

BULLETIN

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Volume 3, No. 14

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March 2014

REALITY FROM THE WORD

By Andrew Brown

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the LORD, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph. 4:1). Ephesians begins by setting forth the position of believers in the dispensation of the grace of God, while the concluding chapters instruct on the worthy walk. There Paul teaches a goal of believers of all times to *“preserve the unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3).* He contrasts this with God’s working in the Acts period, when He gave measured gifts to men and they became apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (shepherds) and teachers *“for the equipping of the saints for the work of service” (Eph. 4:11, 12).* (Note: Most verses from NASB version.)

God equipped many with remarkable gifts and experiences to carry out His work. Paul, for example, heard directly from the Lord. God showed Paul *“how much he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9:16).* Much of what Paul heard and saw is undisclosed, but his resume of visions and revelations from the LORD is lengthy. God’s visions were so vivid Paul was uncertain whether or not he was there physically (2 Cor. 11).

Living in the dispensation of grace, which started at Acts 28:28, God does not supply direct visions and words. Heaven is silent. Believers are shut up to the inspired Word of God alone. It might seem like a bitter deal to not experience manifest revelation, yet God has not left us without hope. We hold greater blessing having believed without seeing (John 20:29). Our gracious Lord has supplied us with an even more certain sufficiency. *“So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention in your hearts as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” (2 Pet. 1:19).* As we respond with belief, God’s Word becomes our vision and reality to lean on in these dark, silent times, and is more certain than receiving an experience from the Lord.

How so, if God-given experience was so amazing and real? Consider Matthew 24. Jesus was directly teaching His disciples about what they would see unfold as “signs” of His *Parousia* after the great testing. Peter was there, hearing the words directly from God; words that would be crucial to not being deceived in that future time. Immediately following Christ’s discourse, however, Peter, along with all of the soon-to-be-commissioned apostles, could have repeated only a couple of phrases word for word. As time passed and memory faded they

would recall even less. In His wisdom, the Lord Jesus covered for their forgetfulness by stating “this generation,” in His words, would “not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). They would be recorded exactly as spoken. We, as well as the disciples when resurrected, can turn to the MORE SURE WORD many times to consider what He said.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, NKJV). The out-positioned men of the Acts period were not equipped as we are! Though we did not sit with Jesus during His discourses or see miracles, God made it possible for us to be “thoroughly equipped.” God gave us Scripture to know precisely what He wants us to know. God’s Word brings us to front row seats at amazing events throughout the history of His dealings with man. *“The Word of God is living and powerful” (Heb. 4:12, NKJV).* Scripture corrects our hearts, teaches us the deep truths of God, and enables us to know our Savior. His Word truly is a light for our path, and a shield and sword against attack from the enemy’s lies.

We have been gifted with the *full armor of God!* The Word is the armor *“so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm” (Eph. 6:13).* We not only can resist sin, we can stand strong. With God working secretly through grace, the silencing of miraculous manifestations caused many of the Acts period saints to fall back: *“you are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me” (2 Tim. 1:15).* They stumbled in this day, but possessing God’s completed Word enables us to stand firm like a *“tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither” (Psa. 1:3).* Unlike those of the Acts period who fell away in the dispensation of grace, Paul met the change with a noble attitude of faith, teaching others to do the same. *“I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12).*

We have all we need to take hold of a close relationship with Him, and the mindset (disposition, *phroneo*) necessary to produce the life Christ Jesus desires us to have. The Bible is easily accessible to us, yet its value in every respect is immeasurable. (Psa. 19:11, 119:72). We have the completed Word (Col. 1:25) and the rewarding opportunity to read and apply our minds diligently to it! *“The sum of the Word is truth.” (Psa. 119:160)* Studying the entirety of God’s written Word, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and believing its truth supplies God’s unshakable vision and reality.

As we incorporate the sum of the Word into our minds, it instills God’s vision and the foundation from which we understand and respond to everything. When circumstance arises or information confuses, we can receive all things in light of the truth God has provided. *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matt. 7:24).* Let us build on the rock, *“holding fast the word of life” (Phil. 2:16), walking worthy.*



RESTORING ACTS PERIOD CONDITIONS

By Nathan C. Johnson

Many who recognize the problems that exist in modern-day Christianity feel a need to get back to the way things were among believers soon after Christ left the earth. They believe that the book of Acts is full of examples as to how believers should live, and decide that what is needed to revitalize Christianity today is to restore the conditions that prevailed in the Acts period.

(Editor's Note: The people who are trying to replicate the conditions of the Acts Period are not aware that God did a miraculous thing in giving the believers back then the manifest gifts of the Holy Spirit. See Acts 2 for the introduction of these gifts. However, these abilities were gone after Acts 28:28. See also Philippians 1:6.) (Verses from the NKJV.)

One idea to restore Acts period conditions is to restore the miracles of Acts. Around 1901, a movement started in the United States attempting to revive the Biblical gift of tongues as a means of empowerment by the Holy Spirit. The first proponents of this movement believed that by the gift of tongues the need for missionaries to learn foreign languages before going on the mission field could be eliminated. This is what the gift of tongues did in Biblical times (Acts 2:11). However, though millions of Christians worldwide engage in the “tongues” promoted by this movement, they have done nothing to break down the language barrier. Attempts to restore healing and other miraculous gifts equally do not live up to the powerful works of Acts. There is no going back to the Acts period this way.

Others suggest meeting in homes will restore Acts period conditions. They claim that the original churches were all house churches, and that is the way things are “supposed to be.” Does the Biblical evidence actually bear this claim out? There certainly were no “church buildings” like today in Acts. Yet where did those early believers meet? Acts 2:46 makes it clear. “*So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.*” (See also Acts 5:42.) The early believers met “in the temple.” The buildings of the temple here are called “houses,” just as the temple itself is called the “house of God.” We clearly cannot restore meeting in the temple today.

As the believers scattered out from Jerusalem, the evidence for any kind of “house meetings” remains thin. Paul began his Acts period ministry proclaiming in the Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:5). In Philippi, Paul met with the Jews by a riverside where the women went to pray (Acts 16:13). In Corinth, when he was forced out of the synagogue, Paul met with the believers in a house next door to the synagogue (Acts 18:7). In Ephesus when the same thing happened, he departed from the synagogue and started teaching in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). Paul also mentions “the church” in peoples’ houses, as in Romans 16:5, “*Likewise greet the church that is in their house,*” referring to Priscilla and Aquila. Similar verses are I Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, and Philemon 1:2. Yet when we come to a Biblical understanding of the Greek word *ekklesia*, we realize that this refers to out-called individuals living in the households of these people, and not to any kind of “home church” meeting. The evidence of the Bible is that believers met wherever they could get a place, and not exclusively in homes. Forming “house churches” is not an effective way to restore Acts period conditions.

Ideas abound for restoring the Acts church. One group tries to pattern themselves after Paul’s salutations by naming themselves after the city in which they meet (such as “the Church of God in Minneapolis”). Most significantly, they ignore the fact that to be *ekklesia* is to have a position out of God, which they do not have over these cities. Today, as I Timothy 2:5 makes plain, “*There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*”

Other groups think that naming their leaders “apostles,” “elders,” “deacons,” or just the right word will make them like Acts. Others think that practicing “church discipline” like Christ sets it forth in Matthew 18:15-17 will make them like Acts.

Ultimately, these people are so anxious to figure out how they COULD restore Acts period conditions that they never ask themselves if they SHOULD attempt to do this. The reality is that the work that God was doing in Acts has been completed. The Acts period was based on the commission Christ gave in Mark 16:15, “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel in every creation.*” This commission was fulfilled, as Colossians 1:23 reveals, “*The gospel which you heard, which was preached in every creation under heaven.*” At that time, the miraculous signs of the Acts period ended. After this, even Paul could not heal his dear friend Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25-27), had to advise Timothy to take wine for his stomach (1 Tim. 5:23), and left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). After Acts, many of the *ekklesia* turned away from the truth, as Paul testifies those in Asia did (2 Tim. 1:15). His consequent advice to Timothy is: “*The things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*” (2 Tim. 2:2).

These great changes took place at Acts 28:28, when the salvation-bringing message of God was authorized to the nations. The work God was doing in the Acts period drew to a close, and God is now working only in “grace” (Eph. 3:2) and in “secret” (Eph. 3:9). Until God brings in His future kingdom, it will not be possible for anyone to restore the conditions of the Acts period.

Instead of trying to resurrect a work that God Himself brought to a full stop, we should be conforming ourselves with God’s work today, learning of it from the later letters of Paul like Ephesians and Colossians. If we will do this, then we will find ourselves in line with what God actually intends for believers today. If not, if instead we try to restore the conditions of the Acts period, we will only be frustrated, and we will only fail.



THOUGHTS FROM THE EDITOR

Jane S. Hancock

Introducing Andrew Brown: I gave up the front page to showcase one of our new writers for The Word of Truth Ministry **Bulletin** and for **More Seed & Bread**—Andrew Brown. Andy, a gifted young Bible student from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, spoke at our October Conference last year. Nathan Johnson also spoke at the conference. We are featuring articles by both of them in this issue of the WOTM **Bulletin**.

Mailing Inserts: Look for Andy’s **More Seed & Bread**, “What Did Josiah Create?” with this mailing. Also look for an MP3 disk of the October 2013 WOTM Conference. On the disk are “Foreshadowing the Kingdom” by Nathan Johnson, “Kingdom Realities” by Andrew Brown, “Who Is Jesus Christ?” by Louis Tonetti, “The Revolt in Zechariah” by Nathan Johnson, and “Final Words” by Milton Hammond.

Sin: Would you like to join the conversation? We have been discussing the topic of “sin” at our Sunday meetings. The big question has been: “What defines sin in the Dispensation of Grace?” We do not have an answer that satisfies everyone. If you join in the conversation and

use Biblical references, make sure you know when the words were said or written and to whom they were said or written. Also see Joanne Johnson's article on the last page of this Bulletin.

Save the Date: See below. Rusty Hancock and I have already reserved our flights. Come join us.

SAVE THE DATE

September 21 and 22, 2014

A Word of Truth Ministry

Midwest Bible Conference In

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Theme: "What Happened After Acts

28:28—Considering God's Current

Work."

Speakers: Nathan Johnson and

Andy Brown.

More information including final conference agenda, hotel recommendations in next Bulletin.



Errata

The two *More Seed & Breads*, enclosed with the December 2013 Bulletin mailing, were both erroneously numbered "294."

"Traces of the Early Kingdom of God" by M.B. Hammond should have been No. 294, and "Why Did Jesus Die?" by James Witt should have been No. 295.



Bible Study Audio Disks

By Otis Q. Sellers, Bible Teacher

The entire Tape Library (TL) series, consisting of numbers TL-001 to TL-570, is available on MP3 compact disks. A complete subjects list may be obtained from our Web site, www.seedandbread.org, or the home office in Pasadena, CA, or writing/e-mailing:

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WHAT IS SIN? WHAT IS EVIL?

By Joanne L.H. Johnson

We were studying in the New Testament (N.T.) one Sunday and the questions came up: “What is ‘sin’? And how does it compare to ‘evil’?” Here we will study the differing views on what “sin” and “evil” mean.

The original sin of Adam and Eve (as found in Gen. 2:8-3:18) was that they were given a word from God to eat the fruit of any trees of the Garden of Eden except of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and that they would surely die if they ate of it. Eve was beguiled by the subtle serpent, who lied to her and told her that she would not surely die and would be like God to know good and evil. So Eve tried out the fruit and gave some of it to Adam. And when they both ate of it, God asked what had they done, and later told them that they had sinned and would surely die. That was it—they disobeyed God.

The second sin on earth (found in Gen. 4:1-15) was when Cain killed his brother Abel for giving a sacrifice more pleasing to God than his own. He originally had a word from God and sinned. And it was evil, which became sin that he killed Abel, thus disobeying God.

Here we begin with the definitions that were taught by the late Otis Q. Sellers. “Sin” is “missing (falling short of) the mark (God’s high standard of righteousness).”

“Evil” is that which is bad for mankind. For example, Satan is the epitome of all evil. He was a liar and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). God’s high-standard opposite is “*Thou shalt not bear false witness*” (don’t lie, Exod. 20:16) and “*Thou shalt not kill*” (don’t kill, Exod. 20:13).

All sin is evil, but not all evil is sin. In the Word of God, Isaiah 45:6-7 (KJV) says about evil: “*That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside Me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace (“well-being,” NASB) and create evil (“calamity,” NASB). I the LORD do all these things.*”

In *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* there appears a definition, partially quoted here, by Henry L. Carrigan, Jr., of the word “evil” which says: “. . . *The prophetic literature urges individuals and the community to turn from evil ways and to walk in the ways of the Lord. . . . Idolatry is also evil because the individual or community is unfaithful to the covenant with God (Deut. 4:25; 1 Kings 11:6).*” Later, it says: “. . . *Writers in the N.T., as in the O.T., describe evil primarily as moral corruption and a violation of God’s laws. In His teachings, Jesus makes a clear distinction between evil and good (Matt. 5:45; 13:49), and He describes His opponents, notably the Pharisees, as an ‘evil and adulterous generation’ (12:34, 39). Evil originates in the heart (Mark 7:21-23) and describes a person’s actions (John 3:19), thoughts (Matt. 15:19), and speech (Jas. 3:8).*”

Also found in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* is the definition, partially quoted here by Clayton N. Jefford, of sin as “*A reality signifying the broken relationship between God and*

humanity. The occasions by which this relationship breaks, the need to recognize this rupture, and the avenues for salvation are detailed in endless situations throughout the Scriptures. . . .

In the *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (10th edition) it principally defines "sin" as: "1.a: an offense against religious or moral law; 1.b: an action that is or is felt to be highly reprehensible; 1.c: an often serious shortcoming: fault; 2.a: transgression of the law of God; 2.b: a vitiated state of human nature in which the self is estranged from God. . . ."

Also in the *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (10th edition), "evil" is mainly defined as: "1.a: morally reprehensible: sinful, wicked; 1.b: arising from actual or imputed bad character or conduct. . . ."

Romans 1:18-32 tells us what sin and evil really is—they are the opposite of following God's righteous law. See the difference of doing good in comparison to evil in Romans 2:1-29. Read Romans 3:1-31 and Galatians 5:16-26 for more contrasts about sin and following the law or doing that which is right in God's eyes.

Colossians 2:8-17 tells us about things which people try to get other people away from God, which is wrong or evil. And read another distinction about what Christ expects from you in Colossians 3:1-24. Read or be familiar with your N.T. for more contrasts in doing right from wrong or good from evil.

An example of Scriptural usage of the word "sin" is found in Romans 6:23, which says: "*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

In an interesting usage of the word "evil" in Scripture, John 17:14-17 says: "*I have given them (Christ's disciples) Thy Word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I (Jesus Christ) am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy Truth: Thy Word is Truth.*"

Hence we have some definitions and usages of both "sin" and "evil" in the Scriptures. Familiarity with one's Bible is the key to knowing what is "sin" and what is "evil." Like it says in the Lord's Prayer: ". . . *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*"