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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him"

To live with Jesus Christ in this world and in the world to come in eternity, one must first choose to die with Him. If we want to live with Him, we must die with Him first. (2 Timothy 2:11). Christ Himself had to die on earth to live again, and to be fruitful (John 12:24). In Galatians 2:20, Paul, the apostle said, "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

How does one die with Christ? How did Paul die with Christ? In fact, he said that he had been crucified with Christ. How or when did Paul do that? When Christ was crucified on the cross, Paul didn't even know about Christ, Paul came to know about the death of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world much later. As a matter of fact, when Paul had first heard about Christ and his followers, his reaction was quite the opposite. He wanted to kill all Christians. He hated the name of Christ. Paul was a Jew at that time, and he considered Christianity a threat to his Jewish religion. He was the enemy of the cross of Christ, and of those who preached of His death on the cross, and those who followed Christ. (Acts 8:1 and 9:1,2).

As a Jew, Paul's mind was prejudiced against Christ and His church, because he was ignorant about who Christ really was. Perhaps he had heard wrong things about Christ and about His followers. But when Paul learned the truth about Christ, who, in fact, Christ was and why did He come to earth and why did he

die on the cross; his views and perceptions about Christ completely changed. So remorseful and sorry he was after he came to know the truth convincingly that for the next three days he neither ate nor drank water, as we read from Acts 9:9. Paul experienced sorrow which produced repentance in him. (2 Cor. 7:10). He changed his views and perception, his thinking, his mind about Christ and His Christianity, and that produced the effect of death in Paul's life. Paul died to his former belief and understanding. This was repentance. When Paul changed his mind, he died to his unbelief and former understanding. He came to believe in Christ that He truly was the Son of God who had come from heaven to die of the cross for the sins of the world. After learning truth about Christ, Paul, through repentance, died to his sins of unbelief and unrighteousness. And then, as a dead man, dead to sin, he was buried in a grave of water or was baptized into Christ and into His death, to wash away his sins, as he was instructed by a Gospel preacher whose name was Ananias. (Acts 9:18 and 22:16).

Later, when he wrote to his fellow Christians at Rome, he said: "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 raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should also walk in the 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 resurrections." (Romans 6:3-6).

To live with Christ now and in the hereafter, one must, therefore, first need to die with him, like Paul. Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as "a born Christian." No one is a Christian by physical birth. One becomes a Christian, a follower of Christ, when one learns of Christ, when one hears the Gospel of Christ's death for the sinners and of His burial and His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4); when one believes in Christ and repent of all sins and when one is baptized to wash away all sins. If one hopes to live with Christ, he must first choose to die with Christ!

Preparing To Meet God

J.C. CHOATE

We live today in a very wicked world. People are seeking after material things and the pleasures they can bring. The

average person thinks and acts as though he is going to live forever here on earth. With these conditions prevailing, then who is thinking about the need of preparing to meet God? Truly it will be even as the Lord said it would be at his coming. He said, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be (Matthew 24:36-39).

Yes, the Lord is coming back one day. We don't know when he will come, but he will come. He is coming to receive the righteous. Paul wrote, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even, so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 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. Wherefore comfort one another with these words". (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

At the time the Lord comes, he will send his angels to gather out of his kingdom or church all that offend, or the unfaithful, that they might be cast into the fire to be burned up. In explaining the parable of the tares of the field to the disciples, Jesus said, "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth". (Matthew 13:41, 42).

Again Paul tells us that the Lord is coming to take vengeance on those that know not God and obey not the gospel. He said. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with

everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power". (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Christ will also come to judge man. We are told, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad". (2 Corinthians 5:10). In Acts 17:31 it is said that Christ will be the judge. Then in John 12:48 we are told that he will judge us by his word. At that time the righteous will go into life eternal, and the wicked will go away into everlasting punishment. (Matthew 25:46).

Now it is for these reasons that we need to be preparing to meet the Lord. The foolish may go on their way seeking after the things of this world, but the wise will not only be aware of the coming of the Lord one day, but they will likewise recognize that there are also several other things to take into consideration.

The first thing we should remember is that we are living now, but the day will come in which we will have to die. The Hebrew writer tells us. "And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment". (Hebrews 9:27). While we have opportunities now to obey God, along with the freedom to choose to obey the Lord or to reject him, but once we die then our eternal destiny is sealed. The Lord has provided us with salvation and given us every opportunity to believe in him and to obey his teaching, and we would be wise to take advantage of that offer.

Then as we noticed earlier, the judgment day is coming and at that time we will be judged, according to the way we lived this life. The Lord, the righteous judge, will be there to judge us and he will not make any mistake. How sad it would be to have to go before the Lord unprepared to meet him. Please do not let this happen.

My friends, it will not be enough to go through this life living a good moral life, and then to stand before the Lord thinking that he is going to save us. It is necessary to live a good moral life to go to heaven, but that alone is not enough. Cornelius and his household were good people, but they were not saved until they heard the gospel and obeyed it. Read Acts 10. Neither is it enough just to be religious. There are a lot of religious people who are lost. Christ said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name

have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Matthew 7:21-23). Not only that, but money, wealth, a good education, knowing the right people, and so on, will not take you to heaven.

Then how can we prepare to meet the Lord? It is so simple that most people stumble over it. They can't believe that it is that simple. First, the Lord has already died for us and made it possible for us to be saved. All we need to do is to believe in him and obey him. Christ said, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." (John 14:1). He also said, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24). Now is there anything difficult about that? Next, the Lord has asked us to repent or to turn away from our sins. He warns us that we must repent or perish. (Luke 13:3). But you are probably thinking that this is the catch, that this is where he really makes it hard on one. But why would it be hard to give up those things that are only hurting you, and one day they will destroy you? Christ doesn't ask us to give up one thing that is good. Next, he wants us to confess him before men that he is the Son of God, and he has promised that if we will do that, that he will confess us before the Father in Heaven. (Matthew 10:32). Imagine the Lord confessing us before the Father in Heaven. How blessed can we be? And finally, then he has commanded us to be baptized. He said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:16). Then he says that if we will do that, that he will save us and add us to his church (Acts 2:47), and if we will remain faithful to the Lord in the church, then when he comes back to receive his church, then he will take us to heaven. (Ephesians 5:27).

Now if you want to be blessed in this world, and in the world to come; if you want the best there is the best the world has to offer, and the best the Lord has to give, then prepare to meet the Lord, and stay prepared. I pray that you will.

Believing The Bible

JERRI MANASCO

Believing the Bible places you in unique company! To

REALLY believe the Bible, to believe that it is in fact the living word of the living God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) and that it holds forth all that we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3), is to stand with those who have faith and confidence in Him who is the only immovable point of reference for a world in moral and spiritual confusion.

Many do not believe the Bible as the message of God to man. They see the Bible as nothing more than a curiosity. To them the Bible may (or may not be) an interesting book of religious opinions, but it is not (in their mind) to be taken seriously. Some have a fair view of the Bible but do not realize the meaningful impact it has had on the human race over the centuries. They refuse to acknowledge its power and they fail to honor its rightful place in the world. Believing the Bible carries a number of significant implications.

To believe the Bible is to believe God, who gave us the Bible. Those who really believe the Bible do not merely believe IN God but they BELIEVE GOD! They share Paul's confidence, "...I believe God..." (Acts 27:25). Paul did not have a mere concept of some spiritual truth about God, but he kept in his heart a living faith in God. To believe God is to believe the marvelous promises he has set out for us in the Bible, for these are the promises that sustain and motivate toward spiritual service. "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). These are the "exceeding great and precious promises" that form the basis of our deliverance from the corruption of sin (2 Pet. 1:4).

To believe the Bible is to believe the warnings of God as well as his promises. They who believe the Bible have motivation to submit to the great will of God. Yes, there are warnings that are designed not to merely frighten us but to make us aware of the justice and holiness of God. The warnings are sufficient to move to obedience those whose ambition is to honor the Creator.

To believe the Bible is to love the Bible. "O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psa. 119:97). If one really believes the Bible, he will find the reading and study of the Bible to be adequate food for the soul (Matt. 4:4; Job 23:12). He who truly knows the Bible is God's word and not just some religious fantasy will come to love and appreciate it more each day; the

more he loves it the more he sees how the Bible has a positive impact on life.

To believe and love the Bible is to obey the Bible. "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). It is indeed a tragedy that many will pay lip service to the Bible but when their personal beliefs are not supported by the Bible, they will choose to follow their error rather than the truth of God's word. If you really believe the Bible, there will be consistent obedience to it.

Victory in Jesus

FRED L. DILLON

MAN'S GREAT WARFARE

Humankind is in a warfare—a never-ending battle for victory over sin and death.

The Apostle Paul reminded us that he had "fought a good fight," "finished his course," and "kept the faith." By so doing, he had laid up for himself a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, would give him and not to him alone, but also "unto all them that love His (Christ's) appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8).

There is no escape from this warfare. God has called us to be soldiers, but we must volunteer for action. Paul instructed Timothy to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" and to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:1-3). He reminded him that he could not be entangled in the affairs of this life because he had to please the one who had called him to be a soldier (2 Timothy 2:4).

God did not leave us without weapons or without ammunition to fight the war. In Ephesians 6, the Holy Spirit guided Paul to outline and specify the exact armor for the Christian. He commanded Christians to "put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:10-11).

This armor included: a girdle of truth, a breastplate of righteousness; feet shod with the Gospel, the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God), and both prayer and watchfulness as protections against the enemy (Ephesians 6:14-18). The weapons we use are "not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down

of strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4).

God is positive with us in identifying the enemy: "Be sober, be vigilant; because *your adversary the devil*, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

EVERY MAN MUST ENLIST IN THIS FIGHT

God has called us by the Gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14) to follow *the captain of our salvation-Jesus Christ* (Hebrews 2:10). This captain was made "perfect through suffering." He proved Himself by attaining victory over sin and death and thereby obtaining eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:12).

This redemption is only available "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13-14) and must be achieved through His blood that we might have redemption and forgiveness "in Him."

The answer to the question as to how and when I have redemption and forgiveness is the same as the question, "*How do I get into Christ?*"

God did not leave this question unanswered! In Romans 6:3-5 and Galatians 3:26-27, we are instructed *how to get into Christ* and to be a soldier in His army.

Paul told the Romans, "Know ye not that so many of us as were *baptized into Jesus Christ* were baptized into His death?" Baptism-a burial in water for "remission of sins" (Acts 2:38; 22:16) allows us to be in Christ and in His body-the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

The Galatians were told, "For as many of you as have been *baptized into Christ* have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Paul emphasized, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all *one in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:28).

This baptism *into Christ* must be preceded and accompanied by faith (Hebrews 11:6), repentance (Acts 17:30-31), and confession of Christ as God's Son (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10).

This is the only way one can enlist in the Army of the Lord (James 5:4).

THE SPOILS OF VICTORY

One who is faithful "in Christ" has "all spiritual blessings" (Ephesians 1:3). These blessings through the Spirit are given to us as we submit to the will of God (Romans 12:2). They include:

- SALVATION (2 Timothy 2:10): "Therefore I endure all things

for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the *salvation*, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."

- REDEMPTION (Romans 3:23-24): "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by His grace through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus."
- FORGIVENESS (Ephesians 1:7): "In whom we have *redemption* through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."
- ETERNAL LIFE (1 John 5:11): "And this is the record, that God hath given to us *eternal life*, and this life is in His Son."
- COMPLETENESS (Colossians 2:10): "And ye are *complete* in Him, which is the head of all principality and power."
- NO CONDEMNATION (Romans 8:1): There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Considering the rules of enlistment in the Lord's Army, have you *heard the gospel* (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)? *Believed It* (Romans 1:16)? *Repented of sins* (Luke 13:3, 5)? *Confessed Jesus as God's Son* (Matthew 10:32-33)? and been *baptized Into Christ* (Romans 6:3-5)? If not, isn't it time you stepped forward and enlisted in the Army of the Lord? Jesus died for you (Hebrews 2:9). He calls you to join His hosts in the warfare against Satan (Matthew 11:28-30). *Will you answer the call?*

How Would You Like To Be A Christian Only—Nothing More, Nothing Less?

BOB DANKLEFSEN

For a number of years I wondered why all the various churches were divided religiously. I thought it was because they interpreted the Bible differently. A study of God's Word revealed that this was not true. In fact Jesus prayed that His followers be united in one body. (John 17:20,21).

A few years ago I purchased a New Testament and began to read it several hours each night. As I read how Jesus and His disciples suffered persecution for doing the Father's will, it caused me to see how shallow my faith really was. Soon I found myself

on my knees asking God what I had to do to be saved.

JUST A CHRISTIAN

One week later I sat down with a man at work, who, when I asked what he was religiously, said he was a Christian. I asked, "What kind of Christian?" He replied that he was just a Christian, nothing more, nothing less. Having been in denominationalism some twenty eight years, I could not understand anyone claiming to be a Christian without also claiming allegiance to some denomination. Upon learning that God is not the author of religious division, I too, wanted to become just a Christian. (1 Corinthians 14:33). God instructs, "But if you suffer for being a Christian, don't feel ashamed, but praise God in that name." (1 Peter 4:16).

Often denominational people, after giving their denominational affiliation, will state, "I'm a Christian, too." If one were to reflect back to early church history, followers of Christ would never have made the statement, "I'm a Christian, too," because the division that now exists, had not yet begun.

WHY DO WE HAVE RELIGIOUS DIVISION?

The greatest contribution to religious division is the lack of respect for the Bible as one's only authority. Jesus said, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth," (Matthew 28:18). Today, however, man has designed creed books and manuals which often make statements directly opposed to what the Bible teaches. Peter says that the Lord has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Some day we shall all be judged by the Bible. (John 12:48-50).

DOES BIBLE INTERPRETATION CAUSE DIVISION?

Often, when one disagrees with a Bible statement, they will state, "That's your interpretation." God's Word nowhere states one thing and is to be understood to be saying something in opposition to the statement. For example, the Bible teaches, "For by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." (Ephesians 2:8). God makes it very clear that faith is necessary for salvation.

One church, however, makes this claim:

"A person may say that he believes in salvation by grace, but if he sets forth any act of man's will, such as repentance, faith, baptism, or hearing the gospel, as a condition for obtaining it, then

this position must be put on the works side. Primitive Baptists believe that salvation is of the Lord, that it is His grace, and that nothing needs to be added to it," *What Do Primitive Baptists Believe?* by Elder Lasserre Bradley, Jr.

When one reads Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are you saved through faith . . .," it is not a matter of interpretation to say that this means one is "not" saved by faith. Those who reject Ephesians 2:8 normally turn to another scripture, such as in this case, Ephesians 2:5, and then state, "See, this mentions nothing about faith being necessary for salvation." It is unfair to use one scripture against another, yet it is practiced by those who do not accept the whole counsel of God. (See 2 Timothy 3:16)

"I HAVE A RIGHT TO MY OWN BELIEF"

God will never force a person to follow His Word. For example, two men Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire when they burned incense. (Leviticus 10:1,2; 16:12). Fire came from heaven destroying them. They believed that they could use any source of coals to burn incense, but God had instructed that coals from off the altar were to be used. The Lord instructs that the events that happened in the Old Testament were recorded to prevent us from making the same mistakes our ancestors did. (1 Corinthians 10:6-11).

JESUS SET THE PATTERN

Many have not realized what the Lord did to save man from eternal destruction. Jesus, as Deity, became a man, (John 1:1, 14). Although He was tempted, He never sinned, (Hebrews 4:15), but He endured the torment of the cross to die for our sins, (Romans 5:8). Three days later He was resurrected from the dead, showing us that we too, can be victorious over the grave. (1 Corinthians 15:20). He now sits as a man at the right hand of the Father to intercede for Christians. (Hebrews 7:25). Someday He will return as judge. (Acts 17:30, 31). It is amazing to see one who was God become one of our kind, human, so that man could be restored to fellowship with the Creator. Jesus planned from the foundation of the world, (Revelation 13:8), to do His Father's will. It is this same Jesus all religious people will face some day, as well as others, and many will hear, "... depart from me, I never knew you." Jesus obeyed His Father in all points; may we do less? (Hebrews 5:7-9; 1 Peter 2:21-24).

JESUS GAVE US A PLAN OF SALVATION

The message of Jesus leaving heaven, dying on the cross, being resurrected from the grave, His ascension to the throne, and His second coming is the gospel. Jesus said to go preach the gospel to the whole creation. (Mark 16:15). Peter stood up on the birthday of the church and preached the gospel, (Acts 2:22-24). Three thousand repented and were immersed for the forgiveness of their sins, (verses 38-41). If we, today, do what those people did, what will we become?

Today, there are many ways that man is taught he may respond to follow God. The Bible, on the other hand, continues to say, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," (Ephesians 4:4-6).

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE JUST A CHRISTIAN?

"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch," (Acts 11:26b). Even in the early days of the church many began to align themselves with preachers in the Lord's church; the Lord condemned this practice, (1 Corinthians 1:10-15). They did not worship these men; they just wanted to give allegiance to them. Today, the same thing is practiced and one can see the names of various religious people featured on the front of church buildings. Yet there is no reference to the only one who can offer salvation. (Acts 4:12). Incidentally, this is the reason when one is asked what they are religiously, they do not answer Christian. Instead they reply with some other term never found in the Bible.

If one were to have lived 500 years ago, before almost all denominations had been formed, a person could not have become a member of some 400 churches now in existence. If one lived 1900 years ago there was only one church in existence at that time - the Lord's church. (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:4). Jesus said, "the seed is the word of God," (Luke 8:11). If the same gospel message is taught to you that Peter and the other early Christians shared, you, too, could become a Christian identical to those living 1900 years ago. Would you be willing to give up all man-made creeds, doctrines, and terms to become just a Christian?

"WE'RE SATISFIED WITH OUR CHURCH"

The Jewish people had the attitude that they were God's chosen people. Paul boldly told the Jews that since they

considered themselves unworthy of eternal life, that he would go to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). They were satisfied, but lost.

The one thing that was stressed to me when I was taught, was to not be satisfied, but to continue to search for truth (John 8:31, 32). Today if the church I now attend were to practice a false teaching, I would leave it for my own soul's sake as well as my family (2 Corinthians 6:17).

"AREN'T THERE CHRISTIANS IN ALL CHURCHES?"

It is necessary to get a definition of "Christian" when evaluating this statement. Most religious groups regard anyone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God to be considered a Christian. This of course would include Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Science, who, both, deny the Deity of Christ, (See Colossians 2:9).

The Bible, on the other hand, has reference to those who have responded like those in the book of Acts. When one responded in faith and repentance, he was immersed into Christ upon his confession of faith, (Acts 2:38; 8:36-39; Romans 6:3, 4). Those groups who have initiated different responses to the gospel such as sprinkling for baptism, or man-made forms of worship were not under consideration when the name Christian was applied to the followers of Christ. Paul in his letter to Timothy expressed the necessity of living a life consistent with Christian principles and in Bible doctrine. (1 Timothy 4:16).

WHY?

Most believe that the one body, church, (Colossians 1:18), consists of all those making up the different denominations. If this is true, look at all the different teachings on the subject of baptism that would be regarded as truth: Baptism is the sprinkling of water on infants for forgiveness of "original sin; baptism is the sprinkling of water but is not for remission of sins; baptism is immersion in water and is not for remission of sins; and baptism is immersion in water and is for remission of sins. In God's sight only those teaching and practicing what the Bible teaches on this subject will be recognized as true Christians. (1 Peter 3:15).

"WE ALL WORSHIP THE SAME GOD"

I use to make this statement thinking that I could believe anything I wanted to. This God who asked us to worship Him, also

warned us about false or vain worship, (Matthew 7:15-20; 15:7-9). When one follows a practice in worship not authorized in the New Testament, the Lord says this is like the blind leading the blind. (Matthew 15:13, 14).

What kind of influence would a person have who had driven through a red light and then said to the judge, "We all have the same president" even though he sincerely believed the red signal when lit meant "go." Laws across the land, without exception, state that glowing red traffic lights mean stop. Yet it seems to pacify the conscience of those who may not find what they practice religiously in the Bible to state, "We all worship the same God."

HEARTS OPENED TO THE LORD

The beautiful, but simple story of Lydia helps us see that those who are really searching for the Lord's will with an open heart and unprejudice attitude, may become the happiest people in the world. (Acts 16:13-15).

If you would like to become "Just a Christian" contact the church of Christ in your area or write to us.

Judas—What a Waste!

RAY HAWK

He had every opportunity laid at his feet. People could have remembered him in the best of ways. He had a second chance and blew it. Perhaps he thought he was too much of a failure, and that's the reason he did what he did. Perhaps he thought he could never be forgiven, and his was the only way out. Perhaps he did not think his sin could be forgiven — it was too great. I suppose we will never know, this side of eternity, what caused Judas Iscariot to end his life rather than seek Jesus' forgiveness. He could have. Peter did (Matthew 26:75).

Judas was called by Jesus to be one of His apostles. Out of those who followed, he was among the chosen few. Perhaps Judas did not realize the greatness to which he had been appointed. He had something to write home about. His name would be remembered for good as long as there was history. An apostle of Jesus Christ! Ah, the opportunities!

He had abilities that Jesus recognized. After all, did he not take care of the money bag (John 13:29)? No doubt he knew something about book-keeping. When Jesus sent the twelve out, Judas was among those who were commissioned to *"Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead"* (Matthew 10:8). When they returned, Judas was among those who reported what they had preached and accomplished. What excitement must have welled up within him as he gave his report!

How many of us are in an even better position than was Judas to realize the greatness into which we have been called? Yet, how often do we see ourselves sin? How often do we betray our Master by our words and behavior? We have the privilege of being with God now and throughout eternity. We have the opportunity of having our names written in heaven. Even though our names may never find their way into man's history books, if we are children of God, they have been written in the Lamb's book of life! How terrible it would be to see them erased because we threw it all away like Judas.

Peter turned to Jesus. Judas turned to the noose. If only Judas had repented, as did Peter. How many will go through life thinking they aren't worthy enough to go to heaven? Actually, none of us are worthy of that reward (Romans 3:10,23). But Jesus was. He is our Savior. Judas thought it was all about what he had done, when it really is all about what Jesus has achieved for us.

A lot of opportunities cross our paths during this lifetime. Don't miss the ones that God gives you. Follow His Son Jesus.

The Untouchables

DAVID THURMAN

Elliot Ness was the renowned untouchable. The label was given to him because he was unwilling to take a bribe as a law enforcement officer. In an era when many law enforcement officials at all levels were taking money from criminals, Ness and his men were untouchable.

Long before there was a crime fighting unit, there was another group of people who were literally untouchable. They could not just enter into a community. Where ever they went they

had to cry out in warning to others. They were the lepers of ancient times.

These unfortunate victims were defined as unclean under the law of Moses. There were strict guidelines to follow to determine if a person was unclean due to the problems of leprosy. *"As for the leper who has the infection, his clothes shall be torn, and the hair of his head shall be uncovered, and he shall cover his mustache and cry, 'Unclean! Unclean!' He shall remain unclean all the days during which he has the infection; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp"* (Lev. 13:45-46). If the disease was present, the victim was sent to live outside the camp, away from all other people.

These lepers were literally untouchables, and were to cry "unclean" anywhere they went, so that healthy people would not come in contact with them and come down with the disease. They could not have a normal home life, they could not worship with other believers. Anyone who came in contact with a leper was considered unclean as well. So, they were social, spiritual and physical outcasts. They were condemned to a life of isolation and ostracism by all of the healthy members of the community.

Mark tells us a powerful story about one such untouchable. Word had already spread about Jesus' power to heal. One leper decided to go have a little talk with Jesus. *"And a leper came to Him, beseeching Him and falling on his knees before Him, and saying to Him, If You are willing, You can make me clean. And moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand, and touched him, and said to him, I am willing; be cleansed. And immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. And He sternly warned him and immediately sent him away, and He said to him, See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them. But he went out and began to proclaim it freely and to spread the news about, to such an extent that Jesus could no longer publicly enter a city, but stayed out in unpopulated areas; and they were coming to Him from everywhere"* (Mark 1:40-45). This encounter between Jesus and an untouchable can teach us many lessons.

ALL SIN IS UGLY

God chose skin diseases such as leprosy to stand as a

symbol for sin. God probably had many reasons for doing this. Such diseases are often highly contagious, so the Lord wanted people to be protected from contamination by coming in contact with lepers. But God also wanted people to see how He views sin. He did this by choosing a disease that was ugly in all its forms. God wanted mankind to see how ugly sin looks to Him.

Leprosy was horrible in all its consequences. Physically, the sufferer could lose fingers, toes, ears and more as the disease progressed. If the disease continued, it would lead to death. Moreover, the victim could not associate with anyone who was not diseased. That meant no family contacts, no hugging the kids or grandkids. That meant the leper could not go to worship God with other believers. Worst of all, the victim was often treated as a sinner, somehow deserving this cursed fate.

All sin looks this way to God. *"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear"* (Isaiah 59:1-2). God wants to save man, wants to be near man - but God keeps man at a distance because of sin. You might think your "little" sin is no big deal. But to God all sin is ugly. To God, sin in any form is disgusting.

Sadly, all of us have come down with the disease called sin. *"There is none righteous, not even one...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:10, 23). Every one of us looks ugly before God, just as ugly as any leper would look to us. We cannot look down on those whose ugliness is different than ours. We cannot pretend our particular disease is better than someone else's. We are all sinners, and we all look ugly to God.

COMPASSION MOVES GOD

The leper chose to come to Jesus. Jesus had already begun His public ministry and word of His power to heal had spread. The leper probably thought he had nothing to lose and everything to gain, so he obediently approached Jesus. We know he trusted Jesus to do something for him, he had faith. We know he was obedient as he would not approach Jesus too closely so as to cause Him to become unclean.

Jesus was filled with compassion. He cared for this poor man who had suffered from this disease. Jesus looked beyond the ugliness that was there and saw the human being underneath.

Jesus could not stand by and let leprosy win this battle. Jesus acted out of compassion.

That is the nature of God. God reaches out to sinners like us because He loves us, ugliness and all. *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). The nature of God moves Him to reach out to us, just as Jesus reached out to the leper. God does this, in spite of how ugly our sin looks to Him. *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8). Never doubt how much God loves you. He is willing to reach out to sinners like you and me and save us, in spite of our failures, our mistakes, our sins.

GOD GIVES MORE THAN WE ASK

Jesus does an interesting thing with this leper. *"And moved with compassion, He stretched out His hand, and touched him, and said to him, I am willing; be cleansed"* (Mark 1:41). Jesus healed the man, but first the Master touched the man. How long had it been since anyone had touched him? How long had he gone without any human contact of any kind? Whatever the status of his disease, the leper felt the touch of a human hand for the first time in a long time.

Jesus runs a risk in touching the man. According to the law He would be unclean if He touched a leper. But Jesus looked beyond the man's obvious physical need for healing. The Lord saw the man's need for human contact, for acceptance, for love. So, before He healed the man, Jesus touched Him. Jesus knew the man's need better than the man himself.

So it is with us. Jesus knows we need to be forgiven. But He knows much more than that. He knows we need to get along. He knows we need love and acceptance. So the Lord reaches out to us as well, even while we are unclean. He loves us Himself, and places us in a body of believers who will also love us. *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent*

His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:7-11).

God looks beyond the surface requests we make of Him and gives us more than we can imagine. *"Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever" (Eph. 3:20-21).* How that leper must have felt to have a human hand on him. You and I can only imagine how good it will be when God reaches out to us and gives us more than we can ask or think.

THE CLEAN CRY OUT

Jesus tells the leper to follow the law of Moses, go show himself to a priest who will examine him to see if he is clean. Then the former leper would be admitted back into society, back into his home and family, back into the congregation of believers. Jesus also tells the man to keep this private, to tell no one.

But the man has experienced too much blessing to be quiet. He spread the news. What a story he must have told, how Jesus not only healed him, but this new teacher reached out to him and touched as he was healed. Jesus may have wanted the man to keep it private, but the man had been given too much. He spread the news around.

That is what happens when people meet Jesus. They cannot keep quiet. When we realize the ugliness is gone, we want to tell others. When we feel the touch of God and the blessings he gives beyond what we expect, we want to tell others. As God reclaims sinners, it is a natural process that they will want to tell others the story of their cleansing. *"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; For His loving kindness is everlasting. Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, Whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary" (Psalm 107:1-2).*

BE CLEANSED AND CRY OUT

We invite you to come to Jesus for cleansing today. Put your faith in Him, recognizing that only He has the power to cleanse you. Turn from the ugliness of your sin, and then let Jesus cleanse you with His blood as you are baptized into His death and rise to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). Then, with other believers, you can begin to tell the story of the day Jesus touched you.

God's Plan of Redemption

JOHNNY RAMSEY

When the Master promised, *"He that believeth is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16), he opened up vistas of beauty and joy forevermore. By far the most important event in the history of the world was the death of our Lord at Calvary. The truths emanating from the cross of Calvary enrich our sojourn upon the earth and give us hope in the days that lie ahead. The willingness of God to send Jesus to *"taste of death for every man"* (Heb. 2:9) and *"bear our sins in his own body upon the tree"* (1 Pet. 2:24) enriches our very souls. This is the purpose and goal of the New Testament, the gospel: the redemption of mankind. To contemplate such matchless love, that opens for us the marvelous, golden street of glory, overwhelms us.

*In the land of fadeless day
Lies the city four-square;
It shall never pass away,
And there is no night there.*

BECOMING A NEW CREATURE IN CHRIST

When honest seekers (John 7:17) obey genuinely from the heart, the gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:16-18), they are made new in Christ: *"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature"* (2 Cor. 5:17). No passage tells it better than Col. 2:12, *"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."* The next verse bountifully and beautifully informs us that we were thereby made alive from the spiritual death of sin that once engulfed us. Having been forgiven of past transgressions, through the shed blood of the Lamb of God, at Calvary, we stand on holy ground, though we live in a vile and wicked world! It is significant that Gal. 3:27 ties all of these passages together: *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."*

The Holy Spirit guided the apostles *"into all the truth"* (John 16:13), and God's message, thus revealed through them, convicted *"the world of sin, and of righteousness and of judgment"* (John 16:8). This gospel teaching is described by the apostle Paul: *"Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day*

according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). In Rom. 6 we find the perfect illustration of salvation in the first century, or in any other age. When a man becomes dead to sin, as he is buried with Christ in baptism and is raised to walk in newness of life, he then becomes dead to sin and alive to God (Rom. 6:3-7). Having obeyed *"from the heart that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness"* (Rom. 6:17-18). Through the message of the Spirit (the word of God), a man's heart is cleansed by the blood of Christ as his *"body is washed in pure water"* (Heb. 10:22), the new birth is thus consummated. Paul describes that in Eph. 5:26 as *"the washing of water with the word."*

IF WE TRUST HIM, WE WILL OBEY HIM

There are those who look upon all of these Bible passages as technical matters with no spiritual significance. However, throughout the sacred Scriptures we find the blending of God's commands and man's sincere obedience. Abraham, the "father of the faithful," is commended by God: *"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing whither he went"* (Heb. 11:8). Noah was commended because he explicitly obeyed *"all that God commanded him"* (Gen. 6:22). The same compliment is paid to Moses for the same reason (Ex. 40). Disciples of Jesus were told to *"do whatever he tells you to do"* (John 2:5). Our blessed Savior still asks the same pertinent question as He did nearly 2000 years ago, *"Why call you me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?"* (Luke 6:46). Jesus is straightforward when He tells us, *"Except ye believe that I am he ye shall die in your sins"* (John 8:24).

In the great commission, Jesus said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). Notice that both belief and baptism are requirements prior to salvation. In Luke 13:3 we are reminded by the Redeemer that repentance is required lest we perish! And, on the very day the church of the Lord became a reality, sinners were told, *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins"* (Acts 2:38). We continue to read, *"They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. . . the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved"* (Acts 2:41,47). Jesus made it clear to

Nicodemus in John 3:5 that a man must be born again, *"of water and the Spirit"* in order to enter into the kingdom of God. We have the perfect commentary on that passage in Acts 8:12, *"But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women."*

WE GLORIFY GOD IN THE BODY, THE CHURCH

It is significant that the first time our Lord mentioned the church, He also called it the kingdom: *"I will build my church . . . And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom"* (Matt. 16:18-19). The culminating action that brings us into the church or kingdom is baptism (Acts 2:41; John 3:5). Also, in many of Paul's inspired writings, the church is referred to as the body of Christ: *"He is the head of the body, the church . . . [God] gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body"* (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23). Therefore, the synthesis of such teaching can be viewed in 1 Cor. 12; 13, *"For by one Spirit were you all baptized into one body."* When we are *"born again"* we enter the kingdom (John 3:5). When we are baptized, we enter into the *"body of Christ"* (1 Cor. 12:13). The kingdom is the church (Matt. 16:18-19), the church is the body (Col. 1:18). When we are baptized, we are born again *"of water and the Spirit,"* and thus enter into the kingdom, which is the church, which is the body.

Friends of Jesus should love His commands. Did not Christ say that? *"If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments... Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you"* (John 14:15; 15:14). Whatever He tells us to do should be our utmost desire, if we are sincere in our avowal of friendship: *"Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him"* (1 John 2:3-4). The old hymn says it very well:

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

REDEMPTION REQUIRES RIGHTEOUSNESS

The terms of admission into the Savior's domain are simple and clear. Let us rejoice in the eloquent surroundings of God's love and hasten to be faithful members of that spiritual body, the church, made possible by the blood of the Lamb (Acts 20:28). Our blessed Lord made it clear in Rev. 3:1-5 that unless members of

the church cleanse their garments by purging sin out of their lives, they would have their names blotted out of the Book of Life by the Lamb of God! Heaven demands moral purity. Years ago, in my hometown congregation, an old brother would lead a stanza of this great, old hymn:

Break down every idol,

Cast out every foe;

Now wash me

And I shall be whiter than snow.

Salvation in the Master also delivers us from the vanity of sorry people and places us in the company of the best folk on earth. Will it not be marvelous throughout eternity to be far away from the filth and sordid things of this mundane sphere (Rev. 21:8)? We can have a foretaste of glory divine here and now by *"walking in the light"* with the saints of God on earth (1 John 1:7). The sensuality of humanistic society is becoming even more debauched and vile. Such evil (1 John 5:19) makes good people yearn for a purer environment. Heaven was made for folk who look for better things: *"They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly. . . Our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior"* (Heb. 11:16; Phil. 3:20).

From the moment we enter the Lord (Rom. 6:3-4), and thus partake of a quality of life that is of eternal consequence (John 17:3), we eagerly look forward to that place *"there the wicked cease from troubling and the weary be at rest"* (Job 3:17). Therefore, when this earth is rolled up like an old garment and cast aside (Heb. 1:11-12), the loyal followers of the Prince of Peace shall know assuredly that salvation in the Lord was truly the pearl of great price.

Should I Be Baptized Again?

OWEN COSGROVE

1. Are all baptisms equally acceptable to God? By what authority does one say "all baptisms"? The Bible teaches that there is "one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). It is a burial or planting (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3-6) in water (Acts 8:36-39; 10:47,48) for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16), and to put one into Christ (Galatians 3:26-29; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

2. **Aren't sprinkling and pouring also baptism?** Emphatically, no! New Testament baptism requires water (Acts 10:48), much water (John 3:23), going to water, going down into water, being buried or planted in water, and coming up out of water (Acts 8:36-39; Romans 6:3-6).
3. **Aren't all baptisms acceptable, just so they are immersion?** No, it is important not only that baptism be immersion, but that it be preceded by the right things and that it be for the right purpose.
4. **What do you mean, preceded by the right things?** In the New Testament, baptism is to be preceded by faith (Mark 16:15,16), repentance (Acts 2:38), and confessing one's faith in Christ (Acts 8:36-39; Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32,33). Obviously, if one did not believe in Christ, or was not willing to repent, or denied the divinity of Christ, immersing him would be of no spiritual value.
5. **What do you mean, baptism should be for the right purpose?** New Testament baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), or to wash away sins (Acts 22:16). Baptism that is not for the remission of sins or to wash away sins is different from the baptism of the New Testament.
6. **Is there any example of people being re-baptized in the New Testament?** Yes. In Acts 18:24-19:7, some disciples of John the Baptist had not been baptized in the name of Christ or in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, so they were baptized again.
7. **I felt very good about my first baptism. If I am baptized again, won't I be admitting that I was wrong?** We must walk by faith rather than by mere feelings. If one's former baptism was not according to the Bible, it was wrong. It is bad enough to be wrong and not to know any better. It is far more serious to know better and not to correct the situation.
8. **My first baptism was when I was very young, and I have serious doubts about my understanding of what I was doing. What should I do?** By all means, be baptized now and remove all doubt.
9. **I am a little embarrassed after all of this time. Christ was not too embarrassed to die for us. He wants you to make your calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10).**
10. **What if I just decide to take my chances? Would you take your chances with a faulty car title or property deed if it could be so easily corrected?**
11. **I just hate to put others to any trouble over such a minor thing. This is not a minor thing. It is eternally important.**

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