

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

---

**Vol. 40**

**November 2009**

**No. 7**

---

## *EDITORIAL*

### **What Does the Bible Teach?**

#### ***Will There Be Another Chance To Be Saved After Death?***

It is very hard for most people to believe that a loving God will allow people to go to hell if they do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ in this world. The Bible, on the other hand, teaches very clearly that those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ will be punished with everlasting destruction. (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9). Hebrews 9:27 says that it is appointed for men to die once and after this the judgment. Men, however, would like to have a second chance after death. Having rejected God's offer of salvation on earth, by rejecting to believe in Christ and obey His saving gospel when they lived in their bodies on earth, they dream of getting preached to as spirits, in the next world in Hades. And their assumption is based on a passage from 1 Peter 3:18-20 wherein it says: "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls were saved through water."

Now, what was the apostle saying here? Was he writing about Christ personally going to the spirits in Hades and preached to them? If so, why did Christ select to preach to only those of

Noah's generation? Why did he leave all others? Weren't there any others who had died? Or is God respecter of persons? (Acts 10:34; John 3:16). By clearly examining the passage under consideration one learns that the apostle was in fact saying that Christ was put to death in the flesh or body but was made alive by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit (Romans 1:4), and that by the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, He had preached to the disobedient people of Noah's day. That preaching was done by Christ, long before His Incarnation on earth, and that preaching He did through Noah, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Noah had preached to the people of his day, who were living at that time when the ark was being prepared. Noah had preached while the ark was being built. He had preached to those spirits or souls who were in the prison of sin. Christ said in John 8:34, "Whoever commit sin is a slave of sin." Those people of Noah's day were in the imprisonment of sin, and Noah, a preacher of righteousness, (2 Peter 2:5), had preached to them, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. Peter, in 1 Peter 3:18-20 is not saying that Christ, after His death, went into Hades and held a "gospel meeting" and preached to those spirits or souls who had perished in Noah's days because of their disobedience, thus giving them a second chance to be saved.

The apostle Peter also wrote in his epistle that the Spirit of Christ was in the prophets who had lived and preached God's word hundreds of years before the birth of Christ on earth. (1 Peter 1:10-11). Since Christ, according to the Bible, has existed from all eternity (John 1:1-3, 14; 17:1-3; Hebrews 1:1-3), Peter therefore, said He had preached through Noah and the prophets long before His own personal ministry. So Christ did not, after His death, go in person to preach to them who had perished in Noah's day, but He went by or through the Spirit, in the person of Noah, that is, He had inspired Noah by the Holy Spirit, to preach to them who were in the imprisonment of sins when Noah lived and preached while the ark was being built. Peter also said that in that ark that Noah had built "eight souls" were saved. And we know that he was referring to eight individuals who were saved in the ark. Likewise, when Peter and other apostles had preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, and about three thousand of their audience had repented and were baptized for

the remission of their sins, as they were told to do, the record there says that three thousand *souls* were saved and added to them (Acts 2:37-41). Therefore, when he said in the passage under consideration that the preaching was done to the spirits in prison, he was actually referring to those people who were in the prison of sin, and to whom Christ, in the person of Noah had preached, when they were living on earth and when the ark was being prepared. The Bible does speak of people as spirits or souls in some places, as in 1 John 4:1-6.

Instead of waiting and looking for a second chance after this earthly life will be over, people should now, when they are living, and when they have the opportunity, need to believe in Christ with whole heart, and repent from all wrong and ignorance and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins to receive the assurance of salvation now in this life. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16). Do not procrastinate.

## *The Sinner's Prayer*

J.C. CHOATE

Many of the preachers of our day have promoted what they call "The Sinner's Prayer". At the close of their sermons they invite those who are not saved to come forward. Those who do so are then asked to repeat after them a prayer that goes something like this: **"Father in heaven, I come before you as a sinner believing that your Son, Jesus, died on the cross to save me from my sins. I ask you now to forgive me of my sins and accept me as your child. In the name of Christ I ask this. Amen."** The preacher then announces that those who said the sinner's prayer have been forgiven of their sins and are now children of God.

There is just one thing wrong with the procedure I have described: the Scriptures nowhere talk about "the sinner's prayer", and the Lord has not promised to save anyone from his sins through the process of saying such a prayer. This is a prayer — and a doctrine — that has originated with man alone, and those who say such a prayer are deceived into thinking that they have

been saved. They are not only *not* saved, but because they have been *deceived* into thinking they are saved, they themselves remain lost and they influence others to follow their example in saying the same prayer and thereby remaining in their lost condition as well.

Read through the book of Acts and study carefully the 11 accounts of conversion that are given there. Is there even one situation where the sinner was asked to say "The Sinner's Prayer"? You will not find such a thing mentioned in a single case!

Let us look, together, at some of these conversion accounts. On the first Pentecost (a Jewish feast day that brought Jews together in Jerusalem from all over the world) after the resurrection of Jesus, the apostles were in Jerusalem, awaiting the promised coming of the power of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). After receiving that power, they began to preach to the audience in their own languages, which is evidence that God was working through the apostles. They explained that the prophecies of the Old Testament were being fulfilled, that Christ had lived among men, doing good, that with wicked hands He had been crucified, that He had been resurrected from the grave, and that He had returned to the Father in heaven to sit down at the right hand of God, to be King of kings and Lord of lords.

Many of the listeners were cut to the heart, becoming believers in Jesus as the Christ. They asked, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*"

Now what did Peter and the apostles tell them? "Just believe and you are saved!" or "Repeat after us 'The Sinner's Prayer'?" No, we don't read such answers! What does Scripture say? It says, "*Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 2:38). We read further, "*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls*" (Acts 2:41). Finally, we read, "*And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*" (Acts 2:47).

Now you will notice that nothing was said about prayer until after they had been baptized! Then as **children of God**, the Scripture says that "*they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers*"

(Acts 2:42).

Before these people became children of God **they were not in a relationship with God, so they could not properly pray!** In other words, God was not their Father and they were not His children! But after they had **obeyed** the Lord, and had been **born anew** through a penitent heart in the waters of baptism, then they could pray, and they did pray, as we have just noticed.

Now, consider another case of conversion. This time we have Philip meeting a man from Ethiopia in the desert. The Ethiopian had been all the way to Jerusalem to worship and, on his way home, riding in a chariot, he was reading from Isaiah 53. When Philip asked if he understood what he was reading, the Ethiopian invited Philip to teach him. As Philip explained the Scripture to him, teaching him about Jesus, the record says, *"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest, And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing"* (Acts 8:36-39). You will note that nothing was said about prayer. Why? Because this man was not a child of God. First, he needed to obey the Lord that he might be saved, putting him in a relationship where he could pray to God as His child.

In John 9 we have the story of a man who had been blind from birth and how Jesus miraculously gave him his sight. Later, this same man said, *"Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth"* (John 9:31). In other words, this Scripture is plainly stating, that **prayer does not save one** or make him a child of God, but rather one becomes a Christian by doing the will of God. Do you remember that Saul was praying for three days and nights, a penitent man crying for forgiveness, but when Ananias came to him he did not tell him to simply continue praying. No! He said, *"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:16).

In the cases of conversions in the book of Acts, we have seen what one must do to be saved. In John 8:42-47 Jesus spoke of those whose father was the devil. If a sinner could be saved through prayer only, what advantage would a child of God have over a sinner, in being able to pray to his Father? None, of course. There is no place for "The Sinner's Prayer" in *becoming* a child of God. One *must first* become God's child, by being born into His family, *before* he can pray and expect God to hear him.

Christ said that one must **believe** and **be baptized** to be **saved** (Mark 16:16). When the sinner obeys these commands from the heart, he experiences the new birth, and he now has the right to say, "Our Father ...."

## ***Message To The Church At Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13)***

THOMAS R. DOHLING

The message to the church at Philadelphia is found in Revelation 3:7-13. To them, Jesus presents himself as "*He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens*" (3:7), signifying that only He has absolute authority to open and shut, and determine who shall enter in, or be shut out.

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 Philadelphia know (3:7) that He is aware of their works. He tells them of "an open door." "Open door" means great opportunities; generally for preaching the gospel. It probably means here, a way opened to convert the Gentiles and of being spiritually useful.

Jesus knows all about the church at Philadelphia. He notes that they have—

- Little strength;
- Kept His word;
- Not denied His name.

Although they have "little strength" they have remained

faithful to the doctrine of Christ and have not denied His name. *[Very little political authority or influence. The little strength may refer either to the smallness of the numbers, or to the littleness of their grace-Clarke.]*

The Lord promises to deal appropriately with “those of the synagogue of Satan.” These are Jews who constantly hindered the first century Christians. He says that He will “make them come and worship before your feet, and know that I have loved you” (3:9). Implying that some of these Jews would become Christians and esteem the brethren at Sardis and acknowledge them for who they are—the beloved of the Lord.

So our Lord assures them that because they have kept His command to persevere, He will sustain them during the trial “*which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown*” (3:10, 11). The crown refers to their reward received from the Lord for being faithful.

Jesus concludes His message to the church at Philadelphia with this promise: “*He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name*” (Rev 3:12). A pillar is a permanent structure that supports the building. Here it implies strength, permanence and honour. These beloved of the Lord shall always remain in a place of honour, bearing God’s name and the name of the Lamb.

Lesson: Tried and faithful Christians are assured of a new name and a place of permanence and honour in heaven.

## *Achieving Success In Life (Part 2)*

CLEM THURMAN

Real success in life cannot be measured in money or popularity. As God told Joshua, “*This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate thereon day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written*

*therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success*" (Josh. 1:8). Success must be measured by our happiness and contentment, which is based on how well we submit to the will of God for our lives.

In our last article we looked at three ingredients we must have in our lives in order to achieve real success. We must live in faith: faith in God, faith in Christ and faith in ourselves. We must be confident in the faith that, with the Lord's help, we can accomplish anything. Second, we must live obediently. God knows what we need to be happy and to achieve our purpose in life (Jer. 10:23), and as God told Joshua, we must do His will in order to have "good success." Third, we must be dedicated—to God and to His purpose for our lives. Now let us look at some other ingredients for success.

### **A Life of Righteousness**

The apostle Paul wrote, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed the righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith"* (Rom. 1:16-17). A successful life must be a life of righteousness. Righteousness simply means the practice of right, or doing right. But, again, God must define what is right for us: *"O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"* (Jer. 10:23).

The Lord tells us plainly, *"Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people"* (Prov. 14:34). Again, *"Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah"* (Psa. 33:12).

But in the same way that a nation becomes great by righteousness, an individual succeeds through righteousness. When Jesus told the story of "The Good Samaritan" (Luke 10), He simply revealed a responsibility we all have to all of mankind. Every example in the Scriptures is an answer to the question of Cain, *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* (Gen. 4:9). Our responsibility to those around us is encompassed in this word, *"righteousness."* There are things that we are to do, simply because it is right to do them.

When the apostle Paul gave instructions to children, *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord"* (Eph. 6:1), he could have



assigned many reasons for such obedience. He could have argued that parents could punish them for not obeying, or that parents know best, that they have more experience in life, that they love the children, and dozens of other such arguments. But he never used any of those reasons. The reason which the apostle Paul gave for children to obey their parents is really very simple: *"For this is right"* (Eph. 6:1).

To live a successful life is to live by that great rule Jesus gave: *"All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them"* (Matt. 7:12). What a world this would be if everyone lived by that "golden rule"! Notice that the Lord does not say to treat people as they treat you. Treat them as you WANT to be treated! There is the pattern for real success in life, because it will make all of our society better.

### **A Life of Discipline**

We live in an age when even some religious leaders are declaring that man does not need any "external restraints," that he is able to govern himself. A few years ago, John Robinson, bishop of the church of England, wrote a book, "Honest to God," in which he sets forth the idea that man must reject any divine sanction or any law or regulation: "The only test for any act is whether or not it is an act of love." The result of such thinking and teaching is rampant immorality, an out of control drug problem, and raging despair.

Forty years ago there was a very popular song entitled, "I Can't Get No Satisfaction!" That was an outgrowth of the premise that the world owes each of us "satisfaction." But the courts, from the divorce courts to criminal courts, continue to be packed with a veritable log-jam of cases. The idea of "instant gratification"—whether in a squalling baby or one eighty years old—is destructive of both the individual and society. The world owes you nothing. God owes you nothing. The government owes you nothing. Only when we accept responsibility for ourselves, to *"work out our own salvation"* (Phil. 2:12), can we expect to solve problems and achieve our purpose in life.

The apostle Peter wrote, *"Yea, and for this very cause adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue knowledge; and in your knowledge self-control; and in your*

*self-control patience; and in your patience godliness; and in your godliness brotherly kindness; and in your brotherly kindness love"* (2 Pet. 1:5-7). Notice that right in the centre of all of those characteristics is "*self-control.*" That is discipline.

Noah was told to build an ark (Gen. 6). With mockers laughing, Noah had the discipline to do just what God told him to do (Heb. 11:7). It took discipline for Abram to turn his back on his home and family to journey to a foreign land he had never seen. But He did it, simply because God told him to do it (Heb. 11:8-16). When Peter and John were told not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus, they answered, "*We cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard*" (Acts 4:20). They disciplined themselves to preach the gospel of Christ, as Jesus had commanded, no matter what the consequences!

The apostle Paul wrote, "*And every man that striveth in the games exerciseth self-control in all things. Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air: but I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage*" (1 Cor. 9:25-27). As Paul shows, those athletes who succeed practice discipline. They train, they watch their diet and they exercise in order to build strength, agility and endurance. Then they win. Any endeavor that carries a reward demands discipline. And it is a real tragedy when people sit and whine about never "getting the breaks" when they refuse to make the effort to discipline themselves so that they will be qualified to compete — and win — when the opportunity presents itself.

That is just as true in life as in athletics. The Lord Jesus said, "*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*" (Matt. 16:24). Disciples practice discipline. They come from the same root word. Man is expected to achieve and accomplish, to "*Fear God and keep his commandments.*" God knows man, and He knows what will make man happy and enable him to achieve success. Only when we "*deny self*" can we achieve success.

### **A Life of Enthusiasm**

The tepid life is a life of failure. The worst castigation of our Lord was pronounced against the church at Laodicea: "*I know thy*

*works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth"* (Rev. 3:15-16). The lukewarmness of this group of people was such as to be sickening to the Lord. In a similar way, all of us appreciate the urgent fervency, the warmth of spirit, that is manifest by people with enthusiasm.

A student, seemingly limited in ability, becomes a star athlete because of his great enthusiasm for the game and competition. This has been shown to be true in grammar school, high school, and college—in every kind of athletic competition. It is little wonder that those who succeed on the athletic field are also usually successful in later life! In athletics they learned discipline, and they also learn to be enthusiastic about what they do—in athletics, business, the community, etc.

Solomon wrote long ago, *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might"* (Eccle. 9:10). There is no room here for lukewarmness, but rather *"do it with thy might"* means putting oneself wholly into the work. As the apostle Paul wrote, *"Whatsoever ye do, work heartily, as unto the Lord, and not unto men"* (Col. 3:23). God, in all of His dealing with man, has always wanted man to commit himself firmly and entirely to His service. This is wonderfully stated in Rom. 12:1, *"Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service."* No one can go through life in a lukewarm state and obey that!

There is a most interesting word in the Greek that is found in several passages of the Scriptures. It is the Greek word, "spoudazo." This word is often translated as *"give diligence"* (2 Pet. 1:5, 10; etc.). Thayer's Lexicon defines this Greek word as: "Give diligence, do your utmost, do your best." This word is used in 2 Tim. 2:15, *"Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth."* This same word is used in Heb. 4:11, *"Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience."*

God is never pleased with half-way measures in our service to Him. *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice"* (Rom. 12:1). That means

to give your best effort. Don't try to go to heaven "as cheap as you can." Do your utmost — "*give diligence*"—to enter into heaven. That means living a life of enthusiasm for the Lord and His purpose.

"Enthusiasm" comes from the Greek root, "*entheos*." This is a compound word: "*en*" which means "in, or within," and "*theos*" which means "God." Really, then, enthusiasm means having God within. As Paul wrote, "*For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure*" (Phil. 2:13). Here is enthusiasm. When God is in us, working through us, we will succeed in whatever He wants. This kind of life is defined by Paul, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" (Phil. 4:13).

Your life, to be a success, must be a life of faith in God and Christ, a life of obedience to the Lord, a life of dedication, a life of righteousness (doing right in all situations), a life of discipline (self-control) and a life of enthusiasm. May the Lord ever help all of us to succeed, as He wants us to have "*good success*."

## ***From What Source Do We Learn Christian Faith?***

HOLLIS MILLER

Were you given, the choice of only one source from which to learn Christian faith, what source would you choose? Most people would likely choose the New Testament. They would do so because it was written by men who were either directly associated with Jesus or by men who were associates of those who did witness His work and teaching. The associates of Jesus heard Him teach, they witnessed His miracles, and were eye witnesses of many other of his deeds. They also saw him after His bodily resurrection from the dead.

The apostle John wrote: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1.) "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 1:14.) The same apostle also wrote: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you...." (1 John 1:1-3.)

The apostle Matthew wrote concerning the birth of Jesus: "... and she shall bring forth a Son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21.)

Luke, a companion of the apostle Paul, quoted Jesus as saying: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10.) And the writer of Hebrews declared that Jesus tasted death for every man. (Hebrews 2:9.) These, and many similar passages, establish the mission of Jesus to mankind.

Following His resurrection, Jesus commanded His apostles to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things He had commanded them. (Matthew 28:19,20.) The book of Acts is a record of approximately the first thirty years of carrying out the Lord's command. Disciples were made, and churches were established in many lands.

The early disciples of Jesus were called Christians. (Acts 11:26.) However, the most common designation for them was saints. (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1; and other texts.) The word saint means holy; holy because those who are so recognized are separated to God, having been delivered from the defilement of sin. The modern idea of saint is one who has been so designated because he/she lived an especially holy and righteous earthly life. Such a concept of saint is unknown in the New Testament.

Sadly, with the passing of the centuries since Jesus and His apostles lived and taught, their teaching has been altered by the philosophies and theologies of men. As a result there is great confusion in the general Christian world. That the confusion is not pleasing to God is made plain by the declaration of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:33 that God is not the author of confusion. Reason requires that all of the various systems of belief which wear the

name Christian cannot be derived from the teaching of Jesus and His apostles. How, then, does one decide what to believe? A few questions will help.

**1. Did the writers of the New Testament understand Christianity?** If they did, it is certainly reasonable to turn to them for guidance in matters of faith.

**2. Were the first Christians true Christians?** If they were, then should it not follow that all today who believe as they believed are also true Christians? Does it not also follow that all who refuse to believe as the first Christians believed should at minimum hold their faith in suspect? It is important to recognize that the New Testament does not teach anyone to be a disciple of church doctrine(s). Rather, it teaches us to be disciples of what Jesus and inspired men taught.

**3. If one finds that a particular church doctrine(s) does not agree with the teaching of the New Testament should not the doctrine(s) be abandoned?** If not abandoned, then has the church doctrine not replaced Jesus as Lord? (See Luke 6:46.)

What are some of the basic teachings of the New Testament? (Note: space does not permit mentioning every teaching.) (1) All men must believe in Jesus. (John 3:16.) (2) All men must repent of their sins. (Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30.) (3) All who believe in Jesus are to be baptized for/unto the remission of sins. (Acts 2:38; 22:16.) (4) Worship of God is to be in keeping with the worship He seeks, not patterned after human preference. (John 4:23,24.) (5) Life is to be lived in harmony with Jesus' teaching. (Matthew 7:24,25; 1 John 2:4.) (6) Love is to live in the heart, mercy is to be rendered, and prayers are to be uttered.

Jesus did *not* come into the world to introduce a series of confusing and contradicting teachings. Rather, He came to draw all men to Himself, and to fashion unity among all who would follow Him. (John 17:20-23.) How sad it is that a faith that is meant to be united in "oneness" has become a tangle of factions, each of which is going its separate way. Such cannot possibly be harmonized with the Lord's prayer that all who would follow Him be one. What is the solution? Can it be other than a return to the New Testament, permitting it to be the sole guide in all matters pertaining to faith and practice?

# *God's Forgiveness Is Wonderful!*

BASIL OVERTON

God has given us One Book which we call the Bible. The word "Bible" is from the Greek word that means "book."

There is a sense in which we can say that the main theme of God's Book is human sin. Some may respond and say the main theme of the Bible is Christ our Redeemer. Then the proper question is: Redeemer from what? And the obvious answer is: our Redeemer from our sins!

In God's Book there is no one definition of sin that completely shows us the enormity of, and the awful nature of our sins in the sight of God. The best definition of sin in God's Book is the picture of sin's consequences that emerges from its pages!

Some of these consequences are as follows.

**1. The consequences of the sin of Adam and Eve.** These devastating consequences were announced to them very clearly by the Lord and are recorded in Genesis chapter 3. They included their having to leave the garden of Eden and all its splendor and blessings.

**2. The picture includes the universal flood and all the destruction, devastation, and death wrought by it.** God brought this awful deluge upon the earth because He "saw that the wickedness of man was great in all the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5.)

**3. Human sin is the reason for the death of Jesus Christ.** God overruled the greatest tragedy of history and made it to be the greatest blessing, when by the grace of God, Jesus Christ tasted death for every lost sinner. (Hebrews 2:9.) Our sins are so bad that the only sacrifice for them that is sufficient is the sacrifice of the only perfect and sinless person who ever lived, Jesus of Nazareth!

**4. The eternal consequences of sins not forgiven is awesome evidence of how bad sin is.** "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23.) That place of eternal death or separation from God, "where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched"

(Mark 9:44,46) will be the eternal dwelling place of those who refuse God's forgiveness of their sins. Meditation on the eternal piercings of the undying worm should cause a sinner to accept God's forgiveness upon His terms, for there are no other terms!

### **GOD FORGIVES TWO CLASSES OF SINNERS**

**1. God forgives those who are not Christians when they become Christians.** They can become Christians by obeying the gospel. They can obey the gospel by believing the good news that Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary, that He is the Son of God, that He lived a perfect and sinless life, that He died for us, that He was buried and raised from the dead. Obeying the gospel also includes repenting of all sins, confessing the faith that Jesus is God's Son, and then being baptized into Christ. (Romans 6:3.) Those who thus obey the gospel are forgiven by God by His mercy and grace!

Peter told the people on Pentecost in Jerusalem that their sins included their killing God's Son. When they asked how they could be forgiven, he told them to repent and be baptized! (Acts 2:38.)

As man views it, Peter could have said, "You are too mean to be forgiven; you are doomed to go to hell." Beloved, Acts 2:38 contains an enormous demonstration of God's grace! "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." (Acts 2:41.) They did not argue about baptism. Instead they were baptized to be saved by God's abundant grace!

**2. God also forgives those in the church, those who are His children, when they repent of their sins and ask for His forgiveness.** After a man named Simon was baptized, he sinned. Peter did not tell him to repent and be baptized to be forgiven, but he told him to repent and pray for forgiveness! (Acts 8:18-22.)

Please read some more on the forgiveness of Christians in 1 John 1:7-10; 2:1-4. Beloved, let us be aware of, and also very thankful for our Father's forgiveness!

### **GOD FORGIVES ALL SINS WHEN WE MEET HIS CONDITIONS OF PARDON!**

One sin can be greater in God's sight than other sins,



according to Jesus in John 19:11, so there is no need to argue about that! Apparently, some people wonder if some sins are so bad that God will not forgive them.

When sinners meet God's conditions of pardon, He will forgive them no matter how bad their sins are! Those on Pentecost who had murdered God's Son got God's forgiveness when they were baptized for remission of their sins! If they were faithful to Jesus when they died, they will be with Jesus in heaven eternally! The grace of God is abundant indeed!

The following are some very bad sins, but God will forgive them if those guilty of them meet His conditions of pardon.

1. Homosexual practices are very sinful according to what God says in His Book, but if those who are guilty of this sin meet God's conditions of pardon He will forgive them. It is false science that says God made some to be homosexuals. He would not make people so that they cannot keep from being gay, and condemn them for being gay!

Recently, I heard Dr. James Dobson say that he knew of identical twins, and one was gay and the other one was not. He said this refutes the false claim that being homosexual is genetic! Dr. Dobson is an international authority on family and home.

Paul said some of the Christians in the Corinthian church had been gay, but they were washed in the blood of Christ and forgiven when they became Christians. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11.) They were no longer gay! This means homosexuals can quit being homosexuals!

2. God will forgive those who have abortions if they meet His conditions of pardon. If they are faithful to the Lord when they die, they will be in heaven eternally with their children that were aborted.

3. God will forgive one who is drunk and drives a car and hits and kills someone. I know of a case where a young man was driving while intoxicated and he hit a young man who was a Christian. After some time the parents of the young Christian forgave the one who had killed their son. They taught him the gospel and he became a Christian. Then they adopted him to be their son! If he is faithful to the Lord when he dies he will be in heaven eternally with all the redeemed, including the one he killed.

The Bible teaches that under the covenant of Christ when

God forgives, He does not remember the sins He has forgiven through the blood of Christ. Concerning those forgiven under that Covenant, the Bible says that God said, "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." (Hebrews 8:12.)

Praise God and thank Him for such mercy and grace!

## *Busy Here And There*

**T. PIERCE BROWN**

In 1 Kings 20:13-43 there is an interesting story of Benhadad whom the Lord had marked for destruction. King Ahab, who cared nothing about God's will, word, work or way, called him "brother," made a covenant with him and let him go.

God's prophet came to him with this story, a sort of parable, similar in purpose to the one Nathan told King David. "And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king, and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of the battle; and, behold a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he is missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be: thyself hath decided it. And he hasted and took the headband away from his eyes; and the king of Israel discerned that he was of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand the man whom I had delivered to destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria." (1 Kings 20:39-43.)

The difference in the response of Ahab and David is significant. Ahab went to house sullen and vexed. David confessed, repented and was forgiven.

The thought that kept striking me with sledgehammer force was, "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." Is there any lesson there that applies to me? I am so busy with thousands of students doing correspondence Bible courses. I am

so busy speaking and writing to encourage evangelism, both personal and impersonal, at home and abroad. I am so busy writing articles for brotherhood publications and books. I am so busy attending meetings, visiting sick and needy. All of these are worthwhile activities, and I am glad that God has allowed me to be a co-worker with Him in these activities. But I have neighbors who live next door to whom I have not presented the gospel. I asked myself, "If on the judgment day the Lord should remind me that here were daily opportunities confronting me for helping to save the lost next door, would my reply be that I was busy here and there and they were gone?"

I confess that even after 50 years of preaching the gospel, I do not know how to allocate the time of which God made me a steward. How much time to spend in studying God's word, how much to spend in writing about what I have learned, how much to spend sharing the good news with my neighbors, or how much to just quietly sit and meditate on God's grace and goodness. I do not know.

But I do know that the thought of being busy here and there and finding one gone for whom God left me the opportunity and responsibility to help touches my heart. I am not suggesting that we will be lost simply because we did not always know how to keep our priorities straight. But I am suggesting that we may have contributed to someone else staying lost because we were busy with some things when we should have been busy with others.

Have you decided which excuse you will use for not doing the primary job for which God will hold you responsible, that of fishing for men? Will it be, "I am too timid. I just cannot speak to my friends or neighbors about Jesus?" Will you have some reason for being able to talk about everything else under the sun but this? If your excuse is, "I was busy here and there" will you also have some answers about how important were the things about which you were busy? Jesus said, "Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19.) He did not say, "If you do not get too busy here and there."

I am glad that I do not know what God is going to do about those of us who have failed in this respect. I have no doubt that God in His gracious love forgives every Christian who truly repents and asks forgiveness. But there are some things of which we need

to be aware.

1. True repentance involves the kind of Godly sorrow that leads one to determine not to disobey God's will. Is a person penitent who knows that he is not properly about his Father's business and persists in deliberately failing to try to do better?

2. Although we may not miss heaven just because we failed to get our priorities straight, someone may. The consequences of our failure will be eternal. There are untold millions who are dying untold, because most of us are busy here and there and they are gone. Note an important point. I am not the cause of some other person being lost. He is lost because of his own sin. But the principle of Ezekiel 33:7-9 still applies. "So thou, son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word of my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die, and thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way; that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, and he turn not away; he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul."

We have lost many opportunities that are presented at certain times of our lives. As young people we have opportunities to develop habits that will glorify God. But we may be busy here and there and they are gone. Young parents have the opportunity to take their precious child on a knee and tell him the stories of Jesus and others in the Bible that would change his life. Some are busy here and there and they are gone.

The principle of which we speak applies to property, position or power. It applies to talents, time or thoughts. You may find yourself saying, "I once had money I could have used for the glory of God and the good of man, but I was busy here and there and it is gone." "I once had position or power to have influenced some change in government, society or church activity that would have been good, but the opportunity is gone." "I once had great abilities, active mind, or noble resolves, but I was busy here and there and now have 'old timer's disease' and they are gone."

The farmer who does not plan and plow and plant when spring comes may wish and weep and wail when winter comes, but to no avail. Shakespeare was right when he said, "There is a

tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries."

Being busy here and there is not enough. We must be busy about the important things—things that count for eternity. We must be busy at the right moments. Unless our primary aim in life is to glorify God and let Jesus have the first place in our plans, we may find ourselves in the same condition as the man in this parable. What are you busy doing?

## *How Is the Blood Applied?*

CHARLES BOX

Since the only way man's sins can be covered is through the blood of Christ, how anxious we should be to find how that cleansing blood may be applied. There is a one word answer to the question, "How is the blood applied?"—OBEDIENCE.

Somewhere, in the planning of our all-wise God, the sinner must come in contact with that blood which is adequate to cover his sin. Where? How? Some believe that the blood of Jesus is contacted the moment the sinner believes in Jesus Christ. Certainly, we would not minimize faith in Christ—it is essential to salvation. But, where is the scripture which declares that Jesus' blood is contacted through faith alone?

Other sincere people believe we contact the blood of Christ through repentance. We would not minimize repentance—it is a part of "being saved." But again, we ask for a scripture which shows us that we contact the blood through repentance.

Others conclude that the blood of Jesus is applied through prayer. We would never want to minimize prayer, but where is the scripture which tells us that one not a Christian can have the blood applied through his prayer?

I challenge anyone to show any place in the Bible where God declares that one not a Christian may contact the cleansing blood of Christ other than the place indicated in Romans 6:3, which says, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" Where was His blood shed?

Jesus' blood was shed in His death. Then how may that blood be contacted? God says by being baptized into His death. Then how important is it that we humbly obey the divine ordinance of baptism? In the act of baptism the cleansing blood of Christ is applied!

## ***Why Should We Study About Miraculous Spiritual Gifts?***

**MIKE BENSON**

Question: "Why should we study 1 Corinthians 12-14 today? Since miraculous spiritual gifts are no longer available (1 Corinthians 13:10; Ephesians 4:11-13), how are these chapters applicable to the church in the 21st century?"

Answer: There are a number of reasons why we need to investigate these inspired chapters.

1. To help us distinguish between the temporary and permanent. Many of our Pentecostal friends insist that miraculous gifts continue to be exercised today. While sincere in their convictions, they fail to recognize that the special "corroborating" measures (Hebrews 2:3,4) of the Spirit were intended to sustain the church only until such time as the written New Testament was completed. These gifts were never meant to be employed as an on-going or age-lasting means of producing faith.

2. To help reinforce the fact that miraculous gifts were actually present in the first-century. It is not uncommon to find those who deny the reality of the Holy Spirit's work and power in Scripture. In his book *Deceptions and Myths of the Bible*, Lloyd Graham states: "It takes a lot of ignorance to believe this literally, yet, literally, millions do. And then we wonder what's wrong with our world. What better world would you expect of such ignorance?" The Humanist Manifesto II [Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1973, p. 16] claims to 'find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of the supernatural.'"

Thomas Jefferson, onetime president of the United States, scissored from his Bible all references to the miraculous.

David Hume, the nineteenth-century English skeptic, categorically denied the possibility of all such wonders and signs. William Barclay, famous Church of Scotland scholar and author often attempted to "explain away" supernatural phenomena recorded in Scripture.

3. To help us differentiate between genuine miraculous gifts of the first-century and pseudo "miracles" of the present age. First-century supernatural endeavors were performed independent of any secondary causes. They were not the result of any natural phenomena. By contrast, modern-day "miracles" are fraudulent and devoid of any divine element. (Compare Matthew 24:24.) For instance, we need to study all the Scriptures, including those which deal with miraculous spiritual gifts. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17.)

As Christians, we must not only guard against all such forms of unbelief, but we must be ready to defend the integrity of the Word of God. (1 Peter 3:15; compare John 20:30-31.) To fail to study what the New Testament says about miraculous gifts is, in effect, to surrender one of the pillars of our faith to infidelity.

"...Peter Popoff, 'miracle-working' cleric of Upland, California. Popoff, who claimed the supernatural ability to give revealed information about people in his audiences (in conjunction with 'healing' them) was receiving such information through a tiny hearing aid, messages being transmitted by his wife from backstage. Prominent magician, James Randi, exposed the entire affair on nationwide T.V. Randi also demonstrated that Popoff was providing rented wheel-chairs for people who could actually walk, then, at his services, he was pronouncing them 'healed.'" [Wayne Jackson, "The Miracles of Christ vs. Modern Miracles," Reason & Revelation, February, 1990, Vol. X, No. 2, p. 11.] As people who wish to adhere to the Scriptures, we have an obligation to expose this kind of duplicity and to show sincere seekers of truth the difference between the false pageantry of high-profile charlatans and that which was done by humble first-century devotees of Christ (1 John 4:1.)

"Charismatics try to identify 'that which is perfect' as Jesus, and draw an erroneous conclusion that miracles are to continue until the second advent of Christ. However, the language will not allow for such an interpretation. The word so translated is the Greek word 'teleios', meaning 'complete, of full age, mature.' It appears 19 times in 17 verses and never refers to Jesus Christ. In addition, the word is neuter in its gender; that is, it refers to neither male nor female, but to an object without gender, in this case the scriptures." [Todd Clippard, "Do Miracles Still Happen Today?", Words of Truth, March 2001, p. 4.]

"In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 nine spiritual gifts are mentioned, including prophecy, tongues, and knowledge (supernatural). In the next chapter, verse 8, the writer says, '...but whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away.' Paul maintains in this passage that miracles would be done away. In the statement to follow, verse 9 and 10, he tells us when this would happen: 'For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.' At the time Paul wrote the foregoing, the New Testament was in the process of being written. No one inspired man among the Christians to whom Paul is referring was endowed with all knowledge; but when the written New Testament (called by the apostle "that which is perfect" and designated in James 1:25 as 'the perfect law of liberty') was completed, then that which was in part (the various spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12, including supernatural knowledge) was done away... In the concluding verse of 1 Corinthians 13 Paul says, 'But now abideth faith', hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.' After the nine spiritual gifts enumerated by the apostle were done away at the completion of the written New Testament, only faith, hope and love were to abide, 'These three.' Were miracles to be perpetual during the New Testament dispensation, Paul would have said, 'But now abideth...these twelve' (the nine spiritual gifts plus faith, hope, and love.)"

