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EDITORIAL

What Does The Bible Teach?

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. . ."

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, these words were penned, at Revelation 14:13, by John, one of the disciples of Christ. When John wrote and sent this message to his fellow Christians, almost at the close of the first century A.D., Christians were being killed all over Asia minor. The Jews and the Romans hated them and persecuted them. This was the time when Christianity was only about seventy years old. What had happened in those seventy years: Christ's birth; his life; his works mighty and wonderful; his preaching; his death; his burial in a tomb; his resurrection from the dead; his forty days stay on earth as the resurrected Lord; his ascension into heaven that was witnessed by his apostles, as were the other things; then as Christ had promised, he sent the Holy Spirit on the apostles to empower them to speak in the languages of different people; to work miracles; to preach his gospel with boldness, all of which combined together made such a great influence on the people that by the thousands, each day, people began to believe in Christ and repent of their former ways and were being baptized wherever the gospel was preached. Thus, in a matter of a few years thousands and perhaps millions became Christian, followers of Christ; church of Christ (congregations of Christians) were meeting all over places to sing spiritual songs, to pray, to study God's word, and to worship each first day of the week.

While that was going on, the Romans began to view Christianity, from the political standpoint, as a new developing mighty force that could in future become a great threat to the vast Roman empire. Also, the Jews hated Christianity from the very beginning, because Christ was born among them, to Jewish parents; all his disciples in the beginning were Jews; a large number of Jews had become his followers. They no longer called themselves "Jews", but now they were known as Christians or the followers of Christ. Even though the Christians were persecuted from the beginning by these two groups of people, but when Domitian became the emperor of Rome, he vowed to destroy Christianity by persecuting Christians in every possible way. He got his own images built and installed all over his empire and asked all people to bow before him and worship him each day. He knew that Christians wouldn't do that, as Christians always have bowed before the true and the living God and worshipped Him alone. This gave Domitian a valid political excuse or reason to vigorously persecute Christians each day. To force Christians to yield to his wishes, they were, under his authority, denied food and housing and other such civil rights. People, those who were bowing before his images to worship him, were given certain credentials to enable them to live as free citizens, but those didn't possess such were put to all kinds of hardships. When this didn't effectively work over faithful Christians, they were being falsely accused of serious political crimes and were killed in various ways. Some were put to death by sword; others were thrown before wild beasts; still others were put to death by fire or other cruel means. It was in this type of prevailing atmosphere or circumstances, when Christians were facing death and persecution each day, the Holy Spirit of God inspired the imprisoned apostle John to write to his fellow Christians: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works follow them." He also wrote them, to encourage and console them and to remind them of their final victory over death: "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil, (*Domitian, in this case, SD*), is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. (*for some time, or as long as they would be on earth, SD*)." But, then, he quickly added: "Be faithful

until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10). Of course, this was the message of Christ Jesus to his faithful followers, which gave them strength to face death courageously, and to accept persecution and death as a blessing, being in the Lord.

Nevertheless, it is true even today, and will remain true as long as the world stand. Because in eternity, after death, there are only two places where souls will live forever and ever—either in hell or in heaven. Hell is for those who die separated from God, because of sin, under condemnation. But, those who are in Christ Jesus, says the Bible at Romans 8:1, are no longer under condemnation. In him they are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17); washed of sins, cleansed, sanctified and justified before God (1 Corinthians 6:11; Revelation 1:5). In him they are the righteousness of God, according to 2 Corinthians 5:21. Christ is the propitiation for their sins (1 John 4:10). Therefore, they are blessed, indeed, not only in this life, but more so in the life to come, in heaven, where they will live forever with him.

But who can die in the Lord Jesus Christ? Of course, the one who is in him now when he lives. First, one need to put on Christ by being baptized into him, as the Bible teaches at Galatians 3:27. Only those who believe in Christ with whole heart and repent of sins are qualified to be baptized into Christ, says the Bible at Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38, and also at Acts 8:36,37. I know some people who have been "baptized" when they were little babies, when they could neither believe in Christ nor repent of sins. But this is not what the Bible teaches. Also, there are those who think they were saved when they had believed in Christ, but were "baptized" later to "prove" that they were already saved when they had believed. Yet, again, the Bible does not teach this. Christ is not the saviour of those who only believe in him, but he saves those who believe in him and obey his commands (Matthew 7:21; Luke 6:46; Hebrews 5:8,9). There are certain commands, as we can see from the above cited Scriptures, which must be obeyed to be saved or to have sins forgiven or to put on Christ and thus to get into Christ. Yet, as important as it is to put on Christ; to get into him to be saved from sins. It is also important, and more so, to live in him by following his steps (1 Peter 2:21); running with endurance the race that is set before a Christian, looking unto Christ (Hebrews

12:1,2). Those who are baptized into Christ, the Bible says, ought to walk in the newness of life. (Romans 6:4). Not only should one desire to get into Christ, but must also endeavor to live in him each day until the end, to die in him finally, to be blessed in the heavenly home of the righteous.

What We Should Take From Worship

J.C. CHOATE

Christ says that God seeks true worshipers, those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. (John 4:23,24). That translates today into God wanting the saved, His people, members of the church, to meet each first day of the week to worship Him as set forth in the New Testament. We have an example of the early Christians doing this in Acts 2:42 and Acts 20:7. They met on the first day of the week to study, pray, sing, give, and to partake of the Lord's Supper. Other verses of scripture which support this include Ephesians 5:19, 2 Timothy 2:15, and 1 Corinthians 16:2.

The scriptures, therefore, make it clear *who* is to be worshipped, *who is to do* the worshipping, the *day* of worship, and *how*. He is to be worshipped. We are also told *where* we are to worship: anywhere two or three are gathered in His name. (Matthew 18:20).

Not only is the Christian to assemble with other Christians each first day of the week to worship God, but he must come in the true spirit of worship, with a pure heart, desiring to worship, showing reverence in a humble attitude, and having love for God and for his brothers and sisters in Christ. He needs to bring a forgiving spirit, a heart of joy, and a desire to please God in all that he says and does.

Worship is not only our gift of adoration and praise to God, but it becomes God's means of giving special blessing to us. When we worship in an acceptable way, on our departure we will be able to take many good things with us.

- We are greatly strengthened by our communion with God and by the contact with our brethren. These things encourage us, and we find satisfaction in worshipping God

as He has instructed. We are also able to leave with the Lord's assurance that He will be with us.

- Having met to study together, we depart with a greater knowledge of God's word. Our prayers will have brought us nearer to our Father. We were made joyful through the songs of praise we were able to offer Him. By partaking of the Supper, and being reminded again of the great price our Lord paid that we might be saved, we are encouraged to renew our dedication to Him. Finally, with the Lord having blessed us in so many ways materially, as well as spiritually, we are thankful to be able to return to Him some of that which He has given to us, to be used in the furtherance of His cause. Surely if these things will not give boost to the Christian, then nothing will.
- We are able to depart from worship better prepared to live for the Lord, to set a good example before all those we come in contact with, and to take advantage of opportunities to teach God's word to the lost. This makes Christianity more meaningful to us because we are being faithful to the Lord and are able to bear good fruit. All spiritual blessings, therefore, can be poured out on us through Christ. (Ephesians 1:3).

What do you take to *worship*? What do you take *from worship*? You must give in order to receive. If your answer is negative, we would encourage you to make the necessary changes in your life so your answer can be a positive one. The Lord says that if you will believe and be baptized that you too can be saved (Mark 16:16), added to the church (Acts 2:47), to be a child of God (Galatians 3:26,27), and a true worshipper of the Lord. (John 4:23). How simple and easy, but how rewarding! Try it and see for yourself. It works. It really does!

Especially for Women

Can A Woman Be An Elder Or A Deacon?

BETTY BURTON CHOATE

In this changing world, more and more women are asserting

their right to be and do anything men are allowed to do. Even in the realm of religion, women often take behind-the-scenes leadership roles, telling their husbands what should and should not be done in the church. In an earlier lesson we have shown that God gave the men the responsibility to lead the women. If men are strong and do their work well, God is pleased. But if they are weak and abdicate their leadership roles, allowing the women to be the "bossess", this does not mean that God accepts their reversal of roles. Still, God holds the men responsible.

Sometimes critics make belittling remarks about the apostle Paul because it was by his pen that God gave the instructions that women are not to teach publicly in the church, nor are they to usurp authority over the men (1 Timothy 2:12, 1 Corinthians 14:34, 35). These statements lead some presumptuous people to mock, saying that Paul, who was not married, must have disliked women. However, Paul, like all the other writers of Scripture, wrote as he was instructed by the Holy Spirit. He did not write according to his own preferences of thinking. The passage in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 says "*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

It is easy enough for us to understand God's law in the matter of leadership, if we want to see. Approximately forty writers were used to pen the Old and New Testaments—yet there was not a single *woman* among them! In the birth of the nation of Israel, Jacob had twelve sons and one daughter—but we speak of "the twelve tribes of Israel", each tribe being the descendants of one of Jacob's *sons*. We see countless patriarchs (*fathers* of families), priests (no *priestesses*), judges (There was one woman who was a judge in Israel—Deborah—as recorded in Judges 4:1-9, because Israel had fallen into evil in the sight of God and evidently there was no man with faith and courage enough to provide any leadership. This was the shame of the men, as stated in verse 9.), kings, and other *men* who were appointed by God to leadership.

The preachers and leaders named in the New Testament were *men*, in spite of the fact that in some cases it is recorded that the church met in the homes of women. We read of the

twelve original apostles—all *men*—even though some of the women in Jesus' company had more faith than the apostles (Luke 24:10, 11). This shows that it is not because men are more intelligent or more capable or have greater faith that they were appointed as leaders in the family and in the church, but simply because man was first in creation and he has been designated by God as the one in authority. It is, therefore, his God-given *responsibility* not only to prepare himself to lead but to lead to the very best of his ability.

The New Testament shows that there are to be individual congregations of the church of Christ, and that each is independent of the other, being led by its own qualified elders and deacons (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5). The qualifications for the men who filled these offices are given in 1 Timothy 3:2-13 and Titus 1:5-9.

"A bishop [another word for 'elder' or 'pastor'] then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (1 Timothy 3:2-7).

"... appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:5-9).

The directions given in the appointment of elders show several things:

- Each place was to have its own elders, a *plurality* of leadership.

- The description is of a man, in that "he be the husband of one wife. . . one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Timothy 3:2, 4,5). The man who aspires to be an elder cannot be a bigamist, a polygamist, or a divorced man, but he must have only one wife; he must also have shown by the shaping and training of his own household that he can work well in a leadership role and can successfully guide children—whether children in the flesh or spiritual children—to maturity. Having gained experience through the years-long leadership of his own family, he can be expected to provide sound leadership, with his fellow-elders, for the congregation which he serves.

A woman, obviously cannot "be the husband of one wife". Neither can she be the leader in her own family, usurping authority over her husband, and be pleasing to God in doing this. Therefore, she cannot qualify to be an elder.

"Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be proved; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.

"Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

"Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Deacons, in the official office, were to "serve" under the elders, which is what the word "deacon" means. In some denominations today there is no office of "elder", but the "deacons" do the work of "elders", while the so-called "pastor" (who was an elder in New Testament times) does the work of an evangelist or preacher.

These corruptions of proper offices are unscriptural. We must let God be the authority, and we must listen carefully to what He says in His word. He has said that each church is to have elders, and that there are to be deacons. Qualifications are given for both, and these must be met before a man can be

appointed to either of these offices.

As with elders, deacons also are to be "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:12). Obviously, no woman qualifies.

Some would look at verse 11 and say that this applies to "deaconesses". But the context shows that it is speaking of the godliness of the wives of the leadership of the church, not of a woman who has been appointed "deaconess". Of course, in an unofficial sense, all Christians are "servants", and we are to serve. There is much work that a woman in the Lord's church can do to help other Christians and to enlarge the church itself. This, they are certainly encouraged to do. But for any group to take it upon itself to appoint a woman to the office of elder or deacon, giving a woman authority of leadership over a congregation of the Lord's church, would be a direct violation of these plain passages of Scripture. This would be an addition to the commands of God, a thing that is strictly forbidden in His word (Revelation 22: 18, 19; Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:6).

The Bible: A Complete Revelation From God

GARY C. HAMPTON

In the last two hundred years, it has been far from unusual for a new religious body to appear. Most of these new groups have claimed that God has given them some new revelation and it is their purpose to carry it to the world. Events such as these may cause one to question his own faith and wonder if he really does have the complete revelation from God in the Bible. In other words, does he have the essential ingredients necessary to form a belief which will bring about salvation?

The New Testament does not leave any indication that there is a revelation to follow. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correcting, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Peter plainly indicated that all of man's spiritual needs are provided for in the Scriptures. If this were not the case, he

could not have gone on to say, "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble" (2 Peter 1:3-4, 10). John by inspiration says that we have all that is necessary to receive eternal life (John 20:30-31). Paul was convinced he had preached the gospel and warned against anyone who preached anything contrary to it (Galatians 1:6-9). He also admonished the Corinthians to "stand fast in the faith" (1 Corinthians 16:13). All of these passages point strongly to the belief of the apostles in a complete revelation from God. It is no wonder that Paul warned Timothy against those who would turn away from the truth (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

The New Testament does have a claim to completeness. In speaking of Colossians 2:9, James D. Bales says, "Since in him 'dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily' there is no one who could bring a fuller revelation of God" (James D. Bales, *The Finality of the Faith*, Shreveport: Lambert Book-House, 1972, p. 67). He goes on to pen these words: "Immediately after saying that in Christ 'dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,' the apostle Paul said: 'and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power' (Colossians 2:10). Since in Christ there is nothing lacking in God's revelation of himself to man, there is nothing lacking in Christ for man" (Bales). Further, "Christ did not prophesy that anyone would take his place. Who could supersede the Son of God? He is God's spokesman to us today, and his word has been revealed and confirmed by the Spirit through the inspired men of the first century. (Hebrews 1:2; 2:3-4; John 16:12-14; Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:42)" (Bales, p. 69). The apostle Paul said that the new covenant was to be everlasting (Hebrews 13:20-21).

While all of these verses will show the Bible to be God's complete revelation to man, I feel that a proper understanding of Jude 3 is the strongest argument of all. Jude writes, "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." Vines says of the word here translated faith, "by metonymy, what is believed, the contents of belief, faith". (W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1940, p. 71). Of

the words *once for all* he says, "once for all, of what is perpetual validity, not requiring repetition" (Vine, p. 137).

After observing the meaning of these words, one can easily see why Woods makes the following comment: "The 'faith' for which Jude's readers were thus earnestly to contend. . . is the sum of all that which Christians are to believe and obey." (Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude*, Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1955, p. 385) Also,

This faith has *once for all* (*hapax*) not simply formerly as the King James' Version implies, but for all time been delivered to the saints. The meaning is that the truth is delivered for all time; it is a permanent deposit, it will never be superseded, amended or modified. As it now stands it is a perfect, adequate, complete and inviolable deposit of truth, providing the means with which to confute the gainsayer, and resist the advocate of false doctrine. This deposit of truth was infallibly delivered, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 1:11; II Peter 1:21), and no part of it is superfluous or unnecessary (Woods).

While all of these new religion, to my knowledge, claim that the Bible is inspired, they attempt to hold to the inspiration of their new revelation. One can well see that this will not work. There is no mention of a new covenant that is to follow the one delivered by Christ. The gospel is complete and was established to last forever. Finally, the faith was delivered to the saints during the lifetime of Jude and that faith is complete, so there is no need for any addition of it.

Unity In Jesus

FRANCIS DAVID

The religious world is much concerned about unity today. I have talked to religious leaders and they all seem to be interested in UNITY. Is Christian unity possible? The Christian unity would be only possible if we all come to one platform of unity. The religious leaders are interested in unity but at the same time they do not want to leave their man made doctrines.

They want to hang on to their doctrines. All of them claim to be true disciples of Christ but still maintain their separate identity from each other.

We look around and see that there are so many churches and doctrines prevailing in the world. It is sad to see so much religious division in Christianity. Jesus wanted his followers to be one in HIM. He himself prayed for the unity of his people. Jesus said, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them MAY BE ONE, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:20-21). The other day one denominational preacher was giving a speech and in his speech he said, that it does not matter to whatever denomination you belong to, we are all one under one umbrella. How it could be possible. Jesus would never say this, but this particular preacher was saying that this is what Jesus prayed for. He never prayed that all the denominations may be one.

We see, people are trying to make unions in order to be united, is it possible? No, not at all. The unity which Jesus is talking about cannot be achieved through our human ideas. Unity in Jesus is not based on our human thinking. The kind of unity which Jesus desires from his people must be based on scriptures. Our unity must be in thoughts and in action.

All over the world, the followers of Jesus are trying to serve him but according to their own methods and notions which are not based on the Bible. Apostle Paul, while talking to the brethren at Corinth says, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (I Cor. 1:10). Worlds of people claim that they are pleasing God but actually they are not. Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven". My friend, are you willing to do his will? His will is that all his followers may be one. If we are not in unity then we are dishonoring God and Jesus. Lets not give honor to our particular denomination and doctrine. Instead we must honor Jesus through our actions. Paul further says, "When one says, I

belong to Paul and another, I belong to Appolos, are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Appolos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? (I Cor. 3:4-5). In the third verse of the same chapter Paul tells the Corinthians that "you are still carnal, for there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?"

Jesus our Lord built only ONE church (Matt. 16:18). He is the owner of his church. This church is not a denomination. All the denominations have been established by men. The church of Jesus Christ was established on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). This church is neither Catholic nor Protestant. The church of Christ came into existence in AD 33 where as the Catholic church or denominations came into existence in 606 AD. In Greek language the word which is used for the church is "EKKELISIA". It means called out. The church of Jesus is his body. All the saved are in His body. Those who believe in Jesus, confess him as the Son of God, repent of their sins and are baptised are added to this body only by the Lord (Acts 2:47). Only, Jesus does the adding. He does not add the baptised to a particular sect or denomination. All those who were added to his church were in Unity. Lord was Pleased with them because they were all one, the parts of his body, the one church (Eph. 1:22,23 & 4:3-6). All over the world there are still people who are walking according to the Bible. They only follow the Bible as their guide. The word of God is their standard in all religious matters. These people call themselves Christians. They do not wear any sectarian names. In the Bible we read only the name Christian. (Acts 11:26; 26:28 and I Pet. 4:16).

These Christians are always willing to please him through their actions. They are against all sectarianism. How wonderful it would be if we all do the same thing. Let all the followers of Jesus have the desire to fulfill his prayer concerning UNITY. His prayer was, "that all who believe in Him MAY BE ONE". Let us follow the path of Jesus and be united in him. If we do this we will really honor him. Our Lord never taught us the denominational Christianity. Denominational Christianity is not authorised in the Bible. Divided Christianity is not the real Christianity. We may call it Christianity but according to the Bible, it is not the kind of Christianity which Christ talked about. Jesus

said, "Every plant that my heavenly father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots" (Matthew 15:13).

My friend, we the new testament Christians are pleading to all our friends in various denominations to please come back to the Bible based Christianity which was established in the first century. Please leave your creeds, doctrines and denominations and follow the Bible which is our perfect guide (James 1:25). Sects and denominations will divide us but the path of Jesus will unite us. Yes, the unity in Jesus is beautiful and pleasant as the Psalmist says, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell in UNITY. (Psalm 133:1).

"I Will . . . Before I Die"

FLAVIL H. NICHOLS

Aged Jacob, whose name had been divinely changed to "Israel" (Genesis 32:28), had been deceived by his sons into believing that Joseph, his son by his beloved wife Rachel, was dead. He believed this lie for about 22 years. Being finally convinced of its falsity, he said: "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die" (Genesis 45:28). This also he did in the subsequent chapter.

Jacob made a great resolution! He said, "I will . . ." and did it! The Prodigal Son also resolved: I will arise and go unto my father . . ." (Luke 15:18-19) and the next verse says that he did it!

Many have various good intentions, some of which are never carried out. Good resolves of heart are proper at any time. (The first of a year is not the only time one may wisely make good resolutions!) But they should also be executed, or put into practice. Solomon wrote: "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed" (Ecclesiastes 5:4). This sounds like one is a "fool" in God's estimation if he does not live up to his commitments.

It does little good to say, "I will . . . before I die," but make no move to do what is purposed. Doubtless thousands have INTENDED to obey the gospel. Many perhaps have said to

family or other friends: "I will be baptized . . . before I die,"—but kept putting it off until it was too late!

Numerous Christians have told themselves (and perhaps others), "I will search the scriptures daily" like the noble Bereans (Acts 17:11-12), but continually neglect to do so. They do not even attend the midweek services where they could vastly increase their knowledge of the word of God. Nor do they tune in gospel broadcasts, by which they could "grow in knowledge" (II Peter 3:18). Yet they may repeatedly say, "I will . . . before I die"—but neglect to do so.

As a New Year's resolution, some very likely said (either to themselves, or to their families), "I will start attending worship regularly—every Sunday," yet have failed to begin. The month of January is gone—and they have not yet enrolled in Bible classes, nor attended on Sunday nights, nor even for Sunday morning worship. It does no good to say, "I will. . ."—so long as you WONT!!!

Others have made good resolutions about their church contributions. The apostle Paul wrote that the Corinthians "were the first to make a beginning" (II Corinthians 8:10, A.S.V.) regarding the collection for the poor saints in Judea. According to the King James Version he said, "This is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago" (II Corinthians 9:2). Hence they **PURPOSED** ahead, and **PROMISED** a year in advance what they would do. Paul spoke of it as "your aforepromised bounty" (verse 5, A.S.V.). He later wrote them: "Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have" (II Corinthians 8:11).

Remember Jesus said, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10). Due to increase in salary, many are able to give more than they could last year. But merely saying, "I will . . ." does not fulfill one's responsibility. It does no good unless such resolutions are carried out. I repeat Paul's admonition: Let there "be a performance also" (II Corinthians 8:11).

"Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1).

"Be Of Good Courage"

ALLEN WEBSTER

Christianity is no place for weaklings! A sign was seen in a small restaurant, saying, "If our steak is too tough for you, get out; this is no place for weaklings!" Our faith will be tested.

Five volunteers were needed to undertake a dangerous mission, so the general lined up his men and asked volunteers to take one step forward, while he turned his back. When he again faced them, the line was still intact. He expressed disappointment that not a man was brave enough to volunteer, until a corporal interrupted and said, "We have all stepped forward, sir!"

Those in the Lord's army need courage. Christians have many great battles to face, and without courage, they will never outlast the enemy.

A REVIEW OF FEAR IN THE BIBLE

Man has always been a fearing creature. In the Old Testament, Adam and Eve feared God and hid in the Garden (Genesis 3:8); Abraham had to be told not to fear God (Genesis 15:1); the children of Israel feared God's voice at Sinai (Exodus 19:16); the ten spies spread fear throughout the ranks of God's people (Numbers 13:1-16); Twenty-two thousand cowards left Gideon's army (Jude 7:3; cf. Deuteronomy 20:8); Israel's army feared the Philistines (I Samuel 17:11, 24); Saul feared David (I Samuel 18:12) and the Philistines (I Samuel 28:5, 20); and Hezekiah feared Sennacherib (II Kings 19:8-19). The thing that Job greatly feared came upon him (3:25) and the man who grows old without God learns to fear everything (Ecclesiastes 12:5).

In the New Testament, the disciples feared a storm (Matthew 8:26), what they thought was a ghost (Matthew 14:26) and a mob in Gethsemane's Garden (Matthew 26:56). The one talent man hid his talent because he was afraid (Matthew 25:25). The grave watchers fainted in fear when the angels rolled away the stone (Matthew 28:4). Nicodemus came to Jesus by night (John 3:1) and Joseph of Arimathea was a secret disciple (John

19:38). Peter followed afar off (Luke 22:54). Apparently, John Mark lost his courage when crossing the mountains of Perga as he turned back on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:13). John was afraid when he had seen a vision (Revelation 1:17).

THE RESULTS OF FEAR IN OUR LIVES

Fear can cause indecisiveness. Some would not confess Christ for fear of public opinion (John 12:42; cf. Psalm 3:6). To decide not to decide, is to choose to fail (II Thessalonians 1:6-9). "He who walks in another's tracks leaves no footprints" (Reader's Digest). Others refuse to confess sins for fear that others will talk about them (cf. Acts 8:22; James 5:16).

Fear can cripple good works. Many good things never get off the planning table because Christians are afraid of failure (Matthew 25:24-30). The "grasshopper complex" inflicts many congregations (Numbers 13:1-16). As a rabbit caught in the headlights is paralyzed by fear, many churches get over run by evil because leaders are too paralyzed to take a stand.

F.D. Roosevelt told America, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself". He knew the cost and the risks involved in battling the Axis powers in World War II. But he understood that our greatest enemy was our own fear, for fear is the enemy of success.

There is an Eastern legend which says that a pilgrim met the Plague and asked, "Where are you going?" The Plague replied: "I am going to Baghdad to kill five thousand people." A few days later the pilgrim met the Plague again and charged him with killing fifty thousand instead of five. "Oh, no!" said the Plague, "I killed only five thousand; the others died of fear."

Seneca's statement is true: "It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that they are difficult."

Fear can cause one to be ashamed of the Gospel (Romans 1:16; Galatians 4:16). One retorted, "Silence is golden, but sometimes it is just plain yellow." T.B. Larimore used to say, "I would be afraid to be ashamed and ashamed to be afraid." Fear can cause one to "flee to Egypt" as it did Urijah (Jeremiah 26:21). It causes Christians to remain quiet when a brother is deserving of a rebuke (cf. Jeremiah 1:8; Ezekiel 2:6; Galatians 2:11) or needs to be made aware of a personal offense (Matthew

18:15-18). Paul said that Timothy had not been given the spirit of fear or cowardice (II Timothy 2:7), and neither have God's people today.

Fear causes some to fail to develop their talents. How many might now be qualified to be elders, deacons, teachers, soul winners, or song leaders if they did not fear failure? (Matthew 25:24-30; James 4:17).

Fear causes some to lie (Joshua 9:24). How many lies have been told because one fears the consequences of telling the truth? One lie leads to another and they all lead to hell (Revelation 21:8).

THE REMEDY FOR FEAR IS FAITH

Courage has always been attributed to faith. The old Caleb was ready to face giants because he knew the Lord would be with him (Joshua 14:12). The young David's courage waxed strong as he said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (I Samuel 17:32).

The three Hebrew youths resolved to burn rather than turn (if God chose not to save them) Daniel 3:17, 18). Daniel decided prayer was worth a night in the lion's den, and opened his windows to pray as he always had (Daniel 6:10, 11). A Bible school teacher asked her students why Daniel was not eaten by the lions? One little boy replied, "Because he was all backbone!"

Vashti and Esther demonstrated that women can manifest courage (Esther 1:1-22; 4:8, 16). Ezra's faith in God enabled him to lead in rebuilding the temple in the face of Tatnai, Shetharboznai and the Apharsachites who vigorously opposed him (Ezra 5:6-11).

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus showed a change of heart by boldly craving the body of Jesus that it might be given a decent burial (Mark 15:43; John 19:38, 39). The apostles were ready to be imprisoned and die rather than disobey God (Acts 4:18-21, 29, 31; 5:29, 33). Paul showed courage in rebuking a fellow apostle who had fallen into sin (Galatians 2:11-14).

As with the fearful disciples on Galilee, Christ wants us to be brave, when facing the storms of life (Matthew 8:26). It may be the storm of temptation when we feel we just cannot go on (I Corinthians 10:13). It may be the storm of loneliness (Matthew

28:20). It may be a storm of pain as our bodies face disease, injury, or old age (Acts 7:59; II Corinthians 11:22-28; Philemon 9; Ezekiel 18:26). It may be the storm of financial reverses (Revelation 2:9). It may be a storm of persecution for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:10, 11; 10:28; II Timothy 3:12; Revelation 2:9, 10, 24). It may be a storm of marital trouble or parental problems (I Samuel 25:3-35; Leviticus 10:1-3).

Fear is a serious problem, because it indicates a "little faith." It can be soul-damning, for the "fearful" are among those listed in "Hell's Hall of Fame" (Revelation 21:8). Let each Christian summon his courage and wage a winning warfare!

The Convictions Of The Lost

NEAL POLLARD

The lost are convicted, too. Do not let anyone get away with saying that they are not. Some of the strongest beliefs held, some of the most fully persuaded minds, and some of the most determined hearts are attached to lost individuals. Even in the Bible, one finds the deepest rooted convictions in the heart of the alien sinner. If one wants to find a people wholly dedicated, he should take a trip into Noah's world (see Genesis 6:5). If one wants to find a people completely set in a given pursuit, he should visit with King Solomon about the sons of men (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

Now, we should abhor rather than admire the lifestyle of the lost. This statement, if it has ever been true, applies to the people who spread themselves around Pilate's judgment seat. Grounded in their hatred and jealousy of Jesus, the chief priests, the elders, and the persuaded multitude had as their singular focus the destruction of Jesus. They wanted Him gone, and any way they could do this was the way that they were going to try. The rulers of the people had tried to ridicule, embarrass, trap, frustrate, tempt, and discourage Him, but they had failed. One would think that, after three and a half years of trying, they would have given up on their task. But, they were convicted.

While we hold them in contempt and view them with pity because of their wretched sinfulness, let us also notice that the

mob who finally "got rid of Jesus" (actually, they fulfilled God's scheme for their and our redemption) was a crowd from whom we could learn a few lessons.

THEY WERE UNITED (Matthew 27:22)

Pilate asked them what he should do with Jesus Christ. All of them said, "Let him be crucified." No dissension is recorded by Matthew. Together, they forced a Roman governor to submit to their wishes. How unfortunate that they were united to do evil.

When the righteous are united under the proper standard (Ephesians 4:13), "how good and how pleasant it is. . ." (Psalm 133:1). Think of the untold good Christ's disciples can do under the banner of brotherly love (Hebrews 13:1), outdone only by our love, devotion, and obedience to the Lord (Hebrews 5:9).

THEY WERE DECISIVE (Matthew 27:21, 22)

There were no long committee meetings. There were no endless business meetings. They did not vacillate in this moment of decision. Pilate knew who they wanted released. Though iniquitous, their decision was most expedient for their stated goal.

The Lord's church in most places does an adequate job of planning its local work. Alas, in some cases, their best laid plans get lost somewhere between the forming and the fulfilling. No congregation wants to rashly enter any endeavor—whether it be picking up the support of an extra missionary or the purchase of a new songbook. Yet, at times, the church is overcautious and ponderous in discharging its responsibilities. Surely God was thrilled at the decisive way the disciples in the early church mobilized, spread the gospel, and reached the lost. The book of Acts is the model of decisiveness for today's church.

THEY ACCEPTED RESPONSIBILITY (Matthew 27:25)

Pilate wanted to know who was going to take moral responsibility for killing the just Jesus (24). Seemingly without hesitation, "all the people. . . said, His blood be on us, and on our children." They collectively pointed the finger of guilt toward themselves. Later, when Peter's Pentecost preaching pricked their hearts, in a different way they took responsibility for this heinous act (Acts 2:36-37).

Every person must take responsibility for his actions. Everyone will reap what he, individually, has sown (Galatians 6:7-8). In the congregational setting, each autonomous body must accept responsibility for what goes on among its members. When congregations individually begin to accept responsibility for themselves, heretofore "taboo"(?) subjects like church discipline, modesty, fornication, social drinking, unscriptural divorce and remarriage, and the like will again be addressed courageously and frequently from the pulpit, the eldership, the Bible classrooms, and the general membership.

We do not admire those responsible for slaying the sinless Savior. They were callous-hearted wretches darkened by the night of sin. However, they, amidst their bleak chore, teach us the power of a united people ready and eager to stand accountable for what they decided to do. Churches will grow who follow God's blueprint for His Kingdom with enthusiasm and conviction. Let us maintain our convictions in "well doing" (Galatians 6:9).

Did Christ Die In Vain?

JOHNNY RAMSEY

In the book of Galatians, Paul makes it clear that our Lord went to the cross in vain if Judaism was still the standard to follow. Later in that same epistle, the great apostle stated that he only gloried in the events of Calvary. In Hebrews 2:9 the inspired penman reminds us that Jesus tasted of death for every man by the grace of God! The tragic events of Golgotha became the sterling hope for a lost and dying world. The most important moment in history was the death of our Savior and the efficacy of His blood; the dearest price ever paid for redemption.

"Oh Cross, that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to hide from Thee.
I lay in dust life's glory dead
And, from the ground, there blossoms red
Life—that shall endless be!"

People today who still pay allegiance to the Old Testament or the Ten Commandments evidently have not read and applied several succinct passages and principles. Here are five valuable

thoughts that magnify the necessity of following the covenant sealed in the blood of Christ: Hebrews 10:9, 10; Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 13:20; Romans 7:4-7; II Corinthians 3. These dynamic verses, in clarion tones, proclaim that Jesus died to take away the first covenant and establish the second. His blood ushered in the New Testament, which is everlasting. It will not be replaced, removed or superseded. We are dead to the law given at Sinai and are directly answerable to a more glorious arrangement that deals with attitudes and motives as well as the commands of the Gospel by which we shall be judged (Romans 2:16). The words of Christ (John 12:48) and not the life and teachings of Moses, Abraham and David will face us in the final day!

The Redeemer died in vain if we think we can earn a place in heaven. He gave Himself for our sins (Galatians 1:4), and by His stripes we are healed (I Peter 2:25). Grace and mercy form the roadway to glory (Acts 20:24; Titus 3:5-7). Pardon and cleansing emanate from God's throne and not our feelings (Jeremiah 10:23). The heavenly Father did not send the Son to condemn but, rather, to save (John 3:17; I John 4:14):

“Out of the ivory palaces
Into a world of woe
Only His great eternal love
Made my Savior go.”

Grateful recipients of such immeasurable compassion will always be ready to obey commands issued by the One who bore our sins in His own body (I Peter 2:24). Many verses clearly etch upon sincere hearts the joy of doing the will of God lest Jesus died in vain. Some are: John 15:13, 14; I John 2:4; 5:3; Hebrews 5:9; Revelation 22:14; Acts 2:36-42.

Christ died in vain at least for those who reject His will, if His followers war against themselves, break the Savior's heart and violate His prayer in John 17:20, 21. Christ did not leave the beauty of heaven and come vicariously to earth to see the cause of redemption rent asunder by petty people and shallow brethren. While the world struggles in the throes of Satan, how can the Lord's army be shattered by division and animosity between its soldiers and effectively tell the world the sweet story of salvation? When we reflect upon the marvelous words of an old gospel song, may we determine that Christ did not die in vain. Let us, in the harmony and beauty of the glad tidings we

share, go forth as a solid garrison of loyal troops, in the name of Jesus, to conquer Satan and sin! "In loving kindness Jesus came /My soul in mercy to reclaim /And from the depths of sin and shame /Through grace He lifted me."

We should stand amazed that heaven cared enough to allow the death of Christ to become a reality. We owe such love our very lives. May it never be said of us that we lived in such ingratitude that Jesus gave Himself in vain. Through the veil of His flesh, we have access to a new and living way (Hebrews 10:19, 20). It is nothing short of a tragedy, therefore, to live and die in sin (John 8:21). The songwriter was very discerning when he wrote, "He bore it all that I might live." Such abundant living (John 10:10) is the result of an unselfish and powerful death (I Corinthians 15:54-57). "In that old rugged Cross /Stained with blood so divine /There is a wondrous attraction for me /For the dear Lamb of God /Left His glory above /To pardon and sanctify me."

The burden of sin was lifted at Calvary. Praise God for such an unspeakable gift (II Corinthians 9:15).

The Foolishness Of God

G.F. RAINES

That which to worldly people seems to be the foolishness of God "is wiser than men" (I Corinthians 1:25). God says: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

Nothing that God requires men to do is foolish, although we are not always wise enough to be able to see the divine wisdom on which his commandments are based.

In as much as God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8), "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

As John W. May says:

"His plans are always reasonable. They are not always fashionable or understandable, but they are reasonable because He is in them. . . The plans of God are always rewarding. We

may do things our way and miserably fail. Plans without God, or plans that ignore Him, are always unfruitful. Though He does not always do things our way, He does things for our good."

Faithful Christians" walk by faith, not by sight" (II Corinthians 5:7), and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Those who substitute their own will for the will of God practice a religion that is as fruitless and useless as sterile desert land. It has been well said that, "We can never have spiritual power until we are implicitly obedient to all that we know of God's will regarding our own personal lives".

Concerning the self-willed Jews' substitution of their own will for God's will, the Apostle Paul said: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:1-3).

Problems Which Can Be Solved

CECIL CORKREN

Having problems is not so bad. Someone has said, "there is a special place reserved for people who are problem free." It is called the cemetery. We know that God writes with a pen that never blots, speaks with a tongue that never slips, and acts with a hand that never fails. Every Christian has problems. Paul is an example of problems on every hand (II Corinthians 11:13-28). He not only had problems with false teachers, but with false brethren. If we are faithful Christian Paul said, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus SHALL SUFFER PERSECUTIONS" (II Timothy 3:12).

We should not have a persecuted complex, but accept the fact that being a Christian there are crosses to bear, and to bear a cross is painful (Matthew 16:24). When problems arise, and they will, follow Peter's suggestion "Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you" (I Peter 5:7).