

Expository Files

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EF 16.1

Co-edited by Jon Quinn and Warren Berkley

Beginning 16 Years With This Issue

Front Page

Tittle-Tattle

Warren E. Berkley

Do you remember this from junior high school? Another student comes to you and says, “will you tell Sally that I like her?” Or, “will you tell Mary to tell Jane that Henry said he likes Sally?” You were being asked to deliver a message someone else didn’t want to deliver. Perhaps you complied with the request in junior high. But as an adult you recognize that as juvenile behavior.

Yet in offices occupied by adults, a form of that adolescent method may be attempted. “Will you tell the boss that Bob told Bill that Joe didn’t like his annual evaluation. I just think the boss should know.” While you may reluctantly comply with that chain of tittle-tattle, you know there are better ways to communicate.

This happens in families. Shunning straight communication and perhaps with as an equal absence of maturity and courage, one family member may ask another to get another one “told.” Though the approach often backfires it seems to be perpetuated through several generations. It solves no problems and could create many.

Then there are churches. The rule in many places seems to be, if you want to complain about the elders, go to the preacher. If you have something against the preacher, say nothing to him; take it to the elders.

Preachers are targets of this. Many times in 39 years, I've been approached by someone and told plainly, "**somebody** needs to correct brother _____." The object of this criticism may have misworded a prayer, said something out of place or failed to correct a child. The preacher is supposed to fix all of this.

Personally, I just don't do this. I don't let people use me to fix people they think should be fixed. If a complaint is valid, take it up with the "guilty party." If the complaint is just idle talk, I don't want to hear it. The only time you can bring me in would be in cases where specific application of Matt. 18:16 or 1 Tim. 5:19 are objectively apparent.

Christians should be people of such maturity, we don't use the communication methods of a 7th grader. Strife is often the result, when you talk about people in their absence. If you really care about the "guilty party," and you are convinced they are in spiritual jeopardy, speak directly to the person. **Don't hand off challenging situations to others. That's cowardly, immature, fosters ill will and often backfires.**

I like what Henry Van Dyke said: *Never believe anything bad about anybody unless you positively know it to be true; never tell even that unless you feel that it is absolutely necessary — and remember that God is listening while you tell it.*

I really like what James said: *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless (Jas. 1:26).*

Heb. 1:5-14

Angels: Second Place

Warren E. Berkley

The Jews, for many generations before Christ came, held angels in high esteem. There was a basis for this. Angels have long enjoyed a place in God's order, like Gabriel and Michael in the book of Daniel.

Today there is a heightened fascination for "the spirit world" of demons and angels. Mostly this interests revolves around claims of personal experience, dramatic encounters and dreams which could never be verified, but carry some sensation.

When Bible classes come to any mention of angels (as in Hebrews chapter one), there is a temptation to stop everything, unpack everything the Bible says about angels and add to the discussion all the subjective options and stories about these mystic beings.

If you let that happen in Hebrews chapter one, you have acted in direct defiance of the point of the passage. The main thing in Hebrews one is not angels. In fact, the affirmation of the writer is, they are second place to Jesus Christ. What is said and claimed about Jesus Christ could never be said of angels. Our Savior is totally different and stands at a different level. It is our great privilege to be subject to Him.

"Let all the angels worship Him," (Heb. 1:6; Psa. 97:7).

Warren E. Berkley

On the same subject – from a previous issue:

The Superiority of Christ

Hebrews 1:4-14

The book of Hebrews argues that Christ is superior in all things. Christ as our Great High Priest is superior to the priest who officiated under the Levitical system. The covenant of Christ is superior to the Old Covenant given to the Jews at Sinai. Christ is greater than Moses and Aaron. These arguments are designed to lead to the conclusion that the salvation Christ provides (since it is predicated on His own precious blood and not on the blood of bulls and goats) is indeed

great (Hebrews 2:1-4). We ignore or "neglect" this great salvation to our spiritual ruin. Christ is also superior to the angels, which is the theme of Hebrews 1:4-14.

Angels are featured throughout the OT. We generally think of angels of being messenger for God; they did serve that purpose (Genesis 19; 22). Daniel speaks of Michael (Daniel 12:1-2). Angels were a featured part of many Near Eastern religions. The Dead Sea Scrolls suggest that the ancients speculated about the role of angels in service to God. In NT times, the worship of angels has apparently become a problem, probably as a part of Gnosticism (Colossians 2:18). Angels had (have) something to do with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 11. Today, the New Age Movement has again popularized angels; they are the focus of many books and some movies. What place do angels occupy in Hebrews?

First, Christ is said to be better than the angels "as he hath inherited a more excellent name than they" (1:4). Exaltation by the Father's right hand marks Christ as greater than the angels. Further, His name is greater. In context, this seems to be a reference, as verse five states, to the fact that Christ is identified as the Son (cf. Philippians 2:9-11; here Lord is used). While on earth Jesus was clearly the Son (Hebrews 5:9), but in this exalted position of honor, Jesus is demonstrated to be far above the angels; He is ranked or reputed to be above the angels. The Father never said to the angels: "Thou art my son, This day have I begotten thee" (1:5). This is a quotation from Psalm 2:7, which speaks of the triumph of the King over His enemies. Paul, in Acts 13:33, applies the Psalms passage to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Not only is the name of Christ above that of the angels, but His very essence, His deity, was demonstrated by His resurrection from the grave (cf. Romans 1:4). No angel could make that claim.

Second, did the Father ever say to an angel: "I will be to him a Father, And he shall be to me a Son?" No, but He said that to Christ (1:5). This OT quotation is from 2 Samuel 7:14. King David asked permission to build a suitable house for Jehovah. After telling David no, the Lord said that one from David's loins would come forth and his kingdom would be established forever. Yes, David's son, Solomon, would later build the temple in Jerusalem; God would be a Father to Him. But the ultimate fulfillment could not be possible apart from

Christ, the Son, who sits on David's throne (cf. Acts 2:29-36). Could the angels make such a claim of superiority? No, but Christ makes that claim. Is He worthy? Should we listen to Him? The original recipients of Hebrews needed to be reminded of Christ's superiority. We need that same reminder today.

By Randy Harshbarger
From Expository Files 8.2; February 2001

Dealing With Internal Conflict

(Acts 6)

Brady Cook

It is a glorious picture. The apostles standing on the temple steps at Pentecost and proclaiming the Word of God, at which 3,000 respond. Not long after, 2,000 more at Peter's second great sermon, bringing the total number of Christians to an impressive total in Jerusalem. The church is growing, everyone is abiding in the apostles doctrine, and it seems like not even prison can get them down. But with more people can come problems, and it's not long before complaints about how things are being ran appear. In Acts 6, the Hellenists rise up and complain that their widows are being neglected in the daily distribution, more than likely a by-product of the enmity that still existed between native Jews and those who had adopted much of the Greek culture. Nevertheless, there was an issue at hand that needed to be settled, and how the apostles handled it is a good illustration for our own issues today.

The real shame of this debacle is that it was a physical matter the believers were concerned about, people who were supposed to be consumed with the things of the next (1 John 2:15). But in their defense, in the early stages of the church, love needed to be at its strongest; strife and enmity had no place among God's people, which has the power to turn off otherwise well-meaning Christians by itself. Priorities had to be set in place. Which was more important: showing my superiority, or sustaining the kingdom? Keep in mind that the kingdom of God is not about bread or food (John 6:26), but the distribution of food was a way in which previously estranged brethren could display their love under Christ. If one can't handle a physical matter well, what does that say about the spiritual?

The apostles recognized the matter at hand quickly, but instead of overseeing it themselves, seized the opportunity to then hand it over to others who could handle it. This is perhaps the most important lesson to take away from this passage: the delegation of tasks to others who are able to handle it just as well. The apostles were given a special position of authority as Jesus' chosen messengers on earth, and bigger matters lay ahead of them than to oversee food distribution, as they themselves said, *"It is not desirable that we should neglect the Word of God to serve tables."* Sticking around to oversee a simple task such as this is the exact kind of device that Satan would use to strip people of their potential. How many people would not have been saved had the apostles handled every matter themselves! This is not to say by any means that the task was unimportant, but simply that there were others capable of handling it themselves.

In matters of church order, there are several duties that a lot of people can perform, whether it is leading singing, serving the Lord's supper, or delivering the invitation, that all men are able to do. Isolating these tasks to a single man or men places a burden on their backs that is unfair for them to carry. Remember the words of Moses' father-in-law in Exodus 18:17-18, when he observed Moses spending all day judging the people: *"The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it all by yourself."* He would then advise Moses to do the same thing that the apostles instructed the people to do in Acts 6 -- pick able men from among themselves to perform the task.

But there is another similarity between these two accounts that we must take into account as well. Both accounts stress the importance of finding able-bodied men. In Exodus, Jethro (Moses' father-in-law) said these men must be *"able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness."* The apostles instructed the people to look for men of *"good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom."* These both claim the necessity of our leaders, righteous and holy men who will perform the tasks of God. Since the duties of a local church's operation are shared among all the men, should we not all strive to fit the qualifications of these passages?

The apostles not only handled the situation at hand with the right

perspective, but they also handled it quickly before it was able to get out of hand. Over time, this minor problem could have built up into a real issue, possibly causing more strife and anger, until eventually no one had any idea what it was about in the first place.

■ *Brady Cook*

A Believer in God
1 Thessalonians 1:6-10
By Jon W. Quinn

We all can probably define what a “believer” is. I imagine if we each wrote a definition and a description of what a believer actually is, we would get a lot of similarities, but I imagine we would also get a lot of variation as well. We would get words like faithfulness and trust and obedience. If we asked for an example of someone who is a believer, we would get “Paul” and “Abraham”. We might be referred to Hebrews 11 for a whole list of believers. But what if we asked for a good contemporary example of a believer? Who would you select? Would someone else think of you? Our goal ought to be to become good examples of what a life of belief is all about.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul gave us some important thoughts on the matter to consider. He tells us that the first century church at Thessalonica had its share of first rate examples of what it means to believe in God. This description well describes what each of us ought to be, and there is no good reason to settle for less. Far too many of us settle for less; there are many who profess believe but far fewer good examples of what it means to believe. To settle for less is inexcusable!

The Text

You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living

and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

Believers Receive the Word

We need the Word (vs. 6a). We do not need new, cutting edge social theories. There have been so many come only to be later discarded as unworkable. Theories about happiness, marriage, raising children and so forth originate from the same folks who once thought the earth was flat; who once used leeches to heal sickness; who say eggs are unhealthy, then say they're healthy; then unhealthy, then healthy, according to what decade you live in. We do not need another theory.

Instead, we need the eternal word of life! (John 5:24; Philippians 2:16; 1 Corinthians 15:2, 58) It is a serious matter to reject it!

The word “received” means to “welcome”; the way you would welcome an honored guest into your home. You are eager to make him/her comfortable and at ease. Not everyone at Thessalonica received the word this way (the latter part of the verse speaks of tribulation brought on believers by those who rejected the word). Nor are we encouraged to blindly receive the word (Acts 17:11). We should investigate it, weigh it, and make a reasonable decision. But having said that, far more blindly reject the word than blindly receive it.

Believers Accept Both Tribulation & Joy Brought By Faith

Sometimes receiving the word brings a certain amount of trouble. As one is coming to the point of faith, there is a struggle. Jesus said it would often be this way (John 16:33).

Sometimes it is in the midst of turmoil that people enter the kingdom (Acts 14:22b). Sometimes the only way to escape tribulation is to simply ignore the word of the kingdom. Amazingly, it is in the times of tribulation that the 1st century church grew so rapidly.

We do not often think of tribulation and joy as partners, but they are in verse 6 of our text. There can both be outer tribulation and inner joy (see also 2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Where does joy come from in

such adversity? From the hope that is within us; the confidence, peace and strength (Romans 5:1-5; Philippians 4:7,8; 4:4). These things belong to the faithful in spite of tribulation. It is a gratifying thing to suffer loss when such tests your faith and your faith rises to meet the challenge, because the loss is temporary, but victory is forever.

Believers Are Good Examples

The disciples at Thessalonica were models of faith (1 Thessalonians 1:7). The word "example" means "pattern". Others are encouraged to look at the Thessalonian faithful and urged to "be like them." Would it make you feel pretty good to know that the apostle Paul would select you to be an "example" or "pattern" that others should follow? The Thessalonians had earned it! They were not good examples by accident! It is proper to imitate the faith and lives of others if they imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1) It is not enough to "talk" or "think" Christianity. We must "do" it (James 1:22-25).

Believers Sound Forth Their Faith

The Thessalonians were clear voices of faith (vs. 8). It is the "word of the Lord" that should be "sounded forth". That's our business as a church. The Lord Himself is the source of our message (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Churches that deal in politics, drama, the arts, psychology, entertainment.... are in the wrong business.

The phrase "sound forth" refers to the sound made by trumpets. It is clear, distinguishable, obvious and noticeable. We do not offer new age fads; we do not offer human creeds changed by the whim of the human mind; we do not consult the opinion polls to determine what we teach; we do not give counsel based on modern trends or on long held traditions of men, We preach the word! (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

Believers Reject the Worthless

Christians view things from a different perspective (vs. 9). The world has a knack for esteeming the worthless and rejecting the precious. Many are overdosing on selfishness and greed, exalting the wicked and wickedness. Love, honor and godliness are often mocked. The family is troubled. It is time to "turn to God from idols"!

This is why cowards do not become Christians. This kind of commitment calls for the courage to refuse to allow the world to have its way with us. It will not tell us how to dress, how to talk, how to live, and what is important.

Believers Wait for Jesus

“Waiting” is not simply biding our time! (vs. 10). It is a “wait” of busy preparation as we “make all things ready” on a personal level for His coming. The Day will come when the trumpets of God will announce the end of the final hour (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). All worldly plans and ambitions will be rendered null and void forever. Tongues that mocked will confess Jesus as they watch those whom they once mocked rise to meet the Lord in the air, bright shining as the sun. And then, judgment. And then, eternity. For the believer, an eternal victory!

Come Unto Me Matthew 11:28-30 By Ed Barnes

“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

One of the most well known and beloved passages in all the Bible is the gentle invitation of our Lord in Matthew 11:28-30. He lovingly encourages us as he invites all sinners to “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Throughout the centuries these words have served to uplift mankind with the blessings of divine encouragement, comfort and assurance. Even today, as we read and reflect upon this gracious invitation of our Lord we are encouraged, comforted and assured that our faith is secure in Him.

Aside from the emotional comfort conveyed by these words of Jesus, there are certain underlying religious and cultural references that need to be understood in order to fully grasp the meaning of the passage. When we look a little deeper into this tender invitation several questions come to mind: Who, for example, are those who labor and are heavy laden? What is their labor, and with what weight are they burdened? Furthermore, why would a disciple's relationship with Jesus be described as a yoke? And, how can a yoke be easy and a burden light? It is the purpose of this article to offer answers to such questions in the hope that we will attain an even deeper understanding and appreciation for these wonderful words of Jesus.

Come to Me

The tremendous basis for Christ's invitation that all men come to him is the dominion which he exercises and the knowledge which he alone is able to impart. Just prior to the invitation that begins in verse 28 we see certain credentials of Christ being laid out. Verse 27 says: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal him." In the invitation of verses 28-30 Jesus is asking sinners to respond to this revelation of his dominion and knowledge.

Looking back farther to verse 25 we find that even though all may come, all do not. The babes (i.e. those who lack everything and realize their emptiness - Lenski) were willing to receive the truth concerning Christ, but the wise and prudent (i.e. the religious leaders who were filled with their own wisdom and learned ideas) were not.

Also, coming to Christ requires the recognition that persons cannot come by depending on or exalting themselves. Verse 23 states, "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades. Apparently the citizens of Capernaum were reputed to have exalted themselves, and would hence be brought down. The lesson is that only those who are willing to depend wholly on Christ and trust only in Him will be able to come and receive his divine blessings. The spiritual babes were willing to come to Christ under those conditions,

but the proposition was distasteful to those who were wise in their own eyes.

Furthermore, note the number of times the pronoun “me” is used in Christ’s invitation. In this can be seen an emphasis upon the fact that it is only Jesus who maintains a relationship to the Father (as described in verse 27) that can produce eternal blessings for those who follow him. Only to Christ have all things been delivered and only through the Son can one hope to know the Father. Thus, it is to Christ and only to Christ that we must come.

All You Who Labor and are Heavy Laden

Who were those who labored and were heavy laden? They were any and all who had been struggling in an effort to find the truth. They had discovered, however, that the task was impossible and they had been driven to weariness and despair in their vain search. They were exhausted with the search for truth. This group would have included the Greeks of Christ’s day who believed it was very difficult to find God and then impossible to tell anyone else about him. It would have included the Jews, whose religion was a thing of burdens (Matt.23:4) and endless rules. The Law, it seems, was to them a forest of regulations dictating every action of a person’s life to the point where one was always listening for a voice which said “Thou Shalt Not.” During the time of Christ the Pharisees burdened the multitudes by loading them down with whatever they saw as necessary for obedience (Matt 23:1-4, 23), and then, adding insult to injury, confused and exasperated the multitudes as they themselves lived up to the much easier standard of saying but not doing.

The terms, however, really apply to all men. Mankind, generally, has labored and become heavy laden in the search for truth. Zophar rhetorically asked of Job, “Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty?” (Job 11:7). Jeremiah speaks of the vanity of seeking God on one’s own terms. “O, Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” (Jer. 10:23).

Jesus, in keeping with the Father’s plan of salvation, proclaims himself to be the only true revelation of God and the exclusive path to

Him. He declares to Thomas: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Finally, the burden of seeking (but being unable to find) the eternal truth of salvation has been lifted, for we find it through Jesus Christ.

My Yoke is Easy and My Burden is Light

Jesus now speaks of his yoke and his burden. They are described as being easy and light. Truly, the burden of obedience has thus been made lighter in that we now know in whom we have believed (2 Tim 1:12), i.e. Christ Jesus. It is only through Christ that our search for and obedience to the truth produces the desired result of salvation. The burden, however, has not been completely eliminated. Even though Jesus equates the Christian life with spiritual rest, he still proclaims that we must wear a yoke and bear a burden.

Traditionally, a yoke was seen as an emblem of oppression, possibly of slavery. The Jews used the term yoke for entering into submission to something. They spoke of the yoke of the law, the yoke of commandments, the yoke of the kingdom, the yoke of God, etc. The imagery of the yoke in Matthew 11: 28-30, however, is borrowed from the plowing of fields and is presented here as an aid in our spiritual struggle rather than a hindrance.

The yoke of Christ is our fellowship with Him. And like the yoke that couples oxen together, the yoke of Christ neither hinders our efforts nor exempts our need to put forth effort. What it does is make the work of obedience manageable or do-able. Thus, it is a blessing. According to William Barclay, oxen yokes were customarily made to fit a particular animal. They were, in effect, tailor made. The idea being that the yoke of Christ fits well, and will not be a burden to those who wear it. Whatever God gives one to do in the way of burdens (obedience) is designed to fit our spiritual needs and abilities exactly. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. Truly, the yoke of Jesus is easy – not of great weight. It enables us to do much service in his kingdom. No one ever demanded a higher standard from his disciples than did Jesus – consider, for example, the sermon on the mount (Matt 5-7). But Jesus has done more than set a high standard.

He also offers to help us meet that standard. He helps us carry the burden. He shares the load of obedience that he places upon us.

Even though the Christian life is not easy, it is possible. In fact it is pleasant. Our burden is light. The yoke of Christ is easy. Our Lord is gentle and lowly in heart and provides rest for our souls. On the other hand, those who spurn Christ's yoke have only dismay and despair in dealing with the search for truth and spiritual rest.

Topic Page

FIVE THINGS WE NEED TO REMEMBER THIS YEAR

By Don Hooton

By now, you must have noticed the news magazines end of year publications with special pictorial sections that recall people and events that made news in 2008. Many also include articles by experts predicting what they expect to see in the years ahead. Back in 1967, experts predicted that by the turn of the century technology would have taken over so much of the work we do that the average American work week would be only 22 hours long and that we would work only 27 weeks a year. Well, we all know that was wrong!

But here we are in the last week of 2008 and where will we be in 2009? What should we choose as our mission statement for the year? In Ephesians 5:15-17, Paul writes, "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Here are some salient points worth pondering as the year begins.

REMEMBER THAT OUR TIME ON THIS EARTH IS LIMITED. First of all, we must be very careful how we live because our time on this earth is limited. The Psalmist wrote, "Show me, O Lord, my life's end & the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life" [Psalm 39:4]. And then again, "The length of our days is 70 years - or 80, if we have the strength...they quickly pass, and we fly away" [Psalm 90:10]. I can remember when I thought anyone over 40 was ancient -

but not any more. It is all rather relative, isn't it? If I number my days and live to be 65 years old, I have about 7855 days left to live. That's all, just 7855 days left to live which is just 1/3 of the time I have already lived. And really, I don't have a guarantee of even one day more to live.

REMEMBER THAT WE NEED TO WALK LIKE A WISE MAN. Wise people spend their lives walking carefully. The word Paul used indicates we are to use great care in our walk [Ephesians 5:15]. In the KJV and NKJV, the word is translated "circumspectly" and means "exactly, accurately, and diligently" unlike the fool who cares little about where they are going or what is happening.

REMEMBER TO REDEEM THE TIME. We need to take advantage of the time available to us [Ephesians 5:16]. We should "make wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good, so that zeal and well doing are as it were the purchase by which we make the time our own" (from the "Online Bible"). This is necessary, Paul says, because the days are "evil." Whether it is the evil of trials, sins, or even death, Christians will not count on tomorrow but count on the Lord. All we have is right now. And are we right now, right with Him and working for Him?

REMEMBER TO MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY. Sometimes we just need to choose the better path. The lesser path may not be sin - just not as good. Remember when Jesus went to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. He sat down to teach and Mary sat at His feet soaking in every word. Meanwhile, Martha was out in the kitchen preparing dinner. Now, you know the story. Martha gets upset because Mary is not in the kitchen to help her. So she complains to Jesus, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" [Luke 10:40] "Martha, Martha," Jesus answered, "You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her" [Luke 10:41-42]. Martha was committing a sin by being hospitable and fixing a meal in the kitchen! The problem was that she was so preoccupied with what she was doing that she didn't realize that God was in her living room. She could not see the things that mattered most. We all know we do this more often than we ever want

to admit. We get so caught up in today that we lose sight of the eternal.

REMEMBER WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LORD'S WILL IS. Well, Paul said it. The answer to this foolishness is to "understand what the Lord's will is." Do we think God wants our mind so saturated with worries and anxieties about jobs, careers, and the economy that we can't think spiritual thoughts? Do we think He wants our calendar so crowded that we don't have time for the more important things like worshipping with the church, personal Bible study and growing our family spiritually? To understand that will of God, we need to prioritize the spiritual things. "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:1-2; also, Matthew 6:33; Colossians 1:18). So, when Sunday rolls around, will neither rain nor shine, football kickoffs or special sales interfere with being in church, because He comes first in our life? If we do indeed set our mind on things above, we will worship the Lord when we are called to worship and let nothing interfere with that. We will resolve to become closer to our brothers in Christ. Whether it is simply learning their name (3 John 14) or having them over for a meal (1 Peter 4:9), they will be part of the spiritually important matters we need to prioritize.

To understand that will of God we also need to prioritize the family things. We need to make time for our spouse. "Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband" (Eph 5:33). Every husband ought to have a date night with his wife. You heard it here first. The Hootons are going to make time for each other in 2009. We need to make time for our children. How else will our children learn to "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right? HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH." (Ephesians 6:1). They're growing up ever so fast and they need parents - every day, both "quantity" and "quality", of that process.

Someone said, "Life is what happens to you while you're making plans

to do something else." And God says, says, "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11-12). Remember these five things and 2009 will be a year you can remember with delight and no regrets.

Don Hooten

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Plan of Salvation **By Jon W. Quinn**

Plan #1

Announced by the apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to new believers in Christ who asked what they must do:

Acts 2:36-38

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ -- this Jesus whom you crucified." Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

(Acts 2:36-38).

Plan #2

On the back page of a tract, sinner were urged to pray this prayer to be saved. This prayer is not found in the Bible; nor were alien sinners commanded to pray for their forgiveness.

The Sinner's Prayer:

"O' Lord, I accept that I am a sinner and that Jesus died for my sins. I now accept Him into my heart as Lord and Savior asking for your mercy and forgiveness in His name. Amen."

The editors of Expository Files are happy with plan #1 and thankful to the God of all grace for it. We cannot recommend Plan #2 at all, but will change our minds when this prayer can be shown to us in the Bible.

The Final Page 16.1

Our Strength Jeremiah 7:3-10 By Jon W. Quinn

Sometimes I fear that we, as a nation, look at things much like Israel of old did. What is the basis of our security and national strength? We do have grand cathedrals, and most Americans are quick to pray to God during times of national tragedy. Though the atheists and agnostics among us don't care for it, the majority of Americans are pleased and do feel more secure when we respond to crises by "calling on the name of the Lord", each in his own way. Many think we are safer because of this. But some of this confidence has eroded due to the prevailing culture wars. Believers in the fundamentals of the faith are the butt of much negative treatment in the media while their enemies are protected and exalted. There has been quite a change in this over time; 2008 saw much more of it than did 1958!

That attitude of self-sufficiency without God is much like ancient Israel. Consider the prophet Jeremiah's message:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. "Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'" "For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. "Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. "Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and

stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, "We are delivered!" -- that you may do all these abominations?

Jeremiah 7:3-10

The temple and the Law and the sacrifices were precious things, but nothing can substitute for sincere devotion of the heart of the people. No one should ever be satisfied with a surface religion hiding sins and carnality underneath. The only way to build on the Rock is to obey the Lord from the heart.

May God bless you in 2009; and may God bless America with a greater national awareness of our need for Him and a greater awareness and willingness to repent to those things that will ultimately kill us.