The Great Rewards Of A True and Faithful Christian Life

Are the rewards, which are in this life and in the world to come, and are beyond comparison with any other, worth striving for? The wise think so, but the foolish do not.

For the most part mankind has been concerned with that which is desired to make man happy or fulfill his desires. Though the emphasis has generally been upon things in this life, it is interesting to note from history that most people, including pagans of every stripe, have had some interest in a life after this earthly one. To the American Indians, it was the “Happy hunting ground.” Today, people in most nations have some concept of another life, and though it is not based directly upon the teaching of God’s word, I believe this idea of another life originally came from God and His word.

In God’s word, both earthly and eternal values are often discussed. Although there is a sense in which selfishness is condemned, there is overwhelming emphasis upon the personal rewards for faithfully serving God, our Creator. It is not wrong for us to ask, “What will my reward be for living a true and faithful Christian life?” In fact, we should keep that question before us continually.

The rewards for doing so are found on many pages of God’s written word. At the same time, the consequences for failure to live that faithful life are often set forth by the same Author that reveals a home in heaven. The rewards, if received, mean that the punishment reserved for the disobedient will be avoided.

In our following discussion we shall be giving attention to the nature of The Great Rewards, and the meaning of a true and faithful Christian life. Let us first, though, consider...

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The wrong commences when these things are made the uppermost goal, to the neglect of seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Things which are right within themselves become wrong when they interfere with serving God. The overwhelming part of our society is not looking for an eternal reward on the basis of which that reward is promised. This involves two categories of these things: 1) Teach and uphold God’s truth; 2) Encourage mission efforts to seek the lost; 3) Oppose that which is “contrary to sound doctrine” and not in harmony with the “doctrine of Christ.”

The aspects of marital readiness, which are most pressing, are those which relate to our ego, our will, and our spirit. We shall examine these areas, but let us first consider, The RELATIVITY OF READINESS

Bible teaching as to the essentials of marriage is objective: love, loyalty, subordination, sacrifice, etc. (cf. Eph. 5:23ff). Whether, however, a person is ready to practice these things in a marriage is relative to 1) his knowledge of what these ideas mean, 2) his knowledge of himself, and 3) his personal honesty as he assesses himself.

Other than God, you know yourself better than anyone. In order to be ready for marriage, you surely must read and know what God says about marriage; but, you must also “commune with [your] own heart [and by your own] spirit make diligent search” (Psa. 77:6). Only you may finally “try” and “prove” yourself (2Co. 13:5). Other than with God, the one with whom you will have most difficulty being honest is yourself.

Now, we move to consider, THE ESSENTIALS OF READINESS.

When posing the question — How do I know whether I am ready? — let us ask:

Are you ready egoistically? We are all unique centers of personality, and depending on how we were raised, we will be more or less self-centered. You are not ready to get married if your happiness depends on things revolving around you. Just think, if it is a general moral imperative that we “esteem [others] better than [ourselves]” (Phil 2:3), that must surely be true in marriage. Many people are not ready to get married because they cannot imagine counting anyone, even a mate, better than themselves.

Marriage involves “rendering[ing]…due benevolence” (1Co. 7:3), and transfer of personal “power” (v. 4) to another.

Continued from p. 9 —

Jesus said we are to “leave” and “cleave” (Mar. 10:7). We are to respectively “submit” and “cherish” (Eph. 5:22, 28, 29). Marriage is about transition. Two people become one; they make babies, and form a household (cf. 1Tim. 3.5). Overly self-centered people will be frustrated in these and more areas of marriage.

Do you get angry and sulk if you do not get your way? Are you frustrated by change and accommodation to the needs of others? If the answer to any of these is, Yes, you are not ready for marriage.

Think about what the Spirit says about a “wives [being] in subjection unto your own husbands as unto the Lord” (Eph 5:22); and, “husbands…[loving] your wives as their own bodies” (v. 28). Subordinating your will to that of another person; or, putting the interests and needs of another person above your own are not things done easily by anyone much less a self-centered person.

Are you ready to get married? You know how you were raised. Have you spent a lifetime of others altering your will to their own? Are you ready to get married?

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Presently there is a demand for preachers. The time was that the opposite was true. This need then is the mandate for the existence and work of the North-west Florida School of Biblical Studies. The Milestone church of Christ expends great effort, time and resources, not because we just think having a school is a neat thing to do, rather because we actually deeply believe that preacher training is an essential part of God's will.

In the area of mental training, the school views deep training in the Scriptures as primary. Corollary to this supreme task are studies in geography, languages, history, philosophy, and logic.

Moral training flows from emphasis on Bible teaching together with experience, wisdom, openness and consistency in the lives of those who have presumed to don the mantle of teacher. To help equip aspiring preachers effectively to do their work and fulfill their mission, studies in English, public speaking, writing, logic and debate are a part of the curriculum, as well as opportunities for practical application of pulpit preaching and evangelism.

As noted, NWFSBS is the work of the Milestone church of Christ. This church, out of “love [for] the brotherhood,” makes great sacrifices to provide this intense, two-year, tuition-free environment where men can devote themselves to preparation in the areas mentioned above.

We make no comparisons of superiority, but our claim is to offer competent curriculum and teachers. We have what it takes to get the job done. There are already “out in the workplace” several graduates of NWFSBS whose work and ability testify to legitimate grounds for our claim; and, we have more coming. Yet, the Milestone church cannot go it alone. Numerous sister churches and individual Christians give financial support to make this great work possible. Many help in recruiting prospective students. As our student body grows, our need for help in these and other areas grows.

Will you consider helping us? For more information, write: 4051 Stefani Road, Cantonment, FL 32533; call: 850-474-9257; or, email: <kenwb@nwfsbs.com> See also our website: <www.nwfsbs.com>—AA

of a high priority with them. They, by their failure to live a faithful life, imply that those rewards are not worth striving to obtain. Have we lost our sense of values? As the world in which we live goes, so goes the church to some degree. Society has changed to a degree which I would have thought impossible at one time, though I should have known better in view of all the warnings given in God’s word. It saddens me to say it, but in some ways I have seen changes just as great take place within the church. This is evidence that we have to a great degree lost our sense of values. I have lived in times when most people, though perhaps irreligious, were basically honest. They had a moral standard which ruled out lying and stealing. They did not expect to be fed, clothed and housed by those who were willing to work for a living, while they whiled away their time doing nothing. Things have changed drastically during the past few decades. This has had its effect upon the church. It seems that we as parents have, in far too many instances, lost some of our sense of values. The virtues of honesty and integrity are not as highly prized as they once were. This is being reflected in our children. What children see in their parents they are likely to duplicate. When parents fail to teach their children the proper sense of values, they are keeping from them something they deserve. Nowadays, many children are not taught that it is an honorable thing to work in order to have the things we need and want. Consequently, a lot of time doing nothing encourages participation in things which are not conducive to the kind of Christian life that we should live.

We have allowed the present sense of values, which are so often based on material things, which are only temporary, to crowd out those higher values, which make for treasures laid up in heaven. There are stark reminders of this, which it seems we have largely forgotten. Paul reminds us that “the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18). This clearly has reference to material things and spiritual things. As rank materialism has flooded our society it has also affected the church. This is seen in the growing practice of emphasis within the church on the providing of material things and the neglect of spiritual things. One of the direst warnings against trusting in worldly things, which includes material things, is that by the apostle John. If hearing were believing, many would avoid this danger with all their might, for this has been heard over and over, time after time. But this is not the way it always works. People often hear and do not. Note again what John said:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. (1 Jno. 2:15-17).

If we would reap the rewards of a faithful Christian life, we must indeed “fight the good fight of faith,” not allowing the devices of Satan to pull us away.

Elders often feed contaminated food. Over the years it has become evident that some desire to wear the designation of “elder,” but in many instances do not want to do the work of an elder. This is being seen more and more as flocks are being allowed to eat the food which causes serious problems. The food may taste good, but it is contaminated. Instead of bringing about spiritual growth, as would “the sincere milk of the word” (1 Pet. 2:2), it brings about spiritual sterility, when in many instances turns out to be terminal, and some times contagious to others. When this occurs, the victim’s desire for the great rewards wanes and indifference prevails. The influence of preachers. God has ordained that preachers are bound up in God’s scheme of things. The promise of the ages — “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13) — is integrally connected to preaching. The “whosoever” message cannot be heard and believed without a “preacher” (v. 14), and preachers cannot preach except they be “sent” (v. 15). God “sent” preachers during Patriarchy (2Pet. 2:5), and He sent the great Old Testament preachers. He also sent the apostles and other preachers who “anounced” the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow them (1 Pet. 1:10-12). He no less seneds preachers now, and the “feet” of those who “bring glad tidings” are no less “beautiful” (Rom 10:15). “Faith” still “cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (v. 17), and that “hearing” is still made possible by preachers.

Through the “foolishness of the preaching,” it is God’s “good pleasure to save them that believe” (I Cor. 1:21). Preachers, in the local assemblies of Christians (Cf. Acts 20:7; I Cor. 14:4) “preach” so as to edify the church. “They are devoted to ‘preach [ing] the word [whereby they] reprove, rebuke and exhort with all long-suffering and teaching’” (2 Tim. 4:2). We say all this to say what we already know: Preachers are essential. But, what is not so often emphasized is that preachers must be trained.

During the infancy of the church preachers were “sent by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven” (I Pet. 1:2), through the means of such as the Spirit-given gifts of “prophesy” and “tongues” with “interpretation” (I Cor. 14:4, 23-24, 27-31). Even then, though, the apostle Paul was very much involved in preacher training as evidenced by his God-breathed epistles to Timothy and Titus. He alludes to mental training — ‘give attendance to reading’, moral training — “showing thyself a pattern of good works”; and, the mission of the preacher — “work of an evangelist” (1 Tim. 4:4; Tit. 2:2; 2 Tim. 4:5).

With the cessation of the temporary Spirits-en- doved gifts” (I Cor. 13:8-13; cf Rom. 1:11), the need to train preachers has since that time become, and remains, even more significant. This need then is the mandate for the existence and work of the North-west Florida School of Biblical Studies. The Milestone church of Christ expends great effort, time and resources, not because we just think having a school is a neat thing to do, rather because we actually deeply believe that preacher training is an essential part of God’s will.

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good story tellers and jokesters. Another desired qualification is to go softly, not stepping on any toes, and by all means not calling the names of any false teachers in the sense of condemning their error.

Our worship services. If anything in living the faithful life should have our most serious attention it is our worship services. This is indeed a high and exalted privilege, available only to God’s true servants. For this privilege we should be exceedingly thankful. Yet, some times our worship services are characterized by a lackluster attitude. This is seen in various parts of our services.

By this I mean that it appears as though our hearts are not really in what we are doing. Our singing is some times low and slow, lacking any vibrancy when the song calls for it. It is not uncommon for people to interrupt the song service in various ways, as though the song service is not worship.

When God’s word is being read, it should be revered and respected; it is God speaking to us. When God’s word is being preached, it should respect with as few distractions as possible. Too often worshippers have their minds far removed from what is going on. When such is the case, God’s word is not receiving the respect it deserves.

Prayer is another privilege reserved for the children of the Father. Christ gave us a model prayer (Matt. 6:9-15), which can be helpful to us as to what a prayer should include. In the first place, prayer must be from our hearts. This tends to rule out repetition of trite phrases and words. Prayer is to be addressed to God, not the people in the assembly; though they should concur with what is said, if it is a scriptural prayer and is loud enough to be heard. A prayer need not be long. However, if what He teaches; He knows it already. A prayer is not for the purpose of instructing others, but rather the offering of thanks and making requests known. Nothing should take our minds back to the sacrifice made by Christ for us, more than the observance of the Lord’s Supper. When Christ instituted His supper, He used the “bread” to represent His body and the “cup” to represent His blood. The apostle Paul reveals to the Corinthians the reason why the Lord had revealed to him concerning the Lord’s Supper. We should read this often as well as the records in the Gospels. Paul said,

For I received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus in the same night in which he was betrayed did break bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take ye this: for I shall not eat this bread any more until I shall drink the new cup in the kingdom of the Lord and of the Apostles. This do ye in remembrance of me.

(1 Cor. 11:23-26)

Could anything be due greater respect or call forth our true emotions of praise and thanksgiving than the Lord’s Supper? Yet, it seems that some times our hearts are not truly in the observance of that most significant memorial the world has ever known.

Sometimes brethren read a passage of scripture relating to the occasion, and call attention to the purpose of the observance. This is helpful in calling our attention to what we are doing, and if our most serious attention is to be called to anything, would it not certainly include the Lord’s Supper? Yet, some times whoever is leading serving as the head of the table utters not a word. We surely could be at least be reminded that Christ said, “This do in remembrance of me.” Some times something is said about the contribution and its purpose, but nothing is said about the Lord’s Supper. Does this not convey the idea that the Lord’s Supper is just something we do out of habit. These things are written with the hope that they might cause us to think more seriously about our worship.

Perhaps I should add that reference to a “lackluster attitude” does not mean I in any way uphold the Lord’s Supper’s qualification is to go softly not stepping on any toes, but rather the offering of thanks and making requests known.

Before discussing the rewards of a true and faithful Christian life, which is the main point of our discussion, let me say

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April – July 2007

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Pilot Oak church of Christ 25.00
Ledale Simpson 50.00
Anonymous 50.00
Total contribution 3,004.00

“Those we might be fellowhelpers to the truth” (2 John 1). Our sincere thanks to those who continue to make our work possible. You are having a part in getting God’s word to thousands of people, including hundreds in other countries where few of us could go. Response from our readers merely all positive. But we expect some negative.

FINANCIAL REPORT

April – July 2007

Balance on hand April 1, 2007 9,406.36
Contributions for above period 3,004.00
Total funds available 12,410.36
Total Expenses:
  Postage and mailing B.O.T 3,363.01
  Mailing labels 99.45
  Phone 7.10
  Supplies 64.67
Total Expenses 3,534.23
Total funds available 12,410.36
Less total expenses 3,354.23
Balance on hand July 31 8,876.13

Note: This report does not include the mailing expense for July, since, due to my accident, we have been unable to mail it as of writing.

The postage increase which took effect May 14, adds at least $200.00 to the expense of each issue. All the mail which goes to foreign countries must go first class. A single B.O.T now costs $9.00. A bundle of one pound costs $10.10. It is still worth the cost to get the word to those who want and appreciate it.

Would you help us?

Somewhere I saw that families move on the average of once every seven years. That includes many of our readers. You could be a great help to us by letting us know of your change of address. Not only do “returns” cost us 41 cents each, it adds to our work of keeping up with address changes. And, if you appreciate Banner of Truth, we do not want you to miss a single issue.
he has prepared to lead this crucial ministry with families.” Laster goes on to say Spivy, in her previous work at the North Atlanta Church of Christ, a congregation of 1,500 in worship, “coordinated large-scale events, such as VBS, Easter Egg-stravaganza, service projects and Fall Festival.”

That Spivy’s work is not just with children is made clear by Laster’s statements: “Dana’s intention is to build a first-class ministry over the next few years with the more than 200 children and their families in this LifeStage, which totals 27 percent of our RCC families. As a LifeStage Minister, Dana will intentionally mentor and shepherd families into deeper discipleship, authentic community and meaningful ministry.”

From the above we see two serious steps of apathy, the use of instrumental music, and a woman in a leadership role as a “mentor and shepherd.” Actions like this depict a group of people who no longer care for or have any respect for “the old paths.” Rochester College, formerly Michigan Christian College, dropped the word “Christian” because “it scared people off.” The Rochester Church only once in a while adds “of Christ.” Could it be that they fear using “church of Christ” might scare people off? People who love God’s truth and the church which Christ purchased with his blood should fear “Rochester Church.”

When we see such things happening as the above, with many of the larger congregations, and most of our schools, are we deeply concerned? Do we stop to think of the extent of this falling away from the truth? What will our children and grandchildren face? Will they, in so many instances, be unable to find a congregation which still stands for New Testament Christianity?

This drift away from the distinctiveness of the Lord’s church began in the late 1950s. That drift was first noticed among the larger congregations; but, that has now changed in that the same drifting away from the truth is being seen within much smaller congregations. Where will it end? It might be well for us to reflect on what happened to the church in the First Century and soon afterward. John said, “…many false prophets are gone out into the world” (I John 4:1). That was about 90 A.D. What happened then can happen now. —Editor

Readers’ Response

“The family of Fred Wreck acknowledges with deep appreciation your kind expression of sympathy. On a Wreck Stop the Lectures Thanks.” (This is typical of some people, especially those who do not have courage to let one know their address. We can be thankful that there are only a few such people. It is sad that such a person claims to be a Christian — Editor).

“I enjoy the paper so much. We go to the New Brick Church of Christ in Franklin County, TN. There are three of us who would like to receive the paper…thank you so much in advance. Your Fellow Christian servants, Ron & Gail Anderson” — TN

“If you would send Banner of Truth to…we were getting it then it just stopped coming. It was the best bulletin we ever got did get. (Name into Christ — Editor)

“For your paper you send to the church. We enjoy them. We have about 35 families. Hope this check helps, Mt. Jude church of Christ” — AR. (Your check is greatly appreciated. It is brethren like them that make our work possible. Good to have you as fellow helpers. — Editor).

“Thank you for standing firmly on the word of God. So many are drifting away from Teaching. Here is a small contribution to help with mailing cost, Linda Sydnor” — TN. (Thank you so much — Editor).

“Hello my devoted Christian families. I want to drop you all a sincere blessing and praise for all you of for such a wonderful and blessed publication. Banner of Truth.” I love reading Banner of Truth and have been blessed in so many ways. Keep the truth coming and God bless you and yours, Tommy J — AR

“I would like to receive your publication (Banner of Truth) Please send me information on how to receive it. Fran McCartney” — KY. (BOF is free. It is made possible by individuals and congregations. If you know of others who would like to receive it, send their names. — Editor).

“Thank you for sending the bundle of Banner of Truth to be used at the Riverview church of Christ. They were appreciated very much. It was decided that when it was read it would be brought back and another person would do the same until everyone had a chance to read one. You are to be commended for the articles in the publication because they are needed so badly. Again thank you and may you be blessed with good health, Joan Yarbrough” — MI. (Thanks for your comments. If more copies could be used, just let us know — Editor).

“If you have any extra copies since Sept. 2006, and I would appreciate some of each of them. Thank you, James R. Smith” — TN. (We do have copies of many back issues, which we send on request. — Editor).

“Do you receive this paper. If so please add me to your mailing list. If you have any extra copies could be used, just let us know. Thanks for your paper you send to the church. We are deeply concerned. Where will it end? It might be well for us to reflect on what happened to the church in the First Century and soon afterward. John said, ‘…many false prophets are gone out into the world’ (I John 4:1). That was about 90 A.D. What happened then can happen now.” — Editor

“I am a very old church and have had the name ‘agape’ as the name as far as I know. I am now just a penitent believer must then confess faith in Christ which is the church. Paul says that God “gave him a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name” (Acts 11:26).” — LSA

“Again thank you and may you be blessed.” — KTY

“I love reading the Banner of Truth and the church which Christ purchased with his blood should fear ‘Rochester Church.’

“The conversions recorded in the Book of Acts show the process by which one becomes a Christian. We note that certain steps were taken, in accordance with the teaching of God’s word. That first step in the process of becoming a Christian is faith in Christ, and the Gospel (Heb. 1:1).”

“Those who have not taken these steps are not ‘in Christ,’ and therefore are not true Christians. This means that nearly all those who profess to be Christians are not. Sincerity or lack of knowledge does not change the fact. The fact that comes from the hearing of God’s word (Rom. 10:17), enables us to know that we are true Christians. The fact tha one has become a true Christian, however, does not rule out the possibility of his becoming unfaithful in serving the Lord; and faithful service is necessary to receive the great rewards. In fact, there are many warnings set forth in the New Testament regarding the danger of falling away from the faith. Many have done so, and it could happen to any one. It is due to the fact that though a person may obey the true gospel of Christ and become a true
Christian, that person could become “unfaithful,” that the: 

IV. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN?

It is popular to believe that it is impossible for a Christian to fall away or become unfaithful in serving Christ. This doctrine, however, cannot be found in God’s word; it is a false doctrine which comes from the minds of men. If this doctrine were true, why in the name of common sense is so much of the New Testament devoted to warning Christians about the danger of being led astray by false teachers, the love of the world, and many, many other evil things? In God’s word, there are various examples of those who were guilty of error, and there is the plain teaching that error is not going to go into heaven. Paul said, “Whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4). Will those who have fallen from grace go to heaven? Just think of all the emphasis given to serving the Lord faithfully. Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians is a great example: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Note that Paul uses the word “always,” which would mean throughout their lives. Our Lord also makes it clear that living the faithful life is necessary. He said, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32). That this applies to the manner of living, and not just a statement, is evident from the fact that for just anyone to confess Christ, does not mean Christ would confess that person before the Father. If one stops “confessing” Christ by the manner of life, Christ would not confess that person before the Father.

Now that we have considered what it means to be a faithful Christian, another important subject of discussion has to do with the rewards for being such.

IV. THE GREAT REWARDS

These rewards are great because they include rewards in this life and eternal rewards in the world to come. The value of these rewards is far beyond comparison with any other rewards. The rewards in this life do not begin to measure up to the eternal rewards, but they are great nevertheless, and should not be overlooked by any means.

Rewards in this life include a living hope which is necessary to live a good and worthwhile life. The Spirit, speaking of the hope “set before us,” says that “hope [which] we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast…” (Heb. 6:19). Why is a true hope such a blessing? Just stop and think, if you will, of the countless and growing number of people who are drifting through life with no worthwhile purpose. They are on every hand, and resort to all manner of things which are detrimental to a worthwhile life. Growing numbers turn to alcohol and a variety of other drugs, which bring about all sorts of problems which they are dependent on if they can use their arm. My left arm had one broken bone a few inches depending on if I can use my arm. But things do not always go as planned. In the June B.O.T we ran an article by Chris Dawson entitled Rochester College Promotes Women’s in the Church and in the Home. In order to see the connection between the college and the Rochester Church, sometimes called Rochester Church of Christ, we are calling attention to some activities of the church.

A member of the church from that general area sent some information, after having attending a service at the Rochester Church some time ago. That person said, “When I arrived, I was handed a worship bulletin by a woman. We sang acapella, with a ‘praise team’ (male and female) on the stage leading us. I heard clapping during the faster songs, and saw raised hands during the slower ones.” From clippings sent me concerning activities at the Rochester Church, two things really stood out, in that they are an example of the growing apostasy which is engulfing the Lord’s church at a rapid rate. The first thing was a clipping, beginning at the top of the page. In a shaded box, containing darkened hands the following words appear:

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REFUGE

An instrumental worship gathering for all ages 08

Refuge Worship Focuses

On God’s Loving Shelter by Chris Lindsey

The article explains what this refuge is, and in conclusion says:

So, once a month, we invite everyone to join us for an instrumental praise and worship experience. All ages are welcome!

“Mark your calendars and join us for the installation of Refuge on July 28 at 7 p.m. in the HUB (Youth Room). And bring a friend!”

The second thing about the Rochester Church is the arrival of Dana Spivy, as headlined: “To Join Staff As Minister For Families With Children.”

John Laster says of Dana Spivy, “For over a year we have been in various stages of praying and searching for God to direct Rochester Church to the individual

A PERSONAL NOTE

With the coming of July, it was my plan to get the July issue of BOT printed and in the mail. That would mean I had reached a long-time goal of catching up with any other rewards. The rewards in this life do indeed great and are an added blessing to that greatest of all blessings, that which is in the world to come. J

“humble and contrite?” If so, what and how does God answer their prayers?

You ask what I would have told Cornelius. Had I been there to tell him, I would have said something like the following: “Cornelius, you have been a righteous or just man, and God has been pleased with you, but now the gospel has been made available to you and you have the privilege and responsibility to obey it, so that your relationship to God can continue to be acceptable. You can no longer live under patriarchy. It has come to an end, and now there is the one gospel of Christ for all mankind, and to be saved one must obey it.

As for Saul of Tarsus, once again, we do not have any evidence that he has been living like that various examples of those for a special purpose. When Ananias was told to contact Saul, he said he had heard of much evil done by him, but notice the Lord’s response. “But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Ac. 9:15). No, we will not see such instances as that now.

You say of the “humble and contrite,” that “God will always listen to that person.” In other words, if a person is humble and contrite, God will hear that person, even though he is not a Christian. Again, what and how does God not only hear such people, but how does He answer?

Dennis, thanks again for writing. —Editor

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A Response from a Reader

"Brother Pigg, I appreciate receiving 'Banner of Truth' and agree with most of its content. But I question your remarks in the short article entitled 'Will God Hear the Prayer of sinners'?

You define 'sinner's as 'those who have not obeyed the Gospel of Christ.' You then say 'There is no evi
dence in the Bible that God will hear the prayers of such people.' You also say 'The righteous would be limited to those who arc Christians.' You then say that Cornelius had a good relationship with God before the Gospel was offered to him. You also said 'It must be shown that Cornelius was a sinner before Peter brought the gospel to him.'

I wrote the short article as a request from a reader. I addressed the question as if it is usually used in our
time. I think it will help to notice the first line of the article: 'The word sinners generally means those who have not obeyed the Gospel of Christ.' So, when you say 'You define 'sinner's as 'those who have not obeyed the Gospel of Christ,' that is not entirely ac
curate. I used the word "generally" for a reason, and it would have been best to have quoted the state
ment as such.

The eternal blessings might be considered as that which is included in "eternal salvation." Speaking of
Christ, it is said, "Though he were a Son, yet learned
he obedience by things which he suffered." And being
made perfect, he came thee author of eternal salva
tion to them that obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9). We see then
that these blessings are contingent upon obeying
Christ.

Rewards in the world to come: With all the de
scriptive language used in God's word, man is still
unable to fully comprehend those heavenly blessings.
The very thought of timeless existence is incompre
hensible, since we never experience that in this life.
Even the very best things in this life end with time.
As we mentioned earlier, nearly all Cornelius was described
concept of a life after this one. But God has given us
the greatest picture that we can understand in human
terms. In that we can trust.

Abraham, "looked for a city which hath foundations,
whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). A city
built by God, would be the greatest, we know. In Rev
elation 21, we learn that the walls of that city are
made of all manner of precious stones. The gates are
each a pearl. The streets are pure gold. And, as for
light, "The glory of God did lighten it" (v. 24).

As great as the glory of the city is, that does not
compare with the blessed state of existence there.
While the beauty of material things is to be appreci
ated, that which is to be appreciated more is the state
or condition which exists in that eternal abiding place
we call heaven. Listen to the voice John heard:

And I heard a great voice out of heaven, Saying,
Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he
will dwell with them, and they shall be his people,
and God himself shall be with them, and be their
God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their
eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither
sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any
more pain: for the former things are passed away
(Rev. 21:3-4).

We simply cannot imagine such a wonderful exist
ence, since we have never experienced anything like
it, and do not know of anyone who has. Yet, our un
failing faith in God tells us it is real.

The population of heaven will not include any that
should not be there. John said, "And there shall in no
wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither what
soever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they
which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev.
21:27). Just think what a comfort that will be, since
in this life we must live in the midst of a world made
up of every type of evil people.

Much more could be said about the wonderful
things in store for God's faithful people; but, we have
pointed out enough to convince any thinking person
that heaven, as we some times sing, will "surely be
worth it all." But it is so sad that most people are not
willing to seek the great rewards which God offers,
which were made possible by the death of His only
Son.

V. WHY DO PEOPLE THINK FOOLISHLY?

God's word has much to say about "wise" and "fool
ish" people. Mountains of evidence show that the dis
tinction between the two classes is made on the ba
sis of whether or not God's word is believed, re
spected and obeyed. A good example of this is found
in the Sermon on the Mount. After pointing out that
"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall
enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth
the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21),
our Lord says to emphasize that fact, "Therefore
soever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them,
I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his
house upon a rock" (v. 25). The house of that wise
man stood firm; but not so with the foolish man. "And
everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth
them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which
built his house upon the sand" (v. 26). The foolish
man's house did not stand.

The example of wise and foolish builders sets
fourth a principle which is found in many places in
God's word. That principle is simply that those who
are God's will are wise and those who do not God's
will are foolish. Another good example is that of the
wise and foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-13). The
"wise" made preparation for the wedding when they
had the opportunity but the "foolish" neglected to do
so, and were thus dubbed foolish. Does not this prin
ciple apply to people in our time as it did when Christ
was on earth?
Paul speaks of God’s wrath against the Gentiles. He said, “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:21-22). To the Ephesians, Paul said, See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (Eph. 5:15).

In the parable known as The Rich Fool, Christ said of the man who had no room to store all that his ground produced, and said he would pull down his barns and build greater, “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then shall those things be, which thou hast provided” (Lk. 12:20). Then Christ adds, “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (v. 21).

We have never seen a time when so many people put their trust in material things, which are only temporary. Rank materialism has hurt the church so much within the past few decades, but God said that is foolishness.

During my tenure in poor places in India and Thailand, I have noted that the interest in spiritual things is greater than in countries which had more material things. Even though, in most instances, this spiritual interest was not based on God’s truth, nonetheless the trust in material things was not as great as in other countries. Powerful forces in our present society are bent on doing away with God’s influence. When God is out of the picture, trust in material things becomes much greater. We are fast becoming a purely secular and materialistic society.

We have referred to New Testament statements about fools; there are also many references in the Old Testament. There are dozens of references in the book of Proverbs, and many in other places. In most cases where the word fool or foolishness is found, it has reference to something which is contrary to God’s will.

One of the most noted references to a fool in God’s word is that found in Psalm 14:1, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” It is a fact that from the beginning of the human race there have been both foolish and wise men.

The number of those whom God calls “fool” is growing rapidly. Let us bear in mind that God knows the minds of people, and that includes all of us, and it is He who labels people fools in so many instances. Paul speaks of “perilous times,” and we are in such times today. Why so? Various factors are involved, but none has had a greater part to play than outright indifference. If ever there was a time when God-fearing people ought to be doubly concerned, it is now.

V. SOME CLOSING THOUGHTS

One thing which is of great concern to me, and has not been emphasized, is the denominational trend within the Lord’s church. The concern is great because of the effect it is having in keeping our brethren from being recipients of those great rewards we have been discussing. Remember that Christ said, “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man, which built his house upon a rock” (Matt. 7:24). The builder who failed to do so is called “a foolish man.” There is a growing number of those among us who are fellowshipping the man-made churches, and adopting their errors, and denying the distinctiveness of the one true church which Christ purchased with his blood. God’s word being true, such brethren cannot qualify for those great rewards.

As we grow older our lives are often encumbered with things which take away some of the joys of life. But there is something to which you and I can look forward when our time here ends. How dismal it is to think of the man who had not room to store all that his ground produced, and said he would pull down his barns and build greater, “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then shall those things be, which thou hast provided” (Lk. 12:20). Then Christ adds, “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (v. 21).

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