

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 29

July 1998

No. 3

EDITORIAL

What Does The Bible Teach?

"Then Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." "

Jesus Christ said these words to His apostles, after His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead, and before His ascension into heaven. Further, He said to them, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20).

First, from this passage of the Scripture, we note that Christ said that All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. Why did He say that? Because, from Philippians 2:6 & 7 we learn that when He left heaven and came on earth to save man from sin, He had emptied Himself of all His privileges. But because He humbled Himself so much that He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross, to fulfill the will of God, He was exalted by God and endowed with all authority, in heaven and on earth. What does this mean? It means, He has the authority to tell men what must they do to be saved from sin and thus be able to enter God's heavenly kingdom. It means, He has the authority to tell us how we should live lives, acceptable

to God, on earth. It means, He has the authority to tell us what church we ought to belong to. It means, He has the authority to tell us how should we worship acceptably to God. And, it also means that whatsoever we do religiously to honour and please God, it must be authorised by Christ.

Next, Christ said to the disciples that because He has all the authority in heaven and on earth, therefore, they must go everywhere and make disciples or learner by teaching them, and when they believe then baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Another writer of this account put these things in the Bible in this way: "And he said to them, 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 16:16). In other words, Christ authorized that those who believe, after learning, should be baptized, immersed in water (Romans 6:3,4; Acts 8:35-39; Colossians 2:12), for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), in the name of the God-head (Roman 1:20; Colossians 2:9).

Further, they were commanded to teach them, the baptized ones, to observe all things that Christ had commanded or taught them, the apostles. There were things Christ had taught them while He was with them, but there were many other things which He chose to teach them later through His Holy Spirit whom He was going to send to them, after His departure from earth. He had told them: "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things; and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." Again, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify me, for He will take of what is mine and declare it to you." (John 14:25,26 & 16:12-14). Inferentially, whatever was written in the New Testament of Christ was written by His authority by men who were inspired of the Holy Spirit. (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21). These things were first taught to them who had believed in Christ, had repented of sins, had confessed Him the Son of God, and were baptized to be saved; and they were further instructed, as Christ had required of them, to do likewise to others. That has

continued, and has prevailed until this day. Also, those things were written and circulated amongst Christians, who composed the church of Christ in different places; and then all of those inspired writings were compiled in twenty-seven books and were called The New Testament of Christ, as we have them today in the Bible.

We need to remember however, that all authority in religious matters is still with Christ today. He has not given that authority to any man on earth. If we want to follow Christ alone, then we must consult His New Testament to know the answer of such questions: What must one do to be saved or to have the hope of heavenly eternal life? Of which church one must be a member of? In what way must one worship to be acceptable to God? Are there any special religious days that God has authorised for me to observe? As a follower of Christ by what name should I be called? Let us honour the authority of Christ in our lives, by doing those things that He has commanded in His book. "Therefore," Christ has said, "whoever confesses me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, him I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32,33). The only way to confess Christ is to do those things which He has commanded, and the only way to deny Christ is not to do those things which He has commanded.

Do We All Receive The Baptism Of The Holy Spirit ?

J.C. CHOATE

Many believe that all who obey the Lord receive, or *should receive*, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Believing this, they conclude that this gives them the power to do miraculous things as the apostles did in their day. To convince themselves and others of this, they attempt to prove that the 120 believers of Acts 1:15 received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, even as the apostles did, in Acts 2:1-4.

Please consider these questions and answers:

1. *Who was promised the Comforter or Holy Spirit before*

the Lord's departure from this world.

Answer: Speaking to *the apostles*, Christ said, "*But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning*" [not every person of the 120 had been with Christ from the beginning] (John 15:26,27). Again, speaking to the eleven apostles who were gathered with Him (Acts 1:2,4) on the Mount of Olives just before His ascension to heaven, Jesus said, "*And, behold, I will send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem, until you be endued with power from on high*" (Luke 24:49). Also read Acts 1:8.

2. *Did the 120 disciples of Acts 1 receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?*

Answer: Reading through the first and second chapters of Acts, one can readily see that the apostles were the focal point. The original manuscript of Scriptures was not divided into chapters and verses. It read, from Acts 1:26 concerning Matthias, the man chosen to replace Judas, that he was "*numbered with the eleven apostles. Now when the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they [the apostles] were all with one accord in one place . . . and they were all [the apostles] filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance . . .*" (Acts 2:1,4).

The listeners marveled at hearing these varied languages, and they asked, "*Look are not all these who speak Galileans?*" (v. 7). Not all the 120 would have been Galileans, but the apostles were from Galilee. They were the ones who had been promised the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and they were the ones who received Him in this miraculous way.

3. *Was "the gift of the Holy Spirit", as promised to the multitude in acts 2:38, the same as the miraculous baptism of the Holy Spirit?*

Answer: No, it was simply the giving of the Holy Spirit Himself, *the renewal of spiritual life within the obedient*, given to all who are scripturally baptized (Acts 5:32).

4. *Some people think that on the day of Pentecost all believers received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the accompanying power to do miracles. If so, why was it necessary for the apostles to lay their hands on the seven disciples chosen for special service in Acts 6:3-6, in order for them to have*

miraculous power?

Answer: Actually, only the apostles had received the **baptism of the Holy Spirit**, while all other had been **baptized only in water**, receiving the forgiveness of sins and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Only the apostles had the power to do miracles. Neither the 120 of Acts 1:15 nor the 3000 of Acts 2:41 had received *the baptism of the Holy Spirit as the apostles had*.

Yet in Acts 6:1-8, when the apostles asked that seven good men be chosen to serve the people, they designated that they be "*men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom . . .*" It is clear that these men had already received the Holy Spirit, *the gift of the Holy Spirit as promised in Acts 2:38*, the non-miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit; but they had not received any *miraculous power* through the Holy Spirit. It was only after these men were chosen and the apostles laid their hands on them that they were able to perform miracles! (Acts 6:8; 8:5,6).

5. *Today, do believers in Christ receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit?*

Answer: No. Because that special baptism was promised and given only to the apostles (representing the Jewish people) and to Cornelius and his household (representative of Gentiles). Other than these, there are no instances recorded in the Scriptures. They could select certain worthy disciples and lay their hands on them, giving them individual miraculous gifts, but those people could not give the gifts to others (Acts 6:6; 8:14-17).

This limited the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit to the first century, in the infancy of the church, and while the Scriptures were in the process of being written and confirmed by the miraculous power of the writers.

6. *What do people receive today when they are baptized?*

Answer: When we obey the Lord, we receive the promised *gift of the Holy Spirit*, as recorded in Acts 2:38, which involves no miraculous power.

Why do we not receive miraculous power today? Because we have the confirmed word of God to guide us (Mark 16:16; John 20:30,31), and faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), not through seeing a miracle.

Search for Truth The Church and the Kingdom?

BETTY BURTON CHOATE

"Well, this is interesting," Andrew remarked looking at the listing in their new concordance. "In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there's a lot said about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. But from Acts to the end of the New Testament, the church is talked about much more than the kingdom, though there are still many references to the kingdom in those books. Are they the same thing, or different?"

"Let's look up some of the verses and see if we can tell," suggested Rachel.

"The first mention of the church is in Matthew 16:18. Jesus had asked the disciples who they believed He was, and Peter said, '*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*'. Then Jesus blessed Peter and said, '*... on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades, shall not prevail against it.*' "

"But look at the next verse!" Rachel exclaimed. "*And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. . .*" Does that mean that the kingdom *is* the church?

"I'm not sure yet," Andrew answered, "but in this last verse in Matthew 16, Jesus promised that the kingdom would come with power during their lifetime."

"The concordance gives Acts 2:47 as another verse about the church. '*And the Lord added to the church daily those that were being saved.*' Oh, Andrew, this is *really important!*" Rachel exclaimed. "Somewhere between the verse in Matthew and this one in Acts, *the church that Jesus had promised to build was begun*, because God was *adding* people to it, and *He couldn't add them to something that wasn't there!*"

"Let's go back to the beginning of Acts and see what happened," suggested Andrew. "In verse 3, before Jesus went back to heaven, He was talking to the apostles about the kingdom. Then in verse 6, Peter asked if Jesus was about to restore the kingdom of Israel. Jesus said they should wait in

Jerusalem, '... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you ...' That's the same wording He used in Matthew 16, where he promised that the kingdom would come with power during their lifetime! I think that's what was about to happen! The kingdom was about to come!"

"But verse 47 says God added people to the church, not the kingdom!" objected Rachel.

"The way the words are used, first one and then the other, it sounds like they must be the same thing," Andrew said thoughtfully. "Jesus had promised that the kingdom would come with the power of the Holy Spirit. Here in the first part of Acts 2, it says the Holy Spirit came on the apostles, and they began to preach. Then at the end of their sermon, if God added people to the church they must be the same thing!"

"But, Andrew, is that church in the world today? Can we be members of it?"

"I don't know. There's not any name given here—it was Jesus' church, but I don't know of one by that name now. We'll ask the preachers here about that."

"Let's pretend we were there on that first day, Andrew. Would we have been convinced by the apostles' words that Jesus is God's Son?" Rachel asked.

"Peter showed that Jesus' life and death fulfilled prophecies that had been written about Him. It was a strong sermon because at the end of it, when he accused the listeners of crucifying the Son of God, and then said that God had brought Him from the dead and had made Him both Lord and Christ, it says, '*Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"*'"

"If we had been in that group and had asked that question, what would we have heard Peter answer?" asked Rachel eagerly, looking ahead to the next verses. "*Reprint, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*"

"That sounds simple enough," Andrew agreed. "They believed what Peter preached. When they asked what they should do, he said, 'repent' and 'be baptized'. Then they would be forgiven of their sins and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We'll have to study more to find out just what that gift

was, or what it meant in their lives. But the instructions about what *they were to do* are very easy to understand."

"*They* didn't have any problem understanding," Rachel observed. "In verse 41 it says that 3000 were baptized and were added to the group. Then verse 47 tells *how they were added*—by God, Himself.

"I think we've learned some very important truths tonight," Andrew said. "Sunday morning let's go to St. Mary's and maybe we can ask the priest about these things. Then Sunday night we'll go to your Baptist church and see what they say about the church here in Acts 2."

"I think that will help us a lot," Rachel agreed. "I know! Just now I'll look in the concordance and see all the different churches that are listed there! Hm-m-m . . . Andrew, *the Catholic church is not even in here!*"

"Maybe it's 'Roman Catholic'," suggested Andrew.

Why, it's not here at all!" Rachel said, puzzled. "Isn't the Catholic church supposed to be the oldest and biggest church? Why isn't it in the Bible?"

"I don't know," admitted Andrew. "What about the Baptist church?"

"I see *baptism, baptized*,—ah, here is *baptist*, talking about John the Baptist. Was he in the Baptist church?"

"I don't know," Andrew answered again. "But—yes, I remember John was killed even before Jesus promised to start His church! Maybe "the baptist" just means that he baptized people. There wasn't anything said about him starting a church."

"I'm going to look for some of the other churches," Rachel said, turning pages in the concordance. "Why, I'm not finding the Methodist church, or the Pentecostal church, or the Nazarene church, or the Lutheran church, or the Jehovah's Witnesses! Why aren't they in here, Andrew, if they are teaching only what the Bible says?"

"I don't know that, either," Andrew said. "We'll have to ask some of the preachers."

"But we want to be careful," Rachel remembered. "You know Jesus said that even religious leaders can be wolves in sheep's clothing. If their churches are not even named in the Bible, I'm wondering if there will be other things they teach that aren't there either. I keep remembering how many times I've heard people say, 'The church is not important—join whichever

church you like best. "But if Jesus started His church, then surely *His church is important!*"

To be Continued

Cheo, Rantizo And Baptizo

FRANCIS DAVID

When Jesus was on this earth, he gave a great commission to his people and while giving this commission He said: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" and with this authority he said "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, BAPTIZING them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:18-19). A lot of my friends say that baptism is not important but here it is crystal clear when Jesus said you go, make disciples and baptise them. Don't you think that baptism is a command of God and therefore should not be rejected. We must know that one has to be baptised in order to be saved. Baptism is included in the plan of salvation. Jesus while talking to his disciples said like this: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16). He says he who believes and baptised will be saved. Believe plus Baptism is equal to salvation. How plainer can we make this statement. It is so simple and plain. People teach and say that if you believe and just accept Him as your personal saviour, you will be saved. For baptism, they say its upto you if you want to be baptised, you can do it later.

Some teach baptism is an outward sign and it is not important. God says it is essential but man says it is not important. God says in His word that Baptism saves us but man says it does not. (I Peter 3:21). Whom should we obey God or man? There are some who get angry over the command of baptism. Some say please don't talk about it.

Another unusual thing that people are teaching in the religious world is this that there are different modes of baptism. They might say, there are three kinds which one you want. The new testament was written in the greek language and in greek

there are three words which people generally associate with baptism. The three words are Cheo, Rantizo and baptizo. Cheo means to pour water and Rantizo means to sprinkle water and the meaning of Baptizo is to bury or immerse. According to some religious people Cheo and Rantizo can be used for baptism. But according to the Scriptures Cheo and Rantizo cannot be associated with baptism because baptism itself means burial.

Wherever in the Bible the word baptism is used its used as burial, and not as to pour water or sprinkle water. If you want to baptise a person you need a lot of water but if you want to use the method of cheo or rantizo then you don't need much water. So we see, these two methods cannot be used for baptism. In Acts chapter eight we read about a man who was from Ethiopia and he wanted to be baptised. When Philip was baptising him he did not say: "Now sir, I have three methods, which one you want? If you read the account you will see the record says that they both went into the water and Philip baptised him. The Bible does not talk about modes of baptism. There is only one baptism and that is only burial in water. Apostle Paul while writing to the christians at Rome reminds them that they were BURIED with him through BAPTISM into death, that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom. 6:4). The Bible says we are buried with him in BAPTISM. (Col. 2:12). In greek for baptism the word is baptizo and not cheo or rantizo. Perhaps, you might say, when I was a baby I was baptised. My parents took me to the pastor or priest and he baptised me. Was it really the baptism according to the scriptures? No, not at all. It was cheo or rantizo and not baptizo. Infact When you were a baby you were not the subject for baptism. Baptism is for adults and not for little babies. A little baby is innocent. Baptism is for sinners, those who are accountable. Baptism is for washing away one's sins. (Acts. 22:16). Are you being truly baptised as the Bible says?

Why Do The Wicked Prosper?

JOHNNY RAMSEY

An ancient Greek thought-provokingly said: "Life is a theater in which the worst people often have the best seats." It is a

strange phenomenon to many that evil men do seem to have the best of it. Even the Psalmist and Jeremiah asked: "Why do the wicked prosper?" As the fifth seal was broken in the apocalypse John beheld martyrs who mouthed essentially that same ageless question. They wanted to know how long sinful men would dominate the affairs of earth! Any person, with average curiosity, has pondered this problem of life. The Bible is abundantly clear in telling us that the Creator graciously bestows sunshine, rain and bountiful crops upon all mankind (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:17). What then is the answer to the riddle?

Why do the ungodly prosper? Perhaps the following points will clarify the issue:

I. DO THEY REALLY PROSPER ?

I deny that sinful men actually have true prosperity. The meek inherit the genuine pleasures of earth. Uncouth men like Al Capone may have acquired untold wealth financially, but they lived in constant fear of assassination or imprisonment. In Capone's "roaring twenties" a humble milkman in Chicago could sleep better at night than the bootleg baron of America. Wicked men seldom know the tranquil joys of the quiet, unadorned life. In many ways it is still true that the best things in life are free. Andrew Carnegie stated that "rich men seldom smile and never sing." There is another thought to ponder—The real point is this: What do the unrighteous miss in their all-out quest for material prosperity?

II. IN WHAT DO THEY PROSPER ?

It cannot be successfully affirmed that men of evil intent prosper in any worthwhile endeavour. Should they engage in charitable enterprise to cover their atrocities they rob themselves so the true joy of serving others in sincerity. They certainly do not prosper in building homes that bless a community or in leading lost souls from darkness into light. Their influence is forever opposed to those dimensions of life that clearly bring the peace that passeth all understanding (Phil. 4:7). When this earth and its works are burned up and dissolved they will realize the vanity of their emphasis in life. (Rev. 18:17).

III. WHAT IS THE DURATION OF THIS PROSPERITY ?

Since the wicked prosper in earthly things and have no treasures "laid up in heaven" (Matt. 6:20) they must adopt the

Epicurean philosophy of "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." But J. Paul Getty, the world's richest person, freely admitted twenty years ago: "I am miserable. You can just paint the town red so many times and get drunk just so many times. Then you sit at home alone and realize that money cannot buy happiness." A humble Christian, on a vegetable farm, doing the best he can do with what he has, often has that elusive quality called happiness that escapes the grasping clutches of those whose love of money chokes them (Luke 8:14). In AESOP'S FABLES one can read these lines: "He that serves God for money will serve the Devil for better wages." Truly, "success" has ruined many a man!

IV. SHOULD THE RIGHTEOUS REALLY CARE ?

In view of all that we have said it really reflects upon our Christianity for us to even concern ourselves with the rather selfish inquiry: "Why do the wicked prosper?" Surely we are not interested in that kind of prosperity. Long fellow's Psalm of life has the classic reminder:

"Life is real! Life is earnest! And the grave is not its goal 'Dust thou art; to dust returneth' Was not spoken of the soul".

As John Wycliffe affirmed so we earnestly believe: "In the end, truth will conquer!"

Un-Denominational Christianity

GLENN COLLEY

For a man to say that he is member of a particular denomination, is to suggest something which most folks have never seriously considered. They have accepted the concept of denominationalism for so long that it comes as second nature to them. They reason that it must be God's will because so many respected people in the system called "denominationalism."

What does the word "denomination" means?

Webster says that the denominate is, "Having a definite name or designation." In the religious world it implies the idea that many different religious bodies, or sects, having declared and named themselves, are independent of all other "Christian"

bodies. Nevertheless, they all believe that one can go to heaven from any of the various denominations. While they would like for people to join their denomination, they don't believe membership in their sect is essential for going to heaven. One sect is as good as another for going to heaven. To put it another way, they view the church of the New Testament as a big circle divided like a pie. The whole represents the church, and each piece represents a different denomination.

The vast majority of folks in these denominations have never really considered what the Bible has to say about Christians and the church. If they did, and they truly wanted to please God, they would leave the denominational idea and seek to follow the simple New Testament pattern. The New Testament teaches church membership which is absolutely un-denominational.

Did you know that a man today can be a faithful Christian, actively serve Jesus Christ, live his life, die and then go home to heaven for eternity, having never joined any denomination? It is true. The Bible doesn't teach membership in denominations. It does teach us about the church, but it isn't many divided sects, it is one church—and it belongs to Jesus.

In Ephesians 4 we read a list of seven "ones." That is, seven things of which there is only one. Pay attention to this passage. A man simply cannot believe in the concept of denominationalism and also believe this passage. Ephesians 4:4-6—"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." There are plainly as many bodies as there are Gods! There is one God. There is one body. That body is the church. In that same book of Ephesians, chapter one, verse twenty-two, Paul says, "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all."

There is a New Testament example of Christians who began "denominating." The Corinthians. They decided to divide into different groups, or sects, and name themselves after various different preachers of the Word. Paul leaves no room for confusion as he responds to this arrangement which is interestingly similar to the denominational arrangement today: 1 Corinthians 1:10-15—"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the

name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. "For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house* of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius, "Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name." What does God want? Many different churches, divided by different names and doctrines as we have today? Certainly not! This passage says, ". . . speak the same thing . . . same mind . . . same judgment." It does not say "many divisions are good," it says, ". . . no divisions . . ."

When a man is scripturally baptized, the Lord adds him to the church. Later in the letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond of free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:13). Remember, that body is His church. Colossians 1:18 says, "And he is the head of the body, the church . . ."

The church of Christ taught and described in the New Testament, is not a denomination. The Bible no where calls it that. It is simply the church.

May we all study our Bibles and be faithful members of the church of *Christ's* choice.

On A Hill Too Far Away

NEAL POLLARD

A young Christian rationalizes his cursing, expressing his "need" to fit in with his peers. Someone habitually falls asleep during Bible study or worship. A Christian woman tends to talk bad to her friend about their mutual companion. A middle-aged couple forms the habit of missing the evening assemblies to be with friends or pursue other interests. Several Christians silently fret over their inability to focus while partaking of the Lord's

Supper. Some of the brethren seem indifferent to the work of the church. What is happening with these precious children of God?

Several scenarios have been portrayed, but there is in them but a single issue. Why do people, even Christians, do wrong or fail to do right? The first several words of George Bennard's famous hymn are, "On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame . . ." So, what does one do when it seems that Christ died on a hill *too far away*?

The most dangerous thing that can happen to anyone is for the cross of Christ to lose its meaning. It *can* lose its meaning for people. Paul said, "For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect" (1 Corinthians 1:17).

Does the cross have much meaning for the Christian's friends and colleagues whose words, and actions assault that for which the cross stands? Willful sin is against the cross (cf. Hebrews 6:4-6). People like the ones there in Hebrews hurt Christ all over again because the cross means, if their actions accurately reflect their hearts, little more to them than does a fairy tale or ancient history. Because of a desire to please the world, the Christian can develop the same attitude towards the cross. In this moral quandary, he can choose to be close to the enemies of the cross instead of the one who died there. But, when one chooses the world over Christ, *he* becomes God's enemy, too (cf. Ephesians 8:11; James 4:4).

Perhaps a few brief facts will help children of God, especially when the hill far away seem too far away.

REMEMBER THAT THE CROSS IS REAL

So taught Paul, without equivocation (cf. 1 Corinthians 18:1-4). Contemporaries of the cross attest to its historicity. Atheists and skeptics only have blind eyes for the plain facts because acceptance would inevitably put them in realization of the absolute imperative of obeying the doctrine of the slain Savior (cf. Romans 8:17). But the facts, according to Paul, are simple; namely, Christ really died, He was buried, and He arose! What the Bible teaches the Christ did humanity as a whole and for the individual in particular is *true*! The cross is real.

REMEMBER THAT THE CROSS IS REALLY IMPORTANT !

On the cross Christ died for the sins of everyone (Romans

8:8). He died for the seemingly insignificant, seemingly minor sins. He also died for the big, ugly, embarrassing, shameful sins! *On the cross Christ died to bring man back to God* (Romans 8:34). Because of his sins, man was rejected by God. God wanted nothing to do with any, vile person (note: Romans 3:23). But, because of Christ, anyone can come back to God who obeys Him. *On the cross Christ died to be the ruler of the human heart* (Romans 14:19; Galatians 2:20). *On the cross Christ died to show the individual how much he loves him* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; John 14:23). *On the cross Christ died to open the door to heaven, shut by the separating power of sin* (1 Thessalonians 4:14; Isaiah 59:1-2). Thus, in its importance the cross exceeds all else!

REMEMBER THAT THE CROSS IS REALLY SPECIAL

Only Christ could have hung there. No one else was qualified. Only the blood of Christ was right in God's sight for cleansing man from his ugly sins. Only His love, as shown by the cross, is strong enough to break one's love of this world.

REMEMBER THAT THE CROSS WAS REALLY NECESSARY

Christ had to die to satisfy God's perfect justice. Though *all* sin, no sinner, of himself, has anything to offer God to satisfy His just requirements. Everyone needs what Christ gave on that hill far away (cf. Ephesians 2:8-9). There's no good news to obey without the cross (cf. Romans 1:16; Romans 5:5-9). If no cross, then no hope, no joy, and no heaven!!

What can God's child do when the cross seems so distant from him in his spiritual life? Understanding the reality, the importance, the uniqueness, and necessity thereof, he will be prompted to renew his zeal and dedication to the suffering servant who died there for him (Hebrews 5:8-9). Matchless love led God to Calvary, it is love that leads man back to Calvary.

It's The Thought That Counts

CHUCK WEBSTER

When your child or spouse searches long and hard for the perfect gift and comes up short, who cares? The thought behind

the gift is what's really important. On the other hand, suppose you tell your son to be sure and take out the garbage before going to school. You come home from work that evening and find the garbage right where it was that morning. You confront your son who responds by saying, "Well, I thought about it, but never got around to it." It's the thought that counts, right? Hardly. Sometimes the thought is sufficient; Sometimes it's not. The same is true in religion.

God cares about our thoughts. On at least eight different occasions, Jesus explicitly asked people around Him about their thoughts (cf. Mt. 9:4; 17:25; 18:12; 21:28; 22:42; 26:53; Lk. 10:36; 13:4). He placed a great deal of emphasis on the heart because it is there that thoughts and, as a result, actions originate (cf. Mt. 5:28; 12:34-35). Paul admonished the Philippians to guard their thoughts carefully, thinking on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8) David cried out, "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD" (Psalm 19:14). Why are thoughts so important? Because if we're going to act right, we must first get our thoughts right.

Although right thinking is vital in our relationship to God, it's not sufficient. Right thinking must lead to right doing, right living, right serving. It's possible for thoughts to be pure and actions to be wrong. Consider Cornelius. No one would question his heart. Luke calls him "a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, [and who] gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always" (Acts 10:2). But was that sufficient? Not by itself, for God led Peter to his house, and Cornelius obeyed the gospel after hearing Peter's sermon. At what point was Cornelius saved? When he got his thoughts right? Or when he obeyed? With Cornelius, the thought counted, but only as it led to obedience.

Saul of Tarsus was a man who was living according to his conscience (Acts 23:1). He thought he was doing right. He thought he was pleasing the Lord. He thought God was looking down on his actions with pleasure... But he was wrong. Although his thoughts were right as he was tearing down the Lord's church, his actions were wrong. But his good heart led him to accept the truth when confronted with it, and as a result he became one of the greatest preachers of all time (Acts 9:1-31).

So what's the answer? Is it the thought that counts? Up to a point. But in order to please God, good thoughts must lead to good actions. Maybe we ought to rephrase the saying just a little when we apply it to serving God: "It's the thought *and* life that counts."

Is It The Real Thing?

DAVID THURMAN

Not long ago a large group calling themselves Heaven's Gate committed mass suicide in order to join a spaceship trailing behind the Hale-Bopp comet. As dozens of bodies were discovered, the public was shocked and outraged. Magazine articles and television shows explored and examined the cult. Jokes were made by every comedian.

Many took another look at all religions. When cultists do foolish things in the name of their particular doctrines, some people put all believers in the same category. As a result, Christianity and faith get criticized along with the cult.

However, the Bible does offer evidence that will demonstrate to any honest person the difference between a foolish cult and the real thing. When Jesus lived on the earth, He lived a genuine and powerful life. He was not some kook offering "pie in the sky" hopes. By looking at His life and teachings we can learn the difference between real faith and fake religion.

DO PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM THE FAITH?

A simple distinction between fake and genuine religion is the question of benefits. When Jesus taught and ministered, people's lives always improved. Peter's mother-in-law was healed (Mark 1:30-31). A leper was healed (Mark 1:40-45). Sinners were restored, such as Zaccheus (Luke 19:1-10) and Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2) who had demons cast out of her. Everywhere Jesus went He left people whose lives were better.

This grew out of Jesus' love for people. Even when He wanted to get away to be alone, His concern for people caused Him to act in their behalf. *"And He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest awhile'. (For there were*

many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves. And the people saw them going and many recognized them, and they ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. And disembarking, He saw a great multitude, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:31-34). Jesus tried to get away from the crowd, but His compassion made Him take time to teach. Even though they were making it impossible to even stop for dinner, Jesus loved people too much to not help them. The rest of the story describes the feeding of the 5,000, in which that whole crowd ate from a few loaves and fishes, again, the result of being with Jesus.

Anything you come in contact with a religion or faith, watch and see if people's lives are improved by that faith. In genuine Christianity, people are not hurt nor killed, nor do they take their lives. Instead, their lives are improved, empowered and made better. That is what Jesus did. That is what His genuine followers will do.

ARE RELATIONSHIPS BUILT BY THE FAITH?

A second characteristic of Jesus was His teaching on getting along with others. Jesus never asked people to abandon their relationships with others. Instead, He encouraged people to do all that could be done to **heal** relationships. *"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, then come and present your offering" (Matt. 5:23-24).* Jesus wanted people to realize that they couldn't be close to God without first learning how to treat others right. A faith that encourages people to mistreat people or abandon relationships is not a genuine faith.

Look how many times Jesus taught people to get along. We are to love and pray for our enemies (Matt. 5:43-44). We are to forgive those who sin against us (Matt. 6:13-14). We are not to judge or criticize others (Matt. 7:1-5).

It is true that Jesus warned there would be suffering in families because people choose to follow Him. *"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring*

peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household' (Matt. 10:34-36). Jesus warned that following Him would be costly, perhaps even costing broken family relationships. Jesus experienced this Himself, as even His own family members didn't believe in Him (John 7:5). Jesus knew that if you stood up for God and right sometimes people would reject you and your stand.

But unlike cults, Jesus didn't demand that people abandon their homes and families. If there was distance from a family, always it was the family or family members who caused the distance, not the believer. Jesus didn't keep away from his brothers, even though they rejected Him and His message. In other words, true believers heal relationships, using the teachings of Jesus. Others often reject that teaching, which forces the believer to choose between faith and family. But that always comes from the non-believer, not the Christian. In fact, spouses are told to stay with their non-believing partners if at all possible (1 Cor. 7:10-13) and wives married to non-believing husbands should live Christlike lives in front of their spouses (1 Pet. 3:1-2). Religious groups that require you to be cut off from friends and family are not the real thing.

IS GOD'S ENTIRE WORD USED ?

Jesus was familiar with efforts to edit God's word and apply it in self serving ways. Satan tempted Jesus using scripture and Jesus replied using more scripture (Matt. 4:6-7). The Pharisees and Saduccees used various passages and logic to defend their conclusions. Sometimes they were right, many times they were wrong. They could see the rules of the law, but failed to grasp its purpose, which was to help people. So, when Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, all His enemies could see was a man 'working' on the Sabbath. They could not see the good that was done or the suffering that had been relieved. (Mark 3:1-6). Jesus believed and trusted in God's word, but He used and trusted all of it, not just the parts that suited His life or purposes.

Cults often use only those scriptures that support their peculiar thinking. This is the source of all human creeds, when people attempt to refine God's word so it will say more clearly what they want it to say. This was the mistake of the Sadducees

when they tried to trick Jesus concerning the resurrection. Jesus' response speaks volumes concerning cults today. *"You are mistaken, not understanding the scriptures, or the power of God"* (Matt. 22:29).

I can recall meeting with two men from a cult. They picked and chose their verses carefully, ignoring or rejecting any verses that did not comply with their views. In fact, they got angry when I tried to read the entire chapter from which they had chosen one verse. They claimed I couldn't understand it without their help!

DOES THE FAITH ENCOURAGE PERSONAL BELIEF ?

This last point typically underscores a fundamental quality of most cults and is quite different from how Jesus lived. Cults usually claim to have the truth and only they can understand it. If you want to really know about God, or spacecrafts following comets, or whatever, you must use their thinking, their books, their sources.

Jesus merely turned people back to God. When a man asked Jesus how he could inherit eternal life, Jesus responded with, *"What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?"* (Luke 10:26). It looks as if Jesus' first response was always to turn people to God's word, trusting that they could read and understand it for themselves. If they persisted, as this man did in Luke 10, Jesus would go further, often telling a parable. When using parables Jesus said *"To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken from him"* (Matt. 13:11-12). Jesus says that the ability to understand is based on what is in a man's heart, that is, on his openness to the message and his desire to know. People with hard, closed hearts will never get the messages in the parables of the teaching of Jesus. Not because some special person with special insight hasn't explained it, but because they are not ready to hear and learn. Those ready to hear and learn will hear the message. That is why the common people flocked to Jesus. They could hear and understand His teaching.

Any group that denies you can read and understand the Bible for yourself is not a genuine religion. If someone in that

group has written "inspired" explanations of the Bible, then they are denying the message and mission of Jesus. They are not the real thing.

DOES THE FAITH FORGIVE AND RESTORE ?

Perhaps the one great quality that set Jesus apart was His willingness to forgive people. Zaccheus was a tax collector. He was ostracized by his community, not allowed to enter the synagogue. Jesus went to his house to eat (Luke 19:1-10). A woman came to a well and Jesus taught her, even though she was a Samaritan who had been divorced and remarried many times (John 4). Did Jesus condone theft in tax collecting? Not at all. Did the Master condone multiple marriages and divorce? Not at all. But He did love sinners of all kinds and He was willing to spend time with and associate with them.

What about your religion? Does it encourage you to go to sinners? Not to condone any sin, but to demonstrate love to the sinner. Many cults compel their members to disassociate from any people with which they disagree. Jesus was not like that, and neither will His followers be like that.

Jesus came to forgive the world and to restore it to relationship with God. This message of reconciliation is our message as well, if we are the genuine article. Come to God today. Access the blood of Jesus through faith, repentance and immersion in His name. Be reconciled to God, today!

So Great Salvation

W.A. HOLLEY

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"

(Hebrews 2:1-4, KJV).

Hence the salvation in which we are interested was identified and spoken of by the Lord Jesus (Mark 16:15-16). It is a *certified* salvation (Galatians 1:10-12; Hebrews 2:3-4).

Your Bible teaches rather than neglecting your salvation, you should "work out your own salvation." (Philippians 2:12). How does one go about working out his salvation? One does so by obeying those commands of the Lord (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:36-38). After one becomes a child of God one must remain faithful to Him until death (Titus 2:11-12; Revelation 2:10). Backsliders are not working out their salvation!! Salvation has a present and future aspect: Present salvation comes when the sinner is baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:36-38; I Peter 3:20-21); future salvation refers to the day when one is ushered into heaven at the last day (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). Whether we like it or not, I Peter 3:21 says, "Baptism doth also now save us..."

Why is the salvation of our text so great? It is much greater than the salvation of Noah and his family from the flood (Hebrews 11:7). The salvation offered by Christ is far greater than the salvation of Moses and the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 14:13-18, 30). Other salvations might be mentioned, but this will suffice.

The "So Great Salvation" refers to salvation from sin. Matthew 1:21, Jesus came to save his people from their sins." The word *sin* means to miss the mark. "For all have sinned (past tense), and come short of the glory of God (present tense), (Romans 3:23). If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar (I John 1:6-10). Sin represents adversity, humiliation, disgrace, and shame (Galatians 5:19-21). Think of the Young woman and her two little boys!! Think of what could have been: joy, peace, happiness, contentment, and tranquility—a wonderful world!! But alas . . . In one sense one turns his/her life into a hell on earth.

WHAT DOES THIS GREAT SALVATION COST?

(1) It cost God his Son, and it cost Jesus his life (John 3:16; II Corinthians 8:9). Think of the dark scene of Golgotha (Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22). Hebrews 5:7 gives us a description of that ugly scene: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard, in that

he feared.” (See Acts 20:28).

(2) It cost us the appreciation of the value on the soul. ONE soul is worth the value of the whole world (Matthew 16:26) Your soul needs to be saved from eternal death (Matthew 10:28; James 5:19-20). “Receiving the end of your faith, even salvation of your souls” (I Peter 1:9).

(3) The salvation of the soul brings great blessedness of peace and contentment. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul . . .” (Psalm 19:7). Here read the FIRST PSALM and see that there are two ways to live life. Jesus declared. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). Jesus is the way (John 14:6): After the establishment of the church of Christ, those converted to Christ were spoken of as being of “the Way.” (Romans 16:16; Acts 9:2; 16:9,23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). The “Way of the Lord” has never been popular—witness those passages that tell of persecutions even unto death (II Timothy 3:12; II Thessalonians 1:4). Here guilt is removed and joy takes its place.

Great salvation is extended to all sinners. “For the Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus declared, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

(4) The Great Salvation is conditional. The sinner must hear, believe, and obey God’s plan of salvation. One can neglect to obey the truth (Hebrews 2:3; 5:8-9). King Agrippa was almost persuaded to obey Christ but never did (Acts 26:27-29).

Negligence keeps good, moral persons from being saved. They intend to obey before they die, but somehow they never do. One need not be the most lecherous person in town to be lost, but so-called little sins can and will bring damnation unless they are repented of and forsaken. What are some of these little sins? We shall list a few of them: Deceit, slander, using curse words, mistreating one’s wife/husband, temper out of control, difficult to live with, special drinking, and hypocrisy. Look at Ephesians 4:22-32.