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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

***"Blessed is every one who fears the Lord,
Who walks in His ways"***

The blessings are pronounced on those who fear God and walk in His ways. Indeed, those who fear God are truly the happiest and the blessed people on earth and continue to remain such year after year and all of the days of their life. In fact, they are doubly blessed or are happy in two ways. Not only are they blessed in this world, but God has promised to bless them even after their life on earth is over, because they had walked in His ways, or had lived their lives on earth according to His will. (Psalm 128:1). God is the creator of man, and He has not left man without His will. (Hebrews 1:1, 2; Romans 1:18-23). When Christ was on earth, He taught that there are two ways in the world, one of God and the other of man. He taught that there is a way of man and there is a way of God, and both lead men into different eternal homes. (Math. 7:13, 14 & Math. 25:46). The Bible says: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." (Proverbs 14:12). God never changes, and neither does His way. He is not the God who causes confusion, but He is the God of peace and harmony. (1 Corinthians 14:33). Although man has through the centuries devised for himself many many ways and he imagines and believes that all these various ways will lead man to the same destination of heaven. But such is not true. Man's way will not lead him to God. There is only one way to God, and that is God's own way. (John 14:6). And those who fear God,

respect and honour Him by walking in His ways.

Those who fear God, the Bible says, "depart from evil." (Proverbs 16:6). That is to say that they do not engage in any kind of the works of the flesh. (Galatians 5:19-21). They do not use any kind of drugs, they do not smoke or drink strong drink, and they would not engage in any immoral act which bring all sorts of diseases and innumerable sufferings and early death. Therefore, the Bible teaches: "The fear of the Lord prolong days, but the years of the wicked will be shortened." (Proverbs 10:27). The fear of the Lord is the restraining factor. Those who fear God, they know that He is the true and the living God, and that He is present everywhere and therefore He sees everything. (Psalm 139). He is the God, the Bible says, who has appointed every one to die once and then face Him in the judgment. (Hebrews 9:27). "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," says 2 Corinthians 5:10, "that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." The Christian is informed, in 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are." We need to fear God because He is our spiritual Father; and we need to fear God because one day we will all appear before Him to be judged. We are responsible beings. We are not like animals. We have been created in the image of God and after His likeness. (Genesis 1:26, 27). Our Father in heaven has asked us to fear Him, because it is good for us; the fear of God keeps one away from every form of sin and iniquity.

Those who fear God are blessed in another way also, and that is, they do what He has asked man must do to be saved from sin and to go to heaven. Those who fear God obey His will, His commands, like a little child, without questioning God. They do not go about by their own imaginations or follow man made teachings to serve and worship God. (Romans 1:18-23; Matthew 15:8,9). They do what He says, and therefore they have the promise of the Lord that He will save them and will give them the eternal life in heaven. For instance, the Bible at John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." And, in Mark 16:16 Christ said, "He who believes

and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Our loving heavenly Father has done what He should have done for saving us from the consequences of sin and thus providing us the way to enter heaven. But He has asked us to believe in His Son and do what He says, if we want to be saved and go to heaven. Those who fear God, do what He says. "The fear of the Lord", says Proverbs 1:7, "is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." In the last two verses at the end of the book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible, we read this exhortation: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." May we, therefore, learn to fear God and to walk in His ways, while we still have the time and the opportunity.

Why We Believe In Heaven

J.C. CHOATE

When I speak of heaven, I am not talking about the sky, the clouds, or the atmosphere, I am not even talking about outer space. Sometimes we refer to these as heaven, but the heaven that I am thinking about is where God dwells. It is a beautiful place, the home of the righteous, where godly souls shall live all eternity. Heaven is even described in God's Word as the New Jerusalem.

The scriptures speak generally of heaven. Christ said to those who were persecuted for righteousness sake, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." (Matthew 5: 12). Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name." (Luke 11: 2). He instructed them, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." (Matthew 6: 20, 21). Christ said to Peter, the Apostle, after he had confessed him as the Son of God, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever

thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16: 19). Speaking to the seventy whom he sent out on the limited commission, the Lord said: "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10: 19, 20).

Continuing, we are told that there will be joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. (Luke 15: 7). It is said that Christ came down from heaven. (John 3: 13). Jesus spoke of the Father giving the disciples bread from heaven. (John 6: 32). Paul said to the Christians at Corinth, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5: 1). Again, Paul said to the Galatian Christians, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1: 8). Some day, Paul assured the Thessalonians, the Lord would descend from heaven to take vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the gospel. (2 Thessalonians 1: 7-9). Peter said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." (1 Peter 1:3 4). John said, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Revelation 21: 1,2). And on and on we could go with any number of similar passages of scripture that speak of heaven, the eternal abode of God and the home of the soul.

Who will be going to heaven? Jesus told the people of his day, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven?" (Matthew 18: 3). That means then that infants and little children, or those who have not reached the age of accountability, and are therefore not held accountable for their actions, since they do not know right from wrong, will go to heaven if they die. The Lord's

kingdom or church will be saved in heaven. Paul said, "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom of God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power." (1 Corinthians 15:24). We also read in Ephesians 5: 23 that Christ is the saviour of the body or the church. (Colossians 1:18; Acts 20: 28). It should also be pointed out that the Lord will present it as a "glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5: 27). Then we read in Matthew 13: 41 how the Lord will send his angels to gather out of the kingdom or church all things that offend and they will be cast into the fire that they might be destroyed. But if the church is going to be delivered up to God in heaven, then that means that we must be in the church to be eternally saved. The scriptures also say that the faithful, or those who keep the Lord's commandments, will go to heaven. Christ said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Revelation 2: 10). James said, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." (James 1:12). John wrote, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." (Revelation 22: 14).

At the same time it should be pointed out that certain others will not be in heaven. This will include Satan and his angels (Matthew 25: 41), unfaithful Christians (Matthew 13: 41), and the wicked. (1 Corinthians 6: 9, 10; Galatians 5: 19-21). In Revelation 21: 8 we read, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Remember, too, that neither will the hypocrite go to heaven. (Matthew 24: 51). And finally, all of those who are deceived, and are in religious error, will be lost. (2 Timothy 3:13; Romans 16: 17, 18).

Who is in Heaven? God is there. Heaven itself is described as being the city of the living God. (Hebrews 12: 22). Jesus Christ is there. (Acts 2: 32, 33). The angels of God are there. (2 Thessalonians 1: 7-9).

What will heaven be like? John wrote this about heaven, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and

the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things: and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." (Revelation 21: 1-7). Reading on, John writes, "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielding her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." (Revelation 22: 1-7).

Of course, as we read through the entire book of Revelation, we have the inspired John saying that heaven will have streets of gold, the foundations of the wall of the city will have all manner of precious stones, and so on. John began the book of Revelation with these words: "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the

testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." (Revelation 1: 1-3). John, therefore, as a human being, was able to see things that no man had ever seen before. To write about heaven and all of its glory, for instance, he had to put it in words that man could understand. He therefore described much of what he saw in figurative language, comparing it with things here on earth, like gold, precious stones, and so on. It was so beautiful and wonderful that it was really beyond description. After reading what heaven is like in Revelation, if one is impressed and want to go there, then remember that the half has not been told.

Someone has said that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. It is a place where God and his people will live forever more. Man therefore will not really die when he departs this life. He will die physically, but his soul will live on for all eternity. Those who have obeyed the Lord, and have been faithful to him, will one day be taken home to heaven where they will never die. All of this is really beyond our comprehension when it comes to fully understanding it. We therefore accept it by faith and press on to the time that it will become a reality. We have every confidence that God will not disappoint us, but will provide for us far above all that we have ever dreamed or imagined.

Don't you want to go to heaven? Don't you want to live with God one day? How terrible it would be if this life was all there was. There are so many problems and troubles and heartaches here. There are so many pains and aches and so much suffering. But when we can look beyond this life to a better world then we can somehow make it through this life.

If you are not a Christian then you are lost and you have no hope beyond the grave. I would pray that you would realize this and that you would take steps to correct it. You can be saved and have the hope of going to heaven one day if you will believe in Jesus, repent of your sins, confess your faith in Christ, and be baptized that you might be saved. (Mark 16:16). If you will do that then the Lord will not only save you but he will also add you to his church. (Acts 2: 47). We pray that you will while you still have time and the opportunity.

God's Church in the Book of Acts

DAN R. OWEN

Confusion reigns today when people talk about the church. Many separate the idea of salvation from church membership entirely. People talk about finding a home church like they talk about shopping for clothes. As people of the Book, we need to return to our roots in the book of Acts, and discover once again what it really means to be a member of God's church. Consider the following things:

The word translated "church" means a group, a gathering, a congregation, or an assembly of people. God's group officially began when repentance and forgiveness of sins was first preached in the name of Jesus in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38).

When those gathered for Pentecost heard the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the proclamation of his lordship, they humbly asked what they should do. They were told to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins and were promised the gift of the Spirit. "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to their number that day" (Acts 2:41).

ADDING TO THE CHURCH

The process of preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus continued "and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). When a person was saved through obedience to the gospel, that person was added by Christ to the group of saved people. As the book of Acts progresses, we are told of numerous instances where the gospel was preached, people responded, and the group of disciples increased in number. Consider these statements about this group and how they relate to the statements in Acts 2:41 and 47.

As Peter and John proclaimed the risen Lord, the text says, "many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand" (Acts 4:4). After the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, Luke tells us, "Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number" (5:14). After the seven were chosen to feed the

Grecian widows, Luke adds, "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith" (6:7). Notice that there is a continual emphasis on the preaching and hearing of the word of God. Those who responded in faith and obedience were called disciples, and were "added to their number," becoming part of this group.

SCATTERED GROWTH AND SPREADING THE MESSAGE

The first time the word "church" is actually used in the critical Greek text is Acts 8:1 where we are told that on the day of Stephen's death a persecution arose "against the church at Jerusalem." This church or gathering or group at Jerusalem can be no other than that group that began on Pentecost and had been growing according to Luke's summaries ever since. As Saul persecuted the church in Jerusalem, the disciples, with the exception of the apostles, were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, but "those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (v. 4). From the beginning, becoming a disciple or member of this group was about receiving and obeying a message.

As the gospel spread to Samaria, many there "believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, [and] they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). If we follow Luke's presentation, we can safely conclude that these people were added to the number as others before them had been. The same thing happened with the eunuch to whom Philip explained the message. Beginning at Isaiah 53, Philip "told him the good news about Jesus" (v. 35). This man immediately responded the same way as those on Pentecost had responded (vv. 36, 38).

Acts 9 tells the story of how Saul, the persecutor, was converted to Christ. This pivotal story is repeated in Acts 22 and 26. Although Saul saw a vision of the risen Lord, no special treatment was given to him in salvation. He was told by Christ to "get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (9:6). Ananias shared the message of Christ with Saul and told him to "Get up, and be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (22:16). When the persecutor of God's church had been converted to Christianity, Luke says, "Then the church

throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord" (9:31). The word "church" in this passage obviously refers to those groups of disciples that arose everywhere in Judea, Galilee and Samaria where the disciples had preached the message of Christ and people had responded in obedience.

When those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen moved farther north into Syria, they were also telling the message to people (Acts 11:19). Some even began speaking to Gentiles, "telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus" (v. 20). Luke tells us that "a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (v. 21). The Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to help in this new work, and he recruited Saul of Tarsus to help him in the work at Antioch of Syria. Luke says, "So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch" (v. 26).

WHAT MAKES A CHRISTIAN

This passage, when taken with all of Luke's statements about the growth of the church, makes some basic truths fundamentally clear. A disciple is the same thing as a Christian, which is also the same thing as a member of the church. One became a disciple or Christian by hearing the message about the redemptive work of Christ, hearing of His lordship, and obeying that message in faith, repentance and baptism. All who responded in this way were added by the Lord to the number of disciples, and were thereby members of God's church. The churches in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, Galilee and Antioch were not different denominations. They were all congregations of the same apostolic church that began on Pentecost in Jerusalem. They were all begun in the same way, through the preaching of and obedience to the same gospel message.

As the events in Acts progressed and the gospel was spread to new areas, the same things held true. As God ordered His church to exist in ongoing fashion in the world, the apostles appointed elders in the local churches and "committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust" (Acts 14:23). These elders were charged with watching over the souls of the saved

people and guiding them in the teaching of the Word (20:25-35).

The church in Acts, then, is a universal body of saved people resulting from the preaching of the gospel and people's obedience to the gospel. Its existence in the world is part of the eternal purpose of God (Luke 24:46-47). Its mission, as reflected in the book of Acts, is to spread the message of Christ to the ends of the earth, so that people can hear it, obey it, and being saved, can be added by Christ to His group of redeemed people, the church.

Standing on the Promises of God

CLEM THURMAN

"Let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from, an evil conscience: and having our body washed with pure water, let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for he is faithful that promised" (Heb. 10:22-23).

God will do what He said! This is the great cardinal truth of the Bible. Men may deceive you, lie and break their word. But God, will not. He will do just what He has promised. As the apostle Peter wrote, *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise"* (2 Pet. 3:9). Men promise to pay a debt, then ignore it and cheat the lender. Wedding vows are too often broken. Solemn agreements are violated almost daily in the world of business. But it is not that way with God. He is faithful. He keeps His promises. An old gospel song speaks of our confidence in those promises:

*Standing on the promises of Christ my King,
Through eternal ages let his praises ring;
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
Standing on the promises of God.
Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
By the living word of God I shall prevail
Standing on the promises of God.
Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,
Bound to Him eternally by love's strong cord,
Overcoming daily by the Spirit's sword,
Standing on the promises of God.*

PROMISES: CONDITIONAL AND UNCONDITIONAL

Many of God's promises are unconditional. That is, there are no conditions that man must meet in order to receive what God has promised. Because mankind was steeped in sin, He promised a Savior: *"Behold, the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name whereby he shall be called: Jehovah our righteousness"* (Jer. 23:5-6; see also Isa. 19:20, etc.). As we read in Acts 13:23, *"God, according to his promise, raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus."* The dual promise of Heb. 9:27 is also an unconditional one: *"It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment."* There are many other such unconditional promises of God.

But most of the promises of God are conditional promises. That is, there are conditions we must meet in order to receive the promised blessing. The Bible speaks of the promise which God made to Israel, that they would be given the *"promised land"* of Canaan: *"But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey: I am Jehovah your God"* (Lev. 20:24). But this was a conditional promise, conditioned upon Israel trusting God and doing what He told them to do.

Notice what He told them: *"Therefore shall ye keep all the commandment which I command thee this day . . . that ye may prolong your days in the land, which Jehovah sware unto your fathers to give unto them and to their seed, a land flowing with milk and honey"* (Deut. 11:8-9). There is the condition: *"Keep all the commandment which I command."* That is why it is later stated, *"And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that were disobedient? And we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief"* (Heb. 3:18-19).

God had promised that the land would be theirs, but there were conditions they had to meet. And the warning is then given to us in the next verse: *"Let us fear therefore, lest haply, a promise being left of entering into his rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it."* Only if and when we meet His conditions will we receive the promise. The fact that *"the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men"* (Titus 2:11-12) does not

mean that all men will be saved. There are conditions to be met.

"KNOW THE TRUTH → BE MADE FREE"

The blessings of the gospel are all predicated on our learning the truth. *"If ye abide in my word, (then) are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:31-32). Ignorance of what God expects of us will not excuse nor save (Acts 17:30). Only the truth can make men free, and then only if it is known. That is why the Lord said, *"It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me"* (John 6:45). Only by hearing and learning the truth is freedom possible. It is the known truth that makes men free.

When Jesus was on trial, Pilate asked Him, *"What is truth?"* (John 18:38), but he didn't wait for an answer. Jesus prayed to the Father about the apostles, *"Sanctify them with the truth, thy word is truth"* (John 17:17). The tragedy of modern society is the cry for freedom, while the source of freedom is being ignored. There are still those such as Peter discussed, *"For, Tillering great swelling words of vanity, they entice in the lusts of the flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them that live in error; promising them liberty, while they themselves are bondservants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome of the same is he also brought into bondage"* (2 Pet. 2:18-19).

Anyone who leaves God out of his life is not really free. It is God's truth that makes us free. Nothing else can do it.

"STUDY THE WORD → GROW IN CHRIST"

Another promise with conditions concerns our growth and strength in Jesus Christ. Paul exhorts us to be *"strong in the Lord"* (Eph. 6:10). And he clearly stated, *"I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me"* (Phil. 4:13). We are encouraged, *"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Pet. 3:18). And all of us who are Christians want to *"grow up in all things into him who is the head, even Christ"* (Eph. 4:15). But how do we grow? The answer is found in 2 Pet. 3:18, above: *"Grow in the grace and knowledge"* of the Lord Jesus.

There is no shortcut to spiritual maturity. If we would *"grow up"* in Him, it must be by the study of His word. And our growth rate will very closely parallel our rate of increase of our Bible knowledge. As Paul wrote, *"Study to show thyself approve unto*

God . . . *handling aright the word of truth*" (2 Tim. 2:15). Peter tells us, *"Long for the spiritual milk which is without guile, that ye may grow thereby unto salvation"* (1 Pet. 2:2). As we study His word, we become more like Jesus: *"Beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory"* (2 Cor. 3:18). If you truly want to grow up in Christ, then study His word and thus become like Him.

"BELIEVE AND BE BAPTIZED → BE SAVED"

Jesus came into this world, *"To seek and to save the lost"* (Luke 19:10). Before His birth, the angel announced, *"Thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins"* (Matt. 1:21). This was His mission on earth — to save sinners. And when He was ready to depart this earth, He told the apostles, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:15-16). Notice that *"be saved"* is a conditional promise, and two conditions are clearly stated in the passage: *"Believe and be baptized."* If we are to receive the promise, we must meet the conditions. And it is not up to us to make the conditions to receive the promise, only submit to them.

When the apostles later preached the gospel, people were *"pricked in their hearts"* and were then 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 then read the results: *"They then that received his word were baptized"* (Acts 2:41). The Lord has not changed His mind, nor His conditions! He sent Ananias to tell Saul, *"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins"* (Acts 22:16). The Bible shows that our faith leads us to be *"baptized into Christ, baptized into his death"* (Rom. 6:3). We are thus *"saved by faith"* when faith leads us to obey the Lord. We do not choose between faith and baptism, for both are conditions of salvation from the guilt of sin.

"BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH → CROWN OF LIFE"

Jesus made the promise, *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give unto thee the crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10). Assurance that we live with Christ forever is the great hope of the gospel, that we are: *"Heirs according to the hope of eternal life"* (Titus 3:7). Peter writes of that hope, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us*

again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

Before His departure from the apostles, the Lord said, *"In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-3).* This is the promise that removes the terror of death, as John wrote, *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them" (Rev. 14:13).*

What a hope! That the Lord, Who died for our sins and then arose from the dead, now promises us all the joys of heaven with Him forever! We have the assurance that God is faithful, He will keep His promises. We need to be just as faithful to meet the conditions he makes on His promises to us.

"REFUSE TO OBEY → SUFFER ETERNAL TORMENT"

Another promise—and one we don't really like to talk about—is that those who refuse to obey him will suffer eternal torment. When the Lord Jesus pictures the final judgment, He will separate the righteous and wicked. To the latter He will say: *"Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels . . . And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:41,46).* Again, He describes that place: *"Shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth . . . Cast into hell; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Matt. 13:42; Mark 9:47-48).*

The apostle Paul writes of this, *"To you that are afflicted rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with the angels of his power in flaming fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thes. 1:7-9).* Again, the promise is clear: *"If we are faithless, he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself (2 Tim. 2:13).* If we refuse to obey His will, if we refuse to live for Him, we will certainly wish that "hell would just be imaginary." But God will keep His promises—and

that includes His promises of hell as well as those of heaven!

If we refuse His will for our lives, we will be lost eternally. That is His promise, too. Let us, in faith, determine to obey Him fully, to live for Him every day. The promise of eternal life is a conditional promise. We must, as Christians, be "*faithful unto death*" in order to realize the fulness of the promise.

Is The Holy Spirit For Me?

DAN MCVEY

There are many questions that are before us each day regarding the Christian faith. One of the most important questions is about the Holy Spirit and His work in the world. We can see many different ideas about the Holy Spirit in different churches, but what does the Bible say?

The Bible says that the Holy Spirit is God, just like the Father and the Son. Please consider these verses—II Corinthians 13:14; Matthew 28:18-20; Genesis 1:2. We must remember that the Holy Spirit is part of the Godhead or Deity just as much as the Father and Jesus Christ. If you read Acts 5:3-4, you will see the Holy Spirit is called God. The mind of man can never fully understand the deep things of God, but the Bible tells us the Holy Spirit is God.

But what does the Holy Spirit do? Is He for me? Let us consider three different points:

1. In John 14:16, Jesus explained the purpose of the Holy Spirit, who would come into the world after Jesus departed. Please read these verses: John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15. From these verses, we know that the Holy Spirit has several responsibilities:

- (a) He is our Comforter, a very special help. (John 14:16).
- (b) He is a teacher (John 14:26).
- (c) He testifies of Christ (John 15:26).
- (d) He convinces the world of God's righteousness, sin and judgment (John 16:7-11).
- (e) He is the guide to all truth (John 16:13).
- (f) He is to glorify Christ (John 16:14).

After Jesus departed the world and went back to heaven

(Acts 1:4-9), the Holy Spirit was to come and guide the Apostles and the early church by revealing all of God's truth to them (John 16: 13) and causing them to remember what Jesus had taught them (John 14:26). This same Holy Spirit guided the prophets and writers in the Old Testament (II Peter 1:21). Therefore, the New Testament was also given by God's revelation and inspiration through the Holy Spirit. Please read II Timothy 3:16-17 and I Corinthians 2:13. The Bible is one of the works of the Holy Spirit, that we can know God's truth and what he wants us to do. All we know about Jesus and God's truth is in the Bible; therefore, by giving us the Bible, the Holy Spirit has done what Jesus said He would do.

2. One of the Old Testament prophets named Joel had prophesied of a great day to come when God would send His Holy Spirit into the world (Joel 2:28-32). When Jesus was going back to the Father, He told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem for God's promise to be fulfilled (Acts 1:4-5). In Acts chapter 2, we read of God's sending the Holy Spirit with signs of power and glory (2:1-4). When Peter and the other apostles explained to the people what was happening, they told the people it was what Joel had prophesied (2:16-21). God had sent the Holy Spirit into the world—the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Many years later, when Peter witnessed God's accepting the Gentiles as Christians as well as Jews, He referred back to Acts chapter 2 as "the beginning" and understood that God meant this outpouring for all people who would come to Him (Acts 10&11: 1-18). As Peter and the brethren preached in Acts chapter 2 about the Gospel of Jesus, they told the people that if they would repent and be baptized, God would also give them the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37-39).

Therefore, we all can have personal fellowship with God by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Please read Romans 8:9; II Timothy 1:14; I Thessalonians 4:8; Acts 5:32. God gives to the Christian the gift of the Holy Spirit. How do we get this gift? Galatians 3: 1-5 says this gift comes by the "hearing of faith"—the word of God. John 7:37-39 says faith in Christ brings the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:38 and I Corinthians 12:13 tell us it is by baptism that God puts the Holy Spirit within us. All of these scriptures teach the same thing when we come to Christ in faith and accept Him in baptism, we receive the Holy Spirit and become part of God's Kingdom doing His will in the world (Acts 2:47).

3. What does the Holy Spirit do for the Christian?

- (a) He brings sanctification (I Peter 1:1-2). This means the Holy Spirit helps us be like God—pure and holy.
- (b) The Holy Spirit encourages us to live a holy life by dwelling in us (I Corinthians 6:19-20). We are the temple of the Holy Spirit; therefore, we cannot defile our body.
- (c) The Holy Spirit strengthens us to fight the spiritual warfare (Romans 8:13; Philippians 2:12-13).
- (d) The Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses (Romans 8:26-27).
- (e) The Holy Spirit is given to us by God as assurance that He has saved us and will continue to help us. Read: Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; II Corinthians 1:22; 5:5.

The Holy Spirit is God in us—God in the Christian, doing so many wonderful things for us. We do not fully know how the Holy Spirit does all this and more because the Bible does not tell us, but we know the Holy Spirit is with us and in us to God's glory.

How do I know the Holy Spirit is in me? Do I have a strange feeling? can I only feel His presence? No. The Bible tells us how we can know the Holy Spirit is within the Christian. Please consider these points:

- (a) We know the Holy Spirit dwells in us because of our faith in Christ and what He told us. Galatians 3:2, 3:5, 3:14; John 7:37-39; I Corinthians 12:3.
- (b) We know we have the Spirit if we have been immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. Acts 2:38; I Corinthians 12:13; Titus 3:5-6.
- (c) Through our knowledge and understanding of God's love, we can know the Holy Spirit's presence. Romans 5:5.
- (d) If we obey God, we can know of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Acts 5:32.
- (e) Because of the struggle against sin and the desire to be holy, we know of the Holy Spirit's help. Romans 8:13-14; I Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 8:5-9.
- (f) If we have the fruits of the Spirit in our lives, we know the Spirit is with us. Galatians 5:22-23.

My friends, let us not think that the Holy Spirit is just some strange feeling or emotion. Let the Bible be your guide and you can see the great blessing God wants to give you through the Holy Spirit. Let us close our brief study with two questions:

1. What does it mean to be "filled with the Holy Spirit"? This

phrase is found often in the Bible; sometimes it means a miraculous presence of the Spirit; sometimes it does not mean that. Please read carefully these passages—Exodus 31:3; 35:31; Luke 1:41, 67; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9; Ephesians 5:18. Especially notice Luke 1:17 in comparison to John 10:41. John the Baptist was full of the Holy Spirit from his birth (Luke 1:17), but he never performed any miracles (John 10:41). Therefore, to be filled with the Spirit, does not always mean a miraculous event. To be filled with the Spirit is to be under God's control (Romans 8:5), to trust in God rather than ourselves. Ephesians 5:18-21 teaches if we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be filled with praise, thanksgiving and humility.

2. What about miracles like speaking in tongues, healings, etc.? Obviously, what people call miracles today are not what we read about in the Bible. The purpose of miracles was to confirm the message of the Gospel—show that the word was from God. Please read I Corinthians 12:8-10; Mark 16:15-18; Hebrews 2:3-4; John 20:30-31. The apostles played the major part in the performance of miracles—Acts 2:42-43; 4:33; 5:12; 6:5-6; 8:5ff. From Acts 8:14-18 we know the apostles had to lay hands on someone before that person could perform any miracle. Since there are no more apostles, there can be no more miracles as in the days of the New Testament. I Corinthians 13:8-10 and Ephesians 4: 8-15 tell us that the time of miracles was only until the church reached a stage of maturity. Please read these passages. Since God has finished revealing His word the Bible (II Peter 1:3; Jude 3), there is no more need for confirmation by miracles.

Our faith must not rest upon what we see (II Corinthians 5:7), for we walk by faith. If we spend our time looking for signs and wonders, we can be deceived by Satan (Matthew 24:24; II Thessalonians 2:9-12). Jesus discouraged the seeking of signs (Mark 8:11-12). We are to seek God's truth which is in His word.

Does this mean if there are no more miracles that the Holy Spirit is no longer working in the world? Not at all. The Holy Spirit is very active and working and you can be a part of His work. There is no need to fear the evil powers of darkness, God's power is with us through the Holy Spirit. You can be just a Christian and follow God's way. We began this short study by asking—Is the Holy Spirit for me? Yes. The Holy Spirit is for all who will accept God's way. We hope you will come to Christ in faith. Please let us help you in your study.

Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

BATSELL BARRETT BAXTER

There are two ways of looking at God's commandments. We have in mind the Ten Commandments, the moral and ethical principles contained in the Sermon on the Mount, and other teachings of both Old and New Testaments. (1) There are those who think of God's commandments as rigid restrictions of an arbitrary tyrant. They think of God as determined to place restrictions on man that will destroy his happiness. (2) Others of us feel that God's commandments are protective guidance from a loving Father. God knows the dangers and pitfalls of life and warns us against them, out of his deep concern for our good.

There is a delightful story about three little preschool girls. The first, with a prissy toss of her head, said, "My mother lets me cross the street." The second little girl, not to be outdone, replied, "That's nothing. My mother lets me play anywhere in the neighborhood that I want to play." Then, somewhat quietly, the third little girl said, "My mother doesn't let me cross the street. My mother doesn't let me play anywhere I want to play. My mother loves me." So it is with God. God places restrictions upon us, but only because he loves us.

RULES FOR THE HOME

The home is the basic unit of society. When it breaks down, society suffers. For that reason homes need to be solid and permanent. When marriages break down children inevitably suffer. Couples suffer also, for a divorce leaves scars and feelings of failure, not to mention loneliness.

Because the home is so important, God has placed strong protective laws around the home. For example, Genesis 2:23-24 sets forth the original plan of God: one man for one woman for life, with one exception. Commandment number seven of the ten further safeguards the home with the restriction, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." (Exodus 20:14.) One caught in the act of adultery was to be stoned, so serious was the matter considered.

In the New Testament Christ made the requirement even stronger, "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28.) Christ goes on to say that if an

eye causes one to stumble, it should be plucked out, or if the hand causes one to stumble, it should be cut off. These are rather strong figures of speech. Jesus then concludes, "I say unto you, that every one that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery." (Matthew 5:32.) Revelation 21:8 lists fornicators, or adulterers, among the most depraved sinners: abominable, murderers, sorcerers, idolaters and liars, all of whom are to be lost eternally. The severity of punishment for fornication and adultery is right and proper, when one understands the importance of protecting the home and family.

When a person looks at one individual detached case, whether it be stealing, lying, divorce and remarriage, or some other sin, it may appear that the behavior is justified. Especially might this seem true if the one who did the stealing was in serious want, or if the lying was under great pressure, or if the divorce and remarriage grew out of a very unhappy association. However, such a conclusion would be shortsighted, failing to take in the total picture. God who sees everything in proper perspective knows that such permissiveness would destroy the foundations of society and ultimately result in the breakdown of all relationships.

CHRIST'S TEACHING

In Matthew 19:3-9 Christ was very clear in His teaching concerning marriage and divorce. By calling attention to God's original plan, as stated in Genesis 2, He sets the stage for reinstating God's original purpose. The passage admits that because of stubbornness of the people's hearts Moses allowed them divorce, but then Jesus says, "From the beginning it hath not been so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery." (Matthew 19:8-9.) Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, said the same thing in Romans 7:2-3, "For the woman that hath a husband is bound by law to the husband while he liveth; but if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of the husband. So then if, while the husband liveth, she be joined to another man, she shall be called an adulteress ..."

BAPTISM ERASES EVERYTHING (?)

Some highly respected brethren today are arguing that whatever a person has done before becoming a Christian, as it relates to marriage, divorce and remarriage, is not significant.

Everything is made right by conversion. In effect, this is saying that God's marriage laws apply only to Christians. This is not true, however. God's moral and ethical laws, such as stealing, lying, killing and marrying, are universal laws. They apply to all people everywhere. Wrong relationships must be repented of and terminated when one becomes a Christian. One who has stolen must try to repay what he has stolen. One who has lied must try to replace the lie with truth. One in a wrong marriage relationship can hardly continue in that wrong relationship.

WHAT ABOUT 1 CORINTHIANS 7?

Many point to 1 Corinthians 7 and quote certain verses to support their thesis that a wrong marriage relationship can continue after conversion. Such phrases as "... as God hath called each, so let him walk," "Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called," and "Brethren, let each man, wherein he was called, therein abide with God." (1 Corinthians 7:17, 20, 24). To apply these statements so as to condone unscriptural marriage is to take them out of their proper context.

Christianity was so overwhelming in its changes that some of the early Christians at Corinth thought that they should step out of all their previous relationships: marriage, employment, and everything else. Paul taught them that this was not necessary nor right. He urged them to stay as they were in every *honorable situation*, using three examples. First, they were to remain in honorable marriage, if the non-Christian partner was willing. Second, he used circumcision, advising Jews and Gentiles to remain as they were. Finally, he urged bondservants to remain bondservants.

There was no thought of justifying a wrong marriage situation. The early Christians should remain in the situation in which they found themselves at the time of conversion, *if that situation was morally right and ethical*. To interpret 1 Corinthians 7 in such a way as to allow the continuance of an unscriptural marriage would be to contradict Christ in Matthew 19:9. The better interpretation of this passage is to understand it as *endorsing the continuance of all wholesome and honorable relationships* in which the early Christians found themselves prior to their conversion.

In our permissive age, let us hold fast to the sacredness of marriage and the home. May we also remember that a right relationship with God is more important than anything else. It takes precedence over our own feelings and preferences. Nothing in our

relationship to government, to our employers, or in our marriages must be allowed to disrupt our right relationship with God.

A Most Unforgettable Character

BYRON NICHOLS

Every miracle is great, but to give sight to one born blind just seems to be extra 'special. John chapter 9 tells of Jesus having done that very thing.

It is important that we take note in verse 1 that the man was blind from birth. Jesus took pity on the man and anointed his eyes with clay and told him to go wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam. At the end of verse 7 John very matter of factly states that the man did as he was instructed, *"and he came back seeing"*. How remarkable that such a miracle could be described with no fanfare whatsoever!

Verse 10 records the beginning of what may well have been the most questions that had ever been asked of this man who up to now was just "that blind beggar", but who now has become the centre of attention. The people asked how he had been made able to see, and he told them exactly what had taken place.

It appears that the people soon reached a point where they felt that the situation was too much for them, so they took the man to the Pharisees (verse 13). The Pharisees proceeded to ask him the same question, *"How did you receive your sight?"* The man's answer was simple and to the point — *"He put clay on my eyes, and I washed; and I see"* (verse 15).

Some of the Pharisees said that Jesus could not possibly be from God, having violated the Sabbath by doing this act on the Sabbath. However, other Pharisees were honest enough to question how such a miracle could be performed by a sinner. Thus, there was a significant division among them (verses 14 and 16).

The next move by the Jews was to quiz the parents of the man, doubting that he had actually been born blind (verse 18ff). This poor man had been unable to see all of his life, but we now find that he had another major problem—his parents loved their standing in the synagogue much more than they loved him (verse 22). Refusing to get involved, they chose instead to just throw their own son to the Pharisee wolves—*"He is of age; ask him"* (verses 21 and 23). The Jews then confronted the man, trying to intimidate

him, telling him to glorify God by denying that this so-called sinful man, Jesus, performed this miracle (verse 24), but he was relentless.

Verse 25 is indeed a jewel! This fellow may not have had much education, but he displayed an ability to determine what is really important—*"One thing I know; that though I was blind, now I see."*

This marks the beginning of a progression of boldness and courage, even aggressiveness, as the man grows more and more weary of their refusal to face the facts and admit that Jesus actually gave him his sight. He is astounded by their admission that they don't even know where Jesus is from, yet He performed this great miracle (verses 29 and 30)!

This incredible man even proceeds to preach a short sermon to the Jewish leaders, thought by many to be the Sanhedrin itself (verses 30-33). His lack of fear is amazing, and he shows himself to be a man of some understanding of God. The man's disregard for the leaders and his audacity in speaking derisively to them certainly did not go unnoticed by those proud leaders. Their immediate reaction to his little sermon was to cast him out (verse 34).

Up to this point this man had lived his entire life in complete physical darkness, but he didn't have much trouble at all in coming to see Jesus for who He really was, that is, *"the light of the world"* (verse 5).

This was an honest man. He was willing to change his thinking when confronted with additional information. Notice the progression of his faith. In verse 11 he simply refers to Jesus as *"A man called Jesus"*. In verse 17 he called Jesus *"a prophet"*. After Jesus explained that He was the Son of God, verse 38 says that the man told Jesus that he believed that Jesus really was the Son of God, and then he worshipped Him. This was indeed a man of character.

SOME LESSONS FOR US

(1) This man born blind came to see things that others were blinded to. The more he was exposed to Jesus, the more impressed he was. The more he saw and heard from Jesus, the more convinced he was of the greatness, the uniqueness, and the divinity of Jesus. (2) This man gave us a most impressive example of courage to stand for right and against wrong. (3) He further displayed an unusual willingness to embrace truth.

I, for one, am deeply grateful for this most unforgettable Bible character!