

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING SOLOMON

by Danny Tunnell

A fellow asked a preacher to pray for him that he would never be tempted to sin again. The minister responded, "Okay, you want me to pray that you will die?" Temptations are not going to stop while we live. It is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus, Himself, was tempted (Matthew 4:1-11; Hebrews 4:15). Temptation is not sin. It's a sin to yield to it, to do it.

Why would Christians give in to temptation when they know it is wrong? Part of you wants it, and part of you might love it (Hebrews 11:25). James 1:12 tells us, "Blessed is the man that endures temptation." He doesn't give in to it.

Knowledge puffs up, love builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1). You cannot have enough knowledge that it makes you incapable of sin. That includes knowledge of God, and of scripture, and understanding of the wisdom of God. It is not enough to keep you from sinning.

And yet, knowledge of the Bible is essential. Knowing the word enables us to not be confused about what is good or bad (Hebrews 5:14). If you

don't know what is bad, you won't know what to resist. If you don't know what is good, you won't know what to pursue. "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11).

There is not enough knowledge to keep you from sinning. Why? Because it's about what you love; it's about a choice, and it's about desire.

"God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much" (1 Kings 4:29). Solomon's wisdom excelled everybody's. He was wiser than all men (1 Kings 4:30,31). Solomon had greater wisdom than all the kings that went before him or came after him (2 Chronicles 1:12).

Solomon, without question, was the wisest and had the most knowledge. He wrote thousands of proverbs and songs, and he knew about plants and animals (1 Kings 4:31-34). He was a "walking encyclopedia," but that didn't keep him from missing God. He did not end well.

There was a time when Solomon was close to God; nobody had ever seen the like. He built the magnificent

temple. God gave him victory and peace on every side (1 Kings 5:4). The queen of Sheba came from her country just to see what she had heard about. She said, "The half wasn't told me" (1 Kings 10:1-7).

Solomon loved strange women (1 Kings 11:1). God had warned him that these women will surely turn his heart after their gods (1 Kings 11:2). Solomon must have thought, "That won't happen. I can handle it." He had seven hundred wives, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned away his heart (1 Kings 11:3). This happened to the smartest man on earth by a long shot.

Solomon failed to do what God told him to do. A preacher was asked, "what is the most important thing you've learned in 50 years of ministry?" He answered, "That God is smarter than I am."

What would have protected Solomon? Separation! (2 Corinthians 6:17). Separation is safety. Put some distance between you and what's tempting you to sin.

— Miami, OK

ADMITTING WRONG

By Roger Johnson

You probably have not heard that phrase very frequently . . . especially among politicians. Oh, they might when they have been caught red-handed in something. It makes you wonder if they would have continued doing the wrong if they had not been caught.

I was taught that wrong is wrong, even if you are not caught.

I suppose it's human nature, but we don't like to admit that we have been wrong about anything. Consequently, we tend to rationalize and, in other ways, seek to justify ourselves. We put the best twist we can on something in order to make ourselves look good.

Admitting that we have been wrong, that we have sinned, is the most difficult challenge in becoming a Christian. Yet repentance is a requirement before one is baptized into Christ. Before repentance can take place, a person must realize that he has

sinned, admit it, and have a change of heart and mind that results in a change of life. On Pentecost, believers were told to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Simon the sorcerer, a baptized believer, was told to repent and pray that the intention of his heart might be forgiven him (Acts 8:22).

A notable example of people who failed to repent, but attempted to cover up their transgression and deceive others is that of Ananias and Sapphira. The apostle Peter said that in doing so, they lied to God (Acts 5:4). They paid the ultimate penalty for doing so. You may deceive yourself and others, but you cannot deceive God. He knows what is in man (John 2:25).

Whether we ever admit it or not, wrong is still wrong. We might rationalize the wrong in our own mind and say it is okay, but just because we think something is all right doesn't make it so.

Non-Christians need to repent and be baptized. Fallen Christians need to repent and pray. - Phil Campbell, AL

"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sin" (Acts 2:38).

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Old Paths

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"ask for the old paths" (Jer. 6:16)

GOOD NEWS!

by Milton Smith

I rather imagine that you have either said - or had someone say to you - the old expression, "Heard any good news lately?" It is possible that the average person might hear this question (or one similar) several times a year. Many times we ask this question as a mere greeting to friends. Or maybe this question might be asked to "jump start" a conversation. Sometimes we may simply suggest it in an almost mocking manner, implying that "good" news is hard to come by these days.

Within the context of mere human life, good news can often be a rare thing. In some parts of the world living conditions are so abysmal that any news that might brighten a person's life is almost impossible to find.

Most of us are aware of the fact that the word "gospel" actually means "good news." The Christian needs to fully realize that we have a wonderful opportunity each day to present this unequalled good news to friends and family members alike.

If you know someone who is in a lost condition, chances are they are desperately seeking after some good news in their life. You can do this person an enormous favor that carries with it eternal blessings! When the opportunity presents itself, give them the best news they will ever hear!

Are we seriously to believe that it was nothing more than an accident - a mere happenstance - that God chose a word that literally means "good news" for the divine message that we are charged to deliver to the world?

The apostle Paul once persecuted Christians because they promoted this "good news." He was confronted one day by Jesus while traveling on the road to Damascus. Paul's mission on this trip was a simple one: If he found any Christians, whether they were men or women, he was going to arrest them and bring them, bound, back to Jerusalem. Many of them might likely be put to death. But Paul met Jesus on that historic trip and was baptized and became a Christian a few days later. After learning the truth about the glorious gospel of Christ, he would later write, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

What a change!

Paul would spend the rest of his earthly life traveling the world to bring the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ to those lost in sin. Today, you and I have the same privilege. Let's not waste such a blessed opportunity.

Heard any "good news" lately?

— Tulsa, OK

THE ELDERSHIP: WHO QUALIFIES?

by Dalton Key

The qualities expected of elders in the Lord's church may be found in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and in Titus 1:7-10. Much has been said and written over the years concerning the proper interpretation of these attributes and the strictness with which they should be applied. The issue has at times produced heated word-wars among us, in some cases dividing brethren and splitting congregations.

One view insists upon an ultra-rigid, unbending treatment of the qualifications, requiring near, if not total, perfection from prospective candidates on every point. And because no one is without some faults, some weaknesses, no one is ever seen as altogether qualified.

Another view, at the opposite extreme, sees the Bible's requirements as little more than toothless suggestions, to be modified or even ignored altogether, in order to suit the will and whim of the members.

It is true that some of the requirements are both firm and permanently "set in stone". The one wife rule speaks for itself. A prospective elder either "rules his own house well," "having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination," or he doesn't. Is he "not given to wine?" Is he true to the Scriptures, "holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught?" Many of the qualifications are "either, or," "yes, or no" matters.

Other attributes are often more difficult to navigate. A man must be "not self-willed, not quick-tempered," but to what degree? How hospitable must he be? How many years of Christian service are required to move him past the "novice" stage?

In such areas of degree, one's ability to lead and put forth a worthy example should be considered. Elders serve as spiritual leaders, as "examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). A man may not be (as no one is) perfectly perfect in these areas, but the question should be: does he serve as a Christ-like example with respect to them? Is he a man the congregation can safely and comfortably follow?

If a man can't be looked up to, as a real-time example of Christianity, what right has he to lead or oversee the body of Christ? And what effectiveness would he have if selected?

Further, a few requirements are clearly self-evident. Elders must be "elders," older men of sufficient age and maturity to warrant respect. Leaders must be capable of leading. And they must be leading a body willing to follow them. Leadership absent fellowship leads, finally, to either impotency or tyranny.

The church needs - as never before - qualified men who desire and are willing to serve in this noble service. May the Lord bless His church to this end!

LIGHT YOUR CANDLE!

by Bobby Key

Did you ever enter into dimly-lit surroundings and experience difficulty in seeing, only to have your eyes get used to the dark? Funny, isn't it, how easy it is to get used to the dark? As strange as it is how we get used to physical darkness, it is also strange how we may grow comfortable with the darkness of ignorance and sin.

We are living in the dark! Listen to God's Word: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). The depths of present-day depravity are too wretched for us to describe. We have our broken homes, mate swapping, alcohol, profanity, corrupt and dishonest business deals, trashy movies, vulgar novels, pornography, illicit drug use - and the list goes on and on. Yes, our world is a dark one!

We not only live in the dark but we are growing accustomed to the dark. Many of us know so little about the Bible and associate so much with unbelievers that false teaching has come to seem less and less objectionable. We have some folks who are so busy mixing error with truth that they actually think the darkness is lifting! There are also those who find the practices of this world less and less repulsive.

Friends, too many of us are not only living in the dark but we are getting used to it!

As a child of God, I must not allow myself to get used to the dark; I must instead light my candle! I must light my candle by holding forth the Lord, as the "light of the world" (John 8:12). I must light my candle by learning, living and teaching the Bible's light (Psalm 119:105).

I must also light my candle by faithfully living the Christian life: "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16).

Friend, don't get used to the dark. Light your candle! (1929-2018)

"That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:15).

EDITORIAL . . .

(This issue marks the end of this paper's 49th year. Thanks to those of you who have been with us for all or any portion of this journey, and a special thanks to those who have been so kind to help with the expenses of printing and mailing the Old Paths! As many of you choose to help at the end of the year, or the beginning of the next, please accept my thanks for your continued support!)

TRY A LITTLE KINDNESS!

by Dalton Key

"Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1). I've heard that kindness is a hard thing to give away; it just keeps coming back! This truism notwithstanding, common courtesy, like common sense, is not all that common these days. Too many of us are much more enthusiastic with receiving kindness than in extending it, especially toward those who disagree with us.

I don't have to agree with you. I don't have to approve of the things you do, the positions you hold, or the associations you choose to pursue. But I do have a divine obligation to be kind to you.

Where have we gotten the warped notion that difference in thought permits discourtesy in speech and conduct? Such thoughtless thinking was never learned from the Lord.

Christ was the walking demonstration of "truth in love." He never refused to speak with someone He disagreed with. He listened. He waited to hear the question before giving an answer. He never got into shouting matches with His enemies. He never started or spread ugly, unfounded rumors about others, even those who were actively working Him harm. He never attempted to silence His critics by means of mean-spirited barbs, baseless accusations, or snarky jabs of sarcasm.

We would all do well to follow the Master's example.

To be right, both morally and doctrinally, is imperative; to be right in our treatment of others is no less important. Being long on scriptural argument provides no license for coming up short on scriptural attitude.

"Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. Therefore 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-21).

Let's all determine to be more like Christ, "speaking the truth in love," (Ephesians 4:15). Let's try a little kindness!

**A WONDERFUL ADDICTION**

by Danny Boggs

"Now I urge you, brothers - you know the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints - be subject to these, and to every fellow worker and laborer" (1 Corinthians 16:15,16, ESV).

Nobody in Corinth was a Christian before Stephanas and his family. And what did that family think being a Christian was all about? They "devoted themselves to the service of the saints." As the KJV puts it, they "addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints." Nobody had to beg them to do good works. They served and served to the point of exhaustion but never wanted to stop.

Is that the way you think about service?

Take note that "service" and "ministry," and "servant" and

"minister", are interchangeable terms. Nobody is a minister without being a servant. And everybody who is a servant is a minister. The lines drawn in religion between ministers and the rest of the church are unbiblical in that regard. Some of the best ministers would never claim that label or have it applied to them by other people. Their work may not get much attention. But God knows who they are, and His work in the church and in the world depends on them (Hebrews 6:10).

Service, especially toward their fellow Christians, was a way of life for the household of Stephanas. They followed in the footsteps of Jesus, who "came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Stephanas probably led the way with his wife and children as eager partners.

What should we do when we see

such Christians? Be subject to them. Be like them. If they say they could use some help, jump in eagerly.

Who are some fellow Christians you know who have this good addiction? "There is much to do; there's work on every hand!"

— Neosho, MO

"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (Philippians 2:3,4,12,13.)

THE CURE FOR SPIRITUAL VERTIGO

By Joe Slater

I would never make it as a pilot. What if I had to fly at night in fog or a strong wind? Pilots must trust their instruments in such conditions - easier said than done!

Pilots are not immune from vertigo, the loss of their sense of direction, balance, and equilibrium. That's when trusting instruments is especially important! Fifteen percent of airplane accidents are due to vertigo; most of them are fatal. It's far worse for pilots who are not instrument rated.

Christians must trust God and His word just like an airplane pilot must trust the instruments. It's far too easy to become disoriented and rely on our feelings, sincerely believing that we're headed in the right direction. Jeremiah correctly wrote, "Oh Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps" (10:23). Two passages in Judges state: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6 & 21:25). It was one of the lowest points in Israel's history.

How can I be saved? What does God accept as worship? How should I behave each day? What about my relationships with other people? The Bible answers all of these questions and more. However, some presume that their feelings are promptings by the Holy Spirit that somehow out-rank what the Scriptures say. Others think, "God wants me to be happy, and here's what makes me happy, so it must be ok regardless of what the Bible says."

We must deal with spiritual vertigo by trusting God and His word as we fly toward heaven. God and His word are more reliable than the best human instruments, and certainly more trustworthy than our feelings!

— Springfield, IL

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones" (Proverbs 3:5-8).

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you . . . Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:11,105).

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