

Scriptures were a complete mystery to them. In every sense of the word, they were ignorant.

But that condition did not exist among the Jews of Paul's generation. These people knew the Scriptures backward and forward. They prided themselves on being "the people of God," separated from the rest of humanity by their high moral character and deep respect for the Creator. They knew the Law, they knew the rules, they knew of the coming Messiah. In every sense of the word, they "had a zeal for God" — and were proud of it.

But therein lay the problem. Their academic knowledge of God's Law had crossed over into arrogance. Their preoccupation

with the finer points of the Law became a stumbling block that caused them to overlook the underlying principles of that Law. They could recite the most minute details of the Law, and explain exactly how to apply those details in every aspect of life, but in doing so they "neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faith" (Matt. 23:23). So instead of the Law serving as a guide to lead them to the Messiah, it became an instrument of self-aggrandizement, a means of "establishing their own righteousness" before God and others.

When Jesus finally came, He did not fit their elaborate interpretation of what the Kingdom should be, so they rejected Him. They

were "ignorant" by virtue of their misguided theology. And as long as they maintained that condescending air of superiority, they would never be able to understand what Jesus and His gospel were all about.

The great irony in all of this is that the Jews' ignorance of God's plan was due to a misguided zeal for God's book. Their very knowledge of the Scriptures blinded them to the larger message of the book.

There is a warning here for God's people today. Certainly, God wants us to know His Law and obey it. But we must never allow that knowledge to foster a spirit of self-importance that overrides our humility before God. ~

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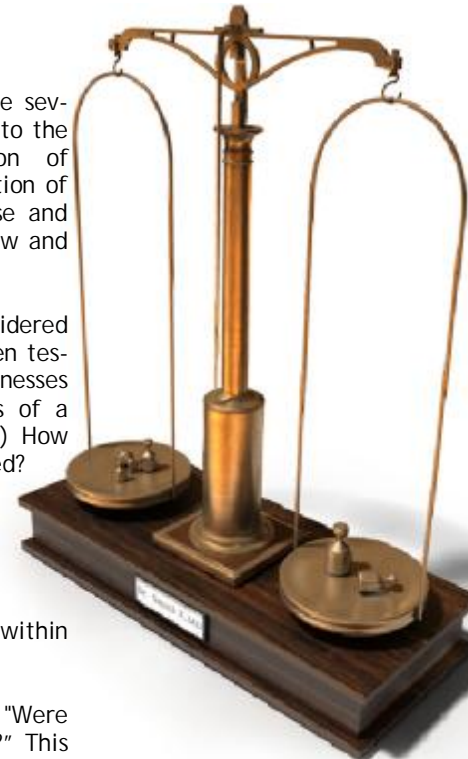
Examining the Witnesses

By David J. Riggs

In the Scriptures there are several witnesses who attest to the fact of the resurrection of Christ. A careful examination of the witnesses will increase and strengthen our faith, renew and enrich our hope.

Three things must be considered to decide a case upon given testimony. (1) Are the witnesses honest? (2) Are the facts of a plain, tangible nature? (3) How many witnesses are involved? If one establishes these three things beyond lingering doubt, he could have no better evidence in any court of law. It is the strongest evidence within the power of mortal man.

First, then, we inquire, "Were the witnesses honest men?" This must be determined from the circumstances of the case. What were they to gain by their testimony? Did they gain large fortunes? Were they promoted to honor or high position? Were they given a comfortable, easy



life? Some have been known to receive such things after giving certain testimony. However, the witnesses of the resurrection received only to the contrary (1 Cor. 4:9-13).

Furthermore, we ask, "Did their testimony agree?" Mark said of the witnesses who testified against Jesus, "...Their testimonies did not agree." (Mark 14:56). There are no contradictions in the testimony of those who witnessed of the resurrection. Also, we question, "Were they willing to stand behind their testimony?" Some in the face of affliction have changed their testimony, but the apostles and early Christians were willing to suffer imprisonment and death for the testimony of Jesus (Acts 5:28-29; Rev. 6:9; 12:11; 20:4). It is not in human nature for men to suffer and die for something they know to be false and promises no earthly rewards. Thus, we have established the witnesses to be honest.

Next, we inquire, "Were the facts of the resurrection of a plain, tangible nature?" There are three ways a deception could have been wrought. (1) Had they been only partially acquainted with Jesus, they

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could have mistaken Him for some other. (2) If He had been absent for a long time, they could have forgotten His general appearance. (3) If they did not have a fair opportunity to identify Him, they could have been deceived.

They were not partially acquainted with Him. They had been closely associated with Him for over three years and would have known His walk, voice, color of eyes, and even the very lines on His face. Jesus needed only to call out Mary Magdalene's name for her to recognize Him (John 20:15-17). They were not away from Him

for a long time. He was crucified on Friday and raised on Sunday - hardly enough time to erase Him from their memory. They had a fair opportunity to identify Him after He was raised. He was in their presence (Matt. 28:9-10; John 20:19-20) and ate with them (Luke 24:36-43; Acts 10:40-41). They were associated with Him for forty days (Acts 1:3) and at last saw Him taken up into heaven (Acts 1:9-12).

As to the number of witnesses, besides those mentioned above, on one occasion Jesus was seen of above five hundred brethren at once (1 Cor. 15:6). We close with these words from the apos-

tle John: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have handled, of the Word of life; (for the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full." (1 John 1:1-4) ~

I'm Too Busy for Church

By Jonathan L. Perz

It is Sunday morning—time to assemble with the saints of our Lord. Believe it or not, for many, this is a moment of decision. There are so many things around the house calling your name—lawn mowing, repairing the thing-a-ma-jig, washing the car, etc. As all of these things flash through your mind, the Lord calls. You may actually find yourself asking, "Whose call do I heed?"

Do you decide on Sunday morning, or evening, or Wednesday evening, whether or not you are "going to church?" Do you find that chores around the house, fishing, hunting, watching sports, working, or other things,

win out over the Lord? What a shameful predicament many place themselves in!

It is shameful because, some day, when the Lord returns again, you will have to explain to Him why you said, "I'm too busy for church." It is written, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Though it is true that attending church is not the 'end all' of Christianity, it is nevertheless commanded (Hebrews 10:24-25). Any Christian who must ask himself at the appointed time if he

is going to assemble with the saints needs to realize the dilapidated condition of his soul. For the convicted, faithful, zealous Christian, such an appointment is automatic! There is never a doubt, only the faithful fact that he will be there when the saints meet!

When one is too busy to go to church, what they really say is: "I'm too busy for my brethren (Hebrews 10:24-25)" and "I'm too busy for the Lord (Ephesians 1:22-23; Matthew 25:40, 45)." If one is too busy for these, he is too busy for heaven! The next time you find yourself thinking, "I'm too busy for church;" remember what that translates into—"I'm too busy for heaven!" ~

Zeal Without Knowledge

by David King

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:1-3).

Paul pinpointed the Jews' refusal to accept the gospel as an intellectual failure: they had "a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge."

They were "ignorant" of God's plan for making man righteous, so they rejected it. In reading this, we are tempted to draw a comparison to the Jews' ancestors during Old Testament times. Back then, the prophets attributed Israel's waywardness to their ignorance of God's law (e.g., "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," Hos. 4:6).

But that comparison doesn't quite hold up. The Old Testament Jews were literally ignorant of the most basic content of God's law. They knew nothing of the history of their people. They had no idea who God was or what He wanted. The

