

EVERYDAY OBSERVATIONS



WHY DO CHRISTIANS WALK AROUND NAKED?

When Jesus was tempted by the devil, He responded not with force but the Word. Jesus countered satan's attacks with the Word of Life. The Bible defeated the prince of the air because it contains truth and the promises of God. The devil lied and even twisted the Scripture to suit his purpose when tempting Christ. Will satan not do the same when attacking us? Scripture indicates that he is like a roaring lion seeking to devour every man.

How can we expect to defeat the devil when we leave our primary weapon at home? We walk around on the enemy's turf as vulnerable as lambs. Paul encouraged the early Christians to put on the full armor of God so that when the devil comes they may be able to stand their ground.

**Our primary weapon is
the Word of God.
But many Christians do not use it
in the daily struggle
with the enemy.
No, they walk around naked.**

Would a soldier run to the battlefield without his weapon? Why do Christians walk around without the Sword of the Lord?

God's Word is different than any other book ever written. The author of Hebrews wrote, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12 - KJV). The Bible is alive and deeply personal. It cuts to the core of the issue and exposes the inner heart. As the very words of God, the Bible reveals to mankind the heart and mind of God. It connects us to God and is a meaningful part of man's relationship with God. The apostle John connects Christ and Scripture even calling Jesus the "Word." Man can only come to the Father through the Son, and we learn about Jesus through the written Word of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit. King David understood the need to know God's Word. He wrote that he hid God's Word in his heart so that he would not sin against God.

Dear father, help me to follow David's example and hide Your Word in my heart. Create a thirst for Your Word. Enable me to commit passages to memory and recall them during the heat of battle. May I thirst for Your living Word and may it be as pleasing to my lips as honey.

ISN'T IT A BIT EARLY FOR CHRISTMAS?

Ask Christians what they think of Halloween and expect to get a bunch of different answers. Some believe it is the devil's holiday; they prohibit their children from going trick-or-treating. Others don't see any harm in kids going house to house to collect candy. Others are pretty much ambivalent about the entire holiday.

Every year on October 31, parents and kids present a wonderful opportunity for the body of Christ to spread the

Gospel. Halloween is the only day of the year that strangers willingly knock on your door wanting to interact with you. By simply attaching Bible verses to candy or dressing children up as Bible characters, a believer could be salt and light to the neighborhood. Which is better — to be secretly self-righteous or to publicly turn what the devil intends for evil into good? I compare the entire Halloween debate to the issue of circumcision for the New Testament believers. The key is the heart behind the action — not whether someone celebrates a holiday. If the Lord intends for a believer to forgo celebrating Halloween, the Spirit will make this known.

I shared these thoughts with a Christian mother at work. She did not plan on letting her kids go trick-or-treating this year. One of her daughters had complained, “That’s not fair. All my friends get to dress up and get candy.” The mother felt trapped. She had always let her daughters participate in previous years. But now, she had a change of heart. She felt it celebrated witches, evil spirits and the devil. Instead of being against Halloween, I encouraged her to be for spreading the Gospel.

**Why do Christians
always rally against something,
not for something?
We can make more of a difference
by focusing on Christ’s love
instead of wagging our fingers
in disgust at the world.**

I suggested that the mother and her children hand out candy with Bible verses on them. As someone came to the door, the greeter could share a Bible verse with the visitor and offer him spiritual candy.

The mother tried this approach combined with taking her

kids later that night to a church harvest festival. The kids had a blast and witnessed to the neighborhood kids too! This was the best Halloween yet. We must remember that in Christ there is liberty. We are not bound by rules established by men, only by what the Spirit imprints on our hearts. Who said that Halloween has to be the devil's holiday? Doesn't every day belong to God? We could carry this thought even farther. Instead of decorating a house with pumpkins and other harvest paraphernalia around the fall time, what if a nativity scene took its place? Talk about salt and light. You would surely make a statement to all your neighbors and bring glory to God. People would ask did Christmas come early this year for you? Then you would have an opportunity to answer.

IS HARRY POTTER EVIL?

Antithesis (www.antithesis.com), a contemporary Christian Web site, carried an article on Harry Potter (HP). The author admired the book series for its prose and ended up declaring the child wizard OK. However, he used little Scripture to defend his position. Instead, he focused on Christian liberty.

In the comment section on the Web site, some posters criticized the author's acceptance of the HP series. Others praised his openness and willingness to give HP a chance. This discussion led me to question many things deemed OK by some Christians.

While Christians are no longer bound by the law, we are called to be led by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit will never grant permission to do something in conflict with the Bible. Problems typically arise with 'grey areas' where the Bible does not give specific prohibitions.

Being led by the Spirit is not necessarily any less strict than following the law. Just consider what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount where He compared looking at a woman

lustfully to committing the physical act of adultery. Jesus did not raise the bar; He identified the level of holiness God desires for His remnant.

Whether or not someone reads a HP book is up to their own conscience as guided by the Holy Spirit. What may be sin for one person may not be a sin for another person. The big problem is that if we don't have a deep one-on-one relationship with Christ, we may not hear the warnings voiced by the Holy Spirit. Do too many Christians try to make judgments about right and wrong for their lives without really hearing from God?

Before we consume any type of media or as parents allow our children to read or watch something, we must consider the following:

- What is my motive behind the action?
- Does the action glorify God?
- Can I honestly do 'whatever' in faith? Would Jesus disapprove?
- Will this sow a negative seed in my life?

Christians tend to focus on whether or not a particular action is a sin. In this case, you can line up Christians on either side of the issue. Some praise HP for encouraging growth in reading among students. They dismiss it as just fantasy. Others believe HP glorifies white magic and opens a doorway to the demonic realm. They view HP as a counterfeit to the real power and truth revealed in the Bible.

Where does Christian liberty end and holiness begin?

Each person is at different stage of maturity in his walk with God. Can we really expect the same level of maturity from a babe in Christ as a seasoned adult? We should understand where others are and love them to the next level of their walk. As people mature, they go from thinking about what following God will cost them to what they can sacrifice to honor and draw closer to God.

The real heart of the issue appears to be the attraction of

kids to the things of the world compared to the things of God. The HP debate shows how self-focused and worldly Christians have become.

We only have a limited amount of time on this earth. Yet Christians frequently trade lasting treasure in heaven for temporary pleasure on earth.

Many ‘church’ kids would rather read HP or dinosaur books than the Bible. We should be asking ourselves why.

THE FORGOTTEN MAN

There are many mighty warriors, powerful prophets and dedicated servants either mentioned or described in detail in the Bible. There are also examples of tyrants, prideful sinners and self-righteous religious leaders. I have wondered how God decided who made the cut. What did the Lord leave out and why? We know that God knows all and could have included much more. If the canonized Scripture had extended to the present, who would be mentioned? Would I make the pages of the Living Word?

Will my life be forgotten when I am gone?

Will I leave an imprint on the lives of many that I have known?

These questions have prompted me to create a fictional character named Jaurus. You will never find him mentioned in the Bible. Here is Jaurus’ story:

Jaurus lived during the day of Jesus’ earthly ministry. A fairly good man by the world’s standards, Jaurus obeyed as

much of the law as he could. He paid the required tithes and temple taxes. Jaurus dealt honestly with people and treated strangers with kindness. Jaurus heard Jesus speak on many occasions. But he always kept his distance from the crowds, choosing to listen from afar. Part of him desired to approach Jesus, but he could not get beyond his doubts. Many respected religious leaders called Jesus a troublemaker. Others went even further, accusing Jesus of being the devil himself. After all, Jesus consorted with the dregs of society including tax collectors, prostitutes and other known sinners. Yet, Jesus healed the multitudes, drove out evil spirits and spoke with authority not of this world. Jaurus could not figure out what to believe. In secret, the religious leaders were threatening to throw Jesus' followers out of the temple. How could God send such a dividing figure to be His messenger let alone the Messiah? Who should Jaurus believe?

One day Jesus walked through the streets of Jaurus' town. While talking to the crowd, He looked right at Jaurus. With an intense love, He peered right into Jaurus' soul as he talked about receiving the living water. Guilt and shame forced Jaurus to look away. Jaurus faced a decision to follow Christ or to run away. Weighed down by his sin and the cares of this world, he chose to run. Leaving his spot on the city wall, he ran out of the city toward the hills. Like a man being chased by a vicious animal, Jaurus ran as fast as his legs would carry him. Suddenly, Jaurus stopped to catch his breath. He realized the truth yet refused to accept it. He could not face Jesus. Jaurus knew the religious people were wrong about Jesus. But he could not accept Jesus' teachings. Jaurus lived the rest of his life trying to obey the law and died in his sin. Lacking faith, Jaurus tried to make it to heaven on his own. But he failed.

On the same day as Jaurus' personal encounter with Christ, a tax collector named Zacchaeus had a different experience. Jesus called to Zacchaeus and asked to stay at his house. As a

tax collector, Zacchaeus made tons of money by charging others more taxes than they really owed the government. Convicted by Jesus' teaching, Zacchaeus gave half of his money to the poor and made restitution to those he had overcharged. Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham" (Luke 19:9).

Many criticized Jesus because he dined and stayed with a tax collector, the scum of society. Yet Zacchaeus, a wicked man, made the cut, appearing in Scripture and received forgiveness and salvation. The people in Jericho would have easily understood Jesus staying with a man as respected as Jaurus. Why did Jaurus not make the cut? He lacked faith and did not welcome Jesus. In the same way, each man is judged not according to his sin or his works but his acceptance of Christ. God included what He wanted in Scripture to convey the main theme of reconciliation. If I want my life to be worth writing about, I must accept Jesus, repent and walk in a relationship with Him. No matter how someone tries to keep the law on his own, he will only end up like Jaurus if he do not hold firmly to Christ.

CHURCH SHOPPING

When Christians move to a new city, one of the first things they tend to look for is a 'good' church. What makes a good church? Is it lively worship, dynamic children's ministry, nice facilities, a large congregation or charismatic pastors? How many people does it require to have a "good" church?

Most people ask friends or look around for churches in a particular denomination. They tend to treat looking for a new church home just like shopping for a new car. They visit a bunch of places, test drive the ministers and make a selection based on what appears to be the perfect fit. Having tried this method through the years, I have visited my share of churches. However, the consumer-based method to church hunting does

not work. Oh, yeah, I can locate a neat church with all the bells and whistles.

**But finding the right church home
requires something more
than a diligent search —
prayer must be the focus.**

Well, what exactly should I pray? To answer this question you must first explore why you ‘go to church’ in the first place. Many Christians go because they have always gone to a Sunday service. Others attend a church out of obedience to Christ or to satisfy desires for social interaction. Others mention the programs or the Bible teaching as a key to their spiritual growth. There is nothing wrong with any of this. Yet these are not the main reason to be part of a local church fellowship. As a matter of fact, the Bible never requires Christians to attend a Sunday morning service or to join a particular institutional church. Instead, the author of Hebrews wrote that Christians should not forsake the assembly of believers. Most of the gatherings during the early Church occurred in homes not designated church buildings. Don’t be surprised if God leads you to someone’s home, not a building with a steeple on top when you seek Him about finding a healthy church fellowship. Of course, there are many fine large churches as well. I am not picking sides in the home church versus large church debate. It’s all part of the Church; there is no division in the body.

All I want to do is encourage you to be open to wherever the Lord leads you. God may surprise you — big time. The Lord knows what you need and will supply it if you will only follow His direction. God calls us to assemble with other believers to mutually edify one another. We can do this corporately through prayer, teaching and worship. But the

focal point remains one-on-one relationships with other individuals and families in the Church. You could go every Sunday to a particular church service and still be missing out if you never develop lasting relationships there. Do you sit in the back and dart out of the building as soon as the last prayer is finished? Can you pick up the phone tonight and talk with a cherished brother or sister about your problems, pain and fear?

Your prayer should focus on finding true community with fellow believers, not a fiery preacher or a church with a ton of programs. If you are currently hunting for a new church home, seek God through prayer. Ask Him to bring other Christians into your life; God will respond as you step out in faith.

THE FORGOTTEN CHURCH

Ask most Christians about their local church, and you'll receive a variety of responses. Many will describe the pastor, the facility or the size of the congregation. Others will talk about close friends or activities at the church. Yet most would never really think to lump their family in as an integral part of their local church. The family has become the forgotten church in America.

The family is the first responsibility of parents, not serving others in the Church. Do you regularly get together as a family to study the Bible, pray and worship? Do you model the Church in your home? If the answer is no, you should consider setting aside one night during the week to seek God as a family. Make it fun and genuine. Your children should be given a chance to actively participate. If you encourage interaction, you may be surprised how much your family grows through the process. Remember — the Church starts at home.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress

them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you lie down and when you get up...Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates”(Deuteronomy 6:5-7, 9).

FILLING IN THE BLANKS

Have you ever wondered why the Lord designed the Bible the way that He did? God could have given us the Cliff notes version of His Word. But instead, I frequently feel like I am reading the Encyclopedia Britannica.

At least, the encyclopedia is in alphabetical order. The Bible is for the most part arranged in chronological order although there are some exceptions, such as the book of Job.

Chapters tend to jump from one concept to another with little or no transition, especially in the New Testament. The Bible is not a self-help book full of how-to formulas and easy-to-understand plans. If you are struggling with pain or how to raise your kids, there are no easy-to-find categories on such topics. Although God does provide in the Bible principles and guidance on the issues we deal with in our every day lives, we may have to dig to find it.

**God divinely ordered His Word.
Its design forces us to rely on
the Holy Spirit for direction.**

The Lord does not want us to allow His Word to become a stumbling block to our relationship with Him. What if everything you need to know about every decision in your life was described in detail in one book? Would you ever need to pray? Would you go off and build your own Tower of Babel?

The Bible stands unique among all literature. God Himself breathed the words into being by inspiring His servants, prophets and apostles. The very words of the Bible are part

of God. In fact, the apostle John calls Jesus the Word. The Bible cannot be fully understood apart from God because the words themselves are spiritual, not physical, in nature. The Bible is alive. It meets each person where he is. According to Hebrews 4:12 (KJV), “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

When you pick up and read the Bible, you are delving into the heart of God. The Bible is God’s love letter to His children. Only the Bible contains the complete inspired truth of God. All other books are a poor substitute for the real thing. Yet the Bible can be misused and misunderstood apart from the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Just read what the Bible has to say about understanding the mysteries of God.

“The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Corinthians 2:10-15).

