

Truth Makes Christians

A perverted gospel cannot save. Jesus declared that it is the knowledge of truth, not the belief of error, that makes men free. (John 8:32). Though a perverted gospel may have in it all the elements of the true gospel, its power to save is lost in perversion. Bread is God's power to quell the hunger, but the admixture of a poisonous element - a spoonful of arsenic, for instance, in a loaf of bread - would destroy its power. Water is God's power to quench the thirst, but the admixture of salt will destroy the quenching power of water.

The gospel is God's power to save the soul, but its admixture with error - the doctrines and commandments of men, when heard and believed - destroys its saving power. Hence, Paul's alarm concerning the perverters at Galatia: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ." (Gal. 1:6-7)

Error preached, error heard, and error believed cannot result in the truth obeyed. No man can accidentally obey God. The truth preached, the truth believed, and the truth obeyed makes a Christian. Nothing else does. How careful then men should be in their handling of it!

- by Foy E. Wallace, Jr.

"To Join The Disciples"

Many members of the body of Christ are under the false impression that by regularly attending a church they are automatically inducted into the membership of the same. This incorrect notion is often perpetuated in practice among churches that lack understanding. While it is not this writer's intention to defend the vocabulary of "placing membership", the concept is very much a scriptural one and worthy of our attention.

Three years after he was converted (Galatians 1:15-19), *"...when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out"* (Acts 9:26-28).

Notice that Saul attempted *"to join the disciples"*, but before he would be considered *"with them"* Barnabas had to vouch for him, confirming that he was, in fact, a faithful Christian. This was not a display of merciless hostility on the part of the church in Jerusalem, but sincere adherence to the will of God, for it is written, *"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds"* (2 John 10-11).

There must, therefore, be a process by which those who desire to be recognized as members of a particular congregation are verified to be worthy of acceptance. In the case of Saul, Barnabas was present to give assurance to the apostles. In other cases, letters of commendation would be appropriate. After he was converted in Ephesus, Apollos moved to Corinth and *"the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him"* (Acts 18:27). Paul implied that letters are not necessary where the individual is previously known to the congregation (for example, in Paul's own case, he was the one who taught them the gospel -- 2 Corinthians 3:1); otherwise, he implied that such letters or other forms of recommendation are useful.

Considering that *"a little leaven leavens the whole lump"* (Galatians 5:9; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8), churches are well advised to exercise caution in who they accept as members.

- by Bryan Matthew Dockens

Making Plans for the Best New Year

As another year winds down, folks everywhere start talking about their plans for the next one. Resolutions get made, goals are set, and people talk a lot about wanting a "happy new year." Usually those plans focus on health, finances, or some personal project. Those things have their

place, of course — but they don't get to the heart of what we really need. A year may look "happy" by the world's standards and still leave us spiritually empty. What we truly need is not just a happy year, but a *blessed* one.

The best way to start a new year is by making a firm decision to put God first. Jesus said, "Seek *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). When serving God is our top priority, everything else finds its proper place. Without that spiritual foundation, even our best plans will eventually fall apart.

A truly blessed year must include purposeful, consistent Bible study. God's word is what shapes our thinking, strengthens our convictions, and helps us make wise decisions. A Bible that stays closed will never build faith — but a heart that regularly feeds on Scripture will grow stronger and more mature.

Right alongside study is prayer. Prayer isn't just a habit; it's our communication to God. A prayerful year is a year lived in dependence on the Lord rather than on ourselves. "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) is more than a slogan — it's the key to real spiritual steadiness.

Faithful attendance is also part of planning for a blessed year. Being present for every assembly isn't optional if we want to grow. When we choose to be there — consistently and intentionally — we strengthen ourselves and encourage those around us. Sporadic attendance weakens; steady attendance builds up.

We also need to plan for good, healthy relationships with our brethren. Strong connection with others doesn't just fall into place by accident. It grows when Christians make time for one another, share burdens, and work together in love. Congregations become stronger when each member purposely invests in the others.

Finally, a blessed year includes renewed effort in spreading the gospel. We all have friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors who need the truth. Evangelism isn't something we "get around to someday." It belongs in our plans right now. A year spent sowing the seed of the kingdom is a year that matters — not just for time, but for eternity.

So as we look ahead and make our plans, let's aim higher than a year that is merely "happy." Let's make plans that will lead to a year that is *blessed* — a year built on spiritual priorities, faithful commitment, and wholehearted service to God. Those are the plans that never fail.

- by Greg Gwin