

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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~ All articles are written by Terry Carter unless otherwise stated ~

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Terry Carter, Editor

The Fear of the Lord...

We are all familiar with and can probably quote, the verse from Proverbs that begins with, "The fear of the Lord". We know that it is the beginning of wisdom or knowledge. We love that verse and quote that verse and rightly so.

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction." Proverbs 1:7 (NKJV)

This is a very important principle in Scripture. It is so important that it is repeated for us more than once or twice.

"And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, And to depart from evil is understanding.'" Job 28:28 (NKJV)

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever." Psalms 111:10 (NKJV)

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Proverbs 9:10 (NKJV)

As important as wisdom is, the fear of the Lord is more than just the beginning of *wisdom*. A quick search of the phrase "fear of the Lord" will

turn up a number of things that result from a fear of the Lord. In fact, there are many benefits to us when we fear the Lord.

In this article, I want to show that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of *worship*. While the phrase, "fear of the Lord" is not found in the passage I want to explore, the concept is most certainly there.

When Moses first came to Pharaoh and asked him to let the people go and worship God, he refused. Pharaoh asked who the Lord was that he should obey His voice. He said he did not know the Lord. He had no fear of the Lord at all. Where there is no fear of the Lord, there is no belief, obedience, or worship.

"And Pharaoh said, 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go.'" Exodus 5:2 (NKJV)

Pharaoh was about to find out the hard way who the Lord was. He was the one and only true God who ruled heaven and earth. Pharaoh would see that God was righteous and Pharaoh and his people were wicked.

"Thus says the LORD: 'By this you shall know that I am the LORD. Behold, I will strike the waters which are in the river with the rod that is in my hand, and they shall be turned to blood.'" Exodus 7:17 (NKJV)

"So he said, "Tomorrow." And he said, "Let it be according to your

word, that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God." Exodus 8:10 (NKJV)

"For at this time I will send all My plagues to your very heart, and on your servants and on your people, that you may know that there is none like Me in all the earth." Exodus 9:14 (NKJV)

"And Pharaoh sent and called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "I have sinned this time. The LORD is righteous, and my people and I are wicked." Exodus 9:27 (NKJV)

God sent ten plagues upon Egypt. Each one was designed to show that He was not like the gods of Egypt. He was actually executing judgment on the false gods of Egypt.

"For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD." Exodus 12:12 (NKJV)

After the final plague, the death of the firstborn, Pharaoh sent the people of Israel out of the land. He was in such a hurry to get rid of them that he didn't even wait till morning. He called Moses and Aaron by night to send them away. The people of Egypt were happy to see them go. They were afraid that they would all die if they stayed any longer.

"31 Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go

out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. 32 "Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also." 33 **And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead.""** Exodus 12:31-33 (NKJV)

They were finally free. However, it didn't take long for Pharaoh to change his mind and chase after the Israelites. Pretty soon he had them trapped with his powerful army behind them and the Red Sea before them.

Though the Israelites were afraid, God delivered them by dividing the Red Sea for them to cross on dry ground. Pharaoh's army followed them into the sea, but God brought the waters upon them and drowned every single one of them. Thus, the Lord saved Israel that day.

"28 Then the waters returned and covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the army of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them. Not so much as one of them remained...30 So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore." Exodus 14:28,30 (NKJV)

The very first thing that is said about Israel after this is that they feared and believed the Lord.

"Thus Israel saw the great work which the LORD had done in Egypt; so the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD and His servant Moses." Exodus 14:31 (NKJV)

What did this fear of the Lord and belief in Him cause them to do? It caused them to worship. Their worship is recorded immediately after the statement above. It fills most of **Chapter 15 of Exodus.**

Moses and the children of Israel sang to the Lord and worshiped. Miriam led the women in singing to Him. Their worship was joyful, praise filled, hopeful, and it contrasted the Lord

with His enemies and the false gods. You will notice that what drove this worship and praise was the fear of the Lord and belief in Him.

Fear of the Lord often led to worship in the Scriptures.

1. The first time we see Jacob worshipping God was after he feared Him.

"16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." 17 And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" 18 Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel; but the name of that city had been Luz previously. 20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, 21 "so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. 22 "And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You." Genesis 28:16-22 (NKJV)

2. When the sailors tossed Jonah overboard calming the sea, they feared and worshipped.

"15 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows." Jonah 1:15-16 (NKJV)

3. Isaiah worshipped the Lord, and desired to serve Him, after he feared Him.

"1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his

face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" 4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts." 6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged." 8 Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." Isaiah 6:1-8 (NKJV)

4. Peter fell at Jesus' knees when he feared Him.

"4 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." 6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. 7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" Luke 5:4-8 (NKJV)

5. When Jesus walked on water, the apostles feared and worshipped.

"25 Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. 26 And when the

disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid..." 32 And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God.""
Matthew 14:25-27,32-33 (NKJV)

6. At the Transfiguration, the disciples fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

"6 And when the disciples heard it, **they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.** 7 But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid.""
Matthew 17:6-7 (NKJV)

7. When John saw Jesus on Patmos, he fell at His feet as dead, but was told not to fear. "And when I saw Him, **I fell at His feet as dead.** But He laid His right hand on me, **saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last."** **Revelation 1:17 (NKJV)**

8. Ezekiel fell on his face after seeing a vision of the Lord and hearing His voice.

"28 Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. **This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. So when I saw it, I fell on my face,** and I heard a voice of One speaking. 2:1 And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you.""
Ezekiel 1:28-2:1 (NKJV)

While the words "fear" and "worship" are not found in all the passages above, the ideas are clearly there. When there is fear of the Lord, worship follows. Worship of God and fear of God go hand-in-hand in the Scriptures.

Why do people who have been delivered from sin not worship the Lord?

Why do they not tithe to Him like Jacob?

Why do they not serve Him like Isaiah? It is because they do not fear Him.

Why do people in general not worship the Lord? It is because they do not believe in Him. People fail to worship the Lord because they only see Him as Someone from Whom they can receive something. They do not see Him as the One to Whom worship should be offered.

Today many, if not most, do not think of the fear of God when they think of worship. That, it seems to me, is precisely the problem with much of what is called "worship" today.

The truth is that worship, by definition, means "to show reverence and adoration". Reverence means "to show deep respect, i.e. fear". When we fear the Lord, we cannot help but to fall before Him in worship.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of worship.

When we view worship as nothing more than a celebration or some kind of party, it is not really Biblical worship. Without a reverence for God, it can never be worship. We can celebrate without the fear of the Lord, but we really can't worship without it.

Maybe the reason so many are not changed today by our so-called "worship services" is that they lack the fear of the Lord.

You can celebrate and not be changed, but you can hardly fear the Lord without being changed. That is not to say that there is no celebration in our worship. It is to say that genuine worship must include fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of worship, and it may just be the missing ingredient in what is called "worship" today. Lack of it may be why so many fail to worship at all.



WHEN FOLLOWERS OF THE LORD DISAGREE

-- by Jerry Paul

We all have learned one of life's most obvious truths: People do not always see the same thing the same way. Attend any sporting event and you will quickly discover fans, players, coaches and even officials seeing the same play coming to different conclusions about what happened. Many times that disagreement focuses on the meaning and application of the rules. One group believes the rules allow a certain type of action while another group believes they do not. Sometimes, that results in very open and very vocal expressions against each other's beliefs and opinions. Unfortunately, this also happens between followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE LORD'S FOLLOWERS SOMETIMES DISAGREE

People within the body of Christ do not always see everything the same way. Yes, we are brothers/sisters in Christ, but our imperfections sometimes result in disagreements between us, including about spiritual matters.

It happened in New Testament times. Paul's epistles clearly indicate that Christians of his day sometimes had differing opinions about what they considered to be important issues.

The Apostle found it necessary to address this problem with the church at Rome, and in so doing provided important guidelines for addressing disagreements between believers today. We of the 21st century would do well to remember these instructions given by the Apostle Paul in **Romans 14**.

We note immediately that Paul's instruction regarding these

“disputable matters” in the body of Christ is not what we would expect.

He does not address the problematic issues. The Apostle does not announce who is right and who is wrong about the issues of conflict. Instead, he addresses the ‘disputers’ and the way they reacted toward one another. **“Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.”**

Then he describes the problem. **“One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables... One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike.” (Rom. 14:1-2,5).**

It is also interesting to note an important point about the two specific issues Paul calls **“disputable matters”** -- food and days. In fact, elsewhere the Apostle declared one side of the food issue to be right. **“But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do” (1 Cor. 8:8 NIV)**

“....no food is unclean in itself” (Rom. 14:14b NIV).

In still another place he also declared one side of the day issue to be wrong when he stated that **“religious festival(s)... New Moon celebration(s) or... Sabbath days”** were all **“a shadow of things that were to come,”** adding, **“The reality...is found in Christ” (Col. 2:16-17 NIV).**

Notice, in spite of these very clear declarations of right and wrong, Paul still calls these **“disputable matters.”** How can this be? How can any issues holding positions already declared to be right or wrong by an Apostle also be called **“disputable matters”** by that very same Apostle? Here we are confronted with a very important fact regarding these statements by Paul. He does not describe these as **“disputable matters”** because of the two issues themselves—

food/days. He calls these **“disputable matters”** because of the different levels of spiritual understanding in the believers that brought them to different conclusions, creating disagreements between them.

Why are there different spiritual levels among disciples of Christ? Several explanations and excuses could be given, but the most fundamental truth is that, unlike Christ, we do not have perfect knowledge or perfect understanding of everything. We are at different stages of spiritual growth. Some are babes in Christ in their spiritual understanding. Some are children/teen-agers in Christ. Some are young adults in Christ. Some understand matters as mature adults in Christ.

As a result of these different spiritual levels, we will sometimes come to different conclusions...even about spiritual matters...and even when a right or wrong position has already been determined in the Word. It is inevitable. Our imperfections combined with our different spiritual levels will sometimes result in **“disputable matters”** even within the body of Christ among people who faithfully study God’s Word.

When that happens, our natural human tendency often leads us to become judgmental with the brother/sister in Christ who takes different positions from what we consider to be right or wrong. Paul addressed this problem directly. **“You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother?” (Rom. 14:10a NIV).**

“Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls” (Rom. 14:3-4a NIV).

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another.” (Rom. 14:13a NIV).

“Someone else’s servant” (?). **“His own master”** (?). Yes, because . . .

ONLY JESUS CHRIST IS THE LORD

“There is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live” (1 Cor. 8:6 NIV).

“For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.... ‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me” (Rom. 14:9, 11 NIV).

Why will every knee bow to Jesus? Because He alone is the Lord...not me, not you, nor any other human being. Only Jesus! Therefore, as His committed followers, **“If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord” (Rom. 14:8b NIV)**

God never made me the owner nor put me in charge of you, your actions, or your opinions. He never made you the owner or put you in charge of me or any other brother/sister in the body of Christ. To the contrary, Paul made very clear that our attitude toward brothers/sisters in Christ is not to be one of superiority. Rather, Paul said, **“in humility consider others better than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3b NIV).**

Anytime we have an attitude or act in such a way that we are putting ourselves over someone else we need to be reminded of the foundational and fundamental truth: **Jesus is the Lord** of everything. Jesus is the Lord of the dead and the living. Jesus is the Lord over me. Jesus is the Lord of every believer around me. Jesus Christ alone is the perfect Lord, and both of us can be acknowledging this even when we are in disagreement on an issue.

“He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.” (Rom. 14:6 NIV)

Here Paul delivers an astounding truth which some find difficult to accept. It is possible for two brothers in Christ to hold opposite positions regarding an issue and both can be honoring and giving thanks to God in doing it - - even when one of them holds a position that is right and one of them holds a position that is wrong. When that happens, Paul says neither one of them is to judge the other because . . . **"To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand"** (Rom. 14:4b NIV).

"The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him." (Rom. 14:3 NIV).

Believe it or not — you and I, brothers and sisters in Christ, can **both** honor God, praise God, and thank God together, even in our imperfections...even when we disagree...even when one of us is right in our belief and the other is wrong. Furthermore, because of God's grace He will make **both** of us stand and **both** of us will still be accepted by Him.

RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISAGREEMENT

Paul does not diminish the importance of the issue of disagreement, nor does he allow us to simply shrug our shoulders and walk away. He clearly points out that as brothers/sisters in Christ we have responsibilities to fulfill, even in our disagreement.

WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO GOD

Paul instructs us, ***"Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food..."*** (Rom. 14:20a NIV)

We need to recognize... the way we handle disagreements can build the Church up in a wonderful way. **But...** because of our imperfections, the way we handle disagreements can also destroy the Church in a terrible way.

Unfortunately, there are some in the Church who carry out their work in a way that is destructive to the work of God and the Lord's Church. Some are so focused on their own ideas, their own opinions, their own methods, their own egos, that the destruction of the Church is almost inevitable. The traveling evangelist who said to this writer, *"If I haven't stirred up trouble in the Church before I leave, I know I haven't done my job in preaching the gospel,"* obviously violated Paul's very clear instructions.

Brothers/sisters, take a long and careful look at your attitudes and your methods in handling the disagreements about spiritual matters because you have a responsibility before God to work toward the strengthening of His Church.

Paul plainly told the Corinthian Christians that God does not look kindly on people in the Church who destroy His work or His temple. ***"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17 NIV).***

Understanding the full meaning of this text should lead us to take very seriously everything we say and do in the church of Jesus Christ. None of our opinions or our ideas about what should be done or how it should be done in the church, even when we may be right, are so important that we carelessly destroy God's church so we can be the one who 'comes out on top.' We have a responsibility to God to strengthen His work, **not** undermine it and destroy it with our own self-will or arrogance.

WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO OTHERS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Paul cautions us, ***"If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating***

destroy your brother for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:15 NIV).

Rather, he says, ***"Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way"*** (Rom. 14:13b NIV)

There is something much more serious than having a brother/sister disagree with you or argue against you, even when you are right. That is, holding your conviction in such a way that instead of leading that brother/sister closer to Christ you cause them to fall. Jesus said, ***"It would be better for (you) to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around (your) neck than for (you) to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves"*** (Luke 17:2 NIV).

Nothing causes people to stumble more or destroys the effective witness of the Church and of the Name of Jesus in our strife-filled world than for brothers and sisters-in-Christ to be at war with one another. Real life situations demonstrate this unfortunate fact. One lady, active in the Church her entire life, asked this writer about a new church, *"What caused the split that created this church? Isn't that the way new churches get started?"*

In another community a man attending a congregational meeting walked out declaring, *"Those people really do hate each other."*

A former atheist who had become a follower of Jesus later wrote: *"Today I quit being a Christian. It's simply impossible for me to 'belong' to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group."*

Unfortunately, these internal conflicts are often executed under the battle cry of standing up for the Truth when it is not Truth at all that is being defended, but some ***"disputable matter"*** or someone's opinion that they have labeled 'truth'.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

Perhaps Paul was thinking of our Lord's Beatitude (***Matt. 5:9***) when he

wrote, ***“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace...”*** (Rom. 14:19a NIV).

Before we sound off and ‘put down’ some brother-in-Christ who has a view about something that is different from ours (even in understanding spiritual things) we need to pause, take a deep breath, and ask ourselves, “How can I handle this in such a way that it leads to, promotes, and cultivates peace in God’s family?”

The rest of Paul’s sentence tells us how to do that. ***“Do what leads to peace and to mutual edification”*** (Rom. 14:19b NIV).

Our responsibility is not to knock down, straighten out, or straighten up our brother/sister-in-Christ. Our responsibility is to edify them -- build them up. Elsewhere the Apostle gives instructive guidance that helps accomplish this. ***“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen*** (Eph. 4:29 NIV).

Paul instructed Timothy that he was to avoid ***“foolish and stupid arguments... because... they produce quarrels.”*** (2 Tim 2:23 NIV).

Instead of quarreling about words that ruin those who listen, Paul told Timothy to gently instruct even those who oppose him ***“Keep reminding God’s people of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.”*** (2 Tim. 2:14 NIV).

A POWERFUL MOTIVATOR

Surprisingly, Paul’s conversion experience reveals a powerful motivator for doing everything we can to build up our brothers/sisters-in-Christ... the Church.

When the Lord confronted Saul (Paul) on the road to Damascus He asked a question: ***“Saul, Saul, why***

do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4 NIV).

Paul might have responded, *“What do you mean, ‘persecute You’? I’m not persecuting You. I persecute Jewish people who talk about You and live for You. I persecute this thing called ‘the Church’ but I don’t persecute You.”*

And Jesus might have then responded to Saul, *“Listen, Saul, and listen closely. Now that I’m no longer down there the Church is My body in the world. So, when you persecute the Church, when you persecute a believer, you are persecuting Me.”*

In the same way the Lord might say to us, “Look at that brother/sister-in-Christ with whom you have a disagreement. Look at that brother/sister who thinks differently than you about a disputable matter. Look at that brother/sister whose opinion on a matter is different than yours. When you stand in judgment over them, when you put them down, when you tell them off, you are standing in judgment over **Me**...you are putting **Me** down...you are telling **Me** off, because that brother/sister is part of **My** body and whatever you do to them you are doing to **Me** and **My** body.”

A FINAL POWERFUL MOTIVATOR

If knowing that our action is not just against a brother/sister-in-Christ but also an action against the Lord Himself does not help us in handling disagreements in the Body, perhaps we need to remember one more very important truth found in **Romans 14**. ***“You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God”*** (Rom. 14:10-12 NIV).

We need to remember our personal accountability to God. And because we are accountable to God, we need to . . .

BE CERTAIN ABOUT WHAT WE BELIEVE

Even when ***“One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind*** (Rom. 14:5 NIV).

We should not believe something because it is what we have always been taught or because our favorite preacher says, “This is the way it is.” Rather, we should be certain our beliefs are, in fact... our beliefs. In addition, we should know the whys and the wherefores of what we believe. Let us make sure our faith and our convictions are indeed, our own.

In this certainty, also be sure to be like the Apostle Paul who said, ***“I know whom I have believed”*** (2 Tim. 1:12b NIV).

If we only know the ‘what’ of our beliefs but leave out the ‘Who’, we will turn what we believe into rules and regulations for everyone else to follow. That will lead into those ***“stupid and foolish arguments”*** and the ***“godless chatter”*** which Paul warned against.

If we ignore the Apostle’s example and instruction, we may become more concerned about getting people to agree with what we believe than in maintaining unity within the body of Christ.

LIVE A LIFE THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH WHAT I BELIEVE

Recognizing our accountability to God should also make us open to Paul’s guidance about the relationship of our convictions with our lifestyle. ***“But if people have doubts about whether they should eat something, they shouldn’t eat it. They would be condemned for not acting in faith before God. If you do anything you believe is not right, you are sinning.”*** (Rom. 14:23 NLT).

Sometimes we get so focused on making sure our brothers/sisters-in-

Christ live according to our beliefs that we forget to make sure our own life is consistent with what we believe. In such a moment we should ask ourselves, "Is my whole life in step with the position I am taking regarding this matter?"

Nothing is more challenging in life than being consistent, especially in the realm of our spiritual convictions and practices. Before 'taking on' the brother/sister with whom we disagree it is wise to step back and look at ourselves. Are the beliefs we defend consistently lived out in our daily lives?

ABOVE ALL, FOCUS ON PLEASING GOD

In the final analysis there is only one thing that makes a difference about everything; what does God think? You may get every person you ever meet to accept every opinion you have, to agree with every issue you put before them, but if, in the final analysis, you aren't pleasing to God then all your so-called 'success' is really a complete failure.

So, brother/sister, be sure you spend more energy and more time focusing on pleasing God than you do in straightening out everyone around you who does not measure up to what you think they ought to be and believe. **"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, (not of "disputable matters") but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (Rom. 14:17-18 NIV).**



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Spiritual Lessons from Covid

My wife and I, like so many other people in our nation and world, have had Covid. We both came down with it last fall. While it was tougher than we expected and lasted much longer than we expected, we made it through without needing to go to the hospital or receive any special treatments. There are many out there who have not been so fortunate.

After having had Covid, I can say that I would not wish it on anyone. I know that for some people it is very mild, but for many it is anything but mild. However, while the experience was rather unpleasant, there are some things that I learned from it. I thought I might share some of these lessons in hopes that others can learn them without having to go through that experience.

I am intentionally staying away from politics in this article. It is more than unfortunate that politics have played such a role in this whole situation. While I was sick with Covid, I really didn't care about the politics of it at all. I wish that the politics could be taken from it even now, but I'm afraid that will not happen anytime soon. Nevertheless, I am sticking to spiritual lessons here.

First, I learned that life is fragile. You may be thinking, "of course, everybody knows that already." It is true that we all know that intellectually, but it is different when your own life is involved. We have all had close calls from time to time, but this was different for me.

For some ten days or more, my condition did not seem to be changing at all. We were monitoring our oxygen levels in case we needed to go to the hospital. Fortunately, they never dropped to that point. But every time I checked it I knew that it was possible that things were (should this say, 'could turn') turning for the worse. Living with that possibility for so many days in a row

made it crystal clear just how fragile our lives really are. Just a tiny little virus could put my very earthly existence at risk. I was reminded of the words of Job.

"In whose hand is the life of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind?" Job 12:10 (NKJV)

The truth is that our lives are always in God's hand but most days we never stop to think about that. We go to bed every night fully expecting to wake up the next day and go about our business. We leave the house in the morning fully expecting to return that evening.

Covid gave me reason to think carefully about just how unsure those thoughts really are. We need to serve the Lord to the best of our ability every day as it may be our last.

Second, the previous lesson has an immediate implication. It is that we are fully reliant on God. Again, we often realize this intellectually without living it out experientially.

My doctor's office did not want to see me at all. All they said was that I should go to the emergency room if my oxygen level dropped too low. I was hoping that I could do something to avoid that. I know that there are some treatments that may help but have been fought against by the media and some politicians. I had no way to get any of those as far as I knew. I felt completely abandoned by the medical community.

However, I knew that I had not been abandoned by God. I knew that whether I lived or died, I was completely in His hands. I relied on Him completely as there was nowhere else to turn. I knew that I wanted to be in His hands whether I lived or died. I certainly have more faith in Him than in the medical community anyhow. I prayed for myself, my wife, and others.

More than that, there were many who were praying for me too. I am convinced that that is why we never

had to go to the hospital. The Lord deserves all the praise and gratitude.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;” **Proverbs 3:5 (NKJV)**

Third, I realized that I had not been praying earnestly enough for others who had fought this disease. I had prayed for them of course. But unless they had health conditions that made them more vulnerable, I didn't take it as seriously as I should have. I really didn't realize how sick some of them had been unless they had been in the hospital.

Since I have had Covid, I have prayed much more earnestly and frequently for others. That is not just true for those with Covid. It is not the only thing that can be more serious than it seems from the “outside looking in”. We have a duty to pray for one another earnestly.

“Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you...” I Samuel 12:23 (NKJV)

Fourth, I learned just how important compassion for others can be to them. Needless to say, Lisa and I were isolated from the world for two solid weeks. For the next week after that, we tried to limit our contact with others as much as possible just to be extra careful. During that time, I got more text messages, phone calls, and cards, than I could really process. I did not have the energy to respond to all the texts in particular. I appreciated that people were concerned, but there were just too many with which to deal.

However, there are a couple of acts of kindness for which we are very grateful. One couple went to the store for us and left food outside our door. They made a point to bring things that they knew we liked. We had lost our sense of taste and smell and thus eating was more of a chore than a pleasure. We ate because we knew we needed to, not because we wanted to. We didn't even have

much appetite. Still, the food was helpful and very much appreciated. The thought behind it meant a great deal to us.

Another woman called to ask if she could bring us a natural supplement that she had read might help. I was happy to try it as nothing else had helped for over a week and a half by that time. She left it outside our door. As far as I can tell, it didn't help with Covid at all, but it greatly boosted our spirits. Her thoughtfulness and compassion were just what we needed at that time, and it was greatly appreciated.

This all makes me realize just how much a “small” act of kindness can mean to someone who is suffering and feeling alone. Although Lisa and I were isolated together, neither of us was much company for the other. Still, I can't imagine how it would have been if we hadn't gone through it together. Covid is not the only thing that can make someone feel that way. It is important to consider others who might need some compassion and deliver it to them.

“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward.” Matthew 10:42 (NKJV)

Fifth, I realized how important it is to assemble with God's people. Obviously, we could not meet with the Church for a couple of weeks. I intentionally arrived late, left early, and stayed in the fellowship area the third week just to be careful. I could not teach my classes at Summit for two weeks, either. It was longer than that before I was able to teach again on Wednesday night.

Being away for that long made me realize just how important that fellowship is. I got a taste of that during the shutdowns in early 2020, but this was different. Then I was still able to talk on the phone, text, watch services online, write sermons and record them, etc. I didn't feel nearly as isolated from fellow Christians then as I did while fighting Covid.

I am an introvert by nature and generally don't mind being alone now and then. In fact, I enjoy some time alone every so often. But I can't imagine how people can make it through life without the support and fellowship of other Christians.

Introvert or not, we need each other in our Christian walk. We need to be there for others, and we need others to be there for us. No wonder we are not to forsake the assembly but are to consider one another.

“24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” **Hebrews 10:24-25 (NKJV)**

It is my prayer that we can all learn these lessons. Hopefully you can do that without being sick. If you have already had Covid you probably understand. If you haven't had it, I pray that you won't get it. Either way, I hope to remember these lessons for the rest of my life. Perhaps you will too.

Summit's School of Preaching Spring Semester 2022

**Begins Jan. 11, 2022-May 5, 2022
Spring Break Apr 4-8, 2022**

TUESDAY

6:30-8:30 PM “Job” – 2 Cr. Hrs.

Instructor: Shane Capps

6:30-8:30 PM “1&2 Tim./Titus – 2 Cr. Hrs.

Off-Campus Class in Madison, IN

Instructor: Kendall Faul

WEDNESDAY

9-Noon “Apologetics” – 3 Cr. Hrs.

Instructor: Kendall Faul

1:30-4:30 PM “Christian Ethics” 3 Cr. Hrs.

Instructor: Jerry Paul

THURSDAY

9-Noon “Hermeneutics” – 3 Cr. Hrs.

Instructor: Terry Carter

1:30-4:30 PM “Gospels 2” – 3 Cr. Hrs.

Instructor: Shane Capps

6:30-8:30 PM “2 Corinthians” – 2 Cr. Hrs.

Instructor: Terry Carter