

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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## *EDITORIAL*

### **What Does the Bible Teach?**

***"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"***

Biblically and historically speaking, though it may sound strange, mechanical instruments of music were never used in Christian worship until centuries after the establishment of the church of Jesus Christ. Early Christians, who were guided by the Holy Spirit inspired apostles, simply lifted their collective voices while singing praises to God in His worship, as is mentioned in Ephesians 5:19, cited above. In 1 Cor. 14:15, the apostle Paul said again, "I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding."

Bible scholars and historians all agree in saying one thing that mechanical instruments of music were entirely absent from the worship of the New Testament church. They all agree in saying that in the early church no instrument of music were ever used. Instrument of music were added later in about 8th century A.D. in the worship of God in the church.

Listen to John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist church, he said, "I have no objection to the organ in our chapels, provided it is neither heard nor seen." (Clarke's commentary, Vol. IV, p. 686). Adam Clarke, the well known commentator also wrote in the same book and volume and page, and said, "I here declare that I never knew them (instruments of music) productive of any good

in the worship of God and have had reason to believe they were productive of much evil. Music as a science, I esteem and admire, but instruments of music in the house of God, I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music, and I here register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of that infinite Spirit who requires His followers to worship Him in spirit and truth." Again, John Calvin, the originator of Presbyterian church wrote: "Musical instruments in celebrating the praise of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law." (John Calvin's commentary, 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm). Martin Luther, a distinguished reformer describes, "the Organ, the ensign of Ball." (McClintock & Strong's encyclopedia, Music, Vol. VI, p. 762).

Instrumental music in itself is not improper. There is nothing wrong in having them in our homes, or playing or listening to them. It is only when they are used in relationship with the worship of God they become improper and wrong. The fact of the matter is, mechanical instruments of music were never commanded or exemplified for use in the worship of God in His church. God wants an instrument of His own creation (human vocal chords) to be used in His praise, rather than an instrument of our (human) creation. Mechanical instruments, and singing by choirs in front of an audience, often become means of entertainment to the audience, whereas worship must be intended as praise to God. (Hebrews 13:15). Teaching and admonishing one another by singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs should be the purpose when we as Christians come together to worship God (Colossians 3:16), and not entertaining. Instrumental music may put people in a certain mood, and may stir human hearts, and may stimulate high sentiments. But the point to be noted is that the purpose of our worship, as Christians, is not to uplift and entertain man; I as an individual must worship God, therefore, instrumental music played or performed by someone else cannot be something that I offer to God. Moreover, our worship is to be determined by what is rational and spiritual and verbal, not by what is emotional, aesthetic or sensual.

Sadly, though, frequently the psalmist David is quoted by many to justify the use of mechanical instruments of music by Christians in our worship of God. But notice, reader, David not only used the mechanical instruments of music but he also danced

(Psalm 150:4). Moreover, David had many wives, he burned incense, offered animal sacrifices, observed feasts days, and likewise did many other things according to the laws given through Moses. If I can put my hand back in the Old Testament and pull out David's mechanical instruments of music, then why can't I do the same with other things also? What law is there that gives me the right to justify mechanical instruments of music because it was in the Old Testament, and then fail in justifying the offering of animal sacrifices, burning of incense, worshipping on Sabbath (Saturday), circumcision, etc.? Old Testament, with its requirements of worship, is done away, and we are no longer living under the Old Testament. Read 2 Cor. 3:14; Romans 7:4-6; Col. 2:14; Gal. 3:19-25; Heb. 8:7&13, 10:1 and Gal. 5:4. Let the Bible, God's word, be our guide and standard and not what man has devised (Amos. 6:3-5).

## *Truth Is The Truth*

**J.C. CHOATE**

What is truth? There are those who would ask this question to suggest that there is no such thing as truth, that there is no absolute, that the answer depends on the values of the one who is giving it, and that "Truth" varies from culture to culture and from country to country. *Is it really left up to each individual to decide what the truth is, what is right and what is wrong, what he will accept and what he will reject, what is good for him and what is bad for him ?*

Surely if we believe there is a God in heaven, that there is a Creator, that he is all-powerful, knows all, sees all, hears all, and loves all, then we would have to conclude that He knows the facts, He knows our needs, and He knows what to tell us so that we may be saved and have the hope of eternal life. He would, therefore, not lie to us, deceive us, or mislead us. Neither would He tell one to do one thing and another to do something else. He would not have one message for one culture and another message for another culture. He created all of us, and He knows we are all in sin. Because of that, He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for the sins of the whole world. Jesus Himself said, "I am the way,

the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

There is *one* God, *one* Lord, *one* Spirit, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* church, and *one* hope (Ephesians 4:4-6). We are also told that there is *one* way, *one* door, *one* gospel, *one* foundation, *one* name, *one* worship, *one* day of worship, *one* heaven, and *one* hell. In all these things, and others which could be added, there is ONLY ONE and all of us know that ONE means ONE, not TWO or THREE or MORE. Someone can explain truth away, misinterpret it, or reject it, but it remains, in spite of all, ONLY ONE. Fact is fact and truth is truth, and *it does not change*.

The Lord has revealed His will to us through the pages of the Bible. It is inspired of God (2 Timothy 3:16,17), it is Spirit and life (John 6:63), and is therefore from God and is God's word. It should not be added to, subtracted from, or changed, but left as it is (Revelation 22:18,19). God knew man's needs and, in response to those needs, He told man what he must do. With all people having the same disease — the disease of sin — God prescribed the same remedy for all (Mark 16:15,16).

The Lord knows what He wants us to do. -He has told all of us to do the same thing, and when we do that, He saves all of us the same way, and adds all of us to His one church (Acts 2:38,47). God has spoken (Hebrews 1:1,2). He has spoken the truth (John 8:32). We are then to live by it, preach it, and take it to every creature under heaven.

Christ tells us that God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24). As the Lord's people, we are to direct our worship to God, in all sincerity and humility, and to worship Him as he has directed or commanded. Anything less than that, or more than that, will not be accepted.

The Lord's word, the truth, is said to be the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). We are exhorted to be doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving ourselves (James 1:22). Christ says, "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). His word will never pass away (Matthew 24:35) and in the last day all will be judged by His word (John 12:48).

God does not lie; He cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). He has always spoken the truth and will always speak the truth

through His word. The gospel preached by the apostles in the first century is the same gospel that is to be preached today. It saved sinners then, and it saves sinner now. It is just as modern and up-to-date as the times. Why should man change it? Woe be to those who would attempt to do so. We can see in the inspired record what has happened with those of the past who have departed from God's truth. To change truth turns it into a lie, and a lie will damn all who follow it.

*The truth, then, is the truth*, consisting of facts, true information, and commands directly from the mind of God. Whether we like it or we don't like it, whether we accept it or we reject it, it remains the same. May God help us to believe the truth, to obey it, to live by it, to preach it, and never to depart from it or to be ashamed of it, so that in the last day we will be judged by the word to be faithful to God, and to be worthy of eternal life.

## *Who Is The Angel of the Lord?*

T. PIERCE BROWN

The expression, "*The angel of the Lord*" appears in the King James Version of the Old Testament more than 50 times and in the New Testament about a dozen times. Our question is, "Does the expression signify an ordinary angelic being, or does it relate to a divine being — what is called a 'theophany'?"

I do not know that the answer to this question will be of any practical value to us in living the Christian life, and it surely does not need to be known for one to be saved. However, it is our judgment that any truth revealed in God's Word is of some value to us, even if at any given moment we may not see any value in it.

It seems evident that in Exodus 3:2ff, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, that he was the God who said, "*I AM*". When Jesus said in John 8:24, "*Except ye believe that I am he ye shall die in your sins,*" and when He said in John 8:58, "*Before Abraham was, I am,*" He was affirming that He was Deity. He was God in the flesh — Emmanuel.

In Genesis 21:17, when the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, he said in verse 18, "*I will make of him a great*

*nation.* "It is evident that Deity was speaking. When Abraham was offering Isaac on the altar, the angel of the Lord said to him in Genesis 22:15ff that he would make of him a great nation and bless him.

It seems highly probable that since John 1:18 says, "*No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,*" and 1 Timothy 6:16 reveals the same truth, that these various appearances of Deity, in the burning bush, in the form of a heavenly or angelic Being, or in the similitude of a man or "the son of man", were actually manifestations of the Second Person of the Godhead, of the One (the Word) who was in the beginning *with* God and who was God (John 1:1), who *became flesh* and *dwelt among us*. Jesus Himself said in John 14:9, "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.*" Of course He was not contradicting Himself when He said, "*No man hath seen the Father,*" for He simply meant that He was a manifestation of the Father.

So, since Jesus said in John 8:58, "*Before Abraham was, I AM,*" and since there were many occasions where persons saw "*the angel of the Lord,*" who was then identified in the same passage as "the Lord" or "God" and was worshipped as God, the only logical and scriptural conclusion we can reach is that in such instances the expression "the angel of the Lord" refers to Deity. A study of the passages shows that "the Lord" who was speaking was the one whom we know as Jesus, acting in His role as mediator between God and man.

We need to realize, however, that the word "angel" itself simply means messenger or one who is sent, and may refer to a human being, an angelic created being, or to a manifestation of Deity. The context will help us to determine which it is.

## ***When Should One Be Baptized?***

**DAVID R. PHARR**

Children who are brought up under the influence of godly parents usually express the desire to be baptized at an early age. Parents are rightly concerned about giving their children proper guidance. They want to avoid anything that might appear to hinder

the child's obedience to God, but on the other hand, they do not want the child to act prematurely.

A young person should not be baptized (1) until he or she has understanding and conviction about sin, (2) until he or she understands fundamental facts about God's plan of redemption, (3) and until he or she is ready to accept the responsibilities of the Christian life.

Understanding the plan of salvation is more than merely being able to recite that baptism is "*for the remission of sins* " (Acts 2:38). There must be some understanding of grace, atonement, the Deity of Christ, and His death on our behalf. Certainly these things must be taught to young people on their level, but a person is not ready for baptism without a degree of knowledge and appreciation of such matters. In some cases we may have explained baptism to those who lack a sufficient foundation in other matters to really grasp it.

Baptism is not *the end*. It is *the beginning*. The commitment to Christian discipleship is not an easy commitment. Parents and teachers should be careful to explain this. Of course, it is vital that parents and teachers teach by the influence of their own consecrated lives. Some parents want their children to be baptized, but they do not seem to want them to attend faithfully. It sometimes appears that some are pleased for their children to be baptized, **but their ongoing influence gives more emphasis to their place in the world than to their place in the church.**

A youth's decision to be baptized should not be based on his or her having reached a certain age. The calendar has nothing to do with it. Neither should one be baptized simply because others have been. Genuine conviction, understanding, faith, and repentance are essential steps into baptism. Faithfulness and purity of life are essential afterwards. We love to see our children give their lives to the Lord, but this requires, more than just being baptized.

## ***Did Jacob See God?***

**WAYNE JACKSON**

*How do we harmonize Jacob's claim that he saw God*

*(Genesis 32:30) with the New Testament statement that no man has seen God at any time (John 1:18)?*

First, it must be noted that as to His actual essence, God, our heavenly Father, is a spirit-being (Isaiah 31:3; John 4:24). As a spirit, He does not possess the nature of humanity. A spirit does not consist of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, the Lord observed that the apostle had not learned that truth from *"flesh and blood,"* but from the *"Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 16:17). It is clear, therefore, that Jehovah is not physical. Contrary to the assertion of some cultists, He is not a man (Hosea 11:9). Thus, as a spirit, God dwells in light unapproachable (1 Timothy 6:16). He is invisible to the eye of humans (John 1:18; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 John 4:20).

While it is true that God cannot be observed as pure spirit-essence, it is also the case that Deity has, on special occasions during the historical period when His redemptive plan was being gradually unfolded, assumed temporary corporeal forms through which He communicated to select individuals. Three "men" visited Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, yet one of them was "Jehovah" who "appeared" to the patriarch (Genesis 18:1). Jacob struggled with a "man" who was really a divine being in temporary human form (Genesis 32:24,30). When Moses requested to see God's "glory", Jehovah suggested that He would make His *"goodness pass before"* the prophet (Exodus 33:18,19). The subsequent context suggests that the Lord's character was revealed to Moses, not the actual essence of Deity (34:5-7).

Too, there are other indirect ways in which God may be seen. His invisible traits (His power and wisdom, for example) are observed in the things which He has created (Romans 1:20). He is seen in the revelation of His Son (John 1:18; 14:9; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). He is "seen" representatively in the rich spiritual blessings which He bestows (Matthew 5:5 with John 3:3-5; 3:36).

Passages, therefore, that speak of seeing God, and not seeing God, do not conflict. They simply represent different vantage points.



# Persistence

ROY BEASLEY

Who is an "over-achiever"? Studies have been made and books have been written on the subject. What makes an over-achiever different from the ordinary? What is the secret of their success? The answer may be surprising. One common trait was discovered. Not a high IQ. Not good fortune. Not special advantage. It was *persistence*.

When Winston Churchill became old and feeble, he was invited to speak at a graduation. Against the advice of his friends and family he accepted. When the time came for him to speak, he rose from his seat and walked slowly to the podium. There he stood silent for a long time looking over the audience. His aids became nervous. The audience became restless. Then he spoke. He said: "Never give up. Never give up. Never, never, never." Then he sat down. That perhaps turned out to be one of the most memorable speeches he ever made. And perhaps it was the best advice that graduating class ever received.

While persistence may appear to be a simple virtue, Jesus stressed its importance. It is essential in every area of life — even in prayer. The Lord taught that we *"ought always to pray and not to faint (or lose heart)"* (Luke 18:1). We are to pray and pray, and keep on praying. Don't give up. To illustrate His point, Jesus told two stories. One involved a friend who came during the middle of the night requesting bread. Although the man was in the bed and was annoyed at this late-hour visit, he responded to the persistent knocking. The point is that if a friend will answer such an appeal, how much more will our Father in heaven respond to us (Luke 11:5-8)? Jesus concluded by saying in verse 9, *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."*

The second illustration was that of a widow who kept coming before an unjust judge to make her request.

*"...There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, Neither regarded man; And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet Because this widow troubleth me, I*

will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

*"And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, Though he bear long with them. I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1-8).*

The point is that if this cruel judge would respond to the persistence of a poor widow, how much more quickly will God listen to the prayers of His saints?

Jesus also taught persistence in faithfulness and preparedness. He described a *"faithful and wise servant"* as one who continues to do his duties in the absence of his master. He said, *"Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods"* (Matthew 24:46,47).

Yes, persistence pays, it becomes our greatest strength when it is anchored in God. As Winston Churchill said: "Never give up — never, never, never."

## ***How Much Does It Cost ... to Become a Christian?***

**JERRY JENKINS**

A frequently asked question in today's world is, "How much does it cost?" We are living in a price-conscious society.

Value of "things" is normally determined by age, duration, or manufacturer. Value can also be determined by time and effort involved. It costs to become a physician, a musician, an athlete, or numerous other things. Generally speaking, one can get anything or become almost anything if he or she is willing to pay the price.

Jesus was keenly aware of cost. He never left the impression that the Christian walk was a Sunday afternoon stroll. *"Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me"* (Mark 8:34).

To be a Christian involves **abnegation**. The expression, "Let him deny himself," does not mean that disciples of Christ are to

**disdain all forms of materialism.** Even after Jesus had called Matthew and he had left all to follow Jesus, the Scriptures affirm that he still owned his own home. *"And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them "* (Luke 5:29).

Neither is "self denial" **the joining of a monastic order.** The followers of Jesus were energetic, active, people-oriented workers. There is a place for frequent devotion and prayer, but the harvest is ready and there is no time to sit in idleness.

The denial of which Christ spoke involves **renunciation.** Some assert that this refers to a denying of some kind of food, some pleasure, or some comfort. Though the disciple has to learn to say "no" to many of the strongest cravings of his earthly nature, the "cross" we are to take up requires far more than denial of these physical comforts. It is a symbol for duty which is to be performed daily, at any cost, even that of the most painful death. To **deny self** means the complete abnegation of one's own life, and of following Him both in teaching and example.

To genuinely follow Christ involves dedication. Though it is true that each individual faces trials and personal burdens, and in this sense has his cross to bear, the lifting of the cross here means to *follow* the will of the Father, and the resulting *suffering constitutes the cross.* Jesus said, *"And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him"* (John 8:29). The world's opposition typically does not involve physical suffering, but sometimes family rejection and work-place shunning can be extremely painful.

Finally, the cost of following Jesus involves **imitation.** Our Lord commanded, *"Follow Me"*. This necessitates adopting Christ's manner of living in words, attitudes, and actions. To follow in His footsteps involves prayer, accepting people for who they are, and seeking in them the highest good. It involves regular attendance to worship (Luke 4:16), and a burning desire to disburse God's words to others.

The advertisement in today's world is, "Come as you are!" The intimation is that God is so eager to claim another soul for His own that He will come down to our standard and will gladly accept us without any change on our part. **This is not what He says in His word.** Unless we are willing to count the cost and to

pay the price *He* asks, Jesus says that *we cannot be His disciples*.  
We must come up out of the world to meet His standard!

## *From Darkness to Light*

T.R. DOHLING

God blessed the Christians in Ephesus with His grace. These Ephesians had received the covenant blessing of salvation (Eph. 3:4-6).

What did the Ephesians do in order to be saved and become recipients of the grace of God? When we review what the Ephesians did in order to be saved by God's grace, we will know what people today must do to be saved.

The historical record in Acts 18; 19 and in Ephesians describes the way they were converted. First, they heard the gospel preached (Acts 18:18-21; 19:1-10; Ephesians 1:13). Second, as they listened to the teaching of the gospel, they believed it was the truth of God revealed. This belief (faith) caused them to accept the fact that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Acts 19:17; Ephesians 1:13, 15). Third, because of their belief in Christ as God's Son, they turned away from all other religious beliefs. They immediately gave up their erroneous beliefs and stopped practices contrary to God's law (Acts 19:17-20). Fourth, they demonstrated repentance by confessing Christ, the Son of God, as Lord of their lives and were willing to abide by Christ's commands (Acts 19:17b, 18). Fifth, they learned that in order to be part of Christ's church (a member of God's family, a saved soul whose sins have been removed), one must be immersed in water, or baptized. Some had been immersed previously, but not according to the baptism that Christ commanded; so they were immersed once again correctly (Acts 19:2-5). The immersion that Christ commanded is for the remission of sins (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15, 16; Acts 2:38; 22:16). Sixth, their immersion placed them in Christ. The phrase "in Christ" indicates that the Ephesians were part of the body of Christ. His body is the church (Colossians 1:18). Only those who are in Christ are saved because only those who are in Him have the benefits of the spiritual blessings described in Ephesians. One cannot be in Christ

until he or she has done everything the Ephesians did in order to be in Christ.

What blessings did God's covenant of salvation bring to the Christians in Ephesus? They are the same blessings found in the lives of those today who do what the Ephesians did in order to be placed in Christ. Ephesians 1:3-23 lists the blessings that are made available to those who are part of Christ's body, the church. The Christian enjoys the following:

- Heavenly blessings that far surpass earthly blessings (v. 3).
- The blessing of being God's chosen possession of great value and worth (v. 4).
- The blessing of being an adopted child of God (vs. 5, 6).
- The blessing of having redemption from sins - complete forgiveness (v. 7).
- The blessing of possessing wisdom and understanding of spiritual truths (vs. 8, 17, 18).
- The blessing of possessing the revelation of God's plan for fellowship with other Christians (vs. 9, 10).
- The blessing of the inheritance of heaven's riches (vs. 11, 12).
- The blessing of being sealed by the Holy Spirit (v. 13).
- The blessing of being given the earnest, or pledge, of eternal redemption (v. 14).
- The blessing of loving fellowship with brethren of like faith (v. 15).
- The blessing of focused prayers by concerned brethren (v. 16).
- The blessing of spiritual strength from God the Father (v. 19).
- The blessing of service in the Lord's efforts (vs. 20-23).

When we learn the truth of God's gospel, believe that truth, confess our willingness to submit to the Lord's rule, are immersed for the remission of sins, and live a steadfast life in devoted faith, then spiritual blessings result in our lives. These actions place us in the saving covenant of God's grace! The cherished memories of understanding the gospel plan of salvation and obeying its commands bless our souls. When we, as Christians, remember the blessings of the covenant relationship with God, joy drives away the despair of darkness and constant thanksgiving result!

# Are Infants "By Nature" Children of Wrath?

ALEX BAYES

There are some who believe and teach that the Scriptures "plainly state that man is indeed born with the guilt of Adam's sin and that we *are* by nature corrupt." This would include infants. Eph 2.1-3 is cited to support this claim.

- In the first place, many use this passage to suggest that humans are "by *birth* children of wrath." This is simply not what the passage says; the assertion is false.
- Notice that *verse 1* plainly declares that spiritual death is the consequence of "your trespasses and sins" (A5V). This emphasizes **personal sin**. ***We are not spiritually dead as a result of Adam's sin.*** Though the term "your" is not found in the KJV (following the Textus Receptus), it is supported by manuscript, version, and patristic evidence (cf. *Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol.3, p.283).
- If this passage teaches that babies are born totally depraved, one would have to necessarily infer that infants who die in that condition *are lost* since they *are* clearly designated as "children of wrath."
- The Greek word, *phusei*, rendered "nature," can denote a "mode of feeling and acting which by long habit has become nature" (Thayer, *Greek Lexicon*, p 660). Clearly, these people, by habitual practice, had become worthy of divine wrath. This thought is consistent with the context, as well as the tenor of the Bible as a whole.
- Verse 3, Paul says that all of us "were ... children of wrath." The verb *emetha* (were) is *an* imperfect tense, middle voice form. The imperfect tense describes ongoing action as viewed in the past (ex. *Sam was hitting the ball*). Thus, here it depicts the Style of life that had characterized these Saints prior to conversion. Had Paul intended to convey the idea of inherited sinfulness, he could have expressed that by saying, "you *became* by birth children of wrath." The middle voice also implies their **personal involvement** in their sinful predicament. We might paraphrase it like this: "... you kept on making yourselves children of wrath."

# Prayers of a Righteous Man

DAVID THURMAN

An amazing scene unfolds in Exodus 32. God has led His people out of Egyptian bondage and brought them to Sinai. He has been giving Moses the law. But in Moses' absence, the people turn to other gods.

*"Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' Aaron said to them, 'Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.' Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.' Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.' So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play . . . My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation." (Ex. 32:1-10).* While Moses is receiving God's laws, the people of God are turning away. In these verses we learn about human nature.

## PEOPLE LIKE GODS THEY CAN SEE

The people come to Aaron and ask him to make them a god they can see. It would be a god that would go before them, that is, a visible image they could follow as they made their way. They had come from Egypt, a land full of idolatrous images. They were used to gods they could see. As Moses was absent, they wanted a god like those they were used to.

Today people still like gods they can see. Some put their trust in money and take comfort in knowing how much they have and how much their investments are making. Others take pride in their cars or their lands. Still others like to see the results of their labor

and honor that. The truth is, we are more comfortable with things we can see and touch.

But the Living God is not like that. *"God is spirit"* (John 4:24). The God of the Bible is not physical in nature, but is Spirit. He is unseen by mortal man and we will never be able to see Him. That is what makes our service to God challenging. We must trust in something we cannot see. *"For we walk by faith, not by sight"* (2 Cor. 5:7). While the world around us clings to hard facts and things that can be seen and touched, we are challenged to trust in a God Who remains unseen.

### **PEOPLE LIKE GODS WHO ARE FUN**

While God is telling Moses what it means to be righteous, the people are looking for a god that will be fun. Aaron declares a day of feasting. The people rise up to play. Fortunately, when you create your own god, you can do whatever you want. That is, if you make your gods, your gods won't tell you not to have fun. Instead, they will encourage you to have fun.

One reason mankind likes to make gods is that they are fun. People want a god that will let them do what they want, when they want, in the ways they want. Many do not want a god who will say "no" to them in any way. They seek a god who will tolerate any behavior and then will still turn around and bless them.

### **PEOPLE LIKE GODS WHO ARE EASY**

While God is telling Moses all the rules and regulations for His people, those same people are forging a god that will have no rules at all. The idol the Israelites create will not impose any moral obligations on them at all. If they don't like something, they can change it. This is a god that will be easy to live with.

This same thing goes on today. Even people who say they worship the God of the Bible want to change Him so that He is easier to live with. Instead of accepting Who He is and What He wants, they seek to ignore His revelation and come up with their own version of God. In some places they even vote on what is good and what is evil, as if man can tell God what He is supposed to like and dislike.

### **INTERCESSORY PRAYER**

In the middle of all this, God comes to Moses with some important information. *"Then the Lord spoke to Moses, 'Go down*



at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves.' They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!' The Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.' Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, 'O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, 'With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heavens, and all this land of which I have spoken I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.' So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people" (Ex. 32:7-14). God was so angry, He was ready to start over with Moses, building a nation through him. But Moses intercedes for the people, asking God to be merciful. Notice how a powerful intercessory prayer works.

### **IT ACKNOWLEDGES GOD'S HOLINESS**

Moses doesn't make excuses for the people. He doesn't say they should not be held accountable. This great leader acknowledges God's holiness. Moses knows (he has seen the ten commandments) how serious God is about righteousness. So, he will not pretend the people are innocent. He will not defend their actions. He will not rationalize their sin.

When we pray to God we must always keep in mind His righteousness. "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Deut. 4:24). "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). When we go to God in prayer, we must keep in mind His holiness. We must keep in mind His nature. We must keep in mind His will. When we keep these things

in mind, we will not offer selfish, evil prayers because our prayers will be centered in God's holiness.

### **IT ACKNOWLEDGES GOD'S ACTIONS**

Moses reminds God of His history with His people. He goes back to the promises God had made over 400 years earlier. He reminds the Lord of His work in leading the people out of Egypt over the last few months. He reminds God of His reputation, especially among the heathens. As Moses intercedes for God's people, he calls attention to God's actions.

This is still a powerful way to pray. The apostles prayed that way in Acts 4:23ff. They reminded God (and each other) of all that God had done in the death and resurrection of Jesus. A wonderful way to pray is to call on God with reminders of His promises. We should keep in mind all He has done, and all He can do.

### **IT ACKNOWLEDGES GOD'S MERCY**

Moses focuses on the mercy of God. He does not excuse the sins of the people, but he depends on God's grace to come through. Moses seeks forgiveness and patience from God. This is not because God doesn't care about holiness, but because God is so loving.

Again, powerful prayers are built on trusting God's mercy. *"Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (Heb. 4:16). Like Moses, we should not hold back. We should boldly go into God's presence, His throne of grace to seek the mercy we desire, mercy for ourselves and for others.

### **WHAT KIND OF GOD DO YOU PRAY TO?**

As we have seen, people love to create their own gods. In our culture today, people like to recreate the Living God into something they can manage. What kind of God do you serve? Is He holy? Is He demanding? Is He loving? Are you following a god you can live with, or are you living for the God who created you? More importantly, do you really want to pray to a god small enough to have been created by you?

### **WHAT KIND OF PRAYERS DO YOU PRAY?**

If you choose to follow God, what kind of prayers do you offer

Him? Moses was willing to intercede for others in prayer. He admitted God was holy and had the right to condemn. But, he reminded God of His promises and sought mercy. Are you praying for yourself or for others like that? As you seek God and His will, never ask Him to change or to give up His holiness. But, always ask Him to keep His promises.

## ***Some People believe and Some Do Not (Acts 28:23-31)***

**NEAL POLLARD**

There are those in this world who adamantly believe that one gets warts from frogs. They simply refuse to buy into this idea that viruses cause them. They'll cite several names of people who picked up a frog only to "catch" a wart soon thereafter. Nothing will convince them, and maybe they are right. The one fact that all will agree upon is that it does not matter either way. Everyone has a right to disagree in matters of opinion, even if the evidence is stacked on one side. However, this affection for stubbornness is fatal when it comes to spiritual matters! There are some things we must believe in order to be saved. For instance, belief in Jesus as God's Son is not optional (Matthew 3:16; John 3:16). This very matter was the substance of Paul's preaching in Acts (28:23-31).

Paul, the confident preacher (Acts 28:31), had never let bonds, whips, or threats keep him from proclaiming the gospel of Christ. So, it seems natural that Paul would preach more vehemently in "peace time," even though he was still encountering opposition. Paul kept on preaching the pure Word of God, citing the law and the prophets from morning till evening (Acts 28:33). Verse 24 sums up the audience's reaction. "And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not." Little has changed since Paul's day. Today, some believe and some do not. From verses 23-31, we find at least three implications growing out of the statement made in verse 24.

I. THOSE WHO DID NOT BELIEVE WERE THE VERY ONES WHO ASKED PAUL TO PREACH (23). The unbelieving

some of verse 24 should be understood to be part of the many in verse 23. They were curious to hear what Paul would say (22). Perhaps their interest was in no way spiritual. Maybe they were anxious to hear a prominent member of a violently opposed "sect" speak about his Lord. So they listened to Paul's persuasive testimony from the Old Law. Surely, Paul delivered the message in a plain and simple way. Yet, they chose not to make application. They no longer wanted what they had once requested. How many people today ask, "What does the Bible say about \_\_\_\_\_," only to scoff at the answer given? When given the Bible answer they once actively pursued, many of the questioners refuse to believe. Remember Jeremiah? He was approached by the captains and the people concerning their future given their present course. They besought him with supplication to hear God's answer (Jeremiah 42:1-4). By the time Jeremiah had finished presenting God's truth to them, they had stiffened their necks in child-like defiance saying, "WE ARE NOT GOING TO DO IT!!" (Jeremiah 44:16). The rich young ruler ran to Jesus to find out what he needed to do to be saved. After Jesus told him to give up his attachment to "things," a disappointed young man turned his back on the Savior and salvation (cf. Luke 18:18-23). Some people think they want to hear God's word until they actually hear it.

II. THE SAME MESSAGE MET WITH DIFFERENT REACTIONS (24). The reactions had nothing to do with Paul's message. Rather, Paul was preaching the word of God to different kinds of hearts. Apparently, some were hard-hearted, while others were receptive. Jesus tells us that the "seed" (here, the word of God) falls on different types of hearts (Luke 8:5-15). The same message that caused pricked hearts to obey the gospel on the day of Pentecost prompted pricked hearts to commit murder in Acts 7. Oh, how well Paul knew that the gospel reaches only honest hearts. In I Corinthians 1:18, Paul said, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God." Some people will not believe the word of God when they hear it preached or taught. Many others will and have! Such will give us the needed incentive to spread the gospel.

III. THE REACTION DID NOT DETERMINE WHAT WAS TAUGHT (25-27;31). Paul maintained his boldness after some had

made known their lack of faith. This beloved apostle is a sterling example of one whose love for God outweighed any tendency to compromise. In Galatians 1:10, Paul wrote, "Do I seek the approval of men or God? Or do I seek to please men? If I were yet pleasing men, I would not be Christ's slave." He further explains in verses eleven and twelve that what he taught was by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The doctrine of Christ was enough for Paul. The concern of those who teach the Bible must always be to please God by teaching His word, regardless of the audience's response to it. Paul reminded Timothy that we must present the truth of the gospel whether it is popular or unpopular to do so (II Timothy 4:2). In writing to the church at Rome, Paul had told these brethren, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is God's saving power to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). Paul reasoned that because the message he disclosed was God's scheme of redemption, he owed it to his audiences to shamelessly preach it! There are some who do not like to hear the truth and are not afraid to voice their displeasure when it is taught. However, like Paul we must not let reaction change redemption's song. With Peter, "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

The importance of believing rests in the validity of what is taught. Hebrews 11:6 says that to come to God, we must believe that He exists. Therefore, we must believe the Biblical description of a God who punishes wrong and rewards right. Those in Acts 28 were not harming Paul; rather, they were hurting themselves by choosing not to believe.

One night a man driving home got behind a slow-moving vehicle. As the man's patience grew thin, he planned to pass as they approached a bridge. A sign posted on his right read, "No passing on bridge." He glanced at it as he whipped around the slowpoke. As he neared the end of the bridge, he saw the blue lights flashing. The police officer pulled him over and commented, "the sign was clearly posted. Why did you blatantly disobey and pass on the bridge?" The man could only reply, "I did not believe I would find you at the end."

The cost of unbelief is high, indeed!

# ***Living For Jesus***

**JOHNNY RAMSEY**

One of the great things about Christianity is the challenge found in various areas of living for Jesus. We must constantly strive to grow in the grace and knowledge of God. There is no place where we can rest on our laurels and come to the conclusion that we have arrived at the zenith of our service to the Lord. But, pressing on in the pursuit of righteousness adds zest to the divine adventure the gospel affords. Nothing is more invigorating as walking down the road of life hand in hand with the Master! To claim friendship with the King demands our best and richly rewards every fleeting moment. To live upon this sinful earth without such a relationship would be overwhelmingly sad. A grand hymn says it well:

Savior, Thy dying love  
Thou gavest me  
Nor should I ought withhold  
Dear Lord from thee ...

Indeed what a Friend we have in Jesus! He puts genuine meaning into our sojourn and helps us to see those matters that are eternal. We are blessed beyond measure to have purpose in life, hope of heaven and fervent love in our souls that propels us into sharing with those who are lost without the unsearchable riches of Christ.

There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood  
Lose all their guilty stains...

Living for the Lord demands that we stand up for the truth in spite of the popularity and ease of error, compromise and worldliness. It may seem that Satan's followers are blessed with all the wealth of this mundane sphere but that kind of riches fades into oblivion. Remember:

"If you want to feel rich, just count all the things money cannot buy."

The abundant life reserved for the saints of God far exceeds

all the trappings of material pomp. No one is ever as wealthy as the loyal devotee of the Redeemer (I Peter 1:18-20).

Sometimes it appears that sincerely living for Jesus is an impossible task due to the excessive opposition Christianity receives from the world. Never forget these words:

“Great opportunity is often disguised as an impossible situation.”

When we rise to the occasion, meet the foe and march on to greener pastures and more vibrant challenges we are nearer heaven than those who are “at ease in Zion” (Amos 6:1). Ships may be safe in the harbor but that is not what ships are made for! We are not on earth to merely exist but to ardently serve the Master (James 1:22). Someone has well stated these provoking words:

Do not count the days

Make the days count!

Our *lot* in life is not for parking but building.

Living for Jesus demands our close attention to sound doctrine (Titus 2:1), scriptural worship (John 4:24) and godly living (Matthew 5:8). We dare not claim to walk with the Savior while overlooking these fundamental facets in the life of a child of God. Pleasing men is an easy, shallow and unrewarding lifestyle (Galatians 1:10; James 4:4). Though purity demands courage and loyalty to eternal mandates, the effort is well worth it. When we compromise the high ethics of Christianity to make friends of carnal neighbors we will find, at the end of the way, that we lost the fellowship of the redeemed for all eternity (Matthew 25:46). What a poor bargain!

Living for Jesus definitely makes one an optimistic person. The One we serve has all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:20) and is willing to guide, maintain and sustain us every step of the way (Psalms 27:1-4). How could we ever be pessimistic and sullen? If we have the proper set of *attitudes* no set of *circumstances* can overwhelm our journey toward heaven.

All the way my Savior leads me

Cheers each winding path I tread

Gives me grace for every trial

Feeds me with the living bread...

These will be days that appear dark and dreary but in the midst of such moments we find sweet peace in the shelter of His wings. On the darkest day in the life of a Christian there is still hope, but the brightest moment in an infidel's existence finds only eternal despair awaiting him. Let us, therefore, always remember the brilliant advantages faithful followers of the Lamb of God possess. We truly are bound for the promised land. Beyond this vale of tears is the land of fadeless day. Living for Jesus will continue on a golden street forever!

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### FORM IV

(See Rule 3)

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