

Philippians 3:12-14 Pressing On!

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one
another
on!"

(Heb.
10:24)

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was launched in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1905. In 1932 we moved to Buenos Aires, Argentina, and in 1998 to Málaga, Spain, from where the 'bullezine' is still sent out to some 75 countries, always spurring on the reader to keep on "pressing on!"

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The Comeback of PAGANISM

Jim vH

Before Great Britain and other countries were 'christianized', what were they? They were obviously totally pagan. Now though, it would seem that Christianity is on its way out, and paganism is settling back in - comfortably. More and more citizens proudly call themselves 'Pagan'. And there are plenty of symptoms of the trend: Stone Henge celebrations are more popular than ever. Spiritism, of course, has been 'in' for over a century, while open witchcraft and satanism are catching up. Animal sacrifices are increasing - even child sacrifice. These may be illegal, but unborn babies are sacrificed legally to the Moloch of the new paganism - in their millions.

Superstitions? 'Horoscopes', 'touching wood', 'rabbit's foot', etc., all are tell-tale signs of daily paganism. On the Internet, Tarot reading is advertized and shoved in your face almost wherever you look. And don't underestimate the numerous Hollywood movies that specifically romanticize paganism, while vilifying corrupt Christianity. Their influence in changing people's mindsets cannot be overestimated. According to City University, New York, the number of people identifying with Wicca (official name for witchcraft) in the USA went from 8,000 in 1990 to 134,000 in 2001.

Richard Wagner, Germany's highpriest of Nordic paganism, managed to bewitch generations with his "Nibelung saga". It made him Hitler's hero.

One hot item in toystores is the demonic 'Ouija Board'! Won't it make a great Christmas present for your child? The ideas and items of 'New Age', 'Mother Earth' and 'Reincarnation' are gaining in popularity, even in churches. And how about this, did you ever think you'd see the day that in the USA a proud Statue to Satan would be unveiled? Well, it was - just the other day - in Detroit. And then, of course, soon upon us again, will be 'Halloween', the pagan Druids' evil legacy.

Since the beginning of the 19th century, thousands upon thousands of Christian missionaries have seen paganism exposed and overcome in many lands, as the Good News of Christ was faithfully made known. Many of these daring emissaries were martyred - even eaten. But that was "over there"... "Over here", what have we got? What we have 'over here' is a lukewarm church, and it thinks the world of itself... In the face of a pagan agenda that is getting bolder and more aggressive all the time, what stand is the 'Laodicea-church' making? What stand, indeed, is being made to confront the GLBT agenda? Isn't that too part and parcel of the pagan agenda?

That said, we must not underestimate God's wisdom and power - "God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform!" Remember how, even 2,000 years ago, a band of rank pagan astrologers made the incredible and hazardous journey to Jerusalem, only to acknowledge the "King of the Jews" and pay homage to him. And King Herod's passion? While outwardly adhering to the official religion, his pagan heart craved Messiah's elimination.

While some pagans are ready to surrender to him, most will go for the Herod option - if not to kill the Messiah, then to kill his eternal purposes. But the 'official' pagan agenda, conceived and hatched in 'heavenly places' (Eph. 6:12), has lots of projects. One (hot) item is **Cremation**, see next page's special focus. By God's grace **you** can take a clear stand there!

To Burn or To Bury

Jim vH

Some thoughts from history and the Bible that should help to enlighten us.

The word 'cremation' points to the incineration of the dead. It was a practice almost unheard of in countries with a Christian background, i.e., until the 20th century, and not even legal in England until 1884. In Germany the first crematory was built in 1874. At the occasion of the first American cremation, in 1876, there were readings from Charles Darwin and the Hindu scriptures. But a century later, still only about 8% of dead Americans, were being cremated.

On the other hand, especially in Asia, cremation has been practiced by non-Christians for thousands of years - a majority being Hindus and Buddhists. Their cremation practices undergird their beliefs in reincarnation. According to these beliefs, they are not 'coming back' in the old body, not even in a totally transformed 'old body'. Reincarnation means being born in a totally new body, from (another) human mother, or from an animal mother. So to them, resurrection is a no-no, especially when it leads to being arraigned by a Creator-Judge. Hindus have their ashes sprinkled on the waters of the Ganges in what amounts to an act of defiance.

Japan, which has never been remotely Christian, has the highest rate of cremation in the world, more than 99%.

The God of Abraham, however - the God of life and death - has always wanted his people to be distinct from their pagan neighbors in so many of their typical traditions and practices which, more often than not, spring from idolatry.

With all the idolatry going on, not far from the Tower of Babel, Abram was told to leave (Gn. 11). And, indeed, when Sarah died, we find there was no cremation; the practice hadn't yet penetrated Canaan, at least not among the 'sons of Heth' where Abraham dwelt. In any case, Sarah's body was laid to rest in the cave of Machpelah which Abraham purchased for the purpose (Gn. 23).

There was only one thing worse than death for anyone belonging to Abraham's children (through Isaac and Jacob), and that was being denied a proper burial in a grave. We have a notable example in the fate of wicked Jeroboam and family.

Of that whole family only a child was found worthy to "come to the grave" (1K. 14:1-13). The last kings of Judah and their subjects, in the time of Jeremiah, give us another explicit example (Jer. 7:30-8:2).

Burying the dead has always been one way to show that God's people *are* distinct from other peoples. By burial, the Israelites in the OT, and the Christians in the NT, give testimony of their belief in a new dawn - the dawn of that grandiose conclusion of Redemption: redeemed bodies rising and living again.

Cremation was not an issue for the early Church, which historically taught that burial was the 'Christian' thing, and the loving thing, to do for those who had 'slept in Jesus'. In fact, the Scriptures commend Christian burial by equating it with the planting of a seed (1 Cor. 15:35-44). Planting a seed is not the sad 'closing of a door', it is the joyful opening of the 'door of hope'. It looks forward to a glorious harvest ahead.

John 19:40 is truly instructive: **'Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury'**. John wrote this at the very end of the first Christian century. He refers to the Jews - God's Covenant people - and their way of disposing of their dead.

However, the two men acting here, Joseph and Nicodemus, apart from being Jews, were also disciples of Jesus. What is not usually realized is that in order to bury Jesus' body, it must first be saved from incineration. Crucifixion was a Roman execution, and Tertullian (AD 160-230) testifies that the Romans disposed of their victims' corpses by incineration. In Jerusalem, in any case, the victims, once dead, were dumped in the nearby Kidron Valley. There was always a smouldering fire there, ready to get rid of unclean things. This was already the case in the times of Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah, kings of Judah.

So Joseph went to see Pilate and obtained permission from him to keep the body out of the soldiers' hands. In other words, these two men, be it unwittingly, show the way forward for all future disciples of the Crucified One:

Cremation No! Burial Yes!

As we read the accounts of the early martyrs of the Church, we meet not only Jews who treated the bodies of their dead in the traditional way, but converted Gentiles also. They all had the same respect for the lifeless body of a martyr: they laid it to rest in a grave. The pagan practice of cremation was shunned by the Christian citizens of the Roman Empire. And no wonder, they knew the apostolic teaching. What we have in our New Testaments, they had received directly from men like Peter and Paul.

To be precise, the Scriptures tell us about the fact that a Christian's body, once dead, has merely 'fallen asleep'. When that body is laid to rest, it is in full anticipation of the momentous - soon to sound - 'wake-up call'. Here are ten scriptures that tell us about this particular kind of 'sleep': Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess. 4:13-15; 5:10; 2 Peter 3:4.

Furthermore 1 Cor. 15:52 and 1 Thess. 4:16 give us details about the 'awakening from sleep' in what will be the "first resurrection". It's the Lord's trumpet that will wake ALL those that 'sleep in Jesus'.

How important is Jesus' testimony in John 11:11! **"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up"**. See also Mark 5:39.

Looking closely into John 5:25-29, we realize that Jesus is to give his mighty 'wake-up call' twice, first in one resurrection, and later in a second resurrection.

Now how about corpses reduced to ashes? Does Scripture confirm they too are raised? Absolutely. Just think of the mass incineration of Sodom & Gomorrah. Nothing remained, yet the Judge, in Matthew 10:15 & 11:24, states they will be raised and will stand trial (see Rev. 20:11-15). Cremation saves no one from judgment, neither does burial. Only Christ saves! He already took your and my judgment upon himself!

The true Christian, realizing all that, gives testimony about the living Christ who saved him - all his days. Then, thinking about death, is he now going to arrange with his loved ones and with his church that his very last 'statement', after death, must be the typically *pagan* statement of Cremation? Or will he leave clear instructions for his body to be laid in a grave, there to await his Lord's call to Life and Resurrection?



And the Door Was ³ SHUT in Their Faces

Jim vH.

It happened when Noah and family, plus all the animals, were safely on board the ark. God knew that no one else was wanting to go aboard, and so He shut the door! Many people may have had second thoughts after that. But the door remained shut; all of them perished!

The corruption, spread by the line of Cain, had by now so thoroughly infested the descendants of Seth as well, that any difference of 'standard' between them had vanished.

Methuselah, Noah's granddad, had died that very year, only just before the Flood broke, and Lamech, Noah's dad, had died five years earlier. There is no doubt that they were true believers, just like Mathuselah's father, Enoch. In other words, none of them were in need of the ark; they were already safe. But when it came to Noah's other relatives - still alive - brothers, sisters, uncles, cousins, inlaws, why weren't *they* on board? They probably had 'religion', but... there could not have been any 'relationship' like Noah's. Noah "walked with God"! They didn't - that means that God didn't 'know' them; the door remained shut!

The theme of the door being shut to all who come knocking - very religious folks, but not 'known' to him - is pursued by the Lord on three different occasions (in Mt. 7, Lk. 13 & Mt. 25). Furthermore, in Matthew 24 and Luke 17, He makes much of the historical Flood and Noah, and shows that conditions would be very similar in the times of the end, when He is on the point of returning to earth.

We shall just have a look at the goings on, pictured in Matthew 7 and Luke 13, while for our next issue, should He not have come back yet, we shall examine the story of the 'Ten Virgins' (Mt. 25).

Certain Christians expect the Lord to ask them the old question: "What on earth have you done for heaven's sake?" And if that is what He is going to ask, they'll have their answer ready. Aren't they the "Lord-Lord" people? The ones that pride themselves in being on confident terms with HIM?

This is what our Lord has to say about them: "**Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!'"** (Mt. 7:21-23).

He knows them by their 'fruit', or lack of it (20). Mere words don't convince him. He knows their lives, He knows their attitudes, He knows their motives. He knows everything about them. Yet, He tells them that He **doesn't** know them! He doesn't know them **as subjects of the Kingdom**. When access is denied, it is because they are **not** subject to the King! All their prophesying in Jesus' name, exorcising in Jesus' name, performing miracles in Jesus' name, all that does not impress him in the least!

You can prophesy, you can profess to belong to the 'kingdom of heaven', and yet go to hell. What He looks for is 'subjects' to the King, who will **'do the will of the Father who is in heaven'**.

As you may have noticed, these verses come right at the end of the three chapters of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7), in which the King has just charged his subjects with all the spiritual laws of his Kingdom - 'other-worldly' laws. In our world they may sound ridiculous. But He is deadly serious, and, showing that seriousness, He gives them the parable of the two builders:

There's this wide open, dry river bed, or 'wadi', and it seems to beckon enterprising men who want to build. Two of them respond, but only one takes the precaution to ensure there's a solid foundation for his house. Soon enough, both men have the satisfaction to see things developing. Once they've finished building, for all we know, they move in with their families. The weather stays dry; so far, so good, but then, one day, looking north, they see these black thunderclouds gathering above the mountains, and they know that soon a veritable tsunami may come rushing down the river bed. And sure enough, not many hours later, there it is. With torrential rain lashing and furious winds battering, both houses get engulfed by the rushing waters.

Probably, Mr. Wise, trying to make himself heard above the din, expressed his doubts to his wife about the other house: "He's in bad trouble, you know. Didn't bother about a foundation for his house! Seems to be OK for now, but it can't last."

Indeed, it *seemed* the other house was strong enough to withstand the storm, but, all the while, unseen, treacherous currents were undermining its corners... Then, slowly, the house began to list... When the crash came, it was spectacular, even though it took less than a minute... With that, all was gone!

Now, who is the 'wise man' who built on the rock? "**Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, AND DOES THEM.**" And who is the 'foolish man' who built on the sand? "**Everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, AND DOES NOT DO THEM.**" But to what 'sayings' is Jesus pointing? Simply to all the sayings He uttered in the course of these three chapters. You might 'hear' (or read) them thousands of times, but if you just shrug them off, you demonstrate that you are **not** Kingdom material. There is **no** experience, and **no** evidence, of true surrender to the Word of God. Without *that* foundation, your 'religion' won't stand a chance in the storm!

The person who takes the Kingship of Jesus seriously and submits to all the will of God for his life - that is, to obey and serve him - *that* is the person building on the solid rock. He won't be shaken. It is extremely important to understand that merely 'taking a decision to receive Christ', as you are moved by emotion, must not be mistaken for submission to the King! HE demands true repentance of sin. A true citizen of the King lives for his King! All the 'sayings' of these three chapters, so completely 'other-worldly', will become more and more precious to that new believer. Build on that foundation and you need fear no storm!

In Luke 13, the Lord emphasizes the '**narrow gate**', which functioned exactly like our scanning 'gates' at airports. Whatever illegal thing you're trying to smuggle on board, is detected there and you're stopped in your tracks. No flying for you!

The Lord-Lord people will clamor and plead, Jesus says, but He knows only too well what they're up to and He tells them, "I do not know you, where you are from!" Ah, they say, 'But we know *you*; we ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' "Then He will say, 'I tell you I don't know you... **Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!**'"

The King knows your works of iniquity, your lack of true repentance, your hypocrisy. He cannot own you, and cannot know you as one of his...! Yes, He says, "you'll see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, **but yourselves thrust out!**"

Could that be your 'case'? Then don't delay. Repent now!



Do this for me

Howel Jones



4

Lessons from the Letter to Philemon

Of the seven letters Paul wrote during his enforced captivity in Rome, six are semi 'official' letters sent either to churches or to recognized Christian leaders with a view to their teaching being applied to, and implemented in, congregations of believers. His letter to Philemon shares the same purpose but is different in that it is addressed to an individual, or rather to a family (Apphia and Archippus being his wife and son) and to the congregation that gathered in their home. Philemon may, or may not, have been an 'elder' in that congregation. The anticipated effect is the same as that of Paul's other letters: changed behavior reflecting the ethos of Christian testimony.

The situation is quite simple. Across the empire there were many believers in different locations, most of them having benefitted in some way from Paul's ministrations, either as evangelist or in a pastoral sense. Philemon was obviously one of these. In their respective situations these Christians lived their lives, hopefully in a godly way, and carried on their business, whatever its nature. Some, like Philemon, had slaves whom they were constantly exhorted to treat fairly.

One of Philemon's slaves was called Onesimus, which means 'profitable', but, apparently, he turned out to be unfaithful and 'unprofitable', and seems to have run away, abandoning his master, leaving him anything but pleased or well disposed.

In the providence of God, Onesimus ends up in Rome, the empire's capital, and becomes a Christian. How, where and when is not clear, but it is beyond doubt that he is now a transformed man and one with whom Paul, in his captivity, has fellowship, and whom he finds to be a great help in the gospel witness. He describes the converted Onesimus as now being 'profitable' to him in Rome - in stark contrast to his previous, unregenerate 'non-profitability' to Philemon.

So the request is for Philemon to take him back, not just as a slave but as a brother in Christ - with all the potential implications that would have. It is a major challenge.

The way it is done is interesting. By virtue of his seniority, indeed his 'position' as apostle to the Gentiles, Paul could command Philemon to take Onesimus back. He has not hesitated to instruct others to do this and that. But, in this case, he decides to appeal to Philemon, to request a voluntary action which he could well refuse to carry out; but, if he acceded, it would be a wonderful expression of the grace of God being manifested in human behavior and would reflect something of received mercy. Paul is personally willing to vouch for Onesimus and even to compensate Philemon for any loss that may have been incurred. His expressed appreciation of Philemon's established actions, as outlined in the early verses, makes him confident that Philemon will accede to this request and demonstrate the power of "love and a sound mind".

What does this little episode teach us? There can be several answers to that. One is to emphasize again the power of salvation in transforming what seems to be beyond redemption - in this case a runaway slave into a faithful servant. Another is the value of grace and forgiveness in restoration. And the demonstration of grace in different attitudes and actions even in ordinary, non-church, situations. But the distinctive nature of this incident is the prompting by one man of another to ensure a constructive and positive response. It is reminiscent of Paul's advice elsewhere to "provoke one another". And that, not by authoritative coercion, but by an appeal, so that the resulting behavior might be a voluntary expression of the grace of God, shown in transformed behavior in day to day situations. This is an important aspect of Christian fellowship.

In the Gospels, Jesus frequently exhorts the disciples to love one another. He even tells them to do that "as I have loved you". Yet in so many situations that love of His is demonstrated by this kind of 'provocation', urging them to take action that would not come naturally or arise spontaneously from them. For example, he asks them to launch the boat to the other side of the lake; to cast their nets on the right side; or, in the case of the 5,000, "you give them something to eat", when they had so little for such an enormous task. In responding they learn to trust Him and reflect something of that new life He was giving them. Similarly, we should also practise, and willingly respond to, '**provoking one another to love and good works**' (Hb. 10:24).

You Wrote

From Argentina: Dear brother in Christ, I am very happy with the booklet you sent (about the JW Bible). It truly was an answer to prayer! The other day I had an opportunity to speak about God with a teacher colleague! It was good. I happened to have my Bible with me and I shared a few verses. She then told me she doesn't believe in the Trinity, nor in the existence of hell, which made me realize she is a JW. I let her say all she wanted to, as long as it was about the Bible. She also listened to me! We talked for two hours. I constantly prayed that God might give me the right words. At times she would raise her voice - that was when the only answer she had was "The Watchtower". I remained calm and looked for the right Bible verses.... Would you pray for her, please? Her name is C.... Thank you! Thank you for being a blessing! Should you have more material, please share! I'll be happy to receive and read it! Wishing you God's blessing, RC.

From Nigeria: Hello Sir, Very much happy that at last I heard from you. We've been fine by His grace. the Pressing On! packet arrived 4 weeks ago and was distributed among the congregation. They were very happy to get a copy each. I thank God for it, it is very useful and I enjoy mostly the topic: "Loving means Listening". No doubt, I believe it'll be cherished by all that got it. Hope we'll keep corresponding. Thanks and God bless, WE.

From the Philippines: Dear Sir, Thank you so much for not forgetting to send warm thoughts and encouragements. I almost think that maybe you know me personally cause these materials you are sending are straightly for me 😊. I'm so thankful that God uses people I don't know to touch my spirit. I'm reading all your emails and I can say you are truly devoted to doing God's work despite hindrances. How I admire your devotion sir. Thank you for being so thoughtful and I know, as you are sending such emails, you send them with prayers. May our Great God richly bless you and crown you for these labors you do for Him. Yours truly, EW.

RADICAL TRANSFORMATION?

Ron Sider is author of

“**The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience**”.

Here are some excerpts from his interview with ‘ChristianityToday’:

What troubles you the most about Evangelicals today?

The heart of the matter is the scandalous failure to live what we preach. The tragedy is that poll after poll by Gallup and Barna show that Evangelicals live just like the world. Contrast that with what the New Testament says about what happens when people come to living faith in Christ. There’s supposed to be radical transformation in the power of the Holy Spirit. The disconnect between our biblical beliefs and our practice is just, I think, heart-rending.

Evangelical Christians and born-again Christians get divorced just as often, if not a little more, than the general population. And Barna has discovered that 90% of the born-again Christians who are divorced got divorced after they accepted Christ.

John Green, one of the best Evangelical pollsters, says that about a third of all Evangelicals say that premarital sex is okay. And about 15% that adultery is okay.

Cheap grace is right at the core of the problem. Cheap grace results when we reduce the Gospel to forgiveness of sins only; when we limit salvation to personal ‘fire insurance’ against hell; when we misunderstand persons as primarily souls; when we at best grasp only half of what the Bible says about sin; when we embrace the individualism and materialism and relativism of our current culture. We also lack a biblical understanding and practice of the church.

One of my favorite examples is the story of Zacchaeus. He is involved in social sin as a wicked tax collector. When he comes to Jesus, he gives away half his goods and pays back everything that he’s taken wrongly. Jesus says at the end of the story, “Today salvation has come to this house.” There’s not a word in the text about forgiveness of sins. Now, I’m sure Jesus forgave the rascal’s sins; he clearly needed it. But what the text talks about is the new transformed economic relationships that happen when Zacchaeus comes to Jesus. Salvation is a lot more than just a new right relationship with God through forgiveness of sins. It’s a new, transformed life-style that you can see - visible in the body of believers.

Obviously to be a disciple means there’s discipline. Do you see the neglect of church discipline in our day as a factor in this moral crisis?

It’s part of the larger question of recovering the New Testament understanding of the church. This culture is radically individualistic and relativistic. Whatever feels right for me is right for me; whatever feels right to you is right for you. That’s the dominant value. It’s considered outrageous for somebody to say somebody else is wrong.

But historic biblical faith understood the church as a new community. The basic New Testament images of the church are of the body of Christ, the people of God, and the family of God. All these stress the fact that we’re talking about a new community - a new, visible social order. That new community in the New Testament was living so differently from the world that people would say, “Wow, what’s going on here?” Jews were accepting Gentiles. The rich were accepting the poor and sharing with the poor. Men were accepting women as equals. It just astonished people because the church was so different from the world. It was countercultural.

Furthermore, [the New Testament church] understood that being a member of the body of Christ meant that you were accountable to each other. If one suffered, you all suffered. If one rejoiced, you all rejoiced. There was dramatic economic sharing in the New Testament, and there was church discipline. Jesus talked explicitly about church discipline in Matthew 18. Paul clearly had his churches live that out. All of the great traditions at the core of American evangelicalism, whether the Reformed tradition, the Wesleyan Methodist tradition, or the Anabaptist tradition, understood church discipline when they were strong and thriving. But very few Evangelical churches these days have any serious appropriation and practice of church discipline.

Isn’t that at least in part because church discipline has been abused or become legalistic and mean-spirited?

Sure, that’s a part of it. But we don’t give up on marriage just because a lot of people have messed it up so badly. And we shouldn’t give up on church discipline just because we’ve so often done it in a legalistic way. We have to recover the NT understanding. John Wesley put it wonderfully when he said church discipline is ‘watching over one another in love’.

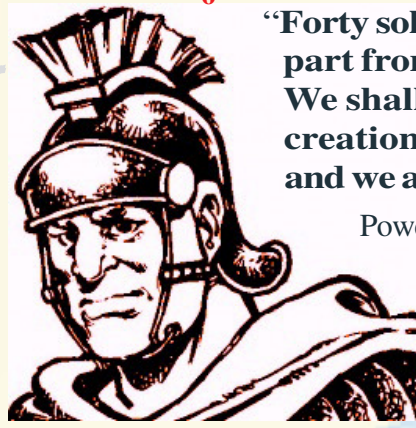
European Christianity and the Slippery Slope

In **Sweden** 85% of the population “belong” to the Church of Sweden (Lutheran), but less than 50% believe in some kind of afterlife. In Sweden (as well as in the USA and other ‘enlightened’ countries) a Christian now runs the risk of incarceration if heard preaching on Gn. 19, Lv. 18:22-30; Ro. 1:24-27, 1 Co. 6:9-11 or 1 Ti. 1:9-11. In **Germany** about 20% of people who call themselves Protestant and 10% of Catholics are atheists (Readers Digest). In **France** only one in 20 people bothers to go to church anymore; in the US, that ratio is one in three. A pastor in

northern France says, “What is interesting isn’t that there are fewer people in church, but that there are any at all.” In **England** there are 25 million people who identify the Church of England (Anglican - Episcopal) as their church, but only slightly more than 1,000,000 go to church every week. There are now almost as many practising Muslims as practising Christians. 52% of the population believe in heaven, 40% in guardian angels, 38% in ghosts and 23% believe in reincarnation. Half the population couldn’t name any of the 4 gospels. In **Italy** (the country of Rome and the Vatican), although 85% of the population call themselves Roman Catholic, fewer than 15% bother to attend church (Sources: Crosswalk, Time & Newsweek).

Paganism Beaten

Edited by
Don Baker



6

“Forty soldiers for Christ! We shall not depart from You as long as You give us life. We shall call upon Your name whom all creation praises. In You we have hoped, and we are not ashamed!”

In the year AD 320, in a vain effort to impede the growth of the Christian church, the Roman Emperor Valerius Licinius (of the Eastern part of the empire) decreed that all civil servants and members of the military must offer sacrifice before the local gods. One cold, winter morning, the order was read to the Twelfth Legion, stationed at Sabaste in Armenia, and the soldiers were called upon to demonstrate their loyalty to the emperor through the prescribed offering. But there were forty Christians in the ranks of the legion, who informed their captain that they could not sacrifice on a pagan altar. The commander was dismayed. Dare these men defy the emperor? Yet, knowing they had proven their bravery many times on the field of battle and not wanting to inflict punishment upon them, he ordered the Christian soldiers placed in confinement overnight, to reconsider their decision. The next morning they were brought forth and again commanded to worship the pagan gods. Again they refused. “We have made our choice,” they said, “We shall devote our love to our God”.

At this, the captain grew angry and ordered the men bound over in custody of the jailer, to await arrival of the general who would pass sentence. During this period of imprisonment, often the soldiers could be heard singing psalms of praise to their God!

When the general arrived, the men were informed that if they did not obey the imperial decree, they would be delivered over for torture. Unshaken, the Christians replied: “You can have our armor, and our bodies as well. We prefer Christ!”

Early the following morning, sentence was pronounced. The men were to be led to the shore of a nearby frozen lake, and there, at sundown, they were to be stripped and escorted out to the middle of the lake, to await death by freezing. Because of their high reputation for valor, however, the general had ordered that they be given the privilege of recanting at any time. To encourage this, a heated bathhouse on the shore was readied for any of the soldiers who were willing to renounce their faith and return to the comfort of the world.

A bitter wind whipped over the lake’s surface as the men were driven out, shivering in the dusk. Guards were posted on the shore, among them the jailer in whose custody they had been kept during their days of imprisonment.

Then one of the forty soldiers lifted his voice, out on the lake, and began to sing. He was soon joined by the others:

Powerfully they sang, while their bare feet were getting frozen on the ice. The night air resounded with one song of praise after another. But as the hours passed, their songs grew more feeble, until finally they could not be heard by the men on the shore.

Then a strange thing happened. One of the forty was seen emerging from the darkness, slowly staggering toward the shore. The guards posted there were dozing, except the jailer, who through the night stood motionless, peering out upon the lake, his ears straining to hear the mumbled prayers of the dying Christians.

“Thirtynine soldiers for Christ”, came a thin faltering voice from the distance. The jailer watched the man drop to his knees and crawl into the bathhouse.

At that moment, something happened in the heart of the jailer. Only he and God will ever know what it was. But the guards reported hearing a shout; it woke them from their sleep. Opening their eyes, they saw the jailer wrench off his armor and run on to the ice. Lifting up his right hand, he cried, **“There are forty soldiers for Christ!”** Then, marching out into the darkness, he began to sing:

“We shall not depart from You, as long as You give us life. We shall call upon Your name whom all creation praises. In You we have hoped, and we are not ashamed!”

In the morning the forty men, now including the jailer, were found in the middle of the lake, huddled together in a frozen heap. As the captain watched their bodies being carted away, suddenly he turned to one of the guards and demanded, pointing to the jailer, “What is he doing there?” “We cannot understand it, captain,” replied the guard. “It was far into the night, when all of a sudden he jumped to his feet, shouted something, stripped off his armor, and ran out on the lake.”

“Was he bewitched?” the captain asked.

“Probably, sir. Ever since those Christians came under his care, we have noticed something different about him. At times he would be singing under his breath. It was a bad omen, we decided. Too much music is bad for soldiers. Makes them strange. Don’t you think so, captain?”

Yes, too much singing praises to Jesus Christ does seem odd, in a world that has no lasting joy. Such happy troubadours of song are earth’s misfits, but they are no strangers in heaven. And one cannot be around them long, before sensing a tug, something of that pull of another world, where joy unceasingly erupts from love, and where praise to the ‘Lamb of God’ never ends!



Dear reader,

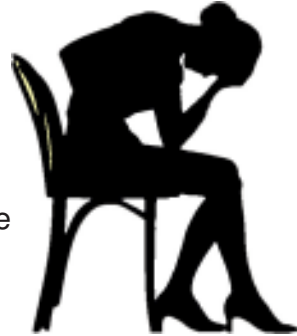
We think and we hope that you will enjoy this latest issue of **PRESSING ON!**

Like every other true Christian, you're in the "race", in the spiritual one. And you know that after a while it's easy to start dragging your feet, lose sight of the "finishing line", get side-tracked, faint, even turn back. **Pressing On!** is here to inform you, to encourage you and to challenge you about **counting on God's grace for all of the race...**

As Philippians 3 informs us, there's the **goal** and there's the **prize** that are set before us, but then Hebrews 10 tells us that the "**considering**", the "**stirring up**", the "**exhorting**" are the things **all** of us are involved in: "*Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching*". It will be obvious to you that the 'considering, stirring up and exhorting' have everything to do with the "assembling". Jesus says that two or three in his name are sufficient for him to be very much present in the midst of them with all that He has to offer. It is absolutely basic for fruitful encouragement and challenge, that you and I plus other 'runners in the race' do so very humbly around HIM, looking to HIM and his open word. You too can be wonderfully used for your fellow "athletes". **Pressing On!** prepares and encourages the encouragers, and can prove to be a very worthwhile tool in your hands...

Picture yourself traveling round the planet, say from Canada, to Croatia, to Cameroon, to the Comoros, to Cambodia, to the Cook Islands, to Colombia or to Cuba. In every one of these countries you'll find true Christians. You may find some big groups, meeting in churches, and you'll find there are small groups, meeting in homes or wherever, even in prisons, but as you get to know them, you'll also find that among them a high percentage are feeling the effects of Satan's 3-D strategy - **Discouragement**, **Depression**, or outright **Defeat** - Christian "athletes" falling, or fallen, by the wayside. The crown laid up for them (2 Tim. 4:8) is receding and could be taken from them (Rev. 3:11).

*Discouraged
Depressed
Defeated*



Not in every country can such folks read English. In many of the 75 countries to which we send **Pressing On!**, English is not even the second language. However, there usually are individual Christians who know sufficient English to grasp the message. And some of these are receiving up to 30 or 40 copies for regular distribution.

We are fully persuaded that you too can become a most valuable encourager of the brethren! And we want you to plainly realize that **PRESSING ON!** is entirely at your disposal to help you, in other words, free of charge!

Please, consider the form below, pray over it, then fill out what applies and send it to us:

-
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 - Separately I am sending you names, addresses and e-addresses of Christian friends who have confirmed they would like to be on your mailing list, either for email or snailmail.
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 2. Once printed and filled out, scan and email the form to:
pressingonstill@gmail.com

“And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” - Mt. 10:42.