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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

*"God who made the world and everything in it,
does not dwell in temples made with hands"*

THE PEOPLE to whom the apostle Paul said those words at Acts 17:24, were highly religious people in all things, as we read from Acts 17:22. Yet they were wrong in their perception of God. So they were told that God is the Lord of heaven and the earth, He is the God who had made the whole world and everything in it. He does not need anything of this world, because everything belongs to Him, since He is the one who has created everything. Neither does God dwell in a building made with human hands. This shows that people could be very religious, but at the same time wrong religiously.

We read of many people in the Bible who were very religious, pious and devoted to their religious beliefs, yet they were wrong. One such person was eunuch of whom we read in Acts chapter 8. So religious he was that he had made a journey all the way from Ethiopia to Jerusalem to worship God. And as he was riding in his chariot on his way back to his home country, he was reading from the Scriptures. He was reading from the scroll of Isaiah chapter 53, what Isaiah had prophesied about Christ some 800 years ago. That was the time when a preacher of the gospel of Christ, Philip, joined him on the way. Philip asked eunuch if he understood what he was reading. Eunuch told him that he surely didn't understand. A lot of

time people don't understand when they read from the Bible. Eunuch didn't either. So Philip explained to him that all of that was written about Jesus Christ, that how he would be born and what He will do and how He would die for the whole humanity for sins of the world by the will of God. Also, Philip told him what he need to do to be saved from his sins by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. "Now as they went down the road," the Bible says, "they came to some water. And the eunuch said, See here is water. What hinders me from being baptized? Then Philip said, If you believe with all your heart, you may. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing." (Acts 8:36-39). Eunuch's rejoicing after his baptism points to the fact that he realized that he was wrong and that now he was right religiously.

In Matthew 15:8&9 we read what Christ said about some people: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." This shows that people can worship God in vain.

The crux of the matter is that man need to change his understanding of God. Man has from the beginning tried to follow God by and through his own imaginations by following traditions of men. God does not live in cathedrals and church buildings, or in any building made with human hands. God does not need lights of candles, or aroma and smell of any earthly object. He is not the God who need to hear the beating of drums and sounds of Piano, Organ, Guitar, or any other instrument of music made by human hands, like the apostle Paul told the men at Athens in Acts 17:25. Through Isaiah, the prophet, God said, "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. Where is the house that you will built Me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist, says the Lord. But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word," (Isaiah 66:1,2). God has revealed Himself and His will to whole mankind through the written word in the Bible. Therefore it matters what the Bible teaches. There is no other way God

speaks to man today. The Bible is not an ordinary book, written by skill and imagination of man. The Bible is God's inspired word. Man need to acquaint himself with the word of God. Speaking of the Bible, the apostle said, "All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16,17). To understand God and His will, and to learn to worship Him as He wants to be worshipped, man need to read and study the Bible, God's book.

Justified By The Blood Of Christ

J.C. CHOATE

WITH MAN being a sinner, then that meant that sin stood between him and his creator. God so hates and despises sin that he could not allow man to come into his presence while in that state. So how would it ever be possible for God and man to get together again?

In spite of man's sin, God had a great love for him and didn't want to see him eternally lost. But for him to be saved, a sacrifice was needed, a perfect sacrifice, a sinless sacrifice. He therefore chose to send his only begotten Son to be that sacrifice. Even then it would be necessary for Christ to enter into this sinful world, live a sinless life, remain faithful to his Father, and then to be willing to humble himself and to die a cruel death in order that he might be that blood offering and sacrifice that was required if man was to be saved.

So with that as a background, we have the setting for the Lord's coming. He was promised, and spoken of in prophecy, and then finally we read of his birth in Matthew 1. It was even said that Mary would bring forth a son, conceived of the Holy Spirit, that his name would be Jesus, and that he would save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:20, 21).

The scriptures tell us how that Jesus grew up, became a preacher, traveled over the country performing miracles to make believers out of the people, was betrayed by one of his own, and

then because of envy and jealousy was taken into custody, given a false trial, was sentenced to death, and was crucified on a cross between two thieves. There his blood was poured out for the sins of the world. He had lived and died a perfect sacrifice, and now it would be possible for God and man to be united again, that is, with the blood of Christ being applied to man's sins, and therefore cleansing him and purifying him. so that he might once more enter into the presence of God.

The apostle Paul said, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement." (Romans 5:8-11). Peter declared that we have not been redeemed or saved by corruptible things such as silver and gold, "But with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." (1 Peter 1:18-21).

Continuing, Paul had this to say about the blood of Christ: "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Ephesians 1:7). Christ himself said, "For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:28).

Now in the verses that we have read up to this point, and others that we could read, suggests that God and man were enemies, but that Christ shed his blood so that man might be cleansed and forgiven of his sins. This being done, then that meant that man was again able to come into the presence of God, that they were reconciled through the atonement that he made on the cross, and that it was possible now for man to be saved not only in this world but in the world to come as well.

We have also read that it was possible for man to be forgiven or to have the remission of his sins. But how was the blood applied so that this would be the result, or how was it possible for man to

come into contact with the blood of Christ so that he could be forgiven?

The scriptures teach that even though God provided salvation through Christ by his grace and mercy, still man must comply with certain conditions to be saved. This is to test his faith and his desire to be saved, but even after all of that, after obeying the Lord's commands to be saved, he cannot boast that he has earned his salvation, because there would be no possible way for man to ever fully pay the Father, for the sacrifice that he made in giving his Son that man might be saved. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, therefore, represents the good news of salvation, and Christ himself commanded the apostles to go into all the world and preach this gospel or good news to every creature. He further commanded them to preach: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15, 16). On other occasions the Lord commanded the necessity of repentance and that of confessing him before men as being the Son of God. (Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32). Then when we turn to Acts 2 we have Peter and the apostles preaching to a large crowd of people that had assembled in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and once they were convinced that Christ was the Son of God, they asked what else they should do. The record goes on to say, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38). Reading on, we are told that some three thousand gladly received the word and were baptized and the Lord added the saved to his church. (Acts 2:41,47).

But what does the remission of sins and the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ have to do with belief, repentance, baptism, and being added to the church? Just this! In Romans 6 we have Paul showing that as one obeys the Lord through his faith in Christ, dying to his sins, which would be repentance, and being buried in the waters of baptism, that one comes in contact with the benefits of the death of Christ, that is, his blood, and his sins are washed away, and then he is raised or resurrected from that watery grave to walk in newness of life. In other words, in obeying the Lord's commands then one pictures Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in his actions. Another example of coming in contact

with the blood of Christ has to do with the apostle Paul. Back when he was obeying the Lord, he had become a believer, was penitent of his sins, and then a gospel preacher came to him and told him that he should arise and be baptized and wash away his sins. (Acts 22:16). But how could he have his sins washed away through baptism? By obeying the commands of the Lord, then he came in contact with the blood of Christ, and his sins were therefore washed away. It was just that simple.

Not only that, but the blood of Christ is associated with the Lord's church. Paul said that Christ purchased the church with his own blood. (Acts 20:28). That means that Christ died for the church, shed his blood for it. When we obey the Lord, and we are saved by the blood of Christ, then we are added to the church by Christ himself. That means then that the church is made up of people that have been saved by the blood of Christ. That is why it is said that Christ purchased the church with his blood. That is also why the church is so important.

Then as we continue faithful in the Lord's service, his blood continues to cleanse us of our sins (1 John 1:7) and we remember the blood of Christ each first day of the week as we partake of the Lord's Supper in our worship to God. Truly, then, we are justified by the blood of Christ.

The Only Safe Guide

JOHN THIESEN

WHAT IS the safe guide for our life? There are several on which people depend to get to Heaven, but there is only one that will actually get them there. Sadly, many are duped into following false guides along the way.

SOME FOLLOW THEIR HEART

Many say, "If I just feel right in my heart, I'm all right." But the Bible teaches that one's own heart cannot be trusted! The prophet Jeremiah said, "*The heart is deceitful above all things...*" (Jeremiah 17:9). Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived said, "*He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool*" (Proverbs 28:26). From these

statements we learn that the heart left to itself as a guide will lead a person in the wrong direction.

"INNER LIGHT" AS A GUIDE

Others say, "Just follow your inner light." This supposes that God has placed spiritual understanding within each of us and that all we have to do is plumb its depths, like miners digging for gold. But again, Jeremiah said, *"The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"* (Jeremiah 10:23). This was why an external revelation from heaven was needed. The light was not in man already and he required a lamp to show the pathway to heaven for him.

THE CONSCIENCE AS GUIDE

"Let your conscience be your guide" is a popular saying. Saul of Tarsus was living in all good conscience before God when he was persecuting Christians, because he thought in his heart that he was doing it for God's sake (Acts 23:1; 26:9). But his conscience was ignorant, and he was actually opposing God while thinking he was doing right (1 Timothy 1:13,15).

GOD'S WORD THE ONLY SAFE GUIDE

The only safe, infallible guide for living for God and preparing for heaven is the Bible. *"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"* (2 Timothy 3:15). This is the divine revelation sent down from the God of heaven containing His will for us and the light from above which can illuminate our minds, guide our feet into paths of righteousness, and see us safely through this dark world to the City of Light on high.

The Authority Of Scripture

DAVID DEFFENBAUGH

THE SUBJECT of the authority of the Bible is one of the most important issues of this or of any day and age. Which way that question is decided will ultimately be the key factor in the spiritual

existence of any person or group of people. This is not simply a grandiose statement. If the Bible is God's **authority**, then the matter is settled as to what influence will guide and direct one's life. It is true that questions of interpretation and application will follow, yet that is another, though closely related, subject. But if the Bible is **not authority**, then what it says is unimportant. It becomes nothing more than a curiosity, and an ancient one at that.

The authority of the Scriptures needs to be understood within the larger context of **"God's Word"**. That Word has been historically manifested in three significant ways. **First, it has been revealed in His direct, spoken word.** This is nowhere better illustrated than in creation itself. *"God said... and there was..."* is a formula repeated for each of the six creative days.

The absolute authority of God's spoken word is irrefutable, as demonstrated in His ability to bring into existence that which was previously nonexistent, by merely speaking the words.

Second, God's Word was manifested in the flesh. So John affirms; *"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us..."* (John 1:14). Jesus, as that Word, also exemplified **absolute authority**. That demonstration came in numerous remarkable forms: He spoke, and nature obeyed (Mark 4:41); He spoke, and the dead heard and obeyed (John 11:43); He spoke, and spirit-beings obeyed (Mark 1:27). And, of course, near the end of His time on earth, He proclaimed, *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth"* (Matthew 28:18).

Third, God's Word has been manifested in written form. At this point the critical question becomes that of the **inspiration of Scripture**. The issue of inspiration is all about where the Bible came from: is it from God or from man? While, this article is too brief to delve into the *proofs* of inspiration, the assertion stands that there is more than adequate evidence to establish the truthfulness of Scripture's claim to be inspired by God. The point is this, *if* (and in reality, *since*) the Bible can be established as being the **written Word of God**, it carries equal authority as God's **audibly spoken word** and as God's **Word manifested in the flesh** as Jesus Christ.

The only question that remains is, **when will man submit to the Bible's absolute authority?** That submission *can* come now as people choose to obey God's revealed will, thus laying hold of His great promise of salvation. Or, they may decide to wait until the

judgment of the last day (John 12:48). Regardless of *when* we acknowledge Him, the Scriptures state in emphatic terms that one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess to God's Lordship and authority (Romans 14:11).

Satan Attacks the Bible

MAXIE B. BOREN

"THE DECEIVER of the whole world" (i.e., Satan, Revelation 12:9), the one who is *"the father of lies"* (John 8:44), has employed every cunning device to undermine and attack the Bible through the years. The devil is relentless in so doing because he knows the crux of the whole matter revolves around how people view the Scriptures.

Satan, through false teachers, has convinced millions that there is no absolute standard of truth. What our forefathers understood to be either black or white has in recent times been painted gray. People are told that there are no clearly defined lines of right and wrong. Morality, and religious doctrine also, have been relegated in the minds of most to be a "gray zone" of relativity. People believe what they want to believe and do what they want to do. It is as in the days of the Judges when *"every man did that which was right in his own eyes"* (Judges 17:6).

The tragedy is that so many gullibly swallow Satan's deceiving poison through his pawns that feed it to them. Thus, they are without a spiritual anchor, being tossed to and fro on perilous seas, and battered from reef to reef of doctrinal untruths. They drift into deep and dangerous waters of doubt and skepticism. They walk in the darkness, having been deluded by Satan into thinking that they have greater spiritual insight. How sad!

To all who will listen, I cry out, "There is a standard of truth given by God — the Bible is His Word (2 Timothy 3:16,17)! And the Word of the Lord will judge all men in the last day (John 12:48)! Please, please believe it, because it is so!"

007 in Any Town

MIKE BENSON

A FRUSTRATED SOVEREIGN

SCRIPTURE DESCRIBES IT as attempted guerilla warfare...

BEN-HADAD tried to carry out a series of assaults against the citizens of Israel (2 Kings 6:8). "Tried" is the operative word, because every time the king of Syria sent out a war party in ambush, he found enemy troops inexplicably guarding the camp he had intended to capture (vs. 8-10).

The inspired text says this happened *"not just once or twice"* (NKJV), but that Ben-hadad's plans were foiled repeatedly. The monarch came to the conclusion that there was either (a) a spy, or at the very least, (b) an intelligence leak within his own war cabinet. Somebody was obviously "feeding" Jehoram — his Israelite counterpart — information. So Ben-hadad summoned his military counsel together in an effort to expose the traitor (vs. 11,12). He inquired of them, *"Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?"* (v. 11b).

As it turned out, no one from Syria had disclosed the king's plans. The informant was actually Elisha — the prophet from Israel — in HIS Majesty's secret service! Like a character from a James Bond 007 movie, the man of God had a divine "surveillance camera" (cf. Proverbs 5:21; 15:3; Zechariah 4:10) in the king's bedchamber and was therefore privy to his most secret conversations (v. 12). Every strategy concocted within Ben-hadad's heart was revealed by God to Elisha who, in turn, conveyed the plans to the Israelite king in Samaria.

Armed with this new information, Ben-hadad turned his attention away from attacking a nation to capturing an individual (v. 13). Think of a deck of 52 playing cards, not with photographs of various high-ranking Iraqi officials, but with Elisha's face on every single card! The Syrian ruler sent a large force to surround the city of Dothan under the cover of darkness (a village about 12 Roman miles north of Samaria — (cf. Genesis 37:17) and apprehend Elisha (vs. 14,15).

A FRETFUL SERVANT

Early the next morning, Elisha's servant awakened and discovered the Syrians entrenched about the city (v. 15). He seemed to have known that the soldiers had come for his lord and cried out in fear, *"Alas, my master! What shall we do?"* (cf. Exodus 14:10-14).

Like American forces searching for Saddam Hussein, the army had located the great prophet and was under orders to take him prisoner (v. 14). Elisha knew that a very great danger existed, but he also knew something of the militia arrayed in his defense. He calmly told his servant, *"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them"* (v. 16).

That may have sounded reassuring, but at that particular moment, no allied troops could be seen in the vicinity. Elisha then prayed that his servant's eyes might be opened (v. 17). The prophet's prayer was immediately answered, and suddenly his aide beheld a massive, heavenly detachment of horses and chariots of fire (v. 17b; cf. Exodus 3:2; Numbers 22:22-31)! This was a vision of deliverance!!

A FAITHFUL SAINT

Consider for a moment the servant's pitiful cry, *"Alas . . . what shall we do?"* You can almost hear the alarm in his voice, can't you? He could only see an imminent attack; he could only see the problem. Brethren, we must strenuously guard against a similar mentality in the church today. Despondency sees only the multitude amassed against us, and fails to consider the Divine host that is marshaled on our behalf. The Bible says, *"...If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31b). Do we really believe that?

Our problem is in the *perception* of the physical instead of the *sight* of the spiritual. It's not that we *lack* sufficient *funds*, or *manpower*, or *space*, but *vision*! We need to stop thinking about what we *can't* do and get a glimpse of what *God can* do through us (Philippians 4:13)! The New Testament teaches, *"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen..."* (2 Corinthians 4:18a; emphasis mine, mb). *"For we walk by faith, not by sight"* (2 Corinthians 5:7; emphasis mine, mb).

Years ago, a grade-school class was told to go home and count the stars in the sky as part of their science lesson. Students

came back with wildly dissimilar answers. One child said, "A couple of hundred." Another said, "Ten thousand." Another offered, "One million." Finally, the teacher asked one little boy who had not yet spoken up, "How many stars did you count?" The boy replied, "Three." "Only three?!" the teacher exclaimed. "How did you see only three?" He said, "I guess we just have a small back- yard."

Beloved, let me humbly but forcefully suggest that we need a big backyard today; we need a great vision — one that is worthy of the "King of kings and Lord of lords". I'm not thinking in terms of some miraculous manifestation (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:11-13); I'm talking about faith and focus. The eye of faith sees **Divine presence**, whereas the eye of fear sees **desperate problems**. God is on our side and He's never lost a single battle! Amen?! Once we come to terms with that truth, we'll stop wringing our hands in doubt and start using them in fervent and devoted service (Hebrews 12:2).

The Salvation Of Our Own Depends On Us

JESUS RODRIGUEZ

ON APRIL 15, 1912 an event occurred which moved the world. Man had boasted of having constructed a transport ship to travel the seas which was so safe that it would be almost impossible to sink. We all know the history of the Titanic, the ship which sank in the northern seas after colliding with an iceberg. Around 2,000 lives were lost, owing to the over-confidence and sense of security on the part of the builders, the crew, and the passengers in their belief that the ship was impossible to sink.

That night there were both acts of heroism and truly sad situations. But what made the most profound impression upon the consciences and minds of people of that time were the acts of nobility and love. Most of the survivors on that fatal night were children and mothers. The fathers gave their lives in order to save those they deeply loved. They did everything possible to save those who still had life and opportunity before them. Through the

sacrifice of their own lives, they gave their wives and children a second chance at living.

Let's think about those fathers who opted to lose their own lives in order to save those they loved. How would they have felt in making that decision? With what peace and contentment would they have died, knowing that their own survived? Surely even in death there was bitter-sweet satisfaction in knowing that they were not dying in vain.

God wants each father and mother to be responsible for their children in every way — physically, emotionally, and especially spiritually. He wants us to dedicate our time to ensuring that no glacier or iceberg strikes the ship of our lives to cause our children to fall overboard and perish. It is not the church that is responsible for teaching our children the way of the fear of Jehovah; it is *our* responsibility.

Looking further afield, in some cases we are blind to the fact that we have some very near to us, some who have been with us in the ship since infancy, who are at the point of falling into the sea. I am speaking of our own family members, parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, cousins, and other relatives. We must dedicate ourselves to seeking out and teaching those who are on board with us, while there is still time.

God has given a great treasure of souls into our hands. We must respond to Him for the confidence He has placed in us by not being like the unfaithful servant who did not use the only talent that the Lord had turned over to him (Matthew 25:14-30). Let us not allow the torrents of darkness to envelope our loved ones. Let us make sure that those of our household are always safe in the ship that will carry them to eternal life.

"A Way" In A Manger

MICHAEL L. KING

THERE IS a song traditionally sung during the "Christmas" season in recognition of the birth of Jesus, beginning with the words, "Away in a manger, no crib for His bed." The use of the word "away" is to describe the distant city, Bethlehem, where the baby

Jesus lay. By a simple manipulation of the word "away" an even more profound lesson is taught with the expression, "A way" in a manger. Truly, in that manger in Bethlehem lay "a way" for the entire world to find deliverance!

Almost eight hundred years before the Bethlehem occurrence, Isaiah prophesied, *"And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein"* (Isaiah 35:8). The great spokesman of old was describing the joyful flourishing of Christ's kingdom. It was not just an ordinary way, but a "highway," a loftier thoroughfare than had ever before existed, that would lead people to a destination of holy living.

The forerunner of Jesus, John the baptizer, preached repentance in the wilderness *"for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matthew 3:1,2). He was quoting Isaiah the prophet when he said, *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight"* (Matthew 3:3).

The superstructure for this holy way was laid *"before the foundation of the world,"* that is, *"that we should be holy and without blame before him in love...in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace"* (Ephesians 1:4-7).

Isaiah has warned that *"your iniquities have separated between you and your God"* (Isaiah 59:2). The sins of man caused enmity between God and man, as had been stated in the first prophecy in the Bible concerning Jesus (Genesis 3:15). *"The way of peace have they not known"* (Romans 3:17) because of that enmity caused by sin. Jesus became the way by which the enmity that prevailed between Jews and Gentiles, and also between God and the unrighteous, was abolished, (Ephesians 2:15). Those who *"were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ . . . for he is our peace"* (Ephesians 2:13,14).

During Old Testament times the veil separated the portals of glory from those who could enter only the holy place. That veil was rent from top to the bottom upon the death of Jesus, by which a bold entrance was allowed into the "holiest" through the blood of Christ after sins were remitted (Hebrews 10:17-20).

As the preaching of the disciples of Jesus intensified "concern-

ing the kingdom of God", the result was that, "some spake evil of that way..." (Acts 19:9). His way had now become their way, which was holiness through His kingdom, the church.

Paul, while yet Saul, admitted, *"I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4). After learning the truth and being added to the Lord's kingdom, Paul fell under heavy accusations and charges by those who were enemies of Christ. He boldly declared, "But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:14,15).*

Following Paul's defense, Felix, *"having a more perfect knowledge of that way" concerning "Righteousness temperance, and judgment to come," he [Felix] "trembled" and granted Paul privileges (Acts 24:14,22).*

Solomon said, *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12). In defining the perfect and only acceptable way, Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6).*

Are you looking for salvation? You can find "a way in a manger"?

Friends in the Church

CHARLES HODGE

FRIENDS! Friends in the church! Everytime members have needs down at the hospital or cemetery I wonder what do people do who don't have church friends?!?! Paul was an evangelist, yet his greatest ability was to make friends. He had never worshipped with the saints at Rome (Read Romans 16), yet he already knew the "pillars". He counted them as friends, even brothers. Paul would never be a stranger in Rome!

Paradoxically, we all know friendship is the key to church growth, yet we do little to encourage it. Some are against

fellowship. They have never read Acts 2. Others will not allow friendship/ fellowship events to be had "in the church house". We are a strange lot!

So, we get new members in and lose others. It is reported that eighty percent of new members are lost within six months. What a tragedy!

Actually, new members are not stable until they have been integrated into the fellowship of the church. Every new member needs a minimum of three church friends; and seven is better! Without this supportive group, he "falls through the cracks".

Sadly, and contrary to all that one would expect, the church is a difficult place to make friends! Too many assemblies are simply places where strangers meet! The world will never be evangelized by "anonymous worshippers". Our gatherings are often not structured to incorporate the new into the old group. It is hard to break in because most brethren are merely friendly with "their bunch". Some are more comfortable with keeping the church "like it is". We come in late and rush out early.

On the other hand, some members don't want to be in fellowship. They don't want to be friendly. Some have "moved in" for one purpose only — to get lost in the crowd. Others move often from one congregation to another. They do not wish the pain of separation, so they avoid making close ties.

Most of us are too busy — too busy to cultivate deep relationships in the church, which is sad. We are forced to admit that there is no perfect church, as far as the human element is concerned. We all are flawed and fall short of what we should be and want to be. We must try harder to do better. We must teach/ practice fellowship. We must reach out to newcomers. We must learn how to love others with the agape love of God.

One of these days *you* will need a friend; one of these days *someone* will need *you* as a friend. But unless the relationships are developed now, they won't be meaningful enough to make a difference when the need arises. Let's resolve now to build friendships within the church, and pray for God's help in carrying out our resolve.

First Century Christianity

CHARLES BOX

IS IT possible for those of us living in the twenty-first century to be "New Testament" Christians? Can we be like *first century* Christians in the *twenty-first century*? So much is said about change and so much change is evident. Computers and communications are only two examples. Must the gospel also be changed to fit a changing world, or is the message of Christ's sacrifice still sufficient for the needs of today (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)?

MAN HAS NOT CHANGED

Today's man struggles with the same greed, lust, and bitterness he has always faced. He has not changed. Human nature today is as it has always been. From the beginning, man has been given the choice of good or evil (Deuteronomy 11:26). Man's nature loves sin. *"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members"* (Romans 7:23). Man has not changed.

MAN'S PROBLEM HAS NOT CHANGED

In Noah's days people were wicked. *"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Genesis 6:5). In our day sin is still man's problem. Man is basically sinful. He is un-god-like. *"For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin"* (Ecclesiastes 7:20.). There is no one among accountable people who has not sinned (Romans 3:10,23). Our problem is a common problem to all mankind: **SIN**.

MAN'S HOPE HAS NOT CHANGED

Jesus is our hope. *"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27). Man is the same, and so is sin. Man's hope is also the same — Jesus Christ. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). If it had not been for the death of Jesus, man would have been

without hope. *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit"* (1 Peter 3:18). Man's hope is in the fact that Jesus suffered sin's penalty in man's place.

First century Christianity is possible today. Through a return to the New Testament teaching, in loving obedience to the gospel of Christ, *you can be a Christian only ~ TODAY* (Acts 2:36-47, Romans 6:1-6)! Have you obeyed the gospel? If not, now is the time to do so.

God Works in Us, He is Able!

CLEM THURMAN

THE APOSTLE Paul wrote, *"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen"* (Eph. 3:20-21). The Bible is full of people who underestimated God. The Egyptians did, when God delivered Israel out of slavery (Ex. 10 - 14). The Syrians did during the time of Elijah (1 Kgs. 20), and again during the time of Elisha (2 Kgs. 7) and paid dearly both times. When Jesus said, *"It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God"* (Matt. 19:24), the disciples questioned it, and the Lord replied, *"With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible"* (v. 26).

Too often we think only in human terms: what we can do, what other people can do. If we haven't done it, if we haven't seen it done, or if we cannot do it, we tend to think it impossible. But *"with God all things are possible."* We need the faith to declare, *"God is able."*

GOD IS ABLE TO SAVE US FROM OUR SINS

The reason God sent His Son into the world is revealed by the angel who announced of Jesus, *"It is he that shall save his people from their sins"* (Matt. 1:21). God looked down on a world that was in rebellion to His will: murderers, liars, adulterers, thieves, idolaters, covetous, drunkards, and such like (Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Cor.

6:9-10). Surely such sinners could not be saved!? But God said of Jesus, *"He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through him"* (Heb. 7:25). None are too bad, none have sinned too much - if he will come to Jesus, he can be saved.

It is hard for some to believe, but God WANTS to save sinners. Even the kind mentioned above, the kind we "nice" people don't want to be around. Those are the ones for whom Jesus died. God is able to save them, and He wants to save them: *"God. . . would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim. 2:4). The apostle Peter wrote, *"The Lord is not slack as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pet. 3:9). God will not save people in their sins. But when sinners, no matter what they have done, will come to Jesus in repentance, God is able to save them.

GOD IS ABLE TO DELIVER US FROM TEMPTATION.

Jesus taught the disciples to pray, *"Bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"* (Matt. 6:13). God doesn't ever tempt us to do wrong, *"But each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed"* (Jas. 1:14). The devil tempts, using our own desires that lead to lust. But *"the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation"* (2 Pet. 2:9). Delivering us from temptation doesn't mean that God is going to overrule our wills, that He will deliver us whether or not we cooperate. When Jesus was tempted, as recorded in Matt. 4:1-11, three times He answered the temptation with, *"It is written,"* and then gave the Scripture. We must *"resist the devil"* (Jas. 4:7), if we would be delivered from temptation.

God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt, and punished them when they disobeyed Him (1 Cor. 10:1-11). Maybe they thought they "had it made" and let down their guard. But the apostle then wrote, *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall... God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape"* (v. 12-13). When we put the word of God in our hearts, temptation is easier to overcome (Psa. 119:11) because we can more readily find the way of escape which God provides. But if we deliberately put ourselves in the wrong place, with the wrong

people, finding a way of escape will not be easy. If we would be delivered from temptation, we must cooperate with God Who provides the way of escape.

GOD IS ABLE TO SUSTAIN US AND MAKE US STAND

It sometimes seems that the devil controls things. Loved ones get sick, and die. Friends lie, cheat, betray us. Natural calamities abound and innocent people suffer. But just as God limited Satan in matter of Job (Job 1), so does God put limits on the devil now. God controls this world: *"God... made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God"* (Acts 17:26-27). God strengthens and encourages His children: *"Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might... That ye may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man"* (Eph. 6:10; 3:16). If we surrender to God, He is *"our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"* (Psa. 46:1). That is what enabled the apostle Paul to write, *"It is God who works in you... I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"* (Phil. 2:13; 4:13).

Facing "insurmountable odds," Gideon trusted in God, and God gave him the victory (Judg. 7). The apostle Paul writes of the death and resurrection of Jesus, then states, *"Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 15:57). Trials come, problems nearly overwhelm us, but we must remember: *"If God is for us, who is against us? . . . We are more than conquerors through him that loved us"* (Rom. 8:31,37). I don't have the strength to overcome by myself; none of us do. But God can make me able, God can give me the victory: over sin, over self, over the world, over Satan. Through our faith God's power works: *"This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith"* (1 Jno. 5:4).

Wages of Sin

W. A. HOLLEY

"FOR the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6: 23).

Sin is, and has been, common to all nations, past and present. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3: 23). "Righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14: 34).

Sin is so popular in our world, our jails and prisons cannot accommodate those lawbreakers who should be incarcerated, according to the press. Sin should never be permitted to reign in our bodies (Romans 6: 12).

WHAT IS SIN?

In a broad sense, sin is "the transgression of the law" (I John 3: 4). To "transgress" means to cut across the commandments of God. But sin can be defined in other ways. (1) "All unrighteousness is sin" (I John 5: 17). "Unrighteousness" refers to any injustice or wrongfulness of character in life or act against human beings. (2) There is the sin of omission (James 4: 17). One might not steal, or kill, or commit adultery, but may refuse to yield or submit to the Lord's commandments. (3) "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14: 23). Merely believing a thing is right does not make it right. Saul of Tarsus believed he was doing right when he persecuted Christians, but he was wrong (Acts 23: 1; 24: 6; 26: 9-11; I Timothy 1: 13). Romans 14 refers to Jews eating meat, but yet doubted they were doing the right thing. The verse we are discussing does not refer to faith in Christ or gospel truth; but faith in lightness of what we do. (4) The sin of commission. The person who knows what God has forbidden, but deliberately participates in what is banned, is not obedience to the law of the Lord.

We shall now offer a few examples of sin: David sinned when he committed adultery with Bathsheba (II Samuel 12: 13ff). Nadab and Abihu sinned when they offered fire "which the Lord had not commanded" (Leviticus 10: 1-2). Ananias and Sapphira sinned when they lied to God about the amount of money they gave to him (Acts 5: 1-11). Judas sold the Master for the price of a slave (Matthew 27: 3-10; Acts 1: 18-20).

CHARACTERISTICS OF SIN

Sin is deceitful. Sin promises joy and happiness, but brings hardship and disgrace. "... Lest any of you be hardened through

the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3: 13). Judas was so deceived by sin that he went out and hanged himself.

Sin, like a baby rattlesnake, grows and grows, day by day. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted, when he is drawn away by his own lust, and enticed. Then the lust, when it hath conceived, beareth sin: and the sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death" (James 1: 13-15, ASV). Sin brings guilt, punishment, remorse, and death (Romans 6: 23). Thank God, sin, through Jesus Christ, can be forgiven! (Mark 16: 15-16; Acts 2: 36-38).

Sin's pleasures are fleeting. "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to share ill treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he looked unto the recompense of reward" (Hebrews 11: 24-26, ASV).

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF SIN?

Sin brought physical death into the world (Genesis 3: 1: 1-8; Romans 5: 12-17). Adam and Eve, as a result of sin, were cast out of Eden, and so death came upon all men (Hebrews 9: 27). Sin is, therefore, the cause of all suffering, sorrow, pain, tears and death. Old age, grey hair, and a bent frame, so testify (Ecclesiastes 12: 1-7). In these verses we have a vivid description of old age.

It is sin that separates man from God (Isaiah 59: 1-2). Man is not born a sinner, as Calvinism avers. Psalm 51: 5 does not so teach. "We go astray" —we are not born with sin (Isaiah 53: 6; 58: 3). "... The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18: 20). With regard to a certain man, Ezekiel wrote: "Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee" (Ezekiel 28: 15). Little children are not born totally depraved (Matthew 18: 3; 19: 14).

Finally, sin leads inevitably to hell and destruction (I Peter 4: 16; II Thessalonians 1: 7-9).

Why?

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“WHY?” is the most timeless and universal of all questions. Why must there be suffering, sorrow, heartache, death, even among God's own children? Many people today suffer, and the Bible is our only strength. Let us look at it now in answering the question “Why do people suffer and especially, why do God's children suffer?

1. Suffering keeps this world from becoming too attractive. We are but pilgrims and strangers in this world (I Peter 2: 11). When life is pleasant, we sometimes forget the home that awaits us in heaven.
2. Suffering brings out our best. The bond that exists for those who stand by an ill love-one is welded firmly. The “bearing of one another's burdens” (Galatians 6: 2) becomes even more meaningful.
3. Suffering gives an occasion to put to silence the enemies of God. We are all familiar with the sufferings of Job, and the eventual outcome of his tribulation. That experience, in one degree or another, has been re-enacted since the dawn of time. The faith of those suffering and those who bear with them have caused many to see the Lord's people in a different light.
4. Suffering makes us appreciative. We receive so many good things that we tend to take them for granted. Suffering makes us more aware of God's goodness.
5. Suffering makes us depend on God (Isaiah 54: 5). When physicians say that they have done all that they can, you suddenly realize how much you depend on God.
6. Suffering purifies us (I Peter 4: 11-12; James 1). We want to be our best, and to be rid of every sin, so that God will hear our prayers.
7. Suffering makes us sympathetic (II Corinthians 1: 3-6). Suffering helps us to be more sympathetic with those who suffer.
8. Suffering makes one humble. By remembering how God has been good to us and what many others have done, we can not help but be humble.

9. Suffering reminds us to pray, and that prayer works when nothing else will. Prayer comes more from the heart and is much more specific.

None of us likes to suffer or see others suffer; but maybe if we understand why we suffer we can bear it with greater strength.

Excellent Reasons To Promote Harmony Among Church Members

1. Remember that we are all subject to failings and infirmities of one kind or another.

2. Bear with, and not magnify, each other's infirmities (Galatians 6: 1-2).

3. Pray one for another in our social meetings, and particularly in private (James 5: 16).

4. Avoid going from house to house for the purpose of bearing news and interfering with other people's business.

5. Always turn a deaf ear to any slanderous report, and lay no charge against any person until well-founded.

6. If a member commits a personal trespass, tell him of it in private, before it is mentioned to others (Matthew 18: 15-18).

7. Watch against a shyness of each other and put the best construction on any action that has the appearance of opposition or resentment.

8. Observe the just rule of Solomon - that is, leave off contention before it is meddled with (Proverbs 17: 14).

9. If a member has offended, consider how Godlike it is to forgive, and how unlike him to seek revenge (Ephesians 4: 28).

10. Remember that it is always a giant artifice of the devil to promote distance and animosities among members of the church; we should therefore watch against everything that furthers this end.

11. Consider how much more good we can do in the world at large, and in the church in particular, when we all are united in love, than we could do when acting alone, and indulging a contrary spirit.

12. Lastly, consider the express injunction of the scripture and the beautiful example of Christ, as to these important things (Ephesians 4: 32; 1 Peter 2: 21; John 13: 5, 15).

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