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EDITORIAL

When To Sing Without The Accompaniment Of Mechanical Instruments Of Music?

Historically speaking, the music characteristic of the New Testament is the music characteristic of the churches of Christ. What does the New Testament say about the music? There are atleast nine passages in the New Testament which may be cited to show that the New Testament authorises singing only, and that excludes playing of any kind of mechanical instruments of music when we sing praises to God. These are: Matthew 26:30; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; Hebrews 13:15; James 5:13 and Ephesians 5:19. To sing is the specific command of God in the New Testament under which we live today. If, in the New Testament God had said "Make Music." Then only music would have been the specific command, whether it would be vocal or instrumental or both that was upto us to decide. But, since the New Testament says "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19), we are restricted to sing only, when we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Just as it was in the case of Noah before the great universal flood. There, God had told Noah to "Make yourself an ark of *gopherwood*." (Genesis 6:14). God had specified the kind of wood that was to be used in the building of the ark. That itself excluded any other

kind. He didn't have to say to Noah, "Do not use any other kind of wood." Use "Gopherwood." That was enough. In the worship of God, Christians, never, in the beginning, used any kind of mechanical instruments of music; simply because The New Testament teaches to sing. This is a proven fact from the history also, that the church for six hundred years in the post-apostolic period never used mechanical instruments in worship of God. Even leaders of various religious denominations have written and spoken clearly and distinctly against the use of mechanical instruments in the worship of God. Such include, John Calvin, Adam Clarke, John Wesley, Martin Luther, and Charles H. Spurgeon. If there was nothing wrong in the use of mechanical instruments of music in the worship of God then there was no need for such reputed denominational leaders to speak against them. Of course, there are those who try to defend vainly the use of instruments of various kinds with singing of praises to God by using several silly and crafty arguments. But such does not change what the Holy Spirit has specified in God's book of revelation to man.

Why does God require, and why do we sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs? One purpose is to teach and admonish one another through our singing. (Colossians 3:16). Will the playing of mechanical instruments help Christians to teach and admonish? In fact, it often drowns out the words and meanings and keeps us from being taught and admonished and edified. When Christians sing hymns and spiritual songs it is not for the purpose of entertaining ourselves or the audience, putting on a show. Our purpose is to praise and honour and exalt God's name and teach and admonish one another. God want us to worship and praise Him, us, whom He has created, and not what we have made with our skills and hands. That is why the scriptures says to sing and make melody (music) in your heart. (Eph. 5:19).

Whenever and wherever we sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, we need to remember this: Some think that to sing and make melody in your heart applies to Sunday worship only. This is not true. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 or any other scriptures in the Bible does not teach this. Any time, in any place, under whatever circumstances, when we sing psalms or hymns or spiritual songs, the melody (music) is to be made in the heart or the mind, that is, thoughts and feelings of the heart should be brought into harmony with the sentiment of the songs. What is sung is the outgrowth of the word of God that dwells richly in the heart (mind) of the child of God: The purpose of singing is to praise God, and not to entertain ourselves. No

performance of a mechanical instrument can possibly grow out of the word of God in the heart. The use of the mechanical instrument, in fact, hinders and destroys the essential purpose of the worship in song. The sound of the instrument drowns the words sung, and hinders the teaching and admonition. "I will," therefore, said the apostle Paul, at I Corinthians 14:15, "sing with the Spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding." Sing! Yes, Sing!!

When Will Christ Come Again?

J.C. CHOATE

The Bible teaches that Christ will come again, but the question is, when will he come? There are constantly individuals and religious groups that are preaching the Lord's coming is near at hand. They leave the impression that they know the exact date that he is to return. Some even set a date for that day. These are the ones who quit paying their taxes, take their children out of school, and change their pattern of life altogether. When asked why they are doing this, they explain that it is because the Lord is coming. For some unknown reason, those who follow their leader in all of this also give them their money, land, and other valuables. You would think that they would become suspicious when they are told that they will no longer need these material things and therefore they should give those things to them. If the followers don't need such, then why should the leaders need them? It is obviously an easy way to get rich.

There are those who study their Bible and reach the conclusion that there are clues to be found therein that suggests the exact date for the Lord's return. Sometimes this attracts national and even international attention, as was the case a year or two ago when a Korean set such a date. Then when the police arrested him for deceiving a lot of people in a number of countries and taking their money, the news report said that his comment was, "Well, I guess I was wrong." Not only was he wrong but many others have been wrong when the Lord did not come on the dates that they set. Of course others will follow with new dates, and the sad part is that such false prophets get a following, and also get the money of their followers before they are

proven to be fakes. Why are such people so gullible? Had the Lord wanted to let us know the exact date of his return, he would have clearly stated it in his word. He would not have left it clouded in a mysterious puzzle for someone to figure out. But even sadder is the fact that the world as a whole looks on with contempt and with their unbelief strengthened.

In spite of the foregoing, the Lord will come again, When he will come, we do not know, but believe me, he will come again. Christ himself warned of false prophets, and then declared, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." (Matthew 24:36). Now if the Lord does not know the time of the second coming, and if the angels do not know, but only God himself knows that day and hour, then how would you and I know, and how would it be possible for us to set a date for the return of Christ. The very fact that someone sets a date should be sufficient to suggest to anyone who knows what the Bible teaches on this subject that such a person is a false teacher.

Peter tells us that Christ will come as a thief in the night. (2 Peter 3:10). Now the Lord is not a thief, but he will come as a thief. What does that mean? Well, how does a thief come? He certainly doesn't send word ahead that he is planning to rob them on a certain date. In other words, his appearance is unannounced. So it is with the Lord's coming. He will be like the thief in the sense that he will come unannounced. But why would he do that? He wants us to be prepared for his coming at all times. If we knew the time of his coming then we might have the tendency to prepare for his coming at the last minute. The Lord then is saying in so many words that we should be ready at all times for his return because he could come at any time.

There are some clues, however, as to the time of his coming. While the Lord does not give the exact date, we know that it will be some time in the future, and we are also told that it will be as in the days of Noah before the flood when the people were "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark. And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Matthew 24:37-39). In other words, the world as a whole will pay no attention to what the Lord has said about his return, and therefore the masses will go on about their business living their lives as they choose, living worldly lives, emphasizing the things of this world, eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage until the Lord's return and the world as it is today

comes to an end. Of course at that time there will be those who will cry for the mountains to fall on them that they might hide from the presence of the Lord, but there will be no escape. Instead, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess to the Lord, but it will be too late then to be saved.

It should also be pointed out that there are some who advocate that the coming of the Lord is in the spirit and therefore not visible so that all can see him. When questioned why the Lord did not come when they said he would come, there have been some that have offered as an explanation that he came but that he appeared in the spirit. But the scriptures say otherwise. We read, "behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen," (Revelation 1:7).

Not only that, but God's word says that when Christ returns that he will come with a shout, with the trump of God, the resurrection will take place, the heavens and earth will be destroyed, etc. This doesn't sound like that the Lord will come in such a way that no one will know about it. Yes, all will surely know when he returns.

Let it be stated again that the Lord is coming as sure as we are living. We don't know the date, but he is coming again. He has warned us to prepare and to be ready for that great date. If we will do so, we will be prepared and all will be well with our soul. If we do not take the warning and prepare our soul for that occasion then we will be lost for all eternity. Do you believe in the Lord's second coming? Whether you do or not, he is coming. Are you ready to meet him? If not, please take heed and prepare now while you still have the time and the opportunity.

Especially For Women

Why Is Baptism So Important?

1 Peter 1:22, 23

BETTY BURTON CHOATE

"Tonight we want to talk more about the idea that water can be sprinkled on a person's head for baptism, and there are some other

things we need to study, since you are wanting to be baptized, Anthony," Papa said when they sat down for their family study. "We don't want to delay such an important thing, but you must be sure you understand what you are doing and what God is doing when you are baptized."

"People often say that belief in Jesus is the only thing that is important, and that it doesn't really matter if a person is baptized or not. But *everything* that God teaches us to do is important. *People* are not the authority. We have no right to decide what is important and what is not. Only God can do that."

"But there are some good reasons why God gave importance to baptism. We talked about one already: it pictures a spiritual washing. We are dirty with sin and we need to be cleaned. Our souls are being washed in the blood of Jesus as we obey Him. So, that's one reason baptism is very important. We just can't be dirty with sin—we have to be clean."

"Romans 6:3, 4 is a passage of scripture we've talked about already. It shows more about how we are cleaned in Jesus' blood. Would you read that, Anthony?" Peter asked.

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

"So every time a person is baptized, those who are watching are reminded of the death of Jesus Himself, and of His burial in the tomb, and of His resurrection. The Bible teaches us that He died—like a lamb being sacrificed—instead of us. After all, we humans are the ones who sin, so we should be the ones to die for our own sins. But Jesus came to die in our place, so that His blood could be like a river washing away all of our sins. When we are baptized, we are spiritually washed in His blood. We must never forget that, that is why baptism is so important."

Mary spoke up. "There is another thing we see happening when we are baptized. Do you remember what Jesus said to the man named Nicodemus, in John 3:5?"

"I'll read it," James said. ". . . Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

James looked puzzled. "But what does it mean, to be 'born of water and the Spirit'?"

"Peter tells us more about it in 1 Peter 1:22 and 23," Papa answered. "He explained that their souls had been purified—isn't that the same as washed and cleaned? Let's not forget that those other scriptures tell us that we are washed and cleaned by Jesus' blood when we are baptized.

"But he said that they had been purified through obeying the truth. And then he said that they had also been 'born again', 'not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.'

"It is only through God's word that we learn about being born again, which is how we become a child of God, in His household. Do you remember that Paul wrote to Timothy about how he should behave in God's house? Aseema, can you find 1 Timothy 3:15?"

"... I wrote so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God. . ."

"So God's household, or His family, and His church are all the same thing!" exclaimed Papa. "Just as children are born into their human families, we are also born into God's family—through water and the Spirit, through the word of God!

"Remember that in Acts 2, Peter said that two things happen when we are baptized: our sins are forgiven, and God's Spirit is given to us. *Baptism* is the water in the new birth, and *God's Spirit* giving us new life is the spiritual part of the new birth. When a person is baptized, God adds him to His church—remember Acts 2:47, 'The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.' But also, baptism is 'the new birth' when we are born into God's family.

"So baptism is like the door into God's church, into salvation. That is why it is so important that we understand what it means and what it does in our lives," Peter said.

What A Difference

TOM HALL

There is a vast difference between those who say they believe and do versus those who say they believe and do not. Many will tell you they believe in God, yet, we find no evidence of it in their lives. The book of James is very helpful in showing us the difference in saying you believe and in practicing what you believe.

James says, "If someone says he has faith, but does nothing, his faith is worth nothing. Can faith like that save him?" (James 2:14).

The person who says he believe, yet, does nothing is termed as foolish by James. (James 2:20). The ones who say they believe there is one God but, fail to be active with their belief are no better off than the demons who believe and shake with fear. (James 2:19).

Faith that does nothing is worth nothing. James uses Abraham as a man who believes and does. (James 2:21-24). Abraham's faith and his actions work together. That faith made Abraham right with God. A person then is made right with God by what he believes and does, not simply by what he might say he believes and yet fails to do.

A person cannot be made right with God by faith only. Finally, James draws one final difference in James 2:26. When one's spirit is separated from one's body it is dead. No question about it. It is the same with faith. Faith that does nothing is dead.

I have sorrow for many Christians who say they believe and yet fail to do. On the other hand I am encouraged by those who not only say they believe but also follow it up by activity. It really does make a difference. We no doubt find ourselves in one of two categories today. In which are you? May God bless us all to believe and do!

His Yoke Is Easy, His Burden Is Light

B.J. CLARKE

It is ironic to consider that Jesus required more than the legalistic Pharisees and yet his way was easier. How could this be? The

Pharisees required the performance of certain things without giving consideration to whether these external actions were motivated by hearts given over to God. They were more concerned with external actions than they were with the inner attitude of the heart.

Jesus required more than external actions. He required that these external actions be motivated by changed hearts. Paradoxically, this requires more, but is easier. It is not an oppressive and burdensome thing. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:3). Why are his commandments not burdensome? Because we obey them in love. A song from a few years ago entitled "He Ain't Heavy" he's My Brother," comes near to expressing the thought. I've got to carry my fallen brother, but it doesn't seem like such a burden because of the relationship we have. If I were given the choice of carrying around a 10 pound sack of potatoes or my 35 pound son through an amusement park for 6 hours, I would surely choose my son. Although he is heavier and demands more care and attention, he seems lighter because of my love and affection for him.

When we serve Christ out of a sense of legalistic duty, we torment our conscience. But when we serve him out of a *"faith that worketh by love"* (Galatians 5:6), we enjoy the service. The problem of the Pharisees was that they trusted in themselves and not in God. This is precisely what led Christ to give the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican (Luke 18:9-14). Our righteousness must look beyond the self-righteousness of the Pharisees if we are going to enter the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20).

God required service out of faith and heartfelt motivation and not out of meritorious works alone (Deuteronomy 30:12-14; Matthew 22:37; Luke 11:39-52). The Jews had perverted faith and served the law out of works only. Not only will "faith only" not save; neither will works only. Micah 6:6-8 demonstrates that God requires more than external works of obedience. A "works only" mindset brings death (Galatians 3:12). To live by faith, obedient faith, brings rest and life. Truly, his yoke is easy and his burden is light because we love him so (Matthew 11:28-30).

"It Hath Been Said"

ALLEN WEBSTER

There were many false ideas floating about in Jesus' day. Many thought the earth was flat. Jesus, as far as is recorded, never said otherwise. Others thought the sun revolved around the earth. He smiled to Himself. Their medical practices were woefully insufficient. He held His peace. Their geography maps were altogether wrong. He made no waves. They taught false ideas about religion. *He began to preach!*

Is it not interesting that He did not just go along with false teachings to get along with His contemporaries? He confronted spiritual error because it was dangerous. One could go to heaven thinking the world was flat or ignorant of the western hemisphere, but could not go disbelieving He was the Christ or practicing immorality.

Jesus went up into a mountain one day, sat down, and began to preach (Matthew 5-7). It could be called the "It-Hath-Been-Said" Sermon for, in this lesson, He systematically stated false religious positions and corrected them. He was a man of love, but He did not find this inconsistent with refuting error. Actually, it was love for souls and truth that motivated such action.

Let's study an "It-hath-been-said" lesson for today.

It hath been said that "it does not matter what one believes as long as he is sincere." Many today feel that all that really matters is being a good moral person. We do not, they affirm, have to do all the "i's" and cross all the "t's" in religion to be accepted by Jesus.

SINCERITY IS NECESSARY

One must be sincere about his service to Christ. If insincere, no matter how much truth he practices, one is unacceptable to God (II Chronicles 25:2). Jesus condemned the hypocritical Pharisees, saying, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8). He complimented Nathaniel as being a man "in whom is no guile" (John 1:47). He practiced what He preached (I Peter 2:22).

Paul wrote, "Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a *pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned*"

(I Timothy 1:5). Paul was sincere (I Thessalonians 2:3-5). He asked the Corinthians to prove their sincerity (II Corinthians 8:8, 24). He hoped the Philippians would be "sincere and without offense" (1:10). God expects sincerity to characterize young men (Titus 2:6, 7), worship (John 4:23, 24) preaching (II Corinthians 2:17), the Christian life (II Corinthians 1:12) and public relationships (Jude 9:16, 17).

RIGHT DOCTRINE IS NECESSARY

The next question is, "Is sincerity *enough*?" Centuries ago, Christopher Columbus was warned of sailing off the earth's edge by those who honestly believed it was flat. It is believed that George Washington's life was ended prematurely by sincere doctors who thought bloodletting would help. John Wilkes Booth thought he was doing the country a favour by assassinating Lincoln. Hitler had similar feelings about ridding the world of Jews (Cox). Sincere? Yes. Wrong? Absolutely!

Does the same reasoning apply to religion? Most, when pressed, would admit that at least some tenets of truth are necessary for salvation.

What does the Bible say? The man who picked up sticks on the Sabbath was sincere, but still displeased God (Numbers 15:32-36). Uzzah was sincere when he steadied the ark of the covenant, but was still punished (II Samuel 6:6-7). Saul of Tarsus was sincere when he persecuted Christians (Acts 23:1), but was wrong (Acts 9:4).

The Bible shows great concern for right doctrine. Jesus said, "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matthew 24:4). Paul told Timothy to "charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (I Timothy 1:3). Jesus said, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:3).

OBEDIENCE IS NECESSARY

One might have the right doctrine, sincerely believe it, and still be lost. Obedience is necessary for salvation. Some Christians have the idea that attending a few services will save them. Sitting in a church building does not make one a Christian any more than sitting in a henhouse makes one a chicken! Obedience to God's truth and appropriating His grace saves!

Without obedience, one cannot enter the kingdom. Jesus said,

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). There will be sincere people surprised by their verdict on Judgment Day (Matthew 7:22-23). Sadly, they will face flaming fire at Christ's second coming (II Thessalonians 1:7-9; John 12:48). Jesus asked a question that needs to be repeated to many religious people today, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46; cf. 19:19-22). Some, by their actions, ask Pharaoh's question, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him" (Exodus 5:2). "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

Without obedience, one cannot be made free from sin. Paul said, "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Romans 6:17). Note carefully that the Roman Christians were no longer sinners (servants of sin), because of two things. First, they obeyed from the heart—sincerity. Second, they obeyed God's "form of doctrine"—obedience to truth. In this context, the form of doctrine, refers to Jesus being killed, buried and resurrected. They had crucified the old person (lifestyle), been buried in water (baptism) and resurrected (from the water) to walk a new life (Rom. 6:3,4).

Without obedience, one cannot have a purified soul. Peter taught that sincerity, "rightness" in doctrine and obedience are required. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (I Peter 1:22). Notice salvation (purified souls) is attributed to *obeying the truth* (conformity to New Testament teaching). Further, Christians must practice unfeigned (unpretended) love and possess pure (sincere) hearts.

Without obedience, one cannot show his love for Christ (John 14:15). John said, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3, 4 cf. 5:3). Truth sets men free (John 8:32); but only after it is obeyed (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

Watch out for "It hath been said," Trust in the words of Christ, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

Judging Others

MARLIN KILPATRICK

During the earthly ministry of our Lord, He experienced the afflictions that are common to man (Hebrews 4:15). One such affliction was that His words were sometimes misunderstood. This affliction continues, inasmuch as today Jesus' words are often misunderstood. The passing of judgment on the deeds of another is a good illustration.

Jesus said, "Judge not that ye be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). It is claimed by some well-meaning brethren that Jesus forbids our judging the actions of another individual, and Matthew 7:1 is often cited as proof of such reasoning. In their effort to sustain such a contention the claim is usually made, "You don't know all of the circumstances." Therefore, supposedly, it is wrong to make a judgmental decision concerning the deeds of another person. But, does the evidence presented in the scriptures warrant such a conclusion? If not, what is wrong with such "reasoning?"

Brethren, a reading of the context in which Matthew 7:1 appears will reveal that Jesus was speaking of judging the motives of others. The kind of judging involved here is of a hypocritical nature (See Matthew 7:1-5). Jesus forbids my judging of another's motives. Motives originate in man's heart (cf. Matthew 12:34-37) and only God is qualified to make such judgments (cf. 1 Samuel 16:7). However, Jesus is not forbidding every kind of judging. We judge our brethren daily! This is precisely what we do when we speak of a brother as being "sound in the faith." How can I know another brother is "sound in the faith?" Such knowledge comes by my observation of the other brother's deeds. One is only "sound in the faith" so long as he lives in harmony with God's word. The fine art of judging is practiced by all, including those brethren who misunderstand Matthew 7:1.

The proper interpretation of Matthew 7:1, as with any passage of scripture, will take into consideration the total teaching of God's word on the subject of judging. This is the case because (1) there are DIFFERENT kinds of judging mentioned in the scriptures, and (2) we are, by implication, actually commanded to make certain judgments. Jesus said, "If a man on the Sabbath day receives circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day? Judge not according

to appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:23, 24). This passage demonstrates the two above mentioned situations concerning the making of judgments. There is a "righteous judgment" our Lord commands; hence, a different KIND of judging than of which he spoke in Matthew 7:1. Too, since Jesus actually commands that this kind of judgment be made, it follows that not ALL judging is sinful.

The claim, "You don't know all of the circumstances," is worthy of consideration. This claim involves at least two implications. One, it is implied that only one who possesses "total knowledge" is qualified to make a judgment of another's deeds. This is a false conclusion. The only man who ever walked this earth possessing "total knowledge" is our omniscient Savior, Jesus Christ. If such a requirement (possession of "total knowledge") exists, then no person now living can obey Jesus' words in John 7:23, 24. A second implication is that "circumstances" determines the sinfulness of one's conduct. This, too, is a false conclusion. Brethren, this is nothing but the false philosophy known as "situation ethics," gone to seed! One may allow his "circumstances" to affect his conduct, but the sinfulness/righteousness of his conduct is determined by his transgression of, or, his obedience to God's word (cf. I John 3:4; Romans 6:16-18). David allowed his "circumstances" to lead him into sin with Bathsheba, but he was still guilty of adultery!

Brethren, our judging of others should always be tempered with meekness (Galatians 6:1). The harsh, unkind, hypocritical manner of judging, Jesus forbids. Too, the judging of another's motives must be left to God for He alone knows the heart of man. But, we should also remember Jesus said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits . . ." (Matthew 7:16). The judging of another's "fruit" (his deeds) is not sinfull. What think ye?

"One For The Road"

DALE JENKINS

He was about sixteen years old. His earring, pack of cigarettes and clip-on tie gave him away, but not before his obvious nervousness about being here did. "Here," was the local funeral home. I'd been called by a Brother in Christ to say a few words at the funeral of a family member. Though he was fairly distant kin to the deceased, he was the

closest family member who had any connections to a preacher. None of the family had been church goers for many years. It was quickly obvious that most all of them were living pretty rough lives. But back to the sixteen year old.

I first saw him sitting on the curb of the parking lot, smoking. Even his walk had an attitude. I was waiting for a few more family members to arrive so the funeral could begin. He walked into the room where I was. "Are you the owner?" he began.

"No." "Are you the Father or Priest?"

"I'm the minister."

The deceased was his uncle and it was obvious the young man didn't want to be there. "I've never been in a place like this," he continued as he fiddled with his cigarette box. "I mean a funeral home, or a church or nothin. All this cry'n and stuff. It's not my kinda' show. And I won't be coming back," he concluded emphatically.

"Yes you will, someday." I challenged. "You'll be right where that fellow is," as I pointed in the direction of the casket.

"If I die, I want to be cremated. I want my best friends to have a party and the urn that my ashes are in to be sitting in the room with them. I want one of them to open the lid and pour a bottle of whiskey in and say, 'One for the road buddy.'" Then, he put a cigarette in his mouth, turned quickly and walked away before I could respond.

I have to admit that I was stunned. Never had I seen such brashness in a boy. "Why, he's only a handful of years away from my little boy's age," I thought. May I suggest to you two thoughts:

1. What is it that made this young boy so calloused? May I suggest to you it was that he had no God in his life but his own thoughts. He is part of a growing number in our once Christian nation who are receiving no training at home or at school and who are being bombarded by an anti-God, anti-religion, anti-Scripture media and educational system. Where is the joy in life if our only goal is self-fulfillment, need gratification and pragmatism? Where is the purpose in life if there are no answers to our basic questions? Parents, you had better be training your children.
2. God's love can penetrate even the coldest heart. It didn't take long for me to realize that I would in a matter of moments be speaking to the roomful of people who had shaped this young man's world

view. No, Lazarus and three points on grieving would not fully minister to this family. "Have you ever stopped to think, what if there is a God?" I began. I planted a couple of ideas that should make people think that there must be a God. "And what if there is a God and He chooses to communicate with us through the Bible? What if there is a God that is loving? shouldn't it affect us? If there is no God there is no eternal loss for those of us who spend our lives in service, but if there is a God. . ."

I wish I could tell you that the boy ran me down after the service to tell me he wanted to know more. That would make for a much more exciting close, but he didn't. I wish I could tell you I saw a tear roll down his cheek as I spoke of the God who loves us, but I didn't. I just hope he was listening and maybe someday, some place, some way he will be receptive to the message of God's love. I just hope it's before he comes back to the funeral home.

The Immutability Of God's Counsel!

DILLARD THURMAN

If there is one attribute of God that affords real comfort, it is His immutability! In all aspects of His relationship with man, our God is faithful! The Psalmist said, *"Thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens."* (Psa. 89:2). When He speaks, we know it is true! As Moses sang: *"He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."* (Deut. 32:4). Balaam moved by the Spirit of God, declared: *"God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall not he make it good?"* (Num. 23:19). All of our confidence and hope can be given unto God! Even, as Paul declared of Him: *"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."* (2 Tim. 2:13). Whatever God decrees, it shall come to pass. Whatever God promises, that shall be done. Whatever God says, it shall be true forever! He is not a man, that he should lie! As the prophet said: *"The ways of the Lord are right."* (Hos. 14:9). There is never a reason for doubting the Lord God!

GOD IS TRUE AND FAITHFUL IN NATURE!

There comes calm assurance of God's faithfulness in the realm of nature. The Universe moves under the benevolent laws God had attached thereto. There is never any fluctuation or change! The sun, moon and stars are fixed in their orbit, and their influences in the world do not vary. *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge."* (Psa. 19:1-2). We can retire at night, and arise in the morning, with the assurance, "God is in His heaven, and all is right with the world!" He has control, for *"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."* (Gen. 1:1). How unfailing is our God, and all that which He has created! *Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth."* (Psa. 119:90). Not only has He created and established the earth, but we are assured that He is *"upholding all things by the word of his power"* (Heb. 1:3). A little tyke was throwing a ball in the air, and catching it as it fell. A passerby asked: "Sonny, what are you doing?" The reply was instantaneous: "I am playing catch with God. I throw the ball up to Him, and he sends it back everytime!" Do you have a child-like faith, and acceptance of God's law of gravity, and all other laws of nature? We must have that kind of trusting faith! *"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."* (Heb. 11:3). The immutability of God is seen in the immutable laws by which He governs and controls the vast Universe!

God's immutability is seen in the law of electricity. It varies not. In order to use electricity, we must have both a positive and ground circuit; in other words, an incoming and outgoing current. No light will burn, and no motor turn, without this law obeyed! The law of gravity is also inflexible! Newton may have discovered some laws of gravity, but he was not its author. God who made the law is still enforcing the law! "Seed produces after its own kind" is a law of reproduction that has long been known by the farmer. But that law of reproduction was established before man was made; and it is still immutable! The reason we can trust these laws lies in the immutability of God, who is never capricious, fanciful or vacillating. *"God is faithful."*

A FAITHFUL GOD TO FAITHFUL ABRAHAM

When God called Abram from Ur of Chaldea, He gave to him a promise that became a golden thread of anticipation and hope for all

generations to come! When He said: *"In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed,"* (Gen. 12:3), God set in motion a progression of promises and blessings that gravitate to this central "hope of Israel" theme! But God made doubly sure that His people could place their trust in His promise! *"For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. . . For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife."* But the faithfulness of God precluded Him finding one superior by whom to swear, therefore he had to swear by Himself! But look further to find how secure is our hope! *"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us."* (Heb. 6:13-18). God cannot lie; it is contrary to His holy nature, and therefore impossible! But to that He added an oath, swearing by Himself as the ultimate in faithfulness! Since God swore by Himself, it made this promise eternal, forever, and never ending! had God sworn by any thing temporal and finite, that thing could have passed away, weakening the oath. But since He swore by Himself, it HAD to come to pass. James speaks of *"the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."* (Jas. 1:17). This is in keeping with what the Wise Man said: *"I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him."* (Eccl. 3:14). Mark it down; believe it completely; trust it implicitly! God is faithful and true!

THE PROMISE CONFIRMED BY THE OATH

After God had made His promise to Abraham, He later reinforced it by saying: *"By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord. . . And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."* (Gen. 22:16-18). This same promise was repeated to Isaac (Gen. 26:4), but it was yet known as God's promise to Abraham! And it was given because Abraham was obedient to God's voice! *"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed: and he went out, not knowing whither he went."* (Heb. 11:8). God had spoken, and Abraham had faith in God! *"Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God."* (Jas. 2:23). The

people of Israel relied on that promise, and on the oath, and it kept them nearer to God. This was recalled by Moses when the Lord threatened to destroy Israel for building the golden calves at Sinai. Moses said, *"Remember, Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidest unto them . . . And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto the people."* (Exo. 32:13-14). Because of a promise, and an oath, God would not destroy this people! God's word and oath had to remain true and steadfast!

It is a marvelous study to trace the course of this promise through the word of God! Long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, inspiration was lighting His way! *"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all the nations be blessed."* (Gal. 3:8). Time was to flow as a stream before this was fulfilled, but Paul saw its fruition! *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."* (Gal. 3:16). At last, it is pinpointed for us so that we can get its fullest promise! God had promised to bless all nations in the seed of Abraham, but that seed is Jesus Christ, our Saviour! The promise and the oath were immutable: they could not fail! *"Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto."* (Gal. 3:15). After God's promise was made and confirmed, no power could alter it! The course of history for God's people had been blazed by inspiration, and Israel was to walk in the light of that promise! To the end *"that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles, through Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."* (Gal. 3:14). These matters God had determined long ago, and sealed them with the immutability of His counsel! That promise was invulnerable!

THE PROMISE IS CENTRED IN JESUS CHRIST

The promise was of utmost importance to Israel, yet it was not to be fulfilled under the law of Moses! *"For the promise, that he should be heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect."* (Rom. 4:13-14). The law pointed to the fulfillment of the promise, but did not contain its fulfillment. *"And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of*

none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise." (Gal. 3:17-18). God's promise to Abraham, a covenant to bless all nations in Christ, was made for a hundred and thirty years before the law was given at Sinai! And the law, being given later, could not disannul God's promise and oath! This assured the Gentiles of the promise, also, *"to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not only to that which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."* (Rom. 2:26). Thus the immutability of God's word and oath gives us a guarantee of salvation in Christ, reserved for the children of God!

THE BLESSINGS WITHIN THE PROMISE

Having established the immutability of God's promise and oath, we should be better prepared to study where the blessings are obtained. First we read: *"For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us."* (2 Cor. 1:20). ALL the promises of salvation are IN Christ, and no promise is found outside! Thus to obtain the promised blessings, one must be in Christ! The promise is not extended to others! This is tied in with where God has placed blessings: *"Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."* (Eph. 1:3). God's blessings flood the world for all its inhabitants, with sun and rain, seed time and harvest, provided for all. But *"all spiritual blessings"* are located IN Christ! There is not one, single spiritual blessing to be found OUTSIDE of Him! This is the promise God made with Abraham—to bless all nations in His seed, which is Christ! God has located these blessings with His promise and His oath, and *"no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto."* (Gal. 2:15). They are immutable!

It is only in Jesus Christ that one is made spiritually alive. *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."* (1 Cor. 15:22). This takes place in Christ: *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."* (2 Cor. 5:17). We are specifically informed as to when and where this takes place. *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. . . And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."* (Gal. 3:26-29). It is by the faith of Abraham that we enter into Christ by baptism, and become heirs according to the promise God confirmed with an oath! By this we become reconciled to God by the immutability of His counsel which

gave Christ to die for us: *"And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."* (Eph. 2:16). Reconciliation could not take place out of Christ, for that would be contrary to God's promise of all spiritual blessings in Christ. Paul declared, *"Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ with eternal glory."* (2 Tim. 2:10). Where did he say salvation was located? Friend, don't look for salvation outside of Christ! It would be against the confirmed promise of God!

Two immutable things; God's promise and His oath, declare that all these spiritual blessings are conferred on all who come into Christ to receive them! *"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* (Rom. 6:3-4). Friend, make doubly sure that you enter into Christ as God has ordained! Yes, doubly sure, for God made doubly sure, by the immutability of His promise and His oath! Don't neglect so great salvation! (Heb. 2:2-3).

"Come Back Home"

DON WILLIAMS

I have just finished reading Luke 15. I have read it many times before but once again I am impressed by its simplicity, and its statement of love for the lost. As I read this chapter, four words or phrases jump out at me.

Verse 11—A *certain* man had two sons. Why are names given in Chapter 16, but *not* in Chapter 15? why did Luke say he was a *certain* man? It seems to me that he is telling us that first, this was not just any man. It would take a special man to be willing to forgive in the manner that he did, Secondly, the shift of importance is not on their names, but rather on their actions. The younger rebellious son lived in a terrible manner, but was forgiven by a marvelous, loving father.

Verse 13—*riotous* living. Again, the word is not defined for us. does it mean, as the elder brother suggests, that his brother has "devoured the father's living with harlots?" (15:30). Was the older

brother only suggesting what he would have done, had he been in his brother's shoes? Perhaps, God does not define the word, lest we should think ourselves better than others when we forsake *his* way, but do *not* live in a riotous manner. A person is *equally lost*, whether he drowns in the "low life" of sin, or simply forsakes Christ and the church, and willingly dismisses himself from the Christian life he once lived. He may live a "good" life in the eyes of his neighbours, being kind and nice—yet still be just as lost as the one who becomes the "scum" of the earth.

Verse 18—sinned against *heaven* and before *thee*. When the young son realized where his sinful life had led him, he was ready to return home. He would come, asking forgiveness of God in heaven and also his father on earth. He had sinned and brought shame on both fathers—Almighty God and his earth father. Is it not the case today that *public sin* brings shame and reproach to Christ, *and* the people that make up his Church? Thus, there is a need for public confession of wrong when one "quits" church, lives in the "world," and this decides to come back. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed." (James 5:16).

The final words—Verse 24—~~dead~~—~~alive~~—~~lost~~—~~found~~. They describe where the younger son once *was*, and where he now *is*. The son was lost to the father—the father did not know where he was living, and it was as if the younger son were dead—in fact, he could have been dead, for all the father knew. Now, though, he was found—he was back home, sleeping and eating where he ought to sleep and eat. He was alive and happy once again in the security of his home.

Are you *lost* today as a former Christian, having allowed sin to cause you to drift away from Christ and his Church? Please realize that there is *no hope* outside of Christ. Come back home and be *found* in Christ's church once again, being alive and active in his work. Come back to him, repenting and confessing your sins. We'll be glad to pray with you and for you for your forgiveness. **COME BACK HOME!**

Dear friend, are you *lost* today, having never become a follower of Jesus? Then, today, while you have time and opportunity, come to Jesus believing in his word, repenting of your sins, confessing your faith in Jesus, and being baptized for the forgiveness of sins. Dear friend, **COME HOME TODAY!**

"Wrong Is Always Wrong"

JOE T. SPIVY, SR.

In the March 1984 issue of Christian Bible Teacher magazine, Pat McGee wrote, "Wrong is wrong, even if you don't get caught. Let us remember that 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good' (Proverbs 15:3). Wrong is wrong, even if you do it for a good cause. The honorable purpose does not justify a dishonorable deed or action. The end never does justify the means. All sin is transgression of the law (1 John 3:4).

Wrong is wrong, even if others are doing worse things. It will be of little comfort in the day of judgment if you should be lost, that others you knew did things which you considered to be worse than your own sins. Remember, 'The thought of sin is foolishness' (Proverbs 24:9).

Wrong is wrong, even if it does not bother your conscience. The conscience can be trained or educated to accept wrong doings, but even an honest sin or evil done in sincerity is sinful in the sight of the holy God. "... whatever a man sows, that shall he reap" (Galatians 6:7).

How true it is that wrong is always wrong. I am reminded of a young boy who skipped school to attend a steer show. The next day he had a note from his parents stating that he had been sick. A certain young girl missed school to go to town and buy a prom dress. She had a parental note the next day saying she had been sick and had to stay out of school.

A lie is a lie regardless of how it is "dressed up." A peanut is still peanut, even if you dress it up in chocolate and sprinkle sugar over it. The fact that it has chocolate on it does not change the fact that it was and will continue to be a peanut. It matters not about the rhyme or reason for telling a lie, even blaming it on someone else, a lie is a lie and will remain such.

Lying is wrong and any sin not repented of (even a "little white lie") will keep a soul from heaven. Sin is always wrong regardless of circumstances.

"Dull Of Hearing"

DEAN FUGETT

In Matthew 13:15, Jesus accused the Pharisees of "dullness of hearing." In the Hebrew letter, the Hebrew Christians were told that they were "dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5:11). In neither case did this mean that they needed mechanical hearing-aids. It was not a physical illness from which they suffered, but a self-inflicted spiritual malady. They simply refused to listen with understanding to the things being taught that could have brought them to a closer relationship with God. They didn't want to hear anything other than that which they already believed!

Many today suffer from this same affliction. They refuse to even listen to something that is different from their present beliefs and opinions. They have already determined what they will believe, what they will listen to, and thereby have closed the door to any blessings that many come through the hearing of the truth of God (John 8:32). Some have concluded that there is no truth of which they are not presently aware and in which they are not presently occupied.

This prejudice has completely deafened many to any effort of God to convert them. They have concluded that they will not be judged for what they have not heard. In this they are willingly ignorant of the truth that they are accountable to God for all unused opportunities. This included the opportunity to hear! Many are failing to avail themselves of the opportunity to 'hear' by forsaking the assembling of themselves together (Hebrews 10:24-25). Thus they fail to receive the exhortation that could be the very deciding factor in their eternal salvation.

This "dullness of hearing" is within the church as well as without. Note that Matthew's account was of the Pharisees (who "thought" they were righteous) and the Hebrew account is of Christians who were in the kingdom. In either case, when we refuse to hear or refuse to take advantage of opportunities to hear, we leave ourselves without excuse.

We should never become so foolish, prideful, or prejudiced in religion that we will refuse audience to anything other than that which we already believe. If we refuse to listen to another side and give critical examination to what we hear, we have become "DULL OF HEARING." That will condemn us!