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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

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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night"

That Christ, who came into the world more than 2000 years ago and lived on earth, before His death, burial and resurrection and ascension back into heaven, will come back again one day, is one of the most outstanding and profound teachings of the Bible. To His followers Christ had made this wonderful promise "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me, In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you, And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-3). At the time of His ascension back into heaven, as He was being lifted up, and His disciples were watching Him going up with amazement, the Bible says, two men stood by them in white apparel and said to them: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? The same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11).

People have always wondered about the second coming of Jesus Christ. In the first century A.D. itself the apostle Peter had written in his epistle, "Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the

heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." (2 Peter 3:3-10).

Not only did the apostle with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit assured his readers that the Lord will certainly come one day, but he also told them in the manner He will come. He said, as the thief comes unannounced, so will Christ come suddenly unannounced. This also reminds us of what Christ Himself had said earlier while He was on earth. When His disciples had asked Him when will He come back and what will be the sign of His coming again? He told them, "of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be." (Matt.24:36-39). Another important thing that Peter brought to the attention of the readers of his epistle was that when the Lord Jesus Christ will come back, on that day the heavens or the sky up and whatsoever are in them, sun, moon, stars, and other galaxies or elements all will melt with fervent heat and will pass away, and both earth and whatsoever will be on earth will be burned up. Therefore, those who believe that Christ one day will come back on this earth and will reign on earth for one thousand years should take note of this. Do not believe such a fabricated man-made lie. The truth of the matter is that Bible does not teach that Christ will ever again come back on this earth. And why would He? There would be no purpose. In fact, on the other hand, the Bible teaches

that when Christ will come back, His followers, both living and the ones resurrected from the dead will be changed incorruptly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and will be lifted up or shall be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord up in the air, so that they will always be with the Lord, (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 1 Cor. 15:50-53).

Changing Directions

J.C. CHOATE

Sometimes, in business or any endeavor, it is advisable to assess matters to see how things are going. It may even be better to stop what one is doing and to go in another direction. The wise do this. The foolish never seem to learn.

Spiritually, it is always thrilling when anyone in sin decides to obey the Gospel to be saved. We are equally thankful to God when an erring Christian makes up his mind that he is going to return to the Lord. In both cases the individuals were headed in the wrong direction. They were therefore lost for all eternity. It was only when they changed directions to follow Christ that they were forgiven of their sins.

How do we know there is a Creator, that Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the world? How do we know about the Gospel and what one must do to be saved? How do we know about the Lord's church, who established it, who is its Head, who is the Savior, that there is but one, that it wears the Lord's name, and that when the Lord saves us He adds us to that church? How do we know about worship, what is acceptable and what is unacceptable? How do we know the kind of life the Lord wants us to live, of the hope of heaven, and of the warning of hell?

We know all of these things when we read and study God's Word (2 Timothy 3:16,17). It is so simple and easy to understand, to believe, and to obey, in order that we may be saved and live the Christian life. When we follow that path, we are following Christ, and we are heading in the direction of heaven.

Looking at the current situation with the church, we must all admit that we are living in perilous times. Paul could see in his day that the elements were there for a falling away from the truth

(2 Timothy 3:1). Any number of things could have caused the apostasy. The Christians were living in hard times, with persecution running rampant. The setting was right for elders to join forces—even sincerely trying to better understand the truth—but in the process, to lead groups of brethren away from the Lord's way. History has a tendency to repeat itself again and again. Isn't this same thing happening today? Aren't we in the middle of another apostasy?

Brethren are getting too involved in the world, with emphasis on materialism. Husbands and wives are working long hours, with no time for spiritual matters, no time to study God's Word, no time for the family. We have a weak pulpit in the churches, and no concern for evangelism. Some brethren are deciding to compromise and to join the denominations in their concepts of the church, and worship. These brethren are changing directions. They have decided to follow the lead of the religious world in general, turning away from the biblical truths they once espoused and defended.

But if the Lord's way leads to heaven, where will these people go? If they had been following the Lord, but have now changed directions, where will this new way take them? Not to heaven, you can be sure.

All of this reminds us again of the many statements in the Scriptures, warning that we are not to love the world (1 John 2:15-17), that we are not to be deceived (Galatians 6:7,8; 1 John 3:7,8), that we are to take heed lest we fall (1 Corinthians 10:12), that we must seek first the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 6:33), that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4), that we must do the will of the Lord (Matthew 7:21), and we must be faithful unto death to receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Some may say that this change that is taking place is simply a reaction to brethren who have been too negative about the religious world, that there are too many hypocrites in the church, that we don't have enough love. "Change Advocates" point out that our religious friends love the Lord too, that they may not be right on every point but that neither are we, that the grace of God will cover the sins of sincere people, that surely the Lord will not damn all of the religious world, just because they may not see things as we do on every point.

It is true that none of us can be saved without the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8,9), and that even after we do all the Lord asks of us, it will still require the grace of God to see us through. But, at the same time, we must keep in mind that all of God's grace cannot take us to heaven if we have never been born into His family through scriptural baptism and if we refuse or fail to comply with His will to be what He wants us to be.

Regardless of all of man's logic, the fact still remains that the Lord has a way, He has revealed that way, and we cannot follow His way and man's way at the same time. It was religious people who crucified the Lord, it is religious people today who are causing all of the division, who refuse to obey the Lord as they seek to put their ways before His way.

Now, are these the kind of people we want to join? Do we want to wear their man-made names and titles, worship with them and believe and practice the things they teach that are in opposition to what the Lord has said? If so, we have changed directions, and our new direction is not in the way of the Lord and heaven, but it is taking us away from Him, sending us in the direction of eternal destruction (Proverbs 14:12).

My brothers and sisters in Christ, I can tell you the direction I am going. It is the same direction I have been taking for all of the years of my spiritual life. I believe in the Lord and His way and I am not ashamed of it. Christ died that I might be saved, and that is good news. When I obeyed the Lord, He saved me and added me to His church. Christ loved the church and I love the church, my brothers and sisters in Christ. But how can I love the Lord and His way, how can I follow Christ, how can I be saved, and how can I go to heaven if I refuse to do and be what the Lord wants and if I refuse to do what He says if I have fellowship with man-made churches and if I worship with those who meet in the names of men and do things that are contrary to His will? My brothers and sisters in Christ, I cannot be acceptable to the Lord unless I do what He asks and remain faithful to Him—and neither can you.

You can change directions if you want to, but I intend to stay with Christ and His way. I am saddened to see both old and young, and even whole congregations, deciding to go in another direction, away from the Lord, and to cease to be faithful to Him. But that doesn't mean that I have to join them, and neither do

you have to become a part of their error. Numbers—even large numbers—do not make something right. Wrong is never right. Christ says that the majority are on the broad way, and only a few are on the narrow way (Matthew 7:13,14). That was true in His day, in the day of Paul and the other apostles, and it is true now. The Lord's straight and narrow way is the one and only way that leads to Heaven.

Message to the church at Smyrna *Rev. 2:8-11*

THOMAS R. DOHLING

The message to the church at Smyrna is found in Revelation 2:8-11. To them, Jesus presents himself as the "*First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life*" (2:8). He says this to assure those who were themselves facing death that He was resurrected and so would they be if they always remained faithful to Him even until death.

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

- Their Works;
- Their Tribulation;
- Their Poverty (but you are rich);
- Blasphemy of so-called Jews "who ... are a synagogue of Satan".

Jesus knows that the church at Smyrna is under tremendous pressure and stress from many quarters. Yet they are faithful under tribulation. Jesus says, "*I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)*" (2:9). So, even though they are materially poor, Jesus says that they are rich - spiritually. Spiritual riches are more important to Jesus than material riches. The Jews always dogged the steps of Christians in the first century and discouraged them in every way possible. Jesus refers to them as "a synagogue of Satan" (2:9).

The church at Smyrna is about to be tested by the impending

suffering they are about to face. "The devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested" (2:10). Some of them would be imprisoned and even killed. Jesus tells them not to fear any of the things that they are about to suffer. He says, "*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*" (2:10). This is a promise of eternal life to those who always remain faithful to Christ even though they may have to die for their Lord.

Jesus concludes His message to the church at Smyrna with this promise: "*He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death*" (2:11). Their future is secure forever.

Lesson: As Christians, we will face tribulation, persecution, scorn, and ridicule from scoffers. Our Lord said: "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven*" (Matthew 5:10-12). No matter what we face in life for our Lord's sake, we have our Lord's assurance: "*Do not fear ... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death*" (Rev.2:10, 11). Heaven and eternal life are reserved for faithful overcomers. This is a promise from the ONE Who cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

Spiritual Blessings

ALFRED A. MEEKS

In James 1:17, the scripture says, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*" Every day, we receive many blessings from the Heavenly Father—blessings that make it possible for us to live here upon this earth. The air we breath, the food we eat, the water we drink, our places of abode—all of these are blessings (gifts) that come from the Heavenly Father.

These are called "physical blessings" because they are necessary for us to continue our physical lives. These blessings are generally available to us all, and they should be accepted with thanksgiving (Matt. 6:25-34). Whether a person is good or bad,

God still bestows these blessings upon him. In Matt. 5:45, Jesus said, "...your Father in heaven...makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

But there are other kind of blessings—spiritual blessings—that not all people receive. God's word says, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*" (Eph. 1:3). These spiritual blessings are in **Christ** and are enjoyed only by those who are in Christ, where the spiritual blessings are. Let us look at some of the blessings that the Bible says are **in Christ**.

1. Reconciliation. "*Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear*" (Isa. 59:1-2). When a person sins, the relationship he had with God is severed. God has, however, provided a means whereby that relationship may be reestablished. This is called reconciliation. This means they become friends again. "*...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself...*" (2 Cor. 5:19; see Col. 1:21-22). The reconciliation takes place in **Christ**. In order to become friends with God again, we must also be **in Christ**.

2. Redemption. When a person sins, he falls into the bondage of sin (Rom. 6:16). He is under the penalty of death for his sins (Rom. 6:23). He needs to return to God. This can be done only by being redeemed and forgiven of his sins. The word "redeemed" means "bought again." God is willing to redeem us—buy us back. The purchase price is the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. He paid the death penalty for our sins. "*In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace*" (Eph. 1:7; see Rom. 3:23-24). That redemption is **in Christ**.

3. Salvation. Jesus said, "*for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Lk. 19:10). From this statement, we learn that people are lost, they need to be saved, and Jesus (the Son of Man) came to save them. People are lost because they have sinned: "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23). The result of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), which is eternal separation from God. So we all need to be saved. God has provided a way whereby we can be saved from our sins. The Word says, "*Therefore I endure all things for*

the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is **in Christ Jesus with eternal glory**" (2 Tim. 2:10). Where is salvation? **In Christ Jesus.**

4. A New Creation. The apostle Peter wrote, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). The devil eventually gets us all into sin (Rom. 3:23). But we can be free from him, be rid of all our sins, start all over again, have our slates wiped clean, and **become a new creation.** "Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a **new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Our becoming a new creation is dependent upon our being **in Christ.**

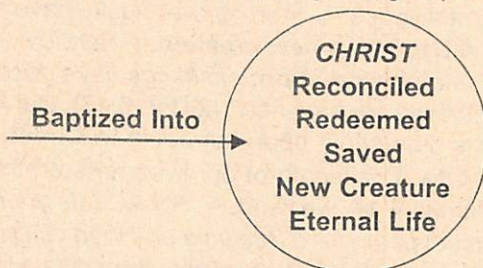
5. Eternal Life. The length of our lives here on the earth is very short. In James 4:14, we read, "...For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. "A person is born, grows up, lives awhile, then dies. He may live 70 or 80 or even 90 or 100 years. But when compared to the amount of time since the beginning, that is still a short life. However, God has promised **eternal life** to those who believe in Jesus (Jn. 3:14-16). Eternal life never ends. It goes on and on and on. How does a person obtain eternal life? By being **in Christ.** "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life **in Christ Jesus our Lord**" (Rom. 6:23).

So, all spiritual blessings are in Christ. Look at the chart below.

<i>Blessing</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Scripture</i>
Reconciliation	In Christ	2 Cor. 5:19
Redemption	In Christ	Eph. 1:7
Salvation	In Christ	2 Tim. 2:10
New Creation	In Christ	2 Cor. 5:17
Eternal Life	In Christ	Rom. 6:23

Suppose we use the following example to illustrate the lesson. A man is walking along a dark road. He has been walking a long way, so he is tired. It is raining, so he is wet. The wind is blowing, so he is cold. He has not eaten for several hours, so he is hungry. But the walker sees a house toward which he is going. He knows that in that house there is light, he can rest, he can get dry and warm, and there is food. He has access to those blessings only by entering the house where they are.

So it is with spiritual blessings. If we want to receive them, we must be where they are. How does a sinner enter into Christ? Paul tells us the answer. *"Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"* (Rom. 6:3). *"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Gal. 3:27). The traveler enters the house through the door. The sinner enters Christ by being baptized into Him.



If you are not in Christ, you do not have all spiritual blessings. You are not in Christ if you have not been baptized into Him. If you have not been baptized into Christ, do you not think it is time?

Friend, I want you to be my brother or sister in God's family. I want to see you in heaven.

Culture Wars

DAVID THURMAN

Culture changes quickly. What once was frowned on is now seen as positive. What once was labeled sin, is now called fun. Whether we speak of values or technology, no one can deny that our culture is rapidly changing.

As our society changes, we should not be surprised that as Christians we find ourselves in conflict with our culture. This war has been going on since the Garden of Eden and will continue until the Lord returns. If we follow the Lord Jesus Christ, we will find ourselves embroiled in an ongoing battle with our culture. The apostle Paul knew this. He experienced the front lines of this war when he first came to a city called Philippi.

Paul had success in this city. He taught and reached some good people and the church was established. While doing much

good, he ran into the culture, and the war was on. Notice what culture said then and still says now.

UP WITH EVIL

"It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave-girl having a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her masters much profit by fortune-telling. Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation. She continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her! And it came out at that very moment. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities" (Acts 16:16-19).

This culture could have cared less about a little slave girl. Was she happy? It didn't matter. Was she healthy? It didn't matter. All that mattered was using her affliction to make money. When the chance to make money was lost, they make trouble for those who helped the girl. Notice, it didn't matter that she was better off after Paul helped her. That the demon was gone and she was sane and normal was immaterial. What mattered was making money.

We should not be surprised that culture still supports evil. The world around us will continue to call evil things good and good things evil. Whether it is sexual behaviors or the value of human life, the world will support evil.

DOWN WITH DO-GOODERS

"But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place before the authorities, and when they had brought them to the chief magistrates, they said, These men are throwing our city into confusion, being Jews, and are proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans. The crowd rose up together against them, and the chief magistrates tore their robes off them and proceeded to order them to be beaten with rods. When they had struck them with many blows, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard them securely; and he, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks"

(Acts 16:19-24).

The girl is saved, helped by these kind strangers. No one thanks Paul and Silas. Instead, they are illegally dragged to a kangaroo court, beaten and imprisoned. In the long run, Paul's actions will help both the girl and the city in which she lives. But all her owners can see is their lost income. All the city can see is the chance to beat up some strangers.

Today we see faith, Christians and the Bible under attack. Believers are limited in what they can say and where they can say it. There are some who are even trying to label the gospel as hate speech (punishable as a crime) because it will not tolerate sin. We should not be surprised. No matter how many lives are changed, how many people are helped, culture will always want to get rid of the do-gooders.

DOWN WITH RIGHTS

Paul and Silas were both Roman citizens (Acts 16:37). As such, they had rights which were supposed to be honored. They could not be tried by local officials, only by a Roman governor. They could not be beaten, or imprisoned or killed without a legal trial. But, all of these rights were ignored. When the community saw these two religious "zealots" doing good, they turned on them with such passion that all their rights were forgotten. The city was so alarmed that even the government officials, who knew better, got in on the illegalities.

Why are we surprised today when culture takes away the rights of believers. You can have a gay parade, but not a religious one. You can have free speech, as long as you don't say something someone else doesn't like. In many places Christians are forbidden by law or company policies from speaking of their faith. In some cases humanitarian aid is rejected unless all religious symbols are removed. Paul and Silas had their rights ignored. Culture still does that today.

UP WITH GUILT

During the night, Paul and Silas pray and sing while in stocks and in jail. An earthquake occurs, freeing everyone, but no one flees. As a result, the jailor of Philippi and his whole family are converted to the Lord. Then, the next morning the local culture discovers what happens when they choose evil over good and take away the rights of good people.

"Now when day came, the chief magistrates sent their policemen, saying, 'Release those men.' And the jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, 'The chief magistrates have sent to release you. Therefore come out now and go in peace. But Paul said to them, 'They have beaten us in public without trial, men who are Romans, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they sending us away secretly? No indeed! But let them come themselves and bring us out. The policemen reported these words to the chief magistrates. They were afraid when they heard that they were Romans, and they came and appealed to them, and when they had brought them out, they kept begging them to leave the city. They went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they saw the brethren, they encouraged them and departed'" (Acts 16:35-40). Roman citizens usually traveled with documentation to prove their status, very similar to a modern passport. If the city officials had followed the law, then Paul and Silas would have proven who and what they were.

A city could lose its status as a Roman colony for violating Roman rights. That meant much higher taxes and the loss of freedoms and legal process. When the magistrates found out Paul and Silas were citizens they were rightfully scared. Not only have they endangered the town's status, they have risked their lives and livelihoods by going along with the angry mob.

This creates a change in their approach. At first they want to get rid of Paul and Silas. Now, they come to them personally, hat in hand, nicely asking if they will leave Philippi. The two men do leave, but at their own pace and at a time of their choosing. From then on, the local officials had to be nice to the church, for fear that Paul and Silas would report them to Rome.

Culture can choose evil over good, but cannot get rid of the awful consequences of evil. So, when culture prevails in attacking good and those doing good, guilt always follows. There will be uncertainty, blame and discontentment. So, while the world upholds evil and attacks those who do good, it digs a deeper and deeper hole that is impossible to climb out of.

BE READY FOR CRITICISM

If the early church fought culture wars, so will we. That means we must be ready for the criticism that will come from the world. As in Philippi, we will be misrepresented. Some will lie about us.

Others will mock us. This should not surprise us. You might think doing good and standing for the Lord will make you a hero. But more likely, it will make you a villain in the eyes of your society.

BE FOCUSED ON CHRIST

"But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). It always amazes me that two men, severely beaten, in stocks in the deepest part of what must have been a dark and damp jail, could be singing and praying so that others are led in worship! But, it tells us how to react to the culture wars. We should stay focused on Christ and what He is, what He wants.

Don't give in to self pity. Don't give in to complaining about your rights. When the world mistreats you, stay focused on the Lord. You can do this by worshiping, as Paul did. You can do this by obeying Him, no matter what the culture says. Just stay focused on Him.

BE LIKE CHRIST

"For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:21-23). Yes, the culture will misuse us. But our task is to be like Jesus who suffered without complaint, who took the punishment and trusted God. So, when the culture attacks you, be like Jesus. Then you, too, can change the world.

Power of Jesus Christ

JOHNNY RAMSEY

Christianity is challenging because it is built upon the deity of the Master. Jesus was not just a man. *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from*

the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3,14).

In reply to the questioning of the Jews, Jesus said, *"Before Abraham was, I am"* (John 8:58). To the unbelieving critics who object to His claims of familiarity with God, He further stated, *"I and the Father are one"* (John 10:30).

Jesus has *"the words of eternal life"* (John 6:68), a name above all names (Phil. 2:9) and a glory unsurpassed (John 14:6). To the King of kings we owe allegiance that propel us into a sojourn that people of the temporal world cannot even fathom (Acts 4:13). Even Napoleon, in his famous speech to General Bertrand, admitted that *"the spirit of Christ overawes me."* As another leader of men wrote, so we believe as well, that our blessed Lord supercedes all rulers, armies, navies and heroes that ever lived in power, splendor and influence.

THE POWER OF EVANGELISM

The impact of Christianity challenges us also because it is promulgated by the great commission and not by some bombastic plan set forth by man. The parting words of the Savior, just prior to His going back to heaven, are so simple, yet profound. He told the apostles, *"Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. . . And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned"* (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15-16).

Jesus sent the disciples into the world with no weapons, no threats: *"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal"* (2 Cor. 10:3). They had only the message of salvation. But that was enough! Nothing could have permeated the Roman Empire so successfully as the humble servants of the crucified Nazarene pressing the claims of the Messiah upon that profligate society. The early saints *"went everywhere preaching the word"* (Acts 8:4), and soon the message of redemption covered the ancient world as the water covers the sea!

THE POWER OF PURE LIFE

Christianity demands our very best because it is demonstrated by purity of life. The fundamental values of the religion of Christ can best be seen in His life: He *"hath been in all*

points tempted like as we are, yet without sin . . . , Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21). It was said of Jesus, "He went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). So do His followers, as they "follow His steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Those same values seen in the life of Jesus are seen in the dedicated demeanor of fervent disciples of the Lord.

Too many times the world receives a faulty impression of the way of the cross because of our failure to portray the ethics of godliness. Oh, what demands the gospel places on the devotees of the Savior! Christianity is great because it brings hope, joy and optimism into the daily walk of the children of the heavenly Father. Trusting in the Creator (Prov. 3:5), instead of earth's vain trinkets, gives us the enrichment that only the hope of heaven can bequeath to us.

Hope includes faith, but it also is assurance. Our hope is centered in the Lord Jesus: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*" (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

Christians never look back to a life of sin, but ever press on to the beautiful home of the soul, so that we, "*Look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God . . . Look for a better country, that is, a heavenly*" (Heb. 11:10,16).

*A careful man I ought to be,
A little fellow follows me;
I do not dare to go astray,
For fear he'll go the selfsame way.*

Let us all rise up to meet the challenge of Christianity. With a firm commitment and a deep resolve, we will one day—by the grace of God—enter into the heavenly city. And when the saints go marching into glory, we'll be able to join in that heavenly chorus.

Mind Warfare

JIM DANIEL

The brother of Jesus writes to us these words of spiritual guidance: "Our desires give birth to sin, when our sin is full grown, our sin gives birth to death" (James 1:15 paraphrased).

Have you ever realized that what you were considering in your mind, the things you desired most in your heart, could result in your separation from God? Separation from God is caused by placing a sin barrier between you and the Lord. Have you ever struggled with desires and thoughts that could endanger your soul? Certainly you have. We have all experienced such temptation.

It is a good thing to recognize our struggle against sin because in those recognitions we build the spiritual muscles to keep our hearts right with the Lord.

Whenever Christians recline for too long in their spiritual comfort zone, when we find no real impetus or catalyst for spiritual growth in our lives, when we become too lazy spiritually to flex our spiritual muscles and grow in the Lord, Satan has full control of our consciences, minds and hearts.

The Bible leads me to believe that the conscience that is seared is owned by Satan. Paul speaks to us about the dangers of having a "conscience seared with a hot iron" (1 Timothy 4:2). Having in us a sinful mind does every bit of our conscience-searing. Whenever Christians willingly tolerate a little sin in self, we have rebuilt the sin wall between self and God, the same sin wall our Savior gave His life to destroy.

The lust and desire produced in our minds lead us into the sin crimes that will stoke the fires of hell with our souls. Satan owns the souls of those whose sin sicknesses have become their sin diseases. Our sin diseases have the power to separate us as sinners from what we need most. We require the healing gifts of God's grace and mercy. We deny ourselves these gifts by our deliberate actions.

We know that Paul was required to struggle in his work as a servant of God. Most Christians will struggle with their doubts, apathy, temptations, fears, envy, pride or lukewarm attitudes

toward the things of the world. Most of these struggles will be inner battles, waged in the mind.

What is the answer to our sin sickness problems? Paul writes, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). Can we really do such a thing? Can we learn to have in us the mind characteristics, the mind traits and the attitudes toward our fellowman that were possessed by the Son of God?

We can! The Scriptures tell us that Jesus possessed these attitudes in His mind about others and about His Father in heaven. In Christ Jesus is found a humble, pure, focused, sensitive, responsive and alive mind. How do we gain these mind traits, these personal attitudes toward others and the Lord?

We do so by allowing Christ to change in us our own mind traits and our attitudes toward others. Our Father in heaven, through the works done at the cross, is at work in every Christian's mind. God is at work in the mind of those who purpose to set their mind on heavenly things, not the things of this world (Colossians 3:1-2).

God is transforming the minds of believers by causing them to be renewed (Romans 12:2). We can also find the infinite peace characteristic of the mind of Christ. We do this by girding up the loins of our minds, by exercising self-control in our minds, by being sober in our thoughts, and by thinking clearly (1 Peter 1:13).

We must do these things cognitively before we act upon our thoughts emotionally. Remember always that becoming a Christian does not assure us that we will be without temptation and sin struggles in this life. Becoming a Christian guarantees us that we will have sin struggles in this life. However, Christianity also promises us that we will have someone to rely upon in our sin struggles and in our mind warfare with temptation. That someone is Jesus.

If your life ever seemed to be occupied with one crisis after another, could it be that Christ occupies too little of your life? Maybe you need to change the spiritual landscape within your own mind. After all, you are truly in a battle to the death. More than anywhere else, your battles for the eternal life of your soul will begin and end in your own mind. We can win these battles. We can do so by controlling our mind's desires as we develop real spiritual muscle.

In Christ, mind control always results in crisis control! Having the mind of Christ will help us control every crisis we experience. We can learn to control our minds through our purposed Bible study, by our consistent participation and attendance in Bible classes, and through our regular worship participation with the saints. We can grow and strengthen our spiritual muscles, our hearts, minds and souls by our faithful fellowship with the Lord and by maintaining an intimate daily relationship with Jesus in our prayers.

It is mind warfare! We should expect our personal battles with the tempter to rage on until our mortal death. Our souls are at stake; Satan wants them. But we can be triumphant. We will triumph only if we will strive to have in us the mind of Christ.

Free Speech, Judgment and Us

BILL BAGENTS

James 3:1-2 reminds us that being high-profile isn't always a blessing. With any position of influence comes increased responsibility. Perhaps we need to be more careful concerning our aspirations. Perhaps we need to be more careful what we ask God to give us. It's so dangerous to have more influence than wisdom, to let pride become permission for speaking before we think (Proverbs 21:23; 29:11).

James 3:3-5 reminds us that our tongues have disproportionate power. Tongues may be little, like a bit or a rudder, but they are highly influential. In their destructive phase, our words are like an out-of-control fire. There's no end to the harm they can do.

Remember Abraham lying about his wife being his sister (Genesis 12:20)? Remember both Sarah and Abraham laughing at God (Genesis 17:18)? Remember the Amalekite who came to David to report the deaths of Jonathan and Saul? David made it clear what killed that man, "Your blood is on your own head, for your own mouth testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed'" (2 Samuel 1:16).

Remember King Herod in Acts 12? It wasn't even his own words that killed him. "And the people kept shouting, 'The voice

of a god and not of a man!' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give glory to God. And he was eaten by worms and died" (vv. 22-23).

James continues to remind us that our tongues are hard to control (3:6-7) because our hearts are hard to keep pure. In Matthew 12:22-30, the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, but Jesus knew their thoughts. He challenged the obvious inconsistency of their charge: a "house divided against itself will not stand" (v. 25).

Jesus speaks vividly of sins of the tongue: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). If it comes out of my mouth, it was first in my heart. Good men speak good things while evil men speak evil things. We will give account for every idle word in the day of judgment. "By your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned" (v. 37). We realize that our words are not the only actions by which we will be judged (2 Corinthians 5:9-10), but Jesus wants to make sure that we know "the things done in the body" include the words that we have spoken.

It is really hard to be consistent with our tongues. On good days, in good settings, with good people, we all tend to say good things. But we're not at our best every day. Every setting isn't good. We're not always around good people. We're not always as good or as vigilant as we should be (cf. James 3:8-12).

We know that people innately value Consistency. We innately oppose inconsistency. This is one way we are made in the image of God. God hates it when we bless Him, and curse our neighbor with the same tongue. It's like a spring that sends out fresh water and bitter. It's like a tree that forgets its proper fruit, bearing both figs and grapes. However, inconsistency abounds in our society. One only needs to watch the news or read the newspaper to figure this out.

Hateful speech is evil speech. Everyone is done a disservice when people claim that words don't mean what they mean. In the main, people do not believe that words have no meaning but the specialized meaning given to them by each unique speaker. At least, people don't believe this consistently. At the core, we believe that we have at least some ability to understand the words of others. At the very least, we believe that others have the ability to understand our words. There is no virtue in Orwellian doublespeak.

As speakers, we are responsible for our words. Our words reflect our hearts. Our words reflect on our friends, our families and our faith. From the perspective of the speaker, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me" is absolutely false. Words have great power for good or for ill.

As hearers, we are responsible for the words of others. We are responsible for how we hear. Words are not all-powerful. We can limit the power of negative words. We can reject false words. We can challenge and oppose words that should not be spoken - words that are untrue, unkind or un-Christian. More than that, because we are Christians, we can do exactly what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:44-45, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."

Why Do Some Insist That Baptism Is a Requirement?

WAYNE JACKSON

Why do some insist that baptism is a requirement for salvation when the Bible simply says, "*Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Acts 2:21)?

The question assumes that calling upon the Lord's name and being baptized are mutually exclusive obligations. They are not.

Consider the following:

(1) It is evident that merely "calling" on the name of the Christ is not sufficient to effect salvation, since Jesus Himself declared: "*Not every one that says unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 7:21). Clearly, therefore, "calling" on Christ involves more than a mere verbal plea.

(2) In Acts 2, the same apostle who promised salvation to all who "*call on the name of the Lord*," also commanded, "*Repent ye, and be immersed each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ to obtain the forgiveness of your sins*" (2:38). Since the "*shall be saved*" of 2:21 is equivalent to the "*forgiveness of sins*" in 2:38, it

necessarily follows that "calling on the name of the Lord" includes both repentance and baptism.

(3) Later testimony from the New Testament makes it apparent that the person who submits to baptism, in order to receive pardon, is calling on the name of the Lord. Note Acts 22:16. Ananias instructed the penitent Saul as follows: "*And now why do you tarry? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.*"

All who wish to enjoy the remission of past sins will call on the name of the Lord by obeying the gospel plan of redemption. In no other way can one receive pardon.

Simon Says

ROYCE FREDRICK

Beginning in Acts 2, we see Simon Peter boldly proclaiming the Gospel. As early as Matthew 16:16, he had confessed to Jesus: "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" But the path to Acts 2 was not always easy. As he walked with the Lord, Peter often made mistakes in things he said to Him.

"LORD, THIS SHALL NOT HAPPEN TO YOU!"

After Peter's confession, Jesus warned His disciples that He would suffer, die, and rise again (Matthew 16:21). Jesus encourages the weak and warns the strong (Matthew 14:27; John 16:33; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Hebrews 3:12-14).

Peter could not believe Jesus would die. "*Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!'*" (Matthew 16:22). Peter confessed who Jesus is, but denied what Jesus said. Peter is not alone. Many confess Jesus as Lord but deny some of His words. Jesus said, "*But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46; see Matthew 7:21-23).

In Genesis 3:4, Satan told Eve, "*You will not surely die.*" Satan often tempts us to take short-cuts around God's will, bypassing any sacrifices which may come between us and the benefits we desire (Matthew 4:8-11). Jesus told Peter, "...*Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not*

mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." Then He told His disciples, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me, For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it"* (Matthew 16:23-25).

Jesus came to give His life as the sacrifice for our sins (Matthew 20:28; John 1:29). After Jesus arose, Peter understood and wrote, *"knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"* (1 Peter 1:18,19).

"LORD...LET US MAKE HERE THREE TABERNACLES..."

Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him onto a high mountain to pray. The disciples fell asleep, but later awoke to see Jesus glorified. Two great men from the past, Moses and Elijah, were talking with Him about His coming death (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36). Peter *"...did not know what to say, for they were greatly afraid"* (Mark 9:6). But He spoke anyway, *"...not knowing what he said"* (Luke 9:33). How often we speak the wrong words when no words were called for at all!

Peter suggested that they honor all three men: *"Lord, it is good for us to be here: if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"* (Matthew 17:4). But God rejected the idea. *"While he was still speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!' And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, 'Arise, and do not be afraid.' When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only"* (Matthew 17:5-8). Peter later wrote about this in 2 Peter 1:16-18.

Peter surely had good intentions, but man's religious ideas are not acceptable to God (Matthew 15:9,13). We must worship and serve Him as He instructs us in the Bible, without changing anything (Jude 3:1; John 9).

Moses and Elijah were prophets of God during the Old Testament times. But God removed the law of Moses when Jesus died on the cross (Colossians 2:14; Galatians 3:24, 25). Now the

New Covenant of Christ is God's will for His people (Hebrews 8:6-9; 9:15-17; John 12:48).

Jesus is our only Lord (Ephesians 4:5). He is our only mediator, not Mary or other departed saints (1 Timothy 2:5). He is our only way to God (John 14:6). We honor God the Father through Christ the Son (John 5:22,23; 23,24).

"YOU SHALL NEVER WASH MY FEET."

After the last supper, Jesus began washing the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17). But Peter said to Him, "*You shall never wash my feet!*" (13:8). Jesus reasoned with him, and Peter finally allowed it.

Pride often prevents us from serving others — and letting others help us. Jesus did not lose His greatness by serving others. In fact, we see His greatness through His service. He did not come to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28; Philippians 2:5-11). Later, Peter wrote, "... *Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*" (1 Peter 5:5).

"...I WILL NOT DENY YOU!"

Jesus warned that His disciples would forsake Him. Peter argued, "... *I will never be made to stumble*" (Matthew 26:33). Jesus then warned that Peter would deny Him three times that night. Peter replied, "*Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!*" (26:35). But he did. He denied Christ exactly as He foretold (Matthew 26:57-75).

Jesus did not abandon Peter, but helped him overcome his sin (Luke 22:31,32; John 21:15-19). After Jesus arose, Peter boldly preached Christ to the people who had murdered Him, endured prison, and met death without once turning from the Lord (Acts 2:4; 2 Peter 1:12-15).

Peter's mistakes do not destroy our respect for him. Instead, they endear him to us. He becomes more beloved to us because we, like Peter, make mistakes. And, as Peter overcame his mistakes with the Lord's help, you and I can do the same.



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