

continually seeking after the next bigger and better experience or yearning for the *feeling* that they are right with God? Maybe! But for that to happen, simple New Testament Christians can not imitate the world by joining in with the latest craze. God's Word has not changed. New Testament Christians should simply teach and practice the Truth as it is found in the Bible. Those people who are frenzied, rushed, over committed and lack the peace promised by God in His Word may find a refreshing attraction to a simple, personal calling of a Savior through His Word.

"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Heb. 4:12 NIV)

The Word is as powerful as it ever was. Redemption's Sweet Song *can* still be heard by those who are willing to take the time and make the effort.

Before we close, let's examine our *own* conscience to determine whether or not *we've* heard Redemption's Sweet Song from God's Word or are we listening to something that gives us a *feeling* that feeds our *own* lustful desires. Will we be approved when we present ourselves to God? Consider these following scenarios.

- You regularly attend a mega church with sound systems, audio-visual equipment, band, Starbuck's kiosk in the lobby, theater style seating, etc. Everything was destroyed in a fire and none of those amenities are going to be replaced — only an out building with metal folding chairs remains. Would you attend there next week and for all the weeks to come?
- You have 4 children and are a part of a congregation that has an active youth program. Because of budget constraints the program and its leader is being cut. Will you continue to meet there, or start "shopping" for another place to attend?
- You believe the Bible is true and that your salvation is in Christ. You've been immersed in baptism for remission of sins and have acknowledged Him as your Savior. You've attended the same congregation from the beginning and are convinced they teach the Truth. But recently, because of declining attendance it's just not as "fulfilling" as it used to be — the singing is not as uplifting as it used to be and some of your friends have moved on. You wonder if *you* should consider attending the church where your friends now are. It's a larger group, it's growing, and the singing there is better. You *know* however that you'll have to make some compromises in your beliefs to attend there. What will you do?

We don't know how *you* might answer these questions, but we do know that as long as New Testament Christians are on this earth we should remind ourselves each and every day of the blessing of being in Christ and of meeting with the saints on Sunday in a *simple worship gathering*. To yearn for something different is to *diminish the value* of the gift of Redemption's Sweet Song.

*"Diligence" is a privately funded publication of:
Dennis and Sherri Owens — Cincinnati, Ohio
diligence@gorfsystems.com — <http://www.gorfsystems.com/diligence/>*



DILIGENCE

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11

A ministry of Dennis and Sherri Owens

Volume 6

March 1, 2007

Issue 3

Redemption's Sweet Song

Traveling through this life presents all of us with many challenges. As Christians however, we have a blessing that others do not have — but that blessing can easily get masked by difficult events of each day. Nevertheless, no matter how trying our day might be, as Christians we have *complete* confidence that our *final* destination is with God and Christ. It is impossible however, for Christians to adequately share the *comfort* provided by that blessing with those who do not know Christ — yet it is *that truth* that we *must* share with others if we want them to understand their own need for salvation.

Sharing the confidence *we* have in our salvation can sound arrogant or perhaps even *over* confident if we describe such a blessing to others by referencing our own unwavering assurance. On the other hand, when we share just the simple message of the Gospel, each person who comes to the knowledge of the truth and acts on it will experience his or her *own* level of confidence and security in Christ as he or she grows.

In recent years it seems that our fear of appearing self-righteous has caused Christians to play down the complete confidence that is ours in Christ. The confidence that the *Word* gives us, is being replaced with a pseudo-confidence that hinges on a variety of *feelings*. It is becoming more and more common today to hear people speak of a "spiritual *feeling*" — or a "near to God *feeling*." Many religious people say they *feel* close to God when they're out in the wild, or in a specific place that's special to them or at some specific time they have set aside *for* that purpose. They claim to *feel* "the presence of God" when they manufacture a setting that in some way alters *their* state of mind. Please don't misunderstand what we're saying here — it is not our intention to say that we shouldn't have a feeling of comfort in *knowing* of God's presence, but the obvious question must be asked — if our assurance is *based* on moments of time when we *feel* God's presence — where is He the rest of the time? Is God *only* present when we *feel* His presence? Certainly not! It is in fact, His presence that gets us *through* many days when the *feeling* is not so warm or perhaps not so spiritual.

Why are we going down this road? Well, anyone who has read even a few of our articles knows that we believe strongly that knowledge of God's Word is extremely important to the Body of Christ. It is unfortunate that the busy lifestyles of today push many people away from taking the time and making the effort to study God's Word. Yet the need and the desire to be *right* with God still exists in the hearts of many — there just isn't enough *time* to *seriously* discover *how* to accomplish that.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does

not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15) According to this verse, presenting ourselves to God “...as one approved...” includes *correctly handling* the Word. But to do that, we have to have *knowledge* of the Word and that takes time and effort — something too few people have today or are willing to make. The *desire* to be right with God and to be at peace with Him however doesn’t *disappear* just because so many lack the time to read and study the Word. So what is the world today offering as a solution to this dilemma?

The world today is equipped to help us meet just about any want or need that we might have. Anything that can’t be met in reality, can usually be met with a substitute. There’s faux fur, fantasy football, cubic zirconiums, ethanol fuel, veggie burgers and on it goes. There is however, *no substitute* for the way of salvation that *assures* us of a final destination with God. Man nevertheless continually tries to invent a substitute for that also! Mankind’s need and desire to be right with God, coupled with his lack of time to make the effort to correctly handle the *Word* makes him *very vulnerable* to *accepting* those often convincing substitutes.

In previous articles we have discussed the numerous ways in which large groups of people are drawn to various types of worship. Many of those types of worship include almost every practice enticing to man *except* those specifically spoken of in the New Testament. In many of those types of worship, the atmosphere is emotionally charged and as positive as can possibly be created by man. Those who are drawn to these types of worship often describe the mood as uplifting, spirit filled and motivational in every respect. Smiles, entertainment and applause abound and all seems to be so satisfying. A feeling of comfort and hope prevail. So is there something wrong with this? Let’s go back to the opening of this article.

Is God only present when I *feel* uplifted and positive? Does the Spirit dwell within me only when I *feel* “spirit filled”? Certainly not! Redemption’s Sweet Song is not only a *feeling* — it is the recognition of the *reality* of salvation *through the knowledge and acceptance of the Gospel*. Confidence in Redemption’s Sweet Song is not *manufactured* by atmosphere, music, stage lighting or motivational speeches, etc.. The Sweet Song of Redemption is heard when sinners recognize the depraved condition of their lives, learn of a Savior and accept God’s way to wash away their sins. It is an *ever present confidence* that *assures* us of a final destination with God.

Each Sunday simple New Testament Christians gather to worship God collectively as a body of believers — to give thanks to God for their Savior and to remember Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. They gain strength in the knowledge that their salvation is *secure* in Christ. By contrast, the emotion driven types of worship “performed” around the world draw multitudes into their assembly in much the same manner one might promote a musical concert. The stage is set with all the amenities of a concert — emotions and spirits are high as music and excitement fills the air. Those in attendance generally believe that the feelings they experience during these performances are the feelings that a person has when he or she is in a right relationship with God. The *manufactured feeling* however, is based on

everything but a knowledge of God’s Word and the *assurance* it promises through obedience to it. These worship performances do little more than fulfill the lustful desires of human nature. It is like what is spoken of in II Peter 2.

“These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.” (II Peter 2:17-19 NIV)

Unlike believers who have their assurance based on the Word, those who are slaves to the *manufactured feeling* continue to search for the next high, not completely unlike a drug addict — while simple New Testament Christians have an *abiding* comfort in God through Christ regardless of the crowd *or* the emotions of the moment.

The individual Christian who *daily* feasts on God’s Word consumes the essential ingredients to stay secure when *feelings* are *not* so warm and confidence is challenged by daily difficulties. The knowledge of God’s concern for each of us individually and specifically is beyond our imagination and comes about by an understanding of His Word. No *feelings* can replace the confidence that exists because of knowing what our Lord and Savior has done for us and knowing what He expects of us in return for His sacrifice.

The fast paced media driven world abounds with extravagant worship performances that feed on man’s lustful desire for an “experience.” One has to ask whether or not those who are drawn to these events are converted to Christ and Redemption’s Sweet Song — or — is it to the *feeling* they get from attending such an event?

For those who are converted to Christ, the *size* of the group with which they work and worship is only a small part of the physical presence of the earthly Body of Christ. Christ has a body of believers that is greater in number than any earthly assembly gathered by man. On any given Sunday *millions* gather, as commanded in the New Testament to worship God and observe the Lord’s Supper — not at all a *small* group of Christians! Don’t be deceived into believing that God’s army is small simply because a local congregation doesn’t have thousands in attendance at any given time. That’s earthly thinking. When simple New Testament Christians assemble in the manner instructed in the Word, we are in the presence of God along with millions of others who do so because of sharing Redemption’s Sweet Song and having a knowledge of the Word and a desire to abide by it. It is not a “worship performance” that causes *Christians* to gather together — it is the Sweet Song of Redemption that brings them together. It’s not about feeling good or “experiencing” the atmosphere — it’s about presenting ourselves to God and being approved by Him.

So how do Christians get the world to accept that it’s not about the feelings *manufactured* with fast paced media devises, extravagant worship performances or emotional highs? Can people be challenged to take the time to learn about God *through* His Word and have an *abiding confidence* in their salvation rather than