

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 37

June 2006

No. 2

EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things"

Man loves power. He is never satisfied. He always is looking for more. In his pursuit of power through the years man has invented for himself powerful automobiles, aeroplanes, missiles and other powerful machines. The way of man's living has drastically changed in the last few years. Today man has tremendously increased his power to see and hear and to travel through television and camera and computer and cellphone. And wait and see, what is coming next!

Yet the question Jesus Christ had posed before man more than two thousand years ago remains where it was, and deserves our utmost attention even today: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul." (Mark 8:36,37). In other words, where is the power on earth which can save the soul of man? Yes, he can add a few more years to his earthly existence by exercising and medication. But what about man's soul, the spirit, which is eternal? The truth is that man needs salvation from sin which is causing man to stay away from God in this world, in this life, and to finally be lost in hell for ever after the life on earth is over. Man may yet invent more powerful things on earth, may gain

better health and more knowledge. Fine. But, will he ever be able to save his own soul? will he be able to trade anything he possesses in exchange for his own soul?

God, the Bible says, has appointed for all men to die once and then face Him in His judgment (Hebrews 9:27). This is getting serious. Where is the power on earth which can stop man from dying and facing Him in judgment? It is said, that money has great power. It is said, that with money and power man can do most anything he want to. The Bible says, at Job 27:8: "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he may gain much, if God takes away his life?"

The truth of the matter is that whatsoever power man possesses, it has a limit. Through researches and hard labours man has discovered and invented medicines and machines to save dying people from various diseases. But no man can save any other or himself from death. The most powerful surgeon, the most powerful doctor, the most powerful medicine and the most powerful machine become useless when death actually comes. This forces us to realise that all the vain things that so charms and seduce and dominate man's life during this brief pilgrimage upon earth are actually endowed with no permanence than a mirage. Whatever glory and eminence may come to man is only for the fraction of a moment. Man gains power and achieve feats; he builds for himself a house or a palace or an empire. But then comes the God's appointed time, and he must leave and go. But where? Does man know where he is going?

Christ taught that there is a broad way of the world which will lead men into everlasting destruction in hell, and there is also the narrow and the difficult way of God which will lead men into the everlasting life in heaven (Matthew 7:13,14). And, then He proclaimed: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6). Why did He say that? "For God so loved the world," says the Bible, "that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). Because Christ is the propitiation for our sins. He is the answer for man's greatest problem of sin. Is He Your Saviour?

God and Christ

J.C. CHOATE

First, What relationship does Christ have with God? Was Christ created by God? How could he be God's Son? To begin with, the Scriptures tell us that Christ was with God in the beginning, that he participated in the creation. We read, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". (Genesis 1:1). We are told that the Hebrew word for God includes not only God the Father, but also God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. These three are also mentioned in Matthew 28:19, 20 and Ephesians 4:4-6, as well as in other passages. They are also referred to as being the Godhead. (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9). But does that mean that we are talking about three distinct Gods? Not at all. There are three persons in the Godhead, but still they are one.

But getting back to the creation, when man was created, God said, "... Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ..." (Genesis 1:26). Please notice that God said, "Let us." Who was there with God? As already pointed out, that was Christ and the Holy Spirit. Concerning Christ, we read, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:1-3). Paul wrote of him, "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Colossians 1:15-17). This truth is also affirmed in Hebrews 1:1; 2.

No, Christ was not created by God. Had he been created then he would be no more than any other man, and being a man, he would have been unable to die for the sins of the world, since he would have also been in need of a Saviour. But in what way was he God's Son? Certainly God did not have a human-like relationship with some female goddess with the result that Christ was born from that union. Rather, Christ was there with God, was on a par with God, was equal with God and the Holy Spirit, and

was therefore deity. Paul explained what happened like this: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:5-11). From this scripture, and other passages of scripture, we see that Christ was there with God, but when man sinned and needed a saviour then it was Christ who humbled himself and was willing to come into this world of sin by being born of woman in likeness of man, to live among men, to be tempted as man was tempted, and finally to offer himself as a sacrifice upon the cross for the sins of the world. In the story of the birth of Jesus, when Mary questioned how it would be possible for her to give birth to Jesus since she had not been with man, the record says, "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35). Therefore to be born as he was, then he was spoken of as being the Son of God.

Second, after man had sinned and the consequences of his sin was revealed, God also spoke to the serpent, or the devil, and said, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15). Bible scholars admit that this was the first reference to the fact that Christ would eventually enter the world. On doing so, Satan would be able to bruise the heel of Christ, which means that he would be able to hinder him some, but that Christ would be able to bruise Satan's head or that he would be able to give Satan a fatal blow. The prophets had much to say about the coming of Christ. As a matter of fact, they foretold of his birth, where he would be born, of his work, and of his death, burial, and resurrection, as well as many other things. Read Isaiah 53, if you have a Bible.

Isaiah 7:14 records the prophecy of how Christ would be born of a virgin. It says, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." This was fulfilled when the Virgin Mary, according to Matthew 1:20, 21 and Luke 1 and 2, miraculously gave birth to Christ in the city of Bethlehem. He had no earthly father since he was conceived in Mary of the Holy Ghost. This was another proof that Christ was more than just another man, he was the Son of God.

Third, Why did Christ have to die on the cross? Paul tells us that we are all sinners (Romans 3:23) and "... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). In other words, man could not save himself, and therefore he needed a saviour. Christ being without sin (Hebrews 4:15) was able to shed his blood that we might have forgiveness of our sins. (1 Corinthians 15:3). Paul said, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23). Peter wrote, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." (1 Peter 2:21-25), John tells us, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." (1 John 1:7).

Fourth, But how could the death of one man make it possible for anyone to be saved? Because Christ was more than an ordinary man. He was the Son of God, he was without sin, and on dying on the cross, he was buried, and then he was resurrected from the grave to return to the Father in heaven to sit down at the right hand of God to be King of kings and Lord of lords and to be man's saviour. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 2).

Fifth, What then must man do to be saved? He must believe that Christ is the Son of God. Christ said, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24). Next, he must repent

of his sins or turn away from those things that are bad and wrong. Christ says that we must repent or perish. (Luke 13:3). Then we are told that he must publicly confess that Christ is the Son of God. Christ himself said, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32). And finally, he must be baptized. Christ said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not will be damned." (Mark 16:16). Now when one does that then the Lord saves him and adds him to his church. (Acts 2:47).

No Stopping Him Now

DAVID THURMAN

Our world provides little comfort for those facing death or those dealing with the death of someone close. The world suggests all kinds of philosophies, all kinds of theories. Some view death as a door to reincarnation. Others view death as a release from this life's pain. Others just see death as oblivion, the end of existence. Whatever your view of death, one thing is sure: you will die one day.

We have seen the death of Jesus and the reactions of the people who watched Him die. The scenes of the cross are horrible. But now, Jesus has experienced death. The Lord died quickly, surprising His guards. Jesus has finished His journey to the cross, but the Son of God is not finished! In fact, the Lord may be dead, but there is no stopping Him now.

"And when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given over to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave. Now on the next day, which is the one after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate, and said, 'Sir, we remember that when He

was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first.' Pilate said to them, 'You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how.' And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone" (Matt. 27:57-66). Jesus will come out of the tomb on the third day. In the meantime, notice several things that happen in this dark hour following Jesus' death.

BRAVE PEOPLE STILL RISK

Joseph runs the risk of exposing his relationship to Jesus. He goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus. Joseph did not have to do this. He did it out of respect for the Lord and because he was a decent, honorable man who trusted Jesus. However, Joseph is taking a great risk. Pilate and the enemies of Jesus may be looking for people just like Joseph, people they can arrest and charge. Joseph does not know what Pilate or the Jewish leaders might do, but still he takes the risk in order to do the right thing.

It is wonderful to know that even in the darkest hours, there will still be people like Joseph who will stand up and be counted. Even as evil people commit atrocities on others, you will find some who will do what is right. There were those in Europe who hid Jews during the second world war. There were those in communist nations that shared the good news, even under threat of prison or death. No matter how dark things look (such as the death of Jesus), there will still be those who are doing good, even at personal risk.

CARING PEOPLE STILL LOVE

The women who loved Jesus are still there. They follow the burial party to the tomb. They want to know where Jesus is buried so they can come and tend to His remains following the Sabbath. They care enough to be there for a man who has died.

How often do you see this at funerals? A person passes away, and all of a sudden many people chip in to help. Some provide food. Others will see to it that music is ready for a funeral. Others send flowers. In the darkest hours there are always those who love enough to be there.

The good news for you is that no matter how bleak life looks,

there will be those who care about you. They will be there for you to help you get through your hardest times. Jesus has died. None of His followers seem to understand what is happening or that He will not be dead on Sunday. Still, in this dark hour they take risks and show their love. That will happen in your life too, if you look for those who care for you.

KIND PEOPLE STILL ATTEND

The death of Jesus was caused by evil men. They plotted against Him, used His friends against Him, lied about Him and saw to it that He was crucified. Still, in the middle of all this evil, there is tenderness around Jesus.

Joseph does the respectful thing and asks for the body of Jesus. He did not have to do this, but it was the decent thing to do. The women want to anoint the body of Jesus. Again, they did this because they cared. While evil gangs up on the Lord, there are still those with tender hearts who will reach out to do the kind things that can make such a difference.

How often have you seen the same thing? Satan tempts a drinker and a drunk driver hurts someone. Yet, at the hospital are those who gently help the injured. There are friends who tend to the family. Satan causes sin in a home, a child is abused. Yet, there are those around who gently reach out to that family to attempt to bring healing. Satan can bring the harshest attacks. The devil is full of venom that will poison lives. Yet, the enemy cannot win when there are tender hearted people willing to do the kind things that bring healing. Satan cannot win, but notice some of his tools.

SATAN STILL PLANS FUNERALS

This must have felt like victory for Satan, he had just killed God's Son. He has plotted, intrigued and even used Jesus' own friends against Him. Maybe the devil recalled the garden of Eden, where he had tempted God's son, Adam. Now, he probably thinks he has won again, defeating God's Son, Jesus.

The fact is, Satan loves death. Death is his ultimate weapon against man. *"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law"* (1 Cor. 15:56). Satan brings death on every person because of sin. To Satan, death is the great victory. He knows we are scared of death. So, Satan still loves to plan funerals, your funeral and mine. But, the good news is, that while Satan plans

funerals, Jesus plans resurrections!

SATAN STILL TWISTS TRUTHS

The leaders of the Jews recall Jesus promised to rise again. So, they station guards at the tomb of Jesus. They heard some of the things Jesus taught, but they didn't get the whole message. Satan used enough truth to confuse them, but not enough to enlighten them.

That is still one of Satan's best weapons. He will use some truth, but not the whole truth. He will tell you part of the story about God, but not the whole story. So, Satan talks of the love of God (which is true), but ignores the holiness of God (which is equally true). Many people rely only on God's love and never grasp the need to live godly lives. Satan speaks of enjoying the good things in life (which God does provide) but fails to mention the cost of selfishness, or over indulgence, and on and on the list could go. Satan still twists truths, in the hope that God's children will lose sight of the empty tomb.

SATAN STILL GUARDS TOMBS

The Jews send men to guard the tomb. They think this will stop any attempt to steal the body of Jesus. Satan thinks death is his domain, that he is in charge when it comes to graves. But, guarding the tomb of Jesus is a waste of time! Satan can not stop what is about to happen. They could have put an entire army around this tomb, Jesus would still have come forth from the dead.

Satan still plans funerals and he still thinks that death is his business. But, Jesus will take charge of Satan and of his greatest weapon. *"Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades"* (Rev. 1:17-18). Jesus had taken control of death. While Satan still uses sin to bring man down, God uses Jesus to redeem man from sin and free him from the sting of death. *"Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives"* (Heb. 2:14-15). Satan is powerless.

Satan guarded the tomb of Jesus and it proved to be a waste of effort. Satan still tries to keep people dead, and that will be a

wasted effort as well. The children of God have nothing to fear, not even death. Even in the darkest of times, even as Satan throws his greatest weapon at us, we can stand fearless, knowing Jesus has won the victory for us.

SO DO THE SIMPLE THINGS

Following Jesus is not that hard, it merely requires you to do the right things. Joseph made a difference. The women made a difference. Anytime people do the simple, good things in a situation, God is honored and Satan is beaten back. Too often believers think they can't do much. But, even when times are hard, you can be kind. You can provide food for a funeral. You can send a note of encouragement. In the darkest hours, it is often the simplest acts that make the biggest impact.

SO WAIT THREE DAYS

Death is on the horizon for each of us. Death remains the great unknown. But, when things look darkest (even at the point of death), wait three days. God has great things planned for His children. Jesus could not be stopped, even though Satan seemed to have won. Put your faith in Christ, turn from your sin, be baptized into His name. When you do, there will be no stopping you either. God will give you the victory, just as He did His Son.

God Cares for Us

JOHNNY RAMSEY

Joseph was the recipient of God's care. From mistreatment by his brothers, and the sorrow of not seeing his father, to loneliness in a foreign land, that noble man was not forsaken by Jehovah. This man later overwhelmed bitterness to salvage the seed of Abraham from disaster in the powerful words of Gen. 45:5, "*God sent me before you to preserve you.*" Yes, the Creator cared when no one else seemed to!

Job came to understand that, although his wife and friends turned away, the Lord would in the end bless him abundantly. After all of his losses and his suffering, the Bible says, "*So Jehovah blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning*" (Job 42:12). Early in that wonderful book that bears his name, Job confessed:

"Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away; blessed be the name of Jehovah" (Job 1:21). God cared for Job.

Daniel, in the lion's den, even caused a heathen ruler to give credit to Jehovah for standing by the young prophet in dire circumstances. The true and living God rules and sustains His brave and courageous servants. As another prophet wrote, *"Can any hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? saith Jehovah. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith Jehovah"* (Jer. 23:24). Jeremiah, often in dungeons for telling unpopular truth, often lamented the sins of Judah. But he rejoiced in the knowledge that the heavenly Father would be with him, even when weak Judah could not tolerate the truth he taught so boldly. He would continue to preach and write God's message, even when wicked Jehoiakim tried to destroy it in the fire (Jer. 36).

While Paul was in *"peril among false brethren"* (1 Cor. 11), the Savior stood by him in the darkest hours of persecution. This great apostle might *"die daily"* (1 Cor. 15:31), but he would live forever in glory with the Lord! The last paragraph that Paul ever wrote, before Nero took his life, shows the constant care which heaven bestows on the faithful. Read the power, the beauty and the consolation of 2 Tim. 4:16-18. As he had before written, *"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift"* (2 Cor. 9:15).

From the backside of Midian, a lonely man named Moses was visited by God. His brother had rejected him, but our Maker knew where Moses was. However sad, or happy, we may seem to be, there is work in the Lord's vineyard for us. The quiet character of godliness is always needed. A sterling statement in Exodus 40 gives us the gist of the matter: *"So did Moses according to all that God commanded him."* The Lord can always use and bless such dedication. A great hymn tells us:

*I know there are joys that await me,
When I've gone the last mile of the way.*

In the days of the prophet Elijah, Baal worship was common. But Elijah, facing hundreds of idol worshipers on Mount Carmel, was not forsaken by God (1 Kings 18:16-39). Elijah's great victory that day proves that the majority cannot win over truthful allegiance to a righteous cause. *"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go"* (Josh. 1:9).

Jesus did not need legions of angels when He was sorely tried by evil rulers and motley crowds. His trust in the help from heavenly realms towered above the hellish schemes of hierarchy from mundane sources. 1 Pet. 1:7 boldly declares, *"That the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (1 Pet. 1:7). The Bible statement in 2 Sam. 22:2 may have been in the mind of Christ as Calvary was in sight: *"The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer."* God's word will not return void (Isa. 55:11), and He has promised always to be with those who are faithful (Mark 10:30).

If Jehovah can take care of the serious problem of death (John 11:24-26), how can anything separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:35-39). Jude challenges and consoles us, *"Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life"* (Jude 1:21). A lovely old gospel song vibrantly blesses us:

*Jesus, lover of my soul,
Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of Thee
Spring Thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity!*

Let us always trust that the Lord will take care of us.

Our Saviour: The Resurrected and Reigning Christ

JOHN GIPSON

The city was Jerusalem—the very place where Pilate handed over Jesus to the mob to be crucified. It hadn't been many days since that terrible event, and yet here were Peter and the other apostles boldly proclaiming the resurrected and reigning Christ (Acts 2:29-36).

What a startling message to those assembled! Was Jesus really what He claimed to be? The Christ? He had spoken of Himself as such, but they were confident He was a blasphemer. He even predicted that after three days He would rise from the

grave. As absurd as this sounded, guards were stationed at His tomb to make sure that His disciples did not steal His body away.

Had the unthinkable happened? The tomb was empty! No denying it. Rather than accept the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead, authorities bribed the guards to lie about what had taken place. "Tell people, 'His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.' And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." So they took the money and did as they were directed; and this story has been spread among the Jews to this day" (Matthew 28:13-15 RSV).

The sober truth was that Jesus had been raised. The apostles and many brethren saw Him and boldly proclaimed His resurrection as fact. It was the very heart and core of their preaching, and their message was confirmed by "many wonders and signs" (Acts 2:43).

As Paul is quick to acknowledge, everything about Christianity hinges upon Christ's resurrection. "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14). In Paul's final letter to Timothy, one thing he mentions must not be forgotten: "Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel" (2 Timothy 2:8).

CHRIST'S DIVINE NATURE

Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in Christ's resurrection. Isaiah saw God's Servant die, be buried and be raised (Isaiah 53:8-12). David speaks of it in Psalm 16:8-11, and Peter offers twofold testimony that showed that this prophecy of the resurrection was fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 2:22-36).

Christ predicted His resurrection as a sign of His divinity. Early in His ministry. He spoke of His body and declared, "I will raise it up" (John 2:19, 21). During His Galilean ministry, when asked for a sign, He offered His own resurrection (Matthew 12:39-40).

All four accounts of the Gospel conclude with this supernatural event in Jesus' life, climaxing with His ascension.

Scripture testifies that Jesus is "designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). In Antioch of Pisidia, Paul declared that in Christ's resurrection the prophecy of the second psalm, "Thou

art my Son, today I have begotten thee," had been fulfilled (Acts 13:33). Jesus, by His resurrection, is shown to be the Son of God!

OUR JUSTIFICATION

Paul reminds us that Jesus "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25). Look at who died for you. It was Jesus, the sinless one. He didn't deserve death, but He died for our trespasses. God laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). Under the Old Covenant, there was no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22), and there is no forgiveness for us without the sacrificial death of Jesus (1 John 2:2). Truly, He was "put to death for our trespasses."

But more than the death of Jesus was required for our salvation. He was "raised for our justification." Christ's blood had been shed, but that blood as yet remained unoffered. Christ rose from the dead to consummate this offering. While Christ was on earth, He was not a priest and could not be one. We are forcefully reminded by two passages of Scripture: "For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests" (Hebrews 7:14) and "Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law" (8:4).

Christ left the earth and ascended on high to offer His blood for us in the true Holy Place as High Priest for the household of faith (Hebrews 9:11-14, 24-28; 10:12). Therefore, the cross did not at once justify us. There had to be the resurrection in order that Christ might appear in heaven and offer His blood for us. "He was raised for our justification!"

THE COMING JUDGMENT

Future judgment is the appointment of God, universal in scope with the whole world being judged. Even the standard of judgment has been announced. It is to be "in righteousness" (Acts 17:31). Moreover, the Judge has also been named (John 5:22).

Future judgment is based on more than words. A great fact proclaims it—the resurrection of Christ. After announcing this great day of judgment to the Athenians, Paul boldly said that "he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

Lyman Abbott has said, "The resurrection of Jesus Christ is

the best attested fact in history." And this fact carries with it the certainty of judgment to come.

OUR COMING RESURRECTION

Because Christ has been raised, we will be resurrected. His resurrection and ours stand or fall together. At Corinth, we find the absurd situation of some who accepted the resurrection of Jesus but denied the general resurrection. Paul questions them with these words: "Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:12-14).

Could they not see the parallel? Christ raised; the dead raised. One is as certain as the other!

The resurrection of Christ is the pledge of our own resurrection. Listen to Paul's ringing words of assurance, "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20-21). Christ had the same nature that we have (Hebrews 2:14), and He was raised up. He, therefore, becomes "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." The first fruits in the Old Testament symbolized the coming of the entire harvest. If Christ has been raised, we then have assurance of our own resurrection.

In Revelation 1, we are privileged to see the glorious Christ and hear Him say, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (vv. 17-18). Just think of it. He has the keys to open both Death and Hades. Because of this, He was able to say to His disciples, "Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19).

CHRIST REIGNS

What a joyous thing when Peter proclaimed the resurrection and the seating of Christ upon David's throne (Acts 2:29-36). The psalmist foresaw this coming event and shouted: "Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O gates!

and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in! Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory! Selah" (Psalm 24:7-10).

Our belief is in the resurrected and reigning Christ.

Laying Aside Every Encumbrance

JOSHUA L. PAPPAS

The Bible identifies two general types of sin. The first type, sins of commission, includes stating any word, embracing any thought, or committing any deed that is unrighteous in the eyes of God. The second type, sins of omission, includes any righteous word or deed that should be said or done but is avoided.

In addition, the Bible identifies something that poses perhaps an even subtler threat to a Christian's walk with God than that which is obviously sinful. The Hebrew writer words it this way: "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance, the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1 NASB). In addition to urging the faithful to lay aside sin, the passage teaches that the Christian should forsake something called an encumbrance. To word it differently, some things are in the world that are not inherently sinful but may yet become hindrances to Christian faith.

Modern life presents a terrible temptation for Christians to become so busy or distracted that there is no longer room for a truly fruitful spiritual life. The time is well past for Christians to make some serious decisions about what things should be allowed to remain a part of their lives and what things should be cast aside as encumbrances.

A SPIRITUAL WEIGHT

First, what is an encumbrance? A simple word study in a Greek dictionary will reveal that the word so translated in Hebrews 12 is "a mass, a hindering burden, or a weight." This encumbrance is anything that weighs a Christian down as he journeys life's spiritual pathway. It is anything that hinders him from seeking God with his whole heart.

From the text, one envisions a great race taking place among

a throng of onlookers in some grand coliseum. The starting bell sounds, and the runners are off. The illustration reveals a host of runners trying to make it to the finish with great burdens upon their backs. Although it may seem silly to attempt a literal race burdened with an unnecessarily heavy load, this is exactly what many Christians are doing spiritually. The passage calls for Christians to cast any such burden aside!

ENCUMBERED BY WORLDLY THINGS

A great many things in the world may hold a Christian back from full trust and faith in God. A job that demands too much of a saint's time, especially one that causes him to miss the assembly of the church regularly, may certainly become an encumbrance, holding him back from fruitful service. Hobbies, as innocent as they may be in ideal, are common distractions that may turn a Christian's heart from full devotion to the Lord. Clubs, sports teams, unions and other extracurricular activities regularly devour the saints' time and attention.

Television is a serious distraction in the spiritual races of many Christians today. Too many are the cries of sorrow over having no time to read the Bible and pray from those who watch at least an hour of television every evening. Mark 4 records Jesus teaching the parable of the soils. Jesus identifies types of soil and relates them to human hearts receiving the Word of God. Verse 18 begins, "And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, and the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful" (Mark 4:18-19). The sad tale of lives encumbered with the weight of worldly things in half-hearted service to God are described.

A DIFFERENT AND HIGHER STANDARD

Likely many Christians are locked in a life and death spiritual struggle with encumbrances to their respective Christian walks. Unfortunately, many fail to notice the cares of the world choking out their faith. Others recognize that their situation is out of hand but cannot discern the things hindering their fruitfulness before God. The world presents terrible pressure upon the Christian to accept that a lifestyle in its image is also acceptable to God.

Before one can recognize the encumbrances in his spiritual

life, he must accept that Christianity is a call to live by a different and higher standard. John wrote, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

When the saint accepts his life as a denial of the world and a denial of self (Matthew 16:24; Romans 12:1-2), he may then, recognizing the things that are God's will according to the Scriptures, see that anything hindering his faith is cast aside. If a club, hobby, team, TV program or anything else is robbing one of the time and energy to bear fruit before God, let him cast it out of his life!

HOLY PRUNING

Jesus teaches an important truth in His use of the vine as a symbol of God's work in Christian lives. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:1-2). When one prunes a branch, he cuts parts of it away for the ultimate good of the branch and the entire tree. So it is with God's will in a saint's life.

Over time, every child of God must see things cut from his life that he might bear more fruit for God. The members of the church of today have never had greater need of such a holy purging. When a Christian finds something to be an encumbrance, may he or she let it go and run the race freed from its weight!

Avoiding Extremes

BRANDON REFROE

He never saw it coming. It was cold, the rain was likely cascading down in sheets, and he had just survived a harrowing experience at sea, culminating in shipwreck and a desperate swim to shore. Although probably near exhaustion, his mind still foggy because of the events of the previous two weeks (cf. Acts 27:33),

Paul managed to think practically, knowing the fire that had been kindled must be kept burning.

Although weary, he gathered a bundle of sticks and added them to a fire that would have to keep himself and his companions warm during the night. Not long after laying the sticks on the fire, suddenly and without warning, a viper lashed out of the flames and latched onto his hand, refusing to relinquish its deadly grip.

The curious island natives, witnesses to the horrific event, decided among themselves that this unfortunate castaway must be getting his just deserts. "He is a murderer," they concluded, "and though he survived the seas, fate will not allow him to live". (Acts 28:4 paraphrased).

However, these islanders did not know Paul or the promise made by the Savior he served guaranteeing protection from serpents and any deadly things he might encounter (Mark 16:18). Thus the apostle, with a simple flick of his wrist, shook the viper harmlessly back into the flames.

But the death watch began. The natives weren't sure how it would happen. Would he swell, lingering for days at death's door, paralyzed by the toxins and forced to suffer silently before finally succumbing? Or would he die suddenly, instantly falling prey to the viper's potent venom?

After watching Paul a great while, waiting for him to show some sign of physical distress but seeing none, the islanders changed their minds. "No," they declared, "this man is not a murderer - he is a god" (Acts 28:6). Quite a significant shift!

Please forgive Paul if he seemed unmoved by their adulation and subsequent attempted deification; it was not the first time such a sudden swing in opinion toward him had occurred. On Melita, the change had been from "bad" to "good" - literally, from "bad" to "god"! - but in Lystra, well, that was a different story.

A few years earlier, the same Paul, together with his traveling companion Barnabas, had barely been able to restrain well-meaning onlookers from offering sacrifices to them as though to gods after the two healed a crippled man (14:8ff).

Soon after witnessing the miraculous display, the good intentions of those ancient onlookers turned to malevolence. After being persuaded by the jaundiced testimony of Jews from Antioch and Iconium, the same fickle crowd who earlier had been eager to worship the two preachers joined with the enemies of the gospel in

stoning Paul, then dragging him out of the city and leaving him for dead.

Paul had certainly been on both ends of emotional pendulum swings by unstable souls. Having experienced the opposite poles of misguided zeal, he sought to warn others of these potential excesses. Perhaps he had these events in mind when he later penned, "That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting" (Ephesians 4:14).

To be sure, the religious world is particularly fertile soil for producing extremes.

For instance, there are extremes in salvation. The Catholic Council of Trent declared that good works performed by men merit "the attainment of eternal life." In a knee-jerk response to this erroneous theology, Protestant reformers fell victim to a pendulum-swing mentality, arguing instead that man is saved by "faith alone." Both positions, of course, are palpably false.

Although it is certainly true that men are not saved by "works of righteousness which we have done" (Titus 3:5), it is also true that man "is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). There is no contradiction here. Although works of human merit are completely inefficacious in procuring man's redemption, works of obedience are absolutely essential (cf. John 6:28-29; Colossians 2:12). Salvation by grace does not negate the necessity of obedience on the part of man (cf. Hebrews 5:8-9).

There are other extremes in doctrine. Some are guilty of binding where God has not bound (anti-ism). Others loose where God has bound (liberalism). Many, after escaping the clutches of anti-ism, rush headlong into liberalism. Others, in breaking away from liberalism, stumble into anti-ism. Neither is pleasing to God.

In truth, the need to avoid extremes is hardly new. God exhorted Joshua, shortly after the death of Moses: "Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go" (Joshua 1:7). Further, Christ declared that "if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch" (Matthew 15:14).

The conscientious child of God must be ever vigilant in his efforts to avoid extremes, veering neither to the right nor to the left. By arming himself with "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians

6:17) and determining to "handle accurately the word of truth," (2 Timothy 2:15).

Not Worth Doing Wrong For

DENNIS LOYD

One of life's most difficult lessons involves measuring present pleasures against future consequences. Is immediate fulfillment worth the future results? We speak of seasonal sports, dress, foods, and experiences; the Bible speaks of seasonal sins (Hebrews 11:25), meaning a sin with a short-term joy. Almost every sin has a very limited time for satisfaction or pleasure. After that, we wonder if the pleasure was worth the sin. Moses reasoned that Egypt and its pleasures were not worth it.

In George Eliot's novel *Silas Marner*, Godfrey Cass finally confesses to his wife that six years before he married her he fathered a child by a now-dead lover. For a time his wife Nancy remains silent. When she speaks, her concern is for that child, long neglected.

"But you wouldn't have married me then, Nancy, if I'd told you," Godfrey said as he explained his actions.

"I can't say what I should have done about that, Godfrey. ... But I wasn't worth doing wrong for - nothing is in this world." That remark makes us wonder - is anything worth doing wrong for?

• Love is not worth doing wrong for. On two different occasions, Abraham lied about Sarah saying, "She is my sister" (Genesis 12:11-19, 20:2). Like his father before him, Isaac tried the same lie about his wife, Rebekah (Genesis 26:7). We can rationalize that both men were motivated to lie because of fear, anxiety, a desire to do more with their futures, love, but none of these - even their love - was worth doing wrong for.

We often use love as an excuse for our sins - parent-child, husband-wife, brother-sister, friend-friend. But the time comes when we must make a choice, as Jesus noted. "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37 NKJV). Loving Christ means telling the truth or making the right choice* even if it frightens or hurts or endangers.

- Beauty is not worth doing wrong for. At a time when kings went out to battle, David stayed behind in his palace and from his rooftop saw Bathsheba bathing. "And the woman was very beautiful to behold" (2 Samuel 11:2). Her beauty became his rationale for adultery, deceit and murder. His sin touched his own life as well as the lives of Bathsheba, Uriah, the baby, and the men who made up his army.

Jesus warned that sins of the flesh often grow from our uncontrollable attraction to the physical and the beautiful. "Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Solomon warns that "charm is deceitful and beauty is passing" (Proverbs 31:30). Such attractions are frequently temporary and seasonal; consequently they are not worth doing wrong for.

- Money is not worth doing wrong for. John describes Judas as a thief who pilfered the money box of the disciples (John 12:6). At some point his greed led him to offer to betray Jesus for money. His whole life seemed to encircle his desire and determination to get, to have. "What will you give me?" The amount agreed on was 30 pieces of silver. Whatever its value then or now, was it worth the life of Jesus? The next morning - in the light of day - the money seemed so valueless, so petty beside the life of the Master, and Judas threw it away along with his life.

So many people build their lives on money. Those who do so lose their decency, their sense of order and propriety, and their honor. So Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:19-21. Paul also warns against this distorted sense of value in 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

- Fame is not worth doing wrong for. Ananias and Sapphira admired the recognition Barnabas and others received for their generosity. They sought a similar measure (Acts 5:1-11). Simon desired the gift of the Holy Spirit that he might do great things (Acts 8:18-24). For all of these, the desire for fame and recognition led them to sin - to do wrong. The fame was not worth the wrong.

Ananias and Sapphira lied, and Simon coveted. They sought public recognition, and they were Christians. Many others have compromised their principles to be noticed in the world. Jesus warned about those who do their works to be seen of men (Matthew 6:1-18). Pilate compromised his sense of justice because he sought to satisfy the people (Mark 15:15). The human desire to be seen, known, recognized and honored is basic and

innate, but these marks of fame are not worth doing wrong for.

What's wrong with situation ethics or the idea of the ends justifying the means? Man has choices to make, and weight must be given to more than temporary satisfaction. Choices have consequences, and we must attempt to look beyond the moment and the desire for an immediate resolution. Enjoyment is seasonal; acceptance by God is eternal. The soul is too valuable, and its redemption too precious for it to be lost. Jesus said, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). If the whole world is not more valuable than one soul, what on earth is worth doing wrong for?

Were Sins Forgiven Under the Old Covenant!

T. PIERCE BROWN

From the more than two dozen references to forgiveness in the Old Testament, it is evident that sins were forgiven under the Old Covenant. However, from Hebrews 10:1-10, it is clear that forgiveness before the death of Christ was different than after. Those Old Testament sacrifices "could not make perfect them that draw nigh" (ASV). As a result, a remembrance of sins was made year by year. In the Lord's church, our custom has been to speak of this as "having their sins rolled forward" because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

A clue to how this "forgiveness" was viewed in the sight of God is found in Paul's statement in Romans 3:25. He describes Jesus as the one "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (KJV). The New International Version says, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished." Although I do not approve of the NIV in general, it is of value to note that the word translated "remission" in the King James Version is not *aphesis*

as found in Acts 2:38, but *paresis*. The difference in the words is that in Christ the penalty for sin is canceled, but under the Law was lifted, covered or overlooked, not cancelled.

This means that under the Law, as far as giving some punishment for sin was concerned, the sin was forgiven or unpunished. It could not be forgiven in a complete sense, for it had not been paid for by an adequate sacrifice. As Paul puts it in Romans, God was just or righteous to pass over (forgive) those sins because He planned to send Christ to offer the complete sacrifice, and those who offered the typical sacrifices of the lambs, etc., were showing that they accepted in type the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Thus God "passed over" those sins until the time when Christ died.

Any argument or controversy about whether sins could be forgiven under the Old Testament economy is merely striving about words, as long as we understand that no "complete forgiveness" could be justly given without adequate payment being made. Because they had no way to make adequate payment (even 10 million lambs, goats and calves cannot pay for one man's soul), God accepted their payment in view of the fact that in His plan or mind the sacrifice was already offered in the death of Christ.

A simple but inadequate illustration of that situation might be this: A person owes a million dollars in back payments on the house in which he lives. He could be evicted by law, but in mercy the landlord says, "If you will pay the interest on this, I will forgive (overlook) the debt, for I have an insurance policy on you that will pay it off when you die." So the person is just as free from any burden as he would be if he were "completely forgiven" as long as he makes the yearly payment of the interest.

Under the Law of Moses, the person whose sins were forgiven or covered by the atoning blood of the sacrifice was eligible for salvation in heaven if he died in that covenant relationship with God just as much as a Christian who dies in fellowship with Christ. Legally, the debt was not paid until Christ paid it, but God could in justice act as if it were paid and say, "The sin is forgiven" because in the purpose and plan of God it was already paid. When those Old Testament characters offered their typical sacrifices, God accepted them as if they were the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

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