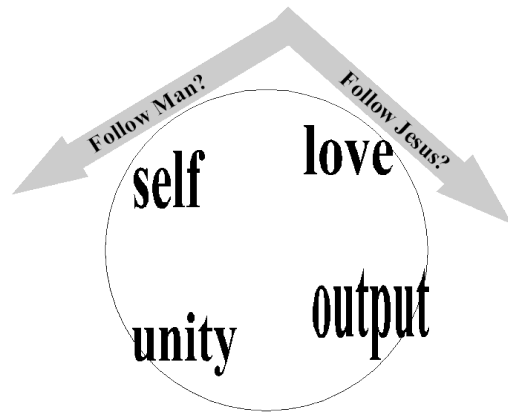


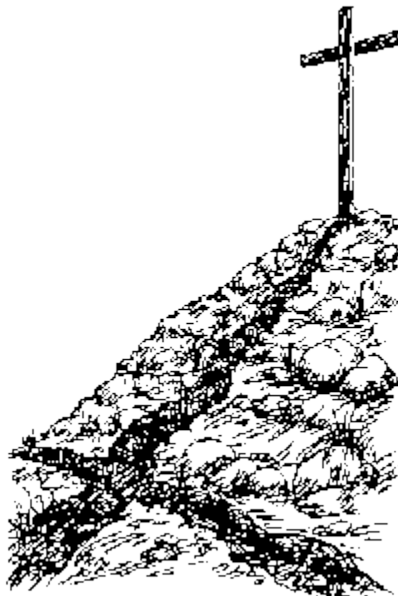
# The Wheel of Life



## Rock Hill Baptist Church

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(Mark 8:34-38 KJV) "And when he had called the people<sup>1</sup> *unto him* with his disciples<sup>2</sup> also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come<sup>3</sup> after me, let him deny<sup>4</sup> himself, and take up his cross<sup>5</sup>, and follow<sup>6</sup> me. {35} For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. {36} For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? {37} Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? {38} Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

There were many people who followed after Jesus – that is, they were part of the masses who sought out our Lord for healing or comfort. Jesus attracted people because Jesus loved people! People knew they could come to Him and they would soon begin to feel better. Either He would heal them, or He would teach them a wonderful Divine truth they had never been offered in the dry, religious environment of the Temple.

Christianity is not fire insurance, though many

people treat it as such. Jesus Christ presented Himself as the only way to God (**John 14:6**), and even equated Himself with God (**John 8:58**) when He told the Jews, "**Before Abraham was, I am**". Jesus took the holy and most sacred name of God and applied it to Himself, an action which caused the religious hypocrites to accuse Him of blasphemy. Fire insurance? Christianity is not about escaping Hell, though that is a major component of this faith. Christianity is not about an easy life, nor having your sickness cured, though the Bible does tell us:

**Isaiah 53:5 (KJV) "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."**

Yes, healing is a facet of Christianity. If it were not, then Jesus would not have spent as much time as He did healing people. The unbelievers – and many believers – equate Christianity with fire insurance, healing, and earthly prosperity. Sure, these are components of its message, that wondrous Gospel message. But the main focus of Christianity is a **relationship with God through Christ our Savior**. Christianity is about *restoration to right fellowship with God*. Christianity is about a **deeper walk with God**.

This is not the message that these early Christians were looking for. When they saw Jesus, they saw Him as prophet, healer, and possible king of Israel. They saw Jesus as a means to rolling back their bondage to Rome. Many looked at Jesus as if He were the great hope, the conquering Hero who would cast Caesar away, and as Moses before Him did, lead Israel out of captivity. The average Jew saw Jesus as Savior – not a soul Savior, but a political Savior. They saw Him, not as the:

**John 1:36 (KJV) "... Lamb of God!"**

that John the Baptist saw taking away the sin of the world, but as a political rival to Herod and Pilate. Not much has changed from the first century of Christianity to today. Today people see Christianity as a type of fire insurance. People in the hospitals want Jesus to heal them of their sicknesses. Some evangelists and preachers, catering to the whims of this age, preach a Jesus of prosperity and riches. Though a relationship with God through Christ can bring all these things, these are not what Christianity is about.

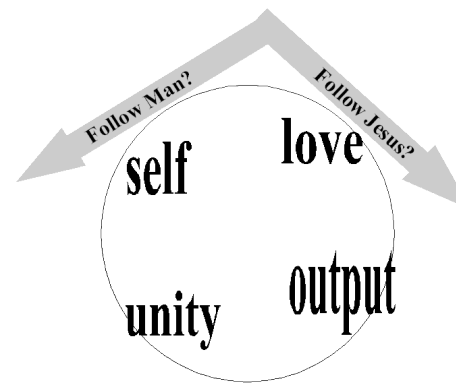
Christianity is an eminently practical faith that stresses **relationship** with God and **relationship**

with man through **relationship** with Christ. The message that Jesus speaks today is to both <sup>1</sup>ochlos {pronounced okh'los}, the <sup>1</sup>crowd or the general public, as well as to <sup>2</sup>mathetes {pronounced math-ay-tes'}, the professed students<sup>2</sup> or followers of Christ. Jesus asks both members of this Church as well as all seekers who have come to *check out the preacher* the same question:

**(Mark 8:34 KJV) "And when he had called the people<sup>1</sup> unto him with his disciples<sup>2</sup> also, he said unto them, **Whosoever will come**<sup>3</sup> after me, ..."**

"Do you want to follow<sup>3</sup> Me? Do you want to go where I am going?" Certainly, we all want to go to Heaven ... that was where Jesus was ultimately going to return to ... but before the Father put the crown on our Lord's head, Jesus had to meet the Cross.

There is a benefit in following Jesus, but there is also a *terrible reality* or *result* in following Jesus. There were many who followed Jesus to satisfy their own needs. Of the ten lepers who followed Jesus for healing, only one returned to give glory to God (**Luke 17:18**). The centurion of **Matthew 8:6** came to Jesus because he wanted his servant healed. The woman with the issue of blood



touched the hem of His garment to receive healing (**Matthew 9:21**). In every instance of His ministry, people followed Jesus to receive some form of

*temporal relief*, but few followed Him to gather the greatest benefit of Christianity: a deeper, more fulfilling relationship with both God and man through Jesus Christ our Lord. So I ask you, just as Jesus asked that crowd of people that very day: Do you want to follow Jesus? Do you want a deeper, more fulfilling relationship with God in Christ? If so, you must do what Jesus commands. His first command is:

### **1. I Must Seek God's Agenda**

**(Mark 8:34 KJV) "... when he had called the people<sup>1</sup> unto him with his disciples<sup>2</sup> also, he said unto them, **Whosoever will come**<sup>3</sup> after me, let him deny<sup>4</sup> himself ...**

The way of the world is to put *oneself first*. Notice the illustration (above) that I call "The Wheel of 6

Life". Most people follow the wheel in a *counterclockwise direction*: they put themselves first. This is not what Christ demands of those who follow Him. Jesus says:

**let him deny<sup>4</sup> himself**

Though this is a *foreign* command, though this is a *terrible* command, it is the first step in a deeper and more rewarding relationship with God. In fact, I can safely say that this is the *heart of the Christian faith*. Jesus uses the word *aparneomai*<sup>4</sup> {pronounced ap-ar-neh'-om-ahee}, which means "to lose sight of your own agenda". You cannot *enter* the Christian faith without losing sight of your own agenda. A person is saved when he publicly *professes Christ as Savior*. Jesus says:

**Matthew 10:32-33 (KJV) "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. {33} But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."**

I must deny my own agenda to enter Christianity, but I must also continue to *deny* my own agenda if I want to follow Jesus to where He is. Where is

Jesus? Well, overtly He is in Heaven – but in a deeper sense Jesus is in *close, intimate contact with the Godhead*. Jesus sits on the right hand of God the Father -

**Romans 8:34 (KJV) "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."**

**Hebrews 1:3 (KJV) "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;"**

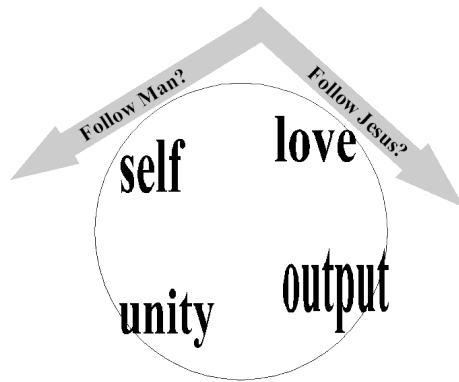
Jesus Christ had to *deny His own agenda* to come to earth, cloak Himself in humanity, and to die for us. Jesus did not come to earth to satisfy Himself, but came because the Father sent Him. God the Son had to set aside His own agenda in order to satisfy the agenda that God the Father gave Him. Jesus gave away all that He had in the flesh – even flesh itself – to secure our salvation. He did this knowing what it would cost. He did this to show us love, Divine love, to both God and man.

Jesus said:

**John 4:34 (KJV) "... My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."**

This was where our Lord was focused – and where we as professing Christians must focus. The world follows the wheel of life by seeking things that gratify *self* first. The Christian is commanded to abandon his own agenda, and to seek to love *first*, to seek out and be obedient to God's agenda *first*. The Scripture says:

**Matthew 6:33 (KJV) "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."**



way they follow the wheel of life. Only after these things are obtained does the unbelieving world seek after an inferior sort of love. Look at the

parable of the rich man.

**(Luke 12:16-21 KJV) "... The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: {17} And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? {18} And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. {19} And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. {20} But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? {21} So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."**

This man was *blessed* by prosperity, but since he followed the pathway of **self – unity – output** he never reached Divine love. The **love** he had was for *material possessions*. This was the agenda that he based his whole life on, and an agenda that led him to a terrible afterlife. Listen Beloved: There's nothing wrong with earning a living, nor is there anything wrong with having the nice things of life. Work hard. The Bible commands us all to

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work, for we read:

**2 Thessalonians 3:10 (KJV) "... if any would not work, neither should he eat."**

But we are not to be like the unbeliever, like this rich man. The man built a life that only found worth when he obtained riches. When his riches exceeded his ability to bank them, he built more banks. His life revolved around riches and his relationship to riches. In the end he, like us all, found himself in the next life devoid of *any riches at all*. This is a warning for both the unbeliever as well as the believer: If you want treasure in the next life, then make service to God in Christ your *number one priority*. For, as our Lord said:

**Matthew 6:21 (KJV) "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."**

Every failure in marriage, every fallen family, every destroyed Church can be traced back to a catastrophic failure to self denial. Just as Jesus did I must put myself *last*, and put both God and His Church *first*. My life must output love both God ward as well as man ward.

What are the obvious *benefits* of self-denial?

a. When we deny ourselves, we will see God's power unfold all around us. God is *immense, infinite, and all-powerful*. Many of us approach life as if God *needs us* to get the job done. Does He? No, for the Scripture says:

**Isaiah 46:11 (KJV) "... I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it."**

**Psalms 2:4-9 "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."**

God does not need us, but has *invited us* into His great Gospel work. It is sad to me that many preachers today preach a *humanistic gospel* that has no roots whatsoever in Biblical Christianity. God is God, and God is ultimately in control of all

things. If I truly believe that:

**Romans 8:28 (KJV)** "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Then I will submit myself to Him, knowing that He is going to bring out the best result for my life. Understanding that God is G-O-D gives me a relaxed mental attitude like no other. How foolish that a person would bring his own agenda into a relationship with God. God's agenda must be first, otherwise I am like that ancient fool Pharaoh who thought himself mightier than God. He found out better when the waters of the Red Sea destroyed him and all his armies. Our *Immense God* said of Pharaoh:

**Exodus 14:17 (KJV)** "And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honor upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen."

b. When we deny ourselves, we stop expending *useless energy* on useless things. God tells us over and over again:

**Romans 12:19-21 (KJV)** "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. {20} Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. {21} Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

If vengeance belongs to God, then I am only getting in God's way when I return wrong for wrong. What if it is a *Christian* who has offended me? The Bible still says:

**Hebrews 10:30 (KJV)** "For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people."

God, who is both *immense* as well as *Almighty* will judge His people. If I as the under shepherd of this flock need to weed out troublemakers – and I do not believe we have any here now – then I will follow Christ's orders in the matter as found in **Matthew 18:15-17**. But I will not seek to avenge wrong for wrong: vengeance *belongs* to God, not to me, and He is able to execute punishment on those who need it.

c. When we choose *God's Agenda over our own agenda* we become more clay like. The Bible says:

**Ephesians 2:10 (KJV)** "For **we are his workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus unto **good works**, which **God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.**"

The Christian is a creature designed to *work for God*, and it is God's desire – God's goal that:

**Galatians 4:19 (NASB)** "... until Christ is formed in you--"

Christ *be formed* in the believer. This is the *goal* of Christianity. I must become more like Christ in my daily life. Too many Churches have turned away from the good Word of God and the empowerment of prayer and the Spirit of God for *various means of entertainment*. I do not mind entertainment as a rule, but it must not supplant the study and preaching of God's Holy Word, nor must it belittle **prayer** and the power of **God the Holy Spirit**. The Bible says:

**Titus 3:5-6 (NASB)** "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by

**the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, {6} whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,"**

**2 Timothy 3:16-17 (KJV)** "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: {17} That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

## **2. I Must Do God's Work**

**(Mark 8:34 KJV)** "... when he had called the people<sup>1</sup> unto him with his disciples<sup>2</sup> also, he said **unto them, Whosoever will come<sup>3</sup> after me, let him deny<sup>4</sup> himself, and take up his cross<sup>5</sup>**"

The second condition for following Jesus is to:

**take up his cross<sup>5</sup>**

The Roman citizen was never executed on the cross, that terrible tree of death. This was a method of execution reserved for murderers, the grossest of criminals, those who were considered lower than polite society. Jesus said if we would follow Him we must be willing to follow His

example of sacrifice.

As humans we often want what we want when we want it! Yet this is not the Christian way of life. On the wheel of life the **output of Divine Love** cannot be satisfying oneself. When Jesus tells us to *take up his Cross*<sup>5</sup> He is actually saying two things.

a. First of all, the work is not attractive. The Cross is not attractive, nor is it pleasurable. It is a bloody Tree, a painful Tree, a humiliating Tree. Jesus was crucified naked or nearly naked on this Tree. Jesus had to surrender all of His Heavenly rights and privileges in order to go to the Cross for us. This was not pleasant, nor was it comfortable.

In America we are used to getting our own way no matter where we are, be it at Wal-Mart, work, in the home, or at the Church. This is not the example Jesus left us. The **output** of true love is always the **Cross**. In the Church each member is commanded to love the other member *before oneself*.

(Romans 12:10 NASB) "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; **give preference to one another in honor;**"

The work of God is an **output of love**. That output is rarely attractive, but harsh, cross-like, bringing a type of suffering on the disciple.

b. Second, the work is *precious*. There are things that I can do in Christian liberty that may be offensive to weaker believers. If *anything* that I do offends the weaker, then I must be willing to *voluntarily set aside my rights* in order that unity be preserved in the Body. The Apostle said:

(1 Corinthians 8:12-13 KJV) "... when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. {13} Wherefore, **if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh** while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."

and again:

(Romans 14:12-15 KJV) "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. {13} Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that **no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.** {14} I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that *there is* nothing unclean

of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean. {15} But if thy brother be grieved with *thy* meat, now walkest thou not charitably. **Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died."**

Jesus Christ our Savior had to deny His own agenda and submit to humiliation on the Cross so that we could have a deeper relationship with God the Father. This work of God is *precious* because God considered it *precious*. God considered man to be worth saving, so God lowered Himself to save man. We must be careful not to take that relationship lightly!

### **3. I Must Do God's Work In Step With Christ**

(Mark 8:34 KJV) "... when he had called the people<sup>1</sup> unto him with his disciples<sup>2</sup> also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come<sup>3</sup> after me, let him deny<sup>4</sup> himself, and take up his cross<sup>5</sup>, and follow<sup>6</sup> me."

**and follow<sup>6</sup> me.**

The Greek <sup>6</sup>akoloutheo {pronounced ak-ol-oo-theh'-o} means "to get in line behind of, to follow the lead of". The Bible says:

(1 Corinthians 9:24-27 KJV) "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. {25} And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they *do it* to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an *incorruptible*. {26} **I therefore so run, not as uncertainly**; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: {27} **But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."**

When you watch a horror movie (if you do such a thing), you will always see people running away from the fictional bad guy, vampire, or ghoul. Think of the old "Godzilla" movies. Those poor Japanese people are always shown running away from the giant lizard. As they run they periodically look over their shoulders to see if the monster is gaining on them. Now that's a recipe for disaster! If you run but keep looking over your shoulder, I can guarantee you one thing – before long you're going to get caught! If you're running from a monster, or just running in a race, the best policy is to keep your eyes on what's in front of you. You do not, if you're smart, keep looking back at where you've been. You keep your eyes in

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front, and try to catch the leader.

Jesus said "If you want to go where I'm going, then *keep in step behind Me*." This is certain: if you follow Jesus, you will get where He is! If you follow your Pastor and he's following Jesus, then we get where He is. The Scripture tells us:

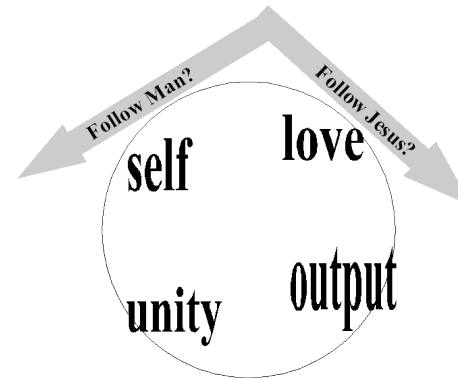
**Colossians 3:1-2 (KJV)** "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. {2} **Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.**"

God's work is a *communal* work: the Christian works with God, and many Christians work together with God to glorify Christ. Two words describe the success of the early Church: **one accord**. These words are repeated over and over again in the book of Acts.

**Acts 1:14 (KJV)** "These all **continued with one accord** in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren."

**Acts 2:1 (KJV)** "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with **one accord in one place.**"

**Acts 2:46 (KJV)** "And they, continuing daily with **one accord** in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,"



**See also Acts 4:24; 5:12; 8:6; Acts 12:20; Acts 15:25; Philippians 2:2**

The Bible tells us that God is not the Author of

Confusion, but of peace (**1 Corinthians 14:33**). The Bible tells us that God is love (**1 John 4:8, 16**). When each Christian decides to follow Jesus in life, placing himself last and love for God and others first, then his output as a Christian is holy. The unity of the Body increases and the effectiveness of the ministry of the Church increases as we all commit to these three conditions: self denial, take up the Cross, and follow Jesus.

As the Church that Jesus died for moves into the 21<sup>st</sup> century pastors everywhere are seeking fads

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and methods to entice new members to their flocks. Is this wise? The power of God has *never* been in the multitudes, but in committed believers willing to follow the commands of Christ. A larger, more prosperous Church with many fine facilities and programs may attract unbelievers, but these facilities and programs will not equip the believer to face the challenges that this brave new world offers. Only one thing stands as a sure anchor throughout every century:

**Hebrews 13:8-9 (KJV) "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. {9} Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein."**

Jesus has never changed. The power of God has never changed. The Word of God has never lost its power. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (**Romans 10:17**). The **divers and strange doctrines** will come and go. The Prayer of Jabez, yesterday a wonderful miracle, today forgotten by all but a few, will never be greater than the prayers of our Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose driven messages will never take the place of simple Christianity: like the label says on

the bottle, read and follow all directions.

Life is like a wheel, and we need to understand that the only way we can come out on top is by doing what Jesus told us to do. May God give us the strength to do His will, and not our own. The future of the Church in America depends on our obedience in denying oneself, picking up the Cross, and following Jesus.



**Rock Hill Baptist Church** is located between Parsons and Lexington, Tennessee, on Highway 412. Look for our sign! We have services on Wednesdays (Adult, Youth, and children's Bible studies) at 7:00 PM, Sundays at 10:00 AM and 6:00 PM. Rock Hill is a family oriented Bible believing Church - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever! Our Pastor, Brother David Buffaloe, will answer any questions you have about our Church if you contact him at 731-845-6104, or through his website at [bibleteacher.org](http://bibleteacher.org);

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