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Don't Take Any Wooden Nickels

"Don't take any wooden nickels!" That's the way they used to say it in the old days, when some people did actually make wooden imitations of nickels to pass as counterfeit money, thus the saying, which today if used at all, simply means: "don't be fooled." The Scriptures say: "Be not deceived," and if you think about it, the obvious implication is that we CAN be deceived and we need to be on our guard. Each of us needs to remember this, because it has ever been the strategy of Satan to produce counterfeits of the true faith and counterfeits of the true servants of the Lord. Our Lord Jesus said that he is "a liar and the father of lies," and a counterfeit is just that, be it money or people or doctrines; it is a lie pretending to be the real thing.

Today more than ever we need to obey the exhortation to "prove all things, hold fast that which is good" (I Thess. 5:21). Yet many who call themselves Christians have never put anything they believe or do to the test. They follow tradition, sentiment, others, but not the Word. Let us not forget that Satan, in his determination to corrupt and ruin what is good, is the master of subtlety and deception. He is not a blundering novice, but a seasoned professional, and inveterate enemy of truth. As many who profess to be Christians follow the course of the age, the wisdom of the world, becoming less discerning and more susceptible to his wiles. In our times there is increased emphasis on personal liberty, individualism, pleasure, worldly comfort and success, and a corresponding loss of interest in spiritual things. One of the dangerous results is reduced skill and

discernment in personal Bible study. Beware, this plays right into the enemy's hands! Friend, you could be deceived! Yes, simple people like ourselves, in simple Christ-honoring New Testament assemblies, can be deceived if we are not careful. Just think of the way the Bible speaks of false things:

False gods: Isaiah 44:9-20

False Christs: Matt.24:23-24; 1 John 2:18

False Apostles: 2 Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2

False Prophets: Deut. 13:1-5; Is. 8:19-20, 30:10; Jer. 23:9-40; Ezek. 13:16-23; Matt. 7:15; 24:11,24; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1, Rev. 2:20 False Evangelists: Acts 15:1; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6-9 False Workers: Matt. 7:21-23; 2 Cor.11:13-15;

False Teachers: 1 Tim. 4:1-5; 6:3-5; 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4; Rev. 2:14-15 False Pastors: Ezek. 34:1-10 False Elders: Acts 20:30 False Brethren: 2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4 False Doctrine: Rom. 16:17; Eph. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; 2 Jn. 9-10 False Professions: Matt. 7:21-23; Titus 1:16; 1 Jn. 2:3-6; 4:20 What an array of deception! As we reach the end of the age and lawlessness abounds more and more, we also see the prophetic word of the Apostle Paul coming to us with freshness and power, for he warned us as he wrote to Timothy: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1), and again, "This know also, that In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous boasters, proud, blasphemers..having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2 Tim. 3:1-5) and again, "the time will come when they will not

endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). These are serious warnings, that should cause is to watch and pray. Trouble is, many traditional church-goers have difficulty thinking THEY could be deceived, which is what makes them prime targets!

Alas! The trouble with us is, apparently many of us don't seem to think that any such thing could happen in OUR congregation. Well, for that very reason it CAN happen, and it IS happening in many places. We are increasingly unlike the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily to see if those things were so (Acts 17:11). Many are more conversant in news and sports than in the things of God. Many have fallen for the idea of "being accepting", or "tolerant", as if it were a virtue instead of obeying the apostolic exhortation, "PROVE all things, hold fast that which is GOOD." So, friend, could you prove from the Scriptures your religious beliefs and practices, or is your best defense: "we've always been members of this church"?

That's God's criteria, clearly stated in the Scriptures. What's yours? Do you study your Bible daily? Do you spend more time watching TV or listening to the radio than you do reading the Bible each day? Do you know CNN better than the minor prophets? Do you prove all things, and do you even know how to do so using the Bible? Do you know WHY you believe that things are true? Can you give sound Scriptural explanations, or are you one of those who says, "I have my own personal convictions". We are not called to have personal, individualistic convictions, but to BELIEVE GOD! Yes,

we should be personally convicted by His Word, but not have “custom” or “tailor-made” beliefs. The Scriptures tell us to “be of one mind,” and God’s Word defines what that one mind is, not a creed or confession, but: “we have the mind of Christ”. Nothing is said about reciting the creed each Sunday, as if that made people orthodox! Creeds were made by men, but “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 perfect, completely furnished for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Are you one of those who takes refuge in saying, “In my church we do this,” or “The preacher says so-and-so,” or do you know what the Scriptures say? We should be taught by the gifted men the Lord gives the Church (Eph. 4:11-12), however, our part is not just to attend meetings, but rather to follow attentively along, take notes, come and ask questions, go home and search out the references in the Bible and study them and KNOW what is good and therefore KNOW what to hold fast to!

Ours is an age full of deceit and of shallow reasoning that uses orthodox words without going any deeper than the words themselves. Things are not going to get better, but worse. “In the last days evil men and seducers [lit. “wizards”] shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). Don’t be a shallow head nodder. Don’t be so easily satisfied by what sounds more or less correct, dear reader, nor should you be offended because of this exhortation! Listen carefully to what is taught. Search the Scriptures, look up the texts and read them carefully. Read the Bible through on your own, cover to cover [4 chapters a day, 2 in the morning and 2 in the evening, will get you through in

less than a year]. Turn off the T.V. and the VCR and open the Bible. Read, meditate, study God's Word. Get down on your knees and pray, asking the Lord for wisdom and discernment (Prov. 2). Don't let yourself be impressed by men's theological titles, position, name or fame. Be a person of the BOOK! Pray, search the Scriptures, think them through, believe them implicitly. Don't take any wooden nickels!

Pleasing God

"For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

Most people live to please themselves, even among evangelicals. The lament of the Apostle Paul is even truer today: "all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2:21). The Bible teaches plainly that it is privilege, not a burden, to live to please God. Yet how difficult it is to find believers who understand that they are servants of Christ; that their purpose in life is to do God's will and please Him. They are rare gems, and have been since Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve fell into sin and did what pleased themselves instead of what pleased God.

The Scriptures are clear that the focus of the life of the believer is not himself or herself, but Christ, not just on Sunday at meeting times, but all day and all week, all throughout life. Let's consider what the Lord has to say about pleasing Him.

In John 8:29 we read, "...I do always those things that please Him." Don't we wish that we could say that? But, alas, we can't, and therein lies our problem. How many homes have been broken, lives ruined and wasted, friendships damaged and churches split because of people who lived to please themselves! No, these words in John 8:29 do not describe our life, but that of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. His was a fragrant life lived in the will of the Father, for the pleasure of the Father. Are we followers of the Lord? If so, we should walk in His steps, imitate Him. 1 John 2:6 says, "He that saith he

abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." This is not directed at preachers, elders or missionaries, but at every true believer and follower of the Lord. No Christian is given permission to live his life to please himself. All Christians are called to follow and imitate Christ. We believe that Psalm 40:8 speaks prophetically of our Lord, when in it the psalmist declares, "I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart."

Hebrews 11:6 tells us that "without faith it is impossible to please God." It does not say that without faith it is impossible to please self or others, or be on good terms with the world. All that can be achieved without a grain of faith. But faith pleases God, He wants to be believed and trusted, and He deserves it! And in order to live and behave in a way that pleases Him, we must trust Him. Feelings, logic, and looking around to see what others are doing, are things that derail us. We must believe God, which is not the same as believing in God. It means to trust Him inherently, completely, to put God first, before emotions, logic, family, tradition, personal likes, common sense, and before what the majority thinks or does. Unless we believe Him and follow Him this way, we cannot please Him.

In 2 Timothy 2:4 we learn from Paul that as the soldier pleases the one who called him to be a soldier, so it should be with the Christian. That phrase in verse 4, "...that he might please," succinctly states the life-purpose of the spiritually minded person. Elsewhere the Apostle calls believers to be imitators of him even as he is of Christ. We should ask, as Paul did, "Lord, what will thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6), not out of curiosity, but with a commitment to do whatever He desires. And if we

ask the Lord, how will we know the answer? We will not find it in the newspaper, on television or radio, nor on the internet. To know what God wants us to do, we need to be reading God's Word, and deepening our understanding of Him and His ways. Life is full of obligations and pleasures that consume our time, and most of them have little eternal importance. In order to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we need to be living in His Word. We need to read it daily, study it diligently, and meditate on it devotionally.

Another passage that speaks clearly of pleasing

God is Hebrews 11:5, with Genesis 5:22. The great chapter on faith in Hebrews is not a museum, but a manual. It is not to admire, but to learn from and imitate. The Lord tells us there that Enoch pleased God and walked with Him. Now, why would the Lord tell us that, except for the obvious reason that this is what He desires from us. Before Enoch was translated, he had this testimony, that he pleased God. That was God's testimony concerning Enoch. When someone dies, folks generally try to say something nice about the deceased, and their comments may or may not be sincere and accurate. God's testimony is always true and accurate. We cannot spend our lives having fun with worldlings, madly chasing career, money, success and pleasure, and then at the end have this kind of testimony from God. We might fool people because we show up at most of the Sunday meetings, but God is never fooled. What are our priorities? When no one sees us, are we walking with God. Is our weekday life filled with fellowship with Him and thoughts of pleasing Him? Each of us should ask

himself, "If I were to die today, would the Lord say that about me?"

In Colossians 1:10 the Scriptures call us to

"walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him." It is an absolute principle of spiritual life in redeemed people. That word that comes before "pleasing" is of interest to us. "Fully" means "completely," "all the way," "entirely," "not leaving anything out." This is the extent to which we are to please the Lord. How much of me belongs to the Lord, not positionally, but practically speaking? Is my orthodoxy way ahead of my orthopraxy? It is one thing to sing "All for Jesus, all for Jesus, all my being's ransomed powers, all my days and all my hours," and yet another to live it. Perhaps that is why Tozer said that Christians tell more lies when they sing hymns than at any other time! Romans 7:4 reminds us that we should "...bear fruit to God." 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 says concerning those whom the Lord has saved, that they "should live no longer for themselves, but for Him that died for them and rose again."

Hebrews 13:16 gives us the following exhortation.

"But to do good and communicate [share] forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." This is of interest to the person whose desire is to please the Lord. What pleases Him? When we do good, that is, to others, seeking their good, not our own, this is pleasing to God. When we communicate, better translated "share," with others, this pleases the Lord. This is what beggars never do, for they are basically selfish people who only think of receiving; they are in it for what they can get, and your job is to give them what they need. Unfortunately there are many parachurch organizations who are like them,

always advertising needs and asking for money and workers, who apparently think the churches exist to supply their needs. But our concern here is more with ourselves. If the Boy Scouts do a good deed every day as part of their code of behavior, how much more should our lives as Christians be full of good deeds, done in Christ's name so that He, not we, gets the glory!

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1 the Apostle reminds the believers that they have learned how they ought to "walk and please God." The epistle is written to all the saints in Thessalonica, not just to the more spiritually mature. Here we see that the doctrine of the Apostles was much more than writing creeds or declaring truths about the Trinity. Apostolic doctrine included instructions for everyday life. This is missing in much preaching and teaching today, and some folks resent preachers that "get into their lives," but that is the apostolic pattern. "Walk" is a word that refers to our daily conduct, our moment by moment behavior. Whatever we are about to do or say, we should ask, "Will this please God?" It is a great test that could deliver us from many problems and wasted time. Let me give just one real practical example for the young people. Did you choose your career, or did the Lord choose it? Have you basically kept going in the same direction in life that you were headed in before you professed faith in Christ? Have you ever put your career choice and preference on the altar before the Lord, abandoned it, and said, "Lord, what do You want me to do with the life you have given me?" Or do you only ask Him to bless what you choose for yourself? Some answer saying, "but the Lord gave me a mind to think and choose." I say, "Amen! So think about doing His will. Think about the fact that He knows better than

you, that He sees the future and you don't even know what you'll eat for supper! Think about how worthy He is to be trusted with that important decision! Think, and choose God's will!"

1 Corinthians 7:32 instructs single believers that they should be concerned with "how to please the Lord." In Ephesians 6:3 parents are told to bring up their children the way that pleases God, not the way that pleases self, the relatives or the world. In Colossians 3:20 children are told to obey their parents in everything, and the divinely given reason is because "this pleases the Lord."

In Ephesians 6:9 masters, bosses are told to treat their servants or employees as the Lord desires. Ephesians 6:5-6 reminds servants/employees that obeying their masters/bosses and serving them well is "serving the Lord." In 1 Peter 5:1-4 elders are instructed to shepherd the saints in a way that pleases the Lord, after all, the sheep are His, not theirs. If a man abuses his delegated authority to make the saints conform to his likes and dislikes, he is pleasing himself, not the Lord. Neither is he pleasing the Lord if he neglects his delegated responsibility and fails to care pastorally for the saints. Elder, pastor, and bishop (overseer) are not titles but words that describe the character and work of those to whom the Lord entrusts the care of His people. The most important thing is not to please self, nor to please the assembly, but to please the Lord. Before teaching His Word, our prayer should be that of the psalmist, "let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD my strength and my redeemer" (Psa. 19:14).

But the greatest example is that of our Lord

Jesus. Romans 15:2-3 extols the virtues of the Lord and calls us to be like Him. "Even Christ pleased not Himself," we are told. Here is the mountain peak! He could have pleased Himself, but He didn't, and for that we thank God. He could have stayed in Heaven. He could have come to earth in all His regal glory and power. He could have avoided the cross, or He could have come down from it, but where would we end up if He had done that? We are followers of the One who did not please Himself, but His Father. When He taught us to pray, "thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," those were not just pious sounding words. His life was the incarnation of those words.

May we learn to judge everything in that simple light, by this simple question, "is it God's will, my will, or someone else's will?" The test is, "Is it truly pleasing to the Lord," for that is why we live, to please Him and glorify Him. God is calling us to put away self-pleasing, no matter what the changes are that must take place, no matter what the cost. Whether we are doing ordinary things like eating or drinking, or whatever we do, we should do all for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). He bought us with the blood of His Son; we are His, not ours. Our right to live to please self was nailed to the cross. "What, know ye not that...ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Saving Grace and Serving Grace

Grace is God's unmerited favor and help. I started learning about it early in life, but school isn't out yet. My godly grandfather etched the words of the hymn "Amazing Grace" into my memory by frequently humming, whistling or singing that hymn, his favorite, in his home, in the car, at work and in the assembly. It meant so much to him because, he said, he was a wretch who had been saved by grace and he would never forget it. It would do us all good to share that sentiment. Nothing gives more hope and blessing to mankind than God's amazing grace. The Bible couldn't be clearer than it already is when it declares, "for by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9, cf. Rom. 4:1-5). Salvation is a gift of God, by grace, and those of us who know what that means can add our "hallelujah, amen!" The grace of God is a comfort, a relief and an assurance to the one who believes. Hebrews 4:16 encourages all believers to come boldly to the "throne of grace" to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. I wonder if any of us has any idea how great and boundless a resource God's grace is. By it He has saved us, and by it He provides for us throughout our entire life. How true are those well-known words, "Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home."

Having said all that, I wonder if we are aware that God's grace is supposed to work out in practical ways in our life? We should treat others with grace, as God treats us. We should speak with grace (Eph. 4:29; Col. 4:6).

Christian behavior and speech should distinguish us from the unsaved. We should neither behave nor talk like the world.

With respect to the Christian life, God's grace is not a pillow on which to lie back and relax. It is not a bed of ease, nor an excuse to do nothing nor to live like the worldlings. This would be to pervert the grace of God. Paul insisted that he had not received the grace of God in vain. He knew that God intended it to have a practical effect in our lives, and his own life graphically demonstrated that fact. Let's consider briefly some of the practical applications of grace that the Bible gives us:

1. In 2 Corinthians 8:7, 9 we see the example of our Lord Jesus, and the great sacrifice that He made when He came into this world and went to the cross bearing our sins. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich." This statement is not made just to fill us with awe, gratitude and worship, but also teach us something about sacrificial giving. The grace of God was expressed in a gift of great sacrifice. One who was rich, by grace became poor. The Apostle invites us, as it were, to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow the Lord in the matter of sacrificial giving. How does the grace of God work out in the matter of our offerings?

2. In Ephesians 4:7 we learn that there is grace to serve in the assembly. Here it refers to the spiritual gifts that our risen Lord has given for the healthy functioning of the church. The words, "But unto every one of us is given grace" (v.7) correspond to 1 Corinthians 12:7

which says, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” [for the common good]. By God’s grace each believer has a function in the assembly. No one is there just to observe or occupy a seat! Ephesians 4:12 emphasizes this, saying, “for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” God has given each of us grace to do the work of the ministry, that is, to serve in some way in the local assembly. There are no useless members in Christ’s body. So, how does the grace of God work out in our assembly service?

3. In Titus 2:12 we read powerful words about God’s grace. Grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present age. Hardly a soft pillow for relaxing! Grace in action in our lives leads to separation from the world, not imitation of the world. It leads to denial, that is, to saying “no.” It leads to serious living, not frivolity and constant joking. It leads to righteous behavior, not to cheating, dishonesty, or corner-cutting. And it produces godliness, which is piety, or devotion to God and the things of His kingdom. In Matthew 6:33 we are instructed to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. We don’t do this in an effort to earn merit or favor with God, but rather because we have been favored by Him! Today the evangelical community in general is at an all-time low tide as far as devotion to God and separation from the world are concerned. According to Titus 2:12 the problem is that we are failing the lessons that grace teaches. It is absurd to say that by God’s grace I don’t have to do anything, because God’s grace teaches us to behave as His special people.

Is the grace of God visible in our separation, holiness and devotion to the Lord?

4. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-12 the Scriptures teach us that there is grace for suffering. There are groups that insist that if we have faith we do not have to suffer, but they are gravely mistaken. To a suffering Apostle who pled in prayer to be relieved, the Lord replied, "My grace is sufficient for thee." When we suffer physically, and pass through all kinds of trials and difficulties, we have the promise of God's all-sufficient grace. Grace can give us strength to bear suffering and not lose focus on spiritual realities. It can keep us from becoming chronic complainers who, as one brother put it, "enjoy ill health," which means they enjoy complaining and talking continually about themselves and their pains and problems. By God's grace we have something better to talk about! It can make us strong when we are weak, and cause us to glorify God when that is the last thing that others would think of doing. Grace sustains us in difficulties and turns our gaze upward. Everyone goes through difficulties from time to time and we all suffer in some way in this fallen world, but the Christian's sufferings are different, for he is sustained by grace. Are we focused on the grace of God, and do we think it is sufficient? Can others around us tell?

5. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 the great Apostle of grace forcefully reminds us that grace is for working, serving, not coasting through life taking the path of least resistance. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." Paul clearly states that having received God's grace, he worked. In

this context he affirms that he did not receive the grace of God in vain, referring to his work. Hebrews 12:28 speaks of having grace to serve acceptably. In the life of the truly born-again Christian, God's grace is a dynamo, a mighty source of energy for living the Christian life. Some appear to have been still-born. Others, as one brother said, were born with tired blood and went downhill from there. But a proper understanding of grace includes this wonderful truth, that God's grace gives us power to serve, to labor tirelessly for the Savior. Not to gain anything, but in response to the great love of God. Salvation is the cause, and works are the effect. No wonder James declares that faith without works is dead! True grace moves us to labor for the Lord, not to go through life taking it easy, watching others serve. In the military the watchword is "never volunteer." But in Christianity we have the opposite. "Here am I, send me," should be our prayer, or in the words of the newly converted Saul of Tarsus, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Grace puts us in the family, and puts divine love in our hearts, love for God, not for self. How is the grace of God seen in our labors? Can we, like Paul, say, "I labored more abundantly..."?

We thank the Lord for His saving grace, and forever we will sing His praises for that reason. But what about His serving grace? What evidence is there of the grace of God in our lives? Are we controlled by grace? What do we DO with the grace of God?

The Christian Family

The name "Christian" does not mean much in the world anymore, except maybe "not Buddhist" or "not Muslim," or something like that. But taking its original and long forgotten meaning, "Christ-one," a follower of Jesus Christ, we ask, "What makes a family a Christian family?" How can we tell one when we see it? Are there distinctive features that will help us pick out of a group of families those that are Christian? How about our homes, how can we discern if they are really Christian?

Outward appearances are certainly no guarantee of having a Christian family, are they? Here is one home with Scripture texts on the walls and a family Bible on the table. The members head out for the meetings of the church each week. Their family car has a "Jesus is Lord" sticker, a "fish" sticker, or a "Christian Marriage Encounter" sticker on the back. However, what if we could be inside the house or the car with them, to listen and observe. Would we hear arguments, and carnal conversations? Would the children be whining, complaining, or showing disrespect to their parents? What would we notice about how they treat one other when they're alone as a family, not "on exhibition"? Would we feel tension between the husband and wife, parents and children, or brothers and sisters? Would there be frowns and the pointed fingers, raised voices, tears? Perhaps. In many cases, probably. We'd soon learn that Christian activities and decorations cannot make a family Christian. Also, the mere fact that a family has Christians in it doesn't ensure that it is a Christian family, because that's quite a different matter.

Religious activities and outward appearances cannot earn, in God's sight, the name "Christian" for any family. There is more to it than that, isn't there?

A Christian family is a family with Christians in it. And more, those Christians live daily life, meaning all those times when they are not in meetings of the church and when no one's watching, in a way that brings glory to God. They live by the principles for family life that are found in God's Word. They may have never been to a family conference, retreat, or enrichment session. They may have never had a sociology class at all. In fact, if this is true of them they have an advantage, believe it or not! The advantage is not having other ideas and presentations to clutter up their hearts and compete with the Word of God. The Christian family knows where, to find the principles for family life, they are in the Scriptures. In this family, the Bible is lived out in the lives of the members in the everyday grind of life. God's Word has a grip on their hearts, so that attitudes and actions flow from it's sacred pages. Christ rules as Lord in the Christian family.

The family is the basic, God-ordained functional unit of human society. God, in His infinite wisdom gave order to His creation. He created a man, put him in Eden, and made a family around him there. The family began when God united Adam and Eve, but existed long before then in the mind of God as His plan for life on earth (Genesis 1:28; 2:21-25). In this He indicated that the family was to be His way of propagating the human race and populating the earth. God stated His favor toward the family again by including family relationships in the Ten Commandments, "honor thy father and thy mother" (Exodus 20:12). The New Testament repeatedly

reaffirms God's interest in the affairs of family life by such teachings as, "children obey your parents;" "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath;" "Husbands, love your wives," and "wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands." The fact that such principles are found in both Old and New Testaments says to us that God has not changed His design for the family since it began. Contrary to voices in society around us, the family is not outdated, outmoded, ineffective, repressive, or unimportant. It is a masterpiece of God's workmanship!

The family, as God's "invention," does not need worldly wisdom in order to survive or flourish. Unfortunately, even in "Christian circles," yes, even in assemblies, psychology has crept in under the guise of "family ministry," "marriage counseling," "parenting seminars," and other such activities. Some family camps, couples retreats, etc. are used as springboards for getting the world's wisdom into the church. In many cases, we, who profess to be so solidly Biblical, need to get back to the Bible, especially since 2 Timothy 3:17 declares that it is the complete equipment of the man of God.

Getting more specific, what about our own homes? How can we define a Christian home in terms that are specific enough to help us tell if we're fitting the description and do something about it if we're not? Good question! Honestly though, there is no verse in the Bible that says, "A Christian family is one that...." Sorry! However, there is plenty of instruction in the Scriptures. God in His wisdom did not organize the Bible into a "systematic theology" book. We must therefore read the Bible through and through. As we read and study the Word we find that we can draw from a number of

different passages throughout it, to form a working description of a godly family. And there are plenty of passages that speak of the family, so take heart!

Here is one description of the family that we could compose from the Scriptures.

1. God comes first in everything, not just in their daily devotions. They live for Him, for His glory, not for self (Matthew 6:33; Luke 14:6, Colossians 1:18). (Sadly, many professing Christians today do not even know what devotions are!)
2. The husband is a godly man, who takes full responsibility for the leadership of the family in a godly way, and devotes time to his marriage and family (Genesis 3:16; 18:19; Colossians 3:18).
3. The husband lovingly and diligently assumes his responsibility to provide for and protect the family. He shepherds the little flock God has given him (Ephesians 5:25, 28-29; 1 Timothy 5:8).
4. The wife both professes and practices godliness. She is oriented to her husband and her home, and works in the home as a helper and co-laborer with her husband (Genesis 2:18, Proverbs 31:10-31; 1 Corinthians 11:9; Titus 2:4-5).
5. Both parents educate (train up) their children in the home, teaching them what it means to live in a godly way, and to be holy, not worldly. They consider themselves, that is, their own example, and also guide the children in both knowledge and practice (Exodus 2:9; Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 1:7; 3:15).
6. The children learn to be godly, not worldly (this carries over into teenage years and young adult life).

They learn to honor their parents in day to day life, by responding positively when taught, and by loving, respectful, prompt obedience, and to show brotherly love to one another (Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20).

7. The family is working together in support of the local assembly, reaching out and ministering to others for Christ's sake and the Gospel's. It is not viewed as a higher priority than the church, nor does it view service in the assembly as a threat or competition (1 Kings 17:10-13; 2 Kings 4:8-10; Mark 1:28-34; Luke 18:28-30; Acts 18:24-26).

Having said all this, we must remember that the Christian marriage and family is a life-long dynamic process, not a project than can be finished in a few years. It is important to begin early, and in the case of those saved after married or after having children, it is still important to make a clean break with the past and get off to a good start in the Christian life. No one has a perfect family, but in spite of this there are some that can be cited as examples. Such was the household of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 16:15), a family "addicted...to the ministry of the saints," and worthy of imitation and collaboration. In Spanish there is a saying, "it's easier to criticize than to imitate." However, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, may we learn to imitate the godly qualities of families in the Scriptures, and in those around us inasmuch as we are able to discern. With the Lord's help, we may be able to live in such a way that will not only bring glory to Him, but also be an encouragement and help to others along the way. May we take our responsibility seriously, and may the Lord help us to really have Christian homes, and not just homes in which some Christians live.

Triple Security

Ecclesiastes 3:14 declares, "I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever; nothing can be put to it nor anything taken from it..." A principle is stated here about the quality of God's work: it is forever and completely sufficient. If we apply this to the subject of salvation, we come immediately to the key question in salvation. Is it man's work, or God's? Does man save himself, or help save himself, or help maintain his salvation once obtained? Is salvation God's doing, or man's? If it is in any way man's work, then it is not secure, but if it is God's work, then "it shall be forever."

According to the Word of God, man is not his own savior. In Psalm 27:1 David said, "The LORD is my light and my salvation." In Psalm 37:39 we read, "...but the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD." In Isaiah 12: 2 the prophet states confidently, "Behold, God is my salvation." "Salvation is of the LORD," declared Jonah. These are just a few of the many texts, all of which describe salvation as a work of God, not of man.

In John 10:28 our Lord states, "...I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." His very name, "Jesus," indicates that "He shall save His people from their sins." (Matt. 1: 21) The Apostle Paul affirms that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," not to "help sinners save themselves." Hebrews 5:9 tells us that He is the author of "eternal salvation." Scripture makes it abundantly clear that salvation is a work of God, and for that very reason each one who has trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness and eternal life is secure forever. The believer is secure because it is

God Himself who saves and keeps him. We certainly have responsibilities in the Christian life, but keeping ourselves saved is not one of them.

In fact, the believer has triple security. God the Father keeps us. "My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." (Jn. 10:29) We are saved and safe in the Father's hand. Whoever or whatever would take us from that mighty hand would have to be greater than God the Father, but He is "greater than all." It would have to be more powerful than the Father, but "no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Our Lord used two absolutes in this declaration. First, the word "all," and then the words "no man." Those allow for no exceptions. Who is strong enough to get us out of the Father's hand? Who is stronger than God? No one! Therefore, the believer is secure in the Father's hand.

But the child of God is also secure in the hand of the Lord Jesus, God the Son, for in the preceding verse, John 10:28, He says, "And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Eternal life is a gift from Him, not something we earn. It is something God gives, a work of God. And the Lord Jesus says that those who receive this gift from Him "shall never perish." There is no uncertainty here. No expiration date. God the Son guarantees it, with no ifs, ands or buts, no conditions added. How can it be? The Lord continues, "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Each believer is in His hand, which means He is personally involved in the safekeeping of the saints. For a believer to become lost, he would have to be plucked out of the Lord's hand, and the Lord affirms that no one will do that. It has never

been done and never will be. Because keeping us is God's work, not ours, and He cannot fail! Safe in the Father's hand, and safe in the Son's hand, as if one were over us and the other under us, protecting our souls. What could be better? And yet, there is more!

The Scriptures teach us that not only the Father and the Son, but also the Holy Spirit is involved in our eternal security. Consider Ephesians 1:13-14. "...In whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of his glory." (NKJV) Let's think for a minute about what this teaches about the security of our salvation. First of all, when we believe, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. This is not an emotional experience nor something that comes later in life. Each believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit when he believes. The seal is a mark of ownership, and also a security device. We are marked as the property of God and protected by the Holy Spirit. He is called the "earnest" (KJV), or "the guarantee of our inheritance." The Holy Spirit personally guarantees that we reach our destination (heaven) and receive our inheritance (life eternal in glory with the Lord). Our arrival is not guaranteed by us, but by the Holy Spirit. Our conduct as believers guarantees nothing with respect to salvation, for the work of salvation was done by Christ at Calvary. When we trust in Him the Holy Spirit seals us, marks us as Christ's, and indwells us, personally guaranteeing our inheritance. And how long does He do this? Until we commit a certain sin? No, for the text says, "until the redemption of the purchased possession." That's the "expiration date" we might say. As the earnest, or down

payment, He guarantees that we will receive the inheritance. When is His work as the guarantor done? Not until we reach glory and enter into the fullness of salvation there in the Father's house. This is the third powerful ingredient of our eternal security.

We are safe in the Father's hand, and secure in the Son's hand, and sealed within by the Holy Spirit who guarantees our entrance into glory. The entire Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, actively provides the eternal security of the believer. No one could be safer. The old hymn says, "He's got the whole world in His hands," but how much more personal to say, "He's got all the true believers in His hands!" We are secure because of the power and perseverance of God, because of the sufficiency of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary! Salvation is a work of God from beginning to end.

Some worry that such teaching causes people to take a light view of sin, and to lose their fear of God. This is not the case. The security of salvation does not encourage us to sin or to think lightly of Christ's work on the cross. On the contrary, it fills us with gratitude, and joy, knowing that our future is secure in God's hands. It causes our hearts to overflow with reasons to worship and praise the Lord. We can sing, "My anchor holds," and mean it! It gives us confidence to preach the gospel, knowing that the fruit is forever. It moves us to live devotedly for the Lord, as a grateful and loving response to Him who loves us with such an everlasting love. We can sing with enthusiasm and devotion words like these:

"Jesus paid it all,

All to Him I owe,

Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.
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