

# **Truth On Fire**

## **The Pastor's Pen Archives 2014**

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**Table of Contents**

**Authentic Fiction.....3**  
**Bloomberg's Teachable Moment.....5**  
**God's Mouse Traps.....6**  
**Iniquity-Free.....7**  
**Musical Instruments in the Church.....9**  
**The Negotiated Wage.....12**  
**The Proper Perspective.....14**  
**Times of Memorial.....15**

## **Authentic Fiction**

Call me out of touch, but today (April 11, 2014) is the first time I've heard about the papyrus called: "The Gospel of Jesus' Wife." Scientists (the so-called 'experts') claim that while the document is 'ancient' it is NOT a 'fake' (Huff Post online). Of course, the REAL issue is NOT whether it is authentic or fake, but whether it is true or false!

Secularists love this kind of stuff because it appears to discredit the biblical account of Christ's life...one which makes ZERO mention of, or reference to, a spousal relationship. Our Lord's sole purpose for coming into this world via Holy Ghost conception in the womb of a virgin was to provide a sinless substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of all men and thus become the ONE Mediator between God and man. Mission accomplished!

There are two critical implications for this 'ancient' document. The first involves the title. I don't know who actually assigned the title, whether it was the author or those who discovered it. But why is it called a 'Gospel'? If we were to assume that the Lord Jesus had a wife, what is the Good News in that? In the four biblical Gospels, Jesus is the central figure. Each culminates in his death and subsequent resurrection, the two events that constitute the crux of the Gospel. There is NO Gospel to be found outside of Jesus Christ, including a fictitious wife!

The second has to do with potential procreative activity. If we assume that Jesus had a wife, and they physically consummated their relationship, isn't it possible that she might conceive? If that happened, how would it affect the Trinity? There would be absolutely NO difference between the sinless Holy Ghost seed that impregnated the virgin Mary and the sinless seed of the Son of God. What would that seed of Jesus produce? More God-Men...or God-Women? Would a child become the fourth person of the Godhead? Would the Trinity be a thing of the past?

Suppose Jesus had three sons through this hypothetical wife. Since they would all share his divine nature absent a sin nature, would not they all be qualified to die for sinners and provide a satisfactory blood sacrifice for their sins? Wouldn't the Father have to update his declaration to say: "Behold, these are my beloved sons, in whom I am well pleased!"? There is no end to the absurdity that one could extrapolate from this idea. For the Father to allow such a possibility into the realm of time and space simply baffles the mind! It would put at risk the entire plan of redemption and the very nature of God Himself!

Now, the fact that an unbeliever centuries ago wrote a piece of fiction suggesting Jesus had a wife should be a surprise to no one. The scribes and Pharisees tried to humanize (and demonize) Jesus and discredit him for three years before they successfully goaded the Romans into crucifying him.

So why in 2014 are we hearing about this piece of 'authentic fiction' that the 'science' community alleges is no fake (as if that makes it a true story)? Well, beyond the obvious reason of seeking to avoid accountability to the God who was manifest in the flesh, who has become the Judge of all men by virtue of his resurrection from the dead, it is designed to lower Jesus to the level of Mohammed. In other words, the two of them would be seen as mere mortal prophets

who naturally satisfied their sexual appetites. And in the final analysis, Mohammed assumed his place as the latest and greatest.

The bottom line is this: Authenticity does NOT prove or imply veracity! Satan is still in the business of trying to discredit Jesus, the Son of God. The "Gospel of Jesus' Wife" is just one more vain attempt to do so.

## **Bloomberg's Teachable Moment**

Former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg went on record recently with this assertion regarding his eternal destiny:

I am telling you if there is a God, when I get to heaven I'm not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It's not even close" (Huff Post Online – Politics).

Bloomberg made this claim based on his work for anti-constitutional gun control, obesity and smoking, which are intrusions into personal freedom. He obviously believes he was engaged in 'God's work' and therefore God will reward him with a heavenly abode in the sweet by and by. This is a teachable moment in that it illustrates the FALSE notion held by billions of humans, beginning with Cain, regarding the credentials GOD requires for entrance to HIS heaven.

What Bloomberg and others will one day discover, to their everlasting torment, is that all those works they considered to be 'righteous' were nothing more than 'filthy rags' in the sight of a Holy God (Isaiah 64:6). The righteousness that God requires for everlasting glory is that which ALONE belongs to His Son, Jesus Christ. This level of righteousness CANNOT be EARNED! It MUST be IMPUTED (reckoned to the sinner's account) by God because (when) they BELIEVE that Jesus died for their sins and rose from the dead (Romans 4:22-24).

Bloomberg's attitude is the epitome of both arrogance and ignorance. Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). But Bloomberg apparently feels his track record for his alleged betterment of humanity is sufficient grounds to bypass biblical truth. In addition, Bloomberg makes no mention of the problem he shares with every other human – SIN! What about your sin, Mr. Bloomberg? How have you dealt with that issue?

The Old Hymn says:

"My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness.  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' Name.  
On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground in sinking sand,  
All other ground is sinking sand!"

Don't look now, Mr. Bloomberg. But your confidence in those attainments as New York Mayor is nothing more than SINKING SAND! You say it's not even CLOSE. But God says it's not even POSSIBLE! This is an eminently teachable Bloomberg moment where Gospel truth is concerned!

## **God's Mouse Traps**

Have you ever had a problem with mice in your home? Mice are pesky little rodents for which inventors have developed several traps. Although many have tried to build 'the better mousetrap', the old tried-and-true spring-loaded traps remain top-of-the-line mouse killers. Put the baited trap in the right place, and wait for the lethal 'SNAP!'

When the Lord led Moses to pen down the inspired Genesis account of creation, he included some mouse traps of his own. For he knew that, in time, pesky little secularist rodents would espouse theories of origin contrary to truth. Two of these traps were designed to 'kill' the damnable theories of evolution and homosexuality.

We find the first trap in these words, brackets mine: "And the Lord God formed man from the [lifeless] dust of the ground, and breathed into his [Adam's] nostrils the breath of life; and man [Adam] became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). The entire theory of evolution rests upon the belief that simple life forms, over vast expanses of time coupled with random chance, developed (evolved) into more complex life forms. But according to TRUTH, man (Adam) was NOT a life form UNTIL God breathed into his nostrils. Adam had the appearance of a fully developed (anatomically complete) man BEFORE he ever became a life form.

I have heard many debates between Biblicists and secularists where this truth is totally ignored! But it is a divine mouse trap that spells death to evolutionary theory with ONE SNAP of the trap!

The second trap is found in these two texts: (1) "Male and female [heterosexual] created he them" (Genesis 1:27); and (2) "Therefore shall a man leave his [heterosexual] father and mother, and cleave unto his [heterosexual] wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24).

This is the biblical truth regarding marriage. If it is NOT heterosexual in nature, it CANNOT be called a marriage. Thus we have a divine mouse trap that spells death to homosexual marriage in ONE SNAP of God's trap! It also demonstrates that homosexual lust is totally dependent upon heterosexual activity (God's design) to survive!

Could anything be more perverted than a man pointing to another man and saying, "That's my wife!" Or a woman referring to another woman as her husband? Both affirmations are destroyed by this biblical mouse trap!

How shall we therefore see these secularists that find themselves and their theories crushed in these biblical, lethal spring-loaded traps? Again, the scripture provides the proper guidance: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22), and "Who changed the truth of God into a lie" (Romans 1:25).

Thank God for his mouse traps. When properly set, they will ALWAYS kill secular rodents!

## **Iniquity-Free**

In Psalm 66:18, David affirmed this truth: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." The word 'free' has become a very popular word these days. For many it embodies a lifestyle, a way of life. People want to be free of things. Look in your pantry or refrigerator. You likely have food products that are labeled 'fat-free' or 'sugar-free'. The more dietary disciplined may ensure that all their food is 'GMO-free' or 'gluten-free'. People who run small engines are opting for gasoline that's 'ethanol-free'. One of the allures of credit unions is their 'fee-free' checking accounts. Many work environments proudly advertise they are 'drug-free' or 'smoke-free'.

With all the emphasis upon the 'free' aspects of life, the vast majority of the human race totally misses what is the Greatest Freedom known to man – freedom from iniquity! If God's children had the same desire to be 'iniquity-free' as they do to be 'sugar-free' or 'fat-free', there would soon be a revival moving within our churches and across the nation.

In our text, the Psalmist (David) presents to readers both the WORST and BEST case scenarios for life. The phrase "the Lord will not hear me" (66:18) is the worst possible scenario for a man. If God Almighty 'turns away' (66:20) the prayer of a man in trouble, and withholds his mercy, there is no where else he can go. Trouble then becomes insurmountable. The phrase "verily the Lord hath heard me" (66:19) is the best possible scenario for a man. For when the Lord 'attends' to the prayer of his child, the worst trouble then becomes eminently fixable.

As a brief aside, the condition under which God will not hear us reads like a policy statement. Companies use policy statements to govern how they conduct business, such as a return policy. These are objective standards that are inflexible. In like manner, Psalm 66:18 constitutes a policy statement of sorts. If you regard iniquity in your heart, the Lord will not hear you. That's his policy!

A prime example of BEST case is king Hezekiah (2 Kings 19-20). On two occasions, he had his back against the wall by enemies for whom he was no match. The first was Sennacherib, king of Assyria (Ch 19), whose army, perhaps a quarter million strong, was in route to destroy him and Israel. The second was an illness that placed Hezekiah at death's door (Ch 20). On both occasions Hezekiah was left with only ONE resource – the ear of God. It was, however, the only resource he needed.

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, sent a letter to Hezekiah threatening the nation with destruction. In that letter he told Hezekiah that he should NOT think that the God of Israel would be able to stop the mayhem. In doing so, Sennacherib mocked the God of Israel. Big mistake! Hezekiah began to intercede for Israel. In response, the Lord sent his angel, who smote 185,000 Assyrian soldiers while they slept. With virtually no army left to execute his plan, Sennacherib returned to Assyria, where he was later assassinated.

The prophet Isaiah later delivered a message to Hezekiah, a death notice, and advised him to get his affairs in order. Upon the prophet's exit, Hezekiah turned over in his bed, faced the wall, and began to pour out his heart to God. God heard the king! The Lord sent his the prophet

Isaiah back with an update – 15 more years of life! In both scenarios, the ONE thing standing between Hezekiah and death was a God whose ear was attentive to his prayer. Hezekiah was able to save both his nation and himself because God heard his prayer.

The obstacle to prayer is found in two words, a verb and an object. They are “regard iniquity.” The verb ‘regard’ is from a Hebrew verb that means ‘to look upon, to gaze at.’ When a student of scripture conducts a word study, enlightenment can come from three sources. First, we learn by the etymology of the word itself (i.e., what does it mean). Secondly, we are bound by the context in which the word is used. Thirdly, we can derive light from the manner in which the word is used elsewhere in scripture. The word “regard” is no exception.

In Genesis 1, it is used several times, and in each instance is translated “saw.” Its first usage is in Genesis 1:4 after God created the light: “And God SAW the light, that it was good.” The ‘saw’ pattern continues after each creation phase. In other words, God looked upon (regarded) every thing he had made after he made it. At no time did he take a mulligan. What he made was right the first time, every time. He liked what he saw. So he allowed them all to stand as made, and moved on to the next creative act. Therefore to regard iniquity means to see it, acknowledge its existence in the heart, like it and allow it to stand.

The object is the Hebrew noun **aven**, which signifies “emptiness, vanity” and is closely related to idolatry in biblical contexts. But here it represents anything (esp. an idol) that stands between a man and God. I say that because nowhere in scripture are we told that David had a problem with idols. He DID have a problem with lust and deviousness (conspired to have Uriah the Hittite killed). But idolatry was not among his iniquities. When a man (or woman) allows anything to stand between him and his God, and accepts in his heart that which God rejects, he gives God no choice but to turn his prayer away. In a real sense, it’s a secret love affair with darkness, spiritual adultery.

I’ve often wondered what David went through during that year in which he committed adultery, conspired to have Uriah killed and covered up (regarded) his iniquity. The Lord was NOT hearing him. Yet he went about the business of ruling, keeping up appearances. I wonder if any of his close associates noticed the difference in his powerless life. The time of reckoning came after Bathsheba gave birth to their child. The baby died, David got right with God (Psalm 51) and then along came Solomon. One of the greatest displays of God’s forgiveness and favor has to be the Lord’s fondness for Solomon. The scripture says: “And the Lord loved him” (2 Samuel 12:24).

So the question each of us must ask ourselves is whether an iniquity-free life is something to which we want to aspire? Do we want to be heard when we pray? How important is that blessed state to our relationship with God? After all, if we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us!



## **Musical Instruments in the Church**

For two thousand years, churches that have aligned themselves with Jesus Christ and his Gospel have incorporated musical instruments in their worship. During the last century, however, some out-of-the-mainstream groups (sects/cults) started to eschew musical instruments, citing the New Testament (NT) absence of any specific guidelines regarding their usage.

Heretics like Alexander Campbell, who split off from the Baptist church, and other 'Church of Christ' derivatives, took up the refrain: "Speak where the Bible speaks; be silent where the Bible is silent!" Since the NT is silent on the subject of musical instruments in corporate worship, these groups assume, and falsely so, that God somehow forbids or bans their usage. Since God doesn't specifically 'authorize' them in his Word, the Church that uses them is in disobedience.

A few exercises in biblical logic will dismantle this argument. First, the Old Testament (OT) clearly sanctions the use of musical instruments in worship. In 1 Chronicles 15:16, we read: "And David spake to the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of musick, psalteries and harps and cymbals, sounding, by lifting up the voice with joy." So we see that the Levites were 'appointed' to be the singers and instrument players.

In 1 Chronicles 16:42, the Bible says: "And with them Heman and Jeduthun with trumpets and cymbals for those that should make a sound, and with musical instruments of God. And the sons of Jeduthun were porters." Note that (1) the sounds of trumpets and cymbals 'should' be made, and (2) the instruments became God's instruments when so dedicated for that purpose. In other words, God was pleased when HIS instruments that HE authorized were played unto HIM in the corporate worship.

This text in 2 Chronicles 5:13 needs little commentary: "It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of musick, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD...." Here we see that God's glory (cloud) filled the house of worship as God's people offered praise and thanksgiving accompanied by musical instruments.

There are other references, such as "musical instruments" (Nehemiah 12:36), and the classic text from Psalm 150:4: "Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs." The bottom line is musical instruments were both appointed and authorized in the OT scriptures. The opponents of musical instruments say the central issue is whether there is any biblical 'authorization' for using them. That argument has no legs on which to stand. Neither is there any biblical authorization for church carpeting, paving church parking lots with asphalt, et al!

With OT authorization firmly established, we are obliged to ask a few questions and make a few observations. First, is there ANY scripture wherein God told his Church to discontinue the use of musical instruments as he had authorized in the OT? No, that biblical reference does not exist!

The apostle Paul, who penned the majority of church epistles, made no mention of musical instruments. That's because his focus was on the big issues of the Gospel and apostolic doctrine (such as justification by faith, redemption, reconciliation, election, adoption and predestination) and not on things that were ancillary or optional. Those who argue against musical instruments in our church worship are therefore obligated to cite the specific point in time when God changed his mind and ceased to be pleased with the sound of musical instrument accompaniment as part of corporate worship. Such empirical evidence does NOT exist either in scripture or in history! Therefore NT silence does NOT make the argument for their cessation!

Secondly, are God's people forbidden from playing musical instruments outside of corporate worship (i.e., in their homes or as part of a musical group)? Absolutely not! In fact, development of one's musical talent (playing an instrument) as a good steward of God's gifts is pleasing unto the Lord that gave them. Can a child of God use musical instruments in his/her private devotions in a manner that pleases the Lord? Absolutely! I know of no intellectually honest individual who would argue that God is OK with his people playing a musical instrument as long as they are NOT used in the context of worship. Such argumentation would be absurd on its face!

Thirdly, musical instruments can be used to honor God or abused in a manner that brings him displeasure. The overriding guideline for the use of musical instruments is found in Colossians 3:17: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." See also Colossians 3:23: "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

Fourthly, it's clear that God has little interest in musical instruments for the instruments' sakes. Whether a church decides to use musical instruments or not as part of their worship is optional. Yes, it's optional. The Lord neither requires them nor forbids them. God's churches are not the BETTER for their absence. Nor are they the WORSE for their presence. Musical instruments are NOT a major issue, but a minor one. That is the reason for NT silence.

Fifthly, what God desires are "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" that come from the hearts of his people (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). It's all about the heart with God! Regimented and routine worship, even when offered without the use of instruments, is displeasing to God. So for one to reason that God bestows favor on our worship simply because we avoid instrumental accompaniment is biblically ignorant and foolish. Equally foolish are those who believe that the introduction of a musical instrument into corporate worship is somehow met with displeasure from the Almighty.

In closing, two observations are in order:

- (1) Church historians, over two millennia, have documented and attested to many movements of Holy Ghost power, conversions to Christ and spiritual renewal within various denominations and congregations that incorporated musical instruments in worship. How do the Johnny-come-lately opponents of musical instruments explain this heavenly phenomenon?

- (2) The opposition to musical instruments is seldom if ever a standalone issue. In other words, opponents are usually part of a theological thought system that has several false doctrines in the mix, such as baptismal regeneration, denial of grace alone through faith alone, et al.

When ANY church or group of churches attempts to argue against musical instruments as an accompaniment to worship, they have wandered off the biblical reservation into the swamp of humanistic rationalism and twisted logic. The argument against musical instruments in church worship, when God authorized it and found pleasure therein in OT times, is futile, and CANNOT be made from biblical truth!

## **The Negotiated Wage**

During his ministry, Jesus had many encounters with the scribes and Pharisees, the religious elites of his day. One of those encounters is recorded in Matthew 15.

The S&P's came to Jesus complaining that his disciples were not observing the traditions of the elders (15:2). The issue was a matter of hand-washing. Jesus turned the tables by pointing out that they themselves were transgressors of the law because they thought more of their traditions than the Word of God (15:3). Then he called them "hypocrites" because they gave lip service to God but had hearts that were far from him (15:7-9).

The disciples then came to Jesus expressing to him their concern that he had "offended" the Pharisees with his rebuke (15:12). In other words, "We need these guys if your ministry is to take root and be successful!" Jesus then responded, "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (15:14). In other words, "I do NOT need these guys to build the church I plan to build!"

What Jesus described speaks volumes to the current political climate in America. Most people in this nation are blind as bats. The leaders are equally blind. America is in a deep ditch. Now we have the sightless Hillary Clinton telling blind Americans that Jesus would have "endorsed the minimum wage" as well as Liberal policies. While the blind may eat up such fiction, the Bible, of which Hillary is ignorant, does NOT teach that. Whenever I hear a godless Liberal invoking Jesus, it raises red flags! A brief review of scripture will expose her ignorance.

In Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus told a kingdom parable. He likened his kingdom to a landholder that needed laborers for his vineyard. So he went out early in the morning and hired some, agreeing to pay them a "penny" for the day's work (20:2). At the third hour he hired more, agreeing to pay them "whatsoever is right" (20:4). He did likewise at the sixth and ninth hours, making the same deal with the workers (20:5). At the eleventh hour, he recruited more workers and agreed to pay them "whatsoever is right" (20:7).

The end of the day came. It was time to pay all five sets of laborers, beginning with last hired. He paid them a penny (20:9). When it came to the first hired, he paid them the 'agreed upon' penny as well. This caused the first hired to "murmur" inasmuch as those who had worked one hour got paid the same as those who had worked twelve hours under "the burden and heat of the day" (20:12). It turns out he paid ALL the workers a penny, an "equal" wage, without regard for time worked.

The landlord answered one of the complainers, saying, "Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?" Now, this parable has kingdom implications (interpretive) that are not within the scope of this discussion, which deals with its application. The point Jesus was making in terms of wages, in which the landlord had done NOTHING WRONG, was that they were NEGOTIATED wages as opposed to minimum or mandatory wages.

Jesus, via this kingdom parable, endorsed the free-market principle of the negotiated wage, or what the market would bear. Those who worked a twelve-hour day could have negotiated for

MORE than a penny. But they AGREED UPON the offer made by the landlord. The fact they got EQUAL wages is NO argument for a MINIMUM wage. Each got a NEGOTIATED wage agreed upon in good faith by the landholder and the workers. For that reason those who worked a full day had NO GROUNDS to complain about what the landholder paid the one-hour workers.

A second principle, in addition to negotiation, is that of ownership. Jesus reasoned, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own?" (20:15). The answer to that rhetorical question is an unqualified "Yes!" The one who OWNS the vineyard has the prerogative to NEGOTIATE the labor required to maintain it, which the landholder did. One of the fundamental building blocks of American society is the principle of Property Rights. Therefore the Government has NO right whatsoever to dictate to business owners what they pay their workers...period!

These are the two problems with the Minimum Wage. First, it strips the labor market of the principle of negotiation. Secondly, it violates the principle of property rights. The Government mandating a certain minimal pay for labor is far, far different than the employer (owner) and employee negotiating (agreeing upon) a wage based on what the employer needs and what the employee brings to the table.

The bottom line: NOWHERE in scripture does Jesus endorse a minimum wage or even hint at the notion. He did, however, illustrate and uphold the free-market principle of a negotiated wage and the right of business owners to negotiate that wage without Government interference!

## **The Proper Perspective**

It's easy for us to criticize and offer political analysis of all things pertaining to Obama and Liberalism in general. We all do it and, for the most part, make valid points. Frankly, I LOVE political analysis, whether it's reading it or writing it. From time to time, however, we need to step back and realize WHO is ultimately in charge. The Bible says: "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another" (Psalm 75:6-7).

Have you ever asked yourself: "How in this world did Obama ever win the presidency?" I sure have. After all the mental gymnastics, all the shoulda-coulda-woulda armchair quarterbacking that we love to engage in, the Word of God has our answer: God Almighty put him there!

God gives nations WHAT they deserve, and often gives them MORE than they deserve. But he doesn't give nations LESS than they deserve. In President Barack Obama, God gave America exactly what she deserved!

Now you might argue that America deserves better. Well, there are 55 million murdered babies that would argue against that notion. Take into account all the political corruption, the corporate greed, the kicking of God out of our schools and the public arena, our leaders calling right wrong and wrong right, and you have a cauldron of moral filth whose stench rises to the heavens.

The Obama government is the most corrupt in our history. Under Obama's leadership America is fast becoming Sodom. For those who argue it already is, I'll concede that point.

The next and more important question is: "Is America now under the judgment of God?" You draw your own conclusions. But I'll say this. If we are, and it's hard to see how that's NOT the case, there is no political party, no President, no Cabinet and no amount of conservatism that will spare us from God's plagues.

The ONLY way of escape from the calamity that is yet to come is GODLY SORROW followed by REPENTANCE coupled with CONFESSION! It must start first in God's churches, whose lukewarmness is giving the Lord a divine stomach ache.

Yes, America's NO. 1 problem is SIN...from the top down. The solution is nothing less than the precious blood of Jesus Christ!

## **Times of Memorial**

Memorial Day is a cherished national holiday, as well it should be. While many have relegated this day of remembrance to a paid day off from work, it continues to focus our attention upon the millions of brave men and women who served honorably in the armed forces of our nation, and gave the ultimate sacrifice for the freedoms we hold dear.

Times of memorial are meaningful, especially in biblical terms, which is why God through the scriptures has taught us to remember certain personages and events as a standard routine in our Christian walk. This does not equate to living in the past. It rather serves to remind us how past events can have a direct bearing upon the present...and the future as well!

Remembering is a worthy activity because it is God-like (or godly) to do so. In fact, the first biblical mention of remembering finds the Lord declaring: "And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (Genesis 9:15-16). The God who remembers his covenants is the One who first establishes them (9:9, 11, 17). They are a matter of sovereign determination! If God chooses to establish a covenant with mankind, he never forgets it! He always remembers!

Moses, as God's spokesperson, called upon Israel to "Remember this [Passover] day" in which they came out from Egypt and the house of bondage by the Lord's strong hand (Exodus 13:3). In the giving of the law at Sinai, the Lord said: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (20:8). If they had diligently remembered these basic statutes, and observed them, it would have spared them a lot of self-inflicted trouble, and perhaps saved an entire generation from death in the wilderness.

Unfortunately, that multitude was mixed, and often found themselves lusting after the things of old, as evidenced by this confession: "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, besides this manna, before our eyes" (Numbers 11:5-6). The memories of "good eats" in Egypt were harmless. But the context in which they summoned them called into question God's ability to provide and make good on his promise to deliver a land flowing with milk and honey.

That mixed multitude died before seeing the first acre of promised land. Before they entered the land of promise, God charged Israel to remember the manner in which he led and kept them through forty years in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2). And again: "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day" (8:19). The price tag for forgetting was perishing (8:19-20).

The Lord Jesus gave one of the more powerful admonitions for remembering: "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). The context was the revelation of the Son of man in the last days. The warning underlined the danger of having one's heartstrings so entwined with earthly

possessions (i.e., materialism) that it obscures that which is truly substantive in life—being in the will of God and pleasing him in the process. In violation of the messenger's command, Lot's wife looked back, and became a pillar of salt. In looking back, I believe Lot's wife displayed the same mindset as did Eve when she ate the forbidden fruit: that is, the will of God was deemed counterproductive to what they thought was in their best interests at the time. This same mindset has sabotaged many a ministerial career, and led to much heartache. Remember Lot's wife!

In his last words to Timothy, Paul said: "Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel" (2 Timothy 2:8). It was an important reminder to a young preacher from a war-torn veteran who was about to die for that gospel. In his pastoral work, Timothy would be subjected to many trials and tribulations—many of which would not rival death. But what if they did? Was Timothy any better than his mentor? Was either any better than the Christ they preached? The gospel of the resurrected Christ, if kept in the forefront of the young preacher's thinking, would suffice to sustain him in any and every trial!

Let's take this time of memorial to reflect upon those things that really matter. These would include Christ our Passover Lamb, our deliverance from sin's bondage, God's commitment to his covenants, the dangers of being entangled with the things of this world, and the death-defeating gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!