a year in America! Most people were ready to study at anytime. It was quite common to walk into someone's yard, ask if they were interested in studying the bible, and see them stop whatever they were doing to discuss the Scriptures! Some of the discussions went on for as long as two hours! Yes there were a few who were no longer interested after the first study, but it was by no means a majority! Contrast that to what we often experience here in America! Just about everyday was a full day of back to back bible studies – leaving our home at 7:30 AM and not getting home until after 10 PM! If you're looking for an opportunity to teach the gospel with someone – foreign evangelism is a great way to conduct more studies than you ever imagined!

I learned that Americans are greatly blessed with material possessions! The poorest American has far more than the average person in Central America! Their lives are hard. An average cane farmer only brings home \$5 US per day. Some of us would do well to experience what it is to live without the "necessities" we find so essential in *first world* countries. A trip overseas will remind one to thank God for what He has blessed us with in America and it will cause one to examine whether his priorities are on the spiritual and not on the material. (Lk. 12:13-15; Mt. 6:19-21.) (Continued on Next Page)

Trees Found, Forest Missing

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

Matthew 13:45-46

The verses above teach us a very important lesson regarding value. From them we learn that if we value something greatly we will be willing to give up all we have to attain it. We follow this principle during almost all of our life. We may not sell all we have but we are willing to do whatever is necessary to attain those things we value. Certainly this is as things ought to be. When we understand the value of Christ and His way we will leave all we have on earth to follow Him.

Unfortunately we may have difficulty helping people understand the lesson taught in these verses and many others found in Scripture. In studying we can become distracted trying to determine what is represented by each part of a particular lesson. Let's look at what can be found in this parable:

The merchant man can represent a seeker and mankind is seeking truth. Therefore the merchant man would be any man that is looking to find value. The pearl of great price must certainly be Truth, for what could have more value than Truth? So, we have a man looking for Truth who finds it and sacrifices everything to gain it. Certainly this fits what these verses teach. We must be right.

But someone else says, “nothing is more valuable than a soul and the kingdom is likened to a merchant man.” This means the merchant must be Christ, for he has the kingship. Jesus came to earth to “seek and to save that which was lost” which would be the souls of man. When he found man lost he willingly gave up who and what he was and purchased man. Now we have a perfect fit to the parable, so it must be right. We even have other scriptures to verify our conclusions.

Then another comes along and says, “the church is the kingdom and therefore the merchant man must be the church.” The church is looking for the lost and should use all its resources to save souls. This is taught in other scriptures also. It must be right.

Now we have a problem. Everyone cannot be right. The first two explanations are almost exactly opposite of one another, so one of them must be wrong. We must decide which is right and follow it, while excluding anyone holding a differing view. There can only be ONE truth, right?

Most all of us have heard of someone who “can't see the forest for the trees.” I think we are guilty of that when studying God's word at times. We spend so much time trying to match the words in a parable that we miss the teaching of the story. The parables of Jesus were delivered to Israel, who had turned away from God. Many of them dealt with this problem specifically. Time after time the theme of a lesson pointed to Israel's need to return to God, or see the prophecy being fulfilled before their eyes. We also learn from those parables today. The principles they teach help us serve the Lord.

When we study the epistles to the churches and individuals of the first century, we know that they are not written directly to us. We understand that even though we may not have an individual committing fornication with his father's wife, as in Corinth, the principles Paul teaches can be applied today. They apply to any sinner in the congregation that does not repent.

If the same is done with the parables we could avoid many disagreements and would be better equipped to serve the Lord. The principle is what we must understand as we study Scripture. A full understanding of the principle will at times point us to only one conclusion regarding the individual elements of a parable. Other times it will allow us to apply a parable to many different areas of our service to the Lord.

So, what of our opening parable? Jesus teaches the lesson of understanding value. A lesson similar to what we find in Matthew 6 as Jesus teaches the importance of recognizing value and being ready to sacrifice to attain that which is truly valuable. It is also comparable to the lesson of Philippians 2 describing his sacrifice in leaving heaven to pay the price for our sins. Be diligent and careful in your study of the Holy Scriptures.

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Poison For The Mind

Society's choices of entertainment have never been kind to those seeking to honor God and live for Him, but there should be little doubt that the industry spawning current entertainment fad and fashion has sunken to new lows. In previous generations the ever-present teenage rebellion was met and countered with relatively higher standards by parents, educators, and entertainers in general. It is no longer the case!

It is regrettably true that while many parents today encourage the misbehaviors of the young by their "hands-off" approach to parenting, many educators do so by their offer of philosophical justification for the conduct and the moguls of the entertainment industry encourage anti-social behavior and mannerisms for the sake of "filthy lucre." Their ill-gotten gain will rise up to testify against their greed later in this life, as well as in final judgment (Jas. 5:3).

The general situation of this infamous industry, typified by the award of a Peoples' Choice Award to the rapper Eminem, was recently the focus of a biting analysis of a column by Bill O'Reilly. Under the cover of "artistry," the money-hungry advance the cause of social and moral degradation (Prov. 14:34), by selling mind poison and one-way tickets to misery, as charged by the columnist. The coarsening of America is the undesirable consequence of this endeavor. The abuse of women; the portrayal of American society as a deck stacked against the poor and minorities; immediate gratification on all levels; promotion of the "gangsta" attitude; encouragement of gutter language, tattoos, and body piercings; approval of obscenity and violence; and the selling and use of dope characterize this moral abyss that has developed around Hollywood. Is this really the people's choice, or just the Peoples' Choice?

What can the godly do? They must continue to live their lives by divine standards (Rom. 12:1-2), pray fervently to the Father to be used to bring better times (1 Tim. 2:1-7), let the light of Christ and the gospel shine in them (Matt. 5:13-16), and seek to teach the gospel to all (Rom. 1:16). It is still the hope of the world because it points people to Christ, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27). Letters to newspaper editors, church-sponsored teaching articles, and other righteous involvement might gain the attention of a few, but the personal interaction of Christians with individuals in the world will produce the most results. O'Reilly charged that Eminem is as dangerous to society as al Qaida, but we can be thankful that God's people have the only antidote to the moral and spiritual poison being spewed on the unsuspecting masses.

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