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The General Epistle of James

Teacher's Outline and Study Bible™

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>1. Temptation is not of God a. God is never tempted b. God tempts no man</p> <p>2. Temptation is of man, of his own lust or evil desire a. Lust & enticement b. The conception of lust & the birth of sin</p> | <p>C. The Origin of Trials & Temptation, 1:13-18</p> <p>13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:</p> <p>14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.</p> <p>15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is</p> | <p>finished, bringeth forth death.</p> <p>16 Do no err, my beloved brethren.</p> <p>17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.</p> <p>18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.</p> | <p>c. The result: Death</p> <p>3. Temptation is not of God's nature a. God is only good b. God gives only good gifts: He is as unchangeable as the heavenly lights He created (sun, moon, stars) c. God wills only to see us born again</p> |
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Section I

TEMPTATIONS AND TRIALS: THE BASIC FACTS

James 1:2-27

STUDY 3: THE ORIGIN OF TRIALS AND TEMPTATION

TEXT: James 1:13-18

AIM: To know and understand the source of temptation.

MEMORY VERSE:

“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13).

INTRODUCTION:

Where does temptation come from? Sometimes the desire or craving for things upon earth is almost unbearable. We see something and know that it is wrong, that we should not have it

or do it, yet the desire becomes so strong that we can hardly stand it. The craving may be for things such as...

- | | | |
|---------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| food/clothing | pornography | worldly possessions |
| alcohol | immoral sex | recognition or authority |
| cigarettes | selfish ambition | position or advancement |

This is what temptation is: the desire or craving for things that God forbids or that are harmful to our bodies or spirits. No matter what it is—even if man justifies it and says it is acceptable—it is sin if God says it is wrong or if it harms our bodies or spirits. Therefore, when we feel an urge or craving for such things, we are being tempted, and the temptation is to be fled from.

Now, where does temptation come from? Take any of the things mentioned above: Why do we desire and crave them? What causes the urge for them? Knowing the origin of temptation will help us tremendously in conquering the trials and temptations of life.

OUTLINE:

1. Temptation is not of God (v.13).
2. Temptation is of man, of his own lust (vv.14-16).
3. Temptation is not of the nature of God (vv.17-18).

1. TEMPTATION IS NOT OF GOD (v.13).

Man is always blaming someone else for tempting him and leading him into sin. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God found Adam and asked him what had happened. Adam, trying to escape the blame, did just what all of us are prone to do: he said, “the woman *who you gave me* tempted me” (Ge.3:12). Then when God turned to Eve, Eve said: “the serpent deceived me” (Ge.3:13). The point is this: man seldom takes responsibility for his own wrongdoing.

What we do is try to justify our behavior and quiet our conscience by blaming a family member, spouse, employer, or anyone other than ourselves. But note what we have done: we have blamed God. How?

- ⇒ By wondering why God ever let such a thing happen to us: such a bad marriage, such a terrible accident, such poor health, and a host of other things.
- ⇒ By reasoning that God created us with desires and passions; therefore, when we slip here and there, He will understand and forgive us.
- ⇒ By thinking that God made the world as it is and everything in it; therefore, if we indulge in worldly things, He will understand and forgive us. It may be a second helping or a second drink or a second look at a loosely dressed woman, but we excuse ourselves with the thought that indulgence is understood by God.

God, of course, did create all things in their raw form, and He created us with desires and passions. God created food and He gave us a desire for food so that we would eat and take care of our bodies. God gave man to woman and woman to man so that they would keep the human race going and would build companionship, trust, and family. They would build a world of love, peace, joy, and of worship and service to God. But God did not make us...

- to desire, and then to desire more and more
- to crave, and then to crave more and more

God is not the Person who arouses lustful desires and cravings within us. Note what this verse says:

“Let no man say [or think or rationalize, or justify his behavior] when he is tempted, I am tempted of God” (Js.1:13).

1. First, God cannot be tempted with evil. God is holy, righteous, and pure. Therefore, by His very nature God can have absolutely nothing to do with evil or temptation. To tempt a person is an evil thing to do. Thus it takes a selfish, carnal, and evil person to try to entice and seduce another person to do the forbidden thing. And God is not like this. God is the very opposite.

2. Second, not only can God not be tempted by evil, but God does not tempt any person. God loves, cares for, and seeks to save man, not to damage or destroy man’s body and spirit. When a person is tempted to do the forbidden or harmful thing, the urge and craving is not of God. God wants the person to turn away and flee the temptation, not to crumble and succumb to it.

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Co.10:13).

ILLUSTRATION:

When we sin, we must not look for an excuse or for someone else to blame. The fault lies within each one of us. Consider this:

How does a worm get inside an apple? Perhaps you think the worm burrows in from the outside. No, scientists have discovered that the worm comes from the inside. But how does it get in there? Simple. An insect lays an egg in the apple blossom. Sometime later the worm hatches in the heart of the apple, then eats its way out.¹³

We all have desires within that can damage the beautiful fruit God wants us to produce. We must seek the help of the Holy Spirit to daily overcome our temptation to feed the flesh.

QUESTIONS:

1. **How can you avoid blaming others?**
2. **Why can God never be the source of temptation to do evil?**
3. **How has God shown you a way out of temptation? What is His will for you in these situations?**

¹³ Ted Kyle and John Todd. A Treasury of Bible Illustrations, #771.

2. TEMPTATION IS OF MAN, OF HIS OWN LUST (vv.14-16).

There are three significant steps involved in temptation and sin, three steps that we must understand if we are to consistently conquer temptation.

1. There is lust and enticement. Every man—without exception—is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own lusts. The word “lust” means to crave either good or evil. There are good desires and bad desires. The word “enticed” means to lure and bait just as a person lures and baits a fish.

The picture is this: man has good desires, natural and normal desires. Therefore, when he begins to think about or look at something, he very naturally desires it. His desire is normal behavior. The problem arises when the thing is forbidden or is harmful. If he looks at and thinks about the forbidden or harmful thing, he begins to lust and to be enticed or lured to go after it. This is the very beginning stage of temptation. Man takes his desire and focuses it upon the forbidden or harmful thing. He begins to pay attention to what he should not look at; he begins to think about the things of the flesh and of the world. Thereby he is tempted and drawn away by his own lusts.

2. There is the conception of lust and the birth of sin. The above point, point one, is what is called the conception of lust. It is a picture of birth. When a person actually begins to look at and think about the forbidden thing, desire and lust are conceived in his mind. He pictures the pleasure of the desire; that is, sin is actually born. Picturing—looking at or thinking about the desire—is sin.

The point to note is this: temptation begins with the normal and natural desires of man and with his thoughts. A person sees, smells, tastes, hears, touches, or thinks about something—something that is forbidden and harmful—and he fails to turn away and flee from it. It may be something as simple as hearing or listening to suggestive music, music about the intimacy of a relationship. Instead of fleeing, the person allows his mind to conceive the thing or act. He pictures the pleasure and begins to desire or lust after it. Sin is born; the wrong is committed right there in his mind. His heart is set upon the forbidden thing. He may never do the act, but he would if he had the chance and the courage.

APPLICATION:

The way to overcome temptation is essentially twofold.

- 1) If the temptation attacks our thoughts, then we must push the wrong thought out of our mind, and then begin immediately to focus our thoughts upon Christ and some passage of Scripture.

- 2) If the temptation comes from an attraction to our senses—seeing, hearing, tasting, or touching—then we must turn our head or body away and flee the temptation. Then immediately we must focus upon Christ and prayer and review some Scripture passage.

3. There is the result of lust and enticement: death. The basic meaning of death is separation. Death never means extinction, annihilation, nonexistence, or inactivity. Man dies physically, spiritually, and eternally because of sin. When God created man, He did not create man to die. Man, through his sin, has chosen to die.

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (He.9:27).

APPLICATION:

William Barclay has a thought on temptation that should challenge us to turn our total being over to Christ.

Now desire is something which can be nourished or stifled. A man can...by the grace of God, eliminate desire if he faces it and deals with it at once. But...

- *he can allow his steps to take him into certain places and certain company*
- *he can encourage his eyes to linger on certain forbidden things*
- *he can spend his life fomenting desire*
- *he can use mind and heart and eyes and feet and lips to nourish desire*

[However, a man] can so hand himself over to Christ and to the Spirit of Christ that he is cleansed of evil desire. He can be so engaged on good things that there is no time or place left for desire. It is idle hands for which Satan finds mischief to do; and it is an unexercised mind which plays with desire, and an uncommitted heart which is vulnerable to the appeal of lust. If a man nourishes and encourages desire long enough, there is an inevitable consequence. Desire becomes action. If a man thinks about anything long enough if he allows himself to desire it long enough, all the chances are that in the end he will do it. Desire in the heart in the end begets sin in the action.¹⁴

ILLUSTRATION:

Along the banks of the Amazon River lives a species of large, colorful spiders. When one of these creatures spreads itself out, it looks exactly like the blossom of a brilliant

¹⁴ William Barclay. The Letters of James and Peter. “The Daily Study Bible.” (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1958), p.61f. Statements in outline form by us for emphasis.

*flower. Bees and other insects lighting upon it expect to find nectar. But instead, the spider secretes a deadly poison.*¹⁵

Sin is very much like that spider. It lures, invites, and even appears to be good for us. But beware: death awaits the person who gives in to the seduction!

QUESTIONS:

1. **When does normal desire become sin? How can you avoid crossing over the line between the two?**
2. **Sin always causes death, separation from God. Does your lifestyle back up your belief in this fact? How can you convey this in practical terms to the unsaved?**

3. TEMPTATION IS NOT OF THE NATURE OF GOD (vv.17-18).

Note three significant points about God and temptation.

1. God is good and perfect. He would not be not God if He were not good and perfect. When we say God, we mean the Supreme and Majestic Being of the universe, the Being who is the Creator, the Being who is good and perfect—who is the Source of all good and perfect gifts. Being good and perfect, God can have absolutely nothing to do with temptation and sin. Therefore, He is not the one who tempts man. God is the One who gives man every good and perfect gift that man receives.

“As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the Lord is tried: he is a buckler [shield] to all those that trust in him” (Ps.18:30).

2. God is the Father of lights and He is unchangeable. It is temptation that leads men into the world of darkness, the darkness of guilt and shame, of personal disappointment and accusation, of hurting and damaging others, of destruction and death, of secrecy and hidden affairs, of the night and closed doors, of hidden and secret acts. God is the Creator of the sun, moon, and stars and of light itself. He is unchangeable. He always gives us the things that will stand in the light, things...

- that give us joy
- that are good for us
- that do not shame us
- that can build us up and perfect and mature us
- that give us assurance and confidence
- that make us secure
- that bring us love and joy and peace
- that will open up the light of truth
- that will take us out of darkness
- that are good and perfect
- that show forth Christ and God

3. God wills above all else to see us born again. He wills for us to know the Word of truth. If we ever hear words of error, they are not of God. All humanistic and false teaching are not of God. They are of some other source, a source that is out to tempt man away from God and His truth. God wants man to be born again. Man—every man—has been physically born and the way of physical birth is death. Every human being will die. But God’s will is what the Word of truth proclaims: that man can be *born again*. He can experience a spiritual rebirth and live forever with God in the new heavens and earth. We can all become one of His new creatures, a new person who is going to be perfected and live forever and ever. We can all be like the first fruits of the vine, a new fruit, a new creature that is unlike the physical creature that we are upon this material earth. We can be made into one of God’s new creatures—made into perfect beings who will live forever to worship and serve God in the new heavens and earth.

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (Jn.1:12-13).

QUESTIONS:

1. **Why is it completely impossible for God to be the source of temptation?**
2. **How have you found God’s gifts to be better than what the world has to offer?**
3. **How can you avoid the false teachings that tempt you to stray from God?**

SUMMARY:

Money, sex, power. We can be sure that Satan will do his best to put these and other temptations before us. He will make them look very attractive. But he cannot entice us to sin unless we take our eyes off the Lord, shift our focus away from the Word of God, the truth. Just like Adam and Eve in the garden giving in to the forbidden fruit, temptation can become sin and grip us before we know it. But we can avoid its evil clutch if we focus on Christ and God’s Word, realizing and understanding that:

1. Temptation is not of God.
2. Temptation is of man, of his own lust.
3. Temptation is not of the nature of God.

¹⁵ Paul Lee Tan. Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations, #13091.

PERSONAL JOURNAL NOTES:

(Reflection and Response)

1. The most important thing that I learned from this lesson was:
2. The thing that I need to work on the most is:
3. I can apply this lesson to my life by:
4. Closing Prayer of commitment:

END

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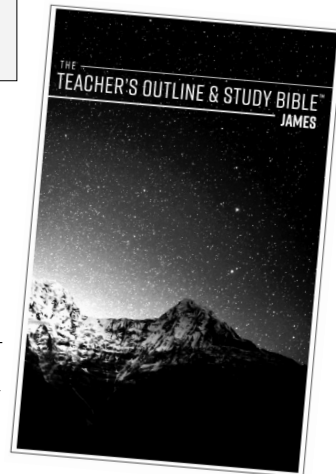
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Do Not Fear

—by John Weaver

What is today the most disobeyed, neglected, and ignored commandment that Jesus gave? 144 times in scripture, I find these words, “*Fear not.*” This is not talking about the fear of God. That is a completely different kind of fear. The fear that we that will look at is about worry, anxiety, fret, etcetera.

There is nothing in all of scripture that is as important for us to possess as faith. “*But without faith it is impossible to please him*” (Hebrews 11:6). The opposite of faith is fear. God wants us to live in faith, to walk in faith, and one day to die in faith. If we instead live in fear, we are trusting in ourselves. We cannot both live in fear and live in faith. The two are not compatible. One cancels out the other. This scripture must become reality for us. “*Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you*” (1 Peter 5:7).

We need to live in the reality of the song that says:

*God is bigger than all my problems,
Bigger than all my fears.
God is bigger than any mountain,
That I can or cannot see.*

In Scripture, what are the first words that an angel told a person upon meeting, or that God said when He spoke to people? Yes, the words were, “Fear not.”

There are many things that we can fear or worry about: fear of failure, fear of dying, fear of sickness, fear of the unknown, fear of the future, fear of the dark. Some people from my background even have a fear of the light. My friend, to all of these things, may I say, “Fear not.” Every one of these things, and many more, God has under His control. Trust in God.

My heart goes out to a person who lives in fear. I do not look down on anyone who has been overtaken by fear. No one wants to live in fear. Several times, Scripture calls fear a spirit: “*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear*” (2 Timothy 1:7), “*For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear*” (Romans 8:15). In other places, it talks about being delivered from fear. “*I sought the Lord and he heard me, and DELIVERED me from ALL my fears*” (Psalm 34:4).

Fear is imagining what might happen. Faith is knowing that whatever may happen, God is in control. “*Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.*” (1 Peter 5:7).

A person who has been overtaken and constantly lives in fear will need prayer and deliverance. But, praise God, He

wants to deliver us from ALL our fears. Seek the Lord. Tell Him all your fears. Then tell Him, “I choose to trust You, Lord.” Memorize the verses in Proverbs and claim them. “(I will) *trust in the LORD with all (my) heart; and lean not unto (my) own understanding. In all (my) ways (I will) acknowledge him, and he shall direct (my) paths*” (Proverbs 3:5-6). Amen.

If, on the other hand, you are helping someone else get free from fear, remember that it will not work to try and explain that their fears are unfounded. To them they are real. They need delivered, not rationalized. I gained understanding on this when Brother Steve Stutzman gave this example:

In front of you is a young girl. Average height and weighing 80 pounds. She is so weak she can hardly stand and has one overriding fear. What is it? Her fear is what anyone can see is totally false: she fears that she is fat.

The person who is overtaken with fear will need love, compassion, and a helping hand to turn from fear to faith. It is faith that overcomes the world. Fear has torment, but faith will cause fear to leave. Praise God. “*The LORD is on my side; I will not fear*” (Psalm 118:6).

The Struggles of Marriage

—by Ernest Schwartz

Did you know that marriage is crazy hard? If you're married, I'm sure you can relate.

For many years, Laurie and I struggled with this thing called marriage. It just didn't work for us like it always does in the movies. We fought like cats and dogs. I was too wild. Laurie was so spiritual it made me sick. I could NEVER live up to her expectations. I had zero desire to sit around all depressed and read. She had zero desire to traipse all over creation with me on my wild excursions. I simply couldn't understand why she didn't understand what it took to keep my heart alive. She simply didn't understand why I didn't relate to her heart. I said she was so heavenly minded that she was no earthly good. She said I was so carnal minded that I was no good at all! All while each of us desperately tried to keep our own hearts alive. Empty hearts cause us to lash out toward those

we love the most, and we did just that. Each other and our kids. Our home was basically a verbal war zone.

But then someone gave us the book *"Wild at Heart"* by John Eldredge. I remember reading the first chapter and throwing it across the floor. This simply couldn't be real!! It so resonated with my heart that I knew if I kept on reading, something had to happen. So I didn't. Not for a few years. But then I picked it up again and read it. With Laurie. It started us on a journey of releasing each other along with the help of some dear friends.

I came to realize that Laurie is an intercessor. Laurie slowly came to realize that I'm wired pretty hot. My mission field involves crazy adventures. We were able to trust even though we did not understand each others calling. We loved anyway. And... we watched each other blossom into what God had in mind all along!

To let go and allow each other to be who they are in marriage is the hardest thing. If the other partner would only change a few things it would sure make life much easier for me! Right?! But that's not marriage. That's control. Freedom is the opposite of control.

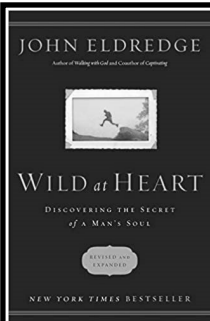
Set them free! Let go and let God! It's not my job to convict my spouse. It's our job to love and respect each other and let God do the convicting. Then, at that point we'll ask our spouse to help us change. It's the only way. It lasts.

Bahhhh!!! If we had only known this in our early years. But we know now.

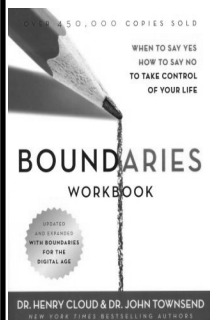
Two books that we would totally recommend:

Wild at Heart, by John Eldredge and *Boundaries*, by Dr. Henry Cloud. ...and find some good older friends to hang out with.

Order both books — see below



In *Wild at Heart*, John Eldredge inspires and speaks to the soul of Christian men everywhere. Do you dare to be the man God created you to be---passionate, adventurous, and free? In this revised edition of his look at Christian manhood, Eldredge challenges you to pursue the purpose God has given you. Encouragement for every man who wants to walk the road least taken---and insights for the woman who loves him! 272 pages, softcover from Nelson. —\$12 (includes shipping)



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Everlasting life is not a future experience that takes place after we die (John 3:36 and 6:47). Jesus said those who believe on Him have everlasting life now.

John 17:3 defines everlasting life as knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ. This is talking about intimacy with God, and that is everlasting life.

1 John 5:11-13 *"And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life..."*

John 5:24 *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."*

Who Cast Jonah into the Sea?

(by Joe Keim)

Christians always talk about how Jonah was cast into the sea by the men who ran the ship. And, that of course is backed up by the following Scripture in Jonah 1:15.

“Then said they unto him [Jonah], What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? ... And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: ... So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging” (Jonah 1:11-15).

However, Jonah gives us a SECOND perspective, several verses later in chapter 2.

Oftentimes, such as in this situation, we are so earthly minded that we forget the fact that God is Sovereign (the ruler of ALL rulers), and has His own plan for mankind.

Here then is the One who really cast Jonah in the sea:

“I [Jonah] cried by reason of mine

affliction unto the LORD, and He heard me; ... For thou [Lord] hast cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me” (Jonah 2:2-3).

Here is a second story that often gets taught with a wrong perspective in mind:

As children (and even adults), we are often taught that it was Joseph's evil brothers who sold him to Egypt. But, was it really the evil brothers that sold Joseph to Egypt?

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. ... And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth...So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God” (Genesis 45:4-8).

Later, Joseph was able to once again remind his brothers that it was God who sent him to Egypt, not his brothers.

“But as for you [brothers], ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Genesis 50:20).

And because Joseph understood the true Sovereignty of God, he was also able to say to his evil brothers,

“Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them” (Gen 50:21).

In Proverbs, God tells us very clearly,

“A man's heart deviseth [plans] his way: but the LORD directeth [establishes] his steps” (Prov 16:9).

Are you going through a difficult time in your life? Have you questioned whether God even cares about you?

Maybe, just maybe, the reminder of what happened to Jonah and Joseph will help you gain a new perspective of your situation. I pray it does! — Joe Keim

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Don't Stop Praying

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17

"God never answers my prayers. I pray and pray, and nothing ever happens."

Have you ever felt that way?

Perhaps someone you know has cancer. You pray for that person, but the tests keep getting worse. Or maybe despite your tear-filled prayers, your parents divorce anyway. Doesn't God care?

The apostle Paul could relate to praying prayers that seem to go unanswered. Three times he begged God to take away a terrible problem in his life. Paul did not get the response from God that he wanted, and the problem remained (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

Think About It

In spite of a seeming lack of response, Paul instructs us to "never stop praying" (1 Thes.

5:17). In other words, never get so discouraged by what a situation looks like that you quit praying.

Many times Christians faithfully pray for years without an apparent answer, yet they continue to pray and eventually see incredible answers to prayer. Other times, God chooses to answer our prayers but won't show us how until we enter eternity.

Is there a discouraging situation in your life? Does it feel like things will never get better? Bring your concerns right now to the Lord. Pray, and don't give up.

Pray About It

Lord, don't let me become so discouraged that I give up on prayer. Help me remember your faithfulness.

Read 1 Thes 4:1-5:28

Finishing Well

Read 2 Timothy 3:10-4:18

A prominent Christian speaker once concluded a retreat with this solemn warning: "I believe all 100 of you are serious in your desire to live for Jesus Christ, but my experience tells me that about five of you will still be walking closely with the Lord ten or twenty years from now. Many begin well, but very few end well."

Nineteen-year-old Alan whispered to his friends, "I don't know about you guys, but I plan on being one of those five." His eyes blazed with intensity. His voice was filled with determination. No one doubted his words. Alan had what it took to go all the way in the Christian life.

Fast forward, five years later: Alan left his wife, moved in with another woman, dropped out of church, and cut off all contact with his Christian friends? Why?

Think About It

The apostle Paul made it clear that the Christian life is like a long-distance marathon (see 1 Cor. 9:24;

2 Tim. 4:7). Completing the race requires grueling sacrifice and strict discipline. Without a total commitment, even the "best and brightest" Christians fall by the wayside.

Demas is one example. He began well, mentioned as one of Paul's most trusted traveling companions (see Col. 4:14; Philemon 1:24). Yet, in the end he was described as a worldly, untrustworthy man (see 2 Tim. 4:10).

What about you? Are you faithfully following Christ, even when it gets hard? Or, like Demas (and Alan above), are you drifting away from a serious commitment you once made? Look to develop a friendship with someone who will help you stay on track.

Pray About It

Lord, the saying is true: "Many begin well, but very few finish well." By your kindness, please help me to walk with you all the days of my life.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-4:22

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Feedback and Response

1

My address speaks for itself about where I'm at. I'm interested in writing religious books, therefore my chaplain directed me to write you a letter. I have an unfinished manuscript that consists of multiple sermons that were written in church, word for word, and then translated into English. What is unique about these sermons is that they were preached by Amish men. I myself am Amish and would like to make these sermons available to the public. Do you think the general public would have an interest in this book? Do you have a publisher that would publish it for me? I have no money to speak of, and would like to have an income. I also want something worthwhile to do while in prison. Along with that I have a desire to write for God. I look forward to hearing back from you soon. —Sincerely, DF

Dear DF,

Thank you for taking the time to write us and share what you feel the Lord is leading you to do. After some consideration, we are of the opinion that your idea of turning Amish sermons into a book format would probably not do a whole lot for you. In our experience, one has to sell at least 2,500 books to get their money back from the cost of publishing the book. Unless your name is known, it is nearly impossible to sell more than a few books, maybe 50 to 100 at most. Advertising can get very expensive and only adds to the cost of publishing and selling your book. I am

sorry to bring you this kind of news, but it has been the reality for us.

On the other hand, we would love to correspond with you while you serve your prison sentence. I would guess your days are long and that you miss your family and community. Are you getting some visitors? How long will you be in prison? Are you able to go to the church services while in prison?

Our ministry, as the name suggests, is centered around our Amish culture. Twenty years ago, the Lord called us to reach out to those who are hurting and desiring to get a better understanding of

who God is and what their true purpose is in life. In time, we came up with several Bible study courses that we believe have been greatly used to help people. Our favorite one is the ABC's for Christian Growth. There is a study for each letter of the alphabet, as explained in your first lesson. We would love for you to start this course, if you'd like. If you need some money to pay for postage, let us know. We would be happy to provide that for you. Just let us know how to go about doing that.

May the Lord continue to do great and mighty works through you! Please stay in contact. —Joe Keim

2

Dear sir, I don't know who might have submitted my name and address, but I am thankful that I had the opportunity to read the [Amish voice](#). It is very well written and theologically sound. The topics are well chosen and hopefully will result in turning people to God and prompting people to seek help for emotional wounds. May God bless you as you continue serving God in this way. Sincerely, EO

We love your kind of responses and words of encouragement. Thank you!

We also receive mail from people who do not like the publication. They say the Amish Voice is full of lies and is deceiving. Others, like yourself, look forward to the next issue in the mail, read the publication cover to cover, and walk away encouraged and drawn closer to the Lord.

Responses and opinions are obviously based on what the person was taught. Everyone has some kind of measuring stick or standard by which they compare articles in the Amish Voice. Today, I would like to put some names to those measuring sticks.

1. Traditions
2. Ordinance Letter
3. Culture
4. God's Word

Traditions should not be used as a measuring stick, because they vary from one family to another. Ordinance Letters should not be used as a measuring stick, because they differ from one community to another. Culture is out, because it too changes from one people group to another. This leaves us with the last choice—God's Word!

Whether I'm Schwartzentruber Amish, Old Order, Swiss, New Order, Beachy, Mennonite, or English, God only has one

measuring stick. His Word!

God's word, alone, is the standard by which each one of us will be measured by, and judged. Jesus said: "...the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

For these reasons, it is our utmost desire to write articles, not based on traditions, cultural values, and ordinances letters, but the Word of God alone. Of the Bereans, it is said: "*they were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so*" (Acts 16:11). —Joe Keim

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).

Suppose you are somewhere with a group of men or women from church, and one of them begins talking about Jesus Christ. What is your reaction? Can you join in the conversation, or do you get an uncomfortable feeling in your stomach and wish that the conversation would soon change subjects?

I think if we’re honest, most of us are very uncomfortable talking about Jesus. In fact, I think we’re so uncomfortable that we come up with reasons why it is better not to talk about our faith at all.

Yes, it is true that the Bible says that our lifestyle must be a good example to others. Jesus was very straightforward with those hypocrites who loved to be seen and heard, but did not “walk the talk.” But with all that, did Jesus ever say that we should *not* talk about our faith in Him? Just because Jesus condemned the actions of the hypocrites does not mean that He ever said Christians should keep their mouths shut. In fact, we have far more examples of people sharing their faith *with words*, than we do of people being a witness *by their actions*.

Simply put, words are necessary so people can hear. People need to know why we are what we are and why we do what we do. They need to hear so they can trust Jesus Christ for salvation, and so we can help them with life’s most difficult problems.

Here are just a few out of many Bible verses talking about the importance of words:

“Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works” (Psalm 105:2).

“What I tell you in darkness,

that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops” (Matthew 10:27).

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10).

I am blessed to have parents who are willing to talk about their faith in Jesus Christ. My wife and I have been able to participate in Bible study groups in which we learned to talk about scripture and pray for each other. Yet, I still sometimes find myself lacking the boldness needed to talk about spiritual matters with some people. Why is that? The most important Person to me (Jesus) is the one thing I should be most excited to talk about. I can talk about work, weather, politics, and almost anything else. Yet, about the Savior of the world, I am sometimes ashamed. Why?

Sinners and righteous people both need to sit down and talk, in a loving and understanding way, about the most important things of life and eternity. If we need to talk about work in order to do a good job, how much more do we need to invest time talking to each other about the love of God in order to remain encouraged in the faith?

You may say, “That is what sermons are for.” Don’t get me wrong, scripture makes it clear that sermons are important. At the same time though, I have discovered that people often have questions despite hearing sermons. In fact, I have heard of people going to church all their life, and at the end of their life not knowing if they are going to go to heaven. Meaning, they know that the way to heaven is through Jesus Christ, but they do not personally know where they are at with the Lord, are still fearful of hell, and confess to not knowing Christ as their personal savior (and worse, do not know

what to do to be saved). This is worth every uncomfortable effort needed to begin talking more about the Lord Jesus Christ. As you begin talking with people, you will also learn that many are struggling with sin and do not know how to overcome. They need to have someone to talk to who loves and cares for them, as we often need ourselves.

It is never easy to start, but we need to start somewhere. Our flesh and the devil recoil at the name of Jesus, but if we are to be overcomers, we must begin despite the resistance. Here are several things that I have found which help me:

Scripture reading. We need to know what we are talking about, and nothing helps more than regular, personal reading of the Bible in the language we understand best.

Prayer. Prayer concerning day to day activities and for people that I am with makes a big difference. We serve a real God who hears and answers prayer.

It takes time. I can’t expect to become good at spiritual conversations quickly and without practice. So start small, pray much, and watch for opportunities to talk with others.

At home. It’s best to start at home, with your wife and children. In my house, we read the Bible, talk about what the words mean, and pray together.

Bible studies. Bible studies are an enjoyable way to learn to talk, and at the same time, to learn more about what the Bible says. I’ve learned that the Bible is not written in some sort of code, but that the words mean what they say. Plus, Bible studies are scriptural, see Acts 5:46 as an example.

“Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another”
(1 Thessalonians 5:11).

END

A Teaspoon of Honey and Goodness of God —by Ann Peachey Detweiler

Some things are impossible to forget.

I can still hear the sound of his boots on the wood as he raced up the stairs after me. I can hear the door slam. But the loud beats of my heart nearly stopped when he grabbed me and I looked into his eyes.

They were the eyes of evil.

There are very few words to describe the horror that followed. I was stripped of all dignity and control. I couldn't get away. I was trapped.

In the semi-darkness, I instinctively cried out to the only One I, in my little girl heart, believed could rescue me. To this day, I'm not sure if the words were audible or not, but my spirit cried, "Help me, Jesus! Help me!"

As my body was being ravished and my spirit broken, I begged Jesus to save me.

But He didn't come.

I was completely alone. Alone with evil.

For years, I didn't have any words for the terror I felt. I just knew I was scared. Very, very, very scared. I lived in fear — fear that that terrible feeling of terror would eat me alive...next time.

Recently, I was able to name it. Its name is Powerlessness.

In those horrific minutes as a little girl on the cold, hard floor, I experienced complete loss of control. I could not get

away. I could not make it stop. I could not even control my body. I was completely powerless.

And, to top it all off, I felt abandoned by God. Because He didn't answer my prayer in the way I was expecting, it felt like He too, was powerless against that kind of evil.

I blamed myself for years. I deceived myself into thinking that everything bad that happens is my fault. I knew in my head that what happened to me as a little girl wasn't my fault, but I couldn't seem to shake the blame and guilt I subjected myself to on a daily basis.

It got worse as the years went by. I blamed myself for the wreck my family had when I was thirteen. I blamed myself when the alarm clock failed to go off and my husband was late for work. I blamed myself every time the children were disobedient. I blamed myself for anything and everything. I apologized frequently for the stupidest stuff.

Why?

Because if I could convince myself in powerless situations that "it is my fault", then I wouldn't have to experience the awful feelings of terror that reminded me of the little girl at the hands of evil. It was my self-defense against feeling powerless.

It wasn't until I came face-to-face with the reality of the scope of the powerless-

ness I faced as a child that I was able to truly believe in my heart that the abuse was not my fault.

Does Jesus understand powerlessness? Does He know what it feels like to be stripped of control?

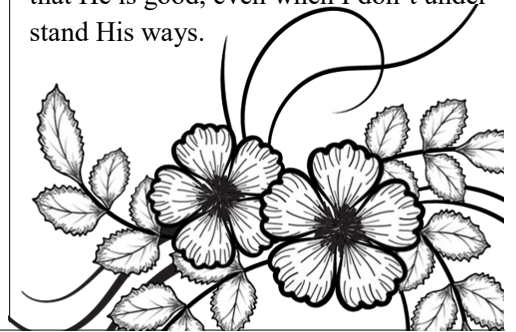
Yes. He chose to experience powerlessness. He wouldn't have had to subject Himself to the limitations of a human body and allow His creation to crucify Him on the cross. He could have stepped off of that cross at any point. But He didn't.

He loved you and I too much to do that.

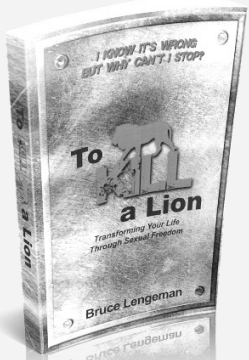
It is not wrong to feel powerless. It's part of being created. After all, we are, in and of ourselves, powerless.

God is in control; not you, not me. Do I understand why He sometimes allows evil things to happen? No, I don't. I can't — because I'm not God.

But if Jesus loved me enough to choose POWERLESSNESS OVER POWERFULNESS, then I believe I can trust Him with my life. And I can rest in the fact that He is good, even when I don't understand His ways.



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January

Book of Romans (Romans 1:1-17)

This verse-by-verse teaching is presented for the layman from the unique perspective of a student that believes the Bible rather than a scholar that critiques it. Michael Pearl addresses all the hard theological issues that have been the foundation of Christian faith down through the centuries.

You are Wanted

When we trust Christ, we become a new creation, but the past tends to pull us down and distract us from the freedom God wants us to enjoy. In this message, Chip Ingram explains how to understand and live in the joy God says is already ours in our journey toward becoming Christ-like!

Make Sense of Suffering

Romans 8:18-23 is a passage for those who know sorrow, pain, disappointment, confusion, frustration and fear. Three key words in this passage reveal how to make sense out of suffering: bondage, liberty and hope. (Message by Adrian Rogers.)

What is Faith?

Messages by Pastor John Marino
(Parts 5 and 6 out of 6)

February

Book of Romans (Romans 1:18-32)

Message by Michael Pearl.

You are Valuable

From the moment we're born to the moment we die; we search to satisfy an unexplained yearning. Chip Ingram reveals the truth that we often perform for the love and praise of others.... because we're all searching for significance. So, where do we find it?

Guard Your Heart

Scripture reveals there is only one way to control your thought life, and that is to guard your heart. Psalm 119: 9-16. You cannot guard your heart, half-heartedly. Adrian Rogers says, "God does business with those who mean business."

Christian Theology – Scripture

(part 1 of 11)

Right doctrine is the foundation of our faith as Christians. If we don't know the truth, we won't know how to behave. In this eleven part series on Christian theology, Pastor John Marino explores what the Bible teaches on sound doctrine regarding sin, man, salvation, and more.

March

Book of Romans (Romans 2:1-16)

Message by Michael Pearl.

You are Secure

Fear is a paralyzing emotion. Are you afraid of getting sick, of civil unrest, of losing your job, of your kids turning out alright, of having enough money? The bottom-line question is: How do we find security in fearful times? Join Chip Ingram for the answer.

Freedom of Forgiveness

Matthew 6:14 says, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." The two great enemies against the human soul are guilt and bitterness. The freedom of forgiveness is the only thing that can combat them. We are freed from guilt when we are forgiven by God. We are freed from bitterness when we forgive others. Message by Adrian Rogers.

Christian Theology – The Trinity

(part 2 of 11)

Message by Pastor John Marino.

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The cost of *The Amish Voice* is \$.50 a copy and is totally funded by readers from across our great country who appreciate the ministry and care to support it. If the Lord would lay it on your heart to come alongside of us by helping with expenses, it would be a great benefit, as well as highly appreciated. Thank you. —Joe Keim, Executive Director

Christianity is proof they are Christians. They have some knowledge of the Bible, but Jesus is not their Lord, which explains why they ignore His core commandments, like His commandment to (1) make disciples of all the nations or to (2) love their neighbors as themselves.

Regarding Jesus' commandment to make *disciples* (that is, obedient followers) of all the nations, religious people never attempt to make disciples, near them or abroad, because they are not themselves His disciples. As the famous Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, once said:

Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor. Recollect that you are either trying to spread abroad the kingdom of Christ, or else you do not love Him at all. It cannot be that there is a high appreciation of Jesus, and a totally silent tongue about him.

Regarding Jesus' commandment to love their neighbors as themselves, religious people do, of course, love those who love them, but that is something Jesus said even tax collectors and Gentiles do (Matt. 5:46-47). The love of unconverted people extends no further than their own family, friends and religious group. They could care less about the multitudes in their town and around the world who are on the road to hell (which they imagine they are not on themselves).

Unconverted, religious people outwardly conform to the standards of their group, whether they be strict or lax, but their public and private lives are full of contradictions. They vocally and/or silently condemn others for sins of which they themselves are often guilty, but on a lesser scale or in some different form. Their secret thoughts and hidden deeds reveal that they actually don't believe that Jesus is the Son of God. If they truly did believe in Him, He would have the preeminent place in their hearts, and obeying Him would consume their lives.

Any practice or tradition among their religious group that would usurp Christ's rightful place or obscure or pervert His clear teaching would result in a holy uproar within their hearts that would manifest itself in concern, grief and action.

Any "loss" suffered as a result of conversion, whether it be financial, friends or even family, would be counted as being of no comparison to what has been gained. As the apostle Paul, who before his *conversion* was a very zealous religious person with a very religious pedigree, wrote:

"If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Philippians 3: 4b-11).

These words are not only the testimony of a former Pharisee whom most

everyone would have assumed was on the road to heaven even before his dramatic conversion (most everyone except God, that is), but the testimony of everyone who has been genuinely converted and who truly believes in Jesus Christ. They have found the "treasure in the field" that is worth giving up everything to gain (see Matt. 13:34). Christ has become their life (Phil. 1:21). Nothing compares to Him.

Man-Pleaser or God-Pleaser?

If the true convert is forced to decide between pleasing family or Christ, he chooses Christ. This is what Jesus undeniably taught:

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:34-37).

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

Regardless of how much we might soften the hyperbole in these passages, Jesus' message remains crystal clear. True converts/believers/disciples love Jesus supremely, and they desire to please Him above all others.

And this is basic Christianity. An authentic conversion is not a socially-imposed conformity founded in the fear

of man, but a change of belief and behavior that is rooted in the fear and love of God.

Of whom do I write? I suspect some readers will be silently saying “Amen” as they think of certain groups, churches and denominations. The truth, however, is that you can probably pick any group, church or denomination under the banner of Christendom. Every one of them includes men-pleasing, tradition- and heritage-lovers who think they are Christians but who have actually never been converted.

In many groups, those kinds of folks are the large majority. Generally speaking, the longer a group has been established, the larger the percentage of its members resemble unconverted Pharisees—religious but not resurrected. If you talk to them about Jesus, they will be uncomfortable and resistant. They may even persecute you to some degree, all the while convinced, like the Pharisees, that they are on the right path. It is indeed tragic.

So I again ask this all-important question: *Have you been converted? Or are you only a link in a religious chain?*

In What Way Must We Become Like Children?

A sure sign that one has been converted, according to Jesus, is that the convert becomes like a child.

Jesus did not specify precisely in what way we must become like children if we hope to enter heaven, but it seems doubtful that He was referring to any of the negative characteristics associated with children. We all know, for example, that children can be very selfish, and they must be trained for years to become considerate of others. In light of everything else that Jesus taught, it would seem safe to conclude He was not saying selfishness is what marks true converts who will one day enter heaven!

Considering the positive characteristics of children, some point out that children are generally more trusting than adults. Thus, some associate Jesus’ words about our need to become like children with the truth that salvation is possessed by faith (Eph. 2:8). We need to have faith like children, they say, trusting in Jesus in order to enter heaven.

Others note that children understand their dependency, particularly upon their parents. In fact, one characteristic that differentiates children from adults is dependency and independency. So some say we must, like children, have no thought of independence or self-sufficiency, and we must acknowledge that apart from Christ—who atoned for our sins, forgave us, and is empowering us to obey God—we have no hope of salvation.

Others emphasize the fact that children naturally love and respect their parents, and generally tend to obey them. So they say we must similarly obey God.

And still others point out that children are usually considered to be innocent. No one looks at a little child and wonders if she is hiding a “deep, dark past.” Although such innocence is lost to adults, it can be regained through the forgiveness and transformation offered by God through Jesus Christ. So some claim that children’s innocence is what Jesus had in mind when He said we must become like children to enter heaven.

I think there is truth to all of those views. Yet I think they should be incorporated into a larger view that not only takes what Jesus said at face value, but also considers the context of the entire New Testament. Jesus did not specify any single characteristic of children that we should imitate. Rather, He said we must be *converted* and *become like children*.

Is it possible that children—to whom, according to Jesus, the kingdom of heaven belongs—possess a spiritual

nature that is lost to adults, but that adults can regain by experiencing an authentic, spiritual conversion? Is it possible that babies and children are in some sense “spiritually alive,” but they “spiritually die” when they chose the wrong path upon reaching the “age of accountability,” after which time they must be “spiritually reborn” to become, once again, “spiritually alive” if they hope to enter heaven?

Personally, I am persuaded that this could very well be what Jesus had in mind when He said we must “become like children” to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Although it seems indisputable that babies are born with—and all children possess—a sinful nature, I am not so certain that such traits preclude the idea that babies and children are “spiritually alive.” According to the Bible, all authentic Christians are “spiritually alive,” yet Scripture also states that all of them still possess sinful natures, what Paul refers to as “*the flesh*” that “*lusteth against the Spirit*” (see Gal. 5:17). So, if spiritually alive adults can simultaneously possess sinful natures, why should anyone claim that children, because they have sinful natures, can’t be spiritually alive?

Paul: Alive, Dead, Alive Again

An interesting verse in Paul’s letter to the Romans seems to support this understanding:

“For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (Rom. 7:9-11).

Although Paul’s words may not be as

clear as we'd wish, it is obvious that he was not referring to being *physically* alive or dead. He could only have been referring to being *spiritually* alive and dead. Scripture teaches that all human beings are tri-part in nature: spirit, soul and body (2 Thes. 5:23; Jas. 2:16). It also teaches that unconverted adults, although possessing bodies that are alive, have spirits that are dead (Eph. 2:1).

Note that in the above passage, Paul referred to a time when he once was alive, but that he died "*when the commandment came.*" The Law of Moses, of course, had been given by God hundreds of years before Paul was born, so when Paul referred to the time when "*the commandment came,*" it seems reasonable to think he was speaking of the time when he heard God's commandment, was held accountable by God to obey it, but decided to disobey it, at which point he died, spiritually.

All of this leads me to think Paul believed there was a time in his life, prior to his conversion, when he was spiritually alive. But, when he reached an age of accountability, he sinned, and he became spiritually dead. And all of that seems to support the idea that babies and children are not spiritually dead, but rather, are spiritually alive, which is perhaps *the* reason or yet another reason Jesus said that we must become like children to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Even More "Like Children"

In addition to all of this, the New Testament repeatedly tells us that truly converted people actually become "children of God":

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God...Beloved, now are we the sons of God" (1 John 3:1a, 2a; see also John 1:12; Rom. 8:14, 16; Gal. 3:26; Phil 2:15; 1 John 3:1-2).

Other New Testament scriptures reveal that true believers in Christ are not only "adopted" by God into His family—which by itself might lead them to think they are only very fortunate orphans—but that they are actually also "*born of God*" (1 John 5:1). That makes them God's *actual* children. They are "born of His Spirit" (John 3:6) and indwelt by His Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19). So they possess His nature. If they could take a "spiritual DNA test," it would reveal "divine spiritual genetics"!

Of course, being supernaturally recreated into God's actual children and bearing His nature, true believers increasingly *act* like God's children, trusting Him, acknowledging their dependence upon Him, and obeying Him (all those characteristics of children often associated with various interpretations of Matthew 18:3). As Paul wrote,

"That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke..." and "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (Phil. 2:15; Eph. 5:1; emphasis added).

Or, as John wrote,

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9, emphasis added).

This, too, is basic Christianity. This is what it means to be a "new creation in Christ," in which "the old things passed away" and "new things have come (2 Cor. 5:17). This is what it actually means to be "born again," another prerequisite Jesus mentioned to entering heaven (John 3:3; see also 1 Pet. 1:3, 23). To enter heaven, we must be converted and be spiritually reborn to become like

children, *children of God.*

Surrounded by Sermons

It is interesting to think that the many children with whom we interact throughout our lives serve as divinely-placed examples to us of what we must become to enter heaven. Had God desired, He could have created us to reproduce, not babies, but mature adults. But He designed humans so that we would be surrounded—all of our lives—by children, little teachers whose silent sermons hold the key to eternal life. Let us open our ears and eyes to the divine message they continually broadcast!

In conclusion, here are the all-important questions each one of us should ask ourselves:

- 1.) Have I experienced a conversion, a change of mind and heart that was so dramatic that it can be described as a "resurrection," and one that has resulted in a relationship with God that supersedes all other relationships, as evidenced by my obedience to Christ's commandments? Or am I just a link in a religious chain following some man-made traditions behind a veneer of Christian culture?
- 2.) Have I become "like a child" through a spiritual rebirth? Can I point to a time in my life when I was spiritually dead but became spiritually alive? Am I indwelt by God's Spirit so that I can say with Paul and every authentic Christian since Paul, "*...nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*" (Gal. 2:20)?

Those who can answer the above questions affirmatively are the most blessed people on the earth! Are you among them?

The author welcomes thoughtful discussion of his article. Please feel free to contact him at:

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Unless You Become Like a Child

—By David Miller

“And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:13).

These words, spoken by the eternal Son of God, the Creator of the universe, the One who holds the keys to God’s Kingdom as well as to death and Hades, and before whom everyone must one day stand in judgment to give an account, would seem worthy of our consideration (Mark 1:1; Col. 1:16; Matt. 6:19; Rev. 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:10; Acts 10:42). The only people who will enter heaven are those who were converted, and in their conversion, became like children (in some way).

It is these words found in Matthew 18:3, and similar words found in other places Scripture, that lead us to believe that children who die enter the kingdom of heaven (see, for example, 2 Sam. 12:23; Matt. 18:10; 19:14). If we must become like children in order to enter heaven (Matt. 18:3), and if the kingdom of heaven belongs to children (Matt. 19:14), it stands to reason that any and all children who die enter heaven. If you’ve ever lost a child or suffered a miscarriage, you’ve got a child in heaven.

It is also from Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:3 that we deduce that there must be a time when children reach an age when God no longer considers them to be children, but rather to be adults, at which time they must—if they hope to enter heaven—be converted and become, in some way, like the children whom they previously were. Theologians refer to that age of passage from childhood to adulthood as the “age of accountability,” a phrase that acknowledges the fact that children are sinful, but that they are not held accountable for their sin by God until they reach adulthood.

Scripture does not reveal an exact age when that transition takes place, and it seems reasonable to think that it could be different for every child. Some like to point to the ages of 12 and 13, when Jewish girls and boys celebrate their bat and bar mitzvahs. Personally, however, I would not want to stake my theology on Jewish tradition.

In any case, a most important question we should all ask ourselves is this: *Have I been genuinely converted?* Tragically, multitudes of people around the world who identify on some level as being Christians have never experienced *authentic* Christian conversion.

Authentic conversion is so dramatic that Scripture describes it as a resurrection. Unconverted people are characterized in the Bible as being dead. When they are converted, however, they become alive. That is one reason converted people are expected to immediately be baptized. When done biblically, baptism is done by total immersion, representing the new convert’s death, burial and resurrection. That is a picture of authentic Christian conversion. So every professing Christian should ask himself or herself: *Have I been resurrected? Or am I just religious?*

The Religious Chain

Although it is right and proper to spiritually train our children, there is an inherent danger in it: Our children might carry on our spiritual practices and traditions but never actually be converted. And their children and grandchildren might follow the same path, creating a chain of religious, but unconverted, descendants.

The human links in such chains never experience conversion simply because they don’t see their need to convert. They are convinced that their veneer of

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