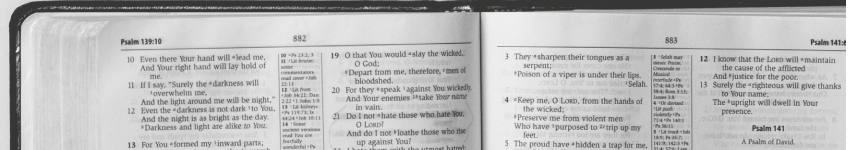


Words of Truth

New Goals for a New Year



Featured Authors

Rohann Marais- He is a student at Heritage Christian University from South Africa. Upon graduation, he plans to return there to preach the gospel. His family worships with the Petersville church of Christ in Florence, AL.

Patrick Morrison- he serves as the pulpit minister for the Curry church of Christ in Jasper, AL. He has also served the 6th Ave church of Christ and the Cleveland church of Christ. He is a past editor of *Words of Truth*.

Autumn Richardson- she is the director of DL and instructor at Heritage Christian University. She also leads Bible studies for women at HCU. She and her husband, Adam, work with the Petersville church of Christ in Florence, AL where he serves as the pulpit minister.

Ricky Berger- he serves as the pulpit minister for the Wood Ave. church of Christ in Florence, AL. He is a regular speaker on the *Words of Truth* radio program. His wife's name is Ashley. They have two sons, Jude and Aspen.

Matt Heupel- he served as the minister at the Woodlawn church of Christ since 2005. Prior to that, he worked in youth ministry for 13 years at the Atlas and Jackson Heights congregations. Matt also serves on the board of directors of Challenge Youth Conference.

Our New Identity in Christ

Rohann Marais
Florence, AL

One of the most gratifying things anyone can experience is buying a new car. It is an amazing feeling when you can finally retire that beat-up, rattling old clunker and slide into the front seat of a new sleek smooth-driving vehicle. With that new car smell in your nose, you just feel ready to look the world in the face and tell it that you have arrived. You feel like a brand-new person, and the renewal of your mode of transport renews your identity.

This perspective is how we should view our lives when we decide to put on Christ in baptism. All the old rattles (sins) must fall away. Our beat-up selves are thrown from us as we are remade. Paul writes in Colossians, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (3:9-10). We can change our identities through knowledge and understanding of who God is. Yet it's not just about the ability to change and create a new identity, but the necessity to do so.

Why is it necessary? In short, change leads to growth, and growth leads to maturity. It is in this maturity that we find our new identity. We are called to change when we follow Christ, called to "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past" in Isaiah 43:18. God has renewed us; we can let go. We are forgiven of our sins and purified of unrighteousness (1 John 1:19, NIV). In the face of God's glory, who are we to hang on to those anchors that weighed us down in the past? But there is also a warning in Hebrews 10:26-27, "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."

C.S. Lewis wrote: "Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important." We must cultivate our new identity in Christ with a sense of purpose and urgency.

What should this new identity look like? It should be Christ-like. It should be an identity rooted first in love. Jesus clearly states it in Mark 12:28-31 when he says that the two greatest commandments are to love God first and our neighbor as ourselves. Added to this, we need to exhibit the fruits of the spirit as outlined in Galatians 5:22, of which the first item on the list is love. Service is the final element of Jesus' identity that we must apply to our lives. Jesus, throughout his ministry, spoke of serving. His sacrifice on the cross showed us the ultimate act of service to humanity. Jesus summarizes a Christ-like identity in Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

New Spiritual Goals for a Christian in 2023

Patrick Morrison, Jasper, AL

There is something about the concept of newness that captures our attention. It excites us. It draws us. We love the thought of a new house, a new car, a new phone, new clothes, new shoes, new fishing equipment, and new golf clubs (you get the idea). We are quick to tell people all about whatever new thing we have found, purchased, done, etc. This notion of newness is a common theme of the New Testament. We are newly created in Christ Jesus (2 Cor.5:17). Through him, we walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:1-4). We get a fresh start!

The advent of a new year always brings the prospects of better things. We often look at the year that has passed and lament our mistakes. We look for ways to do better, live healthier, be more financially sound, and grow in our relationships. A new year brings with it the hopes of leaving behind our failures and struggles and forging pathways to success in those areas of life that we hold dear. For most followers of Jesus, we constantly seek to become more and more like our Lord. We want to be better and do better. We want to challenge ourselves to grow and change. We want to do better, but we often struggle to stick to those things that we believe will help us. We likely set spiritual goals for ourselves, only to lose our momentum and motivation early in the new year. What goals can we set for ourselves as Christians, and what practical steps might we take to keep working toward these goals?

I am not sure I have ever met a Christian who would not say they needed to pray more often and more fervently. We are familiar with passages that encourage us to pray (Phil. 4:6), pray often (1 Thess. 5:17), and pray passionately (James 5:16). Perhaps we begin every year intending to pray more. We start with great enthusiasm and conviction, but likely somewhere along the way, we find ourselves dropping the ball. May I make a suggestion? How about committing each day of the new year to pray for a specific person each day? Sometimes our prayers become somewhat generalized when we need to get more specific. We pray for the sick, the shut-ins, and the lost, but how often do we call them by name? We pray concerning trials we are facing, temptations we are struggling with, etc., but how often do we specify what these are? God has encouraged us to cast all our cares upon him because he cares so deeply for us (1 Pet. 5:7). Think about specific people for whom you wish to pray. Text them, call them, or speak to them in person and let

them know that you plan to pray for them so that they might share with you a request that they might have. Do this to maintain some accountability. This habit will likely motivate you to continue toward your goal.

What about spending more time in the study of God's word? How many of us, as Christians, realize that we could likely spend more time digging into the Bible? Like the Psalmist, we long for God's word to be on our hearts and minds day and night (Psa.1:2; 119:97). We understand that his revealed will is more important to us than even our daily food (Job 23:12; Matt.4:4). Here again, we often set out with the best of intentions, only to lose our momentum along the way. Much of this may stem from a lack of organized study. Maybe we fail to plan a study routine, so we haphazardly approach studying the Scriptures. Might I suggest you choose something similar to the One Word study published by several area ministers in Nashville (or similar systemic studies)?^[i] Perhaps it would do us even better to join a few others in such an undertaking so we have extra encouragement and accountability.

How many of us spend enough time in fellowship with our brothers and sisters? It is hard to get to know one another in the few minutes before class/ assembling or after class/ assembling. We know the value of fellowship (1 John 1:3; Acts 2:42). Hopefully, we long for opportunities to be with our spiritual family. However, a monthly fellowship meal at the church building will hardly suffice for building greater fellowship. Target individuals or families within the congregation you are a part of that you would like to get to know. Invite them to your home for a meal or to go out to eat with you following Sunday morning services. Plan a visit to one of the shut-ins in your congregation, who is likely very lonely and starving for company. Get to know one another!

We likely could add so much more to these ideas, but I pray that these will at least cause us to consider setting some spiritual goals for our walk with the Lord. May we do all that we can to mature in the faith of Jesus and be shaped more and more into his image.

[i] Editor's Note- This study is published by David Shannon, Philip Jenkins, Chad Landman, and Andrew Phillips. You can order it through Freed-Hardeman's Christian Bookstore. It is an excellent resource. – JG.

New Bible Study Methods for 2023

Autumn Richardson, Florence, AL

New Year's resolutions for the Christian often include a desire and goal to spend more time in God's Word—to "do better" at Bible reading or study more. We buy daily devotional books; we download and print reading plans; we set our alarms for thirty minutes earlier in the mornings to have that special quiet time. We have a plan, and all we need to do is stick to it for fourteen days to make it a habit, right? Then, by the end of January, there is dust on the devotional book, the reading plan is misplaced, and we are snoozing our alarm until it's really time to get up. Why do we so often fail at something we genuinely have a desire to do and know will help our spiritual walk?

Perhaps one reason we are unfulfilled from, discouraged by, and inconsistent with our Bible study is that we are coming to it with the wrong posture, asking the wrong questions. Don't get me wrong, we have good intentions, but I've noticed a pattern in how we teach people to study their Bibles that is a problem. Take the popular S.O.A.P. method, for example, S – read the Scripture; O – write down your observations about the verse; A – determine how to apply the verse to your life; P – pray about it. Simple to remember, so what's the problem? Unfortunately, the problem is the same one that plagues most of the modern world. It's all about M.E. What stands out to me about the Scripture? What does the Scripture mean for my life? What do I need to do? Those are the questions this, and other popular methods equip us with to approach our Bibles. No wonder we don't feel any closer to God after a study focusing only on ourselves.

I propose we have put the cart before the horse. It's essential to learn how to live our lives from Scripture, but in only going to the Word to answer questions about ourselves, we've missed the most important thing about reading our Bibles—getting to know God and who He is. Spending time in the Word should connect us to our Creator, shape us into the image of Christ, and fill us with the Spirit...not just give us life goals and to-do lists for being a good person.

How do we train ourselves to approach Scripture with the right posture? First, we read it. That

sounds silly, but I feel like it needs to be stated. I recently surveyed 140 women about their Bible study habits, and 70% said they study by reading books about the Bible rather than the Bible itself. That's like never talking to your spouse or parent, but instead, asking a friend to tell you what they want you to know about themselves. A relationship can't happen in that environment. Find a version you can understand and use it.

Second, we learn to think four-directionally:

1. **LOOK BACK** – To whom was the book written? When and why? Is it history, poetry, or a letter? Where does the passage fit in the overall narrative of Scripture?
2. **THINK HIGHER** – What does the passage reveal about God—His nature, His role? Do you see Christ or the Gospel (typology, direct reference)? Are any common themes present, like light, water, or blood?
3. **GO DEEPER** – This is where you might dig into anything you noticed in the first two steps you'd like to explore further. Do a word study on repeated words; mark OT/NT connections; cross-reference; note action words.
4. **MOVE FORWARD** – Now that we have a good grasp on the passage, we can think about the application for today. Rather than simply asking what this means to me, though, consider these questions:
 - What do I learn about who I need to be in light of who God is?
 - Is there a behavior I need to change, a command I need to follow, a principle I should incorporate in my life, or a change in my heart I need to make?
 - Is there an action or attitude I should be imitating?

This method can be done as quickly or as in-depth as you would like. It is for every level of study and is meant to be a thought process or a posture when reading more so than steps to take. It works when reading one verse or a whole book of the Bible. Once you develop the habit, you can think through the four directions in your head as you read, and you will find your study rich and meaningful, bringing you more in tune with the nature of God so that you can live like Jesus with the help of the Spirit.

New Goals for the Local Church in 2023

Ricky Berger, Jasper, AL

As members of the Lord's church, we take pride in following the pattern of the first-century church. We are constantly fighting against the pressures of the world to modernize and conform to trends seen among our religious friends. Often we will say that we need to "go back to the Bible" and, like in Jeremiah 6:16, we "ask for the old paths, where the good way is." This perspective makes the idea of having New Congregational Goals for 2023 seem foreign to us. However, each local congregation should continually use the never-changing word of God to guide them into each new year.

When considering how our congregations should aim to grow in the new year, we should always go back to the Bible for guidance. Throughout Scripture, we see the call to grow as individuals and as congregations of the Lord's people. The Hebrews writer says, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food" (Hebrews 5:12). Does this sound like our local congregations today? Are we, as a church, still needing milk when we have had every opportunity to grow and dig deeper into God's word? We should be studying daily (Acts 17:11, 2 Timothy 2:15). Without doing so, how can we ever expect to grow as a congregation and be able to teach others? 1 Peter 3:15 commands to be ready always to give an answer. Was your local congregation prepared to teach others in 2022? If not, how can you grow in 2023 and get to the point of teaching others? Let's now determine to have the goal of increasing knowledge in 2023.

We will grow in other areas as we commit to a deeper study of God's word. The more we learn about God, the more we grow in our love and obedience to Him. Romans 12 serves as a checklist for all Christians. If each member of the local congregation can look at this passage and ask, "Where can I grow?" We will undoubtedly see a stronger church in the new year. Although we stand as one body, we know we are composed of individual members. Each one of us has the responsibility to develop and bear fruit. Consider your congregation's growth in 2022. I am not speaking

of just numerical growth but an increase in knowledge and love. What kind of fruit did your congregation produce last year? Did you grow in unity? Were you seeking the lost? Were you standing against false teaching? In Matthew 7:16-20 Christ commands us to bear fruit, and in John 15:1-8, He reminds us that no fruit can come unless abiding in Him. We must be in Christ to bear fruit that is pleasing to God. Likewise, we must stay in God's Word to recognize this fruit and know what is expected of us. A lack of fruit is not acceptable. We are commanded to produce results as Christians.

2 Peter 1:5-10 describes the process of maturing as Christians. Once we grow in these areas of faith by adding virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love, we will make our calling sure. Peter tells us that the church can be sure of its relationship with God by constantly growing and walking in the light. We know from the book of Revelation that congregations can quit growing and need to correct their standing with God. Christ told the Ephesian church to repent and remember from where they had fallen. Once they made the necessary corrections, God still offered them a home in Heaven (Revelation 2:5, 7). No congregation is too far gone to be accepted back to the Father in this new year. What better goals could we have in 2023 than to grow in knowledge and faith or to return to our first love? Once these basic foundations of the Christian church are met, it's only natural that many other desired goals will follow. May God bless us as we strive to follow Him in this new year!

Walking in Newness of Life in 2023

Matt Heupel, Florence, AL

You did it again, didn't you? You have been here before, year after year. You told yourself that this year would be different. This year was the year of the "new you." Of course, you set the standard goals, lose a few pounds, and start an exercise regimen, and this year you also made some spiritual goals. This year you will be a better Bible student, be more prayerful, establish some good spiritual habits, and we must not forget- give up that pesky sin you struggle with daily.

Why is it so hard to change? Why do you keep returning to our old habits and way of life? Will you ever achieve that "newness of life" that the Bible talks about? Of course, you can, but it is not easy. Before I explain, what exactly is "newness of life"? The phrase comes from Paul in his letter to the Romans, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). Paul explains that when you obey the Gospel and put Christ on in baptism, you are simply following a pattern that Jesus left for you. Your repentance and baptism correlate to His death and burial. If you follow His pattern in death (obedience to the Gospel), you will also follow in His resurrection. Just as Christ came back from the dead with a new body, you too will become a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Once that happens, the real challenge begins- maintaining that newness.

It is easy for you to resort back to your former manner of life in sin. That is why John encourages you to continue walking in the light, enabling Christ's blood to cleanse you from all sin (1 John 1:7). If you notice, Paul's admonition contains the very same action that John does, walking. John instructs you to "walk in the light," and Paul commands you to "walk in newness of life." What does "walking" have to do with becoming the "new you" and maintaining those spiritual goals? The answer lies in you taking it one step at a time. Let me explain, I once broke down and spent the money to have my car detailed. I often ate in my car, spilled a few cups of coffee, and routinely left trash on the floor. I deserved to have my car look new

again, and it did. It looked incredible. Now it was up to me to ensure I kept it looking that way. It didn't take long before I began the fall into the same old habits. I began to leave my coffee cup and then that Chick-fil-a box of empty nuggets. Before I knew it, my car had reached a new level of gross! The newness had once again disappeared. It might have stayed clean if I had only taken a few steps. If I had just made more effort to remove my trash every day, it would have never piled up. That's it! That is how you maintain that "newness of life" the Bible mentions, a few little steps at a time.

In its simplest form, "walking" is putting one foot in front of the other. The Bible uses this concept to describe how a Christian conducts himself. Therefore, if your way of life continues to follow Christ's pattern, you will do the necessary things to promote this "newness of life." I don't think Paul and John's use of the same word is just by coincidence. They give you valuable insight into how you can maintain this "newness." You "walk" by putting one foot in front of the other. Sometimes you may have to slow down and take some baby steps. Just as simply taking those small steps of removing the trash from my car keeps it clean. Taking those small steps to walk in the light, will keep you holy. By making one decision at a time, (baby steps, if you will), you can easily keep the trash of life from corrupting your newness of life

Editorial: Blessings Renewed Every Morning

Justin Guin

Jerusalem lay in ruins as the Babylonians razed it when they conquered Judah and took 3,023 people back to Chaldea (Jer. 52:28). These events were no surprise to the prophet Jeremiah. He warned, exhorted, and instructed Judah to repent and return to the Lord. Seventy years of difficulty were on the horizon, but Israel still had hope. Jeremiah wrote in Lamentations, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him’” (Lam. 3:22–24, ESV). Often, amid difficulty, God’s blessings become clearer. You have hope not because of what tomorrow holds but because of who holds tomorrow. Jeremiah understood this principle due to his abiding faith in the Lord.

I do not know what 2022 held for our readers of *Words of Truth*. I am sure it included both highs and lows for most of you. The same was true for me. There were seasons of lows. I conducted more funerals in 2022 than I ever have in my ministry career. My year began with a funeral for a fifteen-year-old who committed suicide. We had deaths in our family, and in the congregation we serve. News of cancer diagnoses, divorces, and other problems left us brokenhearted. We said goodbye to dear friends who moved away. Just as there were lows, we had moments of joy. On June 10th, I had one of the greatest experiences of my life. I was privileged to baptize my oldest son into Christ at Maywood Christian Camp. In addition to Blake, we rejoiced with 14 others who were baptized into Christ at Double Springs. We rejoiced with those who welcomed new children and grandchildren. We celebrated with brothers and sisters who honored in various ways. One thing remained constant in 2022’s highs and lows. The Lord was our portion, and great was His faithfulness. Each day God renewed blessings in our lives. These blessings are constant sources of strength. What are some of these blessings?

First, hope is new every morning. During the seventy years of captivity, it seemed hopeless (cf. Ps. 137). Throughout his book, Jeremiah reminded Judah of hope despite their bleak future. Notice Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” No doubt Jeremiah’s words were a precious reminder of an enduring hope. Better days were ahead. The New Testament also has constant reminders of hope.

Peter wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). It is living and constant. We must hold fast to it without wavering (Heb. 10:23). It is given by an immutable God who is faithful in all things. Our hope is new every morning.

Second, the steadfast love of God is new every morning. The phrase “steadfast love” is translated from the Hebrew word *chesed*. It denotes kindness, love, loyalty, and mercy. In the Old Testament, it describes a special relationship that God has with his covenantal people. This love never ceases to be present with God’s people.[i] The biblical writers use it 194 times, constantly reminding Israel (and us) that God loved them no matter their choices. In the New Testament, affirmations of God’s love are repeated. In the “golden text of the Bible,” we learn that God loves everyone and gave his Son as an eternal, vicarious sacrifice to secure our eternal life. God constantly reminds us that his love never ceases and is renewed every morning.

Third, God’s mercy is new every morning. What is mercy? In the Old Testament, the word is translated from *chesed* (i.e., steadfast love). In the New Testament, it has a range of meaning from having compassion on another to God offering us atonement even though we are not deserving (i.e., propitiation).[ii] One of my Bible class teachers gave me the best working definition of “mercy” when I was in his Jr. High Bible class. Mercy is not getting what we deserve. We deserve wrath and punishment. But God, even though we were dead in our trespasses, gives us life because he is rich in mercy and grace (Eph. 2:4-5). Our God is awesome! Praise be to God because his enduring mercy is renewed every morning.

Reflecting upon the blessings that are new every morning makes us more thankful and humble. We are reliant on them every moment of every day. Jeremiah rightly stated, “The Lord is my portion...I will hope in him.” Great is his faithfulness!

[i] William Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006) 426.

[ii] *Ibid.*, 447.

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**PREACHING
MATTERS.**

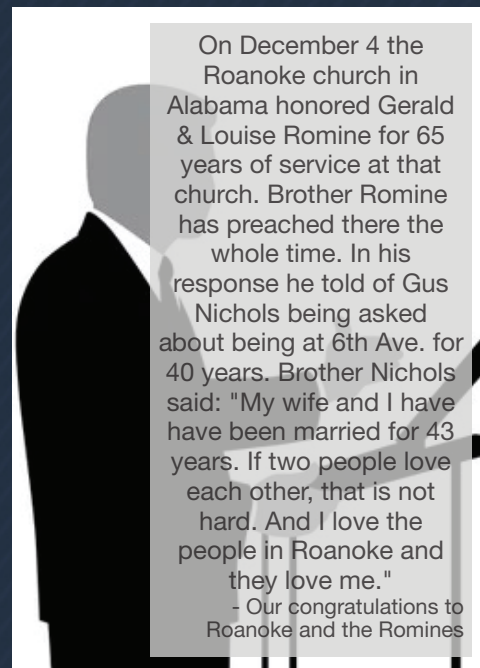
While we do not worry about tomorrow, Christians are the most optimistic, forward-thinking people in the world. Our whole lives are built “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

The recent events in our world have sent some into a time of caution and pulling back. But we are not of that sort (Hebrews 10:38-39). We are better than that. Christians see opportunities in every obstacle (Philippians 3:13-14). It is time for us to dream again. It is time for us to think forward of what we can do to press the Gospel and the Kingdom of our Lord forward. It is time to stop thinking about recovering and start thinking about advancing. One of our dad’s (Jerry Jenkins) favorite sayings was always: “The future is as bright as the promises of God.”

And in this effort, **PREACHING MATTERS!** Consider your sermons. Do they look forward? Consider your work. Is it optimistic about the Lord’s abilities to bring about good? **Here is this month’s challenge:** Encourage your leaders to plan a time to set goals for the days ahead. Work with them to dream of what more the congregation can do.

This will be about Preaching Matters, because Preaching Matters. We invite your comments and ideas as we strive to make this as helpful as possible. Please send any of those to TJ@TheJenkinsInstitute.com.

- Jeff & Dale Jenkins



On December 4 the Roanoke church in Alabama honored Gerald & Louise Romine for 65 years of service at that church. Brother Romine has preached there the whole time. In his response he told of Gus Nichols being asked about being at 6th Ave. for 40 years. Brother Nichols said: "My wife and I have been married for 43 years. If two people love each other, that is not hard. And I love the people in Roanoke and they love me."
- Our congratulations to Roanoke and the Romines

Only 44% of churches of Christ have an annual planning/goal setting time.
-TJI Research, 12/21

71% of employees cannot recognize their own company’s strategy
Harvard Business Review, 2013

OUR MISSION

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in[b] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”
- Matthew 28:19, Jesus

A Word of Encouragement

Beginning Again

Louisa Fletcher begins her famous poem with the following words: “So I wish that there were some wonderful place, called the land of Beginning Again, where all our mistakes and all our heartaches, and all of our poor selfish grief could be dropped like a shabby old coat at the door, and never be put on again.”

Every Gospel preacher is blessed thousands of times in his life to tell people that this is no dream. There really is a place where we can bring all of our mistakes, heartaches, and grief. At the foot of the cross we are given a new life, a new beginning. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

There is a sense where every New Year provides a new beginning. We are reminded each year of the successes and failures in our lives. We are able to pause for a minute and think again about dreams, goals, and plans. We have the opportunity to recommit our hearts to the work of preaching and ministry. We can pray for people in our lives who are dear to us who need to be closer to Jesus.

We should also use this opportunity to encourage those to whom we preach each week to recommit their lives to the Lord. We can challenge them to do more than in previous years. We can joyfully help them thank God for all that He has done in the year that was and praise Him for the freshness of a New Year. May God bless you more than ever as we enter another year of serving and glorifying Him.



The Words of Truth

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ASK A BIBLE QUESTION

QUESTION: Please tell me what “quench not the Spirit” means in 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

ANSWER: The word “quench” is used in the sense of extinguishing a light or fire (Matt. 25:8; Mark 9:48; Eph. 6:16). Just as water, dirt, and other things can extinguish a flame, so the influence of God’s Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) can be smothered in our lives by things such as laziness (2 Thess. 3:10), indifference (Rev. 3:15), worldliness (Jam. 4:4), materialism (1 Tim. 6:10), evil companions (1 Cor. 15:33), and false teaching (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Christians can allow the Spirit to be quenched or not quenched. The Bible teaches us to...

- Resist the Devil (Jam. 4:7).
- Be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10).
- Be not weary in well doing (Gal. 6:9).
- Keep yourself unspotted from the world (Jam. 1:27).
- Be not conformed to this world (Rom 12:2).
- Exercise our senses to discern good and evil (Heb. 5:14).

All that become Christians (John 3:3, 5; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:27) receive the gift of the Holy Spirit when baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Paul described the gift of the Spirit as the guarantee of our redemption in heaven (Eph. 1:13-14). The Spirit dwelling within Christians through God’s Word is like a perpetual flame of light (Matt. 5:16; Phil. 2:15; Eph. 5:8). As we increase our knowledge of God’s Word, the flame grows stronger (1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18; Gal. 5:16, 25; Rom. 8:4); however, if we drift away from that which the Spirit has revealed (Eph. 3:1-5; Heb. 2:1-4), we subtly extinguish that flame (Heb. 2:1). Thus, drifting away from God and His Word quenches the Spirit. We must never quench (i.e., smother, extinguish, suppress, retard, or dampen) the influence of God’s Word by our words, thoughts, deeds (Col. 3:17), or spiritual neglect (Heb. 2:3).

-Mark Nichols Posey
mark.nichols.posey@gmail.com

The words of *Truth*

The Words of Truth

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Please send all correspondence to:

The Words of Truth

Sixth Avenue Church of Christ
1501 6th Avenue
Jasper, AL 35501

Phone: (205) 384-6446

Fax: (205) 302-0595

E-mail: office@sixthavenuechurch.org
www.sixthavenuechurch.org