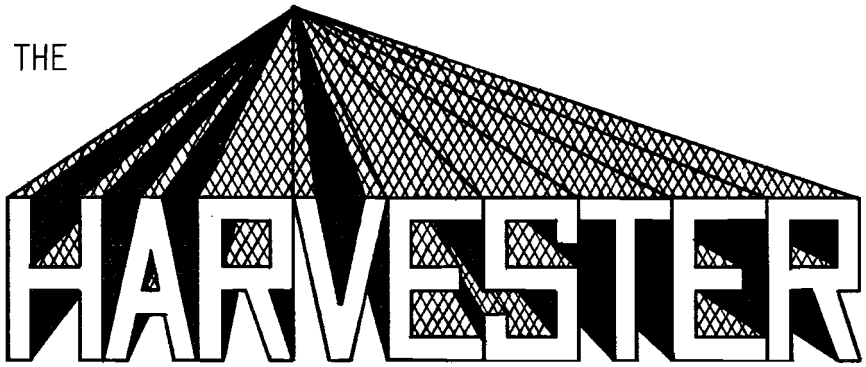


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*"Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2)*

May 1989

No. 041

## BECAUSE OF UNBELIEF

To be rejected by one's own people and in one's own country can be quite disheartening. Such was the treatment that Jesus received when he returned home to Nazareth. He was condemned by his own countrymen! *"But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief."* (Mark 6:4-6)

It should be noteworthy that Jesus *"did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief"* (Matt. 13:58). It is not that He COULD NOT do them nor that He was physically unable because we know that with God all things are

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possible (Matt. 19:26). Did He not lay His hands on a few of the sick and successfully heal them? The point is, then, that Jesus did not cure them all (perform many mighty works) due to the people's lack of faith. It was their own unbelief that made them undeserving or unworthy candidates for God's blessings. It appears the same situation exists today.

Certainly this is an age of skepticism. Everywhere people are doubting the words of the Bible and disregarding God's warnings. Parents are teaching their children in an indirect way to question every command from above and, "just because there is a 'Thus saith the Lord', that doesn't make it so!" This attitude of disagreeing with the Holy Scriptures has now come to the point where even if folk were told the gospel Truth, many would still shake their head in unbelief. *"Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe."*(Luke 22:67)

The question now comes to us: How strong and how sincere is our faith? Do we truly believe in God's word and in places called heaven and hell? Do we believe that salvation will really come to those who obey the gospel and that we must actually live a sober and righteous life? Or is our faith one that has been inherited because "we have always been brought up to believe that way"?

There are many in our society who do not seem to believe in God's presence at all. *"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."*(Psa. 53:1) But as we see the beauty of the world around us, it is very difficult to ignore His Almighty omnipotence. Though the evolutionists disagree, *"through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God"* (Heb. 11:3). The only "concrete" explanation behind the creation of our universe is the presence of

a Supreme Being, i.e., God (Gen. 1:1). So tell me, how can the athiest deny God's existence? The answer is simple: because of unbelief.

Neither do people today have much faith in God's power. This includes some members of the Lord's church. If our faith in the Lord is as strong as it should be, then most of us would not be sinning as much as we do. We would heed his commandments and we would manifest more fear of God's wrath, knowing that "*it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Heb. 10:31). If we really respected Christ, we would be doing more personal work for Him and we would study more diligently and we would attend the services more faithfully. Because of our weak faith, we also do not pray like we should. Our prayers are too few and too feeble and not fervent enough. Yes, it does seem that our faith is not as it should be.

The New Testament has many examples of the disciples' shortcomings due to their "lack of faith". There was the time when such a great storm arose in the sea that it dearly frightened Jesus' disciples. "*And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?*" (Matt. 8:26) Again, at the sea of Galilee, Peter was walking on the water. But seeing the wind around him, he started to sink. After catching Peter, Jesus "*said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*" (Matt. 14:31) And then there was the time when Jesus' disciples could not cast the devil out of a child. Why? "*And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*" (Matt. 17:20)

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These illustrations of unbelief should be a lesson to each one of us. If our faith is weak, we too can fall short of our goal. A person unsure of his faith will be scared every time a storm approaches in his life. Someone of "little faith" will find himself constantly sinking in a sea of doubts. And because of unbelief, there will be times when people will not be able to perform good works or to enjoy God's blessings.

Brethren, there is a dire need to strengthen our faith--in the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, in ourselves and the world around us. *"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."*(Eph. 6:16) We need to bolster our faith so much that it will lead us to do works of obedience such as the faith heroes in Hebrews 11 did. By faith, Abel..Noah ...Abraham...Isaac...Jacob...Joseph...Moses and a host of others performed deeds of righteousness. These men knew the principle: *"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."*(Jas. 2:17) Faith, by itself, cannot save but it is a very important stepping-stone toward salvation.

We close with this poignant warning from the word of God. *"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."* (Heb. 3:12) Brethren, this is directed to you and me. A

weak faith or a state of unbelief will cause a man to have an evil heart. This, in turn, will cause that man to depart from the Heavenly Father. Certainly this is not the direction we wish to take.

RAY McMANUS

## SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES!

1. How long did Moses' mother have him before she hid him in the bulrushes?
2. What did God have Jeremiah hide in the rocks at Euphrates?
3. What were some people perverting in the churches of Galatia?
4. The Psalmist asked God to open his lips so that his mouth would do what?
5. What book of the Bible never mentions the name of God?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH ...

and remember last month's questions?

1. Who heard the Lord marching in the tops of mulberry trees? DAVID (2 Sam. 5:24,25)
2. How many sons did Moses have? TWO (Exo. 18:3-5)
3. If it were physically possible, what would the people of Galatia have given to Paul? THEIR EYES (Gal. 4:15)
4. According to Ecclesiastes, what does a bribe do to the heart of a man? DESTROYS IT (Eccl 7:7)
5. Why did Adam call Eve "woman"? BECAUSE SHE WAS TAKEN OUT OF MAN (Gen. 2:23)

## PROXY RELIGION

When my wife and I owned shares in a mutual fund we received, at least once a year, a card asking us to appoint a proxy to vote for us at an upcoming stock-holders' meeting. This was a convenient way for us to vote since we could not afford to attend the meeting in person, and since we could own so few shares, would not have bothered to attend the stock-holders' meeting if we had been able to afford it. There is, in the business world, a definite place for transactions by proxy.

Business by proxy has crept into the church until, we fear, many members have a proxy religion, i.e., want to conduct their religion by proxy. As children of God living in the New Testament age we are commanded to *"Give diligence (study) to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright (rightly dividing) the word of truth."* (1 Tim. 2:15) Since *"much study is a weariness of the flesh"* (Eccl. 12:12), and since a proxy is so handy, some say, by action, "elders (deacons, teachers, preacher), you study for me." One brother, when asked the meaning of a passage of Scripture said something like, "I don't know what that means, I don't remember what brother McGarvey said about it." Evidently brother J.W. McGarvey, although dead, held his proxy.

When the subject of personal work (teaching the lost the way of salvation) comes up we see religion by proxy bloom into action (or, more realistically, bloom into lack of action). Of course we all know that Paul told Timothy, *"And the things which thou hast heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also"* (2 Tim. 2:2), but evidently many believe, as one woman stated, "We pay the preacher to do

our teaching for us." Her contribution was, in her mind, the equivalent of my signing the mutual fund proxy card.

Money, particularly the Lord's day contribution (1 Cor. 16:1,2), is the proxy card for many members of the church. We learn from the New Testament that *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."* (Jas. 1:27) Never mind that the word translated "to visit" (Gr. episkeptomai) means "to look upon or after, to inspect, examine with the eyes." (Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, p. 242) or that according to M.R. Vincent, "James strikes a downright blow here at ministry by proxy, or by mere gifts of money" (Word Studies in the New Testament, p. 350), or that "Pure and undefiled religion demands personal contact with the world's sorrow to visit the afflicted, and to visit them in their affliction" (Ibid.), some church members claim to have fulfilled their duty because the congregation sent a contribution to an orphan home or homes. Some congregations may spend a whole dollar per member per week on institutional orphan care (it is generally closer to 10¢ per member per week), and then want to berate the "do-nothing antis" who oppose institutions to do the work God gave the church to do. Such attempt to salve their conscience into believing that the dollar or dime qualifies them for "pure and undefiled religion."

When the orphans or foster home children are in your home or you are helping the widows and/or afflicted clean their houses, mow the grass, etc., then you can look to James 1:27 with a conscience void of offense toward God and know that you have visited them "in their affliction." Institutional orphan homes are, without

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a doubt, monuments to the impure and defiled religion of those who practice religion by proxy.

W.V. BEASLEY  
"Oak Ridge Bible Reader"  
Feb. 10, 1980  
(Submitted by Buster Boyd)

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## GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Place &amp; Time</u>	<u>Speaker</u>
May 1-7	Hopkinsville, OH 7:30 pm	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 8-12	Blanchester, OH 7:30 pm	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
May 21	Antioch Church Livingston, TN	Harry Cobb (Birmingham, AL)
May 28- June 3	Pleasant Ridge Church Woodbury, TN	Wilbur Bass (Auburn, AL)

### MORE INFORMATION ON OUR SUMMER GATHERING ...

These studies this year concern the Restoration Movement and are generating much interest. Arrangements have been made to begin at Ashlock on Monday night, June 19 and to conclude there on Friday morning, June 23. We are scheduled to drive up to Cane Ridge Meetinghouse (erected in 1791) on Wednesday morning and over to Old Mulkey Meetinghouse (erected in 1804) on Thursday morning. These old, log meetinghouses are to be used for our meetings, as they were by churches of Christ long, long ago. The list of speakers include: Harry Cobb, Jim Pritchard, Ray McManus, Tom Gentry, Bill Stone, Herman Watson, Gerald Carter, Bill Yarbrough, Thad Eubank, Kenneth Cobb, James McDonald, Orion Allen & Sam Dick.

It would be our pleasure if you could plan your vacation and be with us for this spiritually centered gathering at Kentucky.