

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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"Better Than Precious Ointment!"

Jay Graham

What is the most precious thing you “own”? I put the word “own” in quotes because this is something you have total control over. It must be something you have earned. It must be something that is only yours. It must be your most precious possession. There are very few things in this world that we have total control of. We cannot totally control our health, our children, or even our spouses. This is the one most precious thing we own. It is your “name.” What is your “name” known for? What is your reputation?

The Scriptures speak of the importance of our names a number of times. Solomon wrote of it specifically at least twice in his wisdom-inspired writings:

Ecclesiastes 7:1, “A good name is better than precious ointment.”

Proverbs 22:1, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold.”

I like his emphasis on the word “chosen.” A “good name” is one we choose!

The Bible is filled with faithful saints who were known by their “names.” So much so that when we hear these “names,” certain thoughts and images come to our minds immediately. You can probably quickly associate their “names” with their actions and deeds. What do you think of when you hear of Abel? Or Job? Or Moses? Or Dorcas? Or Cornelius?

What do the Scriptures testify of Zacharias and Elizabeth in **Luke 1:5-7**? They were both “righteous before God.” They walked in all the commandments of the Lord! Or how about the household of Stephanus in **1 Corinthians 16:15-16**? They were known for devoting themselves to the service of the saints! This number probably included Stephanus, his wife, children, and possibly servants. What a great reputation for an entire household to have!

Timothy is another example of a young man who earned a good reputation in **Acts 16:1-3**. He had a good reputation

among the churches or at least among the congregations he lived near (and probably participated with), such as Derbe and Lystra. He probably earned his reputation by teaching among these brothers and sisters. He continued earning this reputation after joining Paul’s work. The apostle considered Timothy a “beloved and faithful son in the Lord,” according to **1 Corinthians 4:17**.

There are the godly and faithful Aquila and Priscilla whom Paul wrote of a number of times. He wrote of their “names” in **Romans 16:3-5** because they risked their necks for his life. At least twice, the church met in their homes. They were also known among the churches of the Gentiles.

Think of those faithful saints whom you have known and still know. Think of how they have impacted your life for the better. Think of how they have helped guide and nurture you into the Christian and servant you have become.

However, this principle also applies to those who were known for wickedness. Cain, Ahab and Jezebel, or Ananias and Sapphira (see **Acts 5:1-11**), to name a few. Like those righteous saints, these also earned their reputations due to their deeds and wickedness.

Your “name” will be known for something. However, you will probably not have a truly accurate understanding of your reputation. We often tend to look at ourselves as seeing no blemishes (though there is certainly a place for self-examination, as Paul wrote about in **1 Corinthians 11:28** and **2 Corinthians 13:5**). However, those who are acquainted with us probably can more accurately and fairly tell us what our “names” are known for.

I am convinced the Lord knows His faithful saints by name.

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Commandments of Men

Tad Morris

The Lord knew Moses by "name" in **Exodus 33:12-17**. He knows us even before we are born, as taught in **Psalms 139:13**. This kind of knowledge implies having an intimate relationship, as the apostle speaks of in **Philippians 3:10**. The Lord certainly knows His congregations by name as mentioned many times in the New Testament Scriptures.

This is in contrast to those mentioned in **Matthew 7:21-23**, where He said He did NOT know them! But of course, this does not imply he was not aware of them, but He did not acknowledge them, for they "practiced lawlessness," in spite of the fact that they were religious people who called Him Lord!

How does one gain a "good name?"

- Following the many examples we have in the Scriptures.
- Having a humble and serving spirit.
- Having a love for the body (His body, not ours).
- Being willing to work in our portion of His vineyard. By prioritizing the Lord's kingdom.

Think of those faithful saints whom you have known and still know. Think of how they have impacted your life for the better. Think of how they have helped guide and nurture you into the Christian and servant you have become. I can think of many saints who have had a positive impact on my life and spirit due to their "names." I can easily name you probably hundreds of individuals' "names." They will immediately bring good thoughts of them to your mind because of their labors and love for the Lord and His people. Through their "names," you have benefited tremendously. And if you live likewise, your "name" will benefit those you come into contact with over the years and decades.

When is a good time to start earning a "good name?" Immediately! The sooner, the better. Once you have earned a "bad name" it can be very difficult to change it. Once you have earned a "good name" it can be very easy to ruin it. It requires constant care and diligence.

The Scriptures teach us the Lord is going to give us a "new name!" **Revelation 2:17** and **3:12** teaches us the Lord will give His saints a "new name" if they remain faithful unto death.

What is your "name" known for?

One sure way to offend the Creator is to start creating laws for Him. Jesus said in **Matthew 15:8-9**, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

Traditions are necessary, and opinions are inevitable, but legislating and judging where God does not will incite the wrath of God. No man can legislate on behalf of God. There are a number of issues on which we might have a convicted, Bible-informed opinion, but it's still just that – an opinion, not a commandment of God. These personal convictions, no matter how well-informed, cannot be projected onto other people as divine doctrines. How many families and churches have been torn apart over man-made doctrines? How many conflicts could be avoided if things outside the scope of the Bible were left outside the scope of the Church?

Paul's instructions for handling these presumptuous commandments were less than gentle. He said in **Titus 1:13-14**, "Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth." If there's one truth in the church that must be accepted as absolutely and unequivocally true, it's that God alone is the lawgiver. The modern church must be diligent to avoid the errors of the Pharisees. Jesus told them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition" (**Mark 7:9**). Commandments of men do not complement the commandments of God. In every situation, they become a competition to the real divine law and an obstacle to real faithfulness.

Sometimes the hard part is identifying these man-made commandments. They have many forms, including both man-made prohibitions and man-made approvals. If God does not prohibit a thing (directly or by implication), I have no right to install a prohibition in the church on His behalf. If God does not approve of a thing, I have no right to approve of it on His behalf. It's also okay to take a personal position and keep it personal. This is the spirit of **Romans 14:22**: "Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves." It's also okay to not take a position at all! Life is easier when we realize we don't have to have an

opinion on everything.

The real trouble is if we take these silent issues in the Bible and make them public spectacles in the church. We cannot make personal convictions a point of contention between brethren or a condition of fellowship. **Romans 14:4-5:**

Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

Even if we accept that our personal convictions are not in fact divine commandments, we might still be skeptical of our brethren that see things another way. This skepticism leads to segregation, and segregation leads to bitterness, and all of this inevitably leads to the rupture of families and churches.

I'd like to give some examples here, but doing so could aggravate the problem I'm saying we should avoid. Personal practices and convictions should remain personal and never become issues of Christian fellowship. The church, in its corporate form, must remain free from man-made doctrines, free from man-made approvals, and free from man-made prohibitions.

One anthem of the Restoration Movement was "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent." I appreciate that more now than I used to. God doesn't need our help.

Even in our personal lives, personal convictions and self-imposed rules are not the substance of our service to God. This, too, is a trap that must be avoided. Submitting to man-made rules does not necessarily make us more faithful. Paul explains in **Colossians 2:20-23:**

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," which all concern things which perish with the using-- according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Genuine faithfulness is not augmented or helped by man-made commandments.

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A Mustard Seed

Wade Stanley

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you" (Luke 17:5-6).

The mustard seed was the smallest seed used by farmers and gardeners in Israel during the days of Jesus. A mature plant could reach ten feet in height. The mustard seed illustrates how small beginnings lead to big outcomes.

Jesus uses the example in the context of forgiveness. To forgive another person for an offense can be incredibly difficult. To forgive the same person for seven offenses in a day seems an impossible demand. Like the apostles, I find myself asking Jesus to increase my faith.

How do we measure faith? Do we describe faith in terms of units? No, we tend to measure faith by its impact. We intuit that slaying a giant or confronting Pharaoh required more faith than we can muster: "I could never have that much faith."

But how much faith was in Sarah's heart when she decided to trust in the faithfulness of God? Did Noah spend a century building a boat for a series of unprecedented events without a moment or two of doubt? Were Gideon's three hundred men absolutely certain they would live through a battle with an army that likely numbered in the tens of thousands? If we measure faith by its results, why then do mountains and mulberry trees move with only a small amount of faith?

When it comes to faith, the outcome is not proportional to belief. Faith does not move mountains or slay giants. Such impossible and improbable feats rely solely on the power of God. Great things are not achieved by great faith. God achieves great things through people with a small measure of faith. God makes a little bit of faith go a long way.

Jesus does not rebuke us for our lack of faith by comparing it to mustard seed. Rather, He teaches us the seemingly impossible takes less faith than we think. To forgive our brother seven times in a day is achievable, it is not beyond our reach or our capability. We only need to believe a little bit more.

Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard



Please check your expiration date!

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it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:23-27).

And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him." Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you (Matthew 17:14-20).

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Blessed Are the Dead

Mary Branch, 72, of Topeka, KS, passed away April 18. She was the daughter of Loren and Bernice Carlock of LaJunta, CO. Mary was baptized by Tom Dennis in 1962, moved to Topeka in 1972, and was a member of the California Acres Church of Christ.

A good name is better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one's birth; Better to go to the house of mourning Than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; And the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth (Ecclesiastes 7:1-4).

Special Meetings

2023 Meetings

- June 10-11.....Vandalia, IA
- July 3-7.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO
- July 22.....Family VBS, Old Lamine, rural Blackwater, MO
- July 23-28.....Summer Meeting, Smart Road, Greenwood, MO
- August 27.....White Oak, rural Ethel, MO
- September 2-3.....Labor Day Meeting, Pleasant Hill, IA
- October 6-8.....Fall Campout, Unionville, MO

The Gospel Message

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