

Monthly

April, 2010

Price: Rs. 2/-

THE BIBLE TEACHER



LET THE TRUTH PREVAIL

1. That there should be only one church today, as it was in the beginning—Church of Christ—Which Christ Himself built, and about which we all can read in the Bible (Matthew 16:18). That congregations of His one church everywhere may be known as churches of Christ, as we read at Romans 16:16. That there should be no denominations or sects in the name of the church. (1 Corinthians 1:10).
2. That there should be only one plan or guideline of salvation, as is revealed and taught in the Bible, followed everywhere. All must be told to believe in Christ, to repent of wrong, to confess Christ the Son of God, and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-38). Those who obey these commands of salvation are saved by the Lord and He Himself adds the saved ones to His church. (Acts 2:47); which is His Spiritual body. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4; 5:22).
3. That all followers of Christ, everywhere, should be known as Christians, after His name alone, as it was in the beginning. (Acts 4:12; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). That all other names which exalt and glorify any other name of a man, or a doctrine, or a day or a movement, etc., must be forgotten.
4. That all man-made creed books must be put aside, with other books written by men, and only the Bible which contains God's inspired message for man must be followed in all spiritual matters. (Matthew 7:21-23; John 12:48).
5. Let us accept the authority of Christ in all religious matters (Matthew 28:18), and strive to abide in the New Testament doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 40

April 2010

No. 12

EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

Miracles have ceased

In the beginning God had created everything by miracles. He spoke and things happened, as He wanted them to be, as we read in the first chapter of the book of Genesis in the Bible. What is a miracle? A miracle is an extra-ordinary happening which is above or beyond the ordinary occurrence of natural laws which govern our physical universe. All plants, vegetations, all kinds of animals, God created big and mature, empowering them to reproduce after their own kinds. The first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve were also created as a result of a miracle. But after their creation God didn't have to continue to create them miraculously, because He had given them the power to reproduce. On the other hand, if God wants to create more of them by miracles, as He did in the beginning, He can very well do that all the time. Because He is all powerful. But why is He not doing that any more? Because there is no purpose and no need.

Likewise, all the miracles, about which we read in the Bible, including those done by Christ and His disciples in the first century, were done for a specific purpose, and when that purpose was accomplished then God took away the power of working miracles.

The Bible itself is the product of miracles, as the inspired men spoke and wrote miraculously to bring to us the Bible. We read, "knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but

holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Peter 1:20, 21). God miraculously used different men at different times to bring into the world His message to whole mankind, through the Bible. But once the Bible was completed God took away the miracle of prophecy. (Galatians 1:6-9; 1 John 1:1, 6; 2 John 9). God is not speaking to man today by any other means. Nothing should be added or changed or taken away from the Bible. (Revelation 22:18, 19).

When Christ came into this world, He was born by the power of God (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 2). His birth was as a result of a miracle, as He was born of a virgin. When Christ grew up and began His ministry, He worked many powerful miracles, about which we read in the New Testament. John, one of His disciples, wrote in one place "And truly Jesus did many other signs **in the presence of His disciples**, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:30,31). Notice, Christ did many signs in the presence of His disciples. Why? First, so that those disciples, who were to take His message of salvation to the whole world, after His death burial and resurrection and ascension into heaven, may believe in Him that He is the Son of God. And, secondly, so that they may write about them in the Bible for us that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing in Him we may have spiritual and eternal life in Him. This was the sole purpose of miracles.

Reader should bear in mind that those disciples who had been with Him for more than three years and had been watching all those powerful and wonderful signs, not all of them really and truly believed in Christ that He was God from heaven, as Christ wanted them to believe in Him. So much so that He had to appeal to them at one instance, "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves." (John 14:11). His mighty works were His credentials. After His resurrection from the dead, some of them were so sceptical that they didn't want to believe that it was possible for Him to be alive again. So we read, that after His resurrection. "When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted." (Matthew 28:17). At Mark 16:14, it says, "Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of

heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen."

To these disciples, who were ridden with scepticism and unbelief, Christ spoke these last words, as He was getting ready to leave the earth to go back to heaven: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. So that after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into the heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen." (Mark 16:15-20).

According to this, the disciples were to go and preach the gospel everywhere, and those who will believe and will be baptized will be saved. And from amongst them the unbelieving disciples, to whom Christ was speaking at that occasion those who will really believe in Christ they will be able to miraculously cast out demons, will speak in languages they had not learned, will take up snakes and will drink poisonous deadly things and will not be hurt by them. Too, they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover. After this when Christ went back to heaven, those disciples went out and preached as they were instructed, the Lord was working with them through the signs and miracles which they were performing along with their preaching.

The disciples of Christ, in the beginning were told to go and preach to the whole world. They didn't have the Bible, God's written word, as we have it today, to preach from, as it was being written at that time. How were people going to believe in what they were preaching? The Lord empowered them to perform signs and miracles, so that when people hear their message accompanying with miraculous signs they will believe. For this purpose the apostles in the beginning were given power to work miracles. And the signs which they performed were genuine miracles indeed. Also, we are told in the Scriptures that "through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done among the people." (Acts 5:12). The apostles were promised the baptism of the Holy

Spirit. (John 14:25,26; John 16:12, 13; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 1:5-8). The apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit, Who enabled them to work signs and miracles. (Acts 2:1-4)

Now, are there miracles, as they are mentioned in the New Testament, happening today? No. First of all, there is no purpose for miracles today. Today we have the word of God in its written form from which we can learn God's will. Faith comes from hearing God's word. (Romans 10:17; John 20:30,31). Second, there are no apostles with us today to whom Christ had promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Who had empowered them to work miracles. The Bible teaches that miracles of the first century A.D. occupied a special place in God's redemption plan, and they have not been extended throughout the Christian dispensation. All miracles were temporary, but the Bible is permanent. When the Bible was completely written miracles were withdrawn, as they had served their purpose by then. Observe what the apostle Paul had said about signs and miracles when he wrote to Christians at Corinth, he said, "Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away." (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Therefore, when "that which is perfect," or the complete law of liberty, as James wrote at James 1:25, came to man from God, that is, God's complete revelation to man, the Bible, by the end of the first century, A.D., then God took away the powers to work miracles, as Paul said, further in 1 Cor. 13:11, 12, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." What was the apostle saying? He was telling them that Miracles were like toys in the hands of children, or like the scaffolding for a building that is under construction. Older and mature people no longer need toys, and neither does the building which is complete need a scaffolding. The church, when it was a baby, in the beginning, when it did not have the full revelation of God as we have it today in the Bible, needed the help of signs and miracles.

Those who contend for modern miracles today simply have not

studied the issue sufficiently to identify the nature and the purpose of a genuine miracle. Millions around the world are being deceived today by many such men who are projecting themselves as "gospel preachers," as they claim that they can heal people super naturally in the name of Christ, by laying their hands on them. But is there one who can give new hands or new legs, or new eyes, or new ears? What about speaking in new languages that one has not learned? If you are a Tamil speaking man can you go and speak in Bengali to those who live in Bengal, or Oriya to those who live in Orissa or in other languages of the people wherever they live? The apostles, who were baptized with the Holy Spirit, the Bible says that when they preached, "everyone heard them speak in his own language." (Read Acts 2:6). They didn't need a translator, as preachers who claim to have the power to work miracles need today. What about handling a Cobra or a poisonous snake? Or drinking poison to prove that one can perform miracles today? Where is the modern instance of restoration of a severed limb? How about walking on water? Where is the corpses that was four days in the grave and walked out? How about taking five loaves and two fishes in hand and feeding five thousand or more with that? Didn't Christ and His disciples, to whom He had given the power to work miracles, do those things? Surely, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, but He doesn't need to continue to work miracles to prove that. The Bible proves that by what is written about Him in it.

Hearing The Gospel

J.C. CHOATE

What one hears can determine what one believes. If he hears error then it is possible that he will believe error, especially if he does not search the Scriptures and put forth an effort to learn the truth. If he hears the truth, then he is most likely to believe the truth. This is why it is so important to hear the pure word of God. Paul says, "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17). Please notice that the emphasis is upon hearing, but not just hearing anything, rather hearing the word of God, that genuine true faith might be the result.

The question arises as to how one may be sure that his faith is founded upon the word of God. So many things are being taught in the name of God and so many things are being said to have come from the pages of the Bible. Many of these are contradictory. Therefore, there is division and confusion. So how may one know for sure as to whether he has heard the truth or not? The best way is to go to the Bible itself. No person should ever accept any man's preaching or teaching as final, no matter how much love and respect he has for him. Our souls are too precious and eternity is too long for us to base our faith and our salvation on the words of mere human beings. Rather, we should go to the source of the truth and that is the Bible itself. We should read and study it and search the scriptures to be sure that we are on the right path. If we are not, then we should correct it.

Christ said, "*You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life, and these are they which testify of Me*" (John 5:39). Then we read of the people of Berea, after hearing Paul preach: "*These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*" (Acts 17:11). Now just think about it! Here were people studying the word of God even after Paul had preached to them to see if he was preaching the truth. If the people in Paul's day could search the Scriptures after his preaching, then how much the more should we do the same today after hearing modern day preachers. Wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone did this? If this were the case, there would hardly be any religious error and there would be fewer false teachers for sure.

Paul even exhorted a young preacher by the name of Timothy to study God's word. Hear him: "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15). Why is it that so many people are ignorant of God's word? Because they have not studied the Scriptures. Why is it that so many people are deceived in religion? Again, it is because they have not studied to know the difference between truth and error. Why is it that so many people are confused about the law of Moses and the law of Christ? It is the same problem — they have not studied and therefore have not rightly divided the word of truth. My friends, if the Apostle Paul was exhorting a preacher of the gospel to study

God's word, don't you think there is a need for you and me to do the same?

John exhorted the Christians of his day, *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God: because many false prophets have gone out into the world"* (1 John 4:1). Here the Apostle is pleading with God's people not to believe every spirit or every preacher for the simple reason that many false prophets or preachers have gone out into the world." But how may we know whether one is true or false? He suggests that we try them. How can we do that? By comparing their preaching and teaching with the word of God itself. If we would do this, we could easily tell who is preaching the truth and who is not.

When Philip joined the eunuch in his chariot he found him reading from the Scriptures and the record says, *"Then Philip opened his mouth and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him"* (Acts 8:35). As a result, genuine faith was produced in his heart and he was obedient to the Lord. In Acts 8:5 we read Philip going down to Samaria and he preached Christ unto the people. Later when Peter and John visited, the record says that they preached the word of the Lord and then returned to Jerusalem (Acts 8:25). Please observe that the emphasis of their preaching was upon Christ and the word of God.

There are two ways that we may hear the gospel. First of all, as has already been indicated, we can study the word of God for ourselves. In so doing, we have the opportunity of hearing Christ, Paul, Peter, and the other men of God, through the inspired pages of God's word. But even in these modern times, not all people can read and this means that they must depend on hearing the word of God taught by word of mouth. In this case there are two parties involved: the preacher and the hearer. For this reason there is a great responsibility placed on the individual who chooses to preach God's word. He must be true to the book. If he handles God's word carelessly or deceitfully and misleads someone then he will have to suffer the consequences. Paul warns his Roman brethren to mark them that cause divisions and with good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Romans 16:17,18). Then the hearer has the responsibility of making certain that what he hears is the truth before he accepts it. In the case of those who are able to read God's word they may simply search

the Scriptures for themselves. But in the case of those who are unable to read, the problem becomes more serious. What can they do? To be sure that they are getting the truth, they can always have someone to read to them directly from God's word itself. Certainly there is a way to learn the truth if one really wants to know it.

It is so important that one and all hear the gospel that the Lord commanded the apostles to go into all the world and preach (Mark 16:15). Again, the record says that they should go and teach all nations (Matthew 28:19). Why? So that mankind might hear the gospel, the truth, the word of God, believe it, obey it, and therefore be saved. Paul wrote Timothy, *"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you"* (1 Timothy 4:16). How could one be saved by hearing? As already stressed, faith comes by hearing, and hearing leads to faith and obedience, and obedience brings salvation. That is exactly what Paul is talking about.

If you will read all of the cases of conversion in the book of Acts you will observe that there was a gospel preacher on hand every time. What was his job? That of preaching the gospel to those who needed to be saved. Therefore, when they heard the gospel, believed it, obeyed it, then they were saved. But what if they had not had the opportunity to hear the word of God? Then they could not have been saved because faith comes only by hearing the word of God, and without faith one cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6).

God said concerning His Son Jesus at the transfiguration, *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"* (Matthew 17:5). Again, we read how that God speaks today through His Son, Jesus (Hebrews 1:1,2). Finally, we read that Christ is the Word (John 1:1,2). It is important therefore that we hear Christ and that we obey Him who came to save us. Forget about what man has said. His opinions, ideas, teachings, etc., are worthless in comparison to what our Lord has said. It is Christ that we are to hear. It is Christ that we are to believe. It is Christ that we are to obey.

Finally, James wrote; *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (James 1:22). While it is so important that we hear the pure word of God, it is also possible to stop there and be lost. The truth cannot save us unless we obey

it. That is why we are exhorted to be doers of the word and not to be hearers only. We would do well to remember this.

The Perfect Pattern

MILES PEEPLE

Concerning Jesus Christ the apostle Peter said, "*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps...*" (1 Peter 2:21). The Lord Jesus Christ has left us an example which we are to imitate. A perfect pattern which we are to follow. We can more accurately understand what Peter was getting at when we examine more closely the word *example*.

The word *example* (hupogrammos) was a word that was used in connection with the primary education of young Greek boys. The school boy's writing tablet was a shallow box filled with soft wax and his writing instrument was a stylus. He used the sharp end of his stylus to write with, and then he used the flat end to smooth over the wax so that he could write again. When the school boy was learning to write, the school master would write some words at the top of his writing tablet. The words the school master wrote at the top constituted the pattern (hupogrammos) which the school boy was to follow. Therefore the word *example* in 1 Peter 2:21 denotes a pattern which is to be followed. The Lord Jesus Christ is our perfect pattern. Our lives are to be a replica, a copy of His. Peter said we "should follow His steps."

When we examine the context of this passage, we learn that the specific conduct the inspired apostle mentioned was the Lord Jesus' behavior when He was treated unjustly. Peter noted that, when our Lord was the victim of abusive and insulting language, He never once retaliated with abusive or rude language toward others. When our Lord was severely persecuted, even to being crucified on the old rugged cross, He never once threatened to get even. He endured all such treatment with patience (steadfast perseverance) and He committed His care into the hands of His heavenly Father. The Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, is the perfect pattern of patiently suffering when one is unfairly and unjustly treated.

Can we generalize from this specific behavior? Can we conclude that the Lord Jesus is our perfect pattern in all things? Yes, we can surely draw that conclusion. In 1 Peter 2:22, the apostle Peter stated that Jesus never sinned, not the first time. Although He was tempted in all points like we are, He never was guilty of sin (Hebrews 4:15). No, not once! Jesus lived a perfect (sinless) life and we are to follow Him (Luke 9:23; John 10:27). Time and again, the writers of the New Testament use Jesus as our example to follow. He is our perfect pattern, our sinless model.

For example, Jesus is a pattern of compassion (Matthew 9:36; Mark 1:41; a pattern of perfect obedience to God (John 4:34; 6:38; 8:29); a pattern of faithful worship (Luke 4:16; John 2:13); a pattern of humble service (John 13:2-17); and a pattern of evangelism (Luke 19:10). In these areas, as well as many other areas, the Lord Jesus Christ is our perfect pattern. He is our *hupogrammos*.

The New Testament gives us a record of the Lord Jesus' perfect pattern. And based upon this perfect pattern, it is appropriate to ask the following question: What would Jesus do? In the specific situations we face day by day, we are confronted with what we should say and what we should do. Speaking generally, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Lord Jesus would always and in all situations keep faithfully the word of God. He would always do those things which are divinely required, and He would never do any of those things which are divinely forbidden. Yes, Jesus is our perfect pattern! Are you following His example?

Old Testament Illustrations of New Testament Baptism

DAVID BRAGG

When Peter first answered the question, "What shall we do?", he did not respond, "Repent, or be baptized," but instead he told that audience, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:37-38 NKJV). There is a significant difference, especially once the eternal context is included, between "or" and "and."

Paul asked a similar question on the Damascus road: "Lord, what do You want me to do?" At this request Paul was instructed, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do" (Acts 9:6). Upon following these instructions, what was Paul told that he must do? Paul was baptized as a result of Ananias' visit (v. 18).

As students progress through the book of Acts they will find Paul's own explanation of that crucial meeting at Judas' home on "the street called Straight" (Acts 9:11). Paul says that Ananias told him to "Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins" (22:16). Had Paul chosen to repent instead of being baptized, his sins would not have been washed away because no divinely authorized promise of forgiven sins is attached to repentance alone. Those who advocate such an approach and thereby promise that simple repentance and perhaps prayer is all that will be required for a sinner to become a child of God will not be available either to represent or deliver the ones they have misled as they come face to face with Christ in judgment (Revelation 20:11-12).

Although repentance and prayer are a sufficient response for the forgiveness of sins for those already baptized (Acts 8:13, 22), only baptism is linked with the forgiveness of sins for those first coming to Christ for salvation. So Peter could later write, "There is also an antitype which now saves us - baptism" (1 Peter 3:21a). Unlike those who promise their students that simple repentance and prayer are sufficient obedience for one to receive salvation from all their past sins, the One who offers salvation to those who are baptized in His name will be present to represent His disciples as they stand before the final judgment bar (1 John 2:1).

Many other familiar passages highlight the importance of Bible baptism. Through baptism one gains membership, being divinely added to the body of Christ (Acts 2:47). Baptism is the only door through which one may enter into Christ (John 14:6; Galatians 3:27). Only in baptism does one personally and intimately re-enact the death, burial and resurrection Christ experienced to meet God's demands for man's salvation (Romans 6:1-4). In physically experiencing this symbolic death, burial and resurrection, our sins, "our old men" enslaved to sin, die as we are born again to live a new life in Christ, free from sin's bondage (vv. 4-5; cf. John 3:5).

These are just a sampling of the many New Testament

passages that teach the crucial role of Bible baptism. But it is also important to realize that the inspired writers of the New Testament opened the entire scope of Scripture to the subject of baptism, using the Old Testament to illustrate the importance of New Testament baptism.

Noah and the Ark

To show baptism's vital role in his reader's salvation, Peter turns to the familiar account of Noah, the flood and the ark (1 Peter 3:20-22; cf. Genesis 6-8). Just as the ark offered salvation for those, willing to place their trust in the message of Christ's Spirit, functioning through the preaching of Noah (and the other Old Testament prophets, 1 Peter 1:10-11), Peter asserts that baptism offers salvation to all who place their trust in the message of Christ's Spirit and obey the inspired directive of baptism.

Unfortunately for the general population who refused to turn to God, as they were at the time Peter wrote confined to an unseen spiritual prison awaiting their final sentence on the Day of Judgment (1 Peter 3:20). These all perished in the flood, as opposed to Noah's family whose lives were "saved by water" as it lifted and carried the ark to safety. For Peter the ark becomes an anti-type or illustration of the vital function baptism serves. Those in the ark were physically delivered from death. Those submitting to Bible baptism are spiritually delivered from sin as the act of being immersed re-enacts the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Peter emphasized that the water itself does not possess the power to remove one's sin; rather it is an agent necessary for the believer's compliance with God's demands. Their faith rests in God's promise that as Christ was raised from the dead, so will all who are baptized into Christ for the remission of their sins.

Moses and the Red Sea

Paul, writing to the Corinthian church that struggled with a multitude of internal problems, illustrated baptism's role in uniting the believing individual with the universal body of God's faithful by pointing to Moses' account of Israel's crossing the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:1-5; cf. Exodus 14). This illustration also appears to stress the proper form baptism takes, a burial or immersion. As the Israelites were buried when they passed beneath a cloudy cover and between the two great walls of the parted Red Sea

("under the cloud" and "through the sea," 1 Corinthians 10:1b), the repentant believer is immersed - completely surrounded - in water as he or she obeys Christ in baptism. Through baptism the new believer is not only united with Christ, but Christ also adds that one to His body (12:13), the church, in union with all other believers (v. 18).

One of the greatest expressions of unity occurs when the church gathers each Sunday to observe the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7). Paul argues that the generation of Israelites Moses led out of Egyptian bondage also experienced a baptism and regularly partook of their own special religious feast (1 Corinthians 10:3-4). In Jesus' death on the cross and fulfillment of every Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament (Luke 24:44), He united faithful, obedient believers from across the ages.

Yet, there is more to salvation than fulfilling the command to be baptized; the believer must obey the Lord's commands relating to the church and live a faithful, pure life. The generation coming out of Egypt experienced a very special, personal relationship with God but when tested in the wilderness with various trials they did not remain faithful.

Paul obviously did not hold the popular human doctrine that those saved couldn't subsequently become lost (Galatians 5:1-4). Realizing the need to remain faithful, Paul cited the experience of Israel in the wilderness as an example to his readers for their need to remain faithful and pure every day. He thought his readers needed to consider Israel's plight and enlist their defeat as motivation (1 Corinthians 10:6-10). Having learned from Israel's misfortune, the Christian will be careful to "take heed lest he fall" (v. 12b).

Naaman the Leper

A third Old Testament example seems appropriate to mention in light of the church's modern situation. After His rejection by the people of Nazareth, Jesus blended the story of Naaman with the account of the widow in Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8ff) to illustrate the danger of the oft-repeated tendency experienced by those closest to a prophet to reject both the prophet and his message (Luke 4:27; cf. 2 Kings 5). Even Naaman initially resisted the prophet's command to dip seven times in the Jordan River to attain freedom from his physical ailment of leprosy. While admittedly not in a context where baptism is discussed, this

example is pertinent because of Naaman's eventual recognition of the need to take God at His Word through His servant Elisha.

Reminiscent of another leader Jesus had encountered in Cana, a certain nobleman whose son was sick in Capernaum and who firmly believed that Jesus possessed the authority and power to heal without being physically present (John 4:46-55), Naaman recognized the blessings attached to respecting divine authority versus the danger of rejecting God's specific commands.

Those who seek to detract from the Lord's command, "He who believes and is baptized" (Mark 16:16), must also soon realize the danger of going against God and His Word, both for themselves and the many, trusting souls who are influenced by their teaching (1 Timothy 4:16).

Lessons From the Past

DEWEY LACKEY

A serious study of the nation of Israel, beginning with the book of Exodus and continuing through the writings of the prophets, will reveal important facts for consideration today in the Lord's church. Israel was the type of the New Testament church in many ways.

The descendants of Jacob were in bondage in Egypt and had been in that bondage for 430 years. God sent them a deliverer in the person of Moses and, as Jeremiah stated on several occasions, delivered them with a strong hand and a mighty arm.

Of great importance is the fact that upon delivering the Israelites from bondage into a state of freedom, God provided for them a detailed set of instructions of what they were to do and how they were to live (see Leviticus and Deuteronomy) so they could enjoy an intimate relationship with God. This was to be a relationship based on a love for God and obedience to His instructions.

God's Instruction for the Israelites

God's provision for the Israelites in the code of conduct contained in the Mosaic Law was not a novel thing. From the beginning of time with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, He always provided sufficient instruction for those with whom He

dealt. God might not have told each of these people what they wanted to know, but He always told them what they needed to know.

Almost from the beginning of the Israelites' deliverance from bondage in Egypt, they began to offer resistance to God and to question His strength and His instruction. The people frequently challenged Moses, and by so doing they questioned God. They made foreign objects of worship while Moses met with God on the mountain. They complained, rose up to play in pagan practices, and continually sought personal gratification in their ways.

When Joshua and Caleb and the 10 other spies surveyed the lands and peoples that God promised to give them, 10 of the spies persuaded the people to question the ability of God to deliver on the promise that He had made (Numbers 13-14). They did this by reducing God's ability to fulfill His promise to their own human capabilities. Because of their lack of faith and what that lack of faith caused them to do, the children of Israel were forced by God to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Throughout the generations, the children of Israel stiffened their necks in rebellion and opposed God by failing to do what He had instructed them to do and by doing those things which He specifically instructed them not to do.

The ultimate act of rebellion is recorded in 1 Samuel 8:5b, "Now make us a king, to judge us like all the nations" (NKJV). God's response to Samuel is found in verse 7: "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."

In the ensuing generations, the Israelites seemed to walk as close to the edge of apostasy as they could without falling into the abyss. They incorporated the worship of the pagan gods, even to the extent that they brought these pagan gods into the temple of God. The ultimate insult to God came when they sacrificed their own children in the fire as an offering to Molech.

During all of the generations of the Israelites, we do not read in any of the Old Testament Scriptures where the children of Israel came before God and said that they no longer wanted to be called Israelites. We do not read anywhere that they requested that His beneficent love be withdrawn from them. We do not read anywhere that the children of Israel made a statement whereby

they rejected God as their God.

However, by their decisions and actions, they rejected God and all that He had to offer them. God had made it perfectly clear from the outset that He would not tolerate any other gods before Him and that all that He had promised them as a nation was conditional. Obedience to His detailed instructions would be the determining factor in how He viewed their allegiance to Him.

The record of the Israelites' compliance to God's will is very clear. They continually rebelled against God with few exceptions, as in the days of Josiah. The children of Israel became an apostate people while wearing God's name.

God's Instruction for the Church

So, what does all of this have to do with God's church today, the church that is the antitype of Israel? Everything. God has given the church specific instruction on who we are to be, what we are to be, and how we are to be. He has told us through the New Testament scriptures what He desires and expects us to be.

In many ways we serve as the mirror by which the deeds of rebellion in Israel are seen. Seemingly, the Lord's church also wants to walk as close to the edge of apostasy as possible without falling into the abyss. Too often we find ourselves questioning the validity of God's written instruction.

Instead of being the city set upon the hill (Matthew 5:14), revealing God and His will through our teachings and practices, we choose to attempt to embellish God's instructions by incorporating practices from the denominational world. Too frequently and in too many places, we are trying to be all things to all people. We add contemporary worship services, praise teams, Saturday worship with the Lord's Supper, musical instruments, and minimize if not deny the efficacy of baptism. Supposedly, these changes are taking place because they will make worshiping God more appealing to the masses.

Was Christ crucified because His message was of such a nature that it appealed to the masses? Were the apostles put to death because they tried to be all things to all people? Christ promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth, revealing what Christ had been given from the Father (John 16:13-16). Did Christ know what He was talking about? Did the Holy Spirit fail in His mission to deliver the truth to the disciples through the writings of the New Testament? If Christ is who He

professes to be and whom we believe Him to be, the answer to both questions must be yes! Christ did know what He was talking about, and the Holy Spirit completed His mission.

The changes we are seeing take place in some congregations of the Lord's church today are really not the problem but symptoms of a much greater problem. The problem is this: God is no longer sovereign for some people. When God's written Word is no longer sovereign, then He who gave it is no longer sovereign. And when God and His Word are no longer sovereign to us, we have become apostate.

To attempt to minimize or explain away passages of Scripture, such as those that pertain to women's role in the church by suggesting that these passages were written in a male-biased way or that they were written to be applicable only to the generation in which they were written, is nothing short of an indictment against the Holy Spirit of God. Second Timothy 3:16a says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

Was the God we worship not capable of providing us with written instruction that would stand for time immemorial? When we consider the Mosaic Law, we find that it was in effect from the time of Moses until the establishment of the church. It did not require any updates or revision during the hundreds of years that it was in effect. As we would say in the common vernacular, God got it right the first time. God also got it right the first time with the New Testament Scriptures. Otherwise, He is not omniscient, and if He is not omniscient, then He is not the God He professes to be.

It would appear that the "perfect law of liberty" mentioned in James 1:25 has been misconstrued by some to be the "law of license" to do as we choose. When we read statements such as, "After careful consideration and extensive study, the elders have come to the decision that..." when instituting many of the changes in the Lord's church, we realize that the statement should have read, "After extensive massaging of the Scriptures, we believe that we have gotten them pliable enough to justify doing what we had already decided to do."

Worshiping God acceptably is not about how we feel when we leave the worship service, although we are to be edified. Worshiping God acceptably means that the service is designed to praise and adore Him. It is not about equal rights or what might

appeal to the masses. It is about doing what God has instructed in the way He instructed, without seeing how close we can come to the abyss.

Our Father in heaven has always been fully capable of saying what He means and has done so. What we need to realize is that He means what He said.

Can We Understand It Alike?

CLEM THURMAN

Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers (John 17:20-21). He commanded, *"That ye all speak the same thing, that there be no divisions among you"* (1 Cor. 1:10). He told the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them *"into all the truth"* (John 16:13). He then defined *"truth"* by praying to the Father, *"Sanctify them with the truth, thy word is truth"* (John 17:17).

Yet, invariably, when we plead for unity in Christ, we get letters that say, "Well, we can't all understand the Bible alike." Many folk seem to believe that such an answer justifies the hundreds of denominations, with their various forms of worship and different teachings as to how one is saved. But the assertion is not proof, and the implications of it are staggering.

To say that we cannot understand the Bible alike implies that truth is capable of meaning different things to different people. It further implies that God did not intend for us to understand it alike, or that He gave us a message which He knew would confuse us! I am just not ready to accept any of those conclusions. I believe God gave us a message which we can *"read and understand"* (Eph. 3:4). After all, we serve a God who loves us: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16). That Son also *"loveth us, and washed us from our sins by his blood"* (Rev. 1:5). God's love assures us that His message is a message of love that is given to inform, not confuse.

The apostle Paul wrote, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation"* (Rom. 1:16). That message of salvation is to be preached to all men everywhere, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that*

believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). As Jesus explained to the apostles, who were thus commissioned, *"He that heareth you, heareth me. He that rejecteth you, rejecteth me"* (Luke 10:16). The apostles preached that gospel, as Jesus told them (Mark 16:20). And they committed it to writing for us today, *"All scripture is inspired of God... Ye received from us the word of the message, even the word of God, ye accepted it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the word of God"* (1 Thes. 2:13). I firmly believe that we can understand that message.

God Offers Salvation Through Truth

Jesus referred to His message, and its power, when He said, *"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). To deliver that truth, and explain it, was His reason for coming to this earth. When Pilate asked Him, *"Art thou a king, then?"* Jesus replied, *"To this end was I born, and for this cause came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth"* (John 18:37). Pilate then asked, *"What is truth?"* with the implication that man couldn't really know the truth. Many folk are in the company of Pilate today!

Only the truth can make us free (John 8:32), and the word of God is truth (John 17:17). The apostle Peter wrote, *"Ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth"* (1 Pet. 1:22). Obeying something other than the truth, the word of God, will not make us free. Only His truth can do that. Thus, if "truth is relative," then salvation is uncertain at best, non-existent at worst. But Jesus came to reveal the truth and to bring *"salvation unto all men"* (Titus 2:11). Did He fail? I don't believe so.

We Must Have Knowledge of the Truth

The Lord never promised that the truth would free all men. He said, *"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32). It isn't just the truth, but our knowing the truth, that makes us free. The Lord put the emphasis on knowledge of the truth. At the first public preaching of the gospel after the death of Christ, Peter put the emphasis on knowing the truth, *"Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified"* (Acts 2:36). The apostle Paul told the Jews, *"The God of our fathers hath*

appointed thee to know his will" (Acts 22:14). Paul wrote of his own desire and purpose, "To know him, and the power of his resurrection" (Phil. 3:10). Then, near the close of his life on earth, Paul wrote, "I know him whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12). To know Jesus Christ, to know His word, to know the truth - this was and is our purpose.

We are exhorted, *"Study to show thyself approved unto God"* (2 Tim. 2:15). While some contend that the Bible is confusing and we really cannot understand it, the apostle Paul wrote, *"Whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit"* (Eph. 3:4-5). That says it plainly. We **CAN** understand what God caused to be written. The apostle further said that God's blessings are for *"them which believe and know the truth"* (1 Tim. 4:3). But why tell us to learn, unless we **CAN** learn. Why tell us to know the truth, unless we **CAN** know it? Peter writes, *"His divine power hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue"* (2 Pet. 1:3).

Commanded to "Understand It Alike"

While some contend it is impossible for people with diverse backgrounds and education to "see it alike," the Bible shows it is required! *"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; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment"* (1 Cor. 1:10). Now, friend, is that possible? It was commanded to us; does God command what is impossible? Notice that wording again: *"All speak the same thing."* How is that possible? Peter answers, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God"* (1 Pet. 4:11). If all will study the truth (God's word), learn the truth and speak the truth, then all will speak the same thing. And that requires that we "understand it alike."

The Lord also said, in the passage above, *"That there be no divisions among you."* Again, some say that is impossible. But did the Lord command an impossibility? He still commands it. Truth teaches that, in following Jesus, there is unity, not division. He does not divide His people, He brings them together. His prayer shows that: *"That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art*

in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me" (John 17:21). Our Lord prayed that we would all be one, He commanded that *"there be no divisions among you"* and that we all speak *"the same thing."*

One more point in that passage from 1 Cor. 1:10. The Lord says, *"Be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* When all are guided by the same truth, they will be united in mind and judgment. For instance, how many Lords are there? If we turn and read, *"Jesus is Lord"* (Rom. 10:9) and *"There is one Lord"* (Eph. 4:5), we will be of one mind and one judgment. The truth, the word of God, will not provide various (and contradictory) answers. How many Gods are there? *"There is one God, and Father of all"* (Eph. 4:6). When we all accept the same authority (the word of God,) and when we understand the truth (the word of God), we are all of one mind and one judgment.

But let us try another one. How many faiths are there? The Lord declares, *"One faith"* (Eph. 4:5), and He exhorts us, *"Contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 3). Warnings are given that some would *"fall away from the faith"* (1 Tim. 4:1). If there is *"one faith"* (and the Lord said it), for which all of us are to contend earnestly, then we must all have the same faith. That means, basing our faith on the word of God (Jude 3; Rom. 10:17), we must understand it. And we must *"understand it alike."* Unity would be impossible, otherwise.

Understand Alike, or Misunderstand

Of course, it is obvious that if we understand God's word at all, we understand it alike. If two people disagree on the truth, it is because at least one does not understand it. Let me illustrate. A teacher gives a problem to the students: "What is the product of three and two?" Several answers may be given. One student may say; "Five," because he added the two numbers. Another may answer, "One," because he subtracted. But those who UNDERSTOOD the question would give the only correct answer: "Six." To say that the students "did not understand it alike" is incorrect. The truth is that some did not understand it at all! They misunderstood it. The exact same principle is true with understanding the Bible. There may be many things we don't understand, because the Bible doesn't reveal them. But what the word of God does reveal must be understood alike by all of us, or someone misunderstands.

Friend, God gave us the truth, His word (John 17:17; 1 Thes. 2:13). He tells us to study and learn that we may know the truth (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Tim. 4:3). The Lord demands that we *"speak the same thing. . . that there be no divisions among you"* (1 Cor. 1:10). We must be of *"one mind and one judgment"* (1 Cor. 1:10), which requires that we understand the teaching He gave us. And when we all understand the truth of God, we will have the same understanding; we will understand it alike. In fact, if we don't understand it alike, we don't understand it.

Walk with the Lord

JOHNNY RAMSEY

In Isa. 40:31 we have the basis for our study clearly enunciated, *"They that wait for Jehovah shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint."* Inspiration tells us that we must walk with God, regardless of external circumstances. One of the most familiar gospel songs tells us that when we *"Walk with the Lord,"* the glorious light of His counsel supports us. The Bible exhorts us, *"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God"* (Col. 1:10).

One of the Bible's most cherished verses informs us that the Lord walks with us: *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me"* (Psa. 23:4). All kinds of blessings emanate from glory for those who traverse this earthly pilgrimage hand in hand with God. Since *"the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him in truth"* (Psa. 145:18), we must ever walk with God. Johnson Oatman wrote these encouraging words in a hymn of gratitude:

*From the strait and narrow way,
Praise the Lord I must not stray,
For I am walking every day
Hand in hand with Jesus.*

Some of us like to walk at a slow, leisurely pace and never over rocky terrain. But following Jesus sometimes involves challenge and difficulty. Too many are still *"at ease in Zion"* (Amos

6:1). We stay away from dedication and perseverance and follow the easy path, resting often! Enoch *"walked with God"* (Gen. 5:24), and he walked right on into glory (Heb. 11:5). We must follow Christ wherever He goes (Rev. 14:4), if heaven would be our home. This walk involves all that we are and all that we have: our talents (Matt. 25), our money (Mal. 3:8-10), our thoughts (Psa. 19:14), our energy (John 9:4; Phil. 2:12) and our time, which is the basic element in stewardship. Norman Trott was most perceptive in his poem:

*No time for God? What fools we are,
To clutter up our, lives with common things,
And leave without heart's gate,
The Lord of life and Life itself- our God!
And when you meet Him face to face,
Will He - should He - have time for you?*

When we walk always with the Lord, each day has meaning, purpose and depth. But a journey that does not include our Redeemer is fruitless and vain, for Jesus reminds us, *"He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for apart from me ye can do nothing"* (John 15:5). Let us wisely and constantly choose to *"walk in the light, as he is in the light"* (1 John 1:7). Then the darkness of sin and shame will never cast a shadow in our pathway. Let us joyously sing:

*Here I am, O Savior, waiting,
For Thy will alone is mine:
This is all my crown and glory;
I am Thine and only Thine.*

The Lord of light and life beckons for us to follow: *"Hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow his steps"* (1 Pet. 2:21). Let us always follow in His steps, and be very sure we are not going in the opposite direction. When we walk with the Lord, the toils of the road will be as nothing.

*There are days so dark that I seek in vain
For the face of my Friend divine.
But though the darkness hides,
He is there to guide
By the touch of His hand on mine.*

Unprofitable or Unholy?

T. PIERCE BROWN

Jesus said in Matthew 25:30, "*And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" So we might assume that if we are unprofitable, we are unholy and lost. However, it may be well for us to realize that the word "unprofitable" is used six times in the KJV and is translated from four different words. They are all related, but apparently have slightly different meanings.

Even when the same word is used, it may have a slightly different meaning in a different context, as is the case with many English words. For example, in Luke 17:10, we find, "*So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*" Here is pictured a servant who has done all the things commanded, and is therefore presumed to be in a saved relationship with God. Yet, he is called unprofitable. The Greek word here is "achreios (akh-ri'-os)" and apparently means, "without merit". He has done all he is supposed to do, but he did not thereby profit God, or give Him any more than His due.

In Romans 3:12 and Titus 3:9, the same root word is used in a verb form and refers to one whose character is such that he has become useless to God. A similar word is used in Philemon 1:11, where Paul is talking about Onesimus. He was at one time unprofitable to Philemon, for he had run away. It had nothing to do with his being in a lost or sinful state, but he was lost to Philemon.

My primary point in this article is to help us to understand that although we are all unprofitable servants in the sense that we do not give God any "profit" or gain by any or all of the obedient acts we perform, it does not mean that we are therefore lost. We simply do not *deserve* to be saved and cannot claim to be saved on the basis of *having done all we are supposed to do*, which none of us have.



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*Printed and Published by Sunny David for Church of Christ, B-350,
Chitrangan Park, New Delhi and Printed at: Print India, A-38/2, Mayapuri
Phase-I, New Delhi-110064. Editor: Sunny David (Cell: 09810896789).*

Regd. No. 26921/71

Postal Regn. No.

DL(S)-17/3154/2009-2011

Licence to Post without Prepayment

No. U/SE/25/2009-2011

Posted at Lodi Road HO

on 10-11 April 2010

Total No. of pages 24+cover

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