



BEHIND THE MASK

THE SIGNS OF CHRISTIAN MATURITY

Vol. 4, Issue 3, July- Sept. 2009

"For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1:23)

In a culture that places an overabundance of emphasis on material success, self indulgence and self -gratification, its influence has infected the church. From pulpits all across the county the gospel message has been replaced with a message of health, wealth and "live your best life now", contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture. In fact you can identify mature believers from immature believers by what they value most. The two positions can be categorized as 'temporal' and 'eternal'. Those whose desire health, wealth, and the best life now, are those who fall into the temporal category, and those who desire to please God by denying themselves fall into the eternal category. To put things in perspective, the gospel recounts that a certain ruler asked Jesus, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10: 25)". Conspicuous by its absence the ruler did not ask what shall I do to inherit good health, wealth or the best life now. Paul declares in 2 Cor. 4:18, "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" . It is no wonder Paul was so torn when he stated he had a 'desire' to be with Christ which is far better (Phil. 1:23), or when he stated; "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). As a **mature** believer Paul knew the ultimate value of Christianity was not in what he accomplished or obtained in life, but what he was willing to surrender. Our maturity is reflected not in what we are willing to live for, but what we are willing to die for.

Min. Chris Cooke

IN FOCUS

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Check out an excerpt from our first issue on www.therealissuesoflife.org

THE PRODIGAL
Life Lessons From
(Luke 15:11-24)

Marks of a Cult

Authoritarian. There is almost always a central, Charismatic, living human leader who commands total loyalty and allegiance. **Oppositional.** Their beliefs, practices and values are counter to those of the dominant culture. **Exclusivistic.** They are the only group that possesses the 'truth.' **Legalistic.** Rules and regulations abound governing spiritual matters and the details of everyday living. **Subjective.** They emphasize the experiential, the feelings and the emotions. This is usually accompanied by an anti-intellectualism. Persecution-conscious. The groups feel they are being singled out by mainstream Christians, the press, parents, and the government. **Sanction-oriented.** They require conformity in practice and belief, and exercise sanctions against the wayward. **Esoteric.** They promote a religion of secrecy and concealment. Truth is taught on two levels, inner truth and outer truth.

Source Unknown

MICHAEL JACKSON: In Heaven or Hell?

In all of the intense media coverage after the death of pop superstar Michael Jackson, the one thing that has driven me crazy has been hearing over and over, often by high profile Christians, that Michael is now at peace in Heaven. Really? I hear this same thing whenever a famous person dies, regardless what they believed during their life, as well as from people when a family member or close friend dies, again, regardless what they believed during their life.

If this is true, than what is the use of the Gospel? If this is true, why should anyone waste their time and effort telling people about Jesus? If this is true, than the death of Jesus on the cross was a meaningless exercise, his resurrection didn't need to occur, and people can believe whatever they want during this life and make it to Heaven.

THAT MY FRIEND IS THE UNIVERSALISTIC LIE FROM HELL!!!

The fact is God made only ONE plan of salvation. There is only ONE way to everlasting life and that is faith in Jesus Christ, the Jesus Christ of the Bible. There are NOT many roads that lead to God, only one, the Jesus road!!! You can't believe whatever you want and die and end up in Heaven. That is a lie from satan that is leading millions of souls to the flames of hell for all eternity. **WHAT YOU BELIEVE DOES MATTER!!!**

It is arguable that Michael Jackson was the most recognized person on the planet.

Despite his vast fame and material possessions, Michael was bankrupt in the things that really matter in life, joy, peace, contentment, **HOPE!** Those things only comes through having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and living according to God's Word.

(excerpt from Pastor Bill Keller, of Live Prayer.com)

SCRIPTURE BREAK

IT'S ONLY A TEST

James 1: Acts 3:1-23

Trails or tests are a part of life, being a believer does not exempt us or protect us from them. But God has a greater purpose in mind when he allows tests to enter into our life.

I. The Reality of Trails (verse 2b "when you face trials")

II. The Response to Trails (verse 2a "consider it pure joy")

III. The Reason for Trails (verse 3"...the testing or you faith...")

IV. The Results of Trails (verse 4 "...develops perseverance...")

V. The Resources for Trails (verse 5 "if any of you lacks wisdom...it will be given to him".)

VI. Rewards of Trials (verse 12 "he will receive the crown of life")

Conclusion: Many believers want a Christianity that is served on a bed of ease, not a crown of thorns or a cross of nails. It's through the trials of life that we grow, we learn more in the valley than on the mountain top. What ever we lose it for our greatest good and for God's ultimate glory. The next time you encounter a trial in your life don't ask *why* me, instead ask *what* can I learn.

**JOIN US THIS QUARTER IN A STUDY OF 1 PETER
"LIVING IN THE LIGHT OF TRIALS"**

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HEALTHY LIVING

"It shall be health to they navel, and marrow to they bones" (Prov. 3:8)

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship."

(Romans 12:1)

Too many of God's children suffer from serious health problems or are living lifestyles that will lead to health problems in the future. Cancer, heart attacks, diabetes, obesity, and numerous other diseases kill millions of people each year even though huge amounts of money are spent on medical care, drugs, and research.

This may be due because so many have traveled the wrong paths in life. Their lifestyle does not promote health, nutrition, and the proper care of the body that God has given them. Our society has become lazy, everyone looks for the easy way out by cutting corners. Convenience is the key to living for most people and the convenient, easy way is not often the best way.

We must have good healthy "living" Biblical food not dead food. How do you expect people that lived 150-890 years they ate what God told them to eat. You wouldn't drink gasoline or eat toxic waste would you? But why do we eat the equivalent of it in food and drink. Our bodies, designed by God, are not to be abused in this way.

#1 – To be Biblically healthy we need God—we need salvation and a right relationship with Jesus Christ.

#2 –Along with that we must eat the right kinds of food and drink.

#3 –And along with those things we also need to exercise. To many people that's a dreaded word. However, it's impossible to drop unnecessary weight and maintain a healthy weight without diet and exercise. .

We encourage you to check out our ministry partner Scriptures which provides natural nutritional vitamins and minerals:
<http://scriptures.cc/109188/>

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

The idea that a Christian worker must attend Bible college or seminary to be legitimate is deeply ingrained, so much so that when people feel a "call" of God in their lives, they are conditioned to begin hunting for a Bible college or seminary to attend. In the New Testament church, as in the ministry of Jesus, people learned in the furnace of life, in a relational, living, working and ministering context. In stark contrast, contemporary ministerial training can be described by the religious talk of Job's miserable comforters; Rational, objective, and abstract. Very little is practical, experiential, or spiritual. Not that I am against bible college or seminary training having attended both, but they have given little or no hands-on experience in the crucible of body life. They turn out theological technicians not ministering servants, ill equipped for real ministry, but good providers of information.

On The Horizon

- Saturday, July 25, Breaking Free! Overcoming Pornography and Sexual Addiction
- August 8, Dimensions of a Godly Parent
 - Catalyst– Men's Fellowship Service

Contact us for more info

ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN \$50.00

In Romans chapter 6, Paul states that Christians are no longer slaves to sin. Yet here he claims he is a slave to sin (vs 14).

How could you explain this difference?

Send your answer, (300 words or less) e-mail address and phone number to:

realissues@aol.com

(one selection will be chosen on September 30 and their answer will appear in the July-September issue)

OPEN RESPONSE: To Developing the Leader Within Blog

I really liked it and got valuable insight into my personal desire to promote the value of biblical relationship within the church and therefore into our homes and communities. I was able to revisit some key words and phrases I tend to use to promote this vision and have decided that some may be misleading from what I am hoping to say, for example my use of the word "environment" is used for a specific reason but now I think there may be a better word or way of bringing out the reality of the Gospels provisions for us that are outside of us and yet working on our behalf in spite of our weaknesses and failures. This is an important context I think the church has lost sight of in its pursuit of holiness and sanctification and as a result we loose sight of the comfort of knowing of God's working on our behalf, whose comfort helps us to endure and stay in the race when so much personal failure surrounds us. Understanding this concept I believe is important for building up the body, most especially for those wounded healers and warriors whom the devil always afflicts the consciences of in order to keep them out of the race and what is so sad about this is that it is these "the least" who are most powerful in the hands of God to accomplish His purposes. This is an important goal of Romans 7 Ministry, to empower the weak to live for God by a righteousness, power and provisions that are not their own but ones that are freely given through the grace of the Gospel. This is the only way that true holiness can be produced and it seems that the weak are the only ones who have been humbled enough to understand this as the rest see sanctification rather than Gospel provision as a means to Christian blessing and power. I think that in our eagerness to confront the culture (and the churches) evils we have lost sight of the true power that flows from the Blood and have turned to the Law and holiness as the foundation of our hope and so we have put the cart before the horse and as a result the Church is in a wreck. As you pointed out: relationships is a missing element in the church today and this is sad because it is only a relationship with God through the Blood that builds a recovering community both vertically and horizontally. Many are looking for an answer to today's problems but it seems that few understand that the foundation to societies and the churches problems are found in a simple relationship with God and then out to each other and that in this context of ordinary "day to day" free, creative and loving relationships God is at work changing lives and the world. As a result we are too caught up in programs, seminars, anointed teachers and healers, seeking fantastic revelations and experiences, etc., etc. and all the while missing out on the reality of the Churches simple provisions that meet us in our ordinary lives. Because wherever we live in community with God there Jesus is amongst us. And where Jesus is there is change and power. I believe that this simple message of the church and Gospel needs to be emphasized again "example: the house church" in order to empower the wounded and incapable that God has chosen otherwise only the capable will be involved in the work of the church and we've seen what that alone has produced. In summing up the purpose of this letter: The Bible says that iron sharpens iron. Therefore, I look forward to your continued insights, help and even criticism so that I might better serve Him because He is worthy and also so necessary for the world today.

John Gibbs, founder of Romans 7 Ministries

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