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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"No one has seen God at any time, The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."

When Christ was born on earth more than two thousand years ago, His birth had fulfilled the following prophecy by prophet Isaiah who had lived more than seven hundred years before the birth of Christ: "Behold the virgin shall be with child," Isaiah had said, "and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, "God with us"." (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23). Biblically speaking, Christ was with God from the beginning, as one of the Persons, co-equal with God, in the Godhead. He was God, but to save man from sin and thus to make possible for man to be reconciled with God He had come to earth. His birth was announced as: "Good tidings of great joy which will be to all people." (Luke 2:10). When Christ was born, God had come on earth to save all people from their sins. Speaking of Himself as the Son of God, Christ said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16,17).

Speaking of Christ, the inspired writer in the Bible wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." And then he said pointing to the birth of Christ on earth, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as

of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1,2,14). Christ had come on earth, as John said in John 1:18, to declare God to man. No man had ever seen God indeed. But in Christ God was amongst men on earth. Christ called God in heaven His Father, (John 14:6) and God in heaven called Christ on earth His Son. (Matt. 17:5).

Even though Christ was God, yet He came on earth, leaving all His privileges in heaven, in the likeness of men. He was most humble and obedient to God, the Father, in everything. In Philippians 2:5-11 the Bible teaches, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

The birth of Christ on earth was in the scheme of God, from the beginning (Genesis 3:15), for the redemption of man from sin. (Romans 5:6-8). Christ had come to the earth to declare or reveal to all men everywhere that God loves all people, and that He was willing to die on the cross to be the propitiation for their sins. He boldly declared, therefore, and said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6). Christ is God's way to heaven. Accept Him, do what He says, and follow Him all your life, for there is no other way of God.

What It Means To Be In Christ

J.C. CHOATE

There are any number of scriptures that speak of being in Christ. We'll begin reading some of those. The apostle Paul said, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22). Again, he said, "Now thanks be unto God,

which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the saviour of his knowledge by us in every place." (2 Corinthians 2:14). In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul said, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul warned, "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

Continuing to note those scriptures that refer to being in Christ, next we go to Ephesians 1:10-14: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." And finally in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 we read, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first."

Now what do all of these verses of scripture mean? Well, all of them have one thing in common, and that is, that each one of them speaks of being in Christ. That leads us then to the next question, which is, what does it mean to be in Christ, and how can one be in Christ? We'll answer the last part of that question by saying that it would be obvious that when the scriptures talk about being in Christ, they are referring to a spiritual state that one is in, and not a physical state. Next, to answer the first part of that question, and that is, what does it mean to be in Christ? From the scriptures we have read, we would have to conclude that to be in Christ would mean that one is saved, that he is a new creature, that he has victory, and that he has hope. Again, Paul says that if we are in Christ that we have access to all spiritual blessings. Hear him, as he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ". (Ephesians 1:3). Paul is speaking to the

Christians at Ephesus, and he explains to them that in Christ they have been blessed with all spiritual blessings. What would be some of those blessings? Salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, brethren, being in the church, fellowship, the privilege of prayer; forgiveness, and the hope of eternal life. In all fairness, however, it should be pointed out that these blessings are reserved for only those who are in Christ. That means that they are not available to those who are outside of Christ. If all people possessed them equally, whether they obeyed God or not, then there would be no advantage of being in Christ, or being a Christian, and a child of God.

In writing to the Romans, Paul stated, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Romans 8:1). To understand what is being said here, then you must realize again that Paul is speaking about those who are in Christ. Being in Christ, they are saved, and they have the hope of eternal life. There is no fear of condemnation, or of being lost, provided they walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. That is, they are not to involve themselves in the things of the world, or in sinful practices, but rather they are to walk after the Spirit, or according to the teachings of the Spirit, which would be the word of God. So that is very simple and to the point, but at the same time, very reassuring that the Lord will bless and care for those who are his, if they will but remain faithful to him.

The next question that comes up is this: How can one get into Christ? Does one just believe that he is in Christ, and that means then that he is already there? Can one enter Christ by confessing him to be the Son of God, by living a good life, or just how is it done? Well, there is no big mystery associated with this question. The scriptures pointedly tell us how this may be done. Going over to Romans 6:3, Paul says, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" The same writer says again, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:26,27). Now, from reading these two passages of scripture, I think you will have to admit that in both cases that Paul is clearly stating that one enters Christ through the act of baptism. Is there any other way to enter Christ? none that I have read about. Surely if there had been some other way to enter Christ then Paul would have explained that one could enter Christ by baptism, but that it was also possible to enter Christ

in some other way. But he didn't do that. Rather, in both of his statements, and being guided by the Holy Spirit as he penned these words, he said that baptism puts one into Christ. That means then that if a person believes that it is possible to be saved without being baptized, that he is saying that one can be saved outside of Christ, and then later, after he is saved, he may want to be baptized to enter Christ. Now is that what Paul said? Certainly not. We can see the problems that are created when man does not choose to accept the truth as it is.

Again, Paul talks about being baptized into the body of Christ or the church (1 Corinthians 12:13), and this would mean then that the same baptism that puts one into Christ also puts one into the church, and therefore to be in Christ is to be in the church or to be in the church is to be in Christ. To be in the Christ or the church simply means that you are in a saved state, that you belong to the Lord, that you have all of his blessings, and that you have the hope of life beyond the grave.

Created in Christ Jesus for Good Works *(Part 1).*

THOMAS R. DOHLING

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

We are saved by the grace (goodwill) of God when we trust Him (believe what He says in order that we may be saved). When we trust Him, we surrender to His will; do what He says we should do so that He may save us (cleanse us) from our sins. He has done what was necessary to take away sin (way of the cross); He laid the sin of humankind on His Son at the cross of Calvary. He blunted Satan's great tool, death, when He raised Jesus up from the dead, so that humankind may no longer be afraid of death (separation from God). So then, we are saved by God's goodwill (unmerited favour) towards humankind. Salvation is the gift of God. God does

not have to save man - He is under no obligation to man. He gave man the freedom of choice and man chose to disobey God. Yet, God, being Who He is -compassionate and kind - chose to save man by His own sacrifice. According to a songwriter (Wesley) "Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, my God, should die for me." God wanted a people for Himself who would be His creation in Christ Jesus who would do what Christ did; be like Christ and thereby (by their lives) glorify Him, good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them. So, when we decide to follow Christ, we have this goal in mind i.e., to do the good works prepared by God and revealed through, and in the lives of, Christ Jesus and the Apostles. While journey on this earth, our minds (spirits) ought to be in heaven where our Lord is. If we love Him, we will do what he says.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, **for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:** That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Being a Christian in name only is not enough. We have to grow in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature - attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature - until we become like our Lord Jesus Christ. In such maturity there is no doubt only a quiet assurance and trust in God which compels us to do His will and be found acceptable to Him. Then, speaking the truth in love, the people of God (His church, the Body of Christ) grow up to be like Christ, the Head, in every way. Then the church grows in Christ being compact with each part supplying the needs of the body as they work effectively according to their fullest ability and thereby the body increases and builds itself up in love - love for Jesus the

Head and love for one another with the interest of God uppermost in each one's mind.

What are the good works that have been prepared for Christians to do?

(Matthew 25:34-40): "Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me"

We remember from Scripture how our Lord left many examples of the good that He did. One example that comes readily to mind is the feeding of the 5000 men, besides women and children.

(to be continued)

Spreading the Good News

DAVID THURMAN

Television can be so discouraging. The newscasts are full of the latest horrors. The "entertainment" shows are filled with the most recent social issues, either violent or reflecting new views on moral issues. The talk shows sell tabloid sleaze, often about affairs, bad relationships and sick love. Meanwhile, much of the world sits in poverty, hunger and constant struggle. I have gotten used to turning off the news just because I am so tired of hearing all the bad news.

Interestingly, the world of Jesus was not much different. They didn't have the electronic news media of our day, but the news was not any better. The Romans ruled the world, sometimes in a good way, more often as an occupying force. The religion of Jesus' day

was almost completely legalistic, offering no hope to anyone who was a sinner. There was no good news.

In the middle of all the confusion and bad news Jesus appeared, preaching the good news. *"After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 'The time has come,' He said. 'The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news'"* (Mark 1:14-15; NIV). Jesus brought a message that was good news to His day. The people were beaten down politically, spiritually and financially. So, Jesus' message was different. It was not the same old teaching they had always heard from their rabbis. Jesus' message was one of good news, of encouragement, of hope and optimism. What did His good news do?

GOOD NEWS BUILDS PEOPLE UP

"Bright eyes gladden the heart; good news puts fat on the bones" (Prov. 15:30). In a world that focuses on the bad and runs big headlines describing the latest tragedies, people can easily get discouraged. That discouragement drains them, taking their energy and their will to go on. Those kind of people need to feel better about their lives, about their futures, about themselves. That is what good news does. Good news brightens eyes and fattens people up.

This proverb is not speaking of physical fattening. It is talking about emotional strength and about spiritual conditioning. When Jesus spoke the good news, people were strengthened. The very people the religious establishment rejected were the ones who thronged to Jesus. He told them good news. God loved them in spite of their sin. God wanted them back. God would give them the power and skills to overcome their sins and face life on a stronger footing. That sort of news energized the sick, the lame, and the lost.

GOOD NEWS REFRESHES PEOPLE

"Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land" (Prov. 25:25). Those who are thirsty have only one thing they desire: a deep and refreshing drink of water. The longer they do without the more they thirst. When Jesus came into the spiritual desert of His times He brought *"living water"* (John 4:10). That water was good news to those who drank of it.

When Jesus spoke of living water, He was conversing with a Samaritan woman. She was a half breed, rejected as unclean by those in power in Jerusalem. She was a woman, and men did not talk with women in public, especially Samaritan women. But Jesus spoke with this woman only a few moments and she hurried back to her village to tell the good news about Jesus to her friends (John 4:28-29). She was so encouraged, she even left the water pot she had carried to the well! The message of Jesus was certainly good news to her. She came to Jesus an outcast, married many times, part of an unclean race. A few minutes with the Master and she is refreshed by His good news.

GOOD NEWS BINDS THE BROKENHEARTED

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted" (Is. 61:1). Good news cheers people up; it refreshes people. But good news also heals those whose hearts are broken. People who have sinned and feel lost and out of touch with God. Good news! God wants you back. People who have been wounded by the sins of others and who ache over the actions of loved ones. Good news! God understands and will have compassion on you. Whatever breaks your heart, whatever the cause of your pain, God has good news for you. You don't have to hurt, He will take your pain.

The gospel (good news) is all about the process of telling those people in sin that they can escape. No matter how severe the sin, no matter how damaging the consequences of sin, there is hope and you can be forgiven by a loving God. That is good news.

The good news is about the love of Christ touching your life. Regardless of who has wounded you, or who has let you down, God is there to bind up the wound and help you to heal. Jesus has wonderful news for you. Your pain doesn't have to last. You can forgive the one who hurt you and move beyond the hurt you have experienced. That is more good news.

GOOD NEWS FREES CAPTIVES

"He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners" (Is. 61:1-2). What could be more depressing than having your freedom taken away?

What is more frightening than the prospect of losing your home and being chained in some distant land or prison? The good news of God is taught in order to free people from those chains. Again, this is not physical slavery, but spiritual. Those trapped in sin are set free when they hear good news. *"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32).

When Jesus came preaching good news, He faced a world trapped by sin and fear. Sin crippled everyone, although a few pretended they were righteous (Rom. 3:23; Matt. 6:1-7). Those outside the religious hierarchy felt isolated and hopeless, trapped by sin they could not escape and burdened by the feeling they could do nothing to improve their standing with God. They were prisoners of their sin and their lack of hope.

Jesus entered that world with good news. They could escape sin. *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved, us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)"* (Eph. 2:4-5). The common people, held at arm's length from God by the decision of men, could now come to God in spite of their sins. They now had hope, a hope that God could and would forgive them and make them free. This was not based on their ability to keep the law, but on God's great love and mercy. That is good news.

GOOD NEWS COMFORTS MOURNERS

"To bring good news to the afflicted... To comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of the spirit of fainting" (Is. 61:1,2-3). People are in mourning all over our world. They mourn the loss of loved one. They mourn the loss of hope, the futures they see fading away before their eyes. People hear bad news about how terrible our world is and they mourn the loss of hope. But good news changes that whole picture.

Those who mourn the loss of loved ones now have hope. Jesus overcame death and promises victory to His followers (Heb. 2:14-15; 1 Cor. 15:50-57). Those who mourn the loss of hope can now have hope that even overcomes our greatest fear, the fear of death. That is good news. Jesus teaches a message of hope even in circumstances the world would call hopeless. No matter how

terrible the situation in your life, God has good news. There is hope for this life and beyond death. That is wonderful news.

This allows those of us who follow Christ to throw off the trappings of death. Instead of ashes, we wear the garlands of celebration. Instead of fainting from our load, we offer energetic praises to the God who redeems us. No wonder we Christians are to praise God: we have no reason to mourn! And in place of sorrow we offer joy and praise. That is good news.

THE GOOD NEWS IS OUR MESSAGE

"He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation'" (Mark 16:15: NIV). The church has been saved by the good news of Jesus Christ. That message redeemed every believer who is part of the body of Christ. Like the woman at the well, we are told to go into our world and share that good news. The mission of the church of Jesus Christ is to tell our world, corrupt and discouraged, that there is good news.

Ours is not a message of gloom and doom. That is Satan's message. Satan wants to convince you how bad you are, how hopeless your life is, how worthless you are as a person. Satan wants you to believe that everyone around you is bad, as well, and that you can't trust anyone or that you can never be safe. Jesus has a different message. Jesus says that you are never beyond redemption. Jesus knows you have hope, if you trust in Him and follow Him. Jesus knows that you can have loving brothers and sisters who will make your life easier in Christ, people of like faith and conviction. That is what the church is for.

So I leave you with the good news from Jesus. *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel"* (Mark 1:15). *"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who had disbelieved shall be condemned"* (Mark 16:16). *"For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward"* (Mark 9:41). Jesus offers you good news. Repent, be born again and your smallest offering to God will always be remembered by Him. Will you accept this good news?

Upside Down

JOHNNY RAMSEY

The Bible speaks of those who defy reality by pretending that things are opposite of what they are: *"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"* (Isa. 5:20). Their priority list is scrambled and their view distorted. Such folk *"worship the creature rather than the Creator"* (Rom. 1:25), and thus constant confusion is the order of their life. But God is not mocked, or deceived, and these same specimens of humanity will reap the tragic dividends of their perversion.

When logic and Bible truth eludes us, we think in upside-down ways. We tend to make God in man's image, but Jehovah is above us (Isa. 55:6-7), and His ways tower over mankind's shallow concepts (Rom. 11:33). We are finite, but from everlasting to everlasting, God rules over us (Dan. 4:25). We are able to hide from our fellows, and can lie to them as we deceive and bribe and cheat humanity. But when we try to fool Jehovah, we fail miserably. God warns clearly, *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good"* (Prov. 15:3). Peter asked a sobering question of a husband and wife, *"Why have you allowed Satan to fill your hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit?"* (Acts 5:4,9). They could hide the facts from men, but not from their Maker! We should always remember that the searcher of our hearts (Acts 1:24) is always near, and the most subtle and obscure sins will never escape His notice! Hagar was perceptive as she said to the Lord, *"Thou, O God, seest me"* (Gen. 16:13).

In our upside down viewpoint, we often think sin is not so bad. However, it is atrociously wicked in heaven's sight. We try to convince ourselves that iniquity is normal and acceptable behavior, but it is capable of separating us from the very One who made us (Isa. 59:1-2). We should be wise enough to triumph over the folly, pomp, pride and futility of sin and march toward glory with purity and integrity. Sadly, like Haman, we erect gallows that will hang us (Esth. 7) due to indifference and imperceptive hearts. Ahab was certain he had a plan that would contradict the prophet of God; he plotted, disguised and concocted a devious scheme. But, before

many hours had passed, dogs were licking up his blood by the pool of Samaria (1 Kgs. 22).

Laodicea boasted great things, but God revealed the truth about their pompous, extravagant pretension. Powerful in the eyes of the Roman Empire, they were worthless on heaven's scales (Rev. 3:14-16). They had everything except Christ; therefore, they had nothing! The only successful life is a sacrificial and surrendered devotion to the Redeemer. Selfishness develops a chasm between us and the Savior who died for us at Calvary.

*All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give,
I will ever love and trust him,
In His presence daily live.*

Upside down conduct causes us to forget our purpose on earth. Vain emphasis means that we forget to glorify God. Conversely, we too often exalt our own puny desires. We pay sad dividends, however, on Judgment Day and realize, too late, we have nothing to count on in the final moment of destiny. Joy does not reside in material possessions, but in the pursuit of righteousness. Houses, land, bank accounts and mundane treasures will surely turn to dust. But the bounty of heaven will supersede all this earth can boast. It is truly upside down thinking that puts a premium on the secular and ignores the spiritual.

*Not all earthy's gold and silver
Can make a sinner whole.
What doth it profit thee, O man,
If thou shouldst lose thy soul?*

Not a single penny of worldly wealth will make its way to the golden street of that supernal realm. Let us get our thinking right-side-up, before it is everlastingly too late!

The Family of God

YARBROUGH LEIGH

In most English translations of the scriptures, the word "family" as applied to God's people, is found only in Ephesians 3:15 where

Paul wrote: "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." The Greek term translated "family" denotes those of a common paternal lineage, both living and dead: those whose descent is from a common father. This same Greek term is found in two other New Testament passages: in Luke 2:4 where Joseph is spoken of as being "of the house and "lineage" of David;" and in Acts 3:25 where Peter made reference to the promise to Abraham that "in thy seed shall all 'kindreds' of the earth be blessed."

WHAT, THEN, IS THE "FAMILY" OF GOD?

From this brief examination we observe that it is made up of all those who have been born of God through the Spirit; having heard his word, believed him, repented and turned to him with such other evidence of obedient faith as to give them acceptance as his children. This family is made up of all those thus called by his name, both in heaven and in earth (Ephesians 3:15).

The apostle Paul made reference to this "family," or "lineage," or "kindred" of God in Ephesians 1:10, where he wrote: "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." In the close of that chapter, he wrote of that one group into which all the family of God has been gathered together, as follows: "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23). This "family," or "lineage," or "kindred," or "people" of God is all of those who have been included in the blood-bought church of our precious Lord: all those for whom atonement was made in his blood on the cross.

THE GRANDEUR AND GLORY OF BEING A CHILD OF GOD

The beloved apostle John wrote, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:1-2).

Again, the peerless apostle Paul wrote: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed unto us" (Romans 8:14-18).

Think of it: "children of God, and joint-heirs with his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen redeemer!"

ALL ARE "SONS," REGARDLESS OF PERSON OR GENDER

Although God has made distinction between male and female gender in roles of leadership and authority in the church, there is no "sex discrimination" with God as concerns the status of either in the Eternal City of God. All are children of God," with all the rights of inheritance, regardless of gender. In the Galatian letter we read, "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26). Next we read, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28-29).

WHY "SONS," AND NOT JUST "CHILDREN?"

Probably, to accommodate the message to traditional rights of inheritance in the eastern nations; in which the principal heir and head of the clan would be the eldest son. So, in the Roman letter, Paul wrote, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;" and in the Galatian letter, "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore, thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:6-7).

Even Jesus is referred to as a "firstborn," thus emphasizing his legal right of inheritance. We read that he was "the firstborn of every creature," (Colossians 1:15); and again, "the firstborn from

the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

Paradoxically, all the members of God's ageless and limitless family are referred to as being "firstborn!" In Hebrews 12:23, (Ye are come) "to the general assembly and church of the firstborn," (literally, "a church of firstborn ones;" i.e.: a church made up of all first-born sons! Therefore, without distinction or discrimination between them, all God's adopted children enjoy the right of co-inheritors with God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our blessed Lord; — and he is made to be heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2)!

THE GRANDEUR AND THE GLORY OF THIS INHERITANCE

The bold and impetuous apostle Peter wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Peter 1:3-5).

WHAT GLORY GOD HAS RESERVED FOR HIS ADOPTED CHILDREN!

- Some years ago, Christine and I were standing with a fine couple as they were finalizing the adoption proceedings for a beautiful baby girl. The judge asked of the adoptive father a question that stirred deep emotions in him: "Do you wish this child to have the right of inheritance?" With tears, he answered: "All that I shall ever have, I wish to share with this darling daughter!"

Heavenly Father, we thank thee that thou hast said of us thy children, "Every blessing I have is theirs in my Son, and they shall be heirs of all things with him!" (Ephesians 1:3; Romans 8:17; Hebrews 1:2). Amen.

How To Be Converted

FLAVIL H. NICHOLS

Do you remember when you studied Arithmetic? The textbook gave some instructions, then presented some examples of how to apply the rules stated. Similarly, Christ gave the Great Commission

to his disciples. Then, in the book of Acts several cases of conversion are recorded as "examples" for us to follow.

To his disciples Jesus, after his resurrection, gave this commission: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Another record of it says, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16).

Luke tells us that Jesus "said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:46-49).

John records the resurrection, and says: "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20:19-23).

Putting these four records together we learn that the gospel must be preached, or that sinners must be taught. All who would be saved must "believe," for "he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). "Repentance" is necessary to obtain the "remission of sins" (Luke 24:47). And after believing and before being saved Jesus put baptism: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

Stated concisely, we learn from the Great Commission that faith, repentance, and baptism are conditions of salvation. This is not to overlook the divine provisions which make our forgiveness possible. Wholly by grace on God's part (Ephesians 2:8-10), he

gave his only begotten Son (John 3:16) to redeem us from our sins. Christ gave his life, his very blood, for our salvation (Romans 5:6-10). And the Holy Spirit both revealed and confirmed the gospel plan of salvation (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 2:1-4).

On an annual Jewish feast day (Pentecost), in the city of Jerusalem, the apostles received "power from on high" just as Jesus had promised (Luke 24:49). Then, in the designated city, they "began" to preach "repentance and remission of sins IN HIS NAME" as Jesus had directed (Luke 24:47).

That very day the apostles proclaimed the resurrection and ascension of Christ. To prove that he ascended, they cited the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This was witnessed by "tongues like as of fire" sitting on each apostle, and gave them power to speak in languages they never had studied, but which the audience understood. The sermon convinced them that the man named Jesus (whom they had crucified less than two months previously) is alive again, and is now at God's right hand, ruling on David's throne. He is now both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:22-36).

Being pricked in their heart by the terrible sin they had committed, they inquired: "Men, and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). "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). "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (verse 41).

Review how they were saved: They were taught the gospel facts (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), including the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:22-36). By this gospel they became believers in Christ. Now having faith in Christ, they were taught to repent and be baptized in his name for the remission of sins (verse 38). Three thousand became Christians that very day (verse 41). This is an approved example of conversion. It is a 'sample' which shows how Jesus' rules of salvation work.

Now, please compare YOUR conversion with theirs. Remember that theirs twice passed under the inspection of the Holy Spirit: (1) when it occurred, for the apostles that day were baptized in the Holy Spirit, and were present; and (2) when it was recorded, for the Holy Spirit guided Luke to write the book of Acts. (If it had not been done right, would inspiration not have corrected

it?) So, we can rest assured that they were converted correctly. Now, if your conversion differs from theirs, should you not follow their example ~ and do it right???

"Here Am I"

DEAN FUGETT

How long has it been since you found yourself deeply involved in some activity of the Lord's work for which you had volunteered? We are not speaking of some one-time effort, but a continuing long-term task for which you volunteered to take the responsibility. The Lord's army is a volunteer force. There can be no other kind in his service. No one is pressed into service for the King of kings. Any time the church has turned to something else, we have developed a system of hirelings. Everyone knows how dependable a hireling is. "But he that is an hireling . . . seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep" (John 10:12-13). This statement is not to negate the Biblical teaching that "the labourer is worthy of his hire." The distinction sometimes gets blurred; but the discriminating spiritual mind can tell the difference. Now, back to our discussion of the faithful, willing servant.

If Paul were to come into your community seeking a Timothy such as he found at Lystra, would he choose you, based upon your record of spirituality and faithfulness? Would he choose you to travel as his companion and fellow-labourer in the great task of spreading the gospel of Christ? Would your spiritual record recommend you to that calling? Could Paul count on you as he could on Timothy? "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy shortly unto you . . . For I have no man likeminded, who will truly care for your state . . . But ye know the proof of him that, as a child serveth a father, so he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel" (Philippians 2:20-22). ". . . My beloved and faithful. . ." (1 Corinthians 4:17). Could there be prophecies of your usefulness to the Cause? What does your present record say?

If the situation called for another Esther willing to risk all for

the Lord's people, would the Lord call on you? Or, would he have to look elsewhere for deliverance? Remember, it could have meant death for Esther: "All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come into the king in the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live; but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days" (Esther 4:11). "... And so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to law: and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). Would your past and present record recommend you as a prospective Esther if the Lord had need?

If Satan were to appear again before the Lord, "from going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it" (Job 1:7), would the Lord feel confident in drawing attention to you and your faithfulness as he did Job's? Are you a "fair-weather" Christian, faithful only when it is convenient and when everything is going well? Or, can the Lord firmly point out "... my faithful servant, (your name) _____, . . . that feareth God, and escheweth evil" (Job 1:8)? Again, what does your record say?

If God were looking for a modern-day Moses, would it take more imploring by the Lord to get you to take the leadership of his people than it did for Moses? We have witnessed some being entreated to become elders, deacons, or preachers, who had all ability necessary to do a great work, but who did not have the commitment, conviction, or willingness. Could it be said of you that (He) "was faithful in all his house, as a servant . . ." (Hebrews 3:5)?

The Lord continues to need servants -volunteers. "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35). "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (Matthew 9:37). Are the labourers few because YOU failed to volunteer? Will you answer, "Here am I. Send me!"?

Will the Lord have to apologize for your having been one of his? How can you answer - based upon the past? Now, what will you do with your future? "Go to now, ye that say, today or tomorrow . . ." (James 4:13). "If any man will come after me..." (Matthew 16:24).

Why Do People Fall Back?

JERRI MANASCO

It is a sad reality of life that many who begin the joy of the Christian life fail to complete the journey. That it is possible for a child of God to drift away from the truth and then to be finally lost, is a scriptural fact. One can allow the word of God to slip from his grasp (Hebrews 2:1-4). He can be moved away from the hope of the gospel (Colossians 1:21-23). He can depart from the living God through unbelief (Hebrews 3:12-13). Multiplied scriptures could be cited to confirm this teaching; but these are sufficient for the thinking person to realize the truth of the matter.

The tragedy is compounded when one who falls accepts the Bible teaching that one who falls back is truly in a dangerous position. Peter defines such an one as being (in his last state) worse than the first (II Peter 2:20-21). The Hebrews writer draws a distinction between those whose faith impels them forward, and those who somewhere along the way fall back. "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man **DRAW BACK**, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:38-39). If a Bible writer says that some draw back unto perdition, then we accept that as truth! If the Bible states that God has no pleasure in one who thus draws back, then we take that at face value. Even if it be any one of us — preacher, elder, deacon, any member, young or old — the rule is still the same; God will respect no man's person. Any who draw back will find the result the same. There are no extenuating circumstances! It is for this reason that the Christian must be diligent in making sure his calling and election (II Peter 1:5-11).

Some of the Christians of the first century had already drawn back by the time of the completion of the written New Testament. Some had turned aside after false teachings (II Timothy 2:15-19). Others had turned away after the world for one reason or another (II Timothy 4:10). Paul said that some had "turned aside after Satan" (I Timothy 5:11-15). Others were undoubtedly heading in that direction as can be deduced from the New Testament epistles

(Galatians 1:6-9; 5:3-6; 6:1; I Corinthians 5; etc.). If these things were taking place in the first century, under the direct leadership of the apostles, then how could we expect less today?

That apostasies were occurring, is beyond dispute. The question we need to address is this: WHY were people falling? Why do people today fall back after having begun their Christian life? A fair examination of this should assist us in (1) tending to our own personal spiritual development, and (2) reclaiming some who have departed.

Some go back because they have not been properly grounded in the faith. Their heart has not been totally converted to Christ. Two reasons may account for this. First, some simply failed to grasp the meaning of becoming and being a Christian. Second, some simply were not taught sufficiently to become solid Christians. This second cause, though it has been emphasized time and again, needs to be emphasized again and again! Far too many times a preacher is so concerned about "job security" which depends (?) on the number of "additions," so he goes out over the neighborhood to find as many as he can to baptize. The result is obvious: he has done inadequate teaching! Those whom he has baptized have outwardly "become members of the church" without having the slightest idea of what that means in practical terms. Tragedy is the ultimate consequence. This is the picture of those whirlwind conversions that have characterized so many in the past and present.

Jesus deals with the topic of unconverted people, in the parable of the Sower: "They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection" (Luke 8:13-14). These simply have not become serious students of the Master! The Colossian letter adds to this the teaching that one must continue in the faith and be grounded and settled therein (Colossians 1:23). Furthermore it is required that one be "rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith ..." (Colossians 2:6-8). Where there is carelessness, there probably will be apostasy!

A failure to go by the Book accounts for many departures.

"Hold fast the form of sound words . . ." (II Timothy 1:13). Yes, there is a "form" that must be kept - even though liberal and modernistic brethren contend that there are no "rules" for us to go by. Our liberal brethren should not be surprised if there should be a mass exodus from their congregations as a result of their teaching that the New Testament "binds" nothing legal on Christians! The denominational leaders have in recent years become upset over declining church affiliations; but what can you expect when you have spent generations teaching people that the "organized" church is not essential to their eternal safety? Our own brethren need to be learning something! Just as it was in the New Testament times, even now we are confronted with the danger of being led away with the error of the wicked (II Peter 3:17). How can we expect to **live in faith**, when there is no respect for THE faith (Jude 3)?

Failure to encourage one another accounts for some of the departures from the Lord. "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised); and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Hebrews 10:23-24). "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). The concern of the individual for himself, and the concern for others in the Lord, will result in more exhorting and loving encouragement. We all need this along the way, and we need it frequently. One may contend that there are many who have fallen back even though they had plenty of encouragement. Of course this is true. But is it not also true that some likely **would not have fallen back** if they had received more brotherly encouragement? Surely this is true. When the old associates are pulling for the attention of the brethren, especially those more recently converted, we must exert a more meaningful attraction for them to stay with the Lord. Jesus' words to Peter may be appropriate here: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32).

If YOU were the one who is slipping back, would you not appreciate some of your brethren turning loose of some frivolous past-time just long enough to come and visit you with words of exhortation? If each of us will consider that indeed "I" might be the one who is drifting (Galatians 6:1), would it not cause us to show more concern to our brethren who ARE in fact drifting?

COULD MY VISIT BE THE KEY TO ANOTHER BROTHER'S SURVIVAL IN THE LORD? What an awesome challenge. But then, the Christian is faced with challenges daily!

The Old Man With Two Sacks

One day a traveler met an old man who was carrying two sacks. One was suspended from his neck in front and the other was strapped to his back. "What have you here?" asked the traveler, "let me see the content of your sacks."

"I shall be glad to do so," replied the old man, "for I have a goodly assortment. The sack which I carry in front is filled with good reports and good deeds of others. Whatever I hear or see of good that others do, I put into this bag and carry it where I can often look upon them."

"Your sack seems to be very full. It must be quite a burden," said the traveler.

"There you are mistaken," said the other. "Though the sack is so full, it is not heavy. Far from being a burden, it helps me onward like sails to a ship."

"And what do you put into the sack which you carry on your back?" asked the traveler.

"All the evil I learn of others I put in there," said the old man. "So that it will be out of my sight."

"It appears to be empty," said the traveler, as he examined the sack more closely, "and no wonder, for there is a hole in the bottom."

"I made it there on purpose," responded the old man, "so that the evil I hear will fall out and be lost. Then it cannot weigh me down or pull me back."

This story reminds us how we can forget the evil done to us, whether real or imagined, and how we can go forward by thinking of the good in people.

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