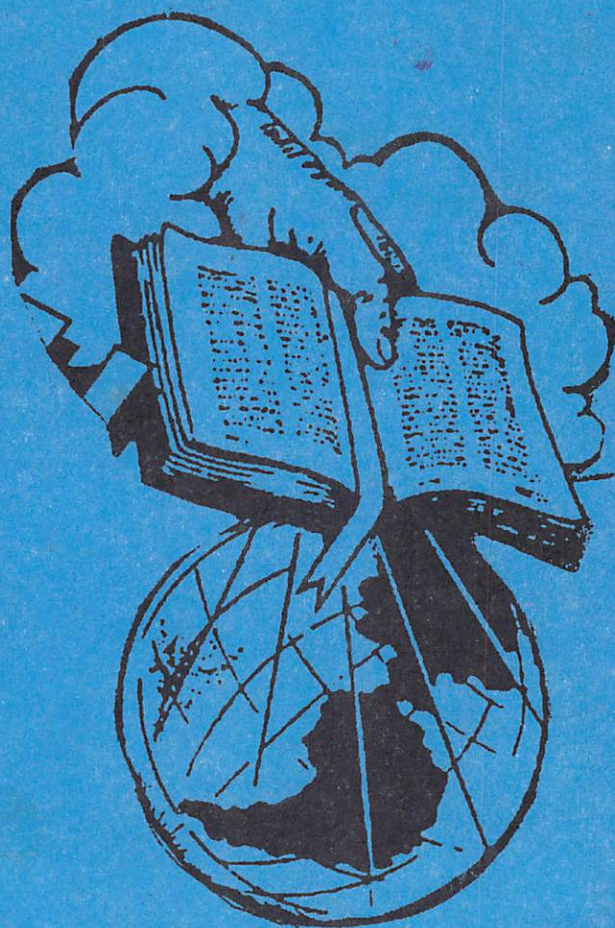


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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

Christ's church is the Kingdom of God

Biblically speaking the church of Christ is the kingdom of God on earth. Let's see what the Bible says. About six hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ when Daniel, with other Jews, was in Babylonian captivity, the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed a remarkable dream. When he woke up he was highly disturbed, he tried to recall the dream but he could not. As the king was very eager to know the dream and its interpretation, he summoned all his magicians, astrologers and sorcerers. But none of them were able to recall the dream or give its interpretation. Because of God's favour Daniel had become much more better in all learning and wisdom than all the Babylonian wise men who advised the king. So when the king was told of Daniel's knowledge, he called Daniel in and asked him if he was able to recall the king's dream and tell its interpretation. Daniel replied in affirmative and said that the secret which the wise men could not reveal and interpret was in fact known to him, because God has revealed to him. Then Daniel began to state before the king that the king had dreamed of a great image, of excellent brightness. The image's head was of fine gold, and its breast and arms were of silver, the belly and thighs were of brass, the legs were of iron and the feet were part of iron and part of clay. Then a stone was cut out, without hand, and struck the image on its feet, breaking it into pieces, and it became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors, and the wind carried them away, so that no trace of them

were found. Then the stone that had destroyed the image became a mountain and filled all the earth. After thus stating the dream, Daniel then began to tell the interpretation of the dream to the king. He told the king that God has given him the kingdom, power, strength, and glory. He, Nebuchadnezzar, therefore, was the head of gold (Daniel 2:38). Accordingly, the various parts of the image represented succeeding kingdoms of the world. Daniel said that after Nebuchadnezzar there would arise a second kingdom, which would be like silver, inferior to Babylon; then a third kingdom which would be like brass, and then a fourth kingdom as strong as iron. The feet and the toes of the image relating to the fourth kingdom showed that it would be a divided kingdom, a kingdom partly strong and partly broken. (Daniel 2:36-43). Now, in the days of the fourth kingdom, Daniel told the king, "the God of heaven will set up **a kingdom which shall never be destroyed**; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, **and it shall stand forever.**" (Daniel 2:44). Further, Daniel said to the king, "Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze and the clay, the silver and the gold—the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain," said Daniel to king Nebuchadnezzar, "and its interpretation is sure." (Daniel 2:45).

After hearing Daniel's revelation of the dream and its true interpretation, the king was so deeply moved that he fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and proclaimed, "Truly your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings and a revealer of secrets, since you could reveal this secret." (Daniel 2:46-47).

Historically speaking, after the Babylonian empire came the Medo-Persian empire, and then the Greek empire of Alexander the great, and then came the Roman kingdom, just as Daniel had stated in his interpretation of the king's dream.

In the New Testament of the Bible we read that Christ was born in the Roman empire during the reign of Augustus Caesar. And just before Christ began to teach, there came John the Baptist, who began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Math.3:2). Afterward, came Christ, preaching the gospel of the kingdom and saying, "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand." (Mark 1:14, 15). A

little later, when Christ's disciples wanted Him to teach them how should they pray, Christ told them, pray in this manner, "Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come..." (Matt. 6:9, 10). In Mark 9:1 we read that Christ told His disciples who were with Him at that time, "Assuredly I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power." When Nicodemus came to Christ, praising Him, Christ told him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (John 3:3, 5).

As we turn to the sixteenth chapter of the book of Matthew, we read Christ was in conversation with His disciples, and after Peter had confessed Christ to be the Son of God, Christ had made the following statement: "And I also say to you, that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and gates of hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matt. 16:18, 19). Reader, please note, that Christ promised to build His church, and in the same statement He stated that He would give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter, evidently, Christ was speaking of the same institution. Later, when Christ, before His death, was produced before Pilate for trial and when He was asked if He was the King of the Jews, Christ told Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36).

After His death, burial and resurrection from the dead when Christ met with the disciples, Luke, in the last chapter of his book, records: "Then He said to them, Thus it is written and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and the remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things. Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high." (Luke 24:46-49). We remember too, reading from Mark 9:1 we had observed that Christ had not only said that the kingdom would come before those disciples, who were with Him at that time, would die, but that it would come with power. Again, in Acts chapter 1 we read of the last meeting of Christ with His disciples before His ascension into

heaven and there, "He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."" (Acts 1:4-8).

So what have we noticed so far? We have observed that the kingdom of Christ or God was to come during the life-time of those disciples who were with Him at that time; and that the kingdom would come with power; and the power would come when the Holy Spirit has come upon these disciples or the apostles. Now as we turn to Acts chapter two we see how these promises were fulfilled. Here we read that the apostles of Christ were, as He had commanded them, in Jerusalem. On the day of Pentecost, which was an important Jewish festival, Jews from every other nation had come together to celebrate the day of Pentecost, when suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled the whole house where the disciples were sitting. The Holy Spirit came on the apostles and they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Holy Spirit they began to preach the gospel of Christ in the languages of all those people who had come together from many different nations. As they heard the message of the cross, the record says, "They were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as Lord our God will call." Then those who gladly received his words were baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." (Acts 2:37-41). At the close of this chapter we read about those who were baptised that they were, "praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47). This is how the kingdom of God or the church

of Christ was established in the city of Jerusalem more than two thousand years ago.

Since the church of Christ and kingdom of God are the same one thing, the apostle Paul therefore wrote in his epistle to the Colossians "Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His **blood**, the forgiveness of sins." (Col. 1:12-14). The saved are conveyed to the kingdom or are added to the church by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47). The Lord has not changed His policy or His plan. Even today those who believe in Him and repent of their sins and are baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, He adds them to His church or conveys them into His kingdom. One day when Christ will come back, He will receive His church or His kingdom and will present it to the Father in heaven. (Ephesians 5:27; 1 Corinthians 15:24).

God and His Creation

Genesis 1 and 2

J.C. CHOATE

The Bible begins, "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*" (Genesis 1:1). Neither here, nor anywhere in the Bible, is the attempt made to prove that God exists or that He created all things. This is assumed to be an already accepted fact. Should this be so strange since man is supposed to be an intelligent being with the knowledge that for each thing that exists there had to be some higher power behind it? That Power is God.

Genesis gives an account of how things came into existence and the order in which they were created. In reality, it was not necessary for us to be told details concerning the creation of the earth, or animal life and human life, in order for us to know that there is a God. In fact, there are many things that we do not have to know about the creation to be convinced that it was all the Lord's doing. Read Genesis 1 and 2 for the full story. This is the only true record that we have, telling what really happened.

There are many reasons why one should believe in God. In the first place, nature itself is a testimony to the fact that there is a God. Just look around you. You see that which God brought into existence and that which is perpetuated by the law of nature which God set in order.

Perhaps you will reason that since you cannot see God with the naked eye, you will not believe He exists. You can see His work, though. I cannot see your brain but I believe you have a brain by that which you do. When I look at my watch I can't see its maker but I believe it had one. As surely as things exist, it is that sure that *someone* had to make them, whether you ever see that person or not.

God is the brain and the life behind the entire universe's existence. Look at the beautiful flowers, the heavens, a newborn baby. With so much evidence and testimony, how can you help but believe in an eternal, all-powerful Being? David said, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork*" (Psalm 19:1).

There is a God because the Bible teaches that He is. It tells us that He is Spirit, that He is powerful, that He is all-seeing, all knowing, and that He is from everlasting to everlasting.

God is because that is the only logical conclusion one can reach. To say that there is no God is but to say that an impossible thing happened: that everything came into existence from nothing, without any cause, and without a Creator. That would be as pointing to a house and saying that it was not built but suddenly one day it just appeared, without building materials or a builder; it just happened.

How can one point to evolution as being the answer when all living things have been the same for hundreds and thousands of years? Not long ago I visited the Cairo Museum and saw on display some mummified monkeys, dogs, etc. When they lived 5000 years ago they were just monkeys and dogs, even as there are monkeys and dogs now. According to the theory espoused by many, those monkeys should *all along* be evolving into man, or there should be no such thing as monkeys today since all should have already evolved to a higher plane. Then what about man? Has he reached the most perfected state or is he eventually to evolve into something greater and better? But this is foolishness.

As you can see, the wise thing is to accept the facts of the case and quit relying on theories whose sole purpose is to deny God. David proclaimed that only a fool would say there is no God (Psalm 14:1).

The God of heaven is the same God that James describes as the giver of all blessings (James 1:17). John said that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). So every way you turn there is the Lord, His work, His blessing, and His mercy being bestowed upon men. Truly, He lives.

Message to the Church at Ephesus

Rev. 2:1-7

THOMAS R. DOHLING

During a time of tribulation and impending persecution in the first century, Jesus' message went out to the seven churches situated in Asia Minor [present day western Turkey] by way of consolation, comfort, and warning; to strengthen and encourage them to remain faithful to Him till the very end. The churches were situated in hostile environment among Gentiles. The "seven churches" signify types of churches as a whole to whom the messages of Jesus are addressed.

The message to the church at Ephesus is found in Revelation 2:1-7. Jesus presents himself as the One *"who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands"* (2:1). In Rev 1:20 Jesus reveals that "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands ... are the seven churches." Angels refer to messengers. Jesus is in charge and control of His churches everywhere.

He always knows what each church and individual Christians are thinking, saying, feeling, and doing. So, at the outset of the message Jesus says: "I know." He lets the Christians at Ephesus know that He is aware of their—

- Labour and patience;
- Abhorrence of those who are evil and the deeds of the Nicolaitans (2:1, 6);
- Testing of liars who claimed to be apostles; (2:2) (cf. 1 John 4:1-3);

- Patient perseverance in their Christian calling (2:3);
- Tireless labour for the Lord's name's sake.

From these qualities we may be led to conclude that the church at Ephesus was a model church. However, in spite of their faithful and patient endurance and tireless labour for the Lord, Jesus finds this to say to them: *"Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love"* (2:4). This implies that the church was serving Christ out of a sense of duty rather than out of love for Him. Even though the intent was right, the motive was wrong.

Jesus reminds the church of its plight and exhorts it to repent with the grim warning that if it didn't do His bidding, He would come quickly and remove its lampstand from its place.

Jesus concludes His message to the Ephesians with a promise and reward: *"To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."*

Lesson: As Christians, both our intent and motive should be right. Love for Christ and our fellow human beings should form the basis of our life and service unto the Lord. Then we would truly be following in His footsteps.

I Did Not Write the Bible

ALBERT GARDNER

I know that it does not come as a great surprise to you that I did not write the Bible. In fact, I have never been accused of writing the Bible. I have read parts of the Bible that people resented. I have taught Bible truth that made people angry. I have shown people things in the Bible that they did not believe and that crossed their long-held doctrines. But I have never been accused of writing the Bible.

Since I did not write it, **I am not responsible for what it teaches.** I cannot change its message (Galatians 1:8,9), and I can't endorse those who do change it (2 John 9-11). Because so many varied things are taught by religious leaders, we must weigh every doctrine by the Bible. *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world"* (1 John 4:1). Though I did

not write the Bible, **I cannot ignore it.** Its claims and commands demand a response. The proper approach to Bible study is to understand that the Book of books came from God. *"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when you received the word of God, which ye heard of us, you received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe"* (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

I must study it. Belief that the Bible is from God requires that we study it. Secular knowledge may be helpful in some ways, but a study of the Bible is life changing (2 Timothy 2:15).

I must understand it. There are some difficult parts in God's word, but what to do to be saved and how to live the Christian life are simple enough for all to understand. *"Therefore, do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is"* (Ephesians 5:17).

Philip asked the eunuch, *"Do you understand what you are reading?"* (Acts 8:30). It would be cruel if we could not understand His will, yet be required to believe, obey, and practice it. *"How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)"* (Ephesians 3:3,4).

I must believe it. Often people hear gospel preaching, but they do not believe it. They may have a mistaken idea that they must have a certain kind of special feeling, in order to know that they are saved, not realizing that we are converted through the Word. *"For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe"* (1 Corinthians 1:21).

I must obey it. Belief of the Gospel is essential, but faith alone is not enough. *"Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins"* (John 8:24).

Jesus set the example of obedience which we are to follow. He makes clear that we are to obey. *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven"* (Matthew 7:21).

After one has heard the true Gospel, he can never be the same and must do *something* in response. He will either believe and obey it like 3,000 did (Acts 2:38,41), or he will reject it like Felix (Acts 24:25).

I must teach it. Though I did not write the Bible, I have the responsibility of teaching it to others so they can understand, believe, obey, and be saved by it. Just before Jesus ascended back to His Father, He gave the marching orders to the apostles, and consequently to us, when He said, "*Go preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mark 16:15).

This duty has not been given to angels, but **people** are to teach **people**. When asked if he understood what he was reading, the eunuch said, "*How can I, unless someone guides me?*" (Acts 8:31).

I must defend it. I did not write God's Word, but I must defend it. The attack is not on only one verse, but is against the whole Book. The Bible cannot proclaim and defend itself, but must depend on those who believe it to support it. Error also depends on those who believe it to spread it to others.

False teachers had slipped into the early church, so Jude wrote about our duty in this regard. "*Beloved, while I was very diligent to write you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting-you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 3).

Summary. I did not write the Bible. Those who did were inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 2:15). What they wrote is accurate, complete, and true. It is **God's** Book! Therefore, we have the responsibility to study, understand, believe, obey, teach, and defend it.

How Does God Speak To Us Today?

CHARLES E. BURCH

Did you ever hear anyone say, "Well, God talked to me in a dream", or another say, "I had a vision", or someone declare, "Well, God talked to me while I was driving my car down the highway", or maybe someone vows that God spoke to him and forgave his sins while he laid his hand on the radio or TV? When you hear someone making such claims, you may be sure they are mistaken.

Did you know that God tells us plainly, in His Word, how He speaks to us today? Would you really like to know how God

communicates with man? If we do not know **how** He speaks today, we will not know **when** He speaks.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1,2). In this inspired text, the writer declares that God had spoken. The question is, **how** does He speak to us today?

Yes, there was a time when God spoke to man directly from heaven, and chosen men heard the voice of God. God talked with **Adam** in the Garden of Eden. In the centuries following, He communicated to the faithful fathers, heads of households, who conveyed God's message to their children. Later, He revealed His Word to the **prophets**, who, in turn, spoke to the people. God told **Moses** that the time would come when He would no longer speak through the prophets, but that He (God) would raise up *one* prophet, referring to His Son, Jesus, Who would speak the words which God would place in His mouth. This important prophetic teaching is found in Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

While Christ was on earth He taught the Word of God. Actually, God put the words in His mouth. But, before Christ ascended to His Father in heaven, He chose His apostles. Jesus made them this promise: *"Howbeit when, He the Spirit, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: And He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: For He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you"* (John 16:13,14).

God revealed His Word unto the apostles by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guided the writers of the New Testament as they revealed **in writing** God's message to us. God speaks to us today through His Holy Word. We do not need Him to talk directly to us. Paul declared that God's Word was inspired and **complete**. *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

How do we know that the claims of special, personal messages from God today are spurious? In these ways:

(1) The message or direction given in the "personal" contact always **contradicts the directions given in Scripture**. In

Galatians 1:6-9, Paul warned that the Gospel message had been given, once and for all, and that even if an angel from heaven spoke something different, it should not be believed or followed.

(2) When people today say that they have had a special revelation, they are claiming that **God is showing partiality to them, or that they are on par with the inspired writers of Scripture** in the first century. When their message contradicts Scripture, when they are members of churches not found in Scripture, when they are teaching different "gospels" contrary to the message of the Apostles, when their worship, call to salvation, and doctrine of life conflict with Scripture, none of their "revelation" can have originated with God. They are preaching their own gospel but trying to give it **validity** by claiming to have had a dream, vision, or revelation. All of this is contrary to Scripture.

What we need today is to allow God's Word to speak to us and to obey what it says. Too many are looking for something mystical, unusual, and exciting instead of sitting down with God's Word and hearing what He says there.

The Matter of Church Membership

JOHN THIESEN

Question: "Can I be a follower of Jesus Christ without becoming a member of the church?"

No, this is impossible. The reason is that Christ cannot be separated from His church. It is *"His body, the fullness of Him"* (Ephesians 1:23).

God planned the church from the beginning of the world. He planned that He would save both Jews and Gentiles in **one body**, the church (Ephesians 1:23).

The Bible says that the Lord adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). The church is made up of those who have come to believe in Christ, repented of their sins, and who have been immersed for the remission (forgiveness) of their sins (Acts 2:38,41,47).

Although it is true that *Christ* does the saving, *not the church*, still **we can't be saved outside of the church**, because it is the saved! When the Lord saves us, we automatically become members of His body, His church.

What They Did to Be Saved

CLEM THURMAN

"And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place . . . And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you, even as ye yourselves know; him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay: whom God raised up . . . Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins . . . They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls . . . And the Lord added the church daily such as were being saved" (Acts 2:1,21-24,36-38,41,47).

Radio preachers and televangelists, doting on sensationalism and publicity, and offering a "cut rate" religion, have sought to lower the standard of God with regard to the terms of salvation by catering to various and sundry schemes and plans. A jargon of confusing doctrines has resulted, and has kept many honest, sincere seekers of truth from accepting *"the simplicity that is in Christ"* (2 Cor. 11:3). Thus it becomes more difficult to call folk back to the primitive ground of the inspired teaching of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16). But that message delivered on Pentecost (see text above) is still the message that is needed today. Thousands were saved that day. What were the agents and factors that saved them? Let us look.

ONLY CHRIST CAN SAVE

When Mary was found to be *"with child,"* the angel announced to Joseph, her husband, *"And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall*

save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). This is the whole reason He left heaven and came to earth, *"For the Son of man came to seek and save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). This mission of the Lord was so clear and unmistakable that Paul wrote, *"Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"* (1 Tim. 1:15).

There is none other who can save. As Peter announced on Pentecost, *"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Acts 2:21). A few days after Pentecost, the apostle told the Jewish council about Jesus: *"And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). That is too clear to be misunderstood. Only Jesus Christ can save, *"There is salvation in none other."* As Jesus had said earlier, *"He that rejecteth me, rejecteth him that sent me"* (Luke 10:16). Only when these Jews on Pentecost put their trust in Him as *"Lord and Christ"* did they begin the path that leads to salvation from sin.

THEY HEARD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL

Notice Acts 2:14, *"Peter stood up with the other eleven"* and began to preach. It wasn't just Peter, but all of them were preaching the word of the Lord Jesus Christ. That word dealt with the death of Jesus and His resurrection (v. 22-24), with the prophecies that led the way to Him (v. 29-35) and with the witness of the apostles (v. 32). Notice that Peter stated, *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words ..."* That word is still *"The power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth"* (Rom. 1:16).

The word the apostles preached was not their own. They were guided by the Holy Spirit. Jesus had told them, *"But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you . . . He that heareth you, heareth me"* (John 14:26; Luke 10:16). On this day of Pentecost, *"They spake as the Spirit gave them utterance"* (Acts 2:4). When Cornelius was told by angel to send for Peter, he was told, *"Who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved"* (Acts 11:14). That word is still necessary for salvation, and people must hear it.

THEY BELIEVED THE WORD AND TRUSTED JESUS

The Bible is clear: *"By grace have you been saved through faith . . . Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with*

God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 2:8; Rom 5:1). Jesus had made it plain during His ministry, *"For if you believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins"* (John 8:24). The apostles did, also: *"Know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified"* (Acts 2:36). Their response shows the faith produced by *"hearing the word"* (Rom. 10:17)—*"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart,"* and asked, *"What shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37).

True faith always produces a response to the Lord, as it did on Pentecost. In fact, *"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead in itself. Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee my faith . . . Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"* (James 2:17-18,24). Until faith produces the proper response of obedience to the will of God, it can never bring salvation. Notice that the people on Pentecost asked, *"What shall we do?"* There was something for them to do, and they knew it. And when they were told what to do, they did it. That is the way faith works.

THEY REPENTED OF THEIR SINS

God's reply to the people was simple, *"Repent ye, and be baptized"* (Acts 2:38). The word *"repent"* means "change of mind, change of will." Until one is willing to repent (turn from his sinful lifestyle), he cannot be saved. Jesus said it plainly, *"Except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish"* (Luke 13:3). After His resurrection, sending the apostles to preach to the world. Jesus told the apostles, *"Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:46-47).

The Lord never intended that those who are saved should go back to their old way of life. As Paul wrote, *"The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again"* (2 Cor. 5:14-15). And again, *"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above . . . But now do ye also put them all*

away: anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking out of your mouth: lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:1-10). Repentance makes us live a different kind of life.

THEY WERE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Those on Pentecost were told, *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ"* (Acts 2:38). Those who received the word, did that (v. 41). Because they believed the Lord, they did what He said—simple! Remember, Jesus had said, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned"* (Mark 16:16). Because those people believed Jesus, they accepted His promise. Later, the apostle wrote, *"Baptism doth also now save us"* (1 Pet. 3:21).

Throughout the book of Acts, all those who were converted were baptized. The Samaritans who believed *"were baptized, both men and women"* (Acts 8:12). When the Ethiopian heard the gospel, he asked, *"See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? . . . And he baptized him"* (Acts 8:36-38). When the Lord appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, He told him to go into the city and he would be told what to do; then the Lord sent Ananias to him to say, *"Now, why tarriest thou? arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on his name"* (Acts 22:16).

The apostle Paul wrote later, *"Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism, unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 6:3-4). This fits exactly with what Jesus told Nicodemus, *"Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"* (John 3:5). That new life begins when one is *"raised to walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 6:4). Again, note that we are *"baptized into Christ"* (Rom. 6:3, see also Gal. 3:27), so one is not *"in Christ"* until he is baptized into Him. When one really wants to be right with God, he will seek to be baptized. Just as those did on Pentecost.

THEY WERE ADDED TO THE CHURCH

"They then that received his word were baptized: and there

were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls ... And the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved" (Acts 2:41,47). Many folk disparage the importance of the church, but Jesus doesn't! He promised, "*I will build my church*" (Matt. 16:18). And He did.

We read later that Jesus "*purchased the church*" with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The apostle Paul wrote, "*He is the head of the body, the church*" (Col. 1:18), and, "*There is one body . . . Christ also is head of the church, being himself the Saviour of the body . . . For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church*" (Eph. 4:4; 5:23,31-32). Christ is head of the church, He is the Savior of the church, and He is married to the church. How in the world can anyone contend, then, that the church is not important? In Bible times, everyone who was saved became part of that church—for the Lord added them to it (Acts 2:47). Is it different now?

Not one of those on Pentecost became member of a denomination. Does that seem strange to you? It shouldn't, for denominations were designed by men centuries after that day of Pentecost. Christ never intended that there be any denominations, for He prayed to the Father, "*Neither for these [the apostles] only do I pray, but for them, also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us*" (John 17:20-21). If we strive to do the will of Christ, we will seek that for which He prayed.

But the Lord also commanded that there be no denominations. When the inspired apostle Paul found divisions in the believers in Corinth, he wrote them (as the Lord directed him), "*Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and (that) there be no divisions among you ... is Christ divided?*" (1 Cor. 1:10-13). Denominations were wrong then in Corinth. And they are wrong in our country, and the world, today.

Friend, go back and read our text again. If you would be saved, you must hear, believe, repent and be baptized—just as those people did. If you do that, Jesus will save you.

Glory in the Cross

JOHNNY RAMSEY

"The unsearchable riches of Christ" Eph. 3:8) centers in the events at Calvary. The Captain of our salvation tasted of death for every man (Heb. 2:9), and walks with us in the shadow of death that we might possess abundant life. The composer, Charles H. Gabriel, aptly wrote:

*I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner, condemned, unclean.*

Giving up the riches of heaven to save poor sinners like you and me is the heart and essence of the gospel's glad tidings. We behold the glory of Christianity in the life and teachings of Jesus and in the changed lives of those loyal to His gracious cause. One grand tribute given to the Savior was enunciated by Phillip Brooks. In part it reads: "Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today, he is the center-piece of the column of progress ... I am within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that One Solitary Life!"

For the unspeakable gift of Jesus we should be willing to die to self and to sin. We should be ready to live up to the glory of God, as we rejoice in the Cross of Christ. As the inspired apostle Paul wrote, "*But far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world*" (Gal. 6:14). We should never neglect this great salvation, but rather pursue it with grateful hearts. Should hardship and suffering come our way, we can endure it, knowing that we have fellowship with the suffering of our Redeemer endured for our sakes. William Cowper wrote,

*O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heav'nly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!*

The depths of God's love were clearly seen in the unfathomed gift of His Son, Jesus, who lay down His life for His friends and foes alike. Spared not by the heavenly Father, but delivered up for us all because we were sinners (Rom. 8:32), Jesus Christ became obedient even to the shameful, painful and lonely death upon the cross at Golgotha. What greater love can there be?

The goodness of God leads us to repentance (Rom. 2:4) and should propel us into an obedient and grateful life. But could it be that the apathetic attitude of the followers of Jesus that last night in Gethsemane is still reflected in the indifference many Christians exhibit now? Jesus had little support and comfort from His disciples that night. In agony, Jesus wept alone. The betrayal of Judas and the subsequent denial of Peter are still often manifested in the conduct of those who claim to be His friends. The weakness of Pilate, the mockery of a trial, the taunting of the mob—attitudes such as these had are still prevalent in the shallow nature of modern-religious leaders and the cowardice of many modern disciples of the Lord.

Jesus Christ had our sins placed upon Him. Willingly He became our sin-bearer and endured the painful, humiliating display of the rigged trial and cruel cross. In loneliness, Jesus was projected between heaven and earth so that fountain for cleansing and for sin could be opened on our behalf. An old favorite hymn says:

*In the old rugged cross,
Stained with blood so divine,
A wondrous beauty I see;
For 'twas on that old cross
Jesus suffered and died,
To pardon and sanctify me.*

Since mankind cannot be redeemed with silver and gold, or by vain traditions, or by parental inheritance, our Creator has made it possible through the blood of the cross—for us to cry, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6) and know the cleansing power our souls so desperately crave. Because the Son of God walked victoriously through the dark valley of death, we can have sunshine in our souls today. Let each one of us "*glory in the cross*" of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"BLESSED ASSURANCE"

ROYCE FREDERICK

God does not want us to live in doubt, fear and hopelessness. He wants us to live life with confidence and "blessed assurance."

THE BLESSED ASSURANCE OF CREATION

There is no need to live all of your life wondering: "What caused the earth and the universe?" "Did plant life and animal life begin by accident?" "Am I merely an accidental combination of atoms?" "Am I no more valuable than an animal?" "Do I have a purpose on this earth?"

There was **power** and **purpose** in creation! In the very first chapter of His written message, God tells us about His creative work (Gen. 1). As God spoke, the complex, orderly creation appeared! *"For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them..."* (Ex. 20:11). *"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible"* (Heb. 11:3). *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork"* (Ps. 19:1; see Rom. 1:20).

After making all other things, God made man and woman: *"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...'"* (Gen. 1:26). Humans are the only creatures who are His "offspring," made in His likeness (Acts 17:29; see Heb. 12:9; Zech. 12:1). Throughout the Bible, God shows that we are very valuable to Him. He made us because He wants us to live with Him forever (see 2 Pet. 3:9; Acts 17:26-27; Lk. 19:10; 1 Pet. 1:20).

THE BLESSED ASSURANCE OF INCARNATION

God came to visit us through Jesus. *"In the beginning was the Word [God's Son], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (Jn. 1:1, 14; see 17:5). *"He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest [shown] in these last times for you"* (1 Pet. 1:20).

To assure us that Jesus is truly His Son, God flooded us with evidences. Hundreds of Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled by Jesus. He worked powerful miracles and taught amazing

messages. He lived a sinless life, gave that life for our sins, and arose victorious over death!

God showed us His power, righteousness, wisdom, and love by sending His Son. Jesus said, *"...He who has seen Me has seen the Father..."* (Jn. 14:9).

THE BLESSED ASSURANCE OF REVELATION

God has not left us in the dark. By means of the Bible, He has revealed His will to us.

For hundreds of years, God spoke through the prophets of the Old Testament (see 1 Pet. 1:10-12; 2 Pet. 1:21). Finally, God finished His revelation through Jesus. *"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son..."* (Heb. 1:1-2).

Jesus personally taught for more than three years. Then, near the end of His ministry, He told His disciples, *"I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. However, when the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth..."* (Jn. 16:12-13). Jesus kept that promise. He sent the Holy Spirit, who finished revealing all of His will through His disciples in the first century A.D. In his last letter, the apostle Peter was able to say, *"...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue"* (2 Pet. 1:3).

To confirm that the New Testament message was truly from God, He worked miracles through the messengers of Jesus. *"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen"* (Mk. 16:20; see Heb. 2:3-4). *"For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance..."* (1 Thess. 1:5). God's word gives us *"...the full assurance of understanding..."* (Col. 2:2).

Today, we do not need to guess about God's will. The Bible contains *"...the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3).

THE BLESSED ASSURANCE OF REDEMPTION

The beautiful song, "Blessed Assurance," written by Fanny J. Crosby and Mrs. J.F. Knapp, exclaims:

"Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood."

We do not need to guess about our salvation. We do not need to live in fear of eternal condemnation. *"There is therefore now **no condemnation** to those who are **in Christ Jesus**, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"* (Rom. 8:1). When we have entered into Christ in baptism, we have His full assurance that we have been saved from our sins! *"But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness"* (Rom. 6:17-18). *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"* (Rom. 6:3).

Baptism is the moment when we place our trust in His saving grace. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast"* (Eph. 2:8-9; see Col. 2:12). *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 6:23).

THE BLESSED ASSURANCE OF RESURRECTION

We need to be very sure that the person whom we follow has the power to take us to heaven.

We do not need to wonder whether Jesus is able to do that. He showed His power over death by raising several people to life. Later, He died, arose from death, and returned to heaven. His resurrection is our assurance that we will be raised and judged by Him. God *"...has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead"* (Acts 17:31).

The Lord does not want us to live in doubt about His return and our resurrection. *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we*

[Christians] who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:16-18). Also, in that same hour, all unrighteous people will be raised and judged (Jn. 5:28-29; Matt. 25:31-46).

THE BLESSED ASSURANCE OF FAITHFULNESS

The Lord does not want us to have confidence in our own good deeds and "self-righteousness" (Lk. 18:9-14). But He does want us to have faith—complete confidence—in **Him**. That does not only mean trusting His power to save us. It also means "walking by faith"—**doing** His will (2 Cor. 5:7; Matt. 7:21).

Loving our brothers and sisters is part of being faithful. "*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, **we have confidence toward God.** And whatever we ask we receive from Him, {because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight}*" (1 Jn. 3:18-22).

The above verses tell us that we obtain confidence by obeying God's commandments **AND** by doing "***those things that are pleasing in His sight***" (1 Jn. 3:22). **Some** of God's will is written as **commandments**. But **much** of His written will is **not given in the form of commandments**. The Bible often teaches us in **other ways**, such as through parables, questions, warnings, rebukes, and stories about the godly actions of people (see Matt. 25:14-30; Lk. 17:17-18; Matt. 7:21-23; Gal. 1:6-10; Acts 11:25-26). So, being faithful means following the commands **and** other teachings of the New Testament (also see 1 Jn. 2:5-6).

One example is the organization of the church. The Lord **did not** say, "Do **not** appoint one man over the local church." Does that give us the liberty to appoint one **man** to be the only overseer of the local church? In the New Testament, every time the overseers of a local church are mentioned, there are always two or more (see Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5; Jas. 5:14). So, if we appoint two or more men as overseers of the local

church, we can have **full** assurance that we are following God's will. But if we appoint only one man as the overseer, we have departed from God's way, and we are doing our own will.

Another example is the Lord's Supper. The Lord **did not** say, "Do **not** use an apple with the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper." Does that give us the liberty to add an apple to the Lord's Supper? If we use only unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, we have full assurance that we are following the Lord's will, because that is what He used (Matt. 26:26-28). However, if we add an apple, we have departed from doing His will, and we are doing our own.

One more example is our singing. The Lord **did not** say, "Do **not** play musical instruments with your singing." Does that give us the liberty to add the playing of musical instruments? Many verses in the Old Testament show that God allowed instrumental music in worship during the Law of Moses (2 Chron. 29:25; Ps. 149). But He did not give us even one verse in the New Testament to tell us that He allows it today. So, if we only sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs from our hearts, we have full assurance that we are following His will (see Eph. 5:18-21; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15). But if we add instrumental music, we have departed from His will to do what pleases us.

We should not make our spiritual choices because "**We like** this or that." Instead, we should determine to follow His will because **We like** doing what we **know** pleases Him (see Gal. 1:10). "*Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God...For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end*" (Heb. 3:12, 14; see 3:6; 6:11-12; 10:19-25). We must follow God's word and have "*no confidence*" in human feelings or teachings (see Phil. 3:3; Prov. 16:25).

You can have "blessed assurance" when you determine to please Him (see 1 Jn. 1:7-10; Phil. 2:13; Rom. 8:31-39). So, "*abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming*" (1 Jn. 2:28).



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