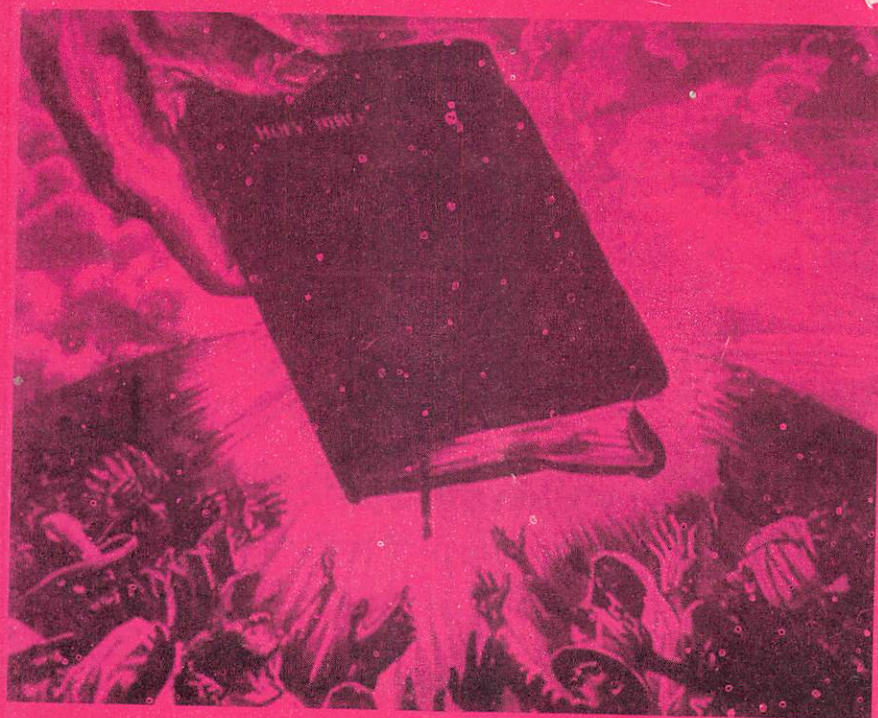


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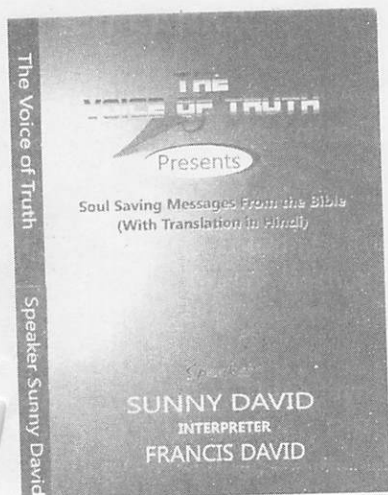
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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

One is not saved by saying a sinner's prayer

What is called a "sinner's prayer," goes something like this: "Father God, I come before you as a sinner, I confess my sins, and I believe that your Son, Jesus Christ died on the cross to save me from my sin. I ask you now to forgive me all my sins. I accept Jesus as my personal Saviour. In Christ's name I pray. Amen."

At the close of their preaching, many preachers today are asking their audience to repeat this prayer after them to be saved from their sins. Also, many tracts and booklets are being distributed wherein at the end of the message the reader is urged to say this "sinner's prayer" to be saved.

But does the Bible teach this? No. The fact of the matter is that there is not even one instance or example in the entire Bible where one can read of any such prayer. God has no where in the Bible, even promised to save anyone from sins through the process of saying such a prayer. This teaching of praying for salvation from sins is purely a doctrine of men. And, reader, the sad fact is that countless number of people all over the world are being deceived by believing in this man-made teaching, as they believe that they are saved because they have said this prayer to be saved.

What Does the Bible Teach?

To be saved from sin, according to the Bible, one must not only believe in Christ, after hearing of His gospel message, but

must also repent of all wrongs, that is, turn away from every wrong belief and practise, and then must be baptized (immersed in water) for the forgiveness of sins, confessing Christ to be the Son of God.

Only then, after one has obeyed these commands to be saved, one has the promise of receiving forgiveness of all past sins. Only then, as a saved individual in Christ, one has the right to continue to receive forgiveness of any unintended sin by confessing sin and praying for forgiveness. (1 John 1:7-9).

The point is, Christ is the Saviour, and therefore, He has every right to tell man what man must do to be saved. When Christ was going back into heaven, after accomplishing God's plan for man's salvation, to His disciples He had commanded: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15, 16). If one could be saved by saying the sinner's prayer, then why did the Saviour say, one need to believe and be baptized to be saved?

Why the apostle Peter at the close of his gospel message, in Acts chapter 2, to his great audience of about 3000 people did not answer their question by saying, repeat the sinner's prayer after me to be saved? Rather, he told them : "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38).

Why Philip, the evangelist, in Acts chapter 8, baptized eunuch, to whom he had preached Jesus, without asking him to repeat a sinner's prayer after him. There we read, Philip preached to eunuch Jesus, as they were travelling. And when suddenly they came to a place where there was water, eunuch said to Philip, "See here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" eunuch so earnestly wanted to be baptized right then and there. Why? Because he had heard Jesus preached to him, who had said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." Philip didn't ask eunuch to say a prayer, but he asked eunuch, "If you believe with all your heart you may." In reply eunuch said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Thereafter, the record says, "both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and he baptized him." (Acts 8:35-39). What did the eunuch do to be saved? Eunuch believed in Jesus, changed his mind, confessed Christ to be the Son of God and was baptized.

Look at Saul's (Paul) conversion. When Ananias, the preacher, came to him at Damascus, Saul was already praying. What did Ananias tell Saul? He didn't say, keep on praying, Saul, or repeat this sinner's prayer after me to be saved. Rather he told Saul, as we read in Acts 22:16, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Notice, if you will, Saul's sins were not washed away even after praying for three days and nights. What did he have to do to have his sins washed away? He had to obey what the Saviour had commanded. Acts 9:18 says, "Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized."

Why most preachers today are not telling people, who believe in Christ, to repent of their sins and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins, as the Bible teaches? Because they believe that baptism is not essential to salvation. They believe that one is saved by faith only, or by believing in Christ and by accepting Christ as personal Saviour. Many of them would love to quote from Acts 16:31 to prove their erroneous teaching, where the apostle Paul had said to the Philippian Jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." But they do not want to read or quote from the next two verses from the same passage of the Scripture, which says, "Then they (Paul and Silas) spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he (Jailer) took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized." (Acts 16:32, 33).

The Jailer, at the first instance, was told to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. But faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17). So far he and his household had not heard about the Saviour Jesus Christ. When Paul and Silas went to his house and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to them that produced faith or belief in them. They believed in Christ, and the Bible says, "And immediately he and all his family were baptized."

Friends, there is no other way to be saved. The Lord has not revealed or authorised another. All must hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, all must believe in Him, and all must repent of every wrong, and all must be baptized for the remission of sins, confessing the Saviour's name. Listen to Christ, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"

Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). He also said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that that judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." (John 12:48). Have you done what the Saviour has asked one must do to be saved from sin?

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

J.C. CHOATE

We know that there are many "churches" in the world. All claim to be of God, naturally. And yet there are some strange ideas concerning what the church actually is. Many define it as a building where the people come together for worship. Others think of it as being a denomination. Still others would say the church is made up of all the denominations as a spiritual body of people, ignoring the many differences in names and doctrines.

If we want to understand what the church really is, we need to go back to the New Testament for our answer. The word "church" comes from the Greek word "ekklesia", which means "the called out". The idea is that the Lord calls people out of the world, into one group or body, and that they become His people. They are called by the Gospel, to believe that Jesus died for them, that He was buried, and that on the third day He was resurrected from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Christ had said that the Gospel should be taken into all the world, and that those who believed it and would be baptized would be saved from their sins (Mark 16:15,16). The Lord Himself adds those who are being saved to the church (Acts 2:47).

Before His death, Christ promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). It was first established in the city of Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles and they preached the good news of Christ to the great crowd that had gathered. This was on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, approximately 33 A.D.

The apostles, having received the promised power of the Holy Spirit, were guided to tell the people about Christ, how He had lived among men doing good, but that they had taken Him and with wicked hands they had crucified the very Son of God! God, though, had not left Him in the grave but raised Him up, and Jesus had returned to heaven to reign at the right hand of the Father. At the

end of this sermon, many were convinced and cried out, asking what they should do. They were told that they should repent of their sins and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. They would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). And the Lord added to the church those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).

This is the first mention in the Scriptures of the church as being in existence, and of people being added to the church. As we continue to read through the book of Acts, we see that the Gospel was preached again and again in that area, in the neighboring countries, and that it spread from there to reach the world..

Christ established only one church (Ephesians 4:4) and that church, being made up of the saved, exists even now throughout the world. It also exists locally in the form of congregations (Romans 16:16), but all of them together make up the one church, the church of Christ.

- Christ is the authority, or head, over His church. *"And He is the head of the body, the church ... that in all things He may have the preeminence"* (Colossians 1:18).
- Christ is the Savior of His church, because the redemption price He paid for it was His life's blood. *"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body"* (Ephesians 5:23).
- Christ is the foundation on which His church is built. *"... no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"* (1 Corinthians 2:11). Christ's name is worn by His church, because it is called His bride. *"The churches of Christ greet you"* (Romans 16:16; Ephesians 5:25-32). Its members, individually are called by His name, "Christian", Christ-like. *"... the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch"* (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16).
- Christ has promised that He will come back one day to receive His church and to deliver it up to the Father: *"... That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish"* (Ephesians 5:27). *"Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father..."* (1 Corinthians 15:24).

While in this world, Christ prayed for the unity of His people, His church, as they would exist in the world through the coming ages. He prayed that they would worship together in spirit and truth, remembering Him in the communion supper each first day of the week (John 4:24; Acts 20:7).

To help humans understand more fully what the church is, in the Scriptures the Holy Spirit likened it to several things.

- It is called the "body" of Christ; that is, the **spiritual body** of Christ. Thinking of our human bodies and heads, we can see the parallel and can understand how we are to work together with Christ, as He (the Head) directs His body (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 4:4).
- The church is pictured as the "house" of God (1 Timothy 3:15), that is, the **spiritual household** or **family** that belongs to God.
- The church is compared to the **sheepfold** for sheep, the place of safety, with Jesus being the Good Shepherd who died to save His sheep (John 10:1-18).
- Another likeness is given, with Jesus being called the vine and Christians identified as branches that are to bear fruit to God (John 15:1-11).

The church is not a denomination or a group of denominations. Neither is it the Catholic Church or any other man-made institution. It is not a church building. Rather, it is the family of God that has been called out of the world. It is the saved, the spiritual body of Christ on earth, the church for which He died.

Are you a member of the church of Christ, the one true church of the Bible, the one and only church bought by Jesus' blood, the one that He will return for one day? If not, we pray that you will obey God and become a part of this glorious church.

The Power of the Ascension

WAYNE JACKSON

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the foundational truth of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:13-19). For that reason, occasionally the resurrection narrative has overshadowed the ascension record. But the ascension event is of equal significance, and careful attention should be given to it.

Prophetically Announced

A thousand years before the Savior's birth, David prophesied the ascension of Jesus when he announced the Lord's enthronement at the Father's right hand (Psalm 110:1). No other psalm is so frequently quoted in the New Testament—an indication of the importance of the event.

Although the disciples struggled with the concept of Jesus' death, He told them plainly that He was going back to the Father (John 14:12). And, while on trial before the Jewish Sanhedrin, Jesus announced to the high priest that presently He would be "sitting at the right hand of Power" (Matthew 26:64 asv). His ascension was one of the tests of Christ's prophetic credibility.

Five times New Testament writers employ the Greek term *analamano* (to take up) of the Lord's ascension (Mark 16:19; Acts 1:2, 11:22; 1 Timothy 3:16). Each time the verb is in the passive voice, He "was taken up." The passive voice represents the subject of the verb as being acted upon, thus, in this instance, indicating that the taking up was empowered from above, namely by God.

Historical Reality

The ascension of Christ presents a problem for the opponents of Christianity. If Jesus was not raised from the dead or if He somehow survived the ordeal of Calvary and died later (as Hugh Schonfield speculated in his infamous book, *The Passover Plot*), surely the Lord's enemies would have vigorously sought to reclaim His body, thus nullifying the resurrection story. With such a trophy, Christianity could have been crushed in its infancy. Those efforts, however, if they existed, were in vain. That lack of evidence indirectly supports the record of the ascension; ~~there was no~~ earthly corpse. The apostles themselves witnessed the Savior's ascension (Acts 1:9-11). Luke's record of this event was undergirded by his careful research (Luke 1:3; 24:51), not to mention his guidance by the Spirit. Mark, who wrote under the tutelage of Peter (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.15), also took note of the ascension (Mark 16:19), and the event was taken for granted in the balance of the New Testament (Acts 2:33; Ephesians 4:8-10; Philippians 3:20; Colossians 3:1; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:22). At the time of his martyrdom, Stephen was permitted actually to see the ascended Christ and petition Him (Acts 7:55-60).

Significantly, Luke's account of the ascension episode (Acts 1:9-11) consumes only 63 words in the Greek Testament. This shows: (a) the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit; strictly human journalistic impulses would have expanded the narrative considerably; (b) the brevity of the recorded narrative also suggests that the ascension was never a point of controversy among the early disciples.

The Abiding Significance

Several significant doctrinal points are connected with the ascension of Christ.

First, the ascension of the Savior is an integral part of the proposition that Christ is the Lord, who has the right to exercise all authority (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:20-23). On Pentecost, after arguing for the resurrection and ascension, Peter contended: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36 asv). Especially note the "therefore" connective.

Second, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was implemented by the ascended Christ (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 2:33). This supernatural event authenticated the fact that the circumstances of that day, resulting in the establishment of the church of Christ, were divinely orchestrated. The Christian regime is from God, not man.

Third, the ascended Christ empowered certain early disciples with miraculous gifts by which the mind of God was revealed to humanity and subsequently preserved in a body of sacred literature (Ephesians 4:10 ff). The present availability of this ancient record allows the modern student to put to the test the credibility of the primitive documents, find them to be trustworthy, and happily anchor his hope of heaven therein. Fourth, the ascension of Christ into heaven clearly reveals that, contrary to Jewish expectations (and even that of the misguided disciples), the Lord's mission to this earth was not to overthrow Rome and establish an earthly, political administration reminiscent of David's (cf. John 6:15; 18:36; Acts 1:6). In the words of a poet:

*They were looking for a king,
To slay their foes,
And lift them high.
Thou earnest a little baby thing,
That made a woman cry.*

Modern millennialists would do well to learn this important truth.

Fifth, the ascension of Christ demonstrated the manner of His final return. The disciples "beheld" Jesus vanishing into the clouds (Acts 1:11b asv). The verb *theaomai* is employed 24 times in the New Testament, and never is it used in a figurative sense. They literally saw Christ ascend. Additionally, Luke emphasizes that "in like manner," i.e., in a visible fashion, the Lord will return. The combination of these terms clearly indicates that the Savior's

second coming will be a literal coming. This eliminates the spurious notion that Christ's representative coming (via the Roman armies—Matthew 22:7), in the overthrow of Jerusalem (24:30), was His second coming (cf. Hebrews 9:28). And yet the advocates of realized eschatology contend otherwise. Luke's language also eliminates the theory that the Lord's next coming will be an invisible rapture-coming, as dispensationalists project.

Sixth, the ascension of Jesus provides us with a supreme confidence that we have a heavenly High Priest who, having been "crowned with glory and honor" (Hebrews 2:7, 9 NKJV) ever lives to make intercession for us (7:25; cf. 1 John 2:1-2). This concept of a heavenly high priest is a prevailing theme in the book of Hebrews.

Seventh, the ascension argues for the proposition that our eternal destiny will not be upon a glorified earth, as many affirm. Jesus entered heaven as a forerunner (one who goes in advance of others) for us (Hebrews 7:20). By His return to heaven, Christ consecrated for us "a new and living way" that is not earthly in nature (Hebrews 10:20). Earth is not heaven (Matthew 6:19-20).

Eighth, the ascension of Christ underscores the fact that Christians are charged with the responsibility of implementing His will on earth, as He reigns from heaven. The Teacher's parting words commissioned His people to make disciples of every creature among the nations throughout the earth (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:47).

In the parable of the pounds, the nobleman (Christ), who went into the far country (heaven), expected his servants to utilize wisely, on his behalf that which had been placed at their disposal. The servant who ignored this obligation was rejected and punished along with those characterized as "enemies" (Luke 19:12-27; cf. Matthew 25:30).

The Lord uses no feet to go, nor tongues to proclaim, save ours. The treasure has been deposited with "earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). Let us, therefore, shoulder the responsibility and be honored thereby.

ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE

MAXIE B. BOREN

Life will always have its "negatives". That is just a fact with which we all have to deal. There will be things happen along the

way that are disconcerting, discouraging, and disappointing. Jesus taught His disciples, *"In the world you have tribulation..."* (John 16:33). When such occurs, we must cope the best way possible. We are not alone in these times, because the Lord will stand by and strengthen us as He did Paul (2 Timothy 4:17). And in so doing, we take great comfort in the fact that God will not allow us to be tempted (or tried) above what we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Perhaps the best thing we can do when we are tested is to accentuate the positive, not to be anxious over matters, but to pray often and fervently, and to think on good things, just as the apostle instructed (Philippians 4:4-8). By so doing, we can indeed learn to be content regardless of the circumstances (Philippians 4:11-13). Remember, we have the Almighty God of heaven and earth who loves us and who is well able to sustain us (Ephesians 3:20). He comforts us in our afflictions (2 Corinthians 1:4). We are thus encouraged to cast all our cares upon Him, because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

So even though we experience troubling times occasionally, let us keep on the "sunny side" of life and count our blessings. Let us constantly look up to Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). And let us believe with all our hearts that everything is going to work for good to them that love God (Romans 8:28) and that the victory will be ours in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).

In The World But Not Of The World

ROYCE FREDERICK

There was a strange man named Simeon, who lived from A.D. 386 to 459. He lived on top of a column sixty-feet high for thirty-six years. From that position, he preached to people and gave his judgment in cases of dispute. During the third through fifth centuries A.D., many people who wanted to follow Christ lived very strange lives in an effort to escape the temptations and corruptions of the world. Some of them lived in caves, while others went into the deserts to live. Some of them weighted themselves down with chains. Some ate only grass. Some prayed in the rain, wind, and

snow without moving. Some endangered themselves before snakes and wild beasts, and a few burned their bodies. They were trying to be "holy" by doing these things.

These strange practices did not come from God. They came from several false beliefs:

- the belief that flesh and everything connected with flesh is sinful;
- the belief that a person who is married is less spiritual than a person who is not married;
- the belief that a person is suffering for Christ when he tortures himself;
- and the belief that living such a life and dying such a death was a sure way to heaven.

Christ and His inspired writers never taught such ideas. The disciples of Christ are *"in the world"*, but they are *"not of the world"* (John 17:11,14). Jesus prayed to God the Father, *"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them (set them apart) by your truth. Your word is truth"* (John 17:15-17). Although we live in a sinful world, our conduct should be guided by God's Word, not by the things we see and hear in the world around us. God's Word helps keep us away from the evil one. Jesus also prayed, *"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world"* (John 17:18). To be a light which leads people to glorify God (Matthew 5:14-16), the Christian needs to live in a godly, holy manner among people (Titus 2:12).

The Bible often uses the word "flesh" to refer to evil desires which tempt us and find expression through our physical bodies (Romans 8:5-13). And the Bible often uses the term "the world" to mean the evil practices of most people in the world (1 John 2:15,16; see Matthew 7:13,14). But the material world (the earth) and all physical things are not evil in themselves. Christ became a human, with flesh and blood like you and me, yet He never committed any evil or sin (John 1:14; Hebrews 4:15). God created all things through Christ (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). Satan never created anything. Sin and evil are actions. Sin occurs when we abuse physical things or have extreme desires for physical things.

Some people have forsaken God's Word by forbidding marriage (1 Timothy 4:1-3). But, the Bible shows us that the

marriage relationship was created by God and should be held in honor (Genesis 2:21-25; Matthew 19:4-9; Hebrews 13:4).

We should endure suffering and should sacrifice ourselves for the sake of Christ. But the Bible does not teach us to torment our bodies. When a person torments his own body as a method of religious devotion, it may appear very impressive, but it has no spiritual value: *"These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh"* (Colossians 2:23). Instead, we are taught to endure persecutions and hardships that come upon us from other sources as we stand for the truth and live for Christ (Matthew 5:10-12; 2 Timothy 2:3-6). We should be a *"living sacrifice"* (Romans 12:1). The way we accomplish that is by using our abilities diligently in the work of the Lord's church (Romans 12:4-8), and by living unselfishly and righteously among our fellowmen (Romans 12:9-21).

But Why Be Baptized?

A.L. FRANKS

Example No. 1

God gave the city of Jericho to the nation of Israel (Joshua 6:2). Yet, He required the Israelites to do something. God commanded the army to march around the city once each day for six days.

On the seventh day God required the Israelites to *"compass the city seven times"*. Afterwards, God commanded the priests to blow with trumpets and all the people to shout with a loud voice (Joshua 6:1-5).

The results? *"The wall of the city fell down flat"* (Joshua 6:20), enabling the Israelites to enter the city and completely subdue Jericho.

What caused the walls of Jericho to fall down flat? Was it the marching? The blowing? The shouting? No. Not really. Question: In all of recorded history, what other city walls have been brought down by marching, blowing, and/or shouting?

The walls of the city fell down flat because God brought them down, but He didn't bring them down until His people evidenced their faith in Him by doing what He commanded. They marched

(13 trips!); they blew; they shouted. Their faith in God was shown when they did what was required. Also notice that what God required the Israelites to do seemingly had no connection whatsoever with the final results.

Example No. 2

The Bible tells about Naaman, said to be *"a great and honorable"* man. He was captain of the Syrian army; yet, he was sorely afflicted with leprosy (2 Kings 5:1). Naaman came into contact with a prophet of God who commanded the leprous captain to *"Go and wash in Jordan seven times"* with the promise, *"...and thou shall be clean"* (2 Kings 5:10). Naaman refused to obey. He became angry. He went away in a rage. The command to *"wash in Jordan"* didn't make any sense to him.

Finally, however, after his servant reasoned with him, Naaman did what God's prophet commanded. He went down to the Jordan River and *"dipped himself seven times, according to the saying of the man of God."* The result? *"His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean"* (2 Kings 5:10-14). Naaman was made well!

What cleansed Naaman? He was cleansed of leprosy because God chose to cleanse him, but, He did not cleanse him until Naaman evidenced his faith and obeyed God by dipping seven times in the river. And, that which God required of Naaman seemingly had no connection whatsoever with the final results.

Example No. 3

Jesus came into contact with a man who was born blind (John 9:1). In addition to teaching the needed lesson that the man's blindness was not caused by his sin or the sin of his parents, Jesus began a healing procedure which was, to say the least, very unorthodox. Jesus spat on the ground, made clay of the spittle, and then anointed the eyes of the blind man. He put moistened clay in the man's eyes! He then commanded the blind man to *"Go, wash in the pool of Siloam"*.

In faith, the blind man obeyed the unusual command. The Bible says, *"He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing"* (John 9:7). Jesus healed the man. For the first time in his life, he could see. What a healing! Consider: In all of recorded history, who else was ever healed of blindness in this same way?

What caused the blind man to see? It was the Lord. Jesus healed the man, but not until he evidenced his faith by obeying

the commandments of Jesus. And, what was required of the blind man seemingly had no connection whatsoever with the outcome.

Summary

God commanded the Israelites to march, blow, and shout. When His commands were obeyed by the believing Israelites, they enjoyed God's blessings. The walls fell down flat. God commanded Naaman to dip in the river. When he finally showed his faith by obeying, he enjoyed the blessing of God. His leprosy was gone! Jesus commanded the blind man to wash clay from his eyes in a pool. When he obeyed, he was blessed with glorious sight for the first time in his life.

Consider Baptism

The Savior said, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved...*" (Mark 16:16). An apostle commanded, "*Repent and be baptized every one of you for the remission of your sins...*" (Acts 2:38). An inspired disciple commanded Saul of Tarsus, "*Arise, be baptized and wash away thy sins...*" (Acts 22:16). Finally, the apostle Peter wrote, "*The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us...*" (1 Peter 3:21).

The above Scriptures clearly teach the following four things about baptism. 1. Baptism *precedes* salvation. 2. Baptism *comes before* the remission of sins. 3. Baptism *washes away* sins. 4. Baptism *saves*.

But Why Be Baptized?

You may still ask, "But why be baptized?" The answer is: for the same reason the Israelites marched, blew, and shouted. For the same reason Naaman dipped in the Jordan River. For the same reason the blind man washed his eyes in the pool of Siloam.

In each example, faith was evidenced through obedience; that is, doing exactly what God said, even though there was apparently no connection whatsoever with the actions taken and the blessings given. The response of man's faith in obedience to God brought blessings—to the Israelites, to Naaman, and to the blind man.

So it is with baptism. To be baptized evidences faith in Jesus. It is doing what He said, although there seems to be no connection with water baptism and forgiveness of sins. Baptism is an act of faith. It is required. It is necessary. Have you been baptized scripturally?

Miracles Happened and Miracles Ceased

CHARLES BOX

The Bible teaches that miracles both happened and ceased. Men in our city and across our nation claim to be miracle workers today. I believe what the Bible teaches about miracles. Therefore I believe these men are frauds. -

Believers in Christ are not the only people in the world today who claim the power to do miracles. "Holy men" in every religion make the same claim. Believers in Christ would dispute their power to work *real* miracles. On what basis would they say that such men cannot do what they claim? **On the basis that the gods they worship, the doctrines they teach, the things they practice are contrary to the Bible.**

We are convinced that we do not have to prove or disprove their claims to do miracles. The very fact that their god and their doctrine are wrong is proof that their miracles are not genuine.

The same proof applies to "miracle workers" who claim to believe in Christ. We can know if their "miracles" are true by the doctrine they teach and the life they live.

For the following reasons, we know that these men and women are not doing anything by God's power, and that people are being deceived by their glitzy performances:

They do not teach the gospel plan of salvation. God's plan of salvation is for a penitent believer to confess faith in Jesus and be baptized for salvation (Acts 2:36-41). Most of those who claim miracles today teach salvation through the "sinner's prayer" and mental acceptance of Jesus. **Would God give miracles to false teachers who deny the Gospel of Christ?**

They do not teach New Testament worship. Most of the so-called "Miracle Working" churches have women in leadership roles, mechanical instruments of all kinds, they do not observe communion weekly, and they participate in other acts of worship foreign to the New Testament. (Read I Corinthians 14:34, Acts 20:7, Ephesians 5:19.) **Will God give real miracles to those who teach and practice false worship?**

They do not practice Bible miracles. These religious racketeers bleed as much money as they can from the poor, unsuspecting, and helpless. They make a mockery out of

Christianity. They do no real miracles. Jesus and His apostles performed great miracles, real miracles!

Nicodemus said, "*Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him*" (John 3:2). Matthew 15:30 says, "*Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He healed them.*" Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves and caused the great calm (Matthew 8:26). No one is doing these miracles today!

When Tammy Faye Baker came down with cancer, why did no miracle worker heal her? Why did she go to doctors and hospitals for her treatment? When Oral Robert's daughter was killed in a car wreck, why did he not raise her from the dead? Why are today's "miracles" that are performed on stages before thousands always dealing with arthritis or heart trouble or some other *unseen* problem? Why are there no legs restored, why are no blind given sight, no dead raised?

Jesus promised His disciples that they would be able to do miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit, which He would give them. Mark 16:20 affirms: "*And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs.*" Even in the first century, there was a **reason** for miracles: to confirm that the word being preached was truly the message of God. Would God empower people today to do miracles when the message they are teaching contradicts the message of the first century?

Miracles ceased when the perfect or complete revelation was received. "*Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.*"

"*When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*" (1 Corinthians 13:8-13.)

When the last words of the New Testament were written in about 96 A.D., miracles had ceased. The only miracles we need today are those written in the Bible.

The Church Respects The Bible

DAVID DEFFENBAUGH

Respecting the Bible is right. Anyone who does so is right. But, as is so often the case, doing what is right is not always easy. Many people have lauded and applauded the Bible without ever respecting it. It has been extolled, admired, honored and praised. But much too rarely has it been respected. Respect for the Bible always involves two things: hearing and obeying. Anything less is merely lip service.

Hearing the Bible demands hearing it for what it is, the very Word of God. If people believe the Bible is nothing but ancient religious texts or good moral teaching or a collection of myths and traditions, they are not hearing God speak. They are hearing one body of religious texts among many, one set of moral teachings among many, and one set of myths and traditions among many. The Bible is simply never on par with other writings of similar character or nature. The Bible always stands out, above and over all others. That is because it is God's Word. " 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts' " (Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV). Those lofty thoughts and ways have been searched out by God's Spirit and revealed to man, verbally inspired, in the pages of the Bible (1 Corinthians 2:10-13).

God expects to be heard because He expressed Himself to be heard. "For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it" (Deuteronomy 30:11-14 NASB). We hear God's Word, and faith is produced (Romans 10:17). We hear the good Shepherd's voice and follow Him (John 10:27). We listen to Him and are able to honor Him appropriately (Matthew 17:5).

Respecting the Bible demands that it be heard because "God ... has spoken" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

The second criteria for respecting the Bible is obeying it. God's covenant people have always been defined by their respect for

His Word in both hearing and obeying it. So, on the rugged slopes of Mt. Sinai, God conditioned His relationship with his people whom He had born on "eagles' wings" and brought to Himself on these terms: "Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). It was their failure on these very terms that prevented them from entering the land God had promised them. At Kadesh Barnea, concerning their unfaithfulness with regard to the 10 spies, God said they had not listened to His voice (Numbers 14:22-23).

It is no surprise that when the next generation made preparations to enter the land, great emphasis was placed on hearing and obeying God's Word. Consequently, the book of Deuteronomy is filled with such encouragement. "It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the Lord our God, just as He commanded us" (Deuteronomy 6:25). "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord" (8:3). His blessing or cursing this people was contingent upon their listening to Him (11:27-28). "So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him" (30:19-20).

This principle is absolutely no different under the New Covenant. God's people are defined by their respect for His Word. Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine" (John 8:31). He concluded His Sermon on the Mount by illustrating the wisdom of the one "who hears these words of Mine, and acts on them" and the foolishness of the one "who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them" (Matthew 7:24-26). One's place in the kingdom certainly hinges upon his or her genuine respect for God's Word.

By no means does this emphasis end with Jesus in the New Testament. "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of

liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25).

Respecting the Bible means hearing it as the very promise of God and rendering submissive obedience to it. When the Bible is thus respected, several things follow. First, people are blessed "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). They, indeed, are "in Christ," "clothed" with Christ (Galatians 3:26-27), having been "buried with Him through baptism" (Romans 6:4).

Further, the ones so blessed are the Lord's church. They have been added to it (Acts 2:47) or transferred into it (Colossians 1:13). It only follows that respecting the Bible results in the church. The church can only exist when the Bible is respected. Otherwise, something other than and less than a body of God's people is present.

Something else happens when God's Word is respected; those who do so are set apart from the world. They become a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9). Former associates of the world will see this newfound way of living as surprising (4:4; "strange" KJV). Unfortunately, those who find such separation from the world uncomfortable soon return to that from which they had been separated (2 Timothy 4:10; 2 Peter 2:20).

This separation, though, extends even beyond the faithless world dominated by the "god of this world." It also includes separation from well-meaning, but sadly mistaken religionists. Jesus spoke of those whose entrance into heaven will be denied, although it was not because of their failure to believe in Him or to be actively religious. Their failure was, in essence, a lack of respect for God's Word. The critical issue was their failure to do "the will of My Father" (Matthew 7:21-23 NKJV). This failure is also seen in the otherwise sincerely religious individual insisting on maintaining human religious traditions, which, Jesus said, leads men to neglect, set aside and invalidate God's Word (Mark 7:8-9, 13). That is, no respect. It also occurs when men's doctrines are placed on par with God's Word, resulting in religion becoming vain (Matthew 15:9). Respecting the Bible demands separation from these common religious errors. Encouragement and efforts at correction of such errors are needed, but separation is a must.

Respecting the Bible is a daunting task. Many people fail. Israel often failed. Many otherwise religious people fail (Matthew 7:21-23). In truth, most people will fail (vv. 13-14). Respect for the Bible

is a task to be undertaken with the utmost humility. To be prideful in the pursuit is to fail. Nevertheless, it must be pursued, not only with humility, but also with diligence and courage.

Respecting the Bible is right. What Moses told Israel is no less true today; if we respect God's Word, "It will be righteousness for us" (Deuteronomy 6:25). If anything is to be said about the heritage of the Lord's church, respecting the Bible has to be at the forefront. The restoration ideal is driven by respect for God's Word. Where the Bible is respected, the Lord's church is; and where the Lord's church is, the Bible is respected.

The Church Withstands The Devil

TOMMY HAYNES

Remember reading several years ago about a denomination that started offering a "divorce ceremony." The couple was to come down the aisle, leave their rings on the altar, and leave separately. This is a disturbing picture of the religious landscape around us today as so many religious people are incorporating evil into their lives instead of withstanding evil. Isaiah speaks of "those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (Isaiah 5:20 NKJV). I am so thankful that I am a member of the church that stands firmly against the devil and strives never to incorporate or condone evil.

I am thankful that I am a member of the church that withstands Satan because I need help to confront temptation. If the church of which I am a member condones evil, then I will fall into the devil's hands. The Bible reveals that "each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren" (James 1:14-16).

The churches of Christ have traditionally been very strong in preaching against sin. We are to make our brethren aware of Satan's ways and point out how he works through temptation. The Bible promises us that we will not be tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). Gospel preachers must preach "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15) and put our brethren on alert. If we strive to justify the sins of members of the church, we defeat

the very purpose for which we are called. John was helping the church when he pointed out the ways of the world (1 John 2:13-17). If John had been like some who seek to justify their own sins, he would have deleted one or all of these lusts (eyes, flesh, vain glory). Paul made sure that he declared "the whole counsel of God" to the Ephesian elders so that they could "shepherd the church of God" (Acts 20:27-28). Helping brethren confront the constant temptations they face is a powerful work of the church. We should lovingly listen to the problems our brethren face, teach them how to overcome, and promise them that we will be at their sides. When we help people face temptation and overcome it, we are doing the right thing.

I am also thankful that I am a member of the church that reclaims those who have been overcome by sin. Unfortunately, Satan wins many souls into his evil domain. Brethren can become weak like the rocky, thorny and wayside soils described in Matthew 13:1-23. Our Lord declares that through a lack of understanding, a lack of foundation, and a lack of strength to keep the cares of this world from creeping back into our lives, we can be snatched away by Satan. God has given a plan to the church when such is the case. Paul teaches, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1-2).

We are also encouraged to see what the result can be when we seek those who have gone back into the world: "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20). What a wonderful work we participate in when we reclaim one of these lost sheep from the grasp of the evil one. While denominations are striving to justify homosexuality, abortion and any number of sinful ways of life, the Lord's church is striving to save those very lives through repentance of these sins and restoration of the erring Christian. I am so thankful to be a part of a life-saving organism that is throwing out the lifeline to those who have walked away from Christ.

Like the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15), we are always looking for those walking the road toward home. Reclaiming erring members is not easy work. Some harbor much bitterness toward the church. Some have become entangled in so much immorality that sorting through the damage can be confusing and frustrating.

Others have flirted with denominational doctrines to try to justify their evil ways. Regardless of the path the erring have chosen, we know that teaching Christ and His way of life is the way back home.

The father of the prodigal son lovingly accepted his son back home. We can be sure that the son had a myriad of problems that would have to be worked out, but the father took him back and reminded him that he was his son. Those who go astray need to be reminded that they belong to Christ, that they are children of God, and brothers or sisters to each of us. When we reclaim them for the Lord and His family, we are doing the right thing. Reclaiming the lost is just one of the things that the Lord's church does right. Let us always stand against Satan and reclaim those he has led astray.

I am also thankful that I am a member of the church that fortifies individuals and families to withstand Satan's attacks. We do this by exposing the way Satan works, and by showing our people how to live for Christ.

Paul confronted the problem of Jewish and Gentile relations in Galatia by pointing out something very personal: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). He points to more than the specific sins they had committed; he also points out how they should live. When we understand that Christ lives in us and that we are to live for Him, then we begin to become stronger in our resistance of sin.

Attending Bible classes on a regular basis is of tremendous help in fortifying individuals and families against the devil. Teachers spend countless hours preparing lessons designed to help us get through each week.

Most congregations encourage every member to be a daily Bible student by offering reading programs of various sorts and weekly Bible reading assignments that coordinate with what is being studied. Preachers preach against sin, how to avoid temptations, and how to live a godly life (Philippians 4:8; Titus 2:11-15). The balance presented from our pulpits assists us in facing devilish ways.

The ministries in which we can be involved also strengthen us. When we are busy about the Lord's work, it is harder to be busy in Satan's workshop. Getting involved is fulfilling our purpose and is spiritually healthy (Ephesians 2:10). These things are like taking a daily regimen of vitamins and nutrients; they fortify us against disease.

While some brethren today are busy tearing down the church, they are not answering a critical question. If they succeed, what will they put in that void? What else will withstand Satan, reclaim the lost, and fortify against sin?

Denominationalism has not done this, for its very existence is sinful by its divisive nature. Cults have not assisted people against sin but have damaged the precious minds that God wants us to save. The community churches have not helped people but have incorporated a worldly atmosphere to make sinners comfortable in remaining in their sins. Only the church of Jesus Christ, preaching the pure Word of God and living the life of Christ before people, will help withstand Satan. Instead of attacking the very body of Christ, we should be busy building it up. It will take a strong body to stand against the sins of our world. With the help of Christ and strict adherence to His Word, we can withstand the devil. I rejoice that I am a member of the church that withstands Satan.

RESTORATION

CECIL MAY, JR.

Manasseh led Judah into total apostasy, into more evil, the Bible says, they did more evil than the Canaanites whom God had driven out of the land before them (2 Kings 21:9). God and His work were totally forgotten. Then Manasseh died, his son Amon, who followed briefly in the evils of his father as king, also died, and Josiah became king.

Josiah wanted to please God. He ordered the abandoned Temple to be cleaned and used again. Workers found the Book of the Law there. They read it, and Josiah and the people determined to walk as the Lord commanded in it.

They destroyed the idols they had worshipped, and they set out to do all that the Lord required. In the Book of the Law, they learned of the miracles God had wrought in their deliverance from bondage and their establishment as a nation. They also discovered it was time for the feast of Passover.

Though Passover had been neglected for many years and its prescribed manner of celebration had been forgotten, when they read the directions in the Book of the Law, they celebrated it again, just as God commanded in His Word.

Restoration, today, follows that same pattern. If the instruction concerning conversion is forgotten or ignored, and believers seeking salvation are being told just to pray, rather than to repent and be baptized, then "reading the book of the Lord" (see for example Acts 2) and putting into practice what is found there is the means of restoration.

If the worship of the church is changed to include things God has not indicated He desires, such as burning incense, praying to departed saints, adding instrumental music, or omitting things He has commanded, such as the Lord's Supper, then by reading the book of God and beginning to practice the things commanded in it, restoration occurs.

If members' lives are immoral, if their attitudes are belligerent and unforgiving, or apathetic about evangelism or division, the solution is to read the book of the Lord and to practice the holiness and commitment commanded in it. Restoration!

Restoration is not an invention of nineteenth century man. It is done at the impetus of the eternal and holy God.



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(See Rule 3)

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