

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 38

April 2008

No. 12

EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

*"The eyes of the Lord are in every place,
Keeping watch on the evil and the good"*

Since the presence of God is in every place and He knows what is going on everywhere (Proverbs 15:3), then why does He allow the evil to persist and abound? Is He not all powerful? Isn't there so much evil in the world? And, in many cases, evil people are prevailing, they are successfully achieving their goals in spreading fear and terror and death and destruction. In fact, there is no place on earth where there is no evil. Where there is man evil is there. We hear about it on radio, watch it on the T.V., read about it in the newspapers. Wherever we turn and wherever we live we see sin and evil more than we see good. Sin and evil resides in man, as the Bible says: "There is none righteous, no, not one." (Romans 3:10).

But why does God allow evil to continue? Some people believe that it is God's job to deal with evil, man can only pray, and it is God who should take action to oust evil from our midst. Man, however, needs to understand that God did not create man in the beginning to commit evil or to live in sin and evil. Just as God did not design birds for swimming and fish for flying. What will happen if all the fishes decide that they are going to fly? Or all the birds decided that they are going to swim? The Bible teaches that God had created man in the beginning after His own likeness and in His own image (Genesis 1: 26,27), that is, like

God, man will live for ever, and like God man was created pure and without sin, or evil. But man chose to do evil by rebelling against God, by doing that which God had told him not to do. (Gen. 3). Since God had created man in His own likeness, like Himself, with a free will, man therefore was able to make his own choice and decide for himself what he will do and what he will not do. Man was not created like a robot or a puppet that can be made to move by pushing a button or by pulling a string. God had created man and had told man what is right and what is wrong. Man by his own will chose to do wrong, and thereby brought separation between himself and his creator God. (Isaiah 59:1,2). When Adam and Eve, the first man and the first woman, whom God had created, chose to go against the will of God, God did not stop them. This does not mean that God wasn't aware of what they were doing. God knew what they were planning to do and what they were going to do, but since they were created with a free will to choose for themselves, God let them do what they wanted to do. However, God had pre-warned them of the consequences they would suffer for doing wrong.

God was not sleeping when Adam and Eve had sinned, and neither is He ignorant of what is going on on earth amongst men today. His eyes are in every place. He knows all about everything, good and evil. God is not the author of evil. This is not His will that man should sin or commit any evil. He is not allowing evil to persist. The Bible says, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, as some count slackness, but is long suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). One day this old world will come to an end according to 2 Peter 3:10,11, and as God has appointed all people will face Him in the judgment (Heb. 9:27), to receive their reward according to what they have done whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10).

Like Adam and Eve, who had forgotten that there is a God who is watching them, most people live and conduct themselves on earth as though there is no God. Some even mock Him. Others follow rituals and traditions of their own imaginations. Like Adam and Eve they want to do what they think is right. Yet the fact of the matter is that God has not left man without His will, without telling man what is right and what is wrong. If there are evil people

on earth today, God is not responsible. If evil persists, God is not responsible. God still loves all people everywhere and want people to turn away from all sin and evil and come to Him by the Way He has appointed (John 14:6; John 3:16). But after this life of earth will be over it will be too late. Because all who live in sin and do evil will have their residence forever in hell. Heaven is for those who hear God and do His will. (Matt. 7:21-27 & 25:46).

Why We Should Not Accept The Conscience As A Safe Guide

J.C. CHOATE

The word conscience has to do with the heart, mind, and soul of man. It means that one has gathered a certain amount of information and knowledge, and then that is used to compare other things with, to determine whether they are right or wrong. The information may be based on facts or it may be based on false reports. Regardless of whether it is true or false, it may be accepted as truth and then used as a guide. There are those who feel that the conscience may serve as a safe guide. Others talk about having a good conscience, and since they have a good conscience, then they feel that that within itself makes it right. Yet, one may have been deceived, but thinking that he received the truth, end up having a good conscience. His good conscience then is not based on truth but on error. That is why one cannot allow his conscience to serve as being his final authority for determining whether something is right or wrong.

To illustrate further how the conscience works, then think about a young child. He is taught by his parents that it is wrong to steal or to take something that does not belong to him. He continues to be taught this during all of the years that he is with his parents. Because he respects them, and this is in keeping with what other honest people teach, and what the law says, then he grows up accepting this as being the truth. But suppose one day he sees something in a friend's house that he would like to have. He is then tempted to take that which does not belong to him,

and so he does. Then because he is going against what he has been taught, which amounts to nothing more than his conscience, then his conscience bothers him, and he finally feels compelled to return what he had taken. But the same could be said of those who have been taught error. Even though it is error, or it is something false, if it is taught to be the truth, and it is accepted as truth, then one's conscience would bother him if he went against what he had been taught as being the truth.

For one's conscience then to be reliable, then it has to be based on truth. In other words, the truth, God's word, must govern the conscience. If one's conscience is based on falsehood, error, then the conscience cannot be recognized as a safe guide.

When we turn to God's word, we find that Saul (or Paul) is a good example of what we are talking about. First of all, remember that Saul was a Jew, that he was a follower of Judaism, that he was very zealous for his religion, and he thought that Christianity was the enemy of that religion. As a result, he went forth to persecute Christians. We read concerning him: "As for Saul, he made havock of the church; entering into every house, and dragging off men and women committed them to prison." (Acts 8:3). Continuing, we read, "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem." (Acts 9:1,2). As the story continues, Saul and his companions were on the road to Damascus when the Lord appeared to him. Then we read, "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do." (Acts 9: 4-6). The record goes on to tell how that a gospel preacher by the name of Ananias came to him, and told him that he should arise and be baptized that his sins might be washed away. (Acts 22: 16). Now what did Saul do? He became a believer in Christ, he repented of his sins, he acknowledged Christ as Lord, and then he was baptized. On

doing that, it says that he straightway preached Christ as the Son of God. (Acts 9: 20).

Now think about this man. He was a very sincere, zealous man for Judaism. He opposed Christianity to the point of persecuting Christians, both men and women. But then all of a sudden he became a believer in Christ and on obeying the Lord he preached Christ as the Son of God. Not only so, but he spent the rest of his life in serving the Lord and spreading his cause.

But what about those years before he became a Christian? Was he honest and sincere in what he did? Hear him as he explains why he did all of that. He said, "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even into strange cities." (Acts 26: 9-11).

All of this is to say that Saul had a good conscience during those days when he persecuted the church. He was honest and sincere in what he was doing. He no doubt felt good about what he was doing. But the fact was, his conscience was not operating on the basis of what God would have him to do, but on the basis of what he thought was right. Only after he learned the truth, and had obeyed the truth, was he acceptable to God.

After Saul's conversion, his name was changed to Paul. Sometime after that, he wrote, "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecuter, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.

Amen." (1 Timothy 1: 12-17).

In the foregoing scripture I think Paul is reminded of the time that he had lived in all good conscience before God (Acts 23:1) and yet he had spent his earlier years fighting God and his Son, Jesus Christ, and persecuting the Lord's people. On learning the truth, and obeying God to become a Christian himself, he realized that the mercy and grace of God was great indeed, if he, the chief of sinners, could be saved. He never forgot his past but only allowed that to give him greater courage to move forward, and to do everything in his power to make up for the past, by giving the rest of his life to that of spreading the cause of Christ.

My friends, if all that God requires of a person is, that he have a good conscience, then that means that all people of all religions could be saved as they are. It would mean that all people of all churches could be saved as they are. It would mean that people could be saved, whether they believed in God or not. It would mean that one could be saved on the basis of a good moral life or by simply doing good works. It certainly wouldn't matter if one was a Christian or not, whether one was a member of the church or not, or even whether one was faithful to God or not. All people have a tendency to eventually justify their own thinking, actions, religion, and so on. They may even sear their conscience or go against God's will long enough so that it no longer bothers them. (1 Timothy 4:1-5).

A good conscience alone, then, is not the answer. That will not assure one of salvation. The only time that one can count on his conscience as being right, is when it is based on a knowledge of God's will, and therefore one's thoughts, actions, and very life, is governed by the Word of God. The conscience can be a safe guide only when it is being guided by the word of God. Or another way of putting it, when one knows God's will, and believes it, then when one's conscience bothers him, when he goes against God's teaching, or doesn't live up to what the Lord expects, then it means that the conscience is alive and well.

The Bible contains the word of God, and it is truth, and it is right. Now when we live up to that, as given by the Spirit, then that means that we are right. When the Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that is, the Spirit's word agrees that we have complied with the Lord's teaching, then we may know that we are the

children of God. That is what Paul said. Hear him: "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Romans 8: 16). On the other hand, when the Spirit's word, the word of God, says one thing or teaches certain things, and we fail to obey that, or to live up to what the Lord requires of us, then it means that the Spirit through the word is bearing witness, or is declaring that we are not children of God, or that we are not obeying the Lord as he would have us to.

That means then that good feelings, or having a good conscience alone, is no proof that we are saved or that we are God's children. Please do not be deceived into thinking that you can be saved in some way other than the way the Lord has prescribed in his word. Of course, if we know God's will, and we fail to obey it, then that means that if our conscience is alive, if it matters to us as to what God has said, then our conscience will bother us, and it should. This is a good reminder that we must make things right with God. Then when we do that, and we know that we have complied with his will, then this produces good feelings, a good conscience, but only on the basis that we know God's will and we have obeyed him. In that case we should have a good conscience and we should be happy, but only then.

What Is The Gospel And How Does It Affect My Life?

BOB DANKLEFSEN

The word "gospel" is used freely by some people to stress a point they are trying to make in their conversation. They may say, "That's the gospel truth." All they are saying here is that they are really telling the truth. The word "gospel" as expressed in God's Word has a totally different meaning. After one comes to understand God's purpose in giving His creation the gospel, this person should be a better person as he sees how much God really does care for him. I know that the gospel has changed my life for the better and I hope it will do the same for you as you read this message.

WHY INVESTIGATE THE GOSPEL?

Jesus made the following statement to his disciples in Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the *gospel* to every creature." Whatever this "gospel" is, it is to be heard by everyone. The Lord had Paul pen, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek," Romans 1:16. Again he wrote, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, By which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you~unless you believed in vain," 1 Corinthians 15:1,2. What ever this message is, it will bring a person to a state of salvation. To be saved in the spiritual sense means to be forgiven by God and be in a continued forgiven state with Him, Matthew 1:21. So the gospel is to be heard by all; first the Jews were to hear it, then the gentiles (non Jewish). Paul states that those to whom he was writing had already heard the gospel. After hearing the gospel, they received it which meant that they had believed it. They were then to stand fast in it.

SAVED BY THE GOSPEL!

Since one is saved by the gospel, how long would it take a person to become a Christian after first being confronted with the gospel? In the scriptures, people were saved the same hour that they were taught. This is evident in the life of the Ethiopian eunuch in the eighth chapter of Acts. The same would be true in the case of Lydia and the Philippian jailer as recorded in Acts 16. Today, it should be the same for people lost in sin who respond to the invitation and should not be asked to wait hours or days to be saved. So the gospel must be something that can be shared in a short period of time so that the hearer may respond to have salvation. Would it be safe to say that the gospel is not the whole Bible due to the fact that the lost responded immediately to be saved and would therefore not have time to digest the entire Old and New Testaments? In fact, since Paul was in the process of writing his letters to the churches, they could not have read much of the New Testament because very little had been penned. Scholars record that it is likely only four of the New Testament letters may have been written prior to his letter to Corinth. Paul

confirms that the Christians at Corinth were saved by the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 6:11, he claims that they were sanctified and justified (acquitted). Most of the New Testament would be written years later, in fact after some had died. So the gospel could not be the New Testament. Stephen died by stoning before any of the letters had been written to the churches, Acts 7. Would one conclude that he was not forgiven by God because he had not read the New Testament?-of course not! Well, could the gospel be the Old Testament?

Again, it would require several days and weeks for some to complete the entire Old Testament. Thus it would be impossible for one to be saved in the same hour of the night if one must read this before conversion. Think, what a predicament this would place a person in who cannot read. In Acts 2, Three Thousand People became Christians after Peter preached to the crowd. They did not have time to read even a portion of the Old Testament. If one will examine Peter's sermon in this chapter, it contained some quotes from the Old Testament concerning Joel's prophecy and a quote from the Psalms. He did not write a comparison of the covenants, did not talk about circumcision and the New Covenant, nor did he tell about qualifications for bishops in the church-these topics were not considered the good news!

Paul mentions something very interesting concerning the gospel in the letter to the Galatians. He says, "But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Here Paul states that he had not received the gospel from man but received it directly from Jesus. What did Jesus tell him? Jesus did not tell him what to do to be saved but left that to Ananias who would come and offer the invitation to be forgiven. Well then, what is the gospel?

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Paul introduces the answer in his letter to the Romans. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the *gospel* of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit

of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Romans 1:1-4. The gospel is the message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. What does the Bible have to say about Him?

Isaiah tells of His Deity, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace," Isaiah 9:6. Here the prophet tells of a *Son* who would be referred to as Mighty God, Father of eternity. Only one person in history has filled this position-Jesus. John expresses the same thing in John 1:1,14, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the *Word was God*. 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." One might ask, "Why is it so important to know that Jesus is God?" The Lord answers this in 2 Thessalonians 1:8 as he says that the Lord would return... "In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here Paul is making it clear that we must know God. To really know Him is to realize that the Godhead planned from the foundation of the world that the Word, God the Son, would become a man and that one could have a personal relationship with Him, 1 Peter 1:19,20.

WHY DID GOD BECOME MAN?

It is truly a big step down for God to become a human being. God's love for His creation caused Him to plan for man's future. Knowing that men would be sinners, He made preparation for Deity to know the thoughts and intents of those humans he had created. God in heaven cannot be tempted, but if clothed in flesh, He could now experience all that humanity now encounters on earth. Note the following, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin," Hebrews 4:15. Jesus knows you and me so intimately that when we are hurt, He hurts also. When we are tempted to sin, He also understands the drawing power of the flesh. He, however, never sinned. Yet the Bible said that He became sin for us, 2 Corinthians 5:21. One who should have been worthy of only glory and honor and exultation gave up His rights and position to suffer as a humble servant,

Philippians 2:6-8. This means that He took our punishment upon Himself by dying on the cross to make payment for our violations against God. Think of this, a person who is both. God and man loved us so much to take our punishment on that cruel cross. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity (sins) of us all," Isaiah 53:6. That same love is expressed in John 3:16, "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."

Once He had died, He was placed in a tomb. A large stone was rolled in front of the entrance. However, He rose the third day just like He said He would, Matthew 16:21. Why is His resurrection so important to Christians today?

JESUS' RESURRECTION AND OUR'S

Paul answers why Jesus' resurrection is so essential to our own future. "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by Man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming," 1 Corinthians 15:20-23. The tomb was empty; Jesus was raised bodily from the grave. We are promised victory over the grave because of His resurrection!

A LAWYER IN HEAVEN

Because Jesus has faced all the temptations we have faced on earth, He is now able to defend those who belong to Him as He intercedes before the Father in heaven. John writes, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One." (1 John 2:1). We have one of our kind in heaven speaking to the Father to defend us when we make mistakes and sin. I need this, don't you?

FROM LAWYER TO JUDGE

When the Father in heaven decides that time will end, Jesus then will become the judge of the world, 2 Corinthians 5:10. At that last trump all the dead who have ever lived will come out of

their graves, both the righteous and the wicked, John 5:28,29. For those having eternal life, it will be a day of victory as described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. For those who die in their sins, it will be a sad reunion for their bodies, Matthew 10:28. Paul says, "And to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, When He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed," 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10. Not only must one know God, but they must also obey the gospel to escape God's wrath. "Obey the gospel," what is meant by this term?

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

Paul defines the heart of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Here he says, "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the *gospel* which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand. By which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ *died* for our sins according to the Scriptures, And that He was *buried*, and that He *rose* again the third day according to the Scriptures." Paul declares that the death, burial and resurrection make up the message that is to be shared with the lost. On the very birthday of the church, that is exactly what Peter preached to those who had earlier crucified Jesus. See Acts 2:22-36. When one investigates the conversions in the book of Acts, that is the message presented.

ACCEPTING THE GOSPEL

One translation of the Bible says, "But not all [the Jews] accepted the good news ..." in Romans 10:16. That same verse reads, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'" (NKJ version). Here, accepting the gospel and obeying it are used to express the same thought. Also, one needs to realize that since accepting the gospel and obeying it are synonymous, would it not then be essential to

obey it to be saved? Peter answers this by stating, "For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?", 1 Peter 4:17. The New Jerusalem Bible uses the term "... believe God's Good News" in place of obey the gospel. One might note also that Peter contrasts the house of God (Christians) with those who have never obeyed the gospel, thus placing obedience to the gospel between being lost and being in God's house, or the church, 1 Timothy 3:15.

HOW DOES ONE EXPRESS HIS FAITH IN THE GOSPEL?

But what does it mean to obey the gospel? When one's faith brings him to a point of believing the gospel, God wants him to demonstrate his faith in it. In Romans 6:17,18 he says, "But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." When one obeys from his heart the form of the gospel, he will be made free from his sins. But what is meant by the word "form?" When a contractor pours a concrete slab, he uses a form to shape the patio. The form is not the finished product but rather what shapes the patio. To obey the gospel literally, one would have to be nailed to two beams laid out in the shape of a cross, buried in the ground and then raise out of the tomb. But to obey a form of that event is better described earlier in the chapter.

"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His *death*? Therefore we were *buried* with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was *resurrected* from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His *death*, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His *resurrection*," Romans 6:3-5. What a beautiful way to express one's faith in the death, burial and resurrection by reenacting it in a watery grave. We are cleansed by Jesus' blood, 1 John 1:7. Where was this blood shed? On the cross in His death. How does one get into His death? Paul has just stated that one is baptized into His *death*. He continues stating that we are *buried* with Him through baptism into death. And Paul concludes that we are *raised* from the watery grave in the likeness

of His resurrection. What a beautiful way to demonstrate one's belief in the one who had to go through so much pain and suffering for each of us! And also, what an expression of our faith to participate in His death, burial and resurrection, Colossians 2:12.

THE OBEDIENT FAITH, IS IT IMPORTANT OR ESSENTIAL?

I appreciate so much the one who shared the gospel with me as he was so kind and gentle as he presented this beautiful message. He always took me to the scriptures and would ask, "What has God told us here?" When we turned to 2 Thessalonians 1:8, he asked, "Is it 'important' or 'essential' to obey the gospel?" After reading that God said that he would take vengeance on me for not obeying it, I knew it was essential. Who was I to argue with the Lord himself? After three months of struggling with my own will and God's will, I decided to change my heart and life (repent), Acts 17:30,31; confess Christ, Acts 8:37; and obey the gospel, Acts 2:38. I have never been so happy, and want others to have this same joy. If you are desiring to obey the gospel and wish to talk to someone about this, contact the church of Christ in your area or write to the editor.

As you wrestle with this decision, look at Hebrews 5:7-9. It says, "Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." Jesus loves you so very much and wants you to obey the gospel. Read Acts 22:16 as you make this most important decision!

Foolish and Ignorant Questions

CLEM THURMAN

There are few things more hurtful to the cause of Christ and the salvation of lost souls than the disposition to teach and agitate issues which involve questions about which the Scriptures are silent. The Lord warns us about indulging in many fanciful imaginations and then teaching them as though they were the

word of God. *"But foolish and ignorant questionings refuse, knowing that they gender strifes"* (2 Tim. 2:23). The apostle Paul had charged the young preacher, Timothy: *"As I exhorted thee to tarry at Ephesus, when I was going into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine, neither to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questionings, rather than a dispensation of God which is in faith"* (1 Tim. 1:3-4). Again he warns us, *"Refuse profane and old wives' fables"* (1 Tim. 4:7). These warnings need to be stressed today.

Many hurtful theories and speculations are taught, and invariably they gender strife. Even if we cannot see the harmful results of such teachings, the fact that God condemns it is sufficient for us to heed the admonition. Such questions are soon stressed and magnified into a "hobby," which often leads to a division among believers. Good men with great abilities and the best of intentions have indulged in such *"foolish and ignorant questions"* until they have either "founded" a new church or have lost their standing as real biblical scholars.

WILL GOD SAVE ALL THE JEWS?

In the early days of Christianity, while most members of the Lord's church were Jewish, the question of genealogy was important. But after the death of Jesus, *"There is neither Jew nor Greek"* (Gal. 3:28). In spite of this, many today still persist in ideas that the Jews remain the "chosen people" of God. But the apostle Peter laid that idea to rest long ago, *"God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe . . . and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith"* (Acts 15:7-9).

Some look for Jesus to return and set up an earthly kingdom with the headquarters in Jerusalem, and claim that at that time, there will be great battle with all of the Jews turning to Christ and being saved. This is mainly based on a misunderstanding of Rom. 11:26, *"And so all Israel shall be saved."* The context of that statement is that God will save all the Jews and the Gentiles in exactly the same way—through Jesus Christ (Rom. 11:1-25). If Gentiles believe and turn to Christ, they shall be saved. And, "so" (in the same way) all Israel shall be saved. Rather than teaching universal salvation of the Jews, this passage teaches universal

salvation of all men, *"in Christ."* So, there is no advantage to being a Jew, and thus the genealogy that shows such heritage is meaningless.

The apostle Paul warned Timothy about this: *"Neither to give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questionings"* (1 Tim. 1:4). As long as those Jews trusted in their "Jew-ishness," they remained separate from Christ. As Paul wrote: *"Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace"* (Gal. 5:4). That is why he wrote further, *"Shun foolish questionings, and genealogies, and strifes, and fightings about law; for they are unprofitable and vain"* (Titus 3:9). As the Scriptures show, the Jews have no special standing before God, as they once did. Today, we all are equal before God, in Christ.

WILL GOD SAVE EVERYONE?

"God loves everyone!" comes the cry from many quarters. And this is true. But too many assume from this that God will save everyone. And that is NOT true. Some suppose that, since God is all-powerful and *"would have all men to be saved"* (1 Tim. 2:4), then He will surely save all men. But the Lord shows that many will be lost in hell for eternity (Matt. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:10-15; 2 Thes. 1:7-9; etc.).

We are saved by grace (Eph. 2:8), but note this Scripture: *"For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world"* (Titus 2:11-12). The grace of God not only brought salvation to all men, but also *"instructed us"* in what we must do to receive that salvation! Jesus pointed out, *"Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it"* (Matt. 7:13-14). It is unrealistic, wishful and vain to think that God will save every person, regardless of how they live. God has plainly said He would not.

DOES GOD ACCEPT ALL CHURCHES?

Many claim that, "One church is just as good as another. It doesn't make any difference what church you are a member of,

for God will accept you." But there is absolutely no scriptural basis for that idea. The Lord Jesus said, *"I will build my church"* (Matt. 16:18). The apostle Paul said that church was *"purchased with his own blood"* (Acts 20:28). And the Bible clearly states, *"The Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved"* (Acts 2:47). To clinch the matter, the Bible also says, *"There is one body ... the church"* (Eph. 4:4; Col. 1:18).

Just before He was arrested and crucified, Jesus prayed, *"Neither for these [the apostles] only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us"* (John 17:20-21). The Lord prayed that all who believe would be one, in *"one body, the church."* The whole system of denominationalism stands opposed to the prayer of Jesus, and opposed to His will for us.

A good example of denominations is found in the city of Corinth. The apostle Paul wrote them, *"I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you . . . There are contentions among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos: and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?"* (1 Cor. 1:10-13). That kind of division was wrong then, and it is still wrong today. And the situation in Corinth very accurately pictures denominationalism today. The remedy is also clearly given: *"Come you out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord"* (2 Cor. 6:17).

IS THE SECOND COMING IMMINENT?

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is going to come again (John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; etc.). All true disciples of the Lord believe that He will come again, and are faithfully watching for His return. But there has been much speculation with regard to the time of His return, and this has generated great confusion and division. The Lord Jesus warned, *"Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ, or. Here; believe it not. . . For as the lightning cometh forth from the east, and is seen even unto the west; so shall be the coming of the Son of man"* (Matt. 24:23-24,27). His return will not be in secret, but *"every eye shall see him"* (Rev. 1:7).

Jesus knew that people would try to predict the time of His return, and He warned: *"Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh . . . Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh"* (Matt. 24:42-44). Again, *"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night"* (1 Thes. 5:2). He will give no warning about the time of His return, as He said: *"But of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only"* (Matt. 24:36). Yet people still make false predictions, saying He will come back on this date, or that date.

And when He comes back, the Judgment will follow immediately (Matt 25:31-32). He pointed out, *"Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of condemnation"* (John 5:28-29). There is much speculation about a "rapture" and "1,000 year reign on earth" when He returns, both of which are completely without scriptural foundation.

WHAT OF UNANSWERED QUESTIONS?

There are mysteries connected with the revelation of God's will to man. The divine side has its mysteries, which we cannot understand because they are not revealed. Mary and Martha could have asked their brother, Lazarus, many questions after he was raised from the dead: "How does it feel to die? Where were you while your body was in the tomb? What were you doing? Could you observe what we were doing here?" They may have asked him such questions, but the Lord did not see fit to reveal them to us.

In the long ago, Moses wrote, *"The secret things belong unto Jehovah our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law"* (Deut. 29:29). God has given us sufficient truth in His revealed word to make us *"wise unto salvation"* (2 Tim. 3:15). He has revealed His will for us, and what is not revealed belongs to the realm of mystery, and is a secret with God. Let us learn to live by what He says, and let us also learn not to speculate on what He has not said.

The Wrong Direction

JOHNNY RAMSEY

"Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?" (Amos 3:3). This passage makes the declaration that to walk with God demands that we are going in the proper path of righteousness. Adam and Eve made a poor decision when they chose to obey Satan. Cain turned his back on the will of God when he killed his brother. Sin causes us to be our own worst enemy and sends us on a detour from the heavenly highway! Each step we take along life's journey will definitely be with God or against Him. He sends us a very clear message: *"And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people"* (Lev. 26:12).

When we go beyond the Scriptures and strive to guide ourselves, we wander into forbidden pathways (2 John 9). If we desire to be on the golden street of glory, we dare not let Satan be our leader on the easy street of sin and shame (John 8:21). An old song tells us that God's tomorrow will be brighter than today. The dainties of the Devil will leave a sour taste in our mouth.

Parents are duty bound to lead their children in the road that will take them to heaven. When mothers and fathers really want their offspring to be saved eternally, and have really productive lives now, they obey the following: *"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up"* (Deut. 6:6-7).

Noah's neighbors would not prepare to enter the ark, so they blundered into oblivion as the disobedient ones of our day. What a tragedy it is to be forever lost when the joy of redemption is available. We have a choice: *"Behold then the goodness and severity of God: toward them that fell, severity; but toward thee, God's goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off"* (Rom. 11:22). God draws the line of demarcation between His goodness or severity, depending on whether or not we keep His word. Charles Brewer wrote these words in a poem:

*Out of the night a star is born,
In shade the lily grows.*

*Out of the darkness comes the morn,
Out of the tomb, a rose.
Faith's seed is sown in lowland soil,
Deep in the vale of fears,
Hope's grain ripens in pain and toil,
Its fruit is watered with tears.*

We may, from time to time, sow in tears, but one day we shall reap in joy (Psa. 126:5). When we walk with the Lord, hand in hand, because we agree with Him, our burdens are lighter and our hopes become brighter! *"He that giveth heed unto the word shall find good; And whoso trusteth in Jehovah, happy is he"* (Prov. 16:20). Joshua 22:5 is a classic passage on the thorough joy that comes from walking with the Lord. We must be diligent in pursuing the road that leads to the blessings of redemption. We must:

**Be diligent and loyal
Love the Lord our God
Walk in all His ways
Keep His commandments
Cleave unto Him
Serve with all our heart and soul.**

The Tower of Babel (Gen. 11) is a basic example of those who attempt to walk alone, rather than with the Creator. Fighting against God will bring us nothing but ruin as we read in Acts 5:39, *"If it is of God, ye will not be able to overthrow them; lest haply ye be found even to be fighting against God"* (Acts 5:39). Job offers wise counsel: *"But as for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause"* (Job 5:8). A rich gospel song is helpful:

*Let me live close to thee,
Take my hand dear Lord,
Guide me all along life's rugged way,
Let me walk close to thee each day.*

Simon Magus

BOBBY KEY

The eighth chapter of Acts records the gospel being carried to Samaria. "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and

preached Christ unto them." Before His ascension the Lord said, "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Under ordinary conditions, a Jew was not likely to go to Samaria. "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans" (John 4:9). The gospel, however, breaks down racial barriers. The Samaritans "believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ" and "they were baptized both men and women" (Acts 8:12). It is at this point that Simon Magus enters the narrative.

Simon lived in the same city and used sorcery to deceive the people. Because of his tricks, he had received quite a reputation. The sorcerer stood ready to render any kind of services which might be desired. He would seek to accomplish such ends as causing a neighbor's house to catch fire, bringing a hail storm, depriving an enemy's cows of milk, or causing his child to become sick or die. He was also credited with domestic brawls or causing sudden death. The ancients were accustomed to attribute all disasters to a malignant demon, sorcerer, or witch. A person with a peculiar look was often accused of being sorcerer, especially old women of unusual ugliness (Prof. Whitehouse, in Hastings Bible Dictionary). **Sorcery was a profitable business (Acts 16:16).**

Not only was Simon a sorcerer, but "he believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done."

There is nothing in this passage to suggest that Simon's believing was different from that of others who became Christians, or that his baptism came from impure motives. Yet, many believe that Simon was a hypocrite and insincere. One wrote, "The verb believe describes him with reference to his supposed or apparent state, not his actual condition. He was wholly insincere." There is every evidence to sustain the proposition that Simon was genuinely converted to Christ.

After his conversion, he "saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given." It was at this point

that he offered money to the apostles, "saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:19). Simon was tempted, and fell into sin.

Peter does not deal with Simon as if he had been wrong all the time. "But Peter said unto him, Thy silver perish with thee." Why? Because Simon had pretended to believe and accept the gospel when, in fact, he had not? No! Rather, "because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money." This evil thought is the beginning of his trouble. Peter next speaks to Simon as an erring child of God rather than an alien sinner. "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

The door opened for Simon to pass is the same that must be entered by all Christians who have been overtaken by sin and wish to return to the Lord. Peter's rebuke shows Simon was wrong only in that he thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Simon was not told to repent of his sins, plural, but to repent of the specific sin in evidence, "This thy wickedness."

It is possible for one to become a Christian, and later fall away. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (I Corinthians 10:12).

Why The Resurrection?

DAVID WADE

Doubters and scoffers have disputed the fact of the resurrection of the dead in every age (Acts 17:32; I Corinthians 15:12). The New Testament clearly attests to the resurrection of Christ from the grave (Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6; Luke 24:1-7, John 20:1-9). In addition, Jesus predicts that the "hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29). The fact that Jesus raised the widow's son (Luke 7), Jairus' daughter (Luke 8), and Lazarus (John 11) underscores the power of God to raise all the dead as Jesus has

promised. While much preaching and writing concerns itself with the reality of the resurrection, we seem to fall short in sharing the "why" of the resurrection. Why was Christ raised from the dead? Why are our bodies to be raised from the dead? Let me share with you five reasons for the resurrection.

(1) The resurrection of Christ establishes Jesus as the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4). Someone may say, "According to John 20:30-31, didn't Jesus' signs and miracles prove him to be the Son of God?" Yes, but these signs, separate from his own resurrection, did not; for indeed, others performed similar signs. It is by his own resurrection from the grave that God declares Jesus to be the "Son of God with power" (Romans 1:4).

His death, burial and resurrection are essential elements of the gospel fulfilling the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). By his resurrection, Jesus is distinguished from all pagan deities and self-proclaimed Messiahs. Without his resurrection, there would be no "good news." Lost humanity would still be awaiting a savior from heaven. The resurrection of Christ is unique. He has been raised to never die again (Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 7:25). By his resurrection, he is declared to be the "Son of God with power."

(2) The resurrection of Christ is a sign verifying the promise that there is life beyond the grave. Without the resurrection of Christ, the promise of life beyond the grave would seem somewhat empty and hollow. It was the purpose of signs to confirm the word (Mark 16:20). Before raising Lazarus, Jesus declared, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet he shall live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). Jesus promised "abundant living" (John 10:10), and "everlasting life" (John 3:16). He said, "I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore" (Revelation 1:18). John declares, "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 3:2). God's word, which promises life beyond the grave, is ultimately confirmed by the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

(3) By the resurrection of Christ, God is able to reclaim his holy temple. In ancient times, God's glory resided in the temple

at Jerusalem (Ezekiel 1). By the time of Christ, God's glory had long since departed from the temple (Ezekiel 11), and faithless Israel's house was left desolate (Matthew 23:38). In the context of the New Testament age, Paul declared that God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24). Speaking of his body, Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19-21). Likewise, Paul declares that "your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost" (I Corinthians 6:19), and that the church is "the temple of God" (I Corinthians 3:16).

The human body is the only physical substance that awaits transformation and reclamation. By the resurrection, God will transform and reclaim his temple, both the good and the bad (I Corinthians 15:50-58). Jesus refers to this great event as "the resurrection of life" and "the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:29). The fact that "God raised up Christ" is the assurance that we will also be "raised in glory" (I Corinthians 15:15,43).

(4) The resurrection of Christ gives power to the gospel. Jesus is "declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16).

If Christ were not raised, the New Testament would be a false witness, we would yet be in our sins, and would be most miserable (I Corinthians 15:12-19). Because Christ has risen from the grave, the gospel is empowered to transform our lives into God's new creation (II Corinthians 5:17).

(5) The resurrection of Christ fills our hearts with hope. Paul said, "of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question" (Acts 23:6). Because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, Paul urges Christians to "sorrow not even as others which have no hope" (I Thessalonians 4:13). Peter declares, "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, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (I Peter 1:3-4).

