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EDITORIAL

Is Anything Too Hard For The Lord?

The story of the birth of Christ in the Bible is the most beautiful story. It is also the most powerful story. The Bible presents Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of man. His birth was not just another birth of another human being. But He was a special person, the Creator of man, the almighty God who has come down in the likeness of men. His birth, therefore, was different from all other births. Speaking of Adam, the first man, the Bible says, he was the man of dust, but Christ, says the Bible, is the heavenly man. (1 Corinthians 15:49). His origin was not dust, as was in Adam's case. But He had come from heaven. John, one of the writers of the Bible, introduces Christ with these words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 14:1, 2, 14). The Word, which became flesh later, was already there with God in the beginning. He simply descended to earth from heaven. Just as in the beginning God chose to form Adam of the dust of the ground, He chose a virgin, whose name was Mary, to give birth to His Son. Some people find it hard to believe and exclaim, "how can this be?" But the same God who had made Adam in the beginning from the dust of the ground, let it happen this way. Is anything too hard for Him to do? When the angel of

God had announced the birth of Christ to Mary, she was struck with awe. But the angel said to her: "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus." Mary asked the angel, "How can this be?" In answer to her question the angel told her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. . . for with God nothing will be impossible." (Luke 1: 30-37).

Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, lived in this world only for thirtythree years, during which He taught many wonderful lessons and did many wonderful things. But the purpose of His coming to earth was not to live but to die for the world. He had come to take away the sins of the world. (John 1:29). Through His death God was going to demonstrate His love for the world. The Scripture says that, "while we were still sinner, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). The wages of sin, says the Bible, is death (Romans 6:23). And God made Christ on the cross of His death to be sin for us, so that we through Him might become righteous before God. (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, very little is said in the Bible about the birth of Christ, but the death of Christ is emphasized both in the Old and the New Testament of the Bible. His death is called the gospel or the good news. He was delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God to be put to death on a cross. (Acts 2:22,23). Just as God demonstrated His love for humanity by giving His Son to die for the world, by the death of Christ on the cross God demonstrated His power to save man from sin. So the apostle Paul preached: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18). By allowing Christ, His Son, to die on the cross for the sinful humanity, not only did God show that He is a loving God but also that He is the just God. Instead of punishing you and me for our own sins, God in Christ took our punishment upon Himself. Now to those who do not want to believe in God and in His power, all of this might sound foolishness. But those of us who believe in the almighty God and know that nothing is impossible for Him, the message of the cross reveals to us His great power.

Christ, when he had risen from the dead, and as He was contemplating to go back to His Father in heaven, met with His disciples for the last time on earth and said to them these words: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is

baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15, 16). Please note, God loves all people, He gave His Son for all and Jesus Christ died on the cross for every man and woman. Thus all can have their sins taken away by the death of Christ, all can become righteous in Christ before God, and all can go to heaven. But all will not. Because Christ's last words were: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved. . . ." There are many who believe in the miraculous birth of Jesus, and in His saving death of the cross, they also believe in His resurrection from the dead and in his ascension to heaven, but the same people will deny that he who believes and is baptized will be saved. yet Christ, the Saviour, has demanded this. Preachers are proclaiming the death and the resurrection of Christ, but at the same time are telling their listeners that they need not be baptized to be saved, but only believe and be save. How tragic! No telling how many millions of people will be lost on the judgment day, because they had heard and believed their preachers and not the Christ! Is it because baptism involves water that people think it is not necessary for salvation? God who used mud to make the first man, Adam; who used Mary to bring His Son in the world; who demonstrated His love and power through the Cross; and by whose power His Son rose again from the dead, is anything to hard for Him?

How Does the Lord Want to be Remembered?

J.C. Choate

Each year around this time, believers in Christ begin to take on a festive mood. Once more it is time to celebrate the birth of Christ. Some of the churches will have a brief service on December 25, but the main emphasis is on visiting, giving gifts, having meals, decorating the house, putting up lights, may be having a Christmas Tree, and perhaps practicing other customs that go along with the season. Now that sounds great, doesn't it? The other religious communities have their festivals, and we have ours. Also, we have a national holiday and so we are officially recognized. Somehow that makes us feel that we belong and that we are well entrenched in the local society.

There is just one question that arises, and that is, where in the

Bible do you read of anything like that? "But Jésus was born," someone quickly responds. We are certainly not denying that since the whole world recognizes that as fact. Then you might wonder what the fuss is about. The question is raised because no where in the Bible do you have the date of the Lord's birth mentioned. No where in the scripture do you have any indication that the apostles, the church, or anyone else ever celebrated the birthday of Christ. Then where did that practice come from? It obviously originated with man and although it was done to honor the Lord, still he did not authorize it.

Don't you imagine the actual date of the birth of Christ would have been revealed in the scripture had the Lord wanted it to be known? Since it wasn't revealed, do you suppose it might be that the Lord did not want to be honored on this day? But since it is not revealed, then men have set aside a day on their own in which they attempt to celebrate the birthday of Christ. In doing that, the Lord must be greatly displeased.

But you might reason that surely there is nothing wrong with it, and it is another opportunity to remind the world of Christ. Yes, that sounds good and logical, but again the Lord's wishes have been completely left out. The question is, how does the Lord want to be remembered? Shouldn't he have some say in the matter? If it is going to be done in his name or by his authority or with his approval, then surely he has a right to say something about such things.

The fact is, the emphasis of the scripture is not on the Lord's birth. There are five billion people plus living in the world today. So billions of people have been born. The emphasis of the scripture is on the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection, and Christians celebrate that by assembling each first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper. (Acts 20:7). They partake of unleavened bread in remembrance of the Lord's body and the suffering that he experienced both before the cross and while he was on the cross. Then they partake of the fruit of the vine, grape juice, in remembrance of the Lord's blood, that blood that was shed on the cross to make it possible for man to be saved from his sins and to have the hope of eternal life. (Matthew 26:26-28; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

But can't one also celebrate the birth of Christ at least once a year? We could do that if the Lord had authorized that we do that or if we had an example in the New Testament of the apostles or of the Christians of that day celebrating the birth of Christ. But you might

wonder what difference that makes ? It makes the difference of either doing what the Lord wants us to do or ignoring the Lord and going on and doing what we want to do.

Paul said of the people of his day, "Ye observe days, and months, and years. I am afraid of you, leas I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." (Galatians 4:10,11). Now these Galatians that Paul speaks of could have fitted in very well with the practices of most believers today by going right along with celebration of the birth of Christ. But Paul was not about to condone what they were doing in those days and if he were living today, he would not be commending those of you that celebrate the birth of Christ.

Then I can just hear many of you saying that my brethren and I do not believe in Christ or that we are the enemy of the Lord and Christianity since we do not celebrate the birthday of Christ through man's traditional Christmas. To the contrary, we do believe in Christ, and we believe in him so strongly that we want to honor his wishes and do only that which he approves of in worship and in practicing Christianity. The reason most of you go along with such a tradition, and it is a tradition, and that is all it is, because you are following the crowd. You couldn't prove it by the Bible or prove that it is authorized by the Lord if your life depended on it. I ask you therefore to take another look at what you are doing.

No, we are not opposing it just to be different or to get attention. Neither are we going to try to force you to stop such a practice. We believe however, that if you will seriously study the matter from a historical point of view, to see where it came from, the customs and practices that it tolerates, and what it produces, and then if you will study it from the scriptural point of view to see if there is any foundation for it, any authorization for it, and how the Lord would really like to be remembered, then you will have second thoughts about the matter. We are not trying to get you to dishonor the Lord but to truly honor him. If this approach will not change your mind, then perhaps nothing will. But keep asking the question: How does the Lord want you to remember Him? Not, how do you want to remember the Lord? There is a difference, you know, and that is a big difference.

"50-50"

BETTY BURTON CHOATE

A young friend was eagerly looking forward to her marriage. She explained, "I know we will be happy together because both of us will go 50-50." She meant, of course, that she would do her part in the marriage and her husband would do his, so they could not fail.

I smiled inwardly, thinking how much she had to learn. "That may be all right most of the time," I answered, "but what about the days when you don't feel well or you are disheartened and disappointed about something? On those days you may, using all the energy inside you, be able to offer only ten percent to the husband-wife relationship. Then, if your husband gives only 50%, how will the 40% that is lacking be supplied?"

"Oh..." she answered, doing some new thinking.

"You see," I went on, "marriage isn't 'I'll go half-way if you'll go half-way.' Marriage is working together and supplying whatever the partner lacks, knowing that tomorrow you may be depending on him to make up the great part that you lack."

A good marriage is not something that just happens because there is a ceremony and two people begin to live together. A good marriage is the result of planned determination and of daily work.

It is an easy matter for two people to become one. Perhaps it may seem less difficult if they knew each other before the marriage and made the choice themselves, out of love. But even with that knowledge, one learns a seemingly completely different person when life together becomes a 24-hour-a-day thing. Personalities, habits, values, ways of thinking may be very different, and even small things can become important when they are influencing and reshaping two lives. Somewhere along the way there must be a lot of "give and take," many days of "60-40," "30-70," "90-10"-- and the successful molding into one can be done only if both the husband and wife are determined not to fail. They must plan to succeed, and every day they must work at their plan.

There are two important keys to success. First, lines of communication must always be kept open. When a problem arises, it should not be stored away in the heart to cause smoldering hurt. It should be talked out, preferably calmly and with mature consideration for everyone concerned; but even if emotions hinder the best selection of words and perfect control, the problem must be discussed and settled.

One reason husbands and wives often cannot discuss their problems is that soon after marriage they stop communicating. They may say few words to each other all day, and those may concern only daily activities and duties. But it takes deliberate intention to open up one's thoughts and feelings, to care enough about another person to want that person to have full understanding of one's inner self. Communicating, whether it be concerning one's thoughts or dealing with problems, is absolutely essential in building a good marriage.

The second vital element is mutual forgiveness. If I could be perfect, maybe I could expect perfection from my mate. But humans make mistakes or fall short or inflict hurt on loved ones every day. We must learn to say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me," when we are wrong. And when our mates are wrong, we must truly forgive, putting the past behind us and being determined to begin anew in our efforts to build a life of love together.

Suffering

Noah A. Hackworth

The Bible often speaks of suffering. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us" (2 Tim. 2:12). "That ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer" (2 Thess. 1:5). "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed" (1 Pet. 4:16). "Fear not the things which thou art about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried. . . ." (Rev. 1:10).

God neither inflicts nor delights in human suffering. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be

tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:13). Our Lord taught us to pray, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). There is difference in tempting a person to do evil, and in proving faith (Gen. 22:1-19). The commands of God test us, and prove us. If we obey, we pass the test. If we do not obey, we fail. We may be tested and tried, but God never tempts us with evil. God may allow evil to exist in the world, but he is not the author of it. God, as the source of light and love, gives the good and the perfect. God tolerates bad things to preserve the right of people to choose between the good and the evil.

Christ suffered because it was necessary. He informed his disciples that he must "go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priest and scribes" (Matt. 16:21). "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day" (Luke 24:46). "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8-9). "Wherefore Jesus. . . suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12), Isaiah 53 describes in vivid detail the contempt, rejection, mockery, insult, grief, chastisement, oppression and humiliation Jesus suffered. "Why did he drink the bitter cup of sorrow pain and woe? Why on the cross be lifted up? Because he loved me so."

Paul, as an ambassador of Jesus, suffered many things. He wrote, "and lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me" (2 Cor. 12:7-8). God allowed the fleshly thorn to continue. Paul profited from his ordeal. The Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9).

Job, the man from Uz, was "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). Yet, he is an example of human suffering, and patient endurance. Tennyson called the book of Job the "greatest poem of ancient or modern times." God permitted Job to suffer, but limited the suffering he endured. "And Jehovah said unto Satan, Behold he is in thy hand; only spare his life" (Job 2:6), Job's suffering was not due to sin on his part. Someone said, "If righteous people did not suffer then many would only be righteous to prevent pain." W.T. Purkizer suggests some valuable lessons we can learn from Job. They are:

1. The purpose of human suffering is not always evident to the sufferer, or to those who look on.

2. Suffering may benefit the sufferer. It may refine his character, and ennoble his personality.

3. The problem of suffering is insoluble within the limits of this life.

4. Perfection of moral character is compatible with misunderstanding, suspicion, ill health, poverty, and partial light. Job was perfect before God, but misunderstood and suspected by men, suffered ill health and poverty, and had a partial revelation of God's will.

A person may suffer, not because of his acts, but the actions of someone else. A delinquent father can squander his salary and cause his family to suffer from a lack of food, clothing or shelter. An intoxicated derelict can drive his car at a high rate of speed, crash and cause many innocent people to hurt. A gossip can spread lies and cause much pain.

The biblical record often speaks of innocent suffering. Adam's sin, for example, caused all to die a physical death. "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come" (Rom. 5:14). Jesus came to deliver us from the fear of death (Heb. 2:15), which shows that before the coming of Jesus men lived in dread of death. They suffered the terror of death though they "had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression."

We sometimes inflict suffering upon ourselves. We must reap what we sow, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:7-8).

All suffering is not caused by sin, but some is. We cannot sin without distress. Jesus told the lame man miraculously healed at the pool of Bethesda, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14). "Sin no more" literally means do not keep on sinning. There was a connection of some kind between the man's sickness and his sin.

Luke 15 tells of a young man who indulged in a life of riot and waste. His sin overtook him. He suffered embarrassment, deprivation and humiliation until he finally "came to his senses" and corrected the terrible situation in which he had placed himself. Death in sin (spiritual death) is the result of sin (Rom 6:23).

As long as our immortal spirit inhabits a body of clay we will be exposed to mental and physical suffering. "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven; if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5:2-4).

The cause of pain and suffering is not important. The question is, How did we handle it? Did the disappointment bring us closer to God, or drive us away from him? Did it make us better than before, or worse?

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:3-5).

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

"Looking Unto Jesus"

R.W. Gray

To encourage Christians to accept the chastening of the Lord, the writer of Hebrews borrows exhortations from the Messianic prophet: "Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed" (Hebrews 12:11-13; Isaiah 35:3; Job 4:3-4).

While they had not "resisted unto blood" in their struggle against sin, the Hebrews were nevertheless inclined to look elsewhere for spiritual comfort when difficulties were thrust upon them (Hebrews 12:4). There was a constant need "to provoke unto love and good works," to "hold fast the profession of faith without wavering" (Hebrews 10:23-24).

Isaiah's metaphors of listless hands, feeble knees, or lame runners describe as well many who make up the "kingdom that cannot be

moved" in our time (Hebrews 12:28). Many are looking back, turning back, abandoning the race, and selling their birthright as members of the church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:16, 23).

This halting, vacillating, tentative faith stems from a powerful influence exerted by the wicked world in which we live. As in a former time, we, too, are surrounded by lawlessness. And because iniquity abounds the love of many has "waxed cold" (Matthew 24:12). Others cease the fight, abandon the race, and forsake the faith through discouragement growing out of internal divisions and strife; and from the observance of others who have drifted away from all things we have heard (Hebrews 2:1-2).

First century Christians required constant reminders, persistent exhortations, and frequent assemblies for edification (Hebrews 3:12; 10:24-25). They were in constant danger of missing the "rest" that awaits the faithful, of falling, after the example of a former generation, into unbelief (Hebrews 4:5, 9-11).

The answer set out by the inspired writer, then, is the pressing need of OUR day. If they were to receive the prize, preserve their birthright, and enter into their rest, there was need again to "consider the Apostle and High Priest" of their profession, Christ Jesus (Hebrews 3:1). By him the worlds were made, and by him are all things upheld. When he by himself purged our sins, a place at God's right hand was his by inheritance. In that exalted position he has a name better than that of the angels. A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of his kingdom. Through him along God speaks to a world that has lost its way (Hebrews 1:1-8; John 14:6). By him we are privileged to enter into the holiest, to draw near unto God with full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:19-22). As members of his household we may boldly approach God's throne with petitions that will fall upon sympathetic ears (Hebrews 4:15-16; 10:21).

To abandon Christ and his house is to surrender all hope. We must keep in constant view the former days, in which we were first "illuminated," remembering that in heaven we have a better and enduring substance (Hebrews 10:19-22). As members of his household we may boldly approach God's throne with petitions that will fall upon sympathetic ears (Hebrews 4:15-16; 10:21).

To abandon Christ and his house is to surrender all hope. We must keep in constant view the former days, in which we were first

"illuminated," remembering that in heaven we have a better and enduring substance (Hebrews 10:32, 34) It is still the case that there is no other sacrifice for sins. There is no other approach to God that is approved. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Hebrews 13:15). To be justified we must continue in the faith as men and women of faith. We must not find ourselves among those who draw back unto perdition. May we be found among those who "believe unto the saving of their souls" (Hebrews 10:38-39).

How glorious the thought that we have truly arrived at Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, where we are in a great company of angels, having come to "God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant." It lies beyond our power to comprehend the importance of hearing him who speaks from heaven's vantage point as King of kings (Hebrews 12:22-25). May we keep our eyes upon Jesus, knowing we have received a kingdom that cannot be moved, and that "our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:12, 28-29).

Many of our present ills are the result of our attention being diverted to other things. Having minimized through neglect the glory of the cross God erected upon Golgotha's summit, we have lost power in our preaching; and in our own lives we have not the hope of salvation and immortality. Too much emphasis has been placed upon hearing men--albeit faithful men; and too little emphasis placed upon a thorough search for freedom and truth to be found in Christ. The cloud of witnesses that have gone before provide great inspiration; but our real hope resides in the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews chapter 11; 12:1-4).

Be Not Deceived

Harold Bingham

In Galatians 6:6-10, the apostle Paul admonishes the Galatian brethren to sow to the spirit and not to the flesh. In verse 6, Paul instructs them to support their teachers. In verse 7, Paul stresses that a person reaps what he sows. In verses 8-10, he encourages them to be faithful in sowing that which is good. In connection with the fact that one

reaps what he sows, the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul issues the command: "Be not deceived." Let us notice some things relative to the thought of being "deceived."

1. **The definition of the word "deceived."** "Deceived" is the translation of the Greek "planao," which simply means "to lead astray; to lead into error." The passive would indicate "to be led astray; to be led into error." In Matthew 24:4-5, "Jesus answered and said unto them. Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." Paul records, "... and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:18).

2. **The possibility of being deceived.** The command issued in Galatians 6:7 forcefully teaches the possibility of an individual's being deceived. In the Old Testament, several examples can be cited: (1) The serpent deceived Eve (Genesis 3); (2) Rebekah and Jacob in their joint effort to deceive Isaac (Genesis 27); (3) Joseph's brothers deceived their father (Genesis 37). Thus, the Bible teaches the great possibility of being deceived.

3. **By whom we be deceived?** One may be deceived and led astray by others Christ sounds the warning against false prophets when he stated. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves" (Matthew 7:15). John echoed, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: Because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). One may also be deceived by his own self. He may be greatly influenced by his own opinions, feelings, and own prejudices. He may have already made up his mind as to what he is searching for, and may refuse to listen to the authority of the Scriptures.

4. **The time of deception.** One is deceived when he thinks: (1) That morality alone will save--Examine Cornelius (Acts 10); (2) That the unrighteous will go to heaven.--Examine 1 Corinthians 6:9; (3) That one can "mock" Jehovah and be saved.--Examine Galatians 6:7; (4) That he can sow one thing and reap another.--Examine Galatians 6:7,8; (5) That he can be saved while disregarding the plan of salvation.--Examine the Scriptures on hearing, believing, repenting, confessing Christ's name, and being baptized for the remission of sins.

5. **How can we avoid being deceived?** We must always study the scriptures regularly, whether those things are so (Acts 17:11). We must study the scriptures carefully, prayerfully, and constantly. We must

rightly divide the scriptures (II Timothy 2:15).

Paul encouraged the Galatians to "be not deceived." Let us never be deceived by the wiles of the devil, but always be sober-minded and alert so that we may "fight the good fight of faith" (I Timothy 6:12).

Warnings Issued In the Bible

Howell Bigham

The names of Cain, Lot's wife and Uzzah all remind us of warnings issued from God. They came as a result of their disobedience to God. Paul stated, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope" (Romans 15:4).

A look at Cain warns that we are to do all things according to God's commands (Genesis 4:5, 7; Romans 10:17). Lot's wife warns that we, who have been redeemed through obeying the gospel (Romans 1:16; I Peter 1:18-19), must not look back to the world of sin (Luke 9:62; 17:32). Uzzah presents the serious lesson that God means what he says (II Samuel 6:1-7). Through these characters God delivered vital lessons all need to learn!

However, let us study some warnings that are sent forth from three other characters in the Old Testament. Their lives echo the following warning to all men: "Respect the blessed word of Jehovah."

Friends let us note some warnings sounded forth by Noah, King Saul, and Nadab and Abihu.

1. Noah issues the warning "DO NOT ADD TO GOD'S WORD." Old Noah, a man who is listed in the "Bible Hall of Faith" (Hebrews 11), was given the command: "Make thee an ark of gopher wood" (Genesis 6:14). This just and upright man (verse 9) was given the exact pattern to build this ark of safety (verses 14-16). How did Noah fare in his service to God's command? The Bible answers: "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (verse 22). When God commanded Noah to construct an ark of gopher wood, had he made the framework of gopher wood, and then braced it with hickory, he would have been in violation of God's law! He would have been guilty of adding to the heavenly Father's word! Men today would do well to study

Noah. For example, those who use mechanical instruments of music in worship are adding to God's word. The Bible teaches that we are to offer singing from the heart to God (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:17). John, the beloved apostle, through inspiration penned this caution: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18). Yes, Noah sounds aloud the message: "LEAVE GOD'S WORD ALONE!"

2. King Saul issues a great warning against subtracting from God's word. The king of Israel (1 Samuel 15:1) was given the command: "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not: but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (verse 3). King Saul was told to "utterly destroy" everything! However, the divine account reads: "But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly!" (verse 9). By sparing Agag and these things, Saul fell short of obeying God! He took away from God's command to "utterly destroy" everything! Samuel, the aged prophet, rebuked king Saul, saying: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (verse 22). Therefore Saul, through his rebellion and rejection of God's command, demonstrates the stern warning: "DO NOT TAKE AWAY FROM GOD'S COMMANDS"!

In what areas can men today be guilty, as was Saul, of Subtracting from Jehovah's law? Some take away from God's word in the area of the Lord's supper. Instead of partaking of this memorial upon the first day of each week (Acts 20:7) some partake of it quarterly, or only once, or twice, a year! Those who are guilty of doing such have a "wee" pronounced upon them! John states "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:19).

3. Nadab and Abihu illustrate God's warning against substitution. These sons of Aaron "offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not" (Leviticus 10:1). Nadab and Abihu, rather than performing their duty as was commanded (verse 10), substituted "strange fire" which God did not command. Their disobedience was rewarded by death! "There went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord (verse 2).

Some today are "akin" to these rebellious sons of Aaron! Some substitute sprinkling and pouring for immersion. The Bible no where teaches sprinkling and pouring for baptism! However, being buried in baptism with our Lord is authorized and commanded (Romans 6:3-4; Acts 10:48)!

Friend, Noah, king Saul, and Nadab and Abihu all teach that we are to have respect for God's word. They warn that we are not to: (1) add to; (2) subtract from; nor (3) substitute for God's eternal word. Truly, these great warnings issue from the Bible (1 Corinthians 10:6). May we ever remember them!

Teach Them To Say "No!"

Jerri Manasco

It is encouraging to see that many governments along with other prominent figures in them are leading the attack against drug abuse in our great world. The priority theme of this attack is to teach people to simply say, "No!" That is the solution! If we can only teach people to "Say 'No' to Drugs," then the drug war will be over, the victory falling to the side of goodness.

What is so remarkable about all this, however, is the fact that for years gospel preachers have been trying to persuade people that the best way to avoid any kind of moral or spiritual disaster is to simply say, "NO." Is it not remarkable that this approach to evil, just now being adopted by our authorities and "experts," is suddenly thought to be unique!?? The word "no" is the only sure thing that will stop sin in its tracks.

It may surprise many people to read this, but godly people have ALWAYS been aware that the best way to answer temptation is a simple, yet firm, negative. The young man Joseph, Jacob's teenage son, was conscious of this "unique" way out of Satan's clutches. When Potiphar's wife "cast her eyes upon Joseph" (lust), and invited him to commit adultery with her, Joseph "REFUSED" and exclaimed, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and SIN AGAINST GOD?" (Genesis 39:7-9). Not one to be so easily rejected by the youth, the woman persisted "day by day" in her pursuit of Joseph. But Joseph "hearkened not unto her to lie by her, or to be with her" (verse 10).

When she would have forcibly insisted on his compliance with her lust, Joseph "fled, and got him put" (verse 12).

Young people today might learn from this episode that it is always right to refuse sin. Joseph preserved his purity and maintained his integrity by his wise actions. Youth today can do the same. Young ladies will reinforce their self respect and earn a virtuous name by simply refusing the deceptions of any 'fresh' young man, no matter how prominent he may be in high school sports, nor how well liked he may be in the school. A shining virtue is much superior to a moment's dark passion.

Vashti, the wife of a pagan king, refused the orders of her husband to present herself to be viewed by the leering eyes of her husband's drunken party-guests. When the king commanded her to appear before his provincial princes and governors, "Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment" (Esther 1:12). The king in his anger and foolish resentment deposed her from her royal palace. Modern "situationists" might argue that Vashti gave up much too great a position simply by refusing this one simple thing. To this we would ask: What husband in his right mind (the king was drunk!) would subject his wife to such ungodly display? Beside that, it is clear that royal privilege can be so easily stripped away. But Vashti retained what REALLY mattered: she still had her modesty, integrity and virtue!

Can you imagine that a woman of Vashti's frame of mind would pose for a nude magazine under the guise of "art"? Why is it that young ladies--and older ones--display their bodies in public with revealing garments, and yet profess to be Sunday school teachers? and Christian women? The fact is: If our homes would lay stress upon the power of the simple word "NO," there would be much less of this moral cowardice! We praise Vashti for her decency!

The noble Three Hebrews, Meshach, Shadrach, and Abednego, receive our fullest commendation for their refusal to participate in sin. The faith of these men would do a world of good in our day, when it seems that the only answer to religious error is to compromise with it -- lest we "hurt someone's feelings!" King Nebuchadnezzar had commanded that upon hearing the signal for worship, all those under his rule must bow down to the golden image he had set up. Anyone who failed to comply would be cast into a fiery furnace (Daniel 3:6). The king's "rage and fury" was unleashed against the notable Three Hebrews for their failure to obey his order. The royal rebuke was met

with a simple answer: ". . . WE WILL NOT serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:18). What an answer! How thrilling that these men gave an answer that no one could misunderstand! Like the apostles in later centuries, the Three Hebrews knew that we must "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). How different from today when we are treated to the notion that the way to win souls and heal breaches among brethren is to compromise in love--in order to spare feelings! The best thing is to say: "NO, we will not compromise truth for the sake of false unity" (Galatians 2:1-5).

The word "no" will go a long way in earning a good name for oneself. "Just one drink" (to please the boss!), or "just one" shady joke (to impress one's co-workers) is JUST ONE TOO MANY! The moral courage to say "NO" will keep our Moral and spiritual fabric whole.

The Times of Our Lives

Guy F. Hester

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).

In the above text the apostle gives the formula for a successful and happy life: LIVE IN THE PRESENT, FORGET THE PAST AND LOOK TO THE FUTURE.

Life has three important chapters: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE. The attitude that we have toward each of these will to a great extent determine our welfare here and eternal welfare in the world to come.

THE PAST

Life's first chapter is the PAST. What a great storehouse of memories we have of the past, both happy and sad. Memory is such a useful tool for successful living. It is so good to occasionally reminisce, and in our memories re-live some of the good times of our past. Sometimes we may want to spend some time with some of our SAD

memories; and even this can be good for us, if we remember soon to put them back where they belong, and go back to living in the present. But there are some things about the past that we are not to remember, if we would be happy and successful. Paul said, "Forgetting those things which are behind" (Philippians 3:13). We should forget the mistakes of the past. When we have done all that we can to correct our mistakes, we should bury them in the sea of forgetfulness. This is what God does: "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12). There is no sin so great but that the blood of Jesus will wash it away, if forgiveness is sought in the right order. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). After we have properly sought the Lord's forgiveness, we must be willing to forgive ourselves, put the past where it belongs, and live in the present.

THE PRESENT

The second chapter in our lives is the PRESENT. There are things that we must do TODAY, if they are ever to be done. Today we must choose whom we will serve (Joshua 24:15). Today we must be workers for the Lord (John 9:4). Today we must exhort and encourage one another in Christian living (Hebrews 8:13). We must plan for the future but live as though today were our last; it may be! (James 4:13, 14).

We must set our priorities in order and learn to put first things first. We have time enough to do all the things that God requires of us, but that time is NOW! "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2). The Lord has promised us NOW, but nothing beyond!

THE FUTURE

The final chapter of our life is the FUTURE. While the PRESENT always remains the same, the PAST is continually getting longer, and the FUTURE is getting shorter. We need to plan well for the future. Time is running out for us all. Paul said, "reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The best preparation we can make for the future, is to do the best we can today. We need to learn to live one day at a time. The one who is not a Christian should see in the approach of death the need to penitently confess Christ, and be baptized for the

remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Matthew 10:32, 33; Acts 2:38). Being a Christian makes for a better life now, and eternal life in the world to come. When this life is over eternity will have only begun!

Live in the PRESENT forget the PAST, and look to the FUTURE. Do the very best that we can day by day, and trust in the Lord to take care of the rest (Matthew 6:33).

"Quid Pro Quo"

Raymond Allen Hagood

The watchwords of politics have always been encapsulated in three Latin words: "quid pro quo" --"something for something," or, "one thing in return for another," So it has always been that in the word of politics one learns to trade favors. One GIVES only if one GETS; and one GETS only if one GIVES. The atmosphere of "quid pro quo" is always one of selfishness. It precludes giving on any basis other than one of illiberality.

One can little doubt that the prevailing view of the majority of the world is one of "quid pro quo," the attitude of "something for something," never "something for nothing." Even the television preachers use this plea. They say, "Send your love offering and God will return it to you fourfold." Oral Roberts calls his "quid pro quo" philosophy "Seed Faith."

Since this is the prevailing view of the world concerning these matters, is it the case that such should be the view of Christians? Should Christians embrace the "quid pro quo" philosophy? or is there another way of thinking for those who wear Christ's name? Only the Bible can answer this question correctly.

There are several passages which deal with this theme, but we shall consider only one in this article. "Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:12-14).

The Lord's teaching here is unavoidable. When we prepare a meal or a feast, instead of calling someone who can pay us back with a meal (like our kinfolk, friends, or some rich people), call those who do not have the means to repay our generosity. Call the poor, the blind, the unfortunate who are just simply unable to reciprocate. It is true that there is a reward involved, but this reward is heavenly, not earthly.

B.W. Johnson said in the People's New Testament with Notes: "to give dinners for the sake of earthly reward is worldly; to feed the needy is heavenly, and will be rewarded in heaven."

It should be obvious from this passage that the philosophy of "quid pro quo," as it applies to Christian service, is wrong. If Christians do things only for some earthly advantage or "pay-back," they violate the law of Christ. If we do anything in Christian service because we see in that service some earthly benefit and this selfish desire is our motive for such service, we have sinned.

If a man preaches for personal, earthly "glory," he sins. If a man serves as an elder in order to have some kind of earthly "power," he profanes God's will. If someone gives money, time, or talents on the basis of quid pro quo," he transgresses both the spirit and the letter of God's law.

Let all Christians learn to give and to serve for the right reasons; and those right reasons do not include the philosophy of "quid pro quo."

Do You Have a 'Heart Condition'?

Dillard Thurman

Since Suffering a mild heart attack a few weeks ago, I have become more acutely aware of the importance of the heart! I am treating it with far better care than ever before, for I realize how indispensable it is! the heart weighs just over half a pound, yet pumps about five quarts of blood per minute. It beats 4,200 times per hour; 100,800 times a day; and the energy it expends is astounding! Your health depends on the condition of your heart! For that reason, I am now trying to regiment myself into a programme of sensible exercise, and guarding against any strenuous work and over-exertion.

BUT WHAT OF THE SPIRITUAL HEART?

When we sing, "Is Thy Heart Right With God?" we are thinking of the Spiritual heart of man; not the muscular organ that pumps blood. The Wise Man charged: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23). Jesus gave emphasis to having the right kind of heart: "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." (Mt. 5:8). Paul pointedly stated, "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned." (1 Tim. 1:5). Again he urged Timothy: "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow after righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." (2 Tim. 2:22). Peter exhorted saints, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently." (1 Pet. 1:22). But even saints must learn to keep the heart pure! "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 Jno. 3:3). Saints reflect the purity of Christ!

HEART OF MAN MUST BE PURIFIED

Jesus recognized the heart of unregenerated men as being impure, and charged: "O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things." (Mt. 12:34-35). If evil things come from a man's heart, that heart is evil and impure! Words spoken by that man flow from a corrupt fountain! Don't try to whitewash the reprobate who speaks his vile language, for he speaks from the abundance of his vile, sinful heart! Don't apologize for him, saying, "O, but he is a good man at heart." That makes a liar of our Lord! It was true said: "As he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7): and moreover, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." (Prov. 18:21): How sorely we need to heed: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." (Col. 4:6). There is a saving quality in the speech of one who walks with the Lord! Titus was told to use "Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." (Tit. 2:8). It was to his brethren that James wrote: "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded." (Jas. 4:8). This is

something each of us must heed!

THE DEGENERACY OF THE IMPURE HEART!

After making man in His own image, "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." It is when we see the spiritual image of God being prostituted by the degeneracy of man that we can understand the next verse: "And it repented God that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." (Gen. 6:5-6). A brother once told me just before worship service: "That which depresses me most is that some Christians talk in such a way that you can't distinguish between them and the world!" Some worldly people have fiendish delight in telling dirty, foul, vulgar, smutty stories; but this should never be known among disciples of our Lord! The immortal backwash of debauchery and degeneracy that promote such moral pollution and depravity as the pornographic business blights our society and our land! And I fear that Christians have not removed themselves sufficiently free of that profligate crowd!

WHEN THE HEART BECOMES A SEWER!

The advance of the godless Humanism doctrine has poisoned the hearts of people! Biblical standards are rejected, and base, profligate lifestyles are championed! Our crime rates are escalating, and murder and sex offences are becoming commonplace! Drinking and carousing is considered the norm! Currently, there is a great effort being made to get the drunks off the streets and into "retreats." How repulsive to see grown men groveling like hogs at a trough, as they imbibe the "slop" that lowers them to the hog's level! Yet, even more nauseating and repugnant is that depraved, degenerate appetite that leads man to hunger for the slime of obscene conversation! Far better to feast one's self at the "slop trough" with the hogs, than to glut as a vulture at carion of filthy talk and smutty jokes! One who poisons his soul with the filth of obscenity is to be abhorred more than one who craves intoxication! The corrupt and polluted appetite of one who seeks tobacco, alcohol or dope is very bad: but that cannot compare to the degenerate who hungers for that which is sensual and devilish, and corrupts the soul! Somehow the purity and innocence of the child was warped, twisted and prostituted to bring this state of debauchery to fruition! A directive of the Spirit is: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is

good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." (Eph. 4:29). Let this be your pattern of conduct.

THE HEART MUST CONTROL THE TONGUE!

Since the mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart, it holds the key of life and death! "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Mt. 12:37). A most disgusting inconsistency is seen in one claiming to be a Christian, but who speaks for the Devil! An Indian accused the white man of having a forked tongue; but James speaks of one far worse: "Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made in the image of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessings and cursings. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" (Jas. 3:9-11). Still, we find some who pray devoutly on Sunday, and "Cuss like a sailor" the rest of the week! O, what awful, terrible things wait all such! "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the first. . . But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." (2 Pet. 2:20,22). If you don't want to fit in that picture frame--clean up your heart! After all, it is the fount of life!

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