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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins"

Christianity was founded on love. Love is the soul of Christianity. Christianity is identified with love. The very first thing that Christ taught on earth was, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). God did not show partiality. He gave His Son for all mankind. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came on earth from heaven, and by the will of God and by His determined purpose and foreknowledge, He was put to death on the cross by human hands, because God wanted for Him to become the propitiation for the sins of humanity. Christ, therefore was right when he spoke: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6). But what, if God had hated man because of man's sin, instead of loving him? Man would perish in his sin, without hope of salvation from sin. The beauty of God's love is seen from Romans 5:8, wherein we read: "But God demonstrate His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinner, Christ died for us."

There has been and is so much hatred in the world. People of one religion hate people of another religion. There is hatred because of colour, and race. There is hatred because of language and nationality. There is no place on earth where there are people

and there is no hatred. They coexist. Just think, how much loss and damage hatred inflicts to a country, to a state, or to a city or town or village or a home or a family! Hatred is like 'cancer, it destroys. But love is like balm that heals and binds. Jesus taught, "You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?" (Matthew 5:43-46). To His own disciples Christ taught, "A new commandment, I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciple, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34,35).

Chapter 13 in the first epistle of Paul the apostle to the Corinthians in the New Testament of the Bible is called "The Love Chapter." Highlighting the great importance of love it says, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." The true love, it says, "suffers long, and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...." Such was the love of God which constrained Him to leave heaven and come on earth to live with sinful men; and then to give Himself a ransom for all.

May the love of God constrain us to learn, as the wise man taught in Proverbs 10:12, "Hatred stirs up strife but love covers all sins." May we love one another and all mankind, as God did and gave Himself a ransom for all. And, above all, may we love God with all of our heart, as Christ taught at Luke 10:27, and with all soul, and with all strength, and with all mind. If we truly love God, then we will keep all His commandments. Because Christ

said, in John 14:15, that if you love Me you will keep my commandments. This is the fruit of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22).

Why Are You Preaching?

J.C. CHOATE

There are many preachers in the world preaching everything that you can imagine, and a lot of things that you cannot imagine. Maybe you are one of them. If so, why are you preaching?

Some preach only for money or to make a living. It doesn't matter to them which church they are with, and if some other church offers more money, they can be easily "converted", willing to preach whatever is asked of them.

On the other hand, there are those who grow up with a particular religious group and they feel a loyalty to stay with it, even to preach for it. They stay and preach in spite of the fact that they cannot read about their church in the Bible, that it was established by some man, that it came into existence during the Reformation Movement or even more recently, that it had its beginning in Europe or America or India, that it wears a human name, that its instructions for salvation and membership differ from the New Testament, that its form of worship both adds to and subtracts from the New Testament pattern, and that many more of its doctrines have their basis for authority in creeds written by men rather than in God's word. Such men are bound to such churches by tradition only, or by ignorance of their error.

Others preach because they have been converted to some religious group and they really believe in it and want to help spread its teaching and work. Often times, social work offered in the name of human compassion is its point of emphasis, rather than doctrine or salvation from sin.

Some have been deceived into thinking that when they accept Christ as their Saviour they are given the power of the Holy Spirit, that they are supposed to be able to speak in "tongues" and perform miracles. They are so impressed with the power promised that they begin to preach the doctrine, even though they have not personally received any miraculous power. They become convinced that, in time, when they become spiritual enough, the

promised claims will be true. They glory in the "power" they think they have, they enjoy all of the attention they get, and become popular with the masses. Each meeting becomes a well-rehearsed production, a show for all who attend.

And others preach because they are natural speakers and it is an easy way to make a living. Especially if they can get some foreign support, they can have that prestige while earning more than if their local brethren supported them — and they may not have to do much work. Such people are often hypocritical and lazy.

None of this is to say that *all* preachers — even those in religious error — are insincere, after money only, and are lazy. Neither is it to say that all who receive foreign support are taking advantage of their brethren. Granted, *some* are guilty of some of these things, *but not all*.

Again, the foregoing matters have been raised to ask you, if you are a preacher, **why are you preaching?** There is nothing wrong in being a preacher. It is one of the most important works in the world, and it *is* work, if one does the kind of job he should conscientiously do. It requires sincerity, honesty, loving God and his Son, Jesus, loving the souls of men, preaching the truth, and being faithful to the Lord and His church even in the face of persecution or death.

Christ warned even in His day, *"For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many"* (Matthew 24:5). John said, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world"* (1 John 4:1). Paul warned, *"But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed"* (Galatians 1:7-9).

After the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, He commanded the Apostles, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:16). Paul said to Timothy, *"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine"* (2 Timothy 4:2).

Paul warned that we are not to preach and teach one thing but practice something else. He wrote to the Roman Christians, *"Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?"* (Romans 2:21,22).

Again, Paul wrote, *"For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"* (1 Corinthians 9:16). Going on, he said, *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake"* (2 Corinthians 4:5). To the Colossians, he declared in speaking of Christ, *"Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus"* (Colossians 1:28).

Do you hear what the Lord and the Apostles are saying about preaching, the need for it, the seriousness of it, the purpose of it, and the rewards of it? What kind of preacher are you? What are you preaching? Why are you preaching? Will the spiritual seed you are sowing save yourself and will it save your hearers, if they respond to it? Remember that one day we who take the responsibility of preaching will have to stand before God and give an answer to Him for what we have preached. Will He be pleased or will He reject us? (John 12:48).

The New Creature In Christ

FRANCIS DAVID

In II Corinthian 5:17, apostle Paul writes, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. When a person gets into Christ there are lots of radical changes take place in his life. When he or she accepts Jesus, their lives are entirely change, if they are truly converted with honesty and true conviction. They are translated from Satan's kingdom or from darkness to the kingdom of the son of His love (Col. 1:13). Jesus calls it a conversion (Matt. 18:3, John 3:3-4). Let us see how this new creature comes into

existence?

This new creature comes into existence when the old man is put off. Paul, tells us about this old man in Eph. 4, by saying, "if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness (21-24). When a person is baptised, his old life which is corrupt is crucified and now the Christ is seen in Him (Gal. 2:20). The old man or the old sinful life is buried in the watery grave and this what we see in Romans 6, "Or do you know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised 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, For if we have united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." (3-6). We must know that when a person is baptised, his old sinful life is fully buried, like the dead body and when he comes out of the watery grave, he is a new person. But sad, that many do not bury the old corrupt man and still hold on to the things which were associated with old corrupt man. This thing is contrary to the Scriptures.

Paul knew what this new life is. He understood this new union with Jesus because after he became a new creature, he knew the new purpose his life has now. He had a new saviour, a new master who is his owner now, and we see he could say, "... for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day." (2 Tim. 1:12). Paul had a zeal and conviction of his new life and we see that he used his energies fully for the Lord's cause. His whole or entire life was spent for the cause of Christianity.

The new Creature in Christ beside his new life has other things to follow. He has new standard now. Christ is the standard of his life because he wants to live like Christ and encourages other to do the same. In I Peter 2:21, Peter writes, "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps: and Paul says, "let this mind be

in you which was also in Christ Jesus. (Phil 2:5). As a new creature we follow Him as our example and encourage other for the same.

As a new creature, we have new fellowship in Jesus. In the past our association was with satan. We were in darkness but now we are in the new fellowship. We are in the kingdom of Christ and He is the king of this kingdom which is His church, we have fellowship with one another. (I John 1:7).

This new creature in Jesus Christ has new motive. His heart or mind is changed now. He clings to what is good (Rom. 12:9). Formerly this man was selfish and now as a new person his motive is different. He is no more selfish. He believe in serving, giving because he understands that it is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35). This new creature in Jesus has a new name, a name which is very special. This name is called Christian—He is known by this name because the Bible says that God will give a new name to His people (Isa 62:2). This name is found in the new testament at three places. (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28 and I Pet. 4:16). How wonderful it is to be a Christian, it means you are honoring Christ by wearing this name.

Lastly we see, that we as new creature in Jesus Christ have new home to dwell in when we depart from this earth. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-3).

Today, you can become a new person in Jesus Christ by obeying his commands revealed in the Bible. Why don't you come to him, believe in him, confess him, repent of your sins and be baptised for the forgiveness of your sins.

"That I Might Not Sin"

CLEM THURMAN

Christians are constantly faced with tremendous temptations, and all of us are forced to ask, "How can I overcome temptation and live for God?" This is a vital question for every child of God, for He wants us to live above and apart from sin. God does not tempt us; that is Satan's domain. God wants us to remain pure and apart from sin: *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he*

himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed" (James 1:13-14). When temptation comes, God *"will with the temptation make also the way of escape"* (1 Cor. 10:13). And He wants us to find that way of escape.

We may not be able to give a complete and perfect answer to the question of how to remain apart from sin, but there are certain factors in our Christian conduct that we can study profitably with that in mind. We must recognize that we do not have to sin, that God is there to help us with the *"way of escape."* What God wants for us is just what Paul prayed for the Colossians, *"That ye may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God"* (Col. 4:12). How can we do it? Maybe these things will point us in that direction.

WE MUST HAVE THE RIGHT PREPARATION

The problems most of us face when we fall to temptation is that we are not really prepared for that particular temptation at that particular time. But there is an answer for that. We must not wait until the temptation comes to get ready for it. As Abraham Lincoln reportedly said, *"I will prepare myself and my time will come."* His time came. And our time of temptation will come. The preparation we make now will get us ready for it. *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes"* (Psa. 119:11-12).

To avoid sin, we must be able to recognize it and fortify ourselves against it. That is what the psalmist is saying. Paul said the Scriptures are: *"Profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness"* (2 Tim. 3:16). When we properly use the word of God, we'll know what is right, and we'll know what is wrong.

Right preparation must involve more than just learning, though. We must put into practice what we have learned. *"Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves. . . But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing"* (James 1:21-25). Most of us are creatures of habit—from the way we put on our clothes to the way we drive a car. God intends us

to use "habit" in our living for Him. Having the "word in our hearts" and living it daily over a period of time makes it a "habit" to do God's will.

WE NEED FIRM DETERMINATION

If we are to live above sin, there must be the will or determination to do so. Paul wrote, *"According to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing shall I be put to shame, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain"* (Phil. 1:20-21). With this kind of motive and determination, Paul found it easier to live for Christ. This helped him to look beyond selfish lusts to the eternal reward: *"I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage"* (1 Cor. 9:27). If we follow Paul's example and determine to live for Christ, we can do it—just as he did.

With firm determination to live for Christ, we can thereby *"crucify the old man of sin"* (Rom. 6:6). The apostle Paul certainly did that, for he wrote, *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me"* (Gal. 2:20). By the love of God (John 3:16) we should thus be motivated to bury the old man of sin and live for the Lord.

WE MUST DEVELOP A RIGHT ATTITUDE

If we fill our minds and hearts with the garbage of the world, we will have no room for God and Christ. God exhorts, *"Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life . . . As he thinketh in his heart, so is he"* (Prov. 4:23; 23:7). When our hearts are filled with the things of God, it is much easier to get our actions conformed to His will. The apostle wrote, *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace"* (Rom. 3:23-24). In spite of our best efforts, we still sin. We still fall short of what God wants, and we fall short of what we expect of ourselves. As John wrote, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). But refusing to allow the filth and corruption of Satan's world to find refuge in our hearts will keep us closer to God at all times.

The only way to drive out evil lusts is to fill our hearts with

the right stuff: *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things"* (Phil. 4:8). When we *"think on these things,"* we don't give the devil any advantage over us. Unless Satan can plant the wrong things in our hearts, he cannot get us to sin. So he works on us constantly. If some ferocious animal were just outside your house, trying to get in and tear you to pieces, wouldn't you try to keep it out? Then read: *"Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Pet. 5:8). You hold the key to your heart. Don't let Satan in. Fill your heart with those things that will keep the devil away.

WE NEED THE HELP OF CARING CHRISTIANS

Our associates have a great deal to do with how well we are able to resist temptation. Peter was with the wrong crowd when he denied Jesus three times. But in the company of the apostles, he was able to boldly preach Christ to those same people before whom he had previously denied the Lord. Paul wrote, *"Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals"* (1 Cor. 15:33). We tend to be like those with whom we associate. Therefore, if we are to live above sin, we need to be careful to avoid the wrong crowd. Many good people have been led astray by being thrown into the wrong environment and with the wrong people.

The early disciples felt a great need to be together: *"They continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers. . . Day by day, continuing stedfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home. . . The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul"* (Acts 2:42,46; 4:32). They were new to this business of being Christians, so they felt a great need to be with other Christians. You see, that is exactly the way we learn! We are strengthened by one another: *"Let us consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works"* (Heb. 10:24). We sometimes fall short and need help, or others need our help: *"If a man be overtaken in any trespass, ye who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens"* (Gal. 6:1-2). We can't

make it alone. We need other Christians to help us.

Above all, we must realize the need for the strength and help of God and Christ. *"If God is for us, who is against us?"* (Rom. 8:31). The apostle Paul wrote, *"By the grace of God I am what I am . . . I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (1 Cor. 15:10; Phil. 4:13). Only by the grace of God can any of us be saved: *"By grace have ye been saved through faith"* (Eph. 2:8). We need the Savior. Every day and at all times, we need Christ. He is our strength (Eph. 3:16-17), our life (Col. 3:4), our hope (1 Pet. 1:3). Only when we look to the Lord can we expect to overcome temptation and live for Him.

Between Life and Death

JOHNNY RAMSEY

In Num. 16:48 we learn that Moses and Aaron formed the line of demarcation between the living and the dead. In this awesome section of Scripture, we read of the rebellion of Korah and those who perished because of improper attitudes and motivations. Decisions that bordered on the ridiculous changed the eternal destiny of thousands of folk. Sin was rampant, and Satan rejoiced over the shallow ideas of carnal minds. *"The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death"* (Prov. 13:14). The consequences of foolish alliances and sinister plans will overflow the banks of hell! *"The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy"* (Prov. 14:10).

Centuries later, men are warned of the danger of perishing *"in the gainsaying of Korah"* (Jude 11). What a price to pay! Today there are vital people that stand between death and life. Their loyalties, for good or bad, help decide for others the route they will take and the path they will follow. Will we join the vast multitude on the broad way that eventuates in torment? Or will we wisely traverse the narrow way with the few who find the golden strand of glory (Matt. 7:13-14)? *"But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: Let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee"* (Psa. 5:11).

Parents are an integral link in this chain that propels children

to victory or defeat at the end of the spiritual journey. Mothers and Dads have a tremendous role on the stage of life. They literally stand between the living and the dead. Millions will be in heaven because of devoted, holy and Christ-like parents that taught and lived earnestly the gospel of grace (Acts 20:24). Conversely, and tragically, due to weak and insipid guardians, thousands will go to perdition. If we all had mothers like Hannah (1 Sam. 1), Lois and Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5), we would have more sound preachers like Samuel and Timothy! When men like Joshua take a stand for truth, offspring grow closer to God! No one shines brighter in the hall of fame of spiritual leadership than a parent that actually puts Christianity first. *"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid"* (Matt. 5:14).

Gospel preachers stand between the dead and the living. The truth they preach can make men free, whereas the truth they hold back can result in lost souls in the Judgment Day. How sad it would be to stand in the shoes of cowardly evangelists when we stand before the Master Teacher in that final hour!

*How deeply grieved our soul will be,
If some lost one there,
Should cry in deep despair,
You never mentioned Christ to me.
You met me day by day,
And knew I was astray,
But you never mentioned Him to me.*

What a haunting cry! The beauty of the glad tidings must be shared with the lost and dying world. Our magnificent obsession must be the message of redemption proclaimed. *"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out"* (Rom. 11:33). According to Ezek. 3:17-20, when we stand between the living and the dead, and fail to warn them, then we, too, shall die. What a terrible price to pay because we were spiritually tongue-tied as God's silent partner.

Jesus and His plan of salvation stand powerfully between the dead and the living. Jesus stated firmly, *"I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come"* (John 8:21). Jesus set forth the necessity of faith, repentance and baptism into Him: *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*

... Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish . . . Repent, and be baptized every one of you . . . Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Mark 16:16; Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 22:16). A woman recently told a gospel preacher, "I will die and go to hell before I will be baptized!" She did not realize how true are those words!

Where do we stand, right now, with regard to life and death? It is altogether proper to conclude with this choice which God gives to all: *"I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil"* (Deut. 30:15). What shall be our decision?

The Danger of Distractions

RONALD D. BRYANT

What is your reaction when reality disappoints, intimidates or bores you? Most of us are forced to reply that when reality does not thrill us we tend to seek stimulation via some distraction. In the face of serious matters that may require more of us than we desire to expend, we will yawn, do a "ho-hum" and look around for something else to engage our attention.

If a matter intimidates us, we may seek comfort in something that is familiar. If a matter appears to be too difficult for us to master, we may choose to pass on to a matter that is not so difficult. Even in religion, or to be more exact, especially in religion, we are given to seeking distractions. This may explain why even the vast majority of church-going folks avoid serious study of the Bible and neglect the disciplines of prayer and worship. Interestingly, many do a "ho-hum" when forced to consider their actions, and fail to heed the directives given and the discipline needed (Ephesians 5:15ff).

One of the largest distractions in the realm of religion is human speculations. It is an undeniable fact that we humans like to speculate.

We like to form theories and express opinions because they are easy. Regrettably, theories that mean little and matter even less often serve to divert attention from the simple yet profound truths of God (James 1:20-21).

It is more than a little sobering to realize that human opinion

is valued on a par with the Word of God by many who call themselves believers. The doctrines of men are quite simply human opinions, speculations or theories. To embrace them is a very dangerous course (Matthew 15:8-9; Galatians 1:8-9).

Then, there is the distraction produced by hype. Religious hype is the stock and trade of the religious entrepreneurs of every age. Special days, special programs, exciting activities, and grand events are frequently passed off as spiritual activities, although they neither prove nor produce anything of enduring spiritual benefit. Personal experiences are hyped and even applauded as evidence of spirituality. Entrepreneurs all find ways to raise capital with which to fund what they are hyping, the ministry they are promoting.

The hype often becomes hysterical! (Hysterical—out of control, anything goes, no limits.) Incredible claims increase, strange doctrines proliferate, gimmicks become more bizarre, and the latest offerings of the religious entrepreneurs are promoted to draw the masses along. Through these, souls are drawn away from the will of God (Matthew 7:21ff). The religious entrepreneurs are ever trying to move on to bigger, better and more appealing activities. After each special they are in trouble, being plagued with the necessity of coming up with still a bigger event, performance, i.e. a bigger hype.

Then there are the holy ritual distractions. Rituals—respected as holy, packaged in approved words, appropriate moods and movements, yet devoid of devotion, reverence or humility—are embraced. Into this mix, performing groups and dramatic presentations have been moved and have become part of the religious offerings. Yet, it is to be insisted, these are not holy offerings! Such can be compared to the performance of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10). They are acted out on what is supposed to be holy ground and in what is supposed to be a holy context, yet they are of human, not holy, origin. They are profane! Although they may serve well for the moment, have vast appeal and be entertaining, they are not of God. They may be popular, and if so, this should come as no surprise. Who does not know that theater is popular? Who does not know that drama is exciting? Who does not know that people like to be entertained? However, theater is not worship! Drama is not devotion! Entertainment is not adoration of God! A greater truth: God is still seeking true worship from true worshipers (John 4:23-24).

Another distraction in this category is the therapeutic. The therapy or counseling in the religious context needs careful scrutiny. It may serve an audience for a moment, but unless it is in itself an earnest and deliberate effort to point men to God, and unless its focus is that of honoring God, it is only a distraction. Consider the way some practitioners use the Word of God. Is it final authority, or is it used in the same way and on the same level as human sources, experts and quotations? Two facts remain: That which God has said about morality, about family and healthy relationships, is not counsel or advice, but Divine decree (Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-23). A human opinion, even a learned one, is not the same nor on the same level as a Divine decree.

Healthy and right activities do have their place. The inward, the emotional, the exciting, the theatrical and the therapeutic have their place. Just as the medicinal, the economic, the political, etc. have their place. Yet, when any of these is pursued or used in the spiritual realm, either for their own sakes or for what they can produce for the moment, they inevitably must be labeled as dangerous distractions. When these programs, claims, performances, and the like become an end within themselves (and such does occur: they tend to become the program that must be kept alive, or an event that must go on, or an expert that must be heard, or a performance that must be seen, or the counsel that must be embraced), in the end they stand as deadly distractions (Colossians 2:18-23).

Religious history is replete with examples of well-intentioned people who flitted about from one distraction to another—one gimmick after another—one program after another. They squandered time and energy and even compromised eternal verities for things that did not bring them to God. They wanted to bow down before God, to yield in greater devotion to Him but were distracted.

Presently, some have worn themselves out pursuing the latest religious fad and have no interest or energy to engage in careful and prayerful study of the Word of God. The evidence is tragically abundant that too often it is our human tendency to pursue some facet of religious expression or accept some substitute for the same while remaining oblivious to the fact that we have forgotten about genuine devotion to Christ. This is a sad and lamentable practice,

yet it is nothing new (Matthew 15:8-9; Mark 7:6-9).

Sometimes we forget that any expression of Christian devotion can become mere formality, dull habit or empty routine. The things God gave to provide spiritual strength, growth and vitality can be misused. The things of God are attractive, but they are not mere ornaments or gimmicks. They are desirable and can be embraced, but they must be adopted wholeheartedly and properly. If they are not properly understood, they can become empty caricatures. What we call devotions begin to take the place of real faith, genuine devotion and God-centered worship and service. Things that God gave to encourage our fellowship and our walk with Him can become empty substitutes. This course is incredibly deceptive and dangerous (Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:16-17).

No matter the cause or the nature of the distraction, when our activities insulate us from the purposes of God, they also isolate us from the power of God. When the outward deeds, personal preferences, humanly devised programs, or human desires become larger and more important to us than love for God or simple obedience to God, the end result is not our salvation but our ruin (Romans 10:1-3).

One of the great puzzles in the spiritual realm is the fact that some choose the course of neglect and carelessness. Yes, neglect and carelessness are choices!

Insincerity and indifference have overwhelmingly been the chosen distractions of the careless, however. Irritations and disappointments can also distract if we allow them to do so. How shallow and incredibly foolish to allow these to distract us from God! Indifference, neglect and carelessness have ever resulted not in spiritual life but in spiritual death (Hebrews 2:1-3).

Open to each of us is but one safe course. We must seek God. Choosing to know and honor Him must be our constant, earnest endeavor. We must face with renewed awareness the necessity of careful and prayerful examination of our devotions and our lives before God (2 Corinthians 13:5). We each must realize that it is possible for us to be distracted even from our devotion to God. The danger of distractions is very real.

How Do You Recognize A Christian?

DENNIS LOYD

When Saul of Tarsus obtained permission to go to Damascus to find Christians, he referred to them as those "belonging to the Way" (NASB). How did he recognize them? During World War II, the Nazi regime required all Jews to wear a yellow Star of David displayed prominently on their clothing for instant recognition. But the Scriptures give us no indication that the early Christians had any distinctive dress or hairstyle to set them apart from others on the street or in the marketplace. So how did Saul recognize a Christian? Had I been in Damascus when Saul came seeking Christians, would he have picked me out for prison? How would he have known that I, an average person walking down the street, was of the Way?

The Bible tells us that we should be recognized personally and individually by at least three distinctive qualities.

Love

We should be recognized by our love for God and for others. Jesus said love would be a distinguishing mark. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). He also told His disciples when they asked about the greatest commandment that we must first love God and then our neighbors. Obviously, He intended for His people to be a people of love. We understand the idea of family resemblance—eyes, nose, hair, tone of voice, or gestures. We hear someone say of a newborn, "Looks just like his mother." No family resemblance for the Christian is more important than that of love, for "God is love." We look and act like our Father when we love one another.

Love does not ignore error, but it corrects gently and compassionately. That is why Peter could say that "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). That concept of covering a multitude of sins is mentioned twice in the New Testament: Peter's statement about the power of love and James' statement about teaching, so that one who turns a sinner from the error of his way also covers a multitude of sins (James 5:19-20). Love enables us to turn that sinner, and love makes us want to turn that sinner. Are we that recognizable?

Reasonableness

We should be recognized by our reasonableness or gentleness. In Philippians 4:5, Paul urges, "Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand" (ESV). The command here is worded differently in most translations because no English word is equivalent to the Greek word used in the text. Thus we have this variety: "moderation" (KJV); "gentleness" (NIV, NKJV); "forbearance" (RSV); "forbearing spirit" (NASB); "magnanimity" (NEB); "reasonableness" (ESV).

Out of that great variety, what we understand Paul to be telling us should be easily recognizable to everyone. He seems to be saying to the Philippian Christians and us to possess a balanced, intelligent and decent outlook on life and to be considerate and thoughtful in our dealings with others. Paul's use of the imperative is very personal— "Let your" He demands an individual trait for all Christians to add to their lives.

It is of interest that this charge comes immediately after Paul referred to a conflict in the church at Philippi. "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true comrade, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel" (Philippians 4:2-3 NASB). In light of their disagreement, the Christians there were not to choose sides but to be reasonable, gentle, forbearing, magnanimous in dealing with Euodia and Syntyche. Notice the urgent request: "I ask you also to help these women." The Christian must avoid being harsh or judgmental. We find it particularly difficult to be gentle or reasonable when we know we are in the right and someone else is in the wrong. But graciousness must be a part of our character. Paul gives a remarkable reason for this quality— "The Lord is near" (v. 4). Life is too short for us to be vindictive or bitter or harsh. Am I recognizable by my reasonableness?

Choices

I must be recognized by my attitude toward choices. As Peter instructs his readers in how to deal with persecution and the pressure to conform to the world, he says, "And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you" (1 Peter 4:4).

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works"

(Matthew 5:16). The world indeed observes our "good works" and our bad ones. Do we live up to what we have said we are? Peter commended his readers because they were living up to their commitments. He noted two ways the world would respond to them—shock or surprise and attack or maligning. The King James sounds old-fashioned but impressive: "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot." They are surprised.

When did we last surprise anyone with our choices and our stand? John warned against the lust of eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Choices surround us, and we can easily fall victim to those lusts or desires. Eve did. Jesus did not. Because we are surrounded by the temptations of the world, some choices must be made early, and then we need to live by them. The appeals to greed, alcohol, drugs, sexual promiscuity, thievery and lying are real and continuous. We must know who we are and Whose we are. Are we recognized as Christians by the stands we take and the wisdom of our choices?

Peter and John stood trial before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4. They were charged with preaching Jesus. As Peter began to tell them about Jesus, explaining that salvation could be found only in His name, the group reacted to what they heard. "Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

James calls the Bible a mirror. When I look into the mirror of God's Word, do I recognize myself as one of His children? And when others see me, do they recognize me as a Christian in my love, reasonableness and choices? Maybe these were the very traits Saul of Tarsus sought among those he went to Damascus to arrest.

How to Identify a False Teacher

RICHARD NORMAN

What does a false teacher look like? Have you ever seen or heard one? How would you be able to tell whether someone is a false teacher or is teaching a false doctrine?

The scene is Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-20). Fire and smoke covered the summit, the sound of a trumpet blast was deafening, and the earth quaked. All Israel gathered and was warned not to go near or touch the mountain, for God had descended to its crest. God then spoke the Ten Commandments directly to the people. They were so terrified they asked Moses to act as an intermediary; thus was born the concept of a priesthood to stand between God and mankind.

It seems incredible that in the 40 days Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments in written form the people abandoned Jehovah God for a golden calf, but they did. The King James Version tells us that God's anger "wax[ed] hot" (Exodus 32:10).

Today, most people believe that moral sins are more serious than religious sins. That is why so many today believe that anything of a religious nature must be acceptable to God. They cannot seem even to consider that anything of a religious nature could offend God. From the Old Testament, we learn that our God is a jealous God, and He will not tolerate pluralism (one god is as good as another). False teaching makes God's anger "wax hot."

False teachers have always existed. In the very beginning, Satan asked, "Has God indeed said?" Eve knew what God had said, but Satan taught something different: "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:1-6 NKJV). It was a lie, and Eve bought it because she saw (perhaps Satan demonstrated) that the tree was good for food. It was pleasing to the eye (did not appear dangerous), and it offered benefits to be desired (the very wisdom of God, the Creator). That is the nature of false doctrine. It is extremely appealing to our senses. It sounds good, looks good and feels good.

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, however, God has repeatedly warned His people about false doctrine and false teachers. The New Testament urges all Christians to beware of apostasy and being led astray with flattering and deceptive teaching and a perverted gospel (Galatians 1:7). We are urged time and again to discern between truth and falsehood in religious teaching -to know and be able to distinguish religious truth from religious error. If that were not possible, as some tell us today, why does the Bible insist on it? John says we must "test" what we are being taught (1 John 4:1ff), literally to put it on trial. How do you put a religious teaching on trial to determine if it is true or false?

How do you "test the spirits"?

Identifying false teachers is often easier said than done. They are said to be deceitful, can have the appearance of "an angel of light" and can transform themselves into "ministers of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:12-15). Jesus warned of "false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15). Jesus even warned of "false christs" (24:24). Paul warns of "false apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:13), and Peter speaks of "false teachers" who "secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). How can we recognize false teachers if they appear and sound harmless, are attractive in personality and manner, are articulate and well-educated, friendly and very persuasive.

False teachers, false teaching and false doctrine can be identified only one way. We must know what the Bible teaches well enough that when we hear some strange teaching we can compare what is said with what the Bible says. That is what the Bereans did (Acts 17:11).

First John tells us we can know the truth and be certain that we know it (1 John 2:21). John tells us how to discern between religious truth and religious error. He says it is a matter of whom we heed. John says the false teachers are "of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them" (4:5). On the other hand, John says, "We [John, the other apostles, and the divinely inspired prophets of the first century] are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (v. 6). In other words, the New Testament is the standard for determining truth and error—not men. Whom are you heeding?

Today, many preachers are so popular, friendly, well-educated and articulate that they can easily slip in false doctrine so subtly that most of us do not recognize it until it is too late - sometimes even in our own brotherhood. False doctrine sometimes comes so sugarcoated and attractive and is so soothing to our ears that we just accept it without question.

The most serious problem today is that too many of our brethren—those in the pew and especially in the eldership—simply do not know their Bibles well enough to recognize false teaching when confronted face to face. Or perhaps we just are not paying close enough attention to what is being taught. In any event,

churches of Christ are being torn asunder throughout our brotherhood.

The Bible says false teachers must be identified, marked and avoided (Romans 16:17). How can this be done if we cannot know, identify and distinguish religious truth from religious error?

Baptism's Place in Conversion

HUGH FULFORD

The place of baptism in the conversion process is an old and much debated subject. Yet it is a matter that we ought not be afraid to revisit. Although mature Christians need to "go on to perfection [spiritual maturity]" (Hebrews 6:1 NKJV), those who have never made an in-depth study of this matter need to do so. This includes young people who are growing up in Christian families as well as adults who have never engaged in such a study.

The religious world is studying again the matter of baptism, and those of us who are pleading for undenominational, non-sectarian Christianity need to be able to make biblically informed contributions to this study.

Conversion to Christ is essential to a proper relationship with Christ (Matthew 18:3; Acts 3:19). The book of Acts records numerous accounts of how people were converted under the Great Commission of our Lord (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). All of these cases should be carefully studied. They are found in Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 16, 18, 19 and 22. Baptism plays a prominent role in each of these cases.

To help clear the air regarding baptism, we need to understand that people living this side of the death of Christ—a death that took place in order for mankind to be saved (Romans 5:8-10)—are not converted to Christ by observing the law of the Old Testament or Jewish economy. By that law, "no flesh shall be justified" for those living under the economy of Christ (Galatians 2:16). The testament of Christ became effective after His death (Hebrews 9:16-17), which means that those living before the death of Christ (including the thief on the cross) are not to be looked at as examples of how one is saved under the testament of Christ.

Furthermore, a person is not converted to Christ by

meritorious works of human righteousness (Titus 3:5). This verse affirms: "but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." What is this "washing of regeneration" by which God saves us according to His mercy? It is baptism.

Too, it should be observed that baptism does not mitigate the grace of God. Those mentioned in the book of Acts were saved by grace through faith just as all are saved today (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation by grace was a key theme in the preaching recorded in Acts (see 11:23; 15:11; 18:27; 20:24). Biblically, baptism is never posited against grace and faith as though it were grace and faith versus baptism.

Baptism is not the lone action that is to be taken in the process of conversion. Baptism without faith in Christ and genuine repentance of sin has no efficacy (Acts 2:38).

What, then, is the place of baptism in the process of being converted to Christ and receiving His salvation?

Christ, in giving His commission, declared: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Failure to believe in Christ results in condemnation; whereas faith in Christ that leads one to be baptized results in salvation.

The chosen ambassadors of Christ—His apostles—unerringly understood what Christ had said one must do to be saved and uniformly proclaimed the conditions of salvation to those to whom they preached.

Peter instructed the convicted ones on Pentecost to "repent, and let everyone 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" (Acts 2:38).

After the proclamation of Christ, the queen's treasurer said: "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Without further delay, upon his confession of faith in Christ, the eunuch was baptized (Acts 8:36-38).

Speaking from heaven, the Lord told Saul of Tarsus that in the city of Damascus he would be informed of "what you must do" (Acts 9:6). By studying the parallel accounts of Saul's conversion, one learns that he was instructed by Ananias to "arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). We need to bear in mind that according to

Christ Himself this was a must!

In the case of Cornelius and his family, Peter "commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48). Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Obedience to God's commandments is not legalism; it is submission. Without an obedient, submissive spirit one is barred from heaven (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Lydia heeded "the things spoken by Paul" and "she and her household were baptized" (Acts 16:14-15). In the case of the Philippian jailer, Paul and Silas "spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house ... and immediately he and all his family were baptized" (Acts 16:32-33). It is important to note that it was after their baptism that they are said to have believed in God (v. 34). Faith is a conviction that leads to obedience to the "primary commands" of the gospel (including repentance and baptism) and that continues in a life of devotion to the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:7).

With reference to the conversion of the Corinthians it is stated that "many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). In Ephesus 12 men who had received John's baptism after it had become obsolete "were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (19:5). It is rather difficult to miss the import of baptism in these new covenant cases of conversion.

Further study reveals that baptism inducts one into Christ and His death (Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27); inducts one into the body of Christ, which is the church, the community of the redeemed (1 Corinthians 12:13); and "now saves us" (1 Peter 3:21).

Rather than holding up the devout unbaptized person as an alleged example of salvation before and without baptism, we need to be lovingly and passionately setting forth the conditions of our Lord's last will and testament (the New Testament, Hebrews 10:9-10) on the basis of which He has promised to save us. Cornelius was extremely pious, but he still needed Christ and the gospel. Despite his being "a devout man and one who feared God with all his household" (Acts 10:2), this good man and his family were commanded to be baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:48).

This is the message of Christ that still needs to be preached today and "even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

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