

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 38

August 2007

No. 4

EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked"

To mock means to make fun of someone or to laugh at someone. Why did Paul say, in Galatians 6:7. God is not mocked? Because, the Bible teaches that God has appointed a day on which He will judge all people. (Acts 17:30). At Hebrews 9:27 the Bible teaches, "And it is appointed for man to die once but after this the judgment. No one can stop death, and no one will be able to avoid judgment. Both are appointed for all. Those who try to mock God in this life, will discover on the day of judgment that they were not right. Be not deceived, therefore, God is not mocked. Who are those who mock God?

Those who do not believe in God, mock God. Look at yourself, and look around you, and look above you. What do you see or observe? Amazing designs everywhere. Everything is pointing to a creator, a great designer. "The fool," says the Bible, "has said in his heart, 'there is no God.' " (Psalm 14:1). There are others who instead of, recognizing and following the one true God, are trying to change His truth into something else, and therefore, are making mockery of God. Of such, the Bible at Romans 1:17-23 says: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by

the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things." What a shame! Repent, before it is too late!

On the other hand, there are also those who believe in God, yet are mocking God, because they are not following His will as He has revealed in His book. Their belief in Him and their worship of Him, even in their own sincerity is in vain, as Christ said in Matt. 15:8,9, because whatever they believe is not based on what the Bible teaches, but is according to teachings and doctrines and commandments of men. In their ignorance they think that they are right, as the apostle Paul used to think of himself before he was converted, but their religious belief and practices are foreign to the Bible and therefore are a mockery of God. They need to give heed to Christ's stern warning, as He said so plainly in Matt. 7:21-23: "Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you who practiced lawlessness." Some are, indeed, thinking that they are serving God, while in fact they are mocking God, as they are not doing things God wants them to do. Of them the Bible says, at Romans 16:18, they are serving their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. But God is not mocked!

Bearing Good Fruit

J.C. CHOATE

Jesus taught the lesson concerning the vine and the branches. I would like to begin by reading that account. He said,

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples". (John 15:1-8).

In this story, the vine represents Christ and his church. The branches represent those who are in Christ and his church. In other words, they are Christians. Life is in the vine and therefore we must be in the vine to be of value to the Lord. If we are not in Christ and his church then we are lost, and we will be eternally lost if we do not obey him so that we can enter the Lord. But how does one enter Christ and the church? There is but one way, and that is through obeying the Lord by believing in him, by repenting of our sins, by confessing Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Paul says that baptism puts one into Christ and into the church. (Romans 6:3, 4; Galatians 3:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 12:13). But what about those who are in the vine or in Christ? The Lord says that they must bear fruit, and much fruit at that. What about those who fail to bear fruit? Then they will be taken away and cast into the fire to be burned up. This is another way to say that they will be lost, eternally lost.

On another occasion Christ said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." (Matthew 7:13-20). According to Christ, then one's fruit tells what kind a person he is, whether he has a

good heart or not, whether he belongs to the Lord or not, or whether he is a false teacher or not. If he is a good person then he will bring forth good fruit. If he is bad, then his fruit will be bad. But what happens to a tree that bears good fruit? It will be saved. But a tree that bears bad fruit will be cut down. The kind of fruit that we bear then tells the story. The question is: What kind of fruit are we bearing?

In Colossians 3 Paul shows how the old man of sin has been put off and the new man of righteousness in Christ has been put on. Let's read some from this chapter to see the contrast. Paul says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in his glory". (Colossians 3:1-4). Here Paul is talking about being risen with Christ, that is, those who have obeyed the Lord, and have been raised from the watery grave of baptism to walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-6). He says now that we are dead, now that we have repented of our sins, and we have entered Christ through our obedience to him, then our interests should be on heavenly things, not earthly things.

Paul continues, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all". (Colossians 3:5-11). Here we can see that the writer is showing that at one time they engaged in all of these evil things, but now that they have put off that old man of sin through their obedience to the Lord, they have now put on the new man of righteousness in Christ, and being in Christ they are all one.

In reading further, Paul declares, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrell against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness". (Colossians 3:12-14). And on and on he goes, but he is showing here that once the old man of sin has been put out of one's life, then one is to fill his life with good things.

Turning to Galatians 5:22-27, the apostle Paul lists some of the fruit of the Spirit. He says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the, flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another". We are being shown that if we have the Spirit within us, and we are guided by the word of the Spirit; if we are in Christ, and we are true to Christ, that we will bear the fruit of the Spirit. He is saying that here are some of the good things that will be found in you because of who you are, and he says there is no law against bearing this good fruit. No one will put you in prison for having love, joy, peace and faith in your heart and life. You will not be persecuted for being good and gentle and temperate. No one will seek to harm you because of these or other good works in your life. How much better it is to be a Christian, and to bear these good fruits, than to remain in sin and to continue to bear bad fruit, the kind that hurts the individual producing it as well as those around him.

When Life Hurts

DAVID THURMAN

All of us experience hardships. All of us face struggles that make little or no sense to us. Sometimes the hurt comes from what others do to us. Sometimes we cause our own pain. Sometimes it takes place at work, or in our home or family, or in our finances. The fact is, there are times in each person's life in which life hurts.

God knew this was our situation. And that is why He sent His Son to save us. A few months after Jesus was born, we read of an event that reminds us just how painful life can be. And, yet, we learn how much God loves us.

"Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, 'Arise and take the Child and His mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him.' And he arose and took the Child and His mother by night, and departed for Egypt; and was there until the death of Herod, that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Out of Egypt did I call my son.' Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its environs, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the magi. Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, 'A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.' But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise and take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead.' And he arose and took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he departed for the regions of Galilee, and came and resided in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'" (Matt. 2:13-23). This is not a warm fuzzy story. God sends His Son to offer hope, and Herod causes the deaths of all the little boys in an entire area. We can only imagine the suffering in those families. Had they known this was caused by the birth of Jesus, they might not have been so thrilled to know the Messiah had come. Yet, in the midst of all this hurt, God demonstrates how much He cares for us. Notice what we can learn.

GOD IS INVOLVED IN LIFE

God warns Joseph in dreams three times. The Lord is watching all this and knows what Herod intends to do. So, God

intervenes by warning Joseph to save Jesus' life. Joseph and Mary would have suffered the fate of all the other families if God had not acted to save them.

This is the good news in this story. God is not on vacation. He is not way off in the distance watching our lives as some disinterested being. He is involved in our lives, helping us cope with the hurt that He sees. In fact, Jesus came to let us know just how close God is. *"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel," which translated means, 'God with us' (Matt. 1:23).* God sent His Son to let us know that He is close by and wants to be involved in our everyday lives.

God is not only close, but He is busy in your life. When you are hurting, it is often difficult to see God at work around you. But He is caring and loving and working for your good. God knows how much we hurt, and He stays close by to help.

EVIL ACTS TO HURT YOU

While God is busy helping, even to the point of sending His Son to save us, Satan is busy doing all he can to ruin our lives. Satan cannot beat God, but He can hurt God's people. So, when God does the most wonderful thing imaginable, sending His Son to the world, Satan does the most horrible thing imaginable, he attacks children and families.

This is a hard lesson for any of us. We think (like those families in Bethlehem must have) that our suffering is unfair. We think something must be wrong with our lives if we are hurting this much. But this story teaches us that when God gets close to us, Satan will come after us with all the tools at his disposal.

This means I cannot promise that if you become a Christian your problems will go away. The opposite can be true as well. It is a fact that Christians suffer in life just like other people. We have turned to God, but Satan has turned against us with greater fury. So, when God comes into our lives, you can expect Satan to turn up the heat.

GOD FINISHES HIS PLAN

God knows what Joseph, Mary and Jesus need. So, the Lord does all that is necessary to protect and save them. He warns them to leave and head for Egypt. He tells them when it is time to go back and even where to live when they get there. In spite of Herod and his violence, God sees to it that His plan to save man is protected.

God sees His plan through to the end.

God not only sees His plan through, He uses all that Herod does to fulfill the prophecies of the Old Testament. Satan does his worst in order to derail God's plan, and God uses his actions to prove that Jesus is the Christ. There is no action that Satan can take that God cannot preempt and use for His own purposes.

We must remember this principle, especially when life hurts. When we are discouraged or afflicted, it can seem that God and good are a long way off. Things may look bleak, but God is still working to see that His plan for your life is successful. *"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"* (Rom. 8:28). Paul doesn't say all things are good for a Christian. What He does say is that even the painful things we endure are going to be used by God to make good happen in people's lives. Yes, the families of Bethlehem suffered, but God is acting to save the whole world. So, when life looks bad, remember, God is working out His will in your life and in countless others.

EVIL CANNOT STAND

The incarnation of Jesus is a joyful event, even though many people suffered. It is joyful because it proves that evil will not be able to stand in the long run. The coming of Jesus to save the world proves that Satan loses. Whatever he does to attack God or God's people will not last. Satan can cause pain. He can create suffering. He could use Herod to attack the little boy, Jesus, and hope to be successful. But all of Satan's evil did not stop God.

This is the good news. God sees to it that Jesus and His family are saved. God knows how wicked Satan can be. He knows Satan can inflict much suffering on people. But, God still wins, as His Son will grow up, will teach and will go to the cross to save us from our sins. And God knows Jesus will come out of that tomb with victory over the enemy. *"But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Cor. 15:57).

SO: LET GOD HELP YOU

When life hurts, instead of blaming God, turn toward Him and let Him help. When God warned Joseph, Joseph did not argue with God, he just got up and left. Joseph didn't make excuses or think he knew better than God how to be safe. He let God help him, and it saved Jesus's life.

When you are hurting, you can turn to a Savior who knows what you are going through. Look at what Jesus experienced as a child. He was a refugee from Palestine. He had to hide in Egypt to escape death. When He came home, He couldn't go home, He had to move to still another village. This family and little boy went through a lot of stress and turmoil.

This means you can turn to a Lord who is not only close, but who is able to understand what you are feeling. *"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."* (Heb. 4:15-16).

LISTEN TO GOD'S CALL

Joseph obeyed God without questioning. In the middle of the night, he took his family to escape Herod's plot. He didn't waste time, he didn't take time to do much of anything. He just left. Maybe he left all or most of their household goods. Maybe they just took what they could carry. There was not much time for anything else. He heard God, and he listened and obeyed.

God can work in your life when you listen and obey. If you are saved, you can face life hurts and suffering with confidence in God's ultimate victory. But, to enjoy that hope, you must listen and obey. Notice what Jesus says, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned"* (Mark 16:15-16). Joseph immediately did what God commanded. Be like him and be baptized today. You will still face life's hurts, but you will be part of God's plan, and that means you win!

The Authority of the Bible

DUANE WARDEN

Before we can discuss the Bible's authority, we need to make two up-front assumptions, neither of which is universally accepted by those who claim Christianity. First, the Bible is the 66 books that

begin with Genesis and end with Revelation. Second, God has so breathed His Spirit into the authors of the Bible that all of its words are the Word of God. In the Bible God reveals Himself, and He instructs His people. The remainder of this article will examine two ways the Bible asserts its authority. Although they do not exhaust the subject, they are nevertheless significant.

First, the Bible asserts authority through commands. God has spoken through prophets, wise men and apostles; and through their words He has set forth laws. Further, He has assured His creation that they are answerable for the way they obey His law. His commands, on the whole, are plain; lengthy explanations or circumventing apologies are unnecessary. "Honor your father and mother" (Ephesians 6:2). "Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). God's laws are not the burden of creation; they are its healing. It is hardly surprising that God commands. Without Him, right and wrong are murky concepts at best. We need Him to offer His law. People should do what the Bible commands because the authority of God stands behind it.

Paul does not hesitate to speak of the "Law of Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21). It needs to be said that God has given a law. The individualism of western culture bristles at authority from any source, God or man. Human law is our collective authority to regulate individual behavior for the sake of the collective good. Authority can be abused, but we risk it. The unattractive alternative is to allow the one with the biggest club to demand and seize whatever he chooses.

The Bible takes authority to another level. To say that God is authoritative means that qualities are built into the fabric of the universe, put there by God, that determine right and wrong. His laws mean that there is a moral and spiritual order to life. Without God, right and wrong are reduced to personal preferences. Thievery is wrong if one gets caught, nothing more. Obedience is an expedient.

Factor God into the equation, and thievery is wrong, not because one might get caught but because it is a violation of the moral order God has built into existence.

Second, the Bible asserts its authority by setting forth models of godly behavior. Much of the Bible is in story form. Propositional statements aside, the Bible asserts its authority in the behavior of its characters. When David sinned in the affair of Bathsheba, his

life fell apart (2 Samuel 10-21). The story makes it clear that treachery and deception are as far from God's moral order as blasphemy or murder. When Jesus put His hand on a leper or wept with Mary and Martha, the Bible is asserting its authority. Deception and treachery on the one hand or compassion and kindness on the other find expression in the stories of David and Jesus. Our task is to transfer the lessons of the biblical story to our personal story. Hardly a minute goes by without the temptation to deceive. A time never comes when one can say, "There! I've been kind. It's over." Because a great deal of godly living can hardly be summarized in a commandment, God shows us right and wrong by example. He offers models of godly behavior.

Sometimes, the reader of the Bible has to study carefully to distinguish biblical authority whether it is being asserted in command or in story. For example, the commandment found several times in the New Testament, "Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12) appears to be as clear and authoritative as, "Repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). Why is obedience to one a matter of cultural adaptation and the other an absolute? Why can we substitute a hearty handshake for a holy kiss, but we can't substitute "accept Jesus into your heart" for repent and be baptized? The answer, at least in part, is that in the first instance the Bible is instructing through story, and in the second through command.

The plain fact is that without the authoritative word that God has given us in the Bible, we are at loose ends. God has commanded, and He has modeled. Through wisdom and letter and prophet and gospel, He has set forth a Word that is fully sufficient to guide His people into all righteousness. Whether our concern is with personal morality, with the life of the church, or with praise offered to God, the authoritative word God has provided is the standard to which His people aspire.

The Lord Opened Hearts

T. PIERCE BROWN

In Acts 16:14 we read, *"And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God,*

heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. "Most preachers and members of denominational bodies assume from this reading, along with their preconceived Calvinistic doctrine of "effectual grace", that God did some miraculous act in opening Lydia's heart. Conversion is indeed achieved by the power of God, and unless God opens the heart, one cannot be turned from the power of darkness into light. But when one takes all the Bible says about the subject, it is not hard to see how God opens the heart of a person.

Before we examine this passage in more detail, let us look at some other related Scriptures. In Luke 24:45 we read, *"Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures."* How did he do this? The same way any teacher opens the understanding of a pupil. He explained the meaning of the Scriptures to them. We may note in Romans 1:31 that Paul says about some that they were *"without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful."* What caused them to be without understanding? Romans 1:28 shows it clearly. *"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."* They did not want to know the will of God, so God did not open their understanding.

Jesus said in John 7:17, *"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."* So for a person's understanding to be opened, he first must want to know. Then if he wants to know, and there is some person to explain to him what he wants to know, he understands what he did not understand.

Since Jesus said that a person understands with the heart, when the understanding is opened, the heart is opened. So, Jesus said clearly in Matthew 13:15, *"For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."*

Even a passage like Hebrews 11:3 casts light on the subject. *"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."* If it is through faith that we understand, and faith comes by hearing God's Word (Romans 10:17), then it should be

apparent that understanding comes when one has the Word of God explained to him.

This Greek word, "opened — dianoigo (dee-an-oy'-go)" is the same word that is used in Luke 24:32, *"And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"* Also, it is the same word in Luke 24:45, *"Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures."* Surely it is easy to see that when he opened the Scriptures and explained the meaning to them, their understanding was opened. Since they understood with their hearts, their hearts were opened.

Now let us look again at Lydia's situation. Acts 16:14 clearly says, *"Lydia — heard us"*. When she listened with an attentive, obedient mind, and she heard the Scriptures, she understood, her heart was opened, and since she already had a willing mind, the result was *"that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."*

When any honest, sincere person wants to do the will of God, the Word of God has the power within itself to enlighten a person's understanding, or open the heart. David said it this way in Psalm 119:130, *"The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."*

We know of nothing in the Bible which suggests that God has to give some extra miraculous light for us to see the light that His Word gives, regardless of the misconception of a great number of religious persons in that regard. Can you imagine God giving us a flashlight to help us on our journey, then having to give us a candle to see the light we have?

God Answers Prayer

HOLLIS MILLER

The Bible clearly teaches that God hears the prayers of His children. But it is equally clear that all prayers are not always answered as the one praying may wish. The apostle Paul prayed three times that something he called *"a thorn in the flesh"* might be removed from him, but God answered: *"My grace is sufficient for you"* (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

James taught that some prayers are not answered because the one praying asks for the wrong reasons (James 4:3; see also 1:5-8). John wrote: *"This is the confidence we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us"* (1 John 5:14).

It is a mistake to take a single passage of Scripture about prayer and assume that the passage contains the whole of what the New Testament teaches on the subject. That God cares for His children is a very positive New Testament doctrine (1 Peter 5:7). However, caring for us and always, without exception, responding to our prayers exactly as we request are not equal to each other. The apostle John was present when Jesus said: *"Ask, and it shall be given you"* (Matthew 7:7). But the apostle's statement cited above evidences that he did not understand Jesus' statement to be unconditional.

Faith in prayer is always placed in God, never in its own sincerity and devotion. Our vision is too limited and our knowledge too inadequate to always know what is best for us. We do not always know, even with regard to the simple things of life, what should be done. Removing the will of God from prayer is to take away the unlimited wisdom, the perfect knowledge, and the unrestricted foresight that belongs to Him alone. Such removal should not be the wish of any Christian.

Fulfilled Prophecy Gives One Reason to Trust the Bible

GARY C. HAMPTON

Only God could have known specific events years before they actually happened, involving at times nations that did not exist when the prophecy was written. For that reason, fulfilled prophecy can be considered one of the strongest proofs the Bible is from God and can be trusted.

George W. DeHoff, in his book **Why We Believe the Bible**, wrote that the criteria of true prophecy has been listed as the following: The event must be beyond the power of man to foresee; it must not be a vision of hope nor a result of fear; it must not be a scientific or political forecast. The prediction must be written before

the event occurs and must be applicable to it. The language of the prophecy must be clear and the fulfillment plain.

When God's prophets challenged the false gods of the people around them, they used this very criteria. Isaiah, for example, wrote, *"Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods..."* (Isaiah 41:23a). In contrast, the true God could say, *"Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'"* (Isaiah 46:9,10). God's ability to look into the future, thus proving He is God and the Bible is His Word, can be seen in numerous prophecies.

Isaiah's prophecy concerning Babylon (chapter 13) is one clear proof the Bible can be trusted. At the time Isaiah wrote, Babylon was still ruled by a viceroy appointed by the Assyrians. Such may account for Hezekiah's boastful approach to the embassy sent to him from Babylon in 704 B.C. (2 Kings 20:12-19; Isaiah 39). Israel suffered the painful reward of Hezekiah's pride when Nebuchadrezzar II conquered Jerusalem. During that time it was said Babylon had a wall around it wide enough to race three chariots abreast! The hanging gardens of Babylon were considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Yet, Isaiah's prophecy clearly looks well into the future to the time when a powerful Babylon would be thoroughly defeated by the Medes. He foretold the city would be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah and left uninhabited! Isaiah wrote around 700 B.C., Jerusalem was conquered in 587, and the Medes attacked Babylon in 539. As one writer has said, "So desolate did Babylon become that, when Alexander the Great later decided to restore it, he gave up the task as a hopeless one." Only God could know the details presented by His spokesman!

Though Judah's captivity was not accomplished until well after the time of Isaiah, he foretold the day when the people of Judah would be restored to the land of promise. Among other things, he wrote, *"Who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, ' even saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' and to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid'"* (Isaiah 44:28-45:7). This prophecy is particularly telling since Cyrus was called by name some 100 years before his birth and 150 years

before he would release God's people!

The book of Nahum has an extensive prediction of the destruction of Nineveh. Bernard Ramm wrote, "Obadiah is a prophecy directed at the Edomites in which it is declared that (a) the heathen would conquer them, and (b) the Jews would conquer them. Both of these came to pass. Amos' prophecy was made around 755 B.C. God caused him to speak of the defeat of Damascus at the hands of Tiglath-Pileser, which occurred in 732 B.C. He also prophesied the destruction of Gaza, Ashdod, and Ashkelon, which were accomplished by three separate kings, Hezekiah, Sennacherib, and Alexander the Great. Micah, who wrote about 730 B.C., predicted the destruction of Samaria (712 B.C.) and Jerusalem (587 B.C.). Concerning Samaria, God said, *"Therefore I will make Samaria a heap of ruins in the field, places for planting a vineyard; I will pour down her stones into the valley, and I will uncover her foundation"* (Micah 1:6). In 722 B.C., Sargon captured Samaria. Ramm says again, "Samaria was on a hill and the stones may be found today literally poured down the side of the mountain, and the foundations of the city will be found to be discovered, i.e., laid bare."

For the Jews, no prophecy may be more distasteful or unlikely than the one made in Malachi 1:11. *"For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations," says the Lord of hosts.* "The clear fulfillment of these words took place in the church after Jesus had broken down the middle wall of partition and Gentiles over the whole world offered acceptable worship to God.

"Good News"—A Forgotten Expression

MICHAEL L. KING

Today's society is plagued by an onslaught of bad news brought on by terrorism, natural calamities, and the infiltration of sin. It leaves mankind, even Christians, languishing and restless. If we

are not careful, a gloomy outlook on life can be acquired, accompanied by a negative, pessimistic disposition regarding life, people, and Christianity. There must be some counteraction for the many bad elements of this life, for the creation or restoration of joy and hope in the hearts of men. God created and offered the possibilities for continuous renewal within us (Colossians 3:10; Romans 12:2). The Bible is replete with passages that produce the positives of life and become the "wind beneath our wings". We can truly live *in* the world, yet not be *of* the world in regard to the leavening affect of society's negative thinking.

It is good news indeed that Jesus died on the cross so that we can receive salvation! Mankind was dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1) prior to Christ breathing His last breath on the cross. God demonstrated His great love by sending His Son while we were yet powerless (Romans 5:8). He *"made us alive"* (Ephesians 2:4) and *"forgave us all our sins"* (Colossians 2:13). We can become participants in the righteousness of God because He made *"him who had no sin to be sin for us"* (2 Corinthians 5:21). No better news can be learned or broadcast than that men, who were alienated from God because of His sins (Isaiah 59:2), and who were *"far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ"* (Colossians 2:13).

Robert Coleman tells in his book, **Written in Blood**, the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. He previously had the same disease and recovered, making him an ideal donor. When asked if he would give his blood to his sister Mary, he hesitated with lower lip quivering, smiled, and said, "Sure, for my sister." The siblings were laid beside each other and needles were placed into their arms. As the blood began to be transferred, from Johnny's body to Mary's, Johnny broke the silence by asking, "Doctor, when do I die?" He had made his decision to give blood to his sister thinking that he would have to give up his life to do so. What a great decision! The cause for the quivering lip and brief hesitation became apparent. We have a precious loving Savior in Jesus who voluntarily died for us, giving life purpose and meaning.

Knowing these things, the Bible assures us of salvation while we are living our lives. The words of Jesus give us reason to be optimistic. He said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word, and believes him who sent me, has eternal life, and does not*

come into judgment, but has passed out of death to life" (John 5:24). John wrote to those *"who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life"* (1 John 5:13).

We can know that we are in a saved relationship with God. We can know, if we have given our lives to Jesus Christ by believing in Him, repenting of our sins, confessing Him to others, and being baptized for the remission of sins. That assurance is accentuated as we live a faithful and godly life by walking in the light (Revelation 2:10; 1 John 1:6-9).

The word "know" comes from the Greek "eidete; perfect tense; here and now present certainty." Our confidence is not based upon future hope alone, but acceptance of God's promises enumerated in the Bible concerning *the present*.

A final exciting piece of good news to warm the hearts of all believers is that one day Jesus is coming back to take us to heaven! The beautiful passage from John 14:1-4 delights the hearts of the faithful. Too long we have used it to eulogize the dead. This is a message *for the living*, to spark confidence and anticipation of better things to come! Jesus is *"preparing a place for us"* so that we can be taken back with Him.

Through the centuries, explorers, pioneers, and dreamers have traipsed off looking for land, gold, and opportunity, with the promise to return for their loved ones. Disappointment and rejection too often followed those promises. The explorers became prey to the elements, accidents, failure, freedom from responsibility, and newfound loves and relationships.

The Bible promises that Christ will not treat us in such a manner. *"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: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). Every day our souls should be filled with good news, especially good news from the Bible. For fullness and happiness, think on these things!

More Benefits of Grace

MILES PEEPLES

In Ephesians 1:6,7, we read the following: *"to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."*

We are accepted in the beloved, and the beloved is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. God accepts us *in* and *through* the Lord Jesus Christ. To be accepted carries with it the idea of being highly favored, the idea of being honored with great blessings. Consequently, in Jesus Christ we are privileged to be highly favored by God and are the recipients of His wonderful blessings. Also, because we are accepted in Jesus Christ, we are permitted to go before our holy and righteous God in prayer, with His promise that He will hear us and answer according to His will. Apart from the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not accepted by God, and we are without hope in this old sinful world.

In verse 7, we are introduced to the promise of redemption. That concept is filled with rich hues of meaning, and it provides a picture of a glorious deliverance. The word "redemption" means a releasing effected by payment of a ransom price.

In the first century world, when the New Testament was written, the buying and selling of slaves was a common practice. In the context of the slave trade of that era, if someone bought a slave and then set him or her free, it was said that he had "redeemed" the slave. Therefore, the act of redeeming a slave was known as redemption. The price paid for the slave before setting him or her free was called the ransom price or the redemption price.

The Lord Jesus through the apostle Paul uses this picturesque term (i.e., redemption) to describe the Christian's deliverance from the guilt and punishment of sin. In John 8:34,35, Jesus said, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever."* And again, the inspired apostle Paul asked this question: *"Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to*

death, or of obedience to righteousness?" (Romans 6:16). Without Jesus Christ, man is pictured as shackled to sin and held captive by the devil. When we enter into union with Christ at the time of our baptism into Him for the remission of sins, we are set free from the guilt and punishment of sin (Romans 6:17,18).

In Christ we have been redeemed and restored to true liberty. What was the purchase price for our redemption? In 1 Peter 1:18,19, the Bible says, *"Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as a Lamb without blemish and without spot."* We have been redeemed (set free) by the blood of Jesus that He shed on that old rugged cross. The ransom price? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

The Bible teaches that each individual, after he reaches the age of accountability, is guilty of sin. *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). Again the Bible says, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us"* (1 John 1:8). About 800 years before the birth of Jesus Christ, the prophet Isaiah said, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, everyone, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6). These passages, and many more as well, tell us that we are sinners. We are guilty of transgressing God's law.

The good news is that in Jesus Christ we have the forgiveness of sins. Only in Him can we find redemption and the joyful release from a guilty conscience. Forgiveness can be ours: but it can be enjoyed only in Christ.

The Empty House

J. ROBERT SWAIN

In Matthew 12:43-45, and also in Luke 11:24-26, Jesus told a parable of evil spirits departing and returning to an empty house. The religious leaders of the time were desperate to stop their people from believing Jesus was a teacher from God and the Son of David (Matthew 12:23). In their fear and deception, the

Pharisees accused Jesus of conducting His miracles through the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of demons. Jesus told this parable in response to these accusations and to throw light on the condition of people who were calling themselves religious on the outside but were not, inwardly.

The Pharisees dressed appropriately, worshiped at the right times, in the right way and, in their eyes, had lives that were rich and full. Jesus saw them as hollow and empty. They were so busy sweeping and putting their houses in order that they could not be filled by the amazement of a miracle from God just because it was performed on the Sabbath! Jesus warns them in this parable that Satan will consume them if they do not change.

Someone is going to live in your house! Luke 16:13 tells us that we cannot serve two masters. But it implies that you will serve one. The lives we choose to live determine with whom we place our allegiance. Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, *"He who is not with me is against me."* You have aligned yourself with Satan by default if you are not following Jesus, even if you are trying to be a good person! In this story, due to some carelessness or unfortunate event, a demon had taken over the house. I'm sure that the builder and owner never intended for this to happen.

SATAN'S POWER IS INFLUENCING MAN TO TURN FROM GOD

James 1:13 states that, *"each one is tempted (by Satan) when he is drawn away (from where he needs to be) by his own desires and enticed."* According to commentaries, most Middle Eastern cultures considered deserts and wild places as being haunted by evil spirits. When the spirit could not find a dwelling place in the desert, it returned to the dwelling that accepted it the first time. Those listening to Jesus would have known this. If Satan's objective is to pull us away from God, then he and his demons must be where they can influence us the most. Satan is not stupid or lazy. He will continue to try new approaches to get inside your house, and when he is successful in weakening your relationship with God, he will try even harder. If you allow Satan a way into your life he will soon take over (1 Peter 5:8).

STAYING AWAY FROM BAD THINGS IS NOT ENOUGH

I find it very sad that someone took the time to get all the "bad

things" out of the house but left it empty. They swept and cleaned it. They took pride in having regained possession of the house. But they didn't fill it with anything! All the effort to get out the "bad things" was not enough to protect it and keep it safe. When the spirit returned and found the house empty and unprotected, it returned with even more spirits and moved in again. This time Satan would make sure that the evil spirits would not be expelled. The situation was worse than before because the owner gave the spirits an opportunity. Second Timothy 3:13 talks of evil men growing worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. When you leave room for evil in your life, Satan will fill it! Romans 12:21 tells us not to be "... overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Make sure that there is no room for evil in your house.

GOD WILL ALWAYS BE MORE POWERFUL THAN SATAN!

The parable makes the assumption that, had the evil spirits returned to a house full of godliness, they would have been blocked from entering. When Satan tempted Jesus in Matthew 4, Jesus commanded the devil to go away, "*and the devil left him.*" In fact, James 4:7 tells us that we can do the same thing. "*Submit to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*" What a wonderful thing to know that we have the power and love of God willing to protect us from such a powerful adversary! It is our submitting to God that makes Satan flee. Filling our house with godliness leaves no room for Satan. Satan delights in Christians who look like they are walking with God but are so far from Him spiritually that they are unprotected by His power. They are empty houses. There is no difference between these Christians and the Pharisees that Jesus dealt with in this story.

As we strive to be *in* this world but not *of* this world, let us be vigilant to fill our lives with true godliness. Let us not be like the Pharisees who thought that *looking* the part of godly people was enough. Ephesians 4:27 warns us not to give the devil a foothold in our lives. Let's sweep and clean our house and then fill it with God's wonderful blessings!

When Was Saul Saved?

FRANK CHESSER

Prior to his conversion, Saul (later called Paul) was an avowed enemy of Christ and Christianity. He described himself as doing *"many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"* (Acts 26:9). He was a *"blasphemer, and a persecutor and injurious"* (1 Timothy 1:13).

However, on the road to Damascus, he met and acknowledged Jesus as Lord (Acts 9:1-6). Many people believe that Saul was saved at that point. But even a casual reading of the text will reveal that such was not the case.

If Saul was saved at that very moment:

(1) He didn't know that he was saved. Instead of rejoicing in his salvation, he inquired of Jesus, *"What wilt thou have me to do?"* (Acts 9:6). Whoever heard of a man being saved and yet not knowing it? Saul's very question is proof of his recognition that something remained for him to do in order to be saved by grace and blood.

(2) God Himself didn't know it. Instead of informing Saul that he was saved by his "faith only", God instructed him to *"go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do"* (Acts 9:6). Note the terms "must" and "do". Contrary to the thinking of many, man has to "do" something to be saved. That's not human interpretation; that's just what God said.

(3) Saul didn't act like a saved man. Instead of expressing great joy and happiness over his salvation, he was *"three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink"* (Acts 9:9). That's a strange way for a just-saved man to act. Saul knew he was not yet saved. He had asked what to do. God said he would be told, though giving him no specific time. Saul waited in darkness, in prayer and fasting for three anxious days.

(4) Ananias the preacher didn't know it. Instead of arguing that Saul was already saved by his "faith alone", Ananias went to Saul and told him what he needed to do (Acts 22:12-16).

(5) He was saved while still in his sins, for God, through Ananias, told him to *"arise and be baptized"*. He was still in his sins, for he had to be baptized to have his sins *"washed away"*.

Why does Scripture connect baptism with the washing away of sins? Because of some special power in the water or in the act of baptism itself? God forbid! The power to wash away sins is in — and only in — the blood of Christ! But when is man cleansed by that blood? When he completes his obedience to the Gospel in the act of baptism. Baptism is the culminating act of obedience that puts one into the death of Christ (Romans 6:3,4) where Jesus shed His blood (John 19:33,34) in order that the penitent believer might have his sins washed away by that blood.

What washes away sin? Only the blood of Christ (Revelation 1:5). **When** does the blood of Christ wash away sin? When one completes his obedience to the Gospel in baptism (Acts 22:16).

Saul was not saved by grace and blood until his faith moved him to complete his obedience in this divinely ordained act.

Experts Aren't Always Right

DALTON KEY

The experts aren't always right. The experts of Egypt, around the time of Moses, believed the earth was hatched from a winged egg, that man came from white worms found in the sludge of the Nile, and that the sun reflected the light of the earth.

But the experts were wrong.

The experts of ancient Babylon taught that humans were produced by a spitting monster. Wherever the monster spat, a man was formed; wherever a man spat, a woman appeared; and wherever a woman spat, an animal emerged.

The ancient experts were wrong.

Today's experts tell us that the universe has evolved, over a span of several billions of years, from nothing before the "Big Bang", to single-celled organisms, to — finally — you and me.

I don't know about you, but I'd just as soon have the spitting monster theory.

Experts may be wrong, but the Bible is right (Psalm 33:4). And, it is right in affirming that "*God created man in His own image.*" (Genesis 1:27).

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