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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

We are living in a passing world. Various kingdoms have risen and have vanished away. People of great wisdom and talents have come and gone. And the Bible says, the world is passing away. (1John 2: 17). Nothing is there on this earth that will remain forever. Man can build and accumulate on this earth whatever he desires, but its not going to be there permanently. Sooner or later everything will pass away. The apostle Peter, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God wrote: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." (2 Peter 3:10). Whatever we see up in the sky, and whatever is there on the earth, all will be burned up in the day of the Lord. But we do not know when that day of the Lord will come. It will come, just as a thief, as a thief comes unannounced. Christ spoke of that day and said, "but of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only." (Matthew 24:36). He also said that that day will be day of resurrection of all, good and bad. (John 5:28, 29). The apostle Paul said that that day will be the day of judgment of all. (Acts 17:30, 31).

But, note, while the Bible says all that is up in the sky and is on earth will be burned up and pass away, it also says, "but he who does the will of God abides forever." The implication is that God has given His will to man, and it also imply that man is required by God to follow His will and abide by it. Like God, man is spirit being, God is spirit (John 4:24). God, in the beginning, had created man in His own image (Genesis 2:27). Therefore, like God, man will exist or live forever. There is no power on earth that can destroy the spirit or the soul of man (Matthew 10:28), because it is the image of God. The soul or the spirit of man is eternal. The concern of God, however, is that man is in sin on earth, and if he continue to live and abide in sin, and then leave from here in sin, he will live forever away and separated from God, in hell, where there is no God. God, our heavenly Father want all His children to come to Him and live with Him, forever in His heaven. Therefore, he has revealed and shown His will to man in His book, the Bible. It is, therefore, very important for us all to know what does the Bible teach, and equally important is to do what it says. Because in the Bible God, our Creator and our heavenly Father has told us what He has done for us to redeem us from the wages of sin, and what we must do to obtain His grace which enables us to enter heaven.

The Gospel of Christ

J.C. CHOATE

We read of the gospel of Christ numerous times in the New Testament. We hear others talking about it. We often refer to the gospel ourselves in various ways. But what is the gospel? What is the gospel of Christ? Let us turn to the scriptures for the answer. Paul writes, *"For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are*

the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" " (Romans 10:11-15). Basically, then, the word "gospel" means good news, glad tidings, salvation, truth, word, promise, and hope. It is distinguished and different from all other news in that it pertains to the good news of Christ.

This good news is based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote the Corinthians, *"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you holdfast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures"* (1 Corinthians 15:1 -4). But how could this be good news? Because it is through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that one is saved and has the hope of eternal life. The same writer again says, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'"* (Romans 1:16,17).

We all know what good news means to us in our daily life. When some blessing comes our way, we are so happy and we want to share the story with everyone. This is only natural. The same thing should be true with the good news of salvation that comes through Christ. If we have obeyed the Lord, and have been saved by His grace, then we should want to tell the world about it. This is why Christ said, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:15,16).

The scriptures also speak of the gospel of God. We read, *"Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the*

faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ; to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:1-7). In the same sense, the same writer speaks of the gospel of the grace of God: "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). These passages only show the unity that exists between God and Christ. It was God who sent Christ to give the gospel to the world. In this way it may either be referred to as the gospel of God or the gospel of Christ.

Again, we read of the glorious gospel. Listen: *"According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust" (1 Timothy 1:11). Again, "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:3,4). The gospel is said to be glorious, which means heavenly, eternal, etc., because it is from God and Christ.*

In Matthew, Mark, Luke and John the expression "the gospel of the kingdom" is used several times. *"Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (Matthew 9:35). "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel' " (Mark 1:14,15). During this period of time, Christ and others preached the good news of the forthcoming kingdom. In other words, it had not yet been established, but soon would be. Later, the gospel was preached in fact, based on the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection. Those who obeyed the commands of it were saved and added to the Lord's church, or kingdom (Acts 2).*

Then we read of the gospel of salvation. Speaking to the Ephesian Christians, the Apostle says, *"In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). It is the gospel then that brings*

salvation. Sometimes we speak of the gospel plan of salvation, which is but a means to describe the Lord's plan or way of saving man.

Next, we have the gospel of peace. Going back to Romans 10:15, the writer says, *"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"* Ephesians 6:14-16 says, *"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one."* The gospel brings peace—peace of mind, peace of soul, peace with our fellowman. Christ was a man of peace and His gospel brings the kind of peace that He experienced—peace with God. Surely that is good news.

Finally, we are told of the gospel of hope. *"And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight — if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister"* (Colossians 1:21-23). As a result of obeying the gospel, one has hope of life and life eternal. This is what the writer is talking about here. Hope comes no other way.

From time to time Paul speaks of "my gospel" or "our gospel". What does he mean by this? He is simply referring to the gospel that he and others had received and that gospel which the Lord had given them to preach to others. In this respect, he says, *"For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake"* (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Also, as pointed out here, and in Romans 1:16, the gospel is powerful in that it saves those who believe and obey it.

This is the gospel in the words of the scriptures. It is simple, yet powerful. It is as modern as today and as ageless as Christ. It saves, it gives hope. There is one gospel and it is to be preached to all. It is of Christ, God, and is glorious. It blesses, it challenges, and it brings responsibilities. It is for one and it is for all. This is truly good news.

The Three Crosses

FRANCIS DAVID

In Luke 23:33, we read, "And when they had come to the place called Calvary there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left." When we look at the cross, we remember the place where they crucified Jesus our Lord. The name of the place was Jerusalem, and there was a hill known as Calvary or Golgotha means the place of skull. We see here, that three persons are hanging on the cross. I think a lot of people focus their mind on the middle cross and they ignore the right and the left crosses. Let us see and focus our minds on the right and left crosses. We can learn some lessons thru these two persons who were robbers or thieves.

First, let us see the one on the right. This thief was a notorious sinner. He was rebellious. He was scoffing at Jesus (Lk. 23:39). He was telling Jesus, even blaspheming Him, by saying, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us". How sad it is, that this man was scoffing at the Son of God, who was innocent. He did not do any wrong thing to anyone. There are many people today in the world who scoff at Jesus at his teachings. They don't want to accept that He is the Son of living God. Sometimes they say jokingly, how he can be the saviour of man? Though this thief on the cross was in pain, agony and was dying but at the same time he was scoffing and mocking at Jesus. He was challenging Jesus by saying "Save thyself and us." How this man can expect this without any repentance? There are people today who are living in Sin and they don't want to turn from their evil ways and assume that God will still save them. Many have come and gone, assuming that God will still save them, thinking that "God is love" He will not condemn us. We need to repent from our sins in order to be saved. Apostle Peter said, "Repent and Be baptised." (Acts 2:38). Have you done this? dear friends?

Let us look at the person who was on the left cross. Here we see another thief, and he was also dying in sins. But his cross was the cross of repentance. He wanted to repent and change his life, and that is why he said, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (Lk. 23:42). He did not laugh at Jesus

or made fun of Him, like the other one did. His was the genuine change of heart. He wanted to surrender to Jesus and worship Him. Right there he made a good confession and said, "LORD". Yes, Jesus is truly the Lord. He is the "King of kings". He humbled himself and said, "Remember me Lord when you come into your kingdom." He got his reward because on the basis of his repentance Jesus promised to him, "You will be with Me in paradise today." (Luke 23:43)

What a great difference between these two thieves! The one saw Him as a criminal and the second one accepted Him as his saviour or his Lord. The first one was mocking at Him or saw Him as a mocking king but the second one saw him as the King of kings. The first one saw Him as a sinner but the other one saw Him as a Saviour.

Now lastly let us see at the middle cross. Here we see an innocent person named Jesus dying for the sins of the world. John says about Him, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29). Paul says, "For when we were still sinners, Christ died for us." It was a cross of suffering. He suffered because of me and you. He had gone through all trials and suffering because he wanted to save us from eternal hell. Today, there are many who deny His death. They deny the central theme of Christianity. His death was not the ordinary one. The two thieves suffered for their crimes but our Lord suffered for you and me. He paid the debt for our sins. (Isa. 53:6; Romans 3:23-26). Today, if you have not confessed the middle cross, you are invited to come to Him. Jesus invites you by saying, "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matt. 11:28).

Who Are The "Other Sheep"?

ALBERT GARDNER

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." (John 10:16.)

Jesus had given the parable of the good shepherd. He said

the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy, but the good shepherd gives life. Even the hireling runs when danger comes, but the shepherd came to lay down His life for the sheep for they are His and they hear His voice.

The "other sheep" are Gentiles who did not have a written law like the Jews. Paul described their relation to God and their spiritual condition. "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." (Ephesians 2:12.) They were away from God because of their own sins. (Romans 1:20-23.)

The way he brought the Gentiles (the other sheep), was to pour out his precious blood for the sins of the whole world. "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:13.) In doing this, Jesus broke down the middle wall that separated Jews and Gentiles by removing the law of Moses, making it possible for both of them to be reconciled to God. (Ephesians 2: 14-18.)

Paul wrote about the mystery that God gave him by revelation. (Ephesians 3:3-6.) It was revealed, he wrote it, and they could understand it. This mystery was not revealed in the Patriarchal and Mosaical ages, which constituted the Old Testament, but it was revealed to the apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

What is the mystery? "That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." The Gentiles (the other sheep), have been brought by the blood of Christ into the same body (or church, or fold).

The bringing of the Gentiles (the other sheep) was a topic of Old Testament prophecy. Paul makes reference to it in answer to the question "even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Hosea, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not my beloved." (Romans 9:24-25; Hosea 1:10.)

The death of Christ made it possible for all to be saved, and the means of coming was the gospel. "For I am not ashamed of he gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16.)

When Peter preached on Pentecost, he told believers to "repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:38-39.) The Jews were first—"you and your children." The Gentiles (the other sheep) were "afar off." Both of them came into the body of Christ the same way. (Ephesians 2:16.)

Since Jews and Gentiles have come to God through Christ, there is one fold, and one shepherd. There is not a Jewish church and a Gentile church. There is only one church.

"Where There's A Will . . . "

DAVID THURMAN

All of us have heard the old saying, "Where there's a will, there's a way." This saying pays tribute to the qualities of persistence and dedication. It tells us that if we will not give up, that through our persistence, we can achieve our goals.

While I applaud dedication and persistence, the fact is having a strong desire (or will) to make something happen will not necessarily make it happen. I read in last week's newspaper about an air force pilot who crashed and died while training. She was flying at low altitude practicing bombing runs at night. She didn't know it, but her fighter was upside down. She thought she was flying upright. So, when it was time to gain altitude she pulled her stick up, and dove right into the ground at high speed. She thought she was flying up to safety, but instead flew to her death.

That pilot "willed her plane" to go a certain direction. She intended for her plane to rise and fly back to her base. Instead, her "will" or choice flew her to her destruction.

Sadly, many people put too much faith in their own will when it comes to the realm of religion. They think they can choose any path that fits them, then fly home to heaven and be safe with God. This applies to those who barely (if at all) believe in God, and to those who are convinced that God speaks to them and through them.

In fact, where there is a will, there is a way. This is true only as long as it is the Lord's will and then you and I can discover the Lord's way. How can you and I discover the Lord's will for us?

MAN DOESN'T KNOW THE WAY

"There is a way which seems right to a man. But its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12). That air force pilot was well trained, well experienced and prepared. She thought she knew the way to safety. But in the end, trusting her instincts instead of her instruments caused her to fly to her death. This principle applies powerfully in the realm of religion. Man can find many "paths to God" that seem right. But, in the end, they lead only to spiritual destruction.

"I know, O Lord, that a man's way is not in himself; Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). God told us centuries ago that man cannot choose for himself which way he should walk. No matter how much sense something makes to you or to any other person, man is not capable of directing his own walk and discovering God. One great thing about living in a free democracy is that everyone gets to express an opinion about anything, including religion. But just because our society has freedom of thought and speech doesn't make all (or any) of that thought and speech worth listening to.

MAN'S OPINION WILL NOT WORK

Man's opinions are only that - opinions. I want more than my good friend's opinion when I have dental work done. I want someone trained in the hard science of dental work, with tried and tested methods of healing, someone authorized to work on my teeth. I want more than opinions when it comes to my car. I want a trained, experienced mechanic to do the work, one who is authorized to perform the necessary repairs and service. In the same way, when it comes to religion, I want more than some well intentioned thinker's opinion to guide me. In matters of things divine, I want someone who will point to divine authority. *"Jesus spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth"* (Matt. 28:18).

MAN'S TRADITIONS WILL NOT WORK

Man's traditions are no better. *"Thus, you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. . . In vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men"* (Matt. 15:7,9). The Jews of Jesus' day thought they could find God if they followed their traditions. But Jesus called their traditions a barrier to knowing God. Even their worship was abominable, because they substituted their will for God's by using tradition as their guide instead of God's word.

It is easy to think that the way something has been done for years, or even centuries, is the way to do it. But, what we have always done may or may not comply with God's will. For years medical science thought "blood letting" would cure everything from fever to cancer. Now we know that taking blood from ill people harms them. The traditional approach was to use leeches to bleed a person. Do you want to rely on tradition for your health, or hard medical science?

The same applies to religion. Many religions have their honored tradition. Some of it is harmless, some of it becomes a barrier to knowing and worshiping God. Whose will are you going to trust when it comes to worship, to salvation, to eternity? Are you going to rely on man's traditions (right or wrong) or on God's will. There is a way to God, if you will trust His will, not your traditions or opinions.

MAN'S LOVE WILL NOT WORK

Some will suggest "all we need is love." This is a popular thought among entertainers and celebrities. Many common people have bought into it as well. The thinking (again, man's opinion) is that if we just love each other, we will please God and find our way to God.

In truth, *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8). God honors those who act in love. *"Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matt. 22:39). But merely loving is not all that is required. I have seen situations where husbands left their wives and families because they "were in love". I have seen people forget their responsibilities to home and society because they "fell in love" and "deserved to be happy". Love is a wonderful thing, but only the kind of love God commands, not the kind man devises. Man's love will not find God.

"If you love Me, you will keep My comandments" (John

14:15). Jesus says it plainly and straight out. The surest proof of genuine, God-pleasing love is to obey God's commands. There is a sure way back to God and it is based in His will. *"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him"* (John 14:21). How can I find God and Jesus? By loving in their way, which means following the will of God, not man.

GOD DOES KNOW THE WAY

God realized that man could not find his own way to God by his own will. God knew that for every man there would be another opinion, another tradition, another emotion that would claim to know how to reach God. So, God acted to provide mankind with a clear path back to Him.

"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world" (Heb. 1:1-2). This passage tells us much about how God reveals His will. In the long ago He spoke through prophets to the people. In these *"last days,"* He speaks through His Son. To know God's will and find your way back to Him, you must listen to His Son.

JESUS SHOWS THE WAY

Jesus came and spread the word of God. He did this in two ways. First, He preached and taught the good news (Mark 1:14). Throughout His life Jesus shared God's message with all who would hear. Second, Jesus lived the word of God. In fact, He is described as *"the word of God"* (John 1:1) and that *"word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14). Jesus showed the way to God by His teaching and His lifestyle. If you want to know the will of God today, listen to His Son and imitate Jesus. If you love God, you will do what Jesus did and will respond to what Jesus taught.

GOD HAS REVEALED THE WAY

Once Jesus was risen from the dead and ascended to the Father, He sent His apostles and other inspired followers out to spread the message about salvation. *"After it was first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God*

also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will" (Heb. 2:3-4). Jesus spoke the message first, then entrusted it to others who spread the word. This was not done by man's will or according to man's thinking. It was God confirming the message "according to His own will". So, God spoke through Jesus, His Son. Jesus spoke through His designated followers, confirming the message by the power God gave them.

When we read what they wrote and taught, we can find the will of God which shows the way to God. *"That by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by refering to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit"* (Eph. 3:3-5). The apostle Paul explains how to find God's will today. God, through Jesus and the Spirit, revealed the message to Paul. He wrote it down and when we read it, we, too, can understand the mystery of Christ. It is through the revealed will of God, as recorded in scripture, that we can know the way to God.

THE SCRIPTURE IS THE WAY

God tells us that the Scriptures are the way to God. *"All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible holds the way to God. In it is revealed the will of God that tells us how to live, what is right and wrong, what the man of God should do to please His maker.

Your choice is simple. You can follow your feelings, man's opinions and man's traditions and hope that brings you close to God. Or, you can pick up your own Bible and study and learn God's will for yourself. You will never know the way to God, nor how to please God, using your own will. If you will accept the will of God as revealed in Scripture, you can know the way. Where there is a will there is a way. If the will is God's will you will discover God's ways.

Preparation

CLIFFORD DIXON

Rehoboam, son of Solomon, was not a very good king. He triggered the division of the nation by promising heavier taxation and burdens on the people. His reign was one of turmoil; and the scriptures point out that he did evil in the sight of the Lord. We read, "And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord" (II Chronicles 12:14). This is the case of people doing evil in our day—they prepare not their hearts to seek the Lord. We have to prepare ourselves for the word of God to enter our hearts and be fruitful, in much the same way that the soil must be prepared for the planting of a crop.

God will not force himself upon anyone, because he respects the image of himself in man. We must prepare ourselves to serve the Lord. Israel had to prepare themselves for three days before God gave them the law upon Sinai (Exodus 19:10-11). The world was prepared for thousands of years for the coming of Christ. From his fall, man had the promises and prophecies of the coming of the Saviour. When Christ was ready to establish his kingdom (which is the church), preparation of the hearts of men was first necessary. John preached that the kingdom was at hand, and so did Christ (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17). Christ showed that a teaching process was necessary for people to enter the kingdom (Luke 8:1-18). Christ also showed that one must be born again to enter the kingdom (John 3:3-5). He showed that his kingdom is a place of work and development of talents (Matthew 20:1-16; 25:1-30).

Preparation of our hearts is necessary for us to become servants of Christ. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:8-10). We must realize the sinfulness of our lives, and must determine that we will turn an about face, and serve the Lord. This does not mean that one is saved at that moment; but he must then go to God's word and find the will of God which he must obey.

Men are drawn to God by being taught the truth (John 6:44-

45). We must know the truth to be made free (John 8:32). That truth includes three fundamental facts: Jesus died for us, was buried, and arose again the third day (I Corinthians 15:1-4). That truth contains three fundamental commands; Faith, repentance, and baptism (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38). We are then added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47).

This is not the end of the spiritual journey, but only the beginning. Every act of service in the Lord's vineyard requires preparation. We must prepare our hearts to partake of the Lord's supper. The early church partook thereof on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Jesus told the Christians to partake of it in remembrance of him (I Corinthians 11:23-26). Paul further says, "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (I Corinthians 11:27). "Unworthily" is an adverb, and refers to the manner in which we partake of the supper. Verse 29 points out that this is done by "not discerning the Lord's body." So, when one does not prepare his heart to remember the death of Christ, he eats and drinks damnation to himself in partaking of the supper.

In our singing we must teach and admonish one another, and make melody in our hearts to the Lord (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). There is not an item of worship in which we can render an acceptable service without preparation.

Preparation is necessary to teach the word of God. Ezra set his heart to seek the law of the Lord, to do it, and to teach God's statutes in Israel (Ezra 7:10). Unless a teacher clearly understands his lesson, he cannot properly teach it. Such is but a blind leader leading people blindly into the ditch with himself (Matthew 15:14).

Let us not make wrecks out of our spiritual lives by not preparing our hearts to seek the Lord.

Religious Sinners

BOBBY KEY

It is a difficult truth to accept, but one may be religious and still be a sinner. Solomon saw the wicked buried. These wicked people had "come and gone from the place of the holy" (Ecclesiastes 8:10). Today they would be called "regular

churchgoers." In spite of this fact, they were still wicked! Jesus saw people in the judgment calling, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:22, 23). Yes, religious people will be turned away at the judgment.

The most prominent and influential religious sect of Jesus' day did not have God's approval. The Pharisees had made a pledge to set apart all sacred tithes, to refrain from eating anything which had been tithed, and to observe all laws and conditions concerning purity in food and family relationships. To them religion was a burden consisting of thousands of petty rules and regulations. Their whole idea of religion consisted of outward appearances.

These religious sinners were rebuked by John the Baptist and by our Lord. They would say and do not — they preached much, but practiced little. Their works were done to be seen of men. They loved the preeminence, and shut up the kingdom against men, not going in themselves and not allowing others to enter. They often made long prayers, standing on street corners. They frequently talked widows and poor people into letting them manage their property for them, thus, devouring widow's, houses. They would cross land and sea to make one proselyte; yet, their efforts only made the convert worse. Jesus said, "Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" (Matthew 23).

It is interesting to note that the Pharisees came into existence about 160BC, but never became a really large group of people. Judah's population was well over one-half million, but the sect of the Pharisees numbered as little as two thousand, and as many as six thousand. One can only wonder how such a minority could have so great an impact.

It has been observed that there are three reasons for the Pharisees remaining so few in number. (1) The group was small because of their rigid entrance requirements. In order for a person to apply, he had to be recommended by a member of the Pharisaic order. After that recommendation, and an extensive background check, the applicant was questioned by three members of the sect, and only after being approved by all these

methods would a person be allowed to take the oath to become a Pharisee. (2) The group was so small because of their internal control system. Once a person was a Pharisee, he was never allowed to give tithes or prepare food unless someone else of the Pharisaic order was present to assist and observe. This was done in order that discipline could be maintained. When a person became a Pharisee, his entire household became Pharisees and were bound by the rules of the sect. The head of the household was responsible for the conduct of all the family, including servants and slaves. (3) They remained small because of their strict system of discipline among their members. If one member of the order was considered suspect of not following the rules of the order, he was brought before a council. If charges were proven, the member was expelled.

Being religious is not enough. External religion has always been easier than internal religion. It is far easier to abstain from certain foods, and to wash the hands in a certain way than it is to forgive the unlovely and the unlovable, and to help the needy at the cost of one's own time, money, comfort and ease. It is easier to attend the church service than it is to maintain the right spirit while there. External observances are often misleading. We see what man does, but we cannot know why he does it. We examine the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.

This is the reason we continue to harp on attitude. Attitude determines action — it is just that simple. To change a man, you must first change his heart, his thinking. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

It is possible to attend church every time the door opens, and never really worship. We can honor the Lord with our lips, and our heart be far from Him. We can go through the motions — meet the letter of the law — yet fail to worship in spirit. Thoughts are as important as deeds; the motive is as important as the act. To be what we ought to be we must have the right spirit and the right action. It is little wonder that the Lord places so great emphasis on the heart! "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love:
Where there is injury, pardon:
Where there is doubt, faith:
Where there is despair, hope:
Where there is darkness, light:
Where there is sadness, joy.

Oh, divine Master, grant that I may not so much
Seek to be consoled as to console:
To be understood as to understand:
To be loved as to love:
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned:
It is in dying that we are born
To eternal life.

I Am Not Ashamed

W.A. HOLLEY

Jesus said, "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the Holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

Paul suffered many things for the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ, but he was not ashamed of it (II Timothy 1:12). Onesiphorus was not ashamed of the chain worn by Paul (vs. 16). No one should be ashamed to wear the name, Christian (I Peter 4:16). There are some things of which we should never be ashamed. Please note the following.

(1) Never, never, be ashamed of the gospel of Christ. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). Thus, the gospel of Christ is the only power God uses to save believers.

God does not use dreams, visions, or experiences of so-called grace, or prayer to save the lost. There are many false gospels being preached today (Galatians 1:6-10). Many would be

well advised to see if what they believe to be gospel truth is really and truly taught in the Holy Bible (Acts 17:11; Isaiah 8:20).

(2) We must never be ashamed of the word of God. Throughout the centuries the Bible has had many enemies. For example, ten thousand Bibles were burned at Graez in Steiermark on August 8, 1600 by order of Ferdinand II. Again, 60,000 Bibles were burned in one year, 1637, in Bohemia. These are but samples of numerous efforts to destroy the word of God. Even today there are those who have devoted each waking moment to its destruction; and, if they cannot destroy it, they seek to discredit it. Thousands of preachers are standing in the pulpit preaching from a Bible which they do not believe. Dr. Spong, a bishop of the Episcopal Church has said, "Is one of the reasons that our clergy do not teach the Bible rigorously to their congregations the fact that clergy ourselves have come to dismiss much of the Holy Scripture as no longer valid?" (Birmingham News, February 3, 1989). This same man wants to "retire this noble book to the shelves of our libraries and museums." Dear readers, never be ashamed of God's Holy Word!!

(3) Do not be ashamed of the Lord's church or kingdom. The Lord's church has never been popular, but many are determined through gimmicks and gadgetry to make it so. These people will bend or wrest the scriptures to attain their goals (II Peter 3:15-16). Others are willing and ready to ignore or sweep under the rug certain passages which stand in their way. One Birmingham area Church of Christ through its leadership has said, "Women have been scapegoated throughout history in religion. The church is an instrument of man and sometimes does wicked things that do not reflect God (Birmingham News, March 24, 1989). To show just how far they are willing to go, they say, "As far as we can tell, that will mark the first time that any woman has stood up in a Church of Christ and given a sermon." The passage they wish to wrest is I Timothy 2:12. It is false to contend that "The church is an instrument of man. ..." Man did not establish the church (Matthew 16:18-19); it was established by the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, not man, possesses all authority necessary to lead the church in His way. The church as Jesus Christ established it needs no improvement!

(4) We should never be ashamed of scriptural worship. This worship has been divinely authorized, and it must not be changed

(Revelation 22:18-19; Galatians 1:6-10). The first day of the week is the Lord's day (I Corinthians 16:1-2; Revelation 1:10). The items of worship are: participating in Bible study, in fellowship, the Lord's supper, prayers, singing, and giving of our means (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 5:19, I Corinthians 16:1-2). Human participation may be subject to improvement, but the divine side of worship cannot be improved (John 4:23-24). For example, the addition of a piano or organ cannot improve the Lord's prescribed worship, for the use of such like instruments would be an addition (Revelation 22:18-19).

(5) We should never be ashamed of being a Christian. "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (I Peter 4:15-16). How shameful for one to live a life devoted to sex addiction, to crime in all of its ramifications, drug addiction, locked away in some institution!! But how wonderful to see people, young and old, living lives devoted to truth and righteousness!

Christianity, wrongly practiced, casts long, dark shadows which blind men to the truth of God Almighty. Christians are required to be examples of believers, in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity (I Timothy 4:12). Elders, deacons, preachers, brothers and sisters, do great harm to the cause of Christ when they set sinful examples before others. Never be ashamed to set the finest example before others. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:11-12).

Dear reader, do not be ashamed of the Lord's will. Obey it today.

Asking And Receiving

DAVID WADE

Aesop tells the story of an old man, bent double with age and toil, gathering wood in the forest. While trudging out of the woods with the load on his back, he grew tired and hopeless. He

threw down the bundle of wood and cried out, "I cannot bear this life any longer. Oh, I wish Death would only come and take me!"

As he spoke, Death appeared to him and said, "What wouldst thou, Mortal? I heard thee call me." "Please sir," replied the woodcutter, "would you kindly help me to lift this faggot of sticks on to my shoulder?" The moral to the story is, "We would often be sorry if our wishes were gratified."

The Prodigal of Luke 15 learned this lesson the hard way. Apparently, no amount of love his father could show him would keep him from asking for his inheritance to squander in a far country. He had to experience the pig pen of life before he came to himself. It is regrettable that some lessons are learned in the "school of hard knocks" but for some, that is the only way they learn. Furthermore, James says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:3-4).

It is far better to be in harmony with the will of God. Then, we have the assurance that our prayers shall be answered. "And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22). "Now this is the confidence we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

Isn't It Easy To Conform?

DEMAR ELAM

Conforming to the world is one of the easiest things we do in life. Isn't it easy to conform? However, Paul instructed those at Rome with these words "and be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:2). Divine inspiration demands nonconformity with the world. So, did Paul mean that we aren't to do anything that people in this world are doing? Certainly not! There are many acts of

acceptable conduct that people in the world engage in. But, Paul has in mind our being conformed to those acts of conduct that are evil and wrong.

The great apostle of love wrote, "The whole world lieth in wickedness" (I John 5:19). Our world is surrounded and permeated with wickedness. Being conformed to the world carries the idea of going along with its wickedness.

Webster defines the word CONFORM thusly: 1) to be similar or identical 2) to be obedient or compliant; especially to adapt oneself to prevailing standards or customs.

A synonym of conform is agree. Conformity is the order of the day but isn't that because conforming to the standards and customs around us is the easiest thing for all of us to do?

Satan is the prince of this world (John 14:30; 16:11) and we read in Galatians 1:4 that Christ died to deliver us from this present EVIL WORLD. If we drift with the tide of today's world, we'll find ourselves conforming to such sins as immoral sexual acts, filthy language, lying, stealing, murder, greed, hatred, idolatry, drunkenness, and pride.

We are living in perilous times! "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord almighty" (II Corinthians 6:17, 18). We must not conform to the pattern or mold of today's society. Though there are many good and wonderful things happening in our times we are forced to admit that sin is rampant in our present world.

Paul told the Corinthians, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Corinthians 7:1). Let us break away from conformity with the world. **Faith, Courage, Conviction and Holiness** should be very much a part of our lives today.

If you live righteously, you will definitely be considered a non-conformist and will attract, like a lightening rod, the scorn of a world that DEMANDS conformity. But just as the lightening rod protects those around it, so you will guard fellow Christians by your example of receiving the fiery darts of the wicked without submitting to them.

"Let Me Die The Death Of The Righteous!"

JOE E. GALLOWAY

What better wish could be expressed than: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (Numbers 23:10)? To "die the death of the righteous" is to die faithful to the Lord! Those who so depart this life will with certainty be rewarded in heaven with God eternally!

Who expressed this wish, a wish that should be the number one priority of every person? Surprisingly, the person who said this was Balaam! You will remember that Balaam had been approached by Balak, king of Moab, who had offered Balaam great material rewards if he would curse Israel, God's people (Numbers 22:7). Properly, Balaam had inquired of God what he should do. God had said, "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed" (v. 12). But, Balak then offered Balaam "very great honor" along with the riches. Balaam was enticed! He asked Balak to wait until he could ask "what the Lord will say unto me more" (v. 19). God does not force individuals to do right; so he allowed Balaam to go with Balak, although God emphasized that Balaam would be permitted to prophesy only the word God permitted regarding Israel. "God's anger was kindled because he went" (v. 22). The well-known instance of the ass talking to Balaam showed God's displeasure, further, and gave Balaam another chance to reconsider and repent. But, Balaam "loved the hire of wrong-doing" (II Peter 2:15, ASV); so he went anyway!

Someone may ask, "Did not Balaam end up blessing Israel as God wished? What harm was done?" Yes, Balaam's three groups of prophecies blessed Israel so well that Balak became very angry and refused to reward him (Numbers 23 and 24). Balaam was able only to speak the words God put in his mouth, but evidently this was because the Lord turned his intended curses into blessings (see Deuteronomy 23:5; Joshua 24:10). And, this is not the end of the story! Apparently Balaam coveted the silver and gold of Balak so much that he gave him some advice on how

to bring Israel down: The daughters of Moab were to seduce the young men to commit fornication. This was done, resulting in a plague which killed 24,000 Israelites (Numbers 25 - 23,000 fell in one day, I Corinthians 10:8). Revelation 2:14 informs us that Balaam "taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." Little wonder that Jude 11 pronounces a "woe" on those who "ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward"!

Did Balaam finally come to repentance and "die the death of the righteous"? The sad answer is, "No." Numbers 31 records God's instructions to Moses to avenge Israel of the Midianites. Along with the names of the great men of Midian that were slain by God's edict, "Balaam also, the son of Beor, they slew with the sword" (verse 8). Verse 16 again emphasizes that it was his counsel that caused so many of Israel to perish.

There is an extremely important lesson to us from all this: We cannot expect to **DIE the death of the righteous** unless we are willing, now, to **LIVE the life of the righteous!** Seldom do those who put off obeying the Lord change when death approaches. The very attitude that rejects God and his will at present, is a rebellious attitude that will make it difficult to change later. Added time does not soften one's heart if he is knowingly living away from God in sin; it hardens it instead (Hebrews 3:13)! **TODAY** is the best time in your life to obey the Lord! You cannot go back and obey the Lord yesterday. Tomorrow may not come (Proverbs 27:1), and even if it does, you may be more hardened in sin. Why not obey the Lord and live the life of the righteous, now? "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2).

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