

THE BATTLE CREEK BULLETIN

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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 9:00 a.m.
Worship 10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.
Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

To Live Is Christ; to Die Is Gain

By Matthew W. Bassford

Among its other effects, a terminal diagnosis will lead you to read the Scriptures with very different eyes. All sorts of passages that you thought you understood take on new depth and meaning. For me, the chief of these is Philippians 1:21-24.

Years ago, I read this passage as Paul being Paul. He was a good man and loved the Philippians, so he wanted to continue living in order to help them. That's true, but it's vastly incomplete because it doesn't really reckon with either half of Philippians 1:21.

Let's start with the back half. When Paul describes death as gain, he isn't guessing. According to II Corinthians 12:2-4, he was caught up into the third heaven and heard inexpressible things that no human can repeat. The unimaginable joys of eternal life were no mystery to him.

Against that gain, though, he balances life in the likeness of Christ. Serving the Philippians is as precious to him as his heavenly reward. This might seem incredible to us, but I think it's where most genuine disciples would end up if they were placed in Paul's position.

I'm not eager to die. I don't look forward to the process of dying, which is likely to be very unpleasant. I don't relish giving up my abilities one by one. I already miss hunting and hiking, and I'm sure I'll miss being able to walk when I lose that. However, against those things, I can set my hope of that which is far better. From a selfish perspective, heaven wins every time!

Instead, the losses that I mourn the most are of my opportunities to serve others. I bitterly regret that I probably won't be able to finish raising my children. I grieve that I won't be able to give my wife a lifetime of being happily married. I mourn that I will have to step away from the pulpit

and the keyboard and won't be able to help others on to heaven. Once I die, I will be done with all of those things.

I think that's what Paul is talking about when he says, "*To live is Christ.*" Christ was a servant who actually **left Heaven** so He could come to earth and help us! The essence of following Him is living with self-sacrificing love. Paul prized the opportunity to do that so highly — an opportunity that would last only as long as his life did--that he was willing to postpone his reward for the sake of others.

The Christian's bucket list, then, doesn't consist of travel and skydiving. There's nothing wrong with them, of course, but they are of no lasting value. Instead, the truly valuable things in life are the times when we can put a family member or a friend ahead of ourselves, take on that Bible class at church that nobody else wants to teach, or gather our courage and invite an outsider to worship with us. Those, not our possessions or abilities, are our true gifts. As Paul found, they are the only things in this life that are worthy to be compared to the joys of heaven.

Press On! Press On!

By George Slover

"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (Hebrews 10:35-36).

During my boyhood days, we spent many hours on a lake enjoying the outdoors with boating, camping, swimming, and water skiing. I remember my father patiently teaching someone how to water-ski. The slack would come out of the rope and suddenly Dad's student would pop up on those skis only to quickly fall. This process would be repeated a number of times until the novice was able to get his balance on those skis. Finally, because of my father's patience and the student's perseverance, the mission was accomplished and the student was able to enjoy his ride.

Like water skiing, being successful as a Christian takes many hours of work and perseverance. We are like the boxer who gets knocked down but keeps getting up. It involves doing God's will even when we don't feel like it. It is being satisfied with the rewards that don't come instantly but in the next life. It means not giving up our connection with other Christians. It may be working and earning a paycheck even when we are not wild about the job. It includes resolving conflicts with others and accepting help from others to do the right thing.

The message is clear. It is never God's will for us to run from a problem, but to press on so that we can go to the next level. The message is clear: Perseverance under pressure pleases God!

The Devil's Inoculation

By Dee Bowman

I was watching a ball game the other night. Between innings, a commercial came on in which a man was asked by his wife, "Do I look fat in this dress?" He replied, "Yes, you do." The answer had a catastrophic effect. She bawled — and I don't men she cried — she bawled, everywhere they went. Then they reversed the idea, having him answer when she asked if she looked fat in the dress, "Honey, you look fantastic."

The "wise" conclusion he reached contained a fine line that graphically depicts how far we have descended in our moral judgments. The tag line on the commercial said, and I quote it verbatim, "A man knows peace is more important than the truth."

How sad. How utterly sad!

The world sneaks up on you. It never invites you into the slime pits of sin, it merely gives you little shots of carnality so that you are soon inoculated against spiritual things and give little notice to them. And it all happens almost without your knowing it. It would be interesting to know just how many people were actually horrified by the tagline on that commercial. Far too few, I suspect.

And I know what you're thinking — "It can't happen to me. I won't be influenced by such thinking." That's another tool of the devil. "*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*" (I Corinthians 10:12). He knows how to make slight deviations from the truth attractive, or in this case, so unnoticeable that after a time you come to tolerate them almost without thinking, he builds up a kind of carnal immunity.

Television and the internet are wonderful when they are used with discretion. But when they become the main entity in our lives, they can have a devastating effect. We need some moderation, people. How long since you actually turned the television off because you were turned off by the television? We can't afford to let these media conveniences dominate our thinking, we are apt to be led away — almost without knowing it.

Truth is not elastic. You can't just move it around to fit whatever you want it to fit. You have to manage your thinking in strict adherence to what is right and make your decisions accordingly.

"*Buy the truth and sell it not*" (Proverbs 23:23). There is no simpler way to put it. Truth has high value. It's worth the keeping. In fact, without it, there can be no real peace. The peace that really matters comes from using truth to make wise choices, no matter how difficult, not choosing as the commercial says, "peace is more important than truth." That is not so!

Paul speaks of the devil's deceit, bound in "*and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be*

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saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness” (II Thessalonians 2:10-12).

That, my friends, is an apt description of the television commercial we just described. And do you know what’s really sad? It works. Far too often, it works.

Sadly, there are dozens of other commercials like the one we just described. And our fragmented thinking, produced by our taking in only little sketches of worldliness and carnality at a time, can cause us to eventually find the truth to be little more than a mere suggestion, certainly not any sort of restriction.

What bothers me most is how this kind of “smallism thinking” is affecting our young people. If we are not careful, we will allow them to believe that what they see on television and what they see on Facebook, and what they text (sometimes without the least bit of moral restraint) is normal, just the way life is and that we needn’t worry about it. And it may be the way life is today — but we don’t have to let them be vaccinated with small shots of it so they can either ignore it or just look the other way.

Could You Not Watch One Hour?

By Bryan Matthew Dockens

Frustrated that His disciples allowed themselves to be overcome by fatigue as he agonized in the garden, Jesus sternly inquired "Are you sleeping? Could you not watch one hour?" (Mark 14:37). It is truly disappointing that the dramatic spiritual events unfolding before them failed to sustain the attention of the apostles. Is Jesus any more satisfied by the attention He receives now?

Movie-goers arrive early to preview upcoming movies, concert-goers crave an encore, and sports fans are thrilled by games that go into overtime. Yet worshippers presented with a sermon lasting longer than anticipated depart in a state of discontent. Evidently, they do not share the sentiment of the psalmist who wrote, "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

Those who insist on brevity would have been rather unhappy to worship in Troas when Paul visited. Would they continue to glance at their watches as the apostle "continued his message until midnight" (Acts 20:7)? Certainly, they would be horrified at the prospect of gathering before the Water Gate with Ezra the scribe as he read from the law "from morning until mid-day" (Nehemiah 8:1-3).

It is a matter of priority (Matthew 6:33) and zeal (Romans 12:11) which marks the difference between a bored worshipper and a satisfied one.

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Thanks to Steven Willis (See Genesis 6-8)

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