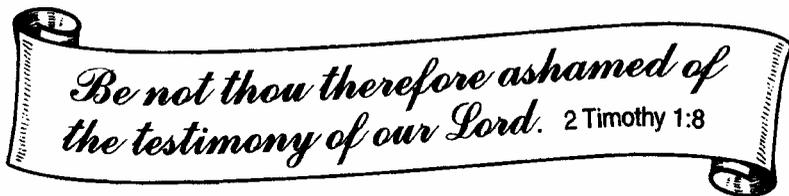


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We instill reverence for God by venerating the representations of His Person. God commanded, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). This practice promoted reverence for God. We hallow the Name of God by never using it lightly. Just the same, our care and use of the Bible should show due respect for its divine author. Muslims will not allow another book to lie on top of the Koran. We hold dear a book written not by man but by the finger of God. Do we treat it as such?

Children, even at a very young age, should subconsciously perceive that the Bible is more than an ordinary book. It has a reserved place on a shelf and a regular, daily time of reading. Mother ceases her mending and the older brother his reading during this hallowed time. Everyone assumes a formal, respectful posture and distracting noises or music is silenced.

The Bible is also kept holy by its appearance. We keep its pages clean by washing our hands before reading it. Dog-eared corners should be straightened. Its binding will last longer if other books, such as Sunday school quarterlies, are not inserted in its pages for convenience. We should replace Bibles that are beyond decent repair.

The Bible should be read in a worshipful manner as if God were truly speaking—and He is. Casual Christians reveal their brazenness by whispering, passing notes, chewing gum, and suchlike during the reading and teaching of the Word. This can become a severe test for youth to choose reverence over peer pressure. Keeping photographs in our Bibles will distract us and others from seeing the image of God.

Holiness is beautiful in its simplicity. Spiritually empty, sensual worship needs props such as adorned cathedrals, images of saints, crucifixes, musical instruments, and choirs. Our formal but simple dress also aids in focused worship. It is consistent to keep our Bibles holy in the same manner. If crucifixes do not adorn our churches, they should not be ornaments on our Bibles.

A simple black cover has been a fitting cloak for the sacred Word. Decorated cases with paintings, artwork, or attractive embroidery may be pretty, but they subtly detract from God's glory. Society ladies give the same effect by carrying a stylish handbag to draw attention to their outfit. If the angels hide their glory in God's presence (Isaiah 6:2), surely man's art and glamour are sensual distractions from the Bible's spiritual glory. Its contents, rather than its case, should draw our attention and comments.

God's Word has also been desecrated by using its familiar phrases out of context. We observe this more and more in a society that freely blasphemes and mocks sacred things. If "the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7), God will surely avenge the abuse of His Word, for the psalmist proclaimed, "Thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psalm 138:2).

The King James Version continues to communicate, resonate, and inspire with its formality, accuracy, and familiarity. In contrast, some versions reflect a degenerate view of God or contain commentaries that use the street language of our culture.

We keep the Bible holy by diligently studying its pages. Personal notes and neat, organized study marks add value, dignity, and a cherished touch. An underlined verse may recall a sacred moment or commitment. A penciled reference may connect two unique thoughts. Even the layout and style become familiar and make us loath to change to a new copy when wear makes it necessary. "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart" (Psalm 119:111).

Our daily personal devotions should be devoted primarily to Bible study. Other helps should be kept secondary in time and interest. We must remember that they are not inspired. God will speak to us as we open ourselves to the Spirit-illuminated Word. "But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psalm 1:2).

The best way to honor the Scriptures is to live them. "Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them" (Psalm 119:129). We should faithfully give testimony that any appreciated quality of our life is due to the sanctifying influence of the living Word. God has commanded, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). His Holy Word makes this possible as we avail ourselves of His grace.

BAS.



"The Earth Is the LORD'S"

Men in every age and society have found gratification in ownership. They have found pride in owning land, animals, and even other humans (slaves) as their own. Children are not very old before "That's mine!" enters their vocabulary.

Ownership and possessions determine a man's value and status in society. This desire to possess has had its effect on the development of cultures and even nations. It has brought about many wars. "Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war" (James 4:2).

How does God view man's quest for ownership? He has at various times reminded men that "the earth is the LORD'S" (Exodus 9:29; Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26, 28). Indeed, as Creator and Sustainer of the universe, He has every right to this claim. "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). In light of this, man's quarrels over possessions look almost ridiculous.

Nevertheless, God has to a certain degree given man control of His creation. At the time of creation, He commanded Adam, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). The psalmist proclaimed, "The earth hath he given to the children of men" (Psalm 115:16).

How then does God want man to use His earth? Since He created it primarily as a dwelling place for man, He desires that men utilize the resources of the earth to benefit humankind, rather than selfishly grasping possessions for personal gain. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

Therefore, the Christian will see himself as a steward, rather than the sole owner, of God's gifts. "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Rather than thinking, "What do I want?" we instead should ask, "What does the Lord want, and how can I best glorify Him with that which is His own?" Would a responsible steward spend his Master's money for an expensive vehicle to raise his own status or luxurious home furnishings to satisfy his personal taste? Will he use his Lord's money for electronic gadgets to satisfy his (the steward's) whims?

Wisely rationing how much of our Lord's money we expend on ourselves will enable us to give more to kingdom work. It will enable us to utilize the opportunity to serve in a classroom, on a mission field, or in local service, because we do not need the high-paying jobs to pay for our extras. We can and should use our educational resources, intellect, and literature to win the people of the world for the Lord.

As grateful recipients of our Lord's gifts, we will be willing to share. In Deuteronomy 10, God reminded Israel that the heaven and earth were His and that Israel was so richly blessed, only because He had chosen them. He

then commanded them, "Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:19).

In a World Book report, it was estimated that one billion people in the world are lacking the basic necessities for health and life. Dare we assume that since God has blessed us, we can live for self? True, we must provide for our own needs to be healthy and productive so we are able to serve the Lord and others. "The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits" (2 Timothy 2:6).

However, many of us live well beyond our basic needs. Do we need new clothing for many special occasions while others suffer with cold? Should much of the world go to bed hungry while we fare sumptuously? God held the rich man responsible for pampering himself and ignoring poor Lazarus. Let us beware!

God is Lord not only of the earth but also of them "that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). Even our body is the Lord's property. The Christian will acknowledge his health and strength as a gift from the Lord. The unregenerate glorify the human body. Moral perversion is related to man's misconception that his body is his own to use as he pleases.

Even many professing Christians ignore the principle that their body is "the temple of the Holy Ghost." It is to be used only as it glorifies God (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). Our clothing should not draw attention to our body or ourselves, but to our Maker. May we wear a cap as a billboard for an earthly enterprise? Can we use our energies for occupations that feed carnal desires rather than meeting practical needs? Let us be careful lest we neglect the purpose of our Creator.

The use and abuse of the earth is debated much in society. It has been proven that unwise use of pollutants, as well as poor farming and forestry practices, have had far-reaching negative impacts on food and water supplies. Unwise, selfish use and destruction of the earth's resources has caused much suffering in the world. As wise stewards of the earth, Christians should recognize these concerns.

However, we must not adopt the modern thought patterns of those who have "worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator." We understand that man is commanded to "have dominion over ... every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28). We also recognize that this earth will not last forever, no matter how many environmental measures man may take. The ultimate destruction of this earth will be God's judgment on sin.

Finally, God desires that we use our life on the earth as a time to prepare

ourselves and others for the new heavens and new earth that He is preparing for us. He will return soon to claim the kingdoms of this earth for His own (Revelation 11:15). Let us be found watching and ready!

Brother Sheldon.



Assuming Personal Responsibility in Our Driving.

For many of us, the amount of time we spend driving a vehicle adds up to a significant portion of our lives. Driving is a privilege. Youth look forward to it, and the elderly are slow to give it up. Like every other activity of our lives, our driving is a part of our Christian walk.

The responsibility we assume in our driving contributes to the testimony that we leave in our communities. In many communities the roadways are crowded with vehicles. Cooperation among drivers is necessary if our travels are to be reasonably successful and safe. Many accidents are caused by driver irresponsibility or carelessness. We do not have more right to the road than the next person. We should resolve to do our part to make the roadways safe. Sometimes it becomes our responsibility to react to avoid a collision when someone else makes a mistake.

Life and property are gifts from God (Genesis 4:10, 11). We need to use care not to cause damage to property or injury or death to other persons. Fathers are accountable for sons who are reckless in their driving. God held the owner of an ox accountable for the damage it caused (Exodus 21:29). If we are not faithful in practical responsibilities, can God trust us with spiritual responsibility (Luke 16:11)?

In the event that we make a mistake while driving and cause a collision, we need to take responsibility for the damages. Many drivers divert responsibility for their liabilities to their insurance carrier. This often results in a degree of carelessness. We are grateful to be able to relate as a brotherhood and assist each other in our accidents. However, we should exercise care lest we bring unnecessary burden on the brotherhood.

As drivers, we are responsible to be aware of traffic laws. Without traffic laws, there would be confusion. These laws include speed limits, weight limits, traffic signals, seat-belt requirements, child-restraint laws, vehicle lighting and maintenance, and so forth. Sometimes we may think these requirements are excessive. But 1 Peter 2:13 calls us to "submit [ourselves]

to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." We are not responsible to make the laws. We are responsible to obey them. We are responsible for our attitudes as drivers.

Overconfidence in our abilities often results in careless actions such as taking our eyes off the road too much or passing in marginal conditions. Youth may be tempted to show off by daring maneuvers such as weaving through traffic or following too closely. Humility and unselfishness will cause us to be open to advice and to respect fellow motorists.

We should practice courtesy in our driving. We need to avoid pulling out too close in front of someone and to allow others to take their turn at merge points. When driving large or slow-moving equipment, we should pull over at times to allow traffic to pass. Road rage and aggressive driving have become a threat on the highways. Handling our vehicle in such a way as to teach another driver a lesson or to show our displeasure is wrong. We should be courteous even when others are not.

We are also responsible to be awake and alert when driving. A drowsy driver cannot be a safe driver. We must determine that we will pull over and refresh ourselves or change drivers when becoming drowsy. To continue driving while not sufficiently alert is irresponsible. When traveling long distances, we should plan to stop every few hours to change drivers or to refresh ourselves.

We are responsible to practice safety in our driving. Our vehicles must be road-worthy. Tires, brakes, lights, turn signals, and mirrors must all be functional. We need to keep fellow motorists informed of our intentions by always signaling before we change lanes and avoiding situations where the need to brake aggressively may cause a hazard for the person following us.

When using the cruise-control feature, we should not creep up too closely behind another vehicle while looking for an opening to pass. The close proximity of multiple vehicles can easily become a dangerous situation. When changing lanes, we should look ahead and behind, and plan our moves accordingly.

We should know our route so that we are not checking the map while driving. To keep aware of our surroundings, we should adjust mirrors properly and be aware of the blind spots which our mirrors do not reveal. Monitoring our mirrors helps us know the locations of vehicles approaching from behind and coming up beside us. We should also be aware of other drivers' blind spots. Instead of allowing our cruise control to keep us in the passing lane in another driver's blind spot, we should either go ahead or drop behind. We must never assume too much, other drivers may at

times surprise us.

The most common highway accident is the rear-end collision. We should keep a space cushion between ourselves and the vehicle ahead of us. On dry roads at fifty-five miles per hour, the stopping distance is approximately 222 feet. Additional space is needed if the roadway is wet or icy. Using high beams at night when on an open roadway extends our vision considerably, giving much more lead time to expose objects or animals on the road. Changing to low beam should be a habit when encountering opposing traffic or when coming up behind another vehicle. Carelessness in this will be annoying to other drivers and may cause a hazard.

Drivers must stop for a school bus when the red lights are flashing unless it is on the opposite side of a divided highway. When stopped to make a left turn, we should not turn our wheels until the traffic clears and we are ready to proceed. Otherwise, if we are hit from behind, we will be propelled into the path of opposing traffic.

Speaking on a cell phone while driving is a dangerous practice. Can we concentrate on our driving as we should? Most drivers become less aware of their surroundings when speaking on a cell phone, sometimes forgetting to signal or to check their mirrors. We may be able to concentrate for short periods, but long conversations should be avoided. We should obey any state and municipal laws against cell phone use while driving.

Finally, do we have a good reason to be on the road? Being on the highway is too dangerous to be there unnecessarily. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Brother Clair.



Cultural Norms That Press God's People (Part 4)

Display of Wealth

About twenty-seven hundred years ago a rich, successful king became so sick that he almost lost his life. But God heard his prayer and brought him back from the brink of death. Far away a contemporary king heard of the miraculous restoration of his health and sent ambassadors with letters of congratulations and gifts. While the foreigners visited, Hezekiah gave them a royal tour. "There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah chewed them not" (Isaiah 39:2).

The Babylonians' visit was a test that revealed Hezekiah's heart. Did his display reveal thankfulness for God's rich provisions and merciful healing, or was it pride of accomplishment? The Scriptures sadly record, "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 32:25). As a result, Judah was added to Babylon's list of nations to conquer.

Many in our rich land are guilty of displaying their wealth to those who pass by. Vehicles are often little more than display pieces. European vehicle tax is according to engine displacement, so few can afford to drive powerful vehicles. Driving even a pickup truck is a symbol of wealth. But here in North America we often see huge, fuel-guzzling motor homes pulling an SUV or a trailer with a couple of four-wheelers.

Have you ever seen a mansion along a major highway appropriately positioned to draw attention? Do we use our houses to draw attention? While a concrete floor conveys status in Guatemala, houses here sport many gables or are immense.

If we were society folks, we would understand more fully the language of dress and jewelry. Our lives would be more complicated with the intricacies of social class—where we eat or do not eat, where we get our hair cut, who we relate to, how we should walk, and so forth.

Do these expressions look empty to you? They are not part of following Christ. They are the result of pride, which God hates. They reveal that the affections are not set on things above.

The display of wealth very evidently fosters the sins of discontent, envy, and covetousness. This is why the church speaks to classy vehicles, luxurious homes, and other areas of material excess. These tendencies indicate that we are affected by our culture. The Anabaptists who were afflicted by the confiscation of their earthly goods certainly were not tempted to show them off.

We have something to display, however, that does not mix so well with the display of wealth. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

— *Brother Stephen*



The Church Triumphant.

The word church has been defined as "a body of believers who have been called out from the world, and who are under the dominion and authority of Jesus Christ." The great multitude of believers, whose faith in Jesus Christ enables them to live the overcoming life and to share in the complete triumph of truth and righteousness in the end, is the church triumphant. To triumph is to commemorate victory or success with much rejoicing.

The church will triumph because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus was willing to come to this earth as a man and give His life, "by whom we have now received the atonement" (Romans 5:11). "He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). He died that we might experience forgiveness of sins and be reconciled to God. He was raised again for our justification. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15). "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men ... that he might fill all things" (Ephesians 4:8, 10). "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). Jesus was victorious over death, hell, and the grave. He lives forevermore! The gates of hell will not prevail against the Church of Jesus Christ.

The church triumphant is forever delivered from temptations and trials. Temptations in this life are common to man. Those who have lived before us have also faced the wrong desires, doubts, and fears that come with the fallen nature. In this life we need to constantly be on guard lest the evil one would deceive us or entangle us again in sin. We need the whole armor of God that we "may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11-18).

While we do not all face the same trials and tribulations, yet hardship, trouble, distress, affliction, grief, sorrow, and pain are all part of life. Church leaders face "daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28). There may be congregational struggles, divisions, pressing worldliness, and even reverses in numbers. Parents have concerns for the spiritual and physical well-being of their family, even after the children leave home. Young people face the challenge of finding God's will for their life, submitting themselves to the Lord and His church, and experiencing Chris-

tian victory in their lives.

We face many struggles in this life, and sometimes we do fail. Yet we may not become weary in the battle of endeavoring to do right as we walk the strait and narrow way, nor become discouraged with the many disappointments in life. God is still on the throne. Truth and righteousness will prevail. We have the promise that "they that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psalm 126:5). "He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:37). We look by faith to the glory of being redeemed with Christ.

The church is presently a suffering church and at times may even look defeated and overwhelmed. The church triumphant will be delivered from persecutions of every kind: torments afflicted by ungodly men, temptations by Satan, the spoiling of their goods or property, the imprisonment of themselves or their families, and even the loss of life itself by fire or sword. Although the church faces tribulations, they shall not separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:35-37). They will only make heaven more welcome and more glorious.

The church triumphant is liberated from the presence of sin.

While we are not of this world, yet we live in a wicked world, filled with violence and spiritual darkness. Many people are living in bondage to sin, living for the here and now, living for themselves, and doing whatever pleases the flesh. Many times our temptations come through the things that we see or hear.

While God gives the power today to be victorious and flee temptation, the presence of sin around us in speech, conduct, dress, false doctrine, the news media, and so forth may have a conditioning effect upon our lives. But in heaven "there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Revelation 21:27). "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10). Heaven is a holy place—a prepared place for a prepared people.

The church triumphant is in the very presence of God.

Happy is their position before the throne of God. They "serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them" (Revelation 7:15). Although they are serving him, it is without weariness or drowsiness. This service is not one of toil and suffering, but one of delightful pleasure and rest. "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11). And they shall

see his face and his name shall be in their foreheads" (Revelation 22:4).

The church triumphant experiences freedom from all the agonies and distresses of this present life.

Hunger and thirst will be known no more. 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). All their wants will be supplied. Sickness and pain will be gone. He comforts them, gently wipes away their tears, and turns their sorrow into joy.

The church triumphant will stand "before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands" (Revelation 7:9).

They are clothed with robes of righteousness, holiness, and victory. Their robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Blood normally stains, but the precious blood of Jesus cleanses the soul and makes it pure and clean in the sight of God. They carry palms in their hands, just as Roman conquerors appeared in their triumphs. What a glorious occasion this will be! The saints, the faithful servants of God, arrive home at last after they have fought the good fight of faith on earth and have finished their course. "Henceforth there is laid up for [them] a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give [them] at that day" (2 Timothy 4: 8).

The employment of the church triumphant is to cry "with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Revelation 7:10). Both the Father and the Son are included in these praises. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:12-14). Our song will be a song of redemption, the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.

What a day that will be when we get home, when we will be forever with the Lord!

Brother Lester.





GIVE ME THE WINGS OF FAITH

Give me the wings of faith to rise
 Within the veil, and see
The saints above, how great their joys,
 How bright their glories be.

Once they were mourning here below,
 And poured out cries and tears,
They wrestled hard, as we do now,
 With sins, and doubts, and fears.

I ask them whence their vict'ry came;
 They, with united breath,
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
 Their triumph to His death.

They marked the footsteps that He trod,
 His zeal inspired their breast;
And, foll'wing their incarnate God,
 Possess the promised rest.
 —Isaac Watts 1709

