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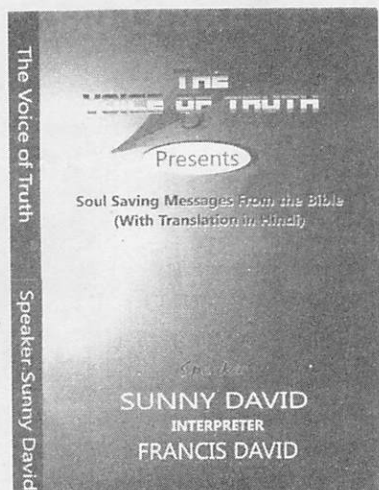
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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

The Holy Spirit Dwells in the Christian

In addition to many special blessings the Christian enjoys, he has also been given the assurance that his body is the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in him. (1Corinthians 3:16 & 6:19).

The Spirit of God is the Holy Spirit, who is one of the Persons in the Divine Nature. He is not merely a force or a power, but is a Divine Person in the Godhead, co-equal with God. (Genesis 1:26, 27; Acts 17:29; Matthew 28:19).

The Holy Spirit indwells Christian just as God the Father and God the Son live in him. Christ taught, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." (John 14:23). Therefore, those who keep His word or do and follow what He teaches, has the promise that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit will come and make their residence in them. How? By or through the Living and Powerful Word of God. (Hebrews 4:12). The word of God is the instrument of the Spirit. (Ephesians 6:17). The Holy Spirit lives in a Christian in the same way just as the Father and the Son lives in him, by and through the written word of God.

The Scripture says: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:1). Again, how? By practising and doing those things the Spirit of God teaches through the written word of God in the Bible. The things we read

in the Bible, were written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit of God to write. (2 Peter 1:20, 21). Therefore, when the Scripture says, "be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18), it means, "let the word of God dwell in you richly." (Colossians 3:16).

The written word of God in the Bible is the instrument of the Holy Spirit. When one believes what God says in the Bible and obeys His word, just as He has said, this shows one is guided and is walking by the Spirit of God.

The fruit of the Spirit is, the Bible teaches, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law." (Galatians 5:22,23). A tree is known by its fruits. (Matthew 7:16). The Christian therefore is expected to bear the fruit of the Spirit, just as mentioned in the Scripture cited above.

The fruit of the Spirit, however, is not an inner feeling "that is better felt than told." Nothing miraculous or supernatural is the fruit of the Spirit. I don't have to work some miracles, or speak in languages that I have never learn-ed, or provide healing to the sick, to prove that I have the Holy Spirit living in me. The Holy Spirit of God is not operating today directly, independently, separate and apart from the already written word of God, empowering certain men to lift their hand and make people drop down on the floor and heal them of their diseases. Such are false notions.

The only meaningful evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Christian is the changed life. Because he is now walking by the teachings of the Holy Spirit, as provided in the Bible by the Spirit of God, the Christian now bears the fruit of the Spirit as mentioned in Galatians 5:22,23, and else-where in the Bible. The proof of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not in feelings, or ecstatic experiences or emotional outbursts, but is in whether a person's life is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit.

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 show 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 he 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.

Stay Close

GLENN COLLEY

Church members need to be close to church members. Anytime a Christian creates a distance between himself and the church, he is under a greater threat of falling away from the faith. Some folks prefer to not be too involved with the work of the church, choosing rather to fall somewhere between "visitors" and "members". They come on Sunday mornings to worship God, which is good in itself, but have little or no other interaction with the other Christians in the church for the rest of the week.

Take a valuable history lesson:

When the great nation of Israel prepared to cross Jordan and take Canaan away from the enemies of God, and thus be blessed, two of the twelve tribes stalled.

"Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land...that, behold, the place was a place for cattle; The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spake unto Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and unto the princes of the congregation,

saying, the country which the LORD smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle: Wherefore, said they, if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan" (Numbers 32:1-5).

The request regarding cattle sounded reasonable, as do most arguments which excuse compromise, but it was compromise none the less. Their real loyalty should have been to God's people.

In other words, they said, "We like it here in the suburbs of Canaan. You all go in and fight all the battles of Canaan, and we'll just be content to build our houses here." Moses said, "No Way! Shall your brethren go up and fight while you sit here in comfort? No. You come fight the battles of Canaan, and then if you choose, you may come live here in the suburbs of God's Canaan land."

And so they did. Weren't they like some Christians today who are half-hearted in their loyalty to the Lord's church?

Let's look at another scene, after many years have passed. Israel has had times of great faith and obedience, but many more of idolatry and disobedience. Ultimately, a divided Israel would fall into the hands of the idolatrous enemies, Assyria and Babylon, because of their worldliness in bowing to the gods of the heathen. That fact is widely known. But I want you to see something else. Which tribes in Israel went down first? We see in 1 Chronicles 5:25,26 that it was Reuben and Gad:

"And they transgressed against the God of their fathers, and went a whoring after the gods of the people of the land, whom God destroyed before them. And the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgathpilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river Gozan, unto this day."

As history progressed, it appears that they bowed first to the gods of the nearby peoples; and now they are the first to go into captivity. Half-heartedness in the united work of God's people always seems an easy way to be religious, but it costs, not pays.

The solution is to **grow out of it!** Never be satisfied with keeping your distance from the activities of the Lord's church. Attend all the services of the church. Find a good work you can enjoy doing, and get at it. Take advantage of opportunities to be

around other Christians.

Be close, stay close, and let's help each other go to heaven.

What Effect Do I Have on My Brethren?

MAXIE B. BOREN

A question which every Christian needs to ask himself is, "What effect do I have on my brethren?" This is an important inquiry for each of us to make, because the Bible has a great deal to say concerning individual responsibility in the matter.

For an example: a harsh, judgmental attitude toward others over inconsequential matters can be a causative factor of someone stumbling and falling, spiritually. Therefore, the apostle Paul urged Christians **not** to put a stumbling block or an occasion of falling in a brother's way (read Romans 14:13). Further, he instructed that Christians refrain from anything that would cause a brother to stumble (verse 21). Jesus declared, *"Woe unto the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes"* (Matthew 18:7 NASV).

Instead of creating stumbling blocks to "trip someone up", would you agree that the cause of Christ would be much better served if we each one would try to make the pathways of others a little bit smoother? Philemon was such a man as that, because the apostle wrote to him and said, *"I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother"* (Philemon 7).

What kind of an effect do I have on other brethren? That is an inquiry each of us needs to make of himself/herself. Ask, "Do I spread gloom and doom in the church by a bad attitude, or do I spread joy and sunshine by a good attitude?" And further, "Am I busy paving life's road to make it better for others, or do I specialize in causing problems by fashioning stumbling blocks along the way?" Diotrephes was apparently in the latter category and was of such a disposition that specialized in casting folks out of the church instead of helping them to be fruitful and productive;

and thus, the apostle John indicted him for his attitude (3 John 9-11). Think about it.

NOT OF NECESSITY

JOE C. MAGEE

My experience with the subject of giving could be called a paradox. For years as a young husband and father, struggling to support a growing family, I would resist, even become upset every time the subject of giving came up. I readily admit that part of the problem was that I knew that I was not giving to support the cause of Christ as I should. But there was another problem.

So many times when the end of each year was approaching, the preacher would be asked by the elders to preach a sermon on giving. At times the sermon would be based upon the budget which the elders had apparently already prepared. At other times, they would approach the subject apologetically. On one occasion the preacher even apologized, saying, "I promise not to touch on this subject again this year."

I began to study the subject of giving from a biblical standpoint. I immediately recognized that we were creating an attitude of necessity, which is exactly what the Bible teaches **not to do**. "*So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver*" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

What constitutes a cheerful giver? Do you remember the first time you had an opportunity to give a gift? What prompted that action, if not love? Love for a mother, father, friend, or sweetheart makes the giving of a gift an exciting and cheerful act. How different from giving out of a sense of obligation.

We should be reminded that we serve a loving and giving God. He gave us life. He gave us a beautiful world in which to live. He gives the strength and resources to supply our needs. Most of all, He gave us His Son to die for our sins; and He gives us the opportunity to share with others our bounty.

This is the opportunity which Paul deals with in his letter to the Corinthians. The saints in Jerusalem were in great need. Paul writes of how those in Macedonia responded to this need. "*Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; that in a great trial of*

affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality" (2 Corinthians 8:1,2).

Note how closely joy and liberality are tied together. And then as Paul admonishes the Corinthians to be prepared, he writes, *"Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation" (2 Corinthians 9:5).* Notice the words "generous", "previously promised", and "not as a grudging obligation." I get the impression that these brethren were excited about the opportunity to help even those whom they did not know, and yet those who were of like precious faith.

What prompted this enthusiasm among the Macedonians? We find the answer in verse five of chapter eight: *"And not only as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God."* Of all the gifts we may offer, none can compare with the one for which our Lord yearns the most: **ourselves.** *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24).*

Let me share with you a method that has been used with surprising results where I have served. First, the leaders would determine to let the congregation set the budget. In order to do so, they would set forth proposals concerning the work of the church. Two months before the budget would go into effect, a series of lessons on giving would be presented. These would be Bible-based and not budget-centered.

Following this, the congregation would be asked to search their hearts and determine what they would give over the next year, and would give that much over the next three Sundays. Why three Sundays? This would determine an average and would allow for any casual giving by visitors to the services. The average of these three Sunday contributions would then serve as a basis for what the leaders could determine they would have to carry on the work. In essence, they have let the congregation set the budget.

The amazing thing about this is that, in every case where I have seen this put into effect, the congregation purposed more than the leaders pro-posed, and at the end of the budget year they had given more than they purposed! What's more, the congregations found themselves personally engaged in more of

the activities of the church, more enthusiastic, and rejoicing in the work of the Lord as never before! Under this method, I have seen congregations double and triple their giving in less than three years.

Giving as described and taught in the Scriptures is an act of love and a glory to God. It can become one of the most exciting experiences a Christian can enjoy.

During Times Of Trial

JESUS RODRIGUEZ

How should a Christian act when he is being mistreated and even persecuted? At times in the church, situations arise which are difficult for us to understand or manage. It is then that we must go to the Word of God for guidance in how we function as Christians. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, behavioral rules are given for those occasions when human wisdom and logic would fail us.

The second thing we must do is to ask God to help us to understand and control our emotions. Overwrought emotions often cloud our understanding and do not permit us to reason clearly. It is only by growing in divine nature, as described in 2 Peter 1:4, that we can avoid serious and harmful mistakes during times of trial.

"And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:5-8).

When we have with perseverance asked the guidance of the Lord in prayer, we should then ask ourselves: What would Jesus do in such a situation? How is the fruit of the Spirit working in me? *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22,23).*

Christ teaches us the importance of mercy and pardon. If we do not feel compassion for those who persecute us, if we do not

deal fairly with those who don't especially please us, how can we ourselves expect pardon from the Lord? Jesus said, *"But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Matthew 6:15).

It could be that some day we ourselves will need the mercy and pardon which we may be denying to someone else today.

Brethren, let's remember this: Christ is constantly giving us another chance. Let's do the same to those who wrong us.

When We Come Before the Lord

RONALD D. BRYANT

It is suggested that when people come into the worship assembly there are at least two things they can expect: They can expect to be **comforted** or **confronted**, and the one who does the comforting or the confronting is the Lord.

Now most of us are comfortable with the idea of being comforted, and the words of Jesus are our refuge (see Matthew 11:28-30). But the thought of being confronted is not so desirable. Yet, in His personal ministry, Jesus was confrontational. He was confrontational for the purpose of turning men to righteousness, and thus to life eternal. He confronted in an earnest effort to help, not hurt. And, to this day, He has neither changed in His character, nor in His desire to turn men to the way of life.

When we come into the assembly of God's people, we are in the presence of the Lord, and we can be assured that He longs for us to be made whole. His desire is to comfort us.

Yet, we can also be assured that He will not wink at our failings, but will lovingly confront us, when and where the need lies, and for our eternal good. We can know that Jesus sees us as we are and confronts us in the same consistent manner of His character.

Consider: Jesus confronts us with our lack of preparation, our lack of reverence, our lack of pure adoration. He confronts us in our pettiness, our self-centeredness, our self-sufficiency. He confronts us in our empty posturing, our empty words, our empty hearts. He confronts us in our lack of love, our lack of faith, our lack of humility. He confronts us with our belief that the world revolves around us, that others must cater to us, that even the worship must serve us.

He confronts us! He confronts us for the purpose of calling us to genuineness of faith, of humility, of repentance, of worship, of life. He is the reason for life, for hope, for holy conduct. He must ever be the point of our focus. He must ever be the one we come to meet in the assembly, and the one for whom we live every day of our lives.

The Deceitfulness of Sin

DANNY CLINE

Desires are a wonderful part of life, but strong desires, intensified desires, must be carefully watched. Being neither good nor bad in their nature, they want to attach themselves to the objects of our desire (see John 17:24; 1 John 2:16).

Because we seek satisfaction and fulfillment in them, we may learn too late that our desires have characterized our lives. Wanting what is good is advantageous, but evil desires destroy us. They are deceptive and tricky, promising what they do not deliver. They pass away with the world; but people who have good desires (who seek God's will or desire) live forever (1 John 2:17).

The Devil is a great deceiver, deceiving the whole world (Revelation 12:9). He began by deceiving Eve in Eden in the beginning, and he has had success with all the rest of us of responsible age (1 Timothy 2:14; James 1:14), including the inspired apostles of Christ who wrote honestly of their own deception (1 Peter 4:3; Titus 3:3; Ephesians 2:3). Lusts of deceit corrupt and ruin us (Ephesians 4:22; 2 Peter 1:4). Bad people proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13).

Hearts of men become darkened and foolish when they refuse to honor and thank the God they know. The truth of God is exchanged by them for falsehood, and the lusts of their hearts lead to immorality (Romans 1:21, 25,26). They become full of deceit (verse 29). Their sin compels them to obey its lusts, producing even more sin (Romans 6:12). Don't be deceived (James 1:14-16).

Satan's plot is to outwit us and lead us to sin (2 Corinthians 2:11). *"Let no one deceive you...the one who practices sin is of the Devil who has been practicing sin from the beginning. Christ*

came to destroy the works of the Devil" (1 John 3:7,8).

The "old man of sin", corrupted by deceptive desire, must be removed. The new man, taught in truth, must be put on (Ephesians 4:20-24). As Christ taught only truth, those who are unable to hear His teaching do not understand it, and end up doing the desires of the Devil (John 8:43-45).

The truth of God teaches us to be obedient children, not allowing our lives to be shaped by the desires of our former ignorance (1 Peter 1:14). Our souls are purified by obeying the truth (verse 22), souls that once were at war with their fleshly lusts (1 Peter 2:11; James 4:1). Recounting the waste of the war, we are not to live the remainder of our time on earth *"to the lusts of men, but to the will of God"* (1 Peter 4:2).

"The saving grace of God has been revealed to all men, instructing us that we should deny irreverence and worldly lusts, and live sensibly, uprightly, and reverently in the present world" (Titus 2:11,12). Deny and say "No" to evil desire.

The flesh with its passions and desires must be "crucified" (Galatians 5:24). *"We know this, that our old self has been crucified together with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that we should no longer serve sin"* (Romans 6:6). Attend the funeral of your old self as you are baptized into Christ Jesus, being buried together with Him through baptism into death (Romans 6:4a). We put on Christ by this immersion (Galatians 3:27).

All this is *"in order that we also might walk in newness of life, in the same manner that Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father"* (Romans 6:4b). Having put on Christ, and having put off the old self, we have clothed ourselves with the Lord Jesus so as to *"not make provision for fleshly lusts"* (Romans 13:14).

Then, walking by the direction of the Holy Spirit, as revealed in God's word, we will no longer fulfill the desire of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). We will want to encourage one another every day so that we do not again become hardened in heart by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13).

THE POWER OF THE INCARNATION

DENNIS LOYD

The word "incarnation," although not a biblical term, means the

taking on of a human form. John presents the idea most effectively when he introduces Jesus as the Word who was present with God in the Creation and was in fact God. But "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 NKJV). When "the Word became flesh," the incarnation occurred. But it was far more involved than that statement might suggest.

Isaiah long ago prophesied, "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given" (Isaiah 9:6). That prophecy established the coming of the Messiah in human form, as a child, a son. The prophet did not say when or where, but the promise remained. When "the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4). And the incarnation was a reality.

Throughout the New Testament emphasis is placed on a fleshly Jesus. Paul quotes what may have been an early hymn proclaiming, "God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16). Because each of these assessments relates to Jesus, we must accept that He was God in the flesh.

A much later hymn serves as the theme for this series of articles, and it begins by declaring, "We saw Thee not when Thou didst come." The miracles surrounding the coming of Jesus into the world are of such magnificent proportions that all would wish to have been actual witnesses. Angels announced individually to Mary and Joseph the coming of this Child. The fact that Mary was a virgin added to the miraculous nature of the event and at the same time possibly provoked great gossip. In Bethlehem far from Nazareth, an angelic message announced the remarkable birth to shepherds. A star led the wise men from the East to the place where Jesus lay. Another angel warned Joseph of Herod's threat against the life of the baby because Herod feared a replacement as king. As the hymn writer says, we did not see any of that.

But the hymn goes on to declare that He came into a world of sin and death. We think of the angel's message to Joseph. "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Although this world is indeed marked by sin and death, Jesus came to offer salvation from both. As amazing as are the miracles surrounding His birth, the New Testament writers make little fuss over them.

Their focus instead is on Jesus the Savior. One would expect the Savior of the world to come into the world in a remarkable fashion. The important thing is not how He came but that He came.

The hymn continues: "Nor yet beheld Thy cottage home, In that despised Nazareth." We assume from the prejudiced comment of Nathanael that Nazareth was despised and ridiculed. From later comments, we realize that the whole of Galilee was mocked (John 7:41-42, 52). But Nazareth was to be His home for nearly 30 years as Jesus grew into manhood and prepared to be about His Father's business.

"But we believe Thy footsteps trod Its streets and plains, Thou Son of God." We did not see these events, but we believe. Jesus told Thomas after His resurrection that he was blessed for believing in the Lord, but He also said others are more blessed for not seeing and yet believing (John 20:29).

We did not share in the experience of the shepherds and the wise men, but we believe the angels announced to the shepherds, "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). And they had the good judgment and the understanding to say to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us" (v. 15). We were not there when the wise men first saw the star in the East and began to follow its path in full faith that it would bring them to the King of the Jews. And when they found the Child, they "rejoiced with exceedingly great joy ... and fell down and worshiped Him" (Matthew 2:10-11). The actions of both groups of men attest to us centuries later that this was no ordinary child born in Bethlehem.

God chose the path of a human existence for His Son to come into the world. His birth was remarkable, but His growing up years, in contrast, were rather unremarkable. We know nothing of them except for the journey to Jerusalem when He was 12 years old. During those years, He was subject to Mary and Joseph and developed intellectually, physically, spiritually and socially. God was preparing Him for the reason He came—to save His people from their sins.

We must be impressed with the numerous references in Scripture to Jesus as a human. The Holy Spirit directed the writers to let us know about Jesus' physical aspects. He was hungry and thirsty. He was weary and frustrated. He knew anger and sorrow.

He was disappointed and elated. He enjoyed company and solitude. He "was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). The Word indeed became flesh.

We did not share the years with Mary and Joseph and the little town of Nazareth, but we believe Jesus was allowed to grow up as normal a youth as He could be. Although some apocryphal books relate stories of miracles performed by Jesus as a child, the Bible offers no such suggestions. Instead He was a child, a youth, a young adult. He was 30 years old before He began the work for which He came. But we believe that He came and that He was destined to become the Savior of the world.

At times we must reflect on our helpless state had He not come. He could have rejected God's offer to become the perfect sacrifice for the salvation of the world. He could have insisted that some other way be found. But He accepted His Father's will just as Isaac long ago accepted his father's explanation that the Lord would provide a sacrifice. For all of us, God did provide a sacrifice, His only begotten Son.

The incarnation was for our benefit. As Paul wrote, "And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:8-11).

"But we believe Thy footsteps trod its streets and plains, Thou Son of God."

THE POWER OF THE CRUCIFIXION

AUBREY JOHNSON

Since Pompey's army marched triumphantly through the streets of Jerusalem, Rome's influence overshadowed the city of David. The empire's reach was undeniable as Roman clothing, coinage and customs became conspicuous in Palestine. The stability of the *Pax Romana* was a welcome relief to the troubled region, but it did not come without a price: new taxes were levied

to sustain the occupying army; new offices were established to protect Rome's interests; and new punishments were instituted to discourage political unrest. So it was that crucifixion became a staple of Jewish life during the time of Jesus.

Crucifixion was the harshest form of punishment allowable under Roman law. The Persians probably devised this method of execution, but Rome perfected it and employed it for political as well as penal use. Its purpose was to terrorize potential enemies of the state. Hanging and beheading were too humane to achieve this deterrent effect. Even crucifixion needed tweaking to extend the victim's suffering long enough to maximize the incentive for restraint. During the 800 years crucifixion was in use, tens of thousands of people experienced this torturous and humiliating death. So in first-century Jerusalem, death by crucifixion was common, if not daily fare, a fact evidenced by the crucifixion of two thieves on the same afternoon that Jesus died.

Why then do Christian hymns glorify this gruesome display of inhumanity? It was because Jesus' experience of the cross was a unique, sufficient and unrepeatable act of atonement. Jesus was the best heaven had to offer. Crucifixion was the worst man had to offer. When the sinless Son of God willingly sacrificed His life to secure forgiveness for hapless humans, it was a testimony to the unconquerable love of Almighty God.

But why was it not enough for Jesus to die quickly and painlessly? Why did He have to suffer so much for so long? Perhaps only crucifixion could convey the depth of man's depravity and need for regeneration. Perhaps crucifixion alone could communicate God's amazing grace and the length to which He would go to redeem His lost children. The kind of death Jesus died made Him the kind of Savior the world desperately needed (Hebrews 5:8-9). No ordinary death could do so much.

The power of the crucifixion was seen in nature's reaction to the events that Friday. The hymnist wrote, "But we believe the deed was done, that shook the earth and veiled the sun." The phenomenons that coincided with Jesus' death were by no means coincidental. God was speaking through His creation. The timing and coordination of these rare occurrences were designed to arrest attention and deliver an unmistakable message to those who would listen.

The earthquake that occurred precisely at the moment of Christ's death signified the opening of a door through which

sinner could return to their heavenly Father. In an object lesson of cosmic proportions, the violent shaking of the earth tore the veil of the temple from top to bottom. The rending of that veil was God's way of explaining the significance of Jesus' death on the cross. Just as the veil barred entrance into the Holy of Holies, the opening of Christ's flesh and the release of His blood were God's means of eliminating the barrier of sin that formerly excluded mankind from His presence.

Quoting Joel, Peter connected the veiling of the sun with the coming of the day of the Lord on the Pentecost after Christ's crucifixion (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16). The prophet's words may also have served as an apocalyptic metaphor for the fall from power of leading luminaries in Jerusalem's political and religious power structure. Still, one must ask why God chose darkness as a sign heralding this change from the Mosaic to Christian dispensation. Was it because "the deed" that made this transition possible was characterized by unspeakable evil? Sin and the delusional thinking underlying it are often depicted as darkness in Scripture (Romans 1:21). Never in the history of the world was wickedness more evident than in the crucifixion of our Lord. Never before were the fruits of futile thinking more obvious than in the warped reasoning that led to our Savior's death.

For a brief moment, it seemed as if the forces of darkness had extinguished all light from the face of the earth. Yet in one of Calvary's ironic twists, the shadow cast over the earth by Jesus' crucifixion was followed by a dynamic period of preaching that spread spiritual light throughout the world. Like a backdraft in firefighting, this resurgence of light was in direct response to efforts to remove it. A backdraft occurs when all the oxygen is sucked out of a room and a sudden inrush of air fuels the nearly extinguished flame. Similarly, a spiritual and beneficial backdraft occurred when Satan attempted to snuff out the life and influence of Jesus. Just when it seemed as if the devil had won, Jesus opened a new and living way to heaven, and the superabundant supply of God's blessings led to the explosive growth of the early church.

The earthquake attending Jesus' death authenticated His divinity (Mark 15:39) and confirmed the presence of God to whom He committed His spirit. The darkness epitomized the evil underlying the attempts to suppress His message and subvert His mission. Whether mild or severe, such opposition merely sets the

stage for a more glorious victory of truth and light and love.

Even so, it is only when "we believe" in the objective reality of Jesus' atoning death that we are able to receive its benefits. Although no person now living was there to behold our Lord's horrific death, millions continue to sing, "But we believe." The belief of which they sing is more than blind faith. It is a conviction that arises from the credible testimony of eyewitnesses and the time-tested reliability of God's Word. Furthermore, it is an assurance that grows out of patterning one's life after the cross.

Jesus' crucifixion is not only God's means of deliverance but also His model for successful living. It reveals that one's worth does not come from accumulated possessions but from the joy and bounty with which one gives. It contends that renewal does not come from a life of ease but from a willingness to sacrifice. It declares that abundant life is not the consequence of looking out for number one but of dying to self. Plainly put, the power of the cross is the power of love—authentic, responsible, committed love (John 13:1).

The genuineness of Jesus' love was forever established at Calvary, but that love is made even more impressive when placed against the backdrop of His foreknowledge. Every day when Jesus awoke, He knew the anguish that awaited Him. What made Him drink the bitter cup? What kept Him on the cross when it was within His power and prerogative to set Himself free? It was the heart of Jesus that held His body in place. Not spikes or soldiers or swords. Not the armies of Rome or the authority of the Sanhedrin. Perhaps the greatest mystery surrounding the death of Jesus is how a body so small and a cross so weak could hold a heart so large.

THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION

JACK WILHELM

On the Sunday after the crucifixion of Jesus, His followers knew what it meant to move from the darkness to dawn. The event, like the incarnation, was announced with an angelic message. The options to understand ranged from a stolen body to a resurrected one. Confusion reigned. "But we believe that angels said, 'Why seek the living with the dead?' "

Ever since that day, humanity has been challenged to decide what happened to the body of Jesus. The tomb admittedly was

empty, although it had been officially sealed and guarded while it contained the body of Jesus.

Skeptics rely on logic to imply that new life in a dead body is not possible. To them, if the tomb was empty, some explanation other than resurrection is essential. They say Jesus merely fainted and later revived and slipped away. They claim that His disciples returned and stealthily stole the body. Some charge collusion in a deliberate fraud. Some say it was not a resurrected body that followers saw but only a vision—as if creating a miracle to deny a miracle is logical.

Some claim that emotional women went to the wrong tomb, although the women helped prepare the body for burial and knew the tomb site, which incidentally was verified by visits from the men later.

Questions posed by believers, however, pinpoint that logic can work as well to affirm the resurrection as to deny it. If a crucifixion occurred and a body was entombed, does that not verify that an historical Jesus lived and was an influential teacher? After being scourged and declared officially dead, would He not have been too weak to move the stone? If the wrong tomb, why was the body not displayed in the correct tomb? If He had not died or someone else was substituted as a victim, why were His subsequent life and death not spotlighted to diffuse the influence of His disciples? When did He later die?

If the body was stolen, why was it not produced later to expose a hoax? Why would dispirited disciples, who had fled, have any interest in stealing the body? What did they have to gain promoting a cause with no assets to perpetrate a hoax that invited severe persecution, even death? Why would pivotal players in the scheme not have recanted and defected rather than suffer or die? If they were bribed to perpetuate a fraud, why would they not have later negotiated a greater bribe from desperate detractors—or further extorted believers to remain silent?

It has been alleged that the empty tomb story was fabricated by Mark or other writers a generation after Jesus died. But His resurrection was predicted 1,000 years before Jesus lived or Mark wrote. David had said, "My flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:9-10 NKJV). Isaiah referred to this in Isaiah 55:3. See also Acts 13:34. Jesus foretold during His ministry

that He would "rise again" (Mark 8:31; Matthew 16:21; Luke 9:22).

Further, if His appearance was merely a vision, how were competent witnesses able to feel the body and verify scars? Why would such visions have ceased? Too many people witnessed the life and resurrection of Jesus to write off the resurrection as a stunt.

What makes witnesses convincing? They are believable if they are honest, numerous, competent, stable and corroborative of others. Some of Jesus' followers were people who previously had been slow to believe in Him, including His own brothers (John 7:5), but they, even enemies, became believers, and some eventually died for Him. They were reputable, good men and women whose lives bore witness to ethical behavior. They were convinced that Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs" (Acts 1:3). He was seen in small informal settings but also by more than 500 at one time (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). He appeared "openly ... to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead" (Acts 10:40-41).

Hugo McCord noted recorded appearances in 12 different references after Jesus' resurrection: to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9); to two women (Matthew 28:9); to two men (Luke 24:13-35); to Simon (v. 34); to 10 apostles (John 20:19-25); to 11 apostles (vv. 26-28); to seven disciples (21:1-24); to 11 apostles (Matthew 28:18-20); to "more than five hundred brothers" (1 Corinthians 15:6); to James (v. 7); to 11 apostles (Luke 24:33-53); and to Paul (1 Corinthians 15:8).

McCord concluded: "Easy it is to convince some people that the idea of a dead body coming to life is impossible and ridiculous. However, thousands of mistaught people accept without question the guess that life on this earth originated in a primeval pool of water, that in the pool some dead chemicals happened to join themselves together in such a way as to form a living cell (an amoeba), and that from that one cell has sprung all plant and animal and human life. More faith is required to believe in such a guess than to believe in 'Moses and all the Prophets' (Luke 24:27) and gospel writers."

It is not surprising that the devil discourages belief in the resurrection of Jesus because after all, He was "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4).

Unbelievers claim the biblical accounts of Jesus' resurrection

are just legends. Some allege that they were merely folklore stories embellished by re-telling as a "miracle" before finally being written down. We need to remember that Matthew and John saw things first hand. Luke saw Paul's miracles, and Mark learned first hand from Paul and Peter also. Paul saw Jesus and wrote inspired accounts. They did not depend on legends but wrote what they saw during their lifetimes. They had no incentives or benefits to perpetrate a hoax.

The resurrection was a demonstration of power, and our belief in it provides power to be victorious Christians. Not only does the resurrection validate the life of Jesus as God's Son (Romans 1:4), but it also affirms that He is now on David's throne (Acts 2:29-36). He is our Lawgiver (Matthew 17:1-8; 28:18-20), Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5; John 14:6), and Savior (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 5:8-9). He is the anchor we need in a troubled world for our faith and our hope (John 14:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15).

The Prayers of Christians

DON L. NORWOOD

Let us study Jesus' teaching concerning acceptable prayer in the life of His disciples. In Matthew 6:5-15, Jesus sets forth a model prayer. We need to learn all we can about prayer so that we can pray acceptably to our heavenly Father.

This prayer that Jesus spoke is a model with reference to brevity and scope. As one analyzes the prayer, it shows a well-considered structure of three parts, namely: (1) the address, (2) a group of petitions pertaining to God, and (3) a group of petitions pertaining to the person offering the prayer.

The prayer is brief, but it covers a wide range of human needs, as well as showing the relationship between God and mankind. It is a model with reference to simplicity and directness. Even those who are uneducated can understand it. Each petition is a request for something distinct and definite. One does not have to use many words or phrases to make a petition to God. We can and must be sincere and direct. Also encompassed in the prayer are acknowledgement of God's sovereignty in heaven and on earth, praise and reverence for God, and concern for His kingdom and for the prevalence of His will.

This prayer is a model in reference to order. Notice that before Jesus mentioned a word about personal needs, He used words to glorify God. He asked that God's name be hallowed and that God's kingdom would come. He further expressed desire that humans would do God's will here on earth, just as it is in heaven (verse 10).

Remember that our prayers should always give God glory, and then we can make mention of our personal needs. We should pray with the conviction that God will answer our prayers if we do our best to learn and do His will, and if we have complete faith in Him (John 9:31; James 1:5-8). God will answer according to what He sees is best (1 John 5:14,15). Remember, doing God's will is the only way any of us can get to heaven (Matthew 7:21-23). We should hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6).

Jesus' prayer is a model with reference to spirit. In order to properly worship God, it must be done in spirit and in truth (John 4:23,24). When one approaches God with a petition, he should do so with complete trust and supplication that comes from a sincere heart, realizing that all good and perfect gifts come from the Father above (James 1:17).

What are conditions for acceptable prayer to God? (1) The prayer must be offered in complete faith (James 1:5-8; Matthew 21:22); (2) the motive for asking must be right (James 4:3); (3) it must be in accordance with God's will (1 John 5:14,15); (4) the petitioner must be in a right spiritual relationship with God (John 9:31; John 15:7; 1 John 5:14,15); (5) the prayer must be offered in the name of Jesus Christ (John 14:13,14).

Christians must avoid things that hinder God's answers to prayers. Such hindrances would include allowing oneself to continue to practice sin (Psalm 66:18; John 9:31), refusing to learn and obey God's will (Proverbs 28:9; 2 Timothy 4:3), refusing to love and to abide in the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12), having a hateful and unloving attitude toward one's mate (1 Peter 3:7), being unwilling to sincerely forgive a person who has offended us and has asked forgiveness (Matthew 6:14,15; Mark 11:25,26), failing to be sensitive to the needs and cries of the poor (Proverbs 21:13; 1 John 3:17), and doubting that God will answer the prayer (James 2:5-8).

Let us all strive to pray as Jesus taught, *"...Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

Faith, Love, Obedience

WAYNE BARRIER

Christians must understand the connection between faith, love, and obedience to live as God wills. We know that *"without faith it is impossible to please Him"* (Hebrews 11:6). The first great commandment is to *"love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind"* (Matthew 22:37). The second great commandment is to *"love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:30). Those who fail to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ are destined to eternal punishment (2 Thessalonians 1:8). We must do God's will or be rejected by Him (Matthew 7:21).

These three aspects of being a Christian are connected, even though man often ignores one or two while emphasizing the others in his attempts to please God. Their connection can be understood by considering the message of 1 John 4:20-5:5.

These verses state, *"If anyone says, 'I love God' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God must love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whoever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."* John states in 1 John 3:18, *"My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."*

Christianity demands a complete commitment and investment of action. It is easy to say that we have **faith** and that we **love** the Savior without investing in the action demanded by **obedience**. Some find themselves obeying the rules but lack the heart of love and appreciation of a true Christian.

Personal examination and inventory can reveal our condition with regard to these three dimensions of Christianity. We must not be *"conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect will of God"* (Romans 12:2).

Faith, love, and obedience can lead us to the ultimate victory that God offers to man through the sacrifice of His Son—eternal life.



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