



Christian Ambassadors, Inc.

My Brother's Keeper

Volume 13, Number 4, October-December, 2008

GROWING on the WORD

A scripture study

The Word of God is the source of light, truth, and power, for those who seek it's meaning and apply it to their life. Jesus Christ is the word made flesh, and we seek to follow him.

John 8:12 (NIV) – *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

Each issue of “My Brother’s Keeper” features a WORD study. This issue’s Word Study is from Sharon K. Griffiee, Co-Founder of Christian Ambassadors and Director of Spiritual Growth Ministries.

The Word Of God Separates

By Sharon K. Griffiee

I John 1:5-7 (NIV) - *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.*

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

This is a powerful message! It is a message that many have heard, yet still needs to be declared. God is light and in Him there is no darkness! None whatsoever. It would be foolish to think that we can have a meaningful relationship with God, and continue walking about in the darkness of this world. Light and darkness just don’t mix, although we can be deceived into thinking that it does. As John warns, that is living a lie! We can’t play in the darkness without it having an adverse effect on us.

The truth? If we desire to have fellowship with God, as well as with other believers, separation from the darkness is inevitable. In relationships we must face the truth. Our love for Jesus will not automatically spill over onto others, drawing them in. We will encounter opposition. There will be those who whole-heartedly accept the message of Jesus, while others utterly reject it. It is a given, those who accept Jesus will run into opposition. Some will even accuse us of being exclusive (thinking we are better than others). But, when push comes

to shove the ultimate loyalty of every believer is to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Come Out And Be Separate

II Corinthians 6:14-18 (NIV) - *Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial [the devil]? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore **come out from them and be separate**, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” [bold emphasis mine]*

In these verses of scripture, Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is exhorting believers not to be yoked together with unbelievers. To drive his point home, Paul asks

the Corinthians five significant questions.

- What do righteousness and wickedness have in common?
- What fellowship can light have with darkness?
- What harmony is there between Christ and Belial [the devil]?
- What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?
- What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?

Through these questions Paul wants to show the Corinthians just how wide the chasm is between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan.

Before we move on, I want to make it clear. Paul was not saying that believers should have no contact at all with unbelievers. That would be absolutely absurd, for Christ clearly commissioned His disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (**See: Mark 16:15**). Jesus desires that every person be given an opportunity to hear the gospel and then make a decision, to believe or not believe. But, in our zeal to convert unbelievers, we must avoid hooking up with or seeking to become best friends with those who are in direct opposition to Jesus. Paul warns;

I Corinthians 15:33 (NIV) - Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."

When we hang with people who openly oppose Jesus, our character and our relationship with Jesus is at stake. Paul admonished, do not be yoked together with unbelievers.

His concern stemmed from his fear that "unbelievers" might lead "believers" astray from their sincere and pure devotion to Christ. How? Through wrong teaching, values, and practices, their minds could become corrupted from the simplicity of Christ's message.

Paul put Christ's simple message on the line when he said; a believer can be rightly yoked only with Christ.

Jesus issued a simple call to faith;

Matthew 11:29-30 (KJV) - Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Jesus alone gives this invitation of rest for our souls. It is a rest from day to day weariness that we so desperately need. And, where does this weariness so often come from? It comes from countless hours and sleepless nights, of enduring the burdens of sin and its consequences. With our focus on Jesus, however, we can be assured that a rest is waiting for us. Rather than carry the burden of sin, along with all its consequences by ourselves, we can (should) come and yoke ourselves with Jesus. When we do, we find that in contrast to everyone else who seems to reject us, Jesus is there for us; gentle, humble, and forgiving.

A word of caution - in coming to Jesus we must never take our relationship with him for granted. When we take His yoke upon us, we are saying we freely submit to His authority and righteousness; to His way of doing things. As we follow His lead, we are happy to

discover that His yoke is not burdensome. On the contrary, His yoke is lined with pure love!

Out Of Darkness Into Light

The word darkness in the Bible is commonly referred to as death, ignorance, sin, and separation from God. The word light, on the other hand, can be referred to and thought of as God's calling card. Why? The nature of light is to shine and dispel darkness.

In the first chapter of John's account we learn that Jesus, the Word, is that light who came into the world to invade the dominion of darkness. Jesus came with a purpose; to destroy the works of Satan - to shine His light on and expose the devil's activities.

See: I John 3:8b.

The Good News for you and me? Jesus came to lead "whosoever will" out of the darkness and into His glorious light. Thank God for Jesus, for not leaving you and me in the dark!

It is always a blessing for us at Christian Ambassadors to receive testimonies from inmates who have *separated* themselves from the darkness of prison, to dedicate their life to Jesus Christ. The following testimony from one inmate, serves as a living example of what can happen when someone encounters the light of Jesus Christ while in prison. He writes;

"I've been locked up for 18 years, doing a 25 year sentence for robbery. I'm doing time in a very high security unit, because I walked away from a prison gang

as soon as I let Jesus in my heart in 2002! People look at you like you are crazy if you tell them you are a born again Christian.

I know enough to realize that Jesus is coming for us "believers", and those who haven't let the Lord in – better hurry!"

What this inmate described so beautifully is the noticeable separation that occurs when the Word [light] of God, comes on the scene to dispel the darkness of Satan.

Isaiah described what this coming of Salvation was like; extreme joy over the birth of the Christ Child.

Isaiah 9:2 (KJV) - The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

But, Jesus [the Word] clinched it Himself when He, as the Savior, boldly proclaimed;

John 12:46 (NIV) - I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

No matter how sin infested our past may have been, we don't have to continue living in this diseased state of darkness. God's Word is set before us, to persuade us to come out of the darkness and into the light. Again we are reminded,

John 12:46 (NIV) - "...no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

To Come In Or Stay Out?

"Believers" have no reason to stay in the dark, because God's people are drawn to the light like a magnet! Though the light exposes and rebukes their sin, they actually welcome it. Wanting to follow Jesus, they are eager to respond in repentance and faith. Knowing He will help them make the changes in their life, motivates them.

But, what about those who choose to stay out in the dark? What hold does the darkness have on them?

Jesus tells us straight up;

John 3:19-20 (NIV) - This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.

In these few verses Jesus gives us the simple verdict. Men love darkness, because of what it hides - their evil deeds. Their big fear? If they come to the light their deeds will be seen as worthless, and Jesus would require them to turn from them. Jesus said that everyone who does evil hates the light. To hate the light, is to hate Jesus, the light of the world. Jesus takes it personally.

Set Apart For God's Use

The Spirit of God in true "believers" is opposed to the spirit of the world - the spirit of hatred. Before Jesus went to the cross, he prayed for the disciples and for those of us who would believe on Him through their words.

John 17:13-21 (NIV) - "I am coming to you now, but I say

these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

In this astounding prayer Jesus asked the Father that we be sanctified (separated) by;

- God's truth
- Set apart to a Holy way of life
- Then sent into the world.

As you can see by now, Jesus placed a huge expectation on us. But, as we become more and more like Jesus we can have - as Jesus promised, the full measure of His joy within us. Awesome!



Joy behind Bars

“Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. I always pray for you, and I make my requests with a heart full of joy.”

Philippians 1:3 (New Living Translation)

Part of our purpose when God saves us is to live godly lives – lives that reflect the character of God. The apostle Paul gives us some of the best instructions for what it means to live a godly life. For the next few meditations we'll be looking at a letter Paul wrote to the believers who lived in Philippi. Keep in mind that Paul is writing this letter from prison.

One of the many remarkable things about Paul is that even though he was unjustly imprisoned, even though he was stripped, beaten, and thrown into the inner dungeon of a Roman prison, he was full of joy. He had every right to complain, but he didn't. He kept his eyes on God's purposes for him. He chose joy!

Paul could have questioned God's plan. God had commissioned Paul to preach the Gospel in foreign lands, and he had just begun an aggressive missionary campaign. But two years in prison interrupted that plan. Again, instead of complaining, Paul kept right on serving God, choosing to see prison as his new mission field.

Like so many of us doing indeterminate sentences, like 2-to-life for sexual assault or 25-to-life for second-degree murder, Paul is not sure he'll ever leave prison; he may even lose his life there. But listen to what he says about that: "But even...if I am to die [because I was preaching the Gospel], I will rejoice, and I want to share my joy with all of you. And you should be happy about this and rejoice with me" (Philippians 2:16-18). For a person in shackles, that is a pretty good response.

Paul is an inspiration to us. When we are tempted to complain, we can choose joy.

Reprinted with permission. "Doing His Time, Meditations and Prayers for Men and Women in Prison", by James C. Vogelzang, with Lynn Vanderzalm, Doing His Time Prison Ministry, PO Box 91509, Santa Barbara, CA 93190

Sharing the Good News

“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

II Corinthians 5:20-21

**From: Walker S.
Clinton Correctional
Dannemora, New York**

Dear Sister Sharon, The reason for this letter is to inform you that I was transferred. And to give you thanks for all your help in the Bible lessons you send me. Also to let you know that I always keep your ministry in my heart, mind, and prayers.

God's Kingdom on earth has been growing for the past two thousand years, because Jesus said,

Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV) – “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Your brother, Walker

**From: Bobby G.
Cummins Unit
Grady, Arkansas**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
Greetings in the name of Jesus. I want to thank you for the monthly

lesson of Spiritual Growth. It has helped me a lot. Please keep me in your prayers.

Thank you and God Bless you in Jesus name. Brother Bobby.

**From: Michael P.
Avenal Correctional
Avenal, California**

Dear Sister Sharon, I just wanted to give you my new address and let you know what a blessing "My Brother's Keeper" is to me. Keep up your good work for the Lord! God Bless! Brother Michael

**From: Faith H.
HPCF
Brush, Colorado**

Dear Sharon and Alan, I want to thank you both for keeping up with me on my address changes.

Thank you so much for being such a blessing to all of us and sharing the Word of God.

Receiving "My Brother's Keeper" all these years has truly been a wonderful blessing that I was able to share with other Christian sisters, and also bring other sisters to the Lord.

Thank you once again for remaining so faithful in your mailing "My Brother's Keeper" to me. God Bless you both in all you do. A sister in Christ, Faith.

**From: Gary W.
Avenal Correctional,
Avenal, California**

Dear Sister Sharon, I'm writing to say thank you for your [Spiritual Growth] lesson on "Recidivism". It was right on!

I'm a man in prison and I live in the Glory of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Many of us will be going to be free sooner or later and we must put God before everything else in our lives. We must build our lives anew on the foundation of Jesus Christ and remember,

*Matthew 28:18-20 (KJV) –
And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

In this we know Jesus is with us always and will give us the courage to adjust to our lives and He will stay with us through our long-suffering till the end of the world.

So with us in Christ we will persevere. We will succeed in our freedom, because our Christian ways are too powerful for our enemy. Our foundation is rock solid. We will have victory over the enemy. We will stay out of prison as free men. Our lives are

full of faith, hope, forgiveness, love and victory.

We will work hard and be such a bright burning light, and if Jesus comes for us during our life time, He will find us all in the righteousness of His Glory. God bless you all! Gary "Brother Free"

**From: Jeffro M.
Red Onion State Prison
Pound, Virginia**

Dear Brothers/Sisters at Christian Ambassadors, I've been on your mailing list for some years now. I really enjoy and am greatly encouraged by all of the materials you send! I like the Spiritual Growth Lessons! And I really enjoy "My Brother's Keeper" newsletter/study. I just received my copy for July, August, September, and as usual, I was extremely blessed by every word in "My Brother's Keeper."

I want to thank you for your faithfulness to us "out casts" of society; the incarcerated prison population of America. God Bless you! Brother Jeffro.

**From: Michael P.
Crowley Co. Correctional
Olney Springs, Colorado**

Dear Sister Sharon, I am so very grateful to be receiving your newsletter "My Brother's Keeper" and your Spiritual Growth Lessons. I was very blessed by [your lesson] *Prayer -Living In Intimate Fellowship With God*, and enjoyed sharing the teaching with

others. I wanted to return the blessing and share a thought for your readers. One is from **Matthew 10:16** where Jesus says,

“Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”

We have all been sent forth on a divine mission, whether on the streets or here in the prison house. And we know we are His sheep, because we hear His voice and follow Him. A defenseless sheep would stand no chance in a pack of wolves without a courageous shepherd. Staying close to the shepherd is our only hope.

As we are being wise as serpents, we need to keep in mind that a snake has a tendency to avoid confrontation. Given the choice between attacking and leaving, it usually leaves. Deflecting verbal assaults with wise questions is a way to be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove. Jesus often answered questions with a question. A subtle person designs questions to avoid conflict. The simple person makes statements that cause contention. **Proverbs 15:1 (KJV)** says;

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

I hope this is a blessing for your readers and I sure am looking forward to your next lesson and newsletter. In Jesus' love,
Michael



Celebrate Christmas

By Ira Butt, Smithfield Correctional, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania

Tw'as a deep, dark and cold December night;
The kind that brave little boys take fright.
They traveled from Galilee, their taxes to pay,
As ordered by Caesar; no time to delay!

They searched for a room to stay for the night;
All evening they looked; not one was in sight.
That is the reason in the manger forlorn
The beautiful Christ child was now to be born.

Three wise men followed His star from the East;
As students of the stars, they mounted their beasts.
This bright shining star led them to His manger.
They followed it there, not caring of dangers.

They each came, you see, to pay their homage's
To this tiny child, the King of all ages;
To bring Him gifts from countries of old;
To bring Him frankincense, myrrh, and gold.

The shepherds, who were watching their sheep that night,
When they saw an angel, took fright at the sight.
The angel appeared, saying, "Be not afraid!"
"I have great news from God," he cheerfully said.

"This day in Bethlehem a Savior is born!
You'll find Him lying in a manger forlorn."
At once, the sky was filled with a heavenly host;
"Glory to God, good will to men," was their boast.

They left their flocks, and so to Bethlehem went
To pay their respects to this child God had sent;
Telling everyone what the angels had said,
Spreading the Good News without fear, doubt, or dread.

Without a doubt, these people all knew
This baby boy's deeds would not be few;
For He came as God, and He lived as man,
A part of our God's everlasting plan.

Let's all share love with all men, not just our brother;
We should all be known for our love for each other;
Not just today, as we celebrate Christmas,
But the whole year long; that's what His command was!

Count It All Joy
By Merissa Lee Kelly

James 1:2-3 – *“Count it all joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”*

I have read this verse many times and to be truthful...I have struggled more times than I care to admit when trying to apply it to some of the circumstances in my life. I have actually said in my “one on one” time with God... “You have GOT to be kidding me! I’m supposed to be joyful in THIS?!” Our flesh prefers to be comfortable...trials, tests and adversity are anything but!

Sometimes the only prayer I can say is “HELP!” I’m so caught off guard...so overwhelmed, I can’t even begin to formulate a coherent prayer. But that one simple word goes straight to the throne. God hears us. If all you can manage to whisper is “Help!”...look at it like this: “Help me...this is an Emergency...Lord...you Promised to never leave me or forsake me!” (Read Isaiah 43:2-4)

Prayer moves the hand of God. When you pray, remember this: Be Persistent...Release your faith...realize He is Able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all we can ask or think...and get Yourself out of the way, so God can do what He needs to do. And of course...REJOICE!!

To “count it all joy” in some circumstances is difficult to say the least
To be content no matter your state, whether it’s famine or it’s feast
To pray for endurance instead of deliverance is not an easy prayer
A rescue team would fit the bill...so we send up another flare

It’s natural to want a comfort zone that never shrinks in size
Where everything is warm and fuzzy...with cloudless, sunny skies
If given the choice, who would choose to walk into a trial?
To get all cozy...pull up a chair...and decide to stay a little while

There’s no such place as “Club Adversity” with a “members only” sign
For the rain can fall on anybody at any given time
To rejoice and keep on praising, even when we’re soaking wet
Is something we should focus on...but so often we forget

Speaking the problem constantly is like quicksand to your soul
So consumed you cannot see that God’s still in control
It’s like your mind is on a stage, rehearsing for a play
Memorizing all the speeches that you would like to say

Continuing in this negative state will only bring despair
Griping and grumbling incessantly how life just isn’t fair
No, it’s not. That’s a fact and why we need to learn
That God is faithful, fair and just...through all life’s twists and turns

Our own understanding is often flawed, when we lean on it, we will find
That too many times our wrong perceptions have placed us in a bind
God has provided a timeless treasure to guide us through each day
His holy word has truth and freedom to help us find our way

When the weight of the world is pressing in, press back with praise and prayer
The Light of the World will shine so bright...you won’t need that flare!
Don’t count the problems, count the steps that God has walked with you
He’ll give you joy and that’s your strength...to see this journey through

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” – **Philippians 4:4 (NIV)***

Rainy Day Thoughts

By: Larry Thompson
Sterling Correctional,
Sterling, Colorado

Because I've never loved so deeply, I'd never experienced the depths of sorrow and regret as I do today. Sorrow, grown out of the seeds of acceptance; acceptance of the fact that my limitations and failures have been a direct result of my own selfishness; and, regret, born out of the knowledge and understanding that I've squandered so many of the blessings that God has bestowed

upon me. I long so badly to cry out in the midst of my pain, but who will hear; who will comfort me in this, my hour of need; save the Lord? Upon Him alone do I entrust the wounds of my soul; the tattered remains of a heart in need of repair. Unto Him alone do I surrender my all, knowing that in spite of my weakness, He is my strength.

I'm tired, but not hopeless. I'm bowed, yet by His Grace, unbroken. I'm weary, but I'm determined to finish my course. In my flesh I'm imprisoned, yet I rejoice in victory, because He has set my Spirit free; for it is written, "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." (John 8:36)

Rainy day thoughts like these give me pause to appreciate all that He has given, and, all that He has taken away. Rainy day thoughts like these compel me to cry out, "*Abba Father, thank you for loving me. For, without You I can do nothing, because I am nothing. But, with You, and through You, I am more than a conqueror. I am Your son. I am loved. Thank you Lord. In Jesus name, Amen.*"

Rainy day thoughts like these help strengthen me to face tomorrow; for tomorrow it may truly rain.

**My Brother's Keeper**

Vol. 13, No. 4, October-December 2008

Sharon K. Griffiee, Senior Editor

Alan W. Griffiee, Production Manager

My Brother's Keeper is published by Christian Ambassadors, Inc., a nonprofit, tax-exempt, Colorado based corporation.

© 1995-2008, all rights reserved.

Reproduction in whole or in part, except for personal or group study, without written permission is prohibited. The CA logo, with dove and cross, is a registered service mark of Christian Ambassadors, Inc., in the United States of America.

Printing and distribution costs are paid for by donations. To have your name, or the name of a loved one in prison, added to our distribution please write to:

Christian Ambassadors, Inc.
PO Box 62876
Colorado Springs, CO 80962-2876

Inspirational articles, especially from current or former prison inmates, are invited and will be prayerfully considered for publication. Please write to request a copy of the publication guidelines before submitting an article for consideration.

Vision Statement - Christian Ambassadors exists to bring the ministry of Jesus Christ into the lives of people, demonstrating how the gospel teachings can help a person live a more abundant life, filled with joy, hope, and purpose.

If you, any member of your family, or a friend, are imprisoned, wanting to find new hope, purpose, and direction in life, please contact us at Christian Ambassadors. Our website can be visited at:

<http://www.christian-ambassadors.org>.