

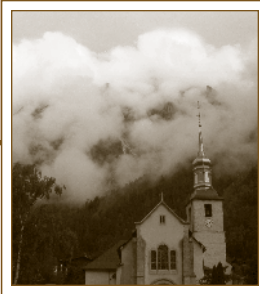


In the Name of Jesus

Volume 3

Essays by Gene Shelburne

THE CHRISTIAN
Appeal



In the Name of Jesus

In my congregation, we often sing a song that tells us to “praise the name of Jesus.” We’re doing that very thing, of course, when we harmonize that hymn, so maybe the writer of that song had something more in mind. Maybe he was casting the same broad perspective the apostle Paul envisioned when he wrote that “whatever you do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17). Or, as the New Living Translation explains, do it “as a representative of the Lord Jesus.” In my devotional essays in this issue, let’s focus together on that broader scope of standing up for our Lord’s name.

—Senior Editor Gene Shelburne

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John Gulley

“**A**nd whatever you do,
whether in word or deed,
do it all in the name
of the Lord Jesus . . .”



The Apostle Paul
Colossians 3

In the Name of Jesus

Judging Our Ancestors

I had just turned two (so the story was told to me) when a surge of independence tempted me to ignore my mother's clear instructions never to leave our tiny yard.

Mom caught up with me before my toddler legs waddled me to the end of our block. All the way back home she swatted my fanny as I yowled and she reminded me of the rule I had just broken.

Two paces from our porch I hooked my toe in a joint in the sidewalk and took a headlong dive onto the concrete steps at our front door. The bump in the middle of my forehead, still visible over 75 years later, is all that's left of the huge hematoma that horrified my loving mother. She blamed herself for it as long as she lived.

Was my mother a child abuser? No way. That day she wasn't trying to hurt me. Contrary to that, she was trying to make sure I didn't get hurt a lot worse. But by today's corporal punishment rules a strict judge might well have found her guilty.

I share this personal anecdote to highlight how blind and unjust we modern folks are if we measure and judge our wisest, most upright ancestors by the moral and social standards applied in our generation.

Yes, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson did own slaves,

and that would not be okay today. But they were recognized on both sides of the Atlantic as astute fellows whose integrity and courage were legendary.

Eric Metaxas is right when he asserts in his book *If We Can Keep It* that we Americans lose more than we can afford to lose if we measure these sterling men by modern rules and discard them as our finest heroes.

I don't have to go back to the Revolution to find examples of this generational mistake. My dear father and his parents before him showed more love to their black neighbors than did anyone else in their little town. My grandmother fed them, doctored them, befriended them. At a time when black and white citizens never mixed at church, over half the crowd at Ma Shelburne's funeral were black. She loved them, and they loved her.

But if you heard my loving, compassionate ancestors talking about these people they embraced and cared for, they used the vocabulary of their time. By today's standard, their use of the n-word would brand them as hateful racists—the opposite of what they really were.

Jesus warns not to judge others unless you want to be judged. Unless you want descendants to call you vile and despicable, take care how you assess our ancestors. *CA*

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Two Tables

Yesterday in a packed restaurant I ate a schizophrenic meal.

On one side of me were three ladies. When they came in, I was impressed by the way the younger two strongly but lovingly assisted the wee, wobbly gray-haired woman with them. Was she their mother or grandmother? I wondered.

As I ate almost elbow to elbow with them, I could not keep from hearing the spate of hells and damns and s.o.b.'s that issued from their table.

They weren't angry. This was obviously their normal way of conversing—especially for the youngest of the three, a mannish, 40-year-old who sat and sipped a massive goblet of beer and seemed unaware that the cut of her severe black dress plunged recklessly toward her navel.

On the other side of me dined two Baptist preachers, one of them bordering on obesity and doing his best that day to cross the border. They ordered rather loudly and, when their salads appeared, gave thanks to God in a timbre that made me uncomfortable.

Somehow the profanity of the ladies seemed less offensive to

me than the preachers' pretentious praying. (Am I a pagan?)

Talking in tones that invaded every other conversation in the cafe, the clergymen proceeded to consume roasted colleague for lunch. Telling tale after tale, they catalogued the sins of their fellow-pastors and found fault with most of the policies of their fellowship.

After 40 minutes of "going over the brethren," the fat preacher wheezed a chuckle and asked his companion, "Have we covered all the gossip yet?"

Evidently not. He immediately brought up another pastor's name and started confessing that man's sins.

Meanwhile, with divided attention, I heard the three ladies visiting, still speaking with mild profanities, but expressing evident feelings of affection for one another. The details of the conversation I overheard were positive, constructive, good-spirited comments about life in general and about their friends in particular.

Had Jesus walked into the café that day, which of the two tables do you think he would have joined? *CA*

In the Name of Jesus

What Kneeling Says

Not long ago I attended a dear friend's funeral in a church that still has kneelers attached to their pews. Some people used them. What are those good folks saying when they drop to their knees during worship?

In all the rural and small town churches where my father often preached, the prayer-time routine was much the same. When prayer began, every able-bodied man in the house hit the floor on his knees. What were those devout souls saying by kneeling?

Not what Colin Kaepernick and his imitators are saying today on NFL turf. That's for sure.

I've never known anyone who knelt in a church in order to draw attention to themselves—to say, "Hey! Look at me!" From the first time Adam prostrated himself in prayer, people have bowed down before the Lord to lower their own visibility and lift up God's.

But these new athlete kneelers wouldn't be on their knees if the TV cameras were not taking it in, would they? Worshipers kneel to express respect. These dudes intend to send the opposite message. They intend to trash what loyal Americans have honored for centuries.

The pews in my little church don't have a place for kneeling. In fact, like most modern Protestant churches,

we don't even provide enough space between the pews to allow any old-fashioned kneeling. If we did kneel, though, I guarantee you it would be to express humility and devotion, not anger and rebellion.

Since our worship facility today makes kneeling almost impossible, to express reverence and respect in this modern generation we often stand. Being erect, upright, standing "at attention" before the Lord, is an effective way to tell him that we honor him.

What are the few pro-footballers still on their feet during our national anthem saying to us? Is it apropos for me to say "Amen" to them at a football game?

In his famous hit "My Way," Frank Sinatra sang disapprovingly of "the words of one who kneels." In this case kneeling implied a lack of grit or courage. On the NFL turf today it implies a lack of love for our land. The crooner complimented those who do not kneel. So do I.

For four decades on Sundays I entered a church to kneel at least in spirit, and then went home to watch pro-football games where the only guys on their knees had just been plowed under by a sturdy linebacker.

I still opt to see the kneeling done in a church, not in a stadium. Adios, NFL. It was fun while it lasted. *CA*

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The Last Supper

Several of us teachers and a busload of delightful students spent the night in Milan, Italy, before heading to Switzerland and Austria the next day.

As we boarded our bus to go north, our main tour leader, Charley Hargrave, buttonholed the bus driver. Charley knew what most of us didn't—that we were just a few blocks from the church that held Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, "The Last Supper."

Although it wasn't listed on our itinerary, Charley asked our usually friendly driver if we could swing by for a quick look at that world-renowned work of art. "No way!" the driver retorted. Charley begged. The Italian driver wouldn't budge.

Later we realized that we were in the week for the World Cup soccer finals, and Italy was competing. Our driver planned to park his bus in Austria and park his carcass in front of a TV in time to see that game.

Thankfully, a few lira discretely folded into his palm changed the driver's answer, so all of us got to see "The Last Supper." What a treat!

What I didn't realize that day, however, was how little of da Vinci's original work we were able to see. Only a few years later a *National Geographic* story showed the vivid,

brilliant colors in the painting after experts had cleaned it. In Milan, we saw it through centuries of smoke, dust, dirt, film.

Unfortunately, it's not just that painting of the Supper that gets dimmed and obscured as the years drift by. If we're honest, most who gather around the Lord's Table with any regularity must admit that far too often we partake of the bread and the wine with our hearts and minds in neutral.

If we perform this holy ritual more out of habit than because of spiritual fervor, then the whole experience can get clouded by extraneous, idle thoughts. Instead of being a heartfelt encounter with the living Lord, the Supper may for too many become a boring ritual, dulled and dimmed even more than da Vinci's vibrant colors had been the day we marveled at his incredible painting.

When we break the bread and raise the cup, how many of us keenly remember Jesus telling us, "This is my body," and, "This is my blood"?

How many of us use that holy moment at the Table to look around us and truly to "discern the Body," those who share our faith in the dying Lamb and the risen Lord? Only then can we see the Supper in living color. *CA*

In the Name of Jesus

Naming Texas Towns

Mark Stein's second volume on how the various states got their boundaries—the volume filled with historical anecdotes about the heroes and villains involved—had me mesmerized when an odd Texas town name popped up and stopped me in my tracks.

Actually, I was reading a section about some other state (possibly Tennessee or Kentucky) when Stein told a tale that involved a place called Toadsuck, Texas.

Although I was born and raised in Texas and have roosted here most of my eight decades, I'd never heard of it. But that got me to wondering about other Texas burgs with equally weird monikers.

I know I have been to Gasoline, Texas, and Bangs, but I was dozing if my Lone Star wanderings ever took me through Black Ankle or Bug Tussle or Big Lump.

Fascinated with this looney topic of strange Texas town names, I decided to open a Texas almanac to see what other off-the-wall municipal listings I might find.

Way before AARP came along, Texas had a micropolis named Arp. I found communities named Bland and Chalk and Chocolate (really). I wondered how close that last one is to Choice. Should be, if it's not.

As you might expect in a state that used to be part of the nation of Mexico, Spanish-named towns cover Texas. Cabeza (head) and Amigo (friend) were just two of several dozen.

Bogus Springs caught my eye. Was "Bogus" a family name, or were the "springs" actually dry holes?

I spent an almost idle hour in that almanac scanning Texas town names, starting with "A" and only making it through "C" before I came up with a cluster of towns called Chub and Click and Cost and Couch. I even found two called Crisp and Cut, before I closed the book.

My apologies to my non-Texas readers, if you think I slighted your state. I'm sure you're surrounded by villages with equally daffy names. Let me assure anyone who happens to inhabit one of the towns listed above that I'm not making light of your fair city. I'm just an odd duck. Names like that tickle my funny bone. Blame the folks in Toadsuck for starting all of this.

My guess is that every town I've mentioned has a worthy historic explanation for their unusual name.

Names matter. A lot. Whether you're Abram becoming Abraham, or Jacob becoming Israel, or Simon getting nicknamed Peter, names matter. None of them more, of course, than the name of Jesus. *CA*

In the Name of Jesus

Next to Godliness?

Not everybody in every time or place has believed the old saw that "cleanliness is next to godliness."

When my lady and I visited Europe the first time almost forty years ago, we had been warned that folks over there didn't bathe or deodorize as often as nasty-nice Americans. It just took one ride on a crowded Paris train or in a packed Rome elevator to verify that fact.

Much of Europe's plumbing has been modernized and warm water made more affordable since then, but those folks inherited traditions rooted in a fear of excessive bathing. As recently as 1896 one respected doctor wrote about foolish mothers who subjected their babies to "dangerous consequences" by bathing them daily, thus "rapidly bringing them to premature graves."

Jeff Kacirk chronicled in his wacky 2015 *Forgotten English* calendar that Britain's king Henry VIII had only two baths in his entire life, one when he was born and the other to prepare his body for burial. Not unlike that order of nuns Victor Hugo described, who never bathed.

In comparison to that odorous monarch, his daughter Elizabeth was a hygienic fanatic. She insisted on having a bath once a month.

In his *Killing England* account

of our Revolutionary War, Martin Dugard comments in passing about how seldom (in comparison to modern habits) our nation's founding fathers such as Benjamin Franklin and George Washington and Thomas Jefferson bathed their bodies. The stench in the closed-up Continental Congress chamber must have been nothing short of rancid.

They inherited their British kin's bath schedule. Many of the settlers in rural England during the 1800s scheduled their annual bath on the first Saturday in June.

When I remember being the sixth cousin to take a Saturday night bath at our grandparents' home in the same putrid water in a Number 2 washtub, I can see why our ancestors saw frequent baths as a health threat. We brats were sure to catch any kind of crud the older cousins might have.

Realizing how recent and rare our daily bath routines are in the accumulated centuries of human history may give us a fresh appreciation for what Jesus and the early church were saying when they instituted total immersion baptism. In their world not that many people got that wet that often. Not like we do.

"Arise, and wash away your sins," would have been a startling instruction to people in a non-bathing world. *CA*

In the Name of Jesus

The Rockets' Red Glare

In the decades since I was a brat popping firecrackers on our front porch and chasing my cousins with a Roman candle, celebrations of July Fourth have slowly morphed (at least for me) into something almost boring.

I don't mean by this that I've stopped being grateful to be an American. If anything, our nation's long history spent protecting personal freedoms and keeping us free from despots and dictators and dynasties appears more valuable to me the longer I live. I'm proud and thankful that I am an American.

But hardly a week passes without an alarming news headline that serves as a warning that some of our nation's taken-for-granted freedoms can vanish over night.

Remember how much fun it used to be to fly? Before 9/11. Before pre-flight security measures had to be ramped up to stymie hijackers and bombers who hate us and our free land.

Remember how innocently we kids strolled into our public school classrooms six or seven decades ago? Before Columbine? Before Parkland? Before a plethora of angry, mentally ill killers were allowed to roam our streets and invade our schools.


Remember life before road-rage?

Before social media bullying? Before identity thieves could invade 50 million lives through a single digital trapdoor?

The carefree world a lot of us grew up in has had to be pruned and picketed and patrolled in previously unthinkable ways just to keep us sort of safe. And with each new set of rules or restrictions, "the land of the free" has become less free.

Pop all the firecrackers you want, light up the metro sky with pyrotechnic extravaganzas, but the most dazzling displays cannot begin to mask the damage done to our freedoms by the growing segment of our population who have little self-control and zero respect for others.

I wonder. Does this growing percentage of Americans who seem so instantly willing to bash or batter or kill have any connection to the steady drop in the percentage with any active links to a faith community?

In his massive *History of Civilization*, Will Durant was describing the whole world during all the centuries when he wrote: "From barbarism to civilization requires a century; from civilization to barbarism needs but a day." Events in our land not long before we celebrated the last Fourth made me wonder if he was describing us. 

In the Name of Jesus

The Great Jihad

I had not been born yet when it happened, and I would live almost eight decades on this planet before I read or heard a single word about what Joseph Yacoub calls "The Assyrian Christian Genocide." A century before the jihad we call 9/11, inflamed Islamists in the Middle East boasted of this one as "the great jihad."

What was it, and why have most of us never heard of this bloody extermination of thousands of Christians all across Mesopotamia (northern Iraq and Iran today)?

Yacoub, a professor at the Catholic University of Lyon, has collected and published firsthand reports of these atrocities. Eyewitness accounts in at least seven languages document the massacres. In 1915 alone over 250,000 Christians in this region perished at the hands of radical Islamists with hardly a word of concern being raised by anybody anywhere.

Blame this willful blindness—this approving silence—on the world war that engulfed most nations in the years that followed. Declared in 1914, World War I became the perfect screen to hide this jihad-led carnage.

"Atrocities included a priest burned alive, another skinned alive, a doctor doused with oil, set on fire,

and shot as he ran," Anne Gardiner tells us as she describes the attacks on Christians in Persia (Iran). "All the women and girls were raped . . . Hundreds threw themselves into the river to escape the horror." Christian females who survived were sold in the market cheaper than cattle, and all were forced to convert to Islam.

Masked by the smoke and headlines of the European world war, jihadists across the Assyrian desert savaged their Christian neighbors. Hundreds of churches and convents were razed, hundreds of priests were tortured and then slaughtered. And nobody even noticed.

Here we are a century later, and history is sadly repeating itself. All across the Middle East—even in places like Iraq where people owe their existence today to liberating forces from the "Christian" West—local Christian communities are being decimated by jihadists.

Faced with the option of either running for their lives or staying to face torture and annihilation, long-time Christian residents by the thousand have become refugees. And, although no global war obscures these events, still we hear few words of protest from the U.S. or the U.N.

In Iraq and Iran and Syria, evidently Christian lives don't matter. 

In the Name of Jesus

Redefining Heaven

If your hair is as white as mine, you grew up as I did during an era when society's accepted standards for behavior were based on Judeo-Christian principles. Most of our rules—from the ones parents set for their kids to the criminal statutes enforced by our courts—had the same roots. God's rules were our rules on most levels.

That fact may seem incredible today to the majority of millennials and to the generation now taking their place. The only moral and ethical rule many of them have upheld is that it is wrong for anybody or any group to make such rules for behavior.

It may perturb many of these modern souls to find out that their current moral standard is still biblical. We just look more like Sodom than like Sinai.

Most of us in the gray-haired generation are deeply troubled to live now in an age that legalizes and normalizes perversions and approves all manner of sexual activity outside of marriage. It may help us to control our spiritual blood pressure, though, if we realize that our current shift to sex-without-rules is nothing new. We're just getting back to what has been normal in most times and places.


In the late 1600s, for example, in a ballad about a lover-hero named

Thomas Rymer, some British poet referred to what Jesus called "the broad road." He said, "That is the path of wickedness, / Tho some call it the road to heaven." He was describing unbridled misbehavior just like ours today.

In the century before that, Shakespeare warned in his Sonnet 129 about "deceptive lust." Evidently he was observing the same immoralities we see all around us today. The famous bard lamented that few know "to shun the heaven that leads men to this hell."

"The wages of sin is death," the Bible clearly warns us, but a godless generation that never opens a Bible has never heard that warning. Does this explain why such a high percentage of the deaths chronicled in each day's news in this modern age are the result of wicked behavior that any wise, moral person would avoid?

"Do it my way," God told his people during the Exodus, "and you can avoid most of the diseases and the distress of the godless nations around you." His holy ways produced health and happiness, a veritable heaven on earth.

Those who ignored him got the opposite result then. Just as they still do. 

In the Name of Jesus

Redefining Morality

One of my high school classmates sent me a book: Gabrielle Kuby's *The Global Sexual Revolution*. Kuby's well-documented exposé of current global campaigns to demolish the traditional family and to squelch all rules for sex will chill the soul of any Bible-believing reader.

School kids worldwide are being sexualized, de-genderized, and taught to ignore all moral guidelines for sex and sexuality. In countries like Germany (Kuby's home), public sex education is mandated and home schooling is illegal. Even the youngest Christian students get taught unchristian behavior by the state.

And it's not just in religionless Europe. Have you checked what kids are being taught about sex in the schools in your state—especially in the states where home schooling by Christian parents has been outlawed?

Kuby quotes at length from the IPPF manual that was distributed in 2010 by the World Association of Girl Scouts and Girl Guides. It told girls worldwide: "There is no right or wrong way to have sex." It went on to recommend everything from masturbation to sex while drinking or using drugs.


In this modern world-without-a-God, the only valid rule for sex is "do whatever you want to."

Why should this arouse any concern in Christians? After all, in America we're still free to teach Christian moral standards and to live by them if we elect to, aren't we? What right do we have to expect non-Christians to live by our rules?

Try running that reasoning by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Let them explain to you why the non-Christian lifestyle of a same-sex couple trumped the rights of the Christian owners of a bakery, who now face bankruptcy because their morals made them refuse to bake a "wedding" cake to celebrate that immoral union.

Or talk to the military chaplain whose promising career crashed and burned when, following his denomination's rules, he asked to be excused from leading a premarital retreat that would involve a same-sex couple.

Or track the fruitless efforts of Christian business owners to be exempted from Obamacare regs that violate their moral convictions by making them provide employee healthcare plans that pay for abortions and morning-after pills.

If this is not enough to frighten you, ask yourself what your grandkids will grow up believing—a generation bathed in daily pornography and taught by the media to accept perversions as the new normal. 

In the Name of Jesus

When He Comes Again

I have never known a Christian who did not believe that Jesus some day will come again. After all, that was his last promise before he ascended—that one day they would see him returning just as he left them.

Ever since that day, though, the subject of Christ's return has set off countless weird theological theories and End-time predictions.

In April 2018 a nut that Fox News called a "Christian numerologist" briefly made headlines. This Bible "expert" named David Meade was sure that April 23 would be the beginning of the Rapture (a word never used in the Bible but popularized by End-timers such as *The Late Great Planet Earth* author Hal Lindsey).

Meade based his prediction on a combination of astronomy, astrology, and questionable Bible interpretation.


I didn't check it out, but Meade's astronomy likely was more precise than his Bible reading. Nobody questioned his assertion that on that April night the sun, the moon, and Jupiter would be visible during the zodiac period of Virgo.

What many would never buy was his mixture of astrology and astronomy to identify this heavenly pattern as the Messiah, "the Lion of the Tribe of Judah."

He discredited himself even with bona fide astronomy experts when he predicted that on April 23 not only Jesus would show up, but that a so-called Planet X (also known as Nibiru, but repeatedly called a hoax by NASA) would appear in the sky and cause volcano eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis.

Only a minority of Bible readers expect anything called "the Rapture." Even fewer would share Meade's theory that the pregnant woman whose birth pains are described in Revelation 12:1-2 represents Virgo (whom astrologists link to the Virgin).

Some Rapturists look forward to the Rapture as a period when Jesus will usher his faithful followers into Paradise while Earth suffers terrible tribulation. Explaining that for some reason the peculiar alignment in the heavens on that April night signaled the beginning of this Rapture, David Meade took his place at the end of a long parade of End-time predictors who got it wrong.

It should not surprise us that specific predictions of when Jesus will return are always wrong. That's what he predicted. "Be ready," he warned us, "because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." 

In the Name of Jesus

Spoofs and Trolls

When you hang around on this planet as long as I have, you can't keep from noticing that words we used when we were kids don't mean the same to our kids.

Take the word "spoof," for example. When I was in third grade, we used the term to describe harmless entertainment. The magician who came to our school to pull rabbits out of a hat performed a spoof for us. Our first reaction was to hold our breath and say, "Wow!" Then, when the trickster showed us how he did it, our entire class roared with laughter.

But today to "spoof" is to defraud or to scam by using falsified phone numbers to mask dishonest calls.

Our police department recently heard from a host of concerned citizens who had been called by scammers. The cops warned us that these crooks can spoof any phone number to make it look like the call is coming from our bank or the IRS or a local court or company.

"Spoofing is described as altering a phone number that shows up on a caller ID in order to masquerade as someone else," the police explained.

So much for what used to be a fun word.


If you're over sixty years old, do you remember your reaction when your mother read you nursery stories

with plots that featured trolls?

Trolls never were nice guys. They always were bad, ugly, even fierce dudes whose calling in life was to hurt the good people. They were stereotypical villains. But to us kids they always were storybook characters, fictitious ogres, whose only real calling in life was to entertain us.

Not so today. In this social media era, a troll is not a beastly bearded dwarf lurking behind a gatepost or under the bridge your fairytale hero is about to cross. Today a troll is an all-too-real dispenser of threats and insults and hate on Facebook or Twitter. Nothing is any longer innocent or fun about trolling. Far too often, in fact, it is cited as the cause of a teen suicide.

What I'm describing here, of course, is nothing new. The meaning of words has been changing as long as there have been words. If you doubt this, just listen to any preacher who quotes his sermon text from the King James Version of the Bible. He may have to spend half his pulpit time explaining Elizabethan terms none of us understand or use today. We don't have to reside in Babel to be confused by the words we hear.

Take care, my friend. Some troll probably will try to spoof you before the sun goes down. 

In the Name of Jesus

One by One

When he was performing in our town, Guy Penrod told us of his recent visit with a Christian psychologist who came to a Kentucky gospel concert.

“My prescription to all my older patients,” the therapist told the singer, “is quite simply: ‘Count Your Many Blessings.’” Of course, he got that line from the grand old song by that name.

Sometimes, though, I’m afraid that we who do give thanks for our blessings overlook that old song’s later advice to “name them one by one.”

Our thankfulness tends to be like a lot of the prayers I heard at church when I was a boy. We prayed long, and loud, and a lot, but usually we prayed “en masse.”

“Bless all the people who are hungry and hurting the world over,” we prayed during almost every service.

Somehow nobody ever suggested that we pray specifically for the crippled veteran Tommy who sat and begged every Monday morning at the west door of the JC Penney store. Our prayers never zoomed in to focus on Widow Thompson on Clay Street or on little Johnny who lay trapped in an iron lung because of polio.

We prayed for everybody “the world over,” and in doing so, in effect we prayed for nobody.

“Help us take the gospel to a lost and dying world,” we intoned Sunday after Sunday. But I don’t recall a time when the prayer leader in my childhood church asked the Lord to help us introduce Bob or Tom or Sam to Jesus. We never asked God to help us share the gospel with the post office clerk or our newspaper boy.

As I matured in my faith, prayer took on a different meaning for me—it became real and valid and necessary—when I quit praying in generalities and began making specific requests to the Lord for specific people.

Let me challenge you to apply this same strategy to your thanksgiving. All of us are thankful all the time, but our gratitude truly takes on substance when we zero in on specific blessings to give thanks for.

Has some special person “been there” for you in recent times? Have you thanked them?

Of all the things you own, has some single item brightened your days? Maybe a hearing aid, or a better jalopy? Or a new iPad, or a warm coat? Have you taken time to tell God how grateful you are for that blessing?

Our blessings bless us most when we do “name them one by one.” *CA*

In the Name of Jesus

Falling Statues

When leftist protestors leveled a long-standing statue on the campus of the University of North Carolina in August, 2018, a news reporter did some Google research and found that over 30 similar historic statues have been toppled in recent years.

I won’t try to catalog all the fallen monuments to heroes of the past, but anyone who keeps up with the news knows that most of those statues honored men who served their neighbors with courage and honor and dignity. They just made the mistake of getting on the wrong side—the wrong side of a war they waged but also the wrong side of modern social convictions.

I’m concerned that we moderns who are so sure that we’ve finally “got it right” will soon run out of heroes if we trash every past champion who unknowingly violated our most recent prejudices.

No doubt you’ve heard what a low-life scoundrel Thomas Jefferson was because he owned slaves and slept with one. None of his detractors seem to be aware that his behavior may have conformed to ancient biblical rules (check out Leviticus 19). What he did breaks our rules, so many moderns defame him.

Our Bible contains a book called Philemon. When Paul wrote that

letter to him, Paul seemed to have the highest respect for this early Christian leader. But Paul tells us Philemon was a slave owner. Does this mean that we need to rip his letter out of our Bibles and throw it into the dirt beside those recently overturned statues?

And, if all ancient slave owners are now unworthy of our respect, who else needs to vanish from our Bibles? If we retro-enforce this twenty-first century standard, how many Bible heroes will we have left?

Don’t misunderstand me. I’m not pro-slavery. I’m not saying that we ought to return to the days and practices when people owned people. My point here is that our growing tendency to measure the character of past heroes by present-day sensitivities takes us down a road most of us don’t really want to traverse.

Such a path will leave us with no forefathers, no political pioneers, no religious ancestors we can imitate or honor. Applying such foolish standards will rob us of the father of our faith (Abraham), the father of our nation (Washington) . . . and the list goes on, endlessly.

When we try to pay “honor to whom honor” is due, we ought to see them through the eyes of their contemporaries, who knew them best. *CA*

In the Name of Jesus

Skin Sin

My Grandmother Key was a Christian lady who adhered to the conservative modesty standards common to the American heartlands in the days before WWII.

We grandkids had to grow up some before we found out how carefully she protected our morals. Those were pre-online, pre-TV days when the biggest marketing ploy in the land was the famous catalogs distributed by Sears Roebuck. They were the Amazon of that era.

Only in later years did we learn that whenever our grandmother knew we brats were coming to roost in her little house, she spent several hours thumbing through the latest Sears catalogs. One by one she ripped out the pages that advertised panties, bras, girdles.

Compared to similar ads today, the pictures on those censored pages back in the 1940s looked like they had been published by Puritans. But Grandmother made sure that in her house we pre-pubescent grandsons never got exposed to even a scanty peek at female skin.

We miss that dear grandmother, but maybe it's a good thing she didn't live to see the images we now see every time we turn on a TV or glance at a cell phone or a computer screen.

Modesty vanished somewhere in the decades just past. Today it's not just the infamous Victoria's Secret ads. Everything from dog food to dish soap to diapers is marketed by flashing female skin.

As I wrote that last sentence, it struck me that folks who create those ads must think males buy all the dish soap and diapers (and medications and cars and insurance), since they display so much female anatomy to lure buyers. Either that, or—even more disgusting—they think their female customers are gender-confused.

What should we do as serious followers of Christ to protect our hearts and minds from such moral pollution?

Whatever gets done about it will be up to us. Gone are the days when public decency standards and TV industry watchdogs would put a lid on soft porn.

Anything done to shield our eyes and our souls we must do. The same kind of spiritual carefulness that makes us limit alcohol, say no to drugs, count calories, or stop smoking, you and I must apply to visual filth.

I've learned to click off any TV shows when the characters don't know if they're male or female, or when the scenes are awash in sex or nudity. I'm not a prude, but I am a temptable human. And my grandmother's not around now to tear out those pages. *CA*



John Gullely

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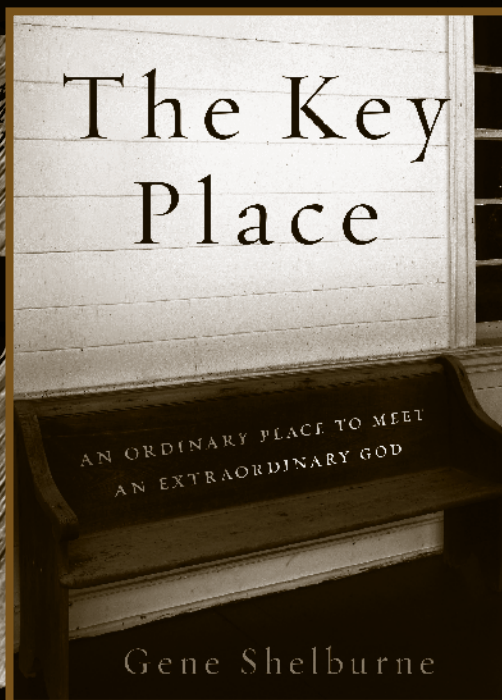
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