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PO Box 3572 * Oldtown, ID 83822 * www.gentleshepherd.com * December 2018

God's Glorious Attributes

Part 5

HIS LOVE

By Rayola Kelley



One of the most popular attributes of God is His love. How many times have you heard *John 3:16*? I have always appreciated God's love, but I've become very concerned that many people will hide or try to use God's love to slide into heaven; but, it is not God's love that saves a person. The Bible is clear we are saved by grace through faith. Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God (*Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 17:17*). The unique aspect of God's love comes down to the fact that out of love God provided eternal life to whosoever will believe. In other words, God's love was a motivation behind Him giving His Son. As Scripture clearly states IT IS BELIEVING UPON THE SON that will assure us that, instead of perishing in our sins, we will be saved from them. It is because He loved us first and reached out with His love to whosoever will believe and receive it that it would be natural for recipients of His love to love Him back. (*1 John 4:19*).

Sadly, many people's idea of love is sentimental, worldly, selfish, and unrealistic. Granted, as we enter into the season of remembering God's great gift to mankind that came by way of a manger, we must discern the

characteristics of God's love to understand what it means for God to be love (*1 John 4:8*).

The idea that God is love tells us He can do nothing but act out of love. As you consider *2 Corinthians 13:14*, you will see that love is associated with the Father, grace to Jesus, and communion to the Spirit. John tells us in his first epistle, "*Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not because it knew him not*" (*1 John 3:1*). This means the Father bestowed love towards those who believe upon the great gift of His Son, while grace comes from Jesus' act of redemption on the cross and now we can come into communion with the Lord because of the gift of the Spirit. It is important to understand that God's love is available to all who will come and receive and embrace it but one must receive God's love through His Son's redemption in order to benefit from it. We may love someone, but if they do not accept our love, there is nothing we can do to help or be beneficial to them.

People talk about God's love being unconditional. It is true you can't earn it, but many people see unconditional love as God accepting them regardless of their unregenerate state and unacceptable conduct. God's love is available to those who come by way of Christ's cross but outside of the cross, man cannot, nor will He be able to experience the benefit of God's love.

Giving His Son was not a matter of pity or merit but because God could do nothing else if man was to be saved. There is no silly sentiment in such love; rather, it reveals a commitment that will go to any lengths to right a matter or ensure that the opportunity is available for man to experience the benefits of such love. It is for this reason that love rejoices when truth wins out and does not rejoice in iniquity (*1 Corinthians 13:6*).

This is the great problem with today's presentation of God's love. Many act as if, out of love, God will give man a pass no matter what he does but this is the farthest thing from the truth and such a concept points to Universalism where everyone is going to be saved in the end. The Apostle Paul made it clear that grace does not allow man to do as he pleases for grace reigns only through righteousness (*Romans 5:20-6:2*). Scripture is also concise that the way to heaven is narrow and many will strive to enter in but will not be able to find the narrow passageway (*Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:24*). The reason the way to salvation is narrow is because it comes down to the person of Jesus Christ. There is only one Jesus that can save. He is the Christ, God who came in the flesh, the Son of God, and the Savior of the world (*1 John 2:22-23; 4:1-3; 4:14-15*). As I have stated, there is only one Jesus and if you do not get Him right, you will find yourself on the broad path leading to destruction.

Godly love is first of all honorable, secondly it is morally responsible, and third all of its desires toward a matter are pure. If we are going to understand God's great love, the first thing we must do when it comes to discerning and recognizing it is to not dilute it by mixing it with the other loves that the world and the flesh operate in. When I was a new Christian I learned there was a difference between brotherly love, the love of a mother for a child, and God's love. To explain these different words the Bible teachers would often show the Greek word for each type of love.

In my research for a chapter of a book I was writing, I looked up love in the Strong's Concordance. I could not believe how great a list of words the concordance has to describe all the different types of loves a person can have from a love for different tastes, preferences, and etc. The main word that seems to tie all the different meanings together was the word

“fondness.” In other words, I have a fondness for certain things or certain food. That which I am fond of can be aroused by smell, taste, memories, or notions.

We are all aware that it is not unusual for people to have “fondness” for someone or something and if such fondness becomes obsessive or possessive it is nothing more than lust that is out of control. Such lust will turn into unabated jealousies, disillusionment, contempt, or pure hate.

Fondness can be very sentimental. For example, at Christmas the baby in the manger conjured up great sentiment in me. Keep in mind, I have been around a lot of babies but the baby in the manger represented something special to me even though I could not explain it. As I considered that event, I realized that Christmas songs had a lot to do with the fondness I felt for the story of the Christ child being born in Bethlehem, but after Christmas the sentiment was packed up and put away with the rest of the decorations, leaving no real lasting effect on me.

Another aspect of fondness is that it is fickle. The right environment must be set up for fondness to be activated. For instance a movie theater or a movie will cause me to desire my favorite snack food—popcorn. I dearly love popcorn, but I don’t think about it unless the environment reminds me that popcorn would nicely fit into the activities. In fact, advertisers use this type of fondness to stir us up to buy certain products.

The other aspect of fondness is that it can be very conditional. If something is going to continue to receive my fondness, it must stir me up in some way for me to desire or pursue it. For example, selfish love is very conditional. If a person makes me feel a certain way, then I can in turn reciprocate. Selfish love is all about serving the whims of self and playing enough off of the egos and vanities of others to get the selfish demands of my self-serving love met.

Needless to say, I have witnessed a tremendous amount of fondness in my life that proved to be temporary, conditional, silly, and self-serving. I even struggled with what real, lasting, godly love was all about. It was when I became a Christian and

understood what that babe in the manger represented and later as man what He did on my behalf that finally impacted and changed my life. One of the Scripture that brought such meaning to God’s love for me can be found in the prophecy of *Isaiah 9:6a*, “*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.*” It took a few years for me to understand that God sent forth a child to be miraculously conceived in the womb of a virgin, in order to give the world His Son. The idea of God giving a child reveals that godly love only gives the best. It will not simply throw crumbs or leftovers or give some other noble gesture, but it prefers the person that love is being extended towards over any self-interests and preservation. The fact that God gave His Son reveals how sacrificial godly love is. To such love no price is too great to pay and as believers we are told in *John 15:13*, “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*” In *John 13:34-35*, Jesus made it clear that this love would identify those who are truly His disciples, “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*”

I realized I did not have this love in and of myself. It had to be shed abroad in my spirit and soul by the Holy Spirit (*Romans 5:5*). It became clear to me I was not a source of God’s love but I was to be an extension of it to others.

Isaiah 9:6 goes on to tell us, “*and the government shall be upon his shoulder.*” Jesus came out of love to establish an unseen, everlasting kingdom in the hearts of believers. God’s love always shoulders the greater burden. To set up the unseen kingdom Jesus had to first shoulder a cross. In other words, Jesus gave up His life so that He could establish the kingdom of God in hearts and lives. As we can see, the Father gave His best and out of love for the Father and for you and me the Son gave His all. In order for Jesus to give His all, He had to consecrate Himself. Godly love will come under a pre-ordained burden and will not let a person simply go part way in a commitment. It will compel the individual to go all the way because it is

the right and honorable thing to do. That is why we are told in *Galatians 6:2*, “*Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” And, how do you fulfill the law of Christ? *Romans 13:10* answers the question, “*Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*”

To godly love any sacrifice is simply one’s reasonable service and reasonable service is the least any of us can do in a matter. Consider Jesus in regard to His consecration. He gave up the riches of heaven to become poor for us so we could be made rich in faith. He gave up His sovereignty to call the shots so that He could become a yielded instrument in the Father’s hand. He allowed His glory to be clothed in humanity so that He could walk as man among us. He became the Lamb of God on the cross so we could be made in the righteousness of God. Out of love Jesus paid a debt we could not pay and because of His love, we are to ever pay a debt of love to others (*Romans 12:1-2; 13:8; 2 Corinthians 8:9; 5:21; Philippians 2:5-11*).

The Son of God came by way of a virgin so He could take on a body. *Hebrews 10:5* tells us why, “*Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me.*” God did not have pleasure in the burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin. It cost a lot of innocent animals their lives because of man’s sin and since there was no offering that could satisfy the Law once and for all, the Lord had to take on a body to become a pure Lamb of God to be offered up on the altar of the cross as our Passover Lamb. John the Baptist said as much when he saw Jesus and cried out, “*Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away sin the sin of the world*” (*John 1:29*). Jesus was lifted up in humiliation for the all world as a man of sorrows, stricken, smitten and afflicted of God. He was wounded for our transgression, bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was on Him and with His stripes we can be healed spiritually (*Isaiah 53:1-5*).

The next thing that *Isaiah 9:6* tells us is this Son would be given a name. It is easy to wonder what is in a

name but we know according to *Philippians 2:9-11*, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Compare *Philippians* with *Isaiah 45:21-23*; "Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? Who hath told it from that time? Have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."

As we consider the Son of God's full name, it is "The Lord Jesus Christ." The word "the" is singular. It is not like the word "a" which can be one of something, one in the line of something, or part of something; rather, Jesus stands alone when it comes to who He is and His work on our behalf. The word "Lord" points to Adon (singular) or Adonai (plural) who is owner and possessor of all. We know that we have been bought with the price of Jesus' blood and as the Apostle Paul reminded us in *1 Corinthians 7:23*, "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men."

The Hebrew name for Jesus is "Joshua." "Joshua" in Hebrew means "Jehovah saves," or "Jehovah is our salvation." Both Jesus' step-father, Joseph and His mother Mary were instructed that His name was to be Jesus. This clearly signifies His mission. He came to save mankind from the consequences of sin upon their soul—that of death or separation from God. The Bible is clear there is only one Savior and *1 John 4:14* identifies that Jesus is **the** Savior of the world and for this reason we are also told this about Him, "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and

they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." This prophecy came from *Isaiah 7:14* and it definitely identifies Jesus as Emmanuel, God with us.

The final part of Jesus' name is, "Christ," the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Promised One. The Christ identifies Jesus as the Son of Man who came from the lineage of David to serve as both king over all and as a High Priest of the Melchisedec priesthood. Both kings and priests were anointed and Jesus was anointed in His humanity by the Spirit of the Living God to preach the Gospel to the poor in spirit, heal the broken hearted, set the captive free, and heal those who have been spiritually bruised by sin (*Luke 4:18-19; Hebrews 7:1-17*). In essence, Jesus came to usher in the year of Jubilee where all those who are heirs of salvation will be set free from the tyranny of sin to claim their inheritance of eternal life.

We could go on about Jesus and all the volumes of the world could not capture His majesty, describe His glory, or reveal the depth of His work of redemption. But, what I do know is that His majesty was put aside, His glory veiled in a human body and His work lifted up on a cross and displayed to all mankind because of God's great love. This Jesus was a gift of love given to the whole world by God. He was born in a stable to identify with humility and wrapped in swaddling clothes to remind us of the state of spiritual poverty we are in until we receive the gift of eternal life. The angels declared Him, the beasts witnessed His birth, lowly shepherds were the first who came to worship Him, and He was seen by those who faithfully served in the temple waiting for the consolation of Israel to appear, as well as sought after by the wise men. The innkeeper missed the opportunity to witness something great, Herod felt threatened by Him as a baby, the religious leaders quoted Scripture but missed the unveiling of the Living Word, and for the most part man slept through the great miracle of God manifesting Himself in the flesh so He could redeem His people (*1 Timothy 3:16*).

The message of what we consider the first Christmas seems lost, but the reality is that it becomes lost to

mankind as man becomes lost to his Creator. Every Christmas we believers try to resurrect the real meaning of the first Christmas, reminding people that Christ is the reason for the season of great celebration.

This Christmas we need to make sure we put more focus on God's great gift of love, knowing that this gift was wrapped in humanity, sealed by the Spirit, and identified and topped off with an old rugged cross that now points man upward towards the heavenly, the eternal, and the everlasting inheritance of life. †

HYMNS FOR SCHOOLS (Published in 1852)

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation." —Zech. ix.9.

HARK! What mean those holy voices,
Sweetly sounding through the skies?
Lo! The angelic host rejoices;
Heavenly hallelujahs rise.
Hear them tell the wondrous story;
Hear them chant, in hymns of joy,
"Glory in the highest—glory!
Glory be to God most high!
"Peace on earth, good-will from heaven,
Reaching far as man is found,
Souls redeemed, and sins forgiven,"
Loud our golden harps shall sound.
"Christ is born, the great Anointed;
Heaven and earth his praises sing;
Oh, receive whom God appointed,
For your Prophet, Priest, and King."
Haste, ye mortals, to adore him;
Learn his name, and taste his joy;
Till in heaven ye sing before him,
"Glory be to God most high!"

About the composer of this hymn: **Hart Pease Danks** (6 April 1834 – 20 November 1903) was a musician who specialized in composing, singing and leading choral groups. In 1873, he published his best known song, "Silver Threads Among the Gold" (words by Eben E. Rexford), which sold over three million copies. Having sold the rights to it, though, he died penniless in a boarding house in Philadelphia, his last written words: "It's hard to die alone". His widow died, alone, in 1924. Danks is buried at Kensico Cemetery, in Valhalla, New York.

Pease Danks was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1970. He wrote over 1,000 songs.

BE A STAR By Jeannette Haley

*"...there shall come a Star out of Jacob,
and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel..."*
Nu. 24:17c

In our culture only certain people are referred to as "stars." They even have their names artfully emblazoned in "stars," some of which are set in pedestrian walks for all to ogle over. There are movie stars, music hall of fame stars, sports stars and porn stars. Webster's defines stardom as, "the state of being a very famous performer." In the estimation of the human mindset being a "star performer" is the ultimate, or another way of putting it, "just about as good as you can get." After all, the stars of heaven are as high as our limited sight and imagination can go so why not compare our idols to them and call them "stars?"

Ancient man looked toward the heavens and esteemed the myriad of stars there as the ultimate height of unattainable grandeur. Today modern man, that is, the majority of people caught up with all their technological gadgets and distractions, rarely take the time to gaze in awe and wonder at the stars. However, there are always those (besides NASA) who do scan the heavens, marvel at the vastness of it all, and appreciate the power of God. The truth is no thinking person can observe the stars for any length of time without coming to the conclusion that we are all very small and insignificant indeed in the scheme of things.

In 1971 the rock opera musical "Jesus Christ Superstar" made its Broadway debut. In 1973 a film adaptation was made of it. Of course the whole production is unscriptural, and has another spirit behind it. The "Star" coming out of Jacob is the "great light" that would come into a world of spiritual darkness, giving light to the people. *Matthew 4:16* says, "*The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up.*" Calling Jesus a "Superstar" is a dangerous denial of all that He is, the reason why He came in the flesh, the true meaning of the cross, the power and glory of His resurrection, the fact of His ascension into Heaven, and His soon return to rule and reign over the earth with a rod of iron. Jesus was no mere "superstar"

but He is the Creator of the host of heaven. "*By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth*" *Psalms 33:6*. "*All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made*" *John 1:3*.

So, just what is a "superstar"? Superstar is defined as (in dictionary.com) "a person, as a performer or athlete, who enjoys wide recognition, is esteemed for exceptional talent, and is eagerly sought after for his or her services." Does this describe the Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate, the Son of God, the Savior of the world? Not hardly! Jesus Christ was not a "performer" of anything, and never will be. According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, "star" in Hebrew is *kowkab*, and can mean "in the sense of rolling, or in the sense of blazing; a star (as round or as shining); fig. a prince." Christians know that the Star coming out of Jacob is a prince: the Prince of Peace.

In Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 2 verses 1-3 we read, "*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*" There is an abundance of opinions concerning the wise men from the east, but such speculation generally comes out of ignorance. A little research into history and culture coupled with a study of the Book of Daniel reveals that the Magi were highly esteemed astronomers (and astrologers) who knew that there would be a king born to the Jews. From cuttingedge.org we read this interesting fact, "The fact that Daniel was a high official of the royal government is highly significant in our study, because only high government officials or high religious leaders had access to books. There was no printing press at that time. The three Wise Men were scholars and therefore had access to the writings of Daniel. Further, the three Wise Men were Magi, which was an order of the Pagan Medo-Persian religious order of Zoroaster.

The Magi were ancient interpreters of dreams and were astrologers (monthly prognosticators). We see them in the Bible in the court of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar."

The chief priests and scribes of the people at the time of Herod were "troubled" because, according to Cutting Edge Org., "Several hundred years before Christ was born, Jewish leaders began to believe and propagate two erroneous teachings. First, they taught that the sacred Scriptures could not be taken literally because they were not totally inspired by God, and thus contained errors. Secondly, they taught that prophecies were not to be taken literally, but spiritually. Prophetic books such as Daniel were not even taught anymore because they contained so much prophecy. After several generations had come and gone, each believing this nonsense, spiritual leaders of Jesus' day were completely unaware of this prophecy. Thus, they were unaware of the "time of their visitation". I can't resist adding: Just like the professing, traditions-of-men, institutional, man-centered, perverted and watered-down, Alexandrian Gnostic bible believing churches of today." Gnosticism was a real problem for Jesus' disciples, and it is still with us today as a powerful tool in the hands of Satan to undermine and destroy the preserved Words of God. The sad thing is, most people, just like Israel when Jesus was born into this world, are completely unaware of how far truth has "fallen into the street." This is a fulfillment of *Isaiah 59:14* which states, "*And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter.*"

I am in complete agreement with this indictment by Cutting Edge: "The significance of this study to today is both simple and obvious. The same wrong teaching concerning inspiration of the Bible and its inerrancy is occurring throughout this nation. Most people today are unaware that all 300+ prophecies concerning Jesus' Second Coming are coming to pass or have already occurred. These people are unaware that this has never occurred before. Therefore, many people will miss Jesus' Second Visitation, to their eternal

peril." Wake up, Church! Wake up, America! *"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God" 1 Peter 4:17?*

But the wise men of the east were awake, alert and aware, and they were watching when His star rose in the east. Their wisdom was demonstrated because they knew that His star was a sign from God, and they also knew that the child they sought was no ordinary king because when they found Him, they *"fell down, and worshipped him" Matthew 2:11a*. Only God is to be worshipped; therefore they knew, and believed, that Jesus was God incarnate. (*Matthew 14:33; 28:9; Luke 24:52; Hebrews 1:61 Peter 3:22; Revelation 5:8*). They also brought gold which represents deity; frankincense which represents righteousness and myrrh His death and burial. No wonder these men were called wise! They understood and believed that which the Jews should have recognized from their own Scriptures. Truly, *"He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" John 1:10, 11*. Thank God, there is a "but." *"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" John 1:12*.

Today roughly only 6 out of 10 professing Christians believe that Jesus is God incarnate, and that number drops significantly with Millennials. In my mind there can be no doubt that the erosion of the revealed Word of God (KJV) by Gnostic "bibles" (modern versions from spurious Alexandrian manuscripts) has resulted in a weak presentation of the Gospel, and introduced "another Jesus," as well as subtly redefined what true Christianity is all about. Our nation is reaping the consequences of the church's failure to obey Jesus' commission to make disciples (students) and followers of Him; failure to come out and be separate from the world, and failure to be the "salt and the light." On top of that, in nearly every church you will find that people are dazzled and caught up with certain "stars" and "superstars" such as false prophet Beth Moore, heretics Joel

Osteen and Rick Warren, and occult writers such as William Young, Sarah Young, A. J. Russell, Roma Downey, etc.

The sad truth is the undiscerning sheep are spiritually starving to death. Victims of compromising shepherds, they, like goats, chase after and gobble up any scrap of unscriptural garbage offered to them by the "superstars" who are in realty ravening wolves fulfilling *2 Peter 2:1-3* which states, *"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."*

If we would have the wisdom of the wise men, then we must begin by worshipping Jesus, know His Word and apply it to our hearts, ask for wisdom and walk in obedience. Here again is the promise: *"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" Daniel 12:3*. Think about that for a while. Can you even begin to imagine what it would be like to shine as the stars for ever and ever? This is the kind of "star" that I want to be! And, just think, no two are alike. *1 Corinthians 15:41* tell us, *"There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory."*

Humanly speaking, most of us start out wanting to be the one and only bright and shiny attraction to our parents, family, friends or those around us. From babes to toddlers to teens and beyond most of us naturally think we're the star that the whole Universe revolves around. It's called "being the center of attention" and if maturity is not soon developed in us through proper discipline, instruction, correction, and experience, then we will remain "fallen stars" that are in competition with the true Star who alone is worthy of all worship, glory

and adoration. *"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" Revelation 4:11*.

To me the biblical account of the star of Bethlehem is both beautiful and fascinating. There are many different theories that have been presented about the Christmas Star, but the Bible declares that it was a star. It wasn't a supernova, an eclipse, a comet, or UFO. Why do we try to explain away the majesty and power of God? *Psalm 147:4, 5* tells us, *"He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite."* *Isaiah 40:26* says, *"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth."* What a great God we serve! He numbers not only the stars, but the very hairs on our heads. His eye sees the sparrow when it falls, and He knows before we ask what we have need of. Therefore, for God to set a star in the heavens as a sign that the king of the Jews was to be born in the city of Bethlehem of a virgin in fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies is no impossible feat.

Now, according to USCB Science Line, "There are about 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars in space, or about 10 raised to the 21 (10 to the 21 power, roughly.) This amount is about equal to the number of grains of sand on ALL of the beaches on planet Earth!!! That is a lot!! Our galaxy, the Milky Way, has approximately 100 billion stars in it, but the Milky Way is not the only galaxy in the universe...there are about 10 billion galaxies in the observable universe! The number of stars in a galaxy varies, but assuming an average of 100 billion stars per galaxy means that there are about 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 (that's 1 billion trillion) stars in the observable universe!"

Can you come up with one billion trillion names? Me either! Yet, our Lord walks among the stars, and calls them all by both number and name. *"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be*

praised; and his greatness is unsearchable” Psalm 145:3. “Is any thing too hard for the LORD” Genesis 18:14a? Therefore, why is it so hard for some to believe that Almighty God created and directed a certain star, which He set in the heavens as a sign for all who would see and understand? In the fourth day of creation “God said, *Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good*” Genesis 1:14:18. No wonder King David sang, “*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him*” Psalm 8:3, 4?

To be a “star” in God’s kingdom means that your life reflects the glory of Jesus to a lost world. In order to become a reflection of His glory we need to go back to the One that the star of Bethlehem led the wise men to. “*When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy*” Matthew 2:9, 10. The purpose of this special star was to point the way to the Christ child, the Promised One of Isaiah 9:6, 7: “*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*”

The star led the wise men to the young child, and Jesus likewise points those who would be “great” or superstars, to young children, “*And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea*” Matthew 18:3-6.

On more than one occasion I have stated that children are the most important people in the church, and the most overlooked. (After all, they don’t have money to give.) If the children are generally ignored, overlooked, separated from their parents, and shut away out of sight to be entertained half to death how are they ever going to learn from example how to revere God? How are they going to learn what real worship and intercession is? How are they going to develop a reverence for what is holy? How are they going to be brought up feeling secure as a part of the Body of Christ, knowing how to function as part of that body, so that someday they will know and fulfill God’s calling on their own lives? The answer is, they won’t and when they hit 18, they are going to walk out through the church doors and probably never look back. Children are the future of the church, and the future of America! This is a point that is taken very seriously by the socialists and communists, but not so much by the social-club, powerless churches of today that have nothing to offer in the way of spiritual meat to disenfranchised youth.

Jesus said, “*...unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*” Matthew 18:3. [Emphasis added.] In response to this Scripture, Oswald Chambers wrote “These words of our Lord refer to our initial conversion, but we should continue to turn to God as children, being continuously converted every day of our lives. If we trust in our own abili-

ties, instead of God’s, we produce consequences for which God will hold us responsible. When God through His sovereignty brings us into new situations, we should immediately make sure that our natural life submits to the spiritual, obeying the orders of the Spirit of God. Just because we have responded properly in the past is no guarantee that we will do so again. The response of the natural to the spiritual should be continuous conversion, but this is where we so often refuse to be obedient. No matter what our situation is, the Spirit of God remains unchanged and His salvation unaltered. But we must “put on the new man...” (Ephesians 4:24). God holds us accountable every time we refuse to convert ourselves, and He sees our refusal as willful disobedience. Our natural life must not rule— God must rule in us.

“To refuse to be continuously converted puts a stumbling block in the growth of our spiritual life. There are areas of self-will in our lives where our pride pours contempt on the throne of God and says, ‘I won’t submit.’ We deify our independence and self-will and call them by the wrong name. What God sees as stubborn weakness, we call strength. There are whole areas of our lives that have not yet been brought into submission, and this can only be done by this continuous conversion. Slowly but surely we can claim the whole territory for the Spirit of God.”

I don’t know about you, but to me this verse in *Daniel 12:3*, “*they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever*” is not only beautiful, lofty, and glorious but it stirs my spirit up in greater ways to set my affection on things above, while causing my heart to rejoice in the beauty and goodness of the Lord. It is a challenge to come higher, dig deeper, go farther, and reach out to others with the Gospel, and “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” Matthew 5:16.

In my lifetime I’ve experienced being the likes of a shooting star, a falling star and a dead star. You can compare that to plenty of zeal without

knowledge; falling because of sin and pride, and being a burned out dud. But, the Lord is merciful! His promises are true, for it is written, (after the angels gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity) *"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear"* Matthew 13:43.



of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" Matthew 13:43.

Therefore, as we meditate on that night so long ago and journey in our hearts with the wise men that followed His star until they found Him, may we too fall before Him in worship and adoration, for truly He is the **"KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS"**. †

QUOTES TO PONDER

By Paul Washer

"A lot of people think that Christianity is you doing all the righteous things you hate and avoiding all the wicked things you love in order to go to Heaven. No, that's a lost man with religion. A Christian is a person whose heart has been changed; they have new affections." - Paul Washer

"Pride is a terrible and dangerous thing. It can take so many forms; it can even assume the appearance of humility. Pride can lead not only to self-exaltation, but also to self-abasement. The key to battling pride is not found in struggling against thinking too highly of ourselves or in striving to think of ourselves as lowly. The key is found in simply not thinking about ourselves at all, but setting our minds on Christ and the needs of others."

"In modern day evangelism, this precious doctrine [of regeneration] has been reduced to nothing more than a human decision to raise one's hand, walk an aisle, or pray a 'sinner's prayer.' As a result, the majority of Americans believe that they've been 'born again' even though their thoughts, words, and deeds are a continual contradiction to the nature and will of God." †

MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYONE!

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

Q: *"What does it mean to turn the other cheek? There is confusion because some think that it has to do with being a doormat about everything, but I don't agree with that. Could you bring some perspective to this subject?"*

A: My understanding of *Matthew 5:39* is that such instruction had to do with not returning like evil or judgment to one who greatly offends you. I say this because of what *Matthew 5:38* tells us, *"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth"*. It was clear that people were to respond with the same action and force towards those who offended them, but according to Jesus, we as believers were not to choose the base response of man, but choose the most excellent way as a means to establish a visible witness.

It is important to point out that the culture of that day was if someone smote you on the right cheek it was like spitting on you to show utter contempt and disregard for your person. This action had the same principle as challenging someone to a duel by slapping the person on the face with a glove. Actions that showed such grave contempt intended to ensure a response back by the one who was offended as a means to protect one's honor. When we consider what is on the line when such contempt is being shown, it is not truth, righteousness, or justice, but our pride, and aggression that originates from pride never will have a good ending.

Jesus was basically saying when a person shows such contempt towards you, instead of responding out of pride to defend your honor, surprise the offender by showing yourself to be a better person by turning the other cheek. The Lord was establishing the protocol for how we are to handle ourselves before our enemies. Turning the other cheek is a point of grace and shows an excellent way to stop the cycle of destruction that takes place when people take personal offense towards the foolish, contrary actions of others. We must not allow the contempt of others to influence our actions. Godly love looks for opportunities to show grace for as Peter made clear in *1 Peter 4:8*, *"And above*

all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins."

There is a big difference between turning the other cheek because of personal pride and standing against our enemy when the matters of heaven are under siege. The Bible is clear that we are to stand, withstand, and continue to stand. It is obvious that our faith, God's pure Word (truth), and our testimonies are under attack, and when it comes to being a soldier in the arenas of this world, we are not to turn the other cheek, lay down before the enemy to be trodden down into the cesspool of the world, or allow our testimonies to be compromised by the insane philosophies of this age. We must stand firmly on the immovable ground of our faith towards God, withstand with the sword of His truth, and continue to stand strong because our testimony of Him allows us to live in expectancy of seeing His promises fulfilled.

I hope this clarifies this matter before you. It is clear we as Christians need to understand the real battleground so that we can choose our battles wisely in light of what is important to God and eternal in purpose. †

QUOTE

By A. W. Tozer

In our mad materialism we have turned beauty into ashes, prostituted every normal emotion and made merchandise of the holiest gift the world ever knew. Christ came to bring peace and we celebrate His coming by making peace impossible for six weeks of each year. Not peace but tension, fatigue and irritation rule the Christmas season. He came to free us of debt and many respond by going deep into debt each year to buy enervating luxuries for people who do not appreciate them. He came to help the poor and we heap gifts upon those who do not need them. The simple token given out of love has been displaced by expensive presents given because we have been caught in a squeeze and don't know how to back out of it. Not the beauty of the Lord our God is found in such a situation, but the ugliness and deformity of human sin. †

CHRIST WAS CONCEIVED ON CHRISTMAS DAY

By Noah W. Hutchings

(Condensed)

"There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron; and her name was Elisabeth" Luke 1:5.

So the setting for Luke's beginning here concerning the birth of John the Baptist, and later Jesus Christ, was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea. It is important to note that Zacharias was of the course of Abia. In the priesthood—as we read in 1 Chronicles 24—it was divided into 24 courses, because there were many priests. If you took all of those priests and put them in the courtyard around the temple, the courtyard probably wouldn't hold them. Each order served in the temple one week, twice a year. In other words, they were in the temple two weeks out of the entire year, and each period of service was separated by six months. Most of the priests lived in the Judean hills; some lived on the outskirts of Jerusalem; some lived down in Jericho, because Jericho was a very beautiful city.

The course, or the ministration of the course of Abia in 5 B.C. was completed on June 19, a Friday. Remember that the service of Zacharias in the temple would have ended on Friday evening around 6 o'clock, or sundown. The next day would have been the Sabbath, June 20. He could not travel on that day because it was the Sabbath. No Jew could travel more than a Sabbath day's journey, which we now know would have been a little over a half mile. So Zacharias would have had to lay over in Jerusalem on the June 20, and departed for home on June 21.

Probably five miles a day for such an old man would have been about all he could travel under the circumstances. The Word indicates that Zacharias and Elisabeth lived in the Judean hills. That would have been anywhere from eight to twenty miles south of the temple area in those hills . . . so he would have arrived home on June 23 or 24. From that we can conclude that John the Baptist would have been conceived of

Zacharias in Elisabeth's womb on June 23 or 24.

We continue on to read from *Luke 1:26–27*: "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary." Luke brings out in these verses that in the sixth month of Elisabeth's pregnancy, which would have been around December 23 or 24, the angel Gabriel appeared to a virgin in the city of Nazareth. This virgin was espoused to a man who was of the house of David. She was a virgin as Isaiah had prophesied. "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (*Isaiah 7:14*).

Mary, a young virgin who lived in Nazareth at the time, was told by the angel Gabriel that she would conceive and bear a son. We see here as we get into the biblical account, as supported by ancient records, that the conception of Jesus would have occurred on the night of December 23 or 24, quite possibly December 24. So, He was not born on Christmas Day, but His conception would have probably occurred on the night of December 24, according to our calendar Christmas Eve after 6 p.m., or December 25 as it would be according to the Jewish calendar. Christians can have reason to associate the birth of Jesus with Christmas. Life begins at conception, and not at birth as some of the pro-choice people of our day contend.

We read that Mary stayed with Elisabeth for three months until John the Baptist was born, which would have been around March 25 according to our calendar, or at the time of the Passover. Then Mary returned to Nazareth where she lived with her husband Joseph.

So Joseph took Mary, who was already nine months pregnant, with him to Bethlehem. There was no exception, even for those with child. There was no excuse for anyone not complying with the orders of the great, divine Emperor Augustus. And so we read in *Luke 2:8–14*: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the

Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Now, what day did this occur? Was it summer? Was it in the spring? Was it in the winter? Or was it in the fall? If the calendar records are correct, and the historical date for the decree of Caesar Augustus is correct, then it was in the early fall, not in the winter—not in December. The time for Jesus to be born was perfect. Humanly speaking He had the perfect mother; he had the perfect birthplace; and the date was perfect: the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles—September 29, 4 B.C. We read in Zechariah 14:16: "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles."

The King of Israel, the descendant of David, the great Lord and everlasting Saviour, was to be worshipped by Gentiles at the Feast of Tabernacles. So according to the prophetic Word, Jesus, the King of Israel, was born on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the only feast day directly associated with Gentile worship and salvation. He came unto His own the first time, but as many as received Him gave He power to become the sons of God, and at His birth Gentiles came from the east, probably wise men from the court of the king of Persia, to worship Him. The fact that Jesus was born on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles also fulfilled John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." †