

Expository Files

Editors: Jon W. Quinn, Warren E. Berkley



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The Front Page The Pew Study – Religion in America By Jon W. Quinn

Today, most Americans believe that the influence of religion is declining in America. In fact, only 37% of those questioned thought religious influence is increasing. That is exactly the same as in March of 2001.

Interestingly, in November of 2001 a full 78% thought that religious influence was increasing. So from March to November there percentage went from 37% to 78%. The obvious reason for such a drastic change is the infamous date of September 11, 2001. The increase came as an aftermath of that tragedy. By December it was back down to 71% and continued its decline until it reached old familiar territory about six months later.

Interestingly enough, out of both groups, those who think religious influence is increasing and those who think it is in decline, a very large majority think that a decrease in religious influence is, or would be, a bad thing for the nation. Fully 84% of those who believe it to be decreasing believe that it is bad for our nation. Also, 85% of those who believe it to be increasing agree that a decline would be a bad thing.

Even among the secular and people with weak religious ties the majority say decreasing religious influence is a bad thing. 58% believe that America's national strength is related to its faith, while 36% believe America would be just as strong even if most of its people did not have religious faith. People with

strong religious ties are much more likely to believe that national strength is based in part upon religious faith.

61% say that children are more likely to grow up to be moral adults if they have a religious background. 35% say children are just as likely to grow up into moral adults without religious faith.

75% of Americans say multiple religions can lead to eternal life. 54% look upon atheism negatively, with that negativity running strongest in the Midwest and south. Sadly, only 21% think that Americans are, on the whole, as honest and moral as they have been in the past.

I thought that these statistics were interesting. But leaving those behind, it is certainly appropriate to make the following observation just now: “Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34).

Sharing the Gospel
“Pay Close Attention To Yourself and to Your Teaching”
1 Timothy 4:12-16
By Jon W. Quinn

Those who believe with their hearts that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the world have a difficult time not sharing their faith with others. We do so by our example as well as our words, and both our example and our words match... and are what Jesus wants them to be. To exist and live as followers of Christ is to show and share His love to others.

We seek to share with others first because we love God with all our hearts, souls and minds. That's the greatest commandment, and this kind of love makes itself evident by actions. Paul described at least three things with reference to his sharing the gospel:

- 1) He realized an obligation to God and to others to share the gospel.
- 2) To right thinking Christians this obligation to God and man brings not only a willingness but an eagerness to share the gospel.

3) The obligation is profound enough that it overrides hesitation due to fear thus making us “unashamed” of the gospel (Romans 1:14-16).

It is important to preach and teach and share the gospel by example. We are going to look into our need to share the gospel. While some of it applies mainly to preachers of the first century, its underlying principles apply to all disciples of all ages, because all disciples are expected to become “teachers” of others (Hebrews 5:12; James 5:19-20).

Here is some good news: the message we are to teach does not change. (1 Timothy 4:1,2). God's will on moral and spiritual issues is the same, though society's view is constantly changing. Consider the text:

12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.

14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

15 Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.

16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

(1 Timothy 4:12-16).

Be An Example of a Believer (4:12)

Any good preacher or teacher lives the message he enjoins upon others. Jesus does not call us to become hypocrites (Matthew 23:2,3; 25). The godly person tries his best to apply the truth to his life. He is not perfect, but he is pressing on toward that direction. His walk is in the light, and he does not treat his mistakes lightly (Philippians 3:12-14; 1 John 1:6-9).

However, the Christian's imperfection should never be used as an excuse to do nothing, and it won't be if the Christian is genuinely “pressing on” toward perfection. He seeks to apply the Lord's will in every circumstance; in public and in private. He watches his speech. He speaks the truth in a controlled way so as not to render his religion vain (James 1:26). He is an example of behavior, love, faith, purity. We continue to press on toward perfection in these things, understanding that we are not there yet. If this is our attitude, then we will be the examples we are called upon to be.

Give Attention to Reading (4:13)

Here, this “reading” is specifically about publicly reading from the Scriptures in the assembly for the mutual benefit of all. This can be very uplifting when the reader knows his text and reads it well, and when he knows the meaning of what is being read himself so that in his inflections and emphasis he may impart that to others. That calls for preparation and study and prayer. Note the Lord does not just say to read the Scriptures, but to give attention to the reading. This entails proper preparation on the part of the reader.

This is necessary because if a reader does not read it well, then it will not be as helpful to others. Reading is a learned skill. We're not born with it. As with other learned skills, it must be practiced to be done well. Public reading, done well, is the edifying experience it ought to be (Nehemiah 8:1-6). All things in the assembly ought to be done with the goal of edification (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Do Not Neglect Your Gifts (4:14)

Whether the gift was bestowed by the Lord miraculously (as with Timothy) or naturally, it is still a gift God has given and must not be neglected. Be aware of what you have to offer and develop your talents for the Lord as you put them to use in His kingdom according to the authority of His word (Colossians 3:16).

We each need to develop our talents. Take preachers, for example. I may have a “favorite preacher” who I always get so much out of his lessons. I cannot be him. I can only develop my talents, not his. You and I do not have to be someone else. We need to be the best we can be at using what God has blessed us with.

When the early Christians were scattered from Jerusalem, they went everywhere preaching and teaching the word (Acts 8:4). Could they all preach like Peter on Pentecost? I doubt it, and they didn't have to. Develop what you have been given; that is all the Lord expects, but He does expect, and even require, that of each one of us! Dedicate yourself to these things. The phrases “take pains” and “be absorbed” give some indication of the prominent attention God expects out of us in developing ourselves (1 Timothy 4:15).

Pay Close Attention to Self and Doctrine (4:16)

Our self-evaluation ought not to be superficial, or self justifying. We are not looking for reasons to remain as we are, but reasons and ways to become better. We want to be more effective citizens of the kingdom.

God gave us a mirror that we need to look into (James 1:25). Don't let anything remain which may spring up and cause trouble later (Hebrews 12:14-16). This includes things like neglect and under evaluating the things of God (like Esau did)!

We must also be careful to maintain purity of doctrine. We must have knowledge of the teachings of Scripture and be willing to teach them to others (2 Timothy 2:15).

The text ends with an admonition and a promise: "...persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you." (1 Timothy 4:16b).

The admonition is to persevere, or continue, in these things. This means live so as to continuously progress as we become better examples of faith to others. The promise is that if we will do this, we will insure salvation for ourselves and for those who will hear us. Isn't that what living for Jesus is all about?

Jesus, the Law, and the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 5:17-42, Matthew 19:3-12, Mark 7:14-23) By Ethan R. Longhenry

I have noticed, especially in the context of some discussions regarding issues of marriage, divorce, and remarriage (MDR), a recent tendency to see Jesus only through the prism of the Law of Moses. Some are teaching that Jesus and Moses taught the same thing regarding marriage matters, along with all other things.

This is not a perspective that one would gain from the account given in Matthew 19:1-9, wherein Jesus first appeals to "the beginning" and then declares that Moses gave the law regarding divorce because of the hardness of the heart of Israel, but that "from the beginning it has not been so" (Matthew 19:8).

This perspective comes more from a particular interpretation of Matthew 5:17-18, and assumptions that underlie that interpretation:

"Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, 'Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished'" (Matthew 5:17-18).

Many reason from this statement that since Jesus is not going to adapt the Law in any way, everything which He will say will be in accordance with that Law.

Such an interpretation may make sense on the surface, but when one begins to investigate what Jesus continues to teach His disciples and the crowds around Him, many inconsistencies become glaring.

"Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, 'Thou shalt not kill;' and 'whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment': but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, 'Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire. If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:21-24).

Jesus quotes the Law of Moses from Exodus 20:3 and Leviticus 24:21/Numbers 35:16. The sense of the guidelines is clear enough: one should not kill one's fellow man, and to do so is to be liable for death yourself. But Jesus does not stop there-- He indicates that "I say unto you," speaking on His own authority, that they ought not even be angry with or insult their brethren.

Many came for generations speaking in the name of the LORD, either prophesying by inspiration, or by interpreting the text in an understandable way. Jesus here does no such thing—He indicates what the Law says, and then speaks on His own authority in a different direction, despite the fact that the Law taught that if any added to it, they were false prophets (Deuteronomy 4:2, 18:20). How can it be, then, that Moses and Jesus are saying the same thing? If they are saying the same thing, why would Jesus not say as much?

"Ye have heard that it was said, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery': but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

Jesus again quotes from the Ten Commandments, this time in Exodus 20:14. Jesus again, on His own authority, expands the realm of adultery to include not just the action but the mental desire for the action-- another matter not specified in the Law.

"It was said also, 'Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement': but I say unto you, that every one that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery" (Matthew 5:31-32).

Here we come to one of the contentious passages-- Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 24:1, and yet on His own authority would seem to go further. Considering the previous examples and the examples to come, how can it be that Jesus and Moses are saying the same thing? Jesus is making deliberate contrasts between what is written in the Law and what He Himself is saying.

"Again, ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, 'Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths': but I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one" (Matthew 5:33-37).

The contrast here is stark. The Law allows for oaths to be made, as long as one does not swear falsely and does what is sworn (Leviticus 19:12, Deuteronomy 23:23). Jesus goes plenty further: do not swear at all. Let your yes be yes and your no, no, and move on.

"Ye have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth': but I say unto you, resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him

two. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matthew 5:38-42).

Here Jesus addresses the *lex talionis*, or the concept of "an eye for an eye," established in the Law in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21. This commandment is not to be interpreted as a mandate for action; it is universally agreed upon that the law is given not to enforce punishment as much as limit vengeance and retribution so that it fits the loss. One has no justification to take an arm for an eye, a leg for a foot, or so on. Punishment for loss should be equal to the loss.

Regardless, Jesus undermines the entire concept by teaching that no vengeance should be taken at all, and that further aid should be given freely. There is no basis for this imposition in the Law.

We can see quite clearly, therefore, that marked contrasts are being made between what was said "of old," all either explicitly or ultimately deriving from Moses' legislation, with what Jesus Himself is saying. These things were astonishing to the people, "for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:29).

Is Jesus here *changing* the Law? Far from it! One could live by every precept Jesus enjoins in Matthew 5 and never violate the Law of Moses. On the other hand, to bind these precepts as part of the Law of Moses would be just as bad as loosing some of the Law, as Deuteronomy 4:2 indicates:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

For Jesus to bind what He says as part of the Law of Moses would make Him no different in kind from the Pharisees who bound plenty of traditions to "build a fence" around the Torah; if this were the case, then He has no ground to argue against the Pharisees as He does in Matthew 12:1-8, for what the Pharisees would do to the Sabbath Jesus would be doing for oaths, divorce, and punishment.

We need to reconsider what Jesus says in Matthew 5:17-18, and include also verses 19-20.

"Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass away from the law, till all things be accomplished. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus here is not commenting on Himself as much as condemning the Pharisees. He indicates, quite subtly, how He is not attempting to adapt or change the Law in any way, but that the Pharisees do this very thing by their traditions. He is not teaching people to break Moses' Law.

But yet what He presents in Matthew 5 itself does not correlate to Moses' teaching. How can this be?

The difficulty rests in the presupposition that whatever Jesus teaches must be part of the old covenant since He lives under the old covenant. Christians in past ages are rightly chastised for diminishing Jesus' Jewishness-- perhaps many today have tipped the balance too far the other way, and make Jesus nothing but a Jew. Neither perspective can withstand the witness of the New Testament.

Consider what Matthew says about Jesus just before the "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew 5-7:

From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"...And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness among the people (Matthew 4:17, 23).

Jesus was preaching the good news of the Kingdom-- the covenant that was coming, and present in the form of the King Himself.

In reality, we universally confess that the Sermon on the Mount represents part of this good news of the Kingdom by our use of Matthew 6:33:

"But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

"His Kingdom?" Where is this understood in terms of the Law of Moses and the old covenant? How often is this verse used to speak about how *Christians* ought to conduct themselves in their lives?

The application of this verse to the new covenant is not in error. Far too often it is forgotten that while the events described in the Gospels transpired under the old covenant, they were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John under the new. They wrote so that people could believe in Jesus or have certainty regarding the things they were taught of Him (John 20:30-31, Luke 1:3). Two of them (Matthew and John) were explicitly promised the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who was going to bring to their remembrance all things Jesus said (John 14:26). Doubtless this is true also of the other two witnesses, of themselves or of Peter and Paul with whom they worked. The Gospels, therefore, are not mere antiquities talking about a Jew living a thoroughly Jewish life teaching only Jewish matters-- the Gospels present the good news of the Kingdom and its king Jesus Christ, who did live and die according to the Law of Moses, but who taught the Gospel of the Kingdom while He was still on earth.

It is true that much of the substance of the message of the Law and the Kingdom are the same-- hence it is possible for Jesus to affirm that one who understood how all the Law was summed up in the need to love God and neighbor was "not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark 12:28-34). Nevertheless, we should not assume that the Kingdom and the Law are in complete harmony, nor that Jesus was speaking novelties: in many instances He returns to the original intentions of God.

Such is clear in Matthew 19:3-12:

And there came unto him Pharisees, trying him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" And he answered and said, "Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh?'

So that they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

They say unto him, "Why then did Moses command to give a bill of divorcement, and to put her away?"

He saith unto them, "Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it hath not been so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery."

The disciples say unto him, "If the case of the man is so with his wife, it is not expedient to marry."

But he said unto them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but they to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs, that were so born from their mother's womb: and there are eunuchs, that were made eunuchs by men: and there are eunuchs, that made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matthew 19:3-12).

Notice some important concepts at work here:

1. Jesus bases His statements on "the beginning," returning to God's intentions for mankind as exemplified in Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:24).
2. When the Pharisees press Him about what Moses says, Jesus indicates that the law from Moses was not based in God's desire but the hardness of Israel's heart (Matthew 19:8). Jesus does not say, "traditions of Moses," but "Moses" himself.
3. The disciples certainly do not understand Jesus' teaching as exactly what Moses taught-- they could not see why any would marry if divorce were only for *porneia*!
4. Jesus' statement of endurance explicitly mentions the Kingdom of Heaven-- quite odd if He's just talking about Jews and the Law. He is likely speaking regarding His own celibacy and perhaps the celibacy of others with Him for the purposes of establishing God's will on earth.

It's hard to see how Matthew 19:3-12 demonstrates that Moses and Jesus

taught the same things. There is no room for David and Solomon's polygamy or the freedom to divorce that marked the Jews in Jesus' interpretation. Jesus does not say, "well, this is what Moses intended". He clearly shows that the Pharisees have accurately interpreted what Moses said by the concession of verse 8 (Moses did allow for divorce, but only because you have hard hearts). He then applies God's intentions as will be manifest in His Kingdom-- one man one woman for life.

Another relevant example is found in Mark 7:14-23:

And he called to him the multitude again, and said unto them, "Hear me all of you, and understand: there is nothing from without the man, that going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man. If any man hath ears to hear, let him hear."

And when he was entered into the house from the multitude, his disciples asked of him the parable.

And he saith unto them, "Are ye so without understanding also? Perceive ye not, that whatsoever from without goeth into the man, it cannot defile him; because it goeth not into his heart, but into his belly, and goeth out into the draught?"

This he said, making all meats clean.

And he said, "That which proceedeth out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:14-23).

Let us first understand the situation and then Mark's interpretation. Jesus is being critiqued by the Pharisees since His disciples did not wash their hands (Mark 7:1-5). Jesus takes the opportunity to teach the truth present in the Gospel of the Kingdom: defilement is not something you obtain from foods that pass through the body and are excreted, for defilement comes from the evil intentions of the heart.

This is as far as Jesus pressed the issue. Yet Mark, writing his Gospel under the new covenant, makes his inspired commentary in verse 19:

This he said, making all meats clean.

Mark is drawing out for us the inescapable conclusion from what Jesus says: if defilement does not really come from food, but from what people think and do, then all those meats called unclean in Leviticus 11 are not inherently unclean, just considered so for God's purposes for Israel. Mark provides the same conclusion for us that Paul provides in Romans 14: nothing is unclean of itself. But notice that Mark does not say that such is just his later interpretation of what Jesus said-- he indicates that He established all meats were clean. While Mark writes the commentary, he is being guided by Jesus in an attempt to understand what Jesus was revealing.

What do we say to all of this? In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus is telling His Jewish audience that He has no intention of adapting the Law itself-- after all, it is not adaptable, per Deuteronomy 4:2. Instead, He is preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, a message that can resonate with Jews but fully and finally establishes God's intentions for mankind. This Gospel is highlighted throughout Jesus' ministry, and used as the basis of teaching Christians in the new covenant how to conduct themselves in life. What Jesus says in Matthew 5, Matthew 19, and Mark 7 find their parallels in Romans 12, Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 8, and James 5:12, and not in anything espoused by the Law.

It is therefore a false assumption that since Jesus lived according to the Law that everything He promoted was according to the Law. He did live according to the Law and thus fulfilled it, as Matthew 5:17-18 establishes, but He taught the Gospel of the Kingdom for those who would hear. Let us be those who are willing to hear Jesus and do what He says!

Hope's Imperatives
1 Peter 1:13-21
By Warren E. Berkley

13Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in

all your conduct, 16since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” 17And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake, 21who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

The apostle Peter wrote these words to Christians who were undergoing a severe test of their faith. They were being “grieved by various trials,” (1:6). Later in this epistle Peter says they were being “reproached for the name of Christ,” (4:12-17).

In those circumstances one thing they needed was hope. Much of what Peter wrote to them was to instill hope and courage.

This is relevant to us! Christians today live in a world that requires the hope of the gospel. We may not be thrown to the lions but we are tempted, stressed and under pressure.

There are fathers struggling to find their place in the workplace without compromising their faith. There are mothers thoroughly devoted to their children and they encounter dangers and threats in doing that good work. Young marriages are struggling. Aged people are coping with the effects of time on mind and body. Teenagers are trying to find their way. Grandparents are seeking appropriate involvement with the families. We live in a time of tremendous pressure and challenge.

And sometimes you may have the thought: It would be easy to just quit serving the Lord. That wouldn’t help you cope with anything! If you quit serving God you will live to regret it. And if you quit and never come back to the Lord – after you die the regret is multiplied. What helps is hope; the hope Peter describes in this passage.

Hope is expecting that after the struggle, there is victory, rest and peace. Hope is what you hold onto, that things will not always be like things are now; it will be better . . . much better. Once you have a firm grip on hope, it produces the energy to tolerate adverse circumstances.

When you ask, “how do I get through this, with my faith intact?” The answer is hope. You can meet the challenges without being drained of your faith, if you have hope. Let’s see how this passage can give us this kind of vitality and patience.

The Basis Of Hope

Hope is not something that just hangs out in midair; in order to be valid, it must have some basis.

Let me illustrate: When you get into a dental chair and you anticipate the discomfort and pain, what gives you the courage or endurance to stay there and get through it? It is hope – but that hope is founded on something: Your confidence in the dentist; your past experiences; your knowledge that many other patients have been able to come out of the chair and be OK.

Hope must have some basis. And Peter tells us the hope of the Christian has a solid basis in verse 21. The basis of our hope identified in verse 21 is – The resurrection of Christ! God raised Him from the dead, and gave Him glory. Then he says in the next phrase: “that your faith and hope are in God!” If God could raise Jesus from the dead, he can take care of us. He can raise us up from the dead, and give us glory. Do you believe that? “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” (1 Thess. 4:14) It doesn’t get any better than this.

Though we struggle here on earth and must endure difficulties and temptations – even though we die God says to His people: I’ll take care of you, just as I brought My Son from the dead. The resurrection of Christ is the basis of our hope.

The object of our hope

We can see that clearly in verse 13: “... the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” What do we look forward to? Jesus will come again. That future event is called, “the revelation of Jesus Christ.” We may die before it happens but we believe it will happen (and dying before it happens doesn’t minimize our participation in glory; see 1 Thess. 4:13-18). This keeps us going. This supplies the energy, the endurance and patience we need, to keep doing what is right!!

Whatever you are going through now that is difficult, it will not survive the second coming of Christ! When He comes, all the rough stuff people are going through will stop. When He comes, all sin will stop, and the eternal punishment will begin.

What is wrong will be made right. It will be a glorious time and if you are trying to live your life and deal with your challenges without this hope - - No wonder you are having so much trouble. Peter says, there is this grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Hope is the solid expectation that all the issues and troubles we live with today will end. This hope is based on the historical facts of who Jesus is, what He did and where He is. Respond to Him and this is the hope you can hold to.

But we must now take these facts about the basis and object of hope, and get to practice. What do we need to be doing?

Hope's Imperatives:

Be Sober. In verse 13 Peter writes this imperative to Christians: BE SOBER, OR BE SOBER MINDED. This is about the discipline of the mind. This is about your use of everything God supplies to well control your thoughts. The sending of His Son . . . The example of Christ . . . All the instruction we have in the Word . . . You can use all this to develop healthy thoughts, virtuous thoughts that will lead you into good behavior. An ole' preacher said one time: If you are having trouble with your thoughts, get more Bible in there. And he wasn't talking just about knowledge, but knowledge combined with commitment, and commitment that results in action. Between now and the time Christ comes, let's be sober minded. Let your thoughts and your emotions exist under the guidance of everything good God provides.

Be Obedient. Verse 14 says, "as obedient children." Disobedience will erode your sense of hope. You cannot expect the blessings of obedience to God if you are stuck in disobedience! So as you use the Word of God to discipline your mind and provoke the thoughts you ought to have be sure you don't miss this step: The step from knowledge into obedience. That will enrich and deepen your sense of hope that in the end, everything will be good and right.

Be Holy. Holiness may be one of the most misunderstood concepts in religious thought. We have images of people who never say anything, or who live off in secluded places. We have spent too much time letting movies and the

media form these images. To be holy simply means to be reverent; to be respectful to God and separated to His purposes in life. You can get up everyday, go to the office and be holy. You can be poor and be holy. You can be rich and be holy. You can be surrounded by people and be holy. But you can't be holy if you do not have, in your heart, mature respect for who God is. "For the Lord Most High is awesome, and He is a great King over all the earth," (Psa. 47:2). If you believe that with all your heart, you can be sober and obedient and God will regard you as holy. And while you are engaged with the world around you – you will have firm in your heart, the hope of the faithful.

There are things I know we worry about and circumstances here on earth that drive us to frustration, sometimes despair. Christians can rejoice in their confession of faith that There Is Hope.

Sweet Hour of Prayer

Psalm 28

By Bubba Garner

I was involved in a car accident. It was minor, but it was my fault. It wrecked my whole week. It was all I could think about. Until my daughter had to get three stitches in her upper lip after a close encounter with a see-saw. She became my world at that moment. Until the next morning when the daughter of one of our families suddenly collapsed and had to be placed on life support. Her father had recently finished teaching a class on the Miracles of Jesus. "We could use one right now," he said in the somber, subdued waiting room.

Life has a way of reminding you of what is truly important. Just when you have fretted over the fact that your team didn't win the big game or your car is not working right or one of the appliances needs to be replaced, you are shocked out of selfishness by something that has real value. In a moment, all of the trivial things that seemed important at the time are thrown aside so that your mind and heart can give full attention to the matter at hand. Since life is so uncertain and can change so quickly, it is also a subtle reminder that you have little control over what happens.

Staying in touch with people is critical when critical times come. We keep them informed, we update them on any progress, we let them know what

we are feeling. But we must not forget the superior form of communication, one where there is no limit on the number of minutes used, no access fees or connections charges. It is a free access to God that man has enjoyed from the beginning. Long before there were cell phones, email, and the combination thereof, there was prayer.

What is it about prayer that it can sweeten even the bitterest of times?

Prayer reassures us that the Lord is listening. David prayed in Psalm 28, “Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to Thee for help, when I lift up my hands toward Thy holy sanctuary” (28:2). Like a little child who raises his hands to be picked up by his father, David was certain that the petitions he was raising were being heard by his Father in heaven. The “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1) understood the significance of the sweet hour of prayer. But David was not the only one who had the ear of God.

The Father was listening to all the prayers offered in all the assemblies of His children on the last Lord’s day. He was listening to all of the families who bowed and “returned thanks” around their dinner tables. He heard every cry from every waiting room, emergency room, and back bedroom. How incredible to think that He who created all the world cares about what’s going on in mine. Our Lord listens.

Prayer reminds us that God can do what we cannot. Psalm 28 is David’s call for help. Perhaps it was written while he was on the run from King Saul or at a time when he felt surrounded by his enemies. But he did not strap on his armor and attempt to fight them on his own. The Lord had delivered him from the paw of the lion or bear that threatened his sheep. The Lord brought him a victory over the giant Goliath. The Lord’s power would prevail over the enemies of His anointed. “The Lord is my strength and my shield,” David confessed (Psa. 28:7). No other weaponry was necessary.

There will be occasions when our safety is threatened by the seemingly impossible, a situation that makes us admit, “I can’t do anything about it.” But God can. No matter how scary the lion or bear, no matter how tall the giant, no matter how many the enemy, no matter how bleak the diagnosis, no matter how great the difficulty. This is still our Father’s world. Trust in His strength to do what you can’t.

Prayer enables us to express our deepest cares. In this psalm, the heart of the man after God’s own heart is opened wide. In his cry for deliverance

from his enemies, David pleads for the Lord to “requite them according to their work and according to the evil of their practices” and “according to the deeds of their hands” (28:4). He is not calling for personal vengeance, but for the Lord to punish the wicked because they do not honor His work or His will. In any case, David does not hide the most intimate feelings of his heart.

God wants to hear from His people, but He is not interested in the mere repetition of meaningless phrases that do not originate from the heart. He wants us to pour out our cares before His throne, to make all our “wants and wishes known.” He will never betray our confidence; our faith in Him will never be disappointed. When David did that, he could boast, “my heart trusts in Him, and I am helped” (28:7). Perhaps our help has not come because we are still withholding from Him from Whom nothing is hidden.

I never know what to say to someone in the wake of a disaster. But I’ve learned that it’s not as important what you say at those times, but Who you say them to. Prayer can turn even the darkest hour into something sweet.

garnerbub@earthlink.net

The Early Church and the Development of the New Testament By Jon W. Quinn

The Church-Its Beginning (Acts 1-7)

The church had its beginning on the first Day of Pentecost following the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (about 30 A.D.). The Book of Acts deals with the early church in its infancy. It was at Jerusalem that the promise Jesus had made to His disciples was fulfilled as the Holy Spirit descended upon the twelve and they began to teach as the Spirit was giving them utterance (Acts 2:4). Thus the gospel age was born as the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ was publicly proclaimed for the very first time as an accomplished fact.

The Church in Transition (Acts 8-12)

The death of the first martyr, Stephen (32 A.D.), brought this period to a close. A great persecution arose against the church at Jerusalem and many disciples were forced to flee. But far from being a crushing defeat, they went

throughout the region preaching the word (Acts 8:4). There came to be disciples in such places as Samaria, Damascus and Caesarea.

The Lord saw great zeal in one of the primary persecutors, a man named Saul, and revealed Himself to him. Saul became a convert (33 A.D.). This enemy of Jesus would become a great servant of His cause. But first, Saul returned to his hometown of Tarsus where he lived for about fourteen years.

Another pivotal event took place soon after Saul's conversion. Peter was instructed to take the gospel to the first Gentiles, a Roman Centurion named Cornelius and his household (34 A.D.). Also, about this time, a strong Gentile church was established in Antioch.

The Gospel Goes Into The World (Acts 13-21:17)

This period begins with Saul beginning his ministry to take the gospel to the Gentiles. He did much traveling, taking the gospel to cities in Asia Minor and then Europe. While he would almost always begin by preaching to the Jews in their synagogues, he would also reach out to the Gentiles.

Paul undertook three well defined missionary journeys. The first, undertaken with Barnabas, went into Asia Minor (Acts 13,14).

It was between this first missionary journey and the following one that the first epistle is written, thus beginning the New Testament Scriptures. We read about a controversy that began when some of the Jewish believers thought that the Gentile converts should be required to keep the law of Moses, or at least portions of it. The apostles at Jerusalem dealt with the matter, and James, the brother of Jesus, wrote the first epistle about this time. The Epistle of James was written about 45 A.D. which was about fifteen years after the church began. It dealt with the need for both faith and works.

It was very soon after that Paul wrote his first epistle to the churches of Galatia. He and Barnabas had planted these churches during his first journey and they were chiefly made up of Gentile converts. The Book of Galatians deals mainly with freedom in Christ and that disciples are not justified by keeping the Old Law now that faith has come. This was in accordance with what the apostles had determined at Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 15.

Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:23) was taken with Silas, and Luke, the writer of Acts, was also in the group much of the time as well (49-52 A.D.). In addition to revisiting the churches of Galatia, Paul was told to

leave Asia Minor and take the gospel to Europe. He first traveled to Macedonia where he preached the gospel for the first time in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea.

After this, he traveled south to Achaia (both Macedonia and Achaia are in Greece) and preached in Athens (even discussing matters with the Greek philosophers on Mar's Hill) and also established the church at Corinth. Here Paul wrote First and Second Thessalonians. Then Paul made his way back to Palestine via Ephesus and other places.

Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:24-21:17) involved a return to Asia Minor and continuing his work among the churches there (53-56 A.D.). He was at Ephesus when he wrote the First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians. After he was forced by persecution to leave Ephesus, he visited Corinth and other churches in Greece. They had collections ready for Paul to receive to take to the needy disciples in drought stricken Judea. It was during this time that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans.

Paul traveled to Jerusalem with the gifts for the needy saints there, stopping at Miletus and having a tearful farewell with the elders from the church at Ephesus and also stopping at Troas, preaching there and partaking of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week.

Paul's Imprisonment (Acts 21:18-28:31)

A crisis was caused at Jerusalem by those opposed to Paul and the gospel of Christ. Paul was arrested after being falsely accused of violating the sanctity of the temple. He was transferred as a prisoner to Caesarea where he remained for two years (57-59 A.D.). It was here that Paul preached about Jesus to King Agrippa as well as to the Roman proconsuls Felix, and later, Festus.

Paul was sent as a prisoner by Festus to Rome where he remained a prisoner for about two more years (59-61 A.D.). Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and after that he also finished writing the Book of Acts, ending it by recording this imprisonment at Rome. Matthew probably wrote his gospel about this time as well.

Paul was also writing as well as teaching, even as a prisoner, kept under house arrest but permitted to receive visitors. During this time of imprisonment at Caesarea and Rome he wrote the Epistles to the Ephesians,

Colossians, Philemon and the Philippians. Also, Mark seems to have wrote his gospel about this time.

Paul was apparently released from prison and continued traveling and preaching for a couple more years. During this time he may have preached in Spain and he wrote First Timothy and Titus. Finally, after being arrested at Rome again, he wrote Second Timothy and shortly thereafter was executed by order of Nero, about 65 A.D.

The Closing of the Apostolic Era

Peter also was doing a great deal of traveling during this time. We know he was at Galatia before Paul wrote to the churches there. He is mentioned as being at Corinth as well. Tradition tells us he was martyred at Rome about the same time as Paul was. Peter wrote two epistles, probably very shortly before his death. Jude was probably written soon after Peter's epistles.

The date of writing of Hebrews is uncertain, but most think it before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Finally, John's Gospel, Three Epistles and the Book of Revelation close out the era, the latest date of writing being assigned to about 96 A.D., about fifty years after the first epistle, had been written. Now, we reverently use these Scriptures to prepare ourselves for Christ's return and eternity.

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

Plan #1

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

Acts 2:36-38

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

Plan #2

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

The Sinner's Prayer:

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

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

Final Page

By Warren E. Berkley

Bible Reading & Study, Like Traveling

"...that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God," (Col. 1:10)

When you read and study the Bible, think of your quest for knowledge like a two-way trip. You go to a place, stay there a while, pick up some things, then return. Once you get back, you use what you picked up on the trip.

Reading and studying the Bible, you make a trip back in time, often to strange places. You go back and visit the land of Moriah with Abraham and Isaac. You take a tour of the land of wilderness with the Israelites, or you spend some time with Isaiah who is trying to tell the people about their sin. While visiting these times and places, you pick up lessons about life.

The hope is, when you return to your present existence, you will use those lessons. In the land of Moriah with Abraham, you learn the depth of trust in God and the activity that trust causes. While touring the desert with the Israelites, you pick up some valuable warnings about temptation. As you read Isaiah, you are able to discover what ruined a society, and bring with you from that trip an awareness of what can ruin us today.

“Bridging the gap between our own world and the world of the Bible requires that we make a two-way journey. We begin by traveling from our own time and place to the ancient world of the Bible. Then we take a return trip to our own experience of life. Two questions govern our interpretation of a biblical text: What did it mean then? What does it mean now?” (From *Effective Bible Teaching*, by Jim Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, p.#96).