

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 40

August 2009

No. 4

EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

Jesus Christ is God

The Hebrew word which is usually translated "God" in the Old Testament of the Bible is the word "Elohim." Derivatives of the word are "El" or "Eloi", and both of these are singular nouns. The Hebrew word "Elohim", however, is a collective noun, such as a team or a group, which means in a particular team or group there are more than one individuals. This word, "Elohim", is used in the very first chapter and the very first verse of the Bible, in Genesis 1:1, where we read: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." It is also used in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." And, notice the grammar of Genesis 1:26, where, before the creation of man, God said: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. The plural is used. In fact, throughout the Old Testament the idea of a plural God exists, that is, wherever the name of God occurred, it suggested that there are more than one Persons in the name God. In Romans 1:20; Acts 17:29 and Colossians 2:9, in the New Testament, we read of the "Godhead" or the "Divine Nature." As we go through the New Testament we learn that in the "Godhead" there co-exist three Divine Persons, "The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). These three constitute the "Elohim" or "God", who created the worlds. In the plan of salvation of man from sin, one of the Persons of the Godhead, left heaven and came to earth to become a man,

in order to become the Saviour of man (Hebrews 2:9-18). Colossians 2:9, therefore, says, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Christ thus became the physical representation of the Godhead on earth.

After the advent of Christ, John wrote about Him and said: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-3,14). So we learn from this passage of the Scriptures that Jesus Christ was with God in the beginning, and He was God, before becoming a man. Notice Jesus' words from John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (Also, Mark 2:5-11; Colossians 1:12-18; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2 Peter 1:16-18). Again, speaking of Christ, Philippians 2:6 & 7 says: "Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men." Christ did not cease being God when He descended on earth for the purpose of the Incarnation.

The Bible teaches that in the mysterious nature of the Godhead or the Divine Nature there co-exists a trinal distinction of Persons with absolute unity of essence. The Father, who sent the Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the world (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10), and the Son, when He returned to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, sent the Holy Spirit to apply His redemption to mankind. (John 14:25, 26; John 16:12-15). At the time of Jesus' baptism, all three Persons of the Godhead are dramatically exhibited together, as we read from Matthew 3:13-17. As the Son came up out of the water and the heavens were opened and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him, and suddenly a voice from heaven came saying, this is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And, though there is no single passage in the Scriptures in which all the details of this great mystery are gathered up and expounded, there do not lack passages in which the three Persons of the Godhead are brought together in a manner that exhibits at once their unity and distinctness. The most prominent of these is

the command of Christ to baptize "in the name", notice, not in the names of, as of many, but, "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19). Thus, according to the Bible, the Father and the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are "one God", (Ephesians 4:4-6). but they are not all three one Person, just as we, all the followers of Christ, are one in Christ (Romans 12:4,5), but that doesn't mean we are one person.

Rightly Dividing the Word

J.C. CHOATE

Many become confused when they read the Bible because they may open it to any book, chapter, and verse, and think that the Lord is personally speaking to them. In doing this, they may conclude that God would want them to build an ark, offer animal sacrifices, or go to Jerusalem once a year to worship. Others are convinced that they are to worship on the Sabbath Day, give tithes of their income, and keep the "Ten Commandments". Of course, their problem is that they are not *rightly dividing the Word*.

The Apostle Paul said, "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15). If one is to know God's will, it is a *must* to study His Word, but one may study the Bible and still be confused and not know what to do. As Paul said, the key is to *rightly divide the Word*. But what does this mean?

We must realize that the Bible was written over a period of about fifteen hundred years! Surely, not all of it was written and directed to you and me — and it was not. So, let's look into this matter of "rightly dividing".

To begin with, the word "Bible" means "the Book" or "the Book of books". The Bible actually consists of 66 separate books, grouped into two major divisions, the "Old Testament" and the "New Testament". There are 39 books in the Old Testament, covering two major periods of time. The first period is called the "Patriarchal Age", beginning with Adam and Eve and continuing to the time of Moses, about twenty-five hundred years. During this period of time God spoke directly to the fathers of the households of those who were obedient to Him. There was no written law from God. The

history of this "age" is to be found in the book of Genesis.

The second period is called the "Mosaic" or "Mosaical Age". It covers some 1500 years, dating from Moses to the death of Christ. This was the time in which God's people — the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham — were governed by the written law that God gave through Moses. The reason for choosing those people, and for giving the law itself, was to prepare the stage for the birth of the Son of God.

The third and final period of time is called the "Christian Age", dating from the death of Christ and the beginning of His spiritual family, the church, as recorded in the second chapter of the book of Acts. This age will continue until His return, when time will end and He will receive the church into that eternal world which He has gone to prepare (John 14:1-3).

Now it's obvious that we didn't live in the Patriarchal Age, or under the Law of Moses that ended with the death of Christ. Only one period of time, or age, remains—the Christian Age, under the Law of Christ—so that is the age in which we live, and the law which we must keep.

Since we are not living in the Patriarchal Period or during the Mosaical Age, those laws do not apply to us! Isn't that logical? Of course it is. So, we read the Old Testament for its example and history, and we learn much that is valuable to us (Romans 15:4). But God does not expect us to obey those laws.

To this point, we have "rightly divided the Word". Now, since we live in the Christian Age, it is logical that we are expected to obey the law of Christ. We don't have to worry about offering animal sacrifices or building an ark — those were commands to other people in other times! But our responsibility is to the Law of Christ *only*! Isn't that simple?

A series of logical questions will help us to rightly divide the New Testament. **First**, who is the speaker? Is it God, Satan, some Bible character, or some other person? **Second**, to whom is he speaking? To the unbeliever, to Christians, to people in general, or to some specific person? **Third**, when was it spoken? Did it apply only to the situation of the infant church (as in the case of the use of miracles to confirm the spoken word), or to all of the Christian Age? **Fourth**, why was it spoken? Was God wanting to reveal some specific truth or guidelines, for a particular age or situation or person?

Surely by now you are beginning to discover if God is speaking to you through His word, or if the message is to someone else. Answering these questions should enable you to know what God wants you to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

To help you in your study, you can get a Bible Dictionary to define words, a Bible Concordance to list more — or even all — of the verses on the subject you are studying; you can get commentaries and other books and materials that discuss the subjects and Scriptures under consideration.

Now, when you read and study the Bible, keeping all of these things in mind, you will find it much easier to understand God's Word. As you study, you must be prayerful that you will hunger for **the truth**, and that you will accept that truth as you learn it, no matter what it costs you.

Another thing to keep in mind is that Satan and his workers will put all kinds of stumbling blocks in the way, to blind you, to deceive you, to make you think it is too difficult to learn God's will. Don't allow him to do that! He will try to have you believe that everyone reads the Bible differently, and whatever you "believe" is all right. But 2 Peter 1:20 says that we cannot have a "private" interpretation of Scripture. Rightly divided and understood, its message is the same for everyone.

In the Bible, our Lord has revealed Himself to the world, telling of His coming, of His life, and of His death, burial, and resurrection. The Gospel is the good news of salvation for those who will believe in God, repent of their sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and are baptized. The New Testament tells of the church, the spiritual body of Christ and how the Lord saves those who obey the Gospel (Mark 16:16) and adds them to His church (Acts 2:47).

May God help us to read and study His Word, rightly dividing it, so we can know His will and obey it, so that we might have the hope of eternal life.

Message To The Church At Pergamos

Rev. 2:12-17

THOMAS R. DOHLING

The message to the church at Pergamos is found in

Revelation 2:12-17. To them, Jesus presents himself as "He who has the sharp two-edged sword" (2:12). He says this to a church which tolerates those who hold on to false doctrines and are causing others to stumble.

At the outset Jesus says: "I know." He always knows what each church and individual Christians are thinking, saying, feeling, and doing. He lets the Christians at Pergamos know (2:13) that He is aware of:

- Their Works;
- Where they dwell, "where Satan's throne is ... where Satan dwells";
- They hold fast to Jesus' name;
- They did not deny Jesus when Antipas, one from among them, was martyred.

Jesus knows that the church at Pergamos is under tremendous pressure and stress because it is situated in an ungodly place "where Satan's throne is" and "where Satan dwells" (2:13). They remain faithful to Jesus even after a fellow-Christian named Antipas is killed. However, in spite of their faithfulness in the face of tremendous intimidation and persecution, Jesus finds this to say to them: "I have a few things against you, because you have (here those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate" (2:14, 15). This suggests that there are those in the church who are holding on to false doctrine and thereby acting as stumbling blocks to their brethren by causing them to "eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality" (2:14). There are even those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans which Christ hates.

Jesus calls upon the church to repent of their sin with the grim warning that if it don't do His bidding, He would come quickly and "fight against them with the sword of My mouth" (2:16) [cf. Heb 4:12 "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."]

Jesus concludes His message to the church at Pergamos with a promise : "To him who overcomes I will give some of the

hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it." He promises to give them of Himself to eat [Jesus is "the hidden manna" see John 6:31-33. "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:33)]. *Among the Greeks a white stone was a symbol of acquittal, as a black stone was of guilt. The white stone implies justification, innocence and victory* [PNT].

Lesson: The church has to hold on to the true doctrine of Christ at all cost. We have to be careful and note those in the church who act as stumbling blocks by holding on to false doctrines which cause members to sin. The true and pure word of God should be the only doctrine of the church.

Christianity Without Denominations

To what denomination did Peter, James, John, about 3,000 on the day of Pentecost, Cornelius, the eunuch, Lydia, the Corinthians, and the jailer belong? (Read Acts chapter 2,8,10,16.) They were members of the body of Christ, which is the Lord's church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18-24), yet they were not members of any denomination. All who were saved became members of this body, the church, by virtue of the fact that God added them to it. (Acts 2:47.) Yet, they belonged to no denomination. They had been called out of the "power of darkness" or the world, and translated into the "kingdom of God's dear Son" which is the church (Colossians 1:13,14,18), but still they were not members of any denominational church.

Just so, today, if a sinner believes in Christ, and is baptized, just as about 3,000, the eunuch, Lydia, Cornelius, the jailer, etc., such would make him a Christian, but nothing more. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:36-41; Acts 8:36-39; Acts 16:14,15; Acts 16:30-34; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27.) This would not make him a member of any denomination.

If a great number should do this, would they not be Christians? Should this number come together on the first day of the week for worship, (Acts 20:7), call themselves by the same

name as did the apostles and early Christians, accept and teach the Bible as their only rule of faith and practice, select such servants as the Bible authorizes, and observe the same commands in the same way as the apostles and early Christians did, and as are set forth in the Bible - they would be simply New Testament Christians, members of the body of Christ, or New Testament church, assembling for worship without being members of any denomination on earth.

This is exactly what the church of Christ is, and contends for. If you want to be simply a New Testament Christian - no more and no less - then investigate and be a member of the church of Christ. If you want to follow the Bible strictly - without addition or subtraction you can, and if you do you will be a member of the church Jesus built. (Matthew 16:18.)

"Holding to the Faithful Word"

CLEM THURMAN

"Holding to the faithful word, which is according to the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in the sound doctrine, and to convict the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9). Men have always been prone to follow their own ways and turn away from the guidance of God. That has been a besetting sin with the human family from the time of Adam until the present. In the Garden of Eden, God never gave many rules; but Adam and Eve soon rebelled against God's guidance and determined to do what they wanted (Gen. 3). Cain and Abel brought sacrifices to God, but God would not accept Cain's because of his sin (Gen. 4:7). Because he persisted in his own willful way, Cain murdered Abel and departed from God (Gen. 4:8ff). Israel was chosen as a special people by God, and He gave them a law at Sinai. They pledged themselves to keep that law (Ex. 24:3), but soon began to rebel against God and sought to follow human wisdom.

The departure of God's elect people marks the destruction and failure of the whole human race. It has been difficult to get people to remain faithful to the way and the wisdom of God. Failure, ruin and destruction have always been the result of man's turning from God and following his own way. *"There is a way which*

seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). The apostle Paul wrote, *"The word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved, it is the power of God. . . Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe"* (1 Cor. 1:18-21). The wisdom of man in the fields of science, philosophy, psychology and other branches of human learning has been emphasized and exalted until man has become puffed up with his own wisdom and ignores the wisdom of God and the way of righteousness. The tendency of man to follow his own wisdom invariably extends fatally into the realm of religion.

The church of the Lord has imbibed of the spirit of worldly wisdom and fallen heavily under the spell of worldly ideals. There is much "enthusiasm" and "pep rally" in many churches, but a lack of real spirituality and righteousness. Denominations have long used subtly secular ways to appeal to the world without preaching the uncompromising gospel. Now, many in the Lord's church seem to be falling into the same error. To prevent further departure from God and His way, I firmly believe that there are some things we must do.

Preach the Power of the Gospel

I am afraid that many churches have lost sight of the Christ and His gospel. We hear much today about "preaching to the needs of people." Man is a social being, interacting with others in the community, in business, in family, etc. This leads many to preach to the social needs of folk. But the truth is that, although man certainly has social needs, our greatest need is spiritual. Our greatest problem is sin. And the preaching of the gospel is the only means we have to solve that problem: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation . . . For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 1:16; 3:23-24).

Too many folk today are like those of whom God speaks, *"The time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after*

their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). It seems that conditions are such that people just cannot see the departures, and trends toward departures, that are prevalent among us. Men are never very skillful in diagnosing their own spiritual illness. People have nearly always failed to realize they were drifting away from God until the departure was complete.

The Bible is not just "a good book." As Paul said it, *"It is the word of God"* (1 Thes. 2:13). Because it is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17), it is actually God speaking to us. To understand the Bible, we don't need "a new hermeneutic," we need to read, study and believe it! *"Whereby when ye read ye may understand"* (Eph. 3:4). It amazes me that so many think we cannot understand the Bible. Who dare accuse the God of heaven of giving us a message that is incomprehensible? Let's get back to being the Bible-preaching, Bible-believing, Bible-quoting and Bible-living people we once were!

Preach the "Oneness" of the Church

Jesus said, *"I will build my church"* (Matt. 16:18). He prayed, *"That they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee"* (John 17:21). He commanded, *"All speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you. . . Is Christ divided?"* (1 Cor. 1:10-13). That teaching is clear. Jesus never built a denomination, nor has He ever authorized anyone to join one. Yet, we have some in the church today contending that we should fellowship those in denominations and join with them in their "good works." Some openly declare that they feel more comfortable with their "denominational brethren" than with those in the church which Jesus built. This departure will become worse, if we don't return to the Bible teaching on the undenominational nature of the church.

We need to preach Christ and His church - not one or the other, but both - deploring every "church" which man built and which competes with His church for the souls of men. Jesus died for the church, purchased it with His own blood (Eph. 5:25; Acts 20:28). When the Lord saves people, He adds them to His church (Acts 2:47). The church for which Jesus died is not a denomination, nor is it the sum of denominations. That church is not "one among many." It is unique, "one of a kind," because it

was built by the Lord. That preaching may not be popular among the denominations, but it is the gospel! And unless we get back to preaching it, we will never please the Lord. Paul wrote, *"Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for it"* (Eph. 5:25). We need to develop enough love for that same church to preach it and defend it against all spurious churches.

Preach the Plan of Salvation

If we *"hold to the faithful word,"* we will clearly show sinners what to do to be saved. Jesus said, *"Preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:15-16). On the day the church began, Peter told those who believed his preaching, *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins"* (Acts 2:38). The result? *"They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added to them in that day about three thousand souls. . . The Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved"* (Acts 2:41,47). The *"faithful word"* demands that we teach that all those who thus obey the Lord are saved and added to His church. But the *"faithful word"* demands that we **NOT** recognize as a *"brother"* any who have not done that! Jesus still asks, *"Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?"* (Luke 6:46).

We hear much preaching from some quarters today on the grace of God. This is good, and long overdue. But some seem to believe that we are saved by grace only. But look at Eph. 2:8, *"By grace have ye been saved through faith."* Everything that God does is a matter of grace, because we don't deserve any blessing from Him. *"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. . . That he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man"* (Rom. 5:8; Heb. 2:9). The cross, the blood, the gospel, remission of sins, *"all spiritual blessings"* (Eph. 1:3), etc., are all the result of God's grace. But, while grace is God's part, man has a part also: *"through faith."* Just as God's grace includes all that God does for us, so does saving faith include all that man does in response to His grace. Thus, *"by faith"* (Heb. 11), we repent, we confess, we are baptized, we serve faithfully in His church to which He adds us. When people asked the apostles what to DO (Acts 2:37), God directed the apostles to tell them (v. 38). There is something for man to DO in order to be saved from sin, and to *"be faithful unto*

death" (Rev. 2:10) so that he can be saved eternally (2 Tim. 2:10). And, just as everything God does for us is a matter of grace, so everything we do in order to be saved is a matter of faith.

It is time, probably past time, for all of us to call a halt and ask ourselves, as members of the church of the Lord: "What direction are we headed?" Are we separating ourselves further from the world, or are we moving toward it? We need to understand that worldly tendency always is in the direction of taking man away from God. And we need to understand that "*friendship with the world is enmity with God*" (James 4:4), and when we become more like the world we become less like Christ.

Brethren, let's turn it around! Let's get back to preaching the Bible. Let's preach the unique nature of the church which Jesus built. Let's get back to preaching the Lord's plan of salvation, and how to develop "*the mind of Christ*" (Phil. 2:5) so that we can "*follow his steps*" (1 Pet. 2:21). Let's get back to being the people of God, whether the world likes it or not. Let's do it, whether the denominational world likes it or not. Let's do it, whether the weak or departing brethren like it or not. For the Lord will approve!

The Value of Truth

JOHNNY RAMSEY

Jesus clearly taught the value of truth when He stated, "*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32). When men receive not "*the love of the truth*," they invite all kinds of problems into their lives (2 Thes. 2:10-12).

TRUTH NEVER DIES

*It answers not. It does not take offense.
But with a mighty silence bides its time.
As some great cliff that braves the elements,
And lifts through all the storms its head sublime,
It ever stands, uplifted by the wise.
Truth never dies.*

The Bible gives many examples of those who had a disdain for the truth, as well as some willing to die to preserve it. Johoiakim, a wicked ruler (Jer. 36), is an example of one who

hated the word of God and tried to destroy it. Conversely, Jeremiah, the stalwart prophet, was willing to defend the way of godliness, even if it meant the dungeon! "Truth, crushed to earth, will rise again." Evil men crucified the Savior because they could not overwhelm the will of God and they were filled with envy (Mark 15:10) at its success.

Satan's propaganda is deceptive, clever and appealing to people who do not think of the consequences of fighting against God (2 Chron. 13:12). Truth is demanding, so weak people make "*lies their refuge*" (Isa. 28:15). This poem fits our point well:

*Though all the world be shattered,
His truth remains the same,
His righteous laws still potent,
And 'Father' still His name.
Though we face wars and struggles,
And feel their goad and rod,
We know above confusion,
There always will be God.*

A gigantic battle for the minds and souls of men is always raging. Will we take the broad way that leads to hell (Matt. 7:13-14), or have the courage and stamina to fight for truth and right (Amos 5:15)? If we have misplaced values and lack real conversion, it will be difficult to overcome the world. But, if truth is dearer to us than the praise of men, we shall be victorious - both now and in the day of Judgment! If we never get deeply involved in the work of the Lord because we listen to soft preaching, we will never value truth enough to be rewarded by the Lord Jesus, who is the essence of Truth (John 14:6).

*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,
Sweetest name I know,
Fills my every longing,
Keeps me singing as I go.*

To Be In Christ Is To Be In His Kingdom

LEE JAMIESON

THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS

Recurring phrases in Scripture need closer scrutiny by the

student of the Bible. By inspiring men to use repetition, obviously God is trying to tell us something. One oft repeated phrase - "in Christ" (or an equivalent) - is used by the apostle Paul over 160 times. Our Father in heaven has blessed Christians with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3.) The ultimate spiritual blessing is "salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." (2 Timothy 2:10.) This teaching is important enough to investigate and understand so that we might live it and teach it to others!

Paul encourages Timothy (and us) to "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 2:1.) The grace of God "with which He favored us in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6) is the saving grace of God in which we stand and rejoice. (Romans 5:2.) If God's grace is bestowed "in Christ," can one be saved "outside" of Christ? Obviously not. Consider that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23.)

Can you be a Christian and be "outside" of Christ? According to Paul the saving grace that is bestowed is the grace that re-creates us as Christians. "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus on the basis of good works that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10.) Our sin makes this "re-creation" essential if we are to be acceptable to a just God. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in transgressions made us alive together in Christ (by grace you have been saved)." (Ephesians 2:4-5.)

The grace of God is bestowed only "in Christ." If we can grasp the wonders of this blessing, and live our lives accordingly, we can grow to be the "peculiar people" of God zealously serving Him. When we are baptized into Christ, God re-creates us (Ephesians 2:10), transforming us into children of God in Christ. (Galatians 3:26,27.)

THE CALLED OUT

The church is the "called out," and Jude expands on this concept when he addresses his epistle to Christians, "the called in Christ Jesus." (Jude 3.) We are the redeemed. Paul points again to Christ, teaching, "in whom we have the redemption through His blood; the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace." (Ephesians 1:7.) God's redeeming grace is truly a spiritual blessing

beyond compare. Those who obey the gospel are "justified as a gift of His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:24.) The full impact is seen in our treatment of others, however, as we are to "be gracious to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God has forgiven you in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 4:32.) Then we truly become a blessing to others.

Seeking to understand our salvation should be an unending quest. In Christ we are called to lay aside our anxieties and trust God, "And the peace that surpasses understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7.) With this assurance, we can confidently overcome the circumstances of our lives.

God's providential care is yet another spiritual blessing that is only offered to those who are in Christ. "But my God shall supply your every need according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19.) Here is where many miss the point. These promises are not to every human being but only those who are in Christ! "How does one get into Christ?" Three times, Paul tells the answer in Scripture ... one of which says, "for by one Spirit, we were all immersed into the one body." (1 Corinthians 12:13.) Are you in Christ?

CHRISTIANS ARE TO BE UNITED

We have explored the Scriptures to glean how the grace of God is bestowed only "in Christ" and God providentially cares for His children "in Christ." Christians are both unique and unified as children of God, for "there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28.) Finally, then, let us consider that the "more excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31b and 13:13), faith, hope, and love, is only "in Christ."

Paul weaves the tapestry of truth together for us in teaching the spiritual blessings of faith, hope and love. In Christ we receive all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3), grace (Ephesians 1:6), redemption and forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7), and knowledge of the mystery of God's purpose. (Ephesians 1:9-11.) Then Paul tells us "why," teaching, "in order that we who first hoped in Christ may be unto the praise of His glory." (Ephesians 1:12.) We are saved by hope (Romans 8:24) and hope anchors our souls. (Hebrews

6:19.) John explains that we have "this hope" only because of God's love. (1 John 3:1-3.) Only in Christ is there hope of eternal life!

In the kingdom of God, the church, God intertwines faith and love in His children. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has meaning, but faith working through love." (Galatians 5:6.) Love that is not displayed is not love at all, and faith that is not displayed is dead. (James 2:17.) These two together, working on the foundation of hope makes us pleasing to God and fruitful in His service. Paul told Timothy that "the grace of our Lord super-abounded with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 4:14.) Only three times in Scripture are we told "how" to get "in Christ." "For as many as have been immersed into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:27.) 1 Corinthians 12:13 teaches, "For in one Spirit we were immersed into the one body." "As many of us as were immersed into Christ Jesus were immersed into His death." (Romans 6:3.)

Faith, hope and love are the "more excellent way" ONLY in Christ, according to God. The body of Christ is the body of the saved (Colossians 1:13-18), those who are redeemed and added to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. Salvation and grace are therefore only found "in Christ" or "in the body" ... the church. As you consider these things, the question, again is, "Are you in Christ?"

I Am Not Ashamed

DAN FLOURNOY

"I'm Not Ashamed To Own My Lord" by Isaac Watts, is one of the great songs of the church. It expresses a noble sentiment that should characterize every Christian. Yet, many who claim to be God's people demonstrate that in reality, they are ashamed of the name of Christ, the church of Christ and the doctrine of Christ.

Why do some congregations seek to evade the name "church of Christ;" by using some other designation? Over the past few years several churches once known as churches of Christ have changed their designation, leaving the name of Christ off. Could

it be that these groups are simply ashamed of the Lord's name?

How could anyone be ashamed of the Lord's church? Evidently, some are because they seldom refer to her except to criticize. They will speak of "our heritage," "our movement," and "our faith-tradition" in place of the church of Christ. Could it be that they are ashamed of the Lord's church? These terms are never used in Scripture to refer to the body of Christ. Jesus did not say, "Upon this rock I will build my faith-tradition!" He said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18.) Paul did not say "our movement" salutes you! He said, "The churches of Christ salute you." (Romans 16:16.) He did not charge the elders of Ephesus with the responsibility to "feed our heritage" but to "feed the church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28.)

The apostle John taught that Christians are to abide in the teaching given by Christ. (2 John 9; compare Acts 2:42.) Likewise, the apostle Paul warned brethren at Corinth "not to go beyond the things which are written...." (1 Corinthians 4:6.) However, some seem to be ashamed of the doctrine of Christ and prefer to go beyond that which is written to follow the doctrines of men. Some have abandoned Christ's doctrine of unity and teach the false doctrine of "unity in diversity." (John 17:20-21; 1 Corinthians 1:1-17.) They go beyond what is written regarding singing in worship and add instrumental music. (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16-17.) They seek to replace simple, godly worship for worldly entertainment including choirs and solos for which there is no authority. They attack and minimize gospel preaching and substitute drama in its place. (1 Corinthians 1:21.) They have replaced Christ's terms of pardon with the false doctrine of "faith only" and substituted the so-called "sinners prayer" for baptism for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38; 22:16.)

The warning of Christ is clear: "For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of man also shall be ashamed of him, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." (Mark 8:38.) Loyal Christians are not ashamed of the name of Christ, the church of Christ, or the doctrine of Christ.

Do Not Be Like Your Fathers And Your Brethren

ROBERT BALL

If we notice any pattern in the history of the Israelites during the period of the divided kingdom it is that they have their spiritual ups and downs. We may also observe that they were inclined to follow the reigning king's lead in this regard. This resulted in their frequent refusal to heed the word of God that was proclaimed to them by His prophets. (Amos 7:12-13; Ezekiel 3:4-9; Jeremiah 5:30-31; 6:16-17; Isaiah 30:8-11.)

The kings of Israel (the northern kingdom) were more consistent than the kings of Judah (the southern kingdom) in that all of the kings of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord God of Israel. Judah had many kings who did evil in the sight of the Lord as well, but it also had some good kings who did right in God's sight. Two examples of kings who did right in God's sight are Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:1-20; 21) and Josiah (2 Kings 22:1-23; 30.)

Hezekiah restored temple worship in Jerusalem. (2 Chronicles 29:20-36.) He also sent runners throughout Judah and Israel with letters from him urging the people to return to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. He sent letters saying they should come to the temple in Jerusalem and keep the Passover to the Lord God of Israel. (2 Chronicles 30:1-20.)

It was in these letters that Hezekiah says something that I believe is important for God's people to remember. There is a lesson that Christians today may learn from Hezekiah's words and it is an encouraging lesson. He said, "And do not be like your fathers and your brethren, who trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to desolation, as you see." (2 Chronicles 30:7.)

As I read this verse of scripture I thought about the Lord's church. The church is a great brotherhood and we are to love it. (1 Peter 2:17.) Many of us who love the Lord and His church are concerned about the direction in which some congregations are being led. It is evident to anyone who can read the Bible with an honest, unbiased heart that error is being taught and accepted by many in our brotherhood. There are indeed false teachers

among us. (2 Peter 2:1.)

Surely each of us will agree that it would be wonderful if false teachers were never among God's people. But the Bible clearly teaches that they will enter in among us. The false teachers among God's people today are not the first to occupy this place. Neither is it the first time some of God's people have chosen to hear and believe the message of such teachers.

Hezekiah asked the Israelites not to be like their fathers and brethren who had listened to false prophets and turned from God's law. In his plea Hezekiah also mentioned some of the forefathers who had lived faithful to God. He mentioned Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. (2 Chronicles 30:6.) We too can find strength and encouragement from those in the past who chose to remain faithful to Christ even in the face of great trials brought about by false doctrine.

As much as we regret anyone's decision to leave "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), we may find encouragement in the fact that there are also those who choose to abide in it. Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." (John 8:31.)

As much as it pains us to see brothers and sisters in Christ depart from the faith it should not surprise us that some do. According to Paul the Holy Spirit said it would happen. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron." (1 Timothy 4:1-2.) Paul was informing Timothy of what would happen later in his lifetime. It happened in the days of Timothy just as Paul prophesied (Hebrews 6:4-6), and it continues to happen in the church today.

My point is simply this, let us pray for the church everywhere making request to the heavenly Father that our brothers and sisters in Christ will choose to abide in the faith. But let us also find comfort and encouragement that even if some choose to depart from the faith, all will not. Let us not be like our fathers (Christians of the past) and brethren (Christians today) who chose to depart from the faith. Let us rather be like our fathers and brethren who choose to abide faithful to the Lord's way.

Second Handed Faith

DONNY WEIMAR

We have all used second hand merchandise whether it was handed down from siblings as we grew older or bought it at a sale, etc. There are times when we come by real bargains only to get home with real lemons. This is the sad case with those who buy into second handed faith.

Second handed faith is that which seems very appealing on the surface because we see others whom we esteem highly believing and practicing it. It's usually given to us without the asking but we take it because we value the friendship or the love of the one presenting it. Many generations of family may have handed down this faith and for that reason alone we feel obligated to believe and practice the same. There is something about this used faith that turns it into a real lemon.

The faith pleasing to God must be personal. (Hebrews 11:6.) Jesus chastened a select group of piously religious Jews because they transgressed the commandment of God by their traditions. (Matthew 15:3.) Their religion had become nothing more than a hypocritical hand-me-down that interfered with pure service to Jehovah. Rebuking them the Lord quoted Isaiah, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me." The heart is what God wants.

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Corinthians 13:5.)

"Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Philippians 2:12.)

Parents Are Strange

BILL BAGENTS

Parents are strange. They think they know more than you. It's as if they really believe Job 12:12, "Wisdom is with aged men,

and with length of days, understanding." It's as if they really think that because they've lived twice or three times as long as you have that they have more experience and more knowledge than you do.

Parents are strange. They think they're in charge. It's as if they really believe Ephesians 6:1-3, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." It's as if they really believe Colossians 3:20, "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord." It's as if they really believe that God intends for them to lead the family.

Parents are strange. They think this world is dangerous. You know how they love to give advice and ask questions. "Be careful. Where are you going? Who's in charge/ Who will be there? What will you be doing? When will you be back?" It's as if they really believe 1 Peter 5:8, "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." It's as if they know how easy it is to "mess up" and how hard it is to stay straight. (Matthew 7:13-14.)

Parents are strange. They think that little things matter. They care about little things, like who your friends are. It's as if they really believe Proverbs 13:20, "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed." It's as if they really believe Proverbs 22:24-25, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul." It's as if they really believe 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Do not be deceived, evil company corrupts good habits."

Parents are strange. They care about little things, like your language. I don't just mean taking God's name in vain, but off-colour talk, cruel words, and even saying more than we ought to say. It's as if they really believe Matthew 12:36, "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment." It's as if they really believe Proverbs 21:23, "Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles." It's as if they really believe Proverbs 10:19, "In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise."

Parents are strange. They care about "little things," like being involved in church. It's as if they really believe that the church belongs to Jesus, that it's His body on earth, and that He cares how His people live. You'd think that they'd been reading Ephesians or Philippians or 1 Peter 2:9-12. Which say, "Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...." and "...Let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ..."

Parents are strange. They care about little things, like guarding your reputation. It's as if they really believe Proverbs 22:1, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favour rather than silver and gold." It's as if they really believe Proverbs 20:11, "Even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right."

Parents are strange. They think it's OK to gang up on you. Don't you hate it when you ask your mom something and she says, "Your dad and I will have to talk about that?" Sometimes you start with your dad and he says his version of the same thing. It's as if they think they should be consistent and united in their parenting. It's as if they really believe that old passage from Ecclesiastes 4, especially verses 9-12, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour...." It's as if they really believe that old proverb that says, "My son, hear the instruction of your father and do not forsake the law of your mother, for they will be a graceful ornament on your head and chains about your neck." (Proverbs 1:8-9.) It's as if they really believe that it's their job to work as a team to teach you that God knows best.

Parents are strange. They think your soul matters more than what makes you happy today. It's not that they're against happiness, they just value the lasting version above the temporary one. It's as if they believe Luke 9:25 is a rhetorical question. You remember it, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?" It's as if nothing is more important to them than helping you learn to love the Lord.

Parents are strange. Some parents are extra strange. It's as if they really believe that all of Scripture is God's truth. It's as if they really believe Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all ways

acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." It's as if they really believe Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

I hope parents are strange in these important ways. If they are, give them a big hug. Thank them for loving you. Respect them for being real Christians. Love them for loving you with the love of the Lord.

What About The Thief On The Cross?

MARK LINDLEY

The Scriptures emphatically teach that baptism is essential to salvation. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; et. al.) Yet, many argue, "I don't believe one has to be baptized to be saved." Those who do not believe baptism is essential often try to prove their position by referring to "the thief on the cross." The thief to whom they refer is one of the thieves crucified with Christ. (Matthew 27:41-44; Luke 23:29-43.) Many reason as follows: (1) the thief was not baptized; (2) the thief was saved without being baptized; (3) therefore, one can be saved today without baptism. Is such reasoning sound?

Was the thief saved? While hanging on the cross, the thief requested of Jesus: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." (Luke 23:42.) Though the thief likely did not understand the nature of Christ's kingdom, he apparently recognized Jesus as the Messiah, Jesus said to the thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43.) Paradise is not heaven; rather, it is a compartment of Hades where the spirits of the saved go at death. (Luke 16:19-31.) Since the thief went to Paradise with Jesus, it is clear that he (the thief) was saved.

Was the thief saved without baptism? Some maintain that baptism is not essential because, according to them, the thief was never baptized. However, it cannot be proven that the thief was never baptized. Both John and disciples of Jesus baptized many. (Matthew 3:5-6; John 3:22,26; 4:1.) Is it not at least possible that

John or a disciple of Christ baptized the man, and then he later became a thief? No, it cannot be proven that he was or was not baptized.

However, it can be proven from the Scriptures that the thief was never baptized under the terms of the Great Commission. One can know this because the thief was saved and he died before the Great Commission was given. Therefore, he could not have been baptized in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins, in fulfillment of the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:18-20.) But does this pose an insurmountable problem for those who believe that baptism is essential? No.

The truth is, the thief did not have to be baptized in the name of Jesus to be saved. As long as Jesus was upon the earth, He could forgive the sins of anyone He chose. (Mark 2:10.) He forgave not only the thief, but also a woman who anointed His feet (Luke 7:37-50), a man bedridden with palsy (Mark 2:1-12), and a woman taken in the act of adultery. (John 8:1-11.) Were any of these baptized? If they were, it cannot be proven by the Bible because no such information is recorded in it. The point is this: they did not have to be baptized. Jesus directly forgave their sins, and, therefore, baptism was unnecessary for them.

The situation is analogous to a millionaire who, while he lives upon earth, can give thousands of rupees to anyone he deems worthy. But when the millionaire dies, the wealth of his estate will be dispensed in keeping with the written will of the millionaire. So it is with Christ. As long as He lived upon earth, He could forgive sins of all He deemed worthy. But when He died, His will came into effect. So in order for one today to receive the benefits of Christ's sacrifice, he must follow the written will of Christ (i.e. the New Testament). The New Testament teaches that all accountable people are to believe and obey the Gospel, including the command to be baptized. (Mark 16:15-16.)

Can one be saved by doing what the thief did? No. The thief was saved by Christ before the New Testament came into force. (Hebrews 9:15-17.) Therefore, the salvation of the thief is not a case of conversion to follow today!

