

Monthly

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# ***The Bible Teacher***



## **LET THE TRUTH PREVAIL**

1. That there should be only one church today, as it was in the beginning—Church of Christ—Which Christ Himself built, and about which we all can read in the Bible (Matthew 16:18). That congregations of His one church everywhere may be known as churches of Christ, as we read at Romans 16:16. That there should be no denominations or sects in the name of the church. (1 Corinthians 1:10).
2. That there should be only one plan or guideline of salvation, as is revealed and taught in the Bible, followed everywhere. All must be told to believe in Christ, to repent of wrong, to confess Christ the Son of God, and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-38). Those who obey these commands of salvation are saved by the Lord and He Himself adds the saved ones to His church. (Acts 2:47); which is His Spiritual body. (Ephesians 1:22, 23; 4:4; 5:22).
3. That all followers of Christ, everywhere, should be known as Christians, after His name alone, as it was in the beginning. (Acts 4:12; Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). That all other names which exalt and glorify any other name of a man, or a doctrine, or a day or a movement, etc., must be forgotten.
4. That all man-made creed books must be put aside, with other books written by men, and only the Bible which contains God's inspired message for man must be followed in all spiritual matters. (Matthew 7:21-23; John 12:48).
5. Let us accept the authority of Christ in all religious matters (Matthew 28:18), and strive to abide in the New Testament doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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## *EDITORIAL*

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

#### ***The Christian Life is the Most Desirable and Valuable Life***

Why should someone desire to be a Christian? First of all, because the Christian has the assurance from God that all his past sins have been forgiven, because he has believed in Christ, who is the propitiation of our sins, and has obeyed the commands of Christ which brings the assurance of salvation from sin. Secondly, the value of the Christian life is obvious in the fact that the Bible tells the Christian that if he continue to live and walk in Christ daily, the blood of Christ will constantly wash him from all his sins which he may have inadvertently committed. And, thirdly, the Christian has the wonderful hope and the assurance from God that when his life of earth will be over, he will have a home in heaven where he will live forever, with God, our heavenly Father. Is there any other life better than the Christian life? Certainly not.

One becomes a Christian when one believes in Christ that He has died for man's sin; and repents of all wrong by leaving all evil and wicked ways of the former life; and is baptized (buried in water) for the remission of sins. (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Anyone can become a Christian. But no person is a Christian by natural or physical birth. Christ taught, one must be born again to become a citizen of heaven. (John 3:3-5). There is no caste system in the Christianity of the Bible. The Bible teaches, "For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,



there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26-28).

Not only one need to become a Christian to be saved from past sins, but one also need to continue to abide in Christ, after becoming a Christian, to remain in the saved state. The apostle John wrote to Christians: "This is the message which we have received from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:5-9). This is the most special blessing that a Christian enjoys, and thereby he knows that he has been saved from sin and continue to abide in that saved state in Christ, in hope of entering into the eternal life of heaven.

As Christ was contemplating his return to the Father in heaven, He assured His followers by saying, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-3). The Christian, therefore, lives his life on earth with the hope that whenever his life on earth will be over, he will one day go to heaven to live with God the Father. As the apostle Paul also said, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1).

The Christian life, therefore, is the most blessed life, both in this world and in the world to come, in eternity. The Christian life is not based on man made rituals and customs and traditions, but it is based on what God has revealed from heaven in His book, the Bible.

## *Repentance of Sins*

J.C. CHOATE

One of the commands of the gospel is repentance. But what



is repentance and what significance does it have to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ? To begin with, the word repentance means to turn again, to go in another direction, to change, to quit doing those things that are bad and wrong. Jesus told a story on one occasion that illustrates what we are talking about. He said, *"But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard'. He answered and said, 'I will not', but afterward he regretted it and went. Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir', but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said to Him, 'The first'. Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him'"* (Matthew 21:28-32). As to its relationship to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, when one turns away from his sins then it is symbolic of the Lord's death. Thus, in both instances, we can see why repentance is so important.

Knowing that man is a sinner (Romans 3:23), and that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), then Christ taught that one must repent or perish (Luke 13:3). To put emphasis on this, He repeated the same statement in Luke 13:5. In other words, He was saying that unless one repents, or turns away from that which will destroy him, he will be lost. Again, He said, *"I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance"* (Luke 15:7).

Let it be understood, though, that repentance is more than just feeling sorry for one's sins. An individual may be sorry that he got caught and ended up in jail. He may not be sorry for what he did, but only for having to pay the consequences for his deed. This is not repentance. The Apostle Paul tells us, *"For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death"* (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly sorrow may lead to repentance but is not to be mistaken for repentance.

Who is to repent? When Paul preached on Mars Hill, toward the close of his sermon, he said, *"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to*

*repent" (Acts 17:30). So according to this, the Lord wants all people everywhere to repent or turn from their sins. Also, note the fact that at one time God might have overlooked certain things because of our ignorance, but He makes it plain that He will no longer tolerate or overlook any sin regardless of whether it was done in ignorance or not. Again, the Apostle Peter says, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).*

In speaking of all coming to repentance, naturally the scriptures identify these individuals as being men or those who have sinned. This would not include babies or even children because *"of such is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:1-3). Rather, the gospel is directed toward those who are old enough to repent of their sins and that would mean that they are knowledgeable of their bad deeds and want to turn from them. Only those who have reached the age of accountability could do this.

Now turning to Acts 2 we have Peter and the apostles preaching to the people on the day of Pentecost. They were preaching to sinners, to those who had even had a part in the crucifixion of Christ. It was only natural therefore, when they wanted to know what they should do, for Peter to say to 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). Later on in another sermon, he said, *"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19).

From these verses of Scripture, it is quite evident that repentance is one of the commands of the gospel. That means that one and all must turn away from their sins if they expect to obey the Lord and have the remission of their sins. Or another way of putting it, one just cannot be saved and go to heaven without repentance. A good moral life is not enough. There is nothing that will take the place of doing what the Lord has said that one must do in order to receive salvation.

Turning on through the book of Acts, and considering the other cases of conversion, you will find that if repentance is not commanded, then it is implied. For instance in Acts 16, after Paul and Silas had preached the word of the Lord to the jailer and his household, it says that he took them and washed their stripes. If

that is not repentance, then what is it? In the case of Saul, according to Acts 9, he was a persecutor of Christians, but once the Lord appeared to him he became a different person. He not only went on to obey the gospel, but to preach Christ and Him crucified, the one that he so bitterly opposed to begin with. Is this not repentance?

Someone has said that in obeying the gospel there is a change of heart, which is brought about by faith, a change of life, which involves repentance, and a change of state, which is the result of baptism. In repentance and obedience to Christ all of one's sins are forgiven or washed away. One becomes a new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17), a new person in Christ (Galatians 3:26,27). Those things that he once did, he does no more. Those things that he once opposed, he is now for. There is absolutely nothing like it in all of this world.

After one becomes a Christian it may be that there will be times in which he must repent again. A Christian is not perfect. Even a faithful Christian may make mistakes. Those who purposely sin must confess their faults and pray to God for forgiveness (James 5:16; Acts 8:22). Otherwise, they will be lost.

But to those who have not become Christians, and who are not yet members of the church, they need to hear Christ, believe in Him, repent of their sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized for the remission of sins. Every one of these commands is important. One cannot be saved by any one of them without the others. Neither can one be saved by leaving one of them off. As for repentance, it means that one must give up every sin, and all errors, even religious errors, that may be in his life, in order to enable him to continue with his obedience. Only then can one say that he has obeyed the command of repentance.

## *Seeking After True Peace*

CLEM THURMAN

Never in the history of man has there been a greater emphasis on peace than now. With wars tearing nations apart and setting brother against brother, a genuine quest for peace on this earth just naturally results. And now with terrorism threatening us from

without and within, we have another war to fight. And peace becomes a very precious, and very rare, commodity. Seldom or never has there been less "inner peace" in man than now. The turmoil in world affairs is but an enlarged picture of the war that rages within each person. Psychiatrists are booked up for months ahead, as people seek to learn how to be at peace within themselves.

A long time ago the prophet cried, *"They have healed also the hurt of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace"* (Jer. 6:14). A lasting peace will not be found in compromise and accommodation, nor in kidding ourselves about having peace when there is none. But only in *"the prince of peace"* (Isa. 9:6) can we find real peace. When Jesus was born at Bethlehem, the angels sang of *"peace on earth"* (Luke 2:14). And after His death and resurrection, there was sounded out to the four corners of the earth *"the gospel of peace"* (Acts 10:36). If we would be honest and sincere in our quest for peace, we must look to Jesus Christ as the Author and Giver of peace.

Let us notice some principles from Scripture with regard to peace.

### **We Can't Make Peace with the Devil**

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, peace with God was broken. Satan, in the form of the serpent, tempted Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit, and she persuaded Adam to eat, also (Gen. 3). But God then made a promise of a Savior that was to come, as He told the devil, *"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"* (Gen. 3:15). The devil is still active in our world today, as Peter writes: *"Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Pet. 5:8).

When Jesus began His ministry, the devil tempted Him repeatedly (Luke 4:1-13). The Bible tells us, *"For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"* (Heb. 4:15). If the Lord Jesus was not immune to temptation from the devil, we can be assured that Satan will attack us, also. The assurance of the Lord, though, is sure: *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful; who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are*



able" (1 Cor. 10:13).

The Lord tells us, "*Be subject therefore unto God; but resist the devil, and he will flee from you*" (James 4:7). If we submit to God, and resist Satan, he will flee from us. But the only way to effectively resist the devil is by submitting to the will of God. There can be no compromise with the devil, we must resist just as Jesus did.

### **Be At Peace With Our Fellow-Man**

The psalmist "wrote, "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*" (Psa. 133:1). Ever since "*Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him*" (Gen. 4:8), man has been seeking ways to be at peace with his neighbor. When trouble arose over the grazing rights of Abraham and Lot, the former said, "*Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between thee and me*" (Gen. 13:8). The apostle Paul found strife in the church at Corinth, and exhorted, "*Let there be no divisions among you ... be perfectly joined together*" (1 Cor. 1:10).

We can never have real peace while ignoring the principles of peace which are set forth by "*the prince of peace.*" Jesus said, "*All, things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them ... I say unto you, resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.... And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*" (Matt. 7:12; 5:39; 22:39; 6:12). These are principles that, if followed, will make peace. If we would really "*serve one another*" (1 Pet. 5:5), and "*bear one another's burden*" (Gal. 6:2), there would be much less strife in this world.

Not just our actions, but our "reactions" to what is done, will make for peace. The "*Prince of peace,*" hanging on the cross, prayed for those who put Him there: "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*" (Luke 23:34). When the world is moved by that spirit, man will be at peace with his fellows. Jesus tells us to love one another (John 13:34), and explains: "*Love suffers long and is kind ... seeketh not her own, is not puffed up ... taketh not account of evil*" (1 Cor. 13:4-5). There is the formula for peace—unselfishly seeking the good of the other person while refusing to be offended! This "formula" will make for peace: in families, in communities, in nations and in the world.

### **Be At Peace With Ourselves**

One reason for the strife between people is the strife within

people. It is difficult to be at peace with others when there is a war raging within us. Paul said that *he "exercised" himself to have a good conscience (Acts 24:16).* And he also wrote, *"Happy is he that judgeth not himself in that which he approveth. But he that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; and whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:22-23).* One cannot have peace within himself while living in a way which he believes to be wrong. To violate your conscience means war within you.

The *"Prince of peace"* grants peace through our faith in Him: *"Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:7).* When we accept Jesus as Lord, realizing that He has *"all authority" (Matt. 28:18),* what peace that brings! Nothing can harm us if we are *"in Christ"* for He promises, *"Lo, I am with you alway" (Matt. 28:20).* And so He exhorts us, *"Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1).* Again: *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful" (John 14:27).* That Jesus cares, that He protects and *"is able to save to the uttermost" (Heb. 7:25),* should enable us to be at peace with ourselves.

### **Be At Peace With God**

Just as the real basis for peace with others is having peace within ourselves, so peace within depends on our being at peace with God. Man's purpose is clearly defined: *"Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccle. 12:13).* When man sinned, he thereby separated himself from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Sin is the cause of all wars — between men and within man. And the magnitude of the problem is seen in Rom. 3:23, *"For all have sinned."* The way to bring peace of mind is to get rid of the sin that causes the turmoil. The way to bring peace to the world is to get rid of sin, and only the *"Prince of peace"* can remove sin!

Before the birth of the Lord, Joseph was told, *"And she shall bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).* Later, the apostle Peter said of Him, *"And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).* Because sin has separated us from God, the only way to return to God is for our sins to be forgiven. And that is what Christ came to do.

We need to be "reconciled to God" (restored again to fellowship with Him). And when Jesus went to the cross it was for that purpose: *"For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross"* (Col. 1:19-20).

The apostle Paul further describes how we are reconciled to God: *"For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God: being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood ... But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life ... Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life"* (Rom. 3:23-25; 5:8-10; 6:3-4).

When we, through faith, are "baptized into his death," we are also "baptized into Christ." What that means is that the blood shed in His death cleanses us from sin and puts us into Jesus Christ. As the Bible says: *"For he is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition ... and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and he came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were nigh"* (Eph. 2:14-17). That "one body" is the church (Eph. 1:22-23), so we are reconciled to God in the church which Jesus built when we are "baptized into Christ."

If we would have peace with other people, we must learn to be at peace with ourselves. But that is possible only when we have peace with God through Jesus Christ. But if we will put our trust in "the Prince of peace," and be reconciled to God in Him, then peace can be ours. As Paul wrote, *"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 4:7). Only Jesus Christ can offer that peace. And we can find it only when we come to Him.

# Living on Easy Street

JOHNNY RAMSEY

*"And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment" (Heb. 9:27). We all must die, and we all must face the Judgment. But what is the basis of that judgment? "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Young people are urged early in life to choose to serve God, so that they can decide later in their years that there is no lasting pleasure in sinful and shameful things.*

What causes so many people to make improper decisions that bring sorrow and ruin to their earthly sojourn? 1 John 2:15-17 lists *"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the vain glory of life."* Because of carnal temptations and prideful people, the devil ensnares millions in our day to engage in illicit associations and activities that *"war against the soul"* (1 Pet. 2:11). Popularity means more than purity to some folk, who refuse to stand against evil and pursue righteousness (Matt. 5:8). Some do not discern the beauty of godliness, but see only the shallow delights of pornography and sordid sensuality. Vanity plays a very large role in the drama of life, while holiness never enters the stage. In our wicked and hedonistic age, millions pander to the flesh and forget the joy of serving the Lord Jesus Christ. God gives the proper emphasis: *"Live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world"* (Titus 2:12). Those who make up their minds not to *"enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season"* (Heb. 11:25) accept a nobler existence now and golden blessings in a far better world!

Too many choose the path of least resistance. Jesus pointed out, *"Enter ye in by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that enter in thereby. For narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it"* (Matt. 7:13-14). The popular route is wide and broad and easy. It takes no real effort to traverse it. However, the end result is absolute destruction in a realm not to be desired. The other choice, made by a vast minority, is challenging and demanding, but is worth whatever the sacrifice may be. Like all truth, it is narrow. And *"Few are they that find it."*



We must serve the Savior without distraction, as we learn in 1 Cor. 7:35. Multitudes still stand in the valley of decision (Joel 3:14), and sadly the majority still walk the wide road of sin and shame. Christ came to give us *"life abundantly"* (John 10:10), but in John 5:40, He said, *"Ye will not come to me that ye might have life."* To make proper choices, we must count the cost (Luke 14:28) and have deep respect for future reward (Heb. 11:26). We must realize the impact upon others, and the repercussions our decisions make on our neighbors, friends and families. We truly need to make up our minds in view of eternity: *"And in the world to come eternal life"* (Mark 10:30). An old gospel song rings out loud and clear:

*We cannot be channels of blessing,  
If our lives are not free from all sin,  
We will barriers be and a hindrance  
To those we are trying to win.*

Our everlasting dwelling place shall be determined by the decisions we make on earth. May we be wise enough to shun easy street and choose the old rugged cross.

## ***The Ascension of Christ***

**E. CLAUDE GARDNER**

On the religious calendar of many in Christendom is the observance of Ascension Day. It has been exalted since the fourth century. It is celebrated 40 days after Easter. Religionists have a penchant for exalting many special days such as Easter and Christmas but without biblical sanction. The ascension is important, as are all aspects of Christ's stay on the earth. What significant and exciting truths are connected with the ascension?

### **Days Prior to the Ascension**

After the Lord's crucifixion, He was raised on the third day. For the next 40 days, He made Himself known to His disciples only. He appeared bodily to the apostles and others for 11 times that were recorded. Luke records that He taught the apostles more about the kingdom that would come into existence on Pentecost. Luke wrote, "to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty

days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

One significant appearance was His visit with the two disciples from Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). He ate a meal with them before He revealed His identity. Because He ate bread, He appeared to them in His body and not as a spirit.

Just before His ascension, Jesus announced the Great Commission. He asked His disciples to meet Him at a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20). He may have announced it more than once. Luke records His account at Bethany before Jesus ascended: "and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). The Great Commission is recorded four times. In addition to the two already cited, it is found in Mark 16:15-16 and John 20:21-23.

Christ was victorious over the enemies who thought they had gotten rid of Him. The gates of Hades did not prevent His victory over death and bitter enemies. "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.... But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth'" (Acts 1:4-5, 8). The last thing He did on earth was to bless the disciples (Luke 24:51).

Jesus charged them to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit endued them with power or authority. He also repeated the promise of the Father to them.

### **Victory! Victory!**

Because the ascension transpired before their eyes, the disciples were happy. When they left Bethany, they returned to Jerusalem with great joy. The Bible describes their response: "And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy" (Luke 24:52).

After blessing them, Jesus literally ascended in a cloud to God in heaven. The Bible describes this historic miracle: "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men

stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven' " (Acts 1:9-11). More than 50 years ago, while in a gospel meeting, I read a book of religious fiction that described the ascension differently. According to this unbelieving writer, Jesus asked the disciples to bow their heads, and He just slipped away. That is not the way Jesus left; it was in a cloud and all could see.

The two men in white apparel reassured the disciples of Christ's personal second coming. He will return at the end in the same way He left - in a cloud. But why in a cloud? Scripture does not say, but some have suggested it as a symbol of God's presence or a new relationship between Jesus and God and among Jesus and His followers. However, the Bible does not state the reason He ascended in a cloud.

The apostle John describes His return in these words: "Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen" (Revelation 1:7). Every eye will see Him; enemies and all people of the earth will see Him.

### **Ascension Was Promised**

During His ministry, Jesus alluded to His ascension. "You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come" (John 7:34). He also referred to this event when He posed a question, "What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before?" (6:62). To Mary, reference was made that He would ascend to the Father. "Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God."' (20:17).

When Jesus ascended, He went back to glory. In the tribute Paul gave to Jesus in 1 Timothy 3:16, the last of the six tributes, was that Christ was "Received up into glory."

### **Ascension Was Prophesied**

The prophet Daniel foretold that when Jesus ascended, He would return to Jehovah God, the "Ancient of Days." Here is what he saw in a divine vision: "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him

near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14). When Jesus ascended, He was given the kingdom, the church that He had promised (Matthew 16:18). It was universal and eternal. He would have complete authority, and His Word would be final.

The psalmist graphically describes Christ's return as the King of glory. "Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, The Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory." (Psalm 24:7-10). This is a poetic description of His majestic return.

### **After the Ascension**

After the return to glory, what role does Christ have? He founded His kingdom and is the head of it (Colossians 1:18). Now He sits on the throne of David at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55). "Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne.... Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand" ' " (2:30, 33-34). His name is above every name (Philippians 2:9-10; Ephesians 4:7-10).

Christ is our Mediator and remains interested in us. "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). As evidence that our Savior cares in times of trouble, we see Jesus described as standing (not sitting) when the martyr Stephen was so wickedly and cruelly put to death. In times both good and bad, we pray to the Father through the name of Christ: "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13).

### **Our Ascension**

Just as Jesus ascended in a cloud, we will do likewise when He brings the world to an end and raises us for the judgment.



"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

"So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). We are thankful for His ascension.

## *But If Not...*

DAN KESSINGER

Literary anecdotes encourage us not to give up because "quitters never win." It's good advice for a locker room wall or a bulletin board, but the account of the fiery furnace in Daniel 3 demonstrates a grittier principle than that of victory through perseverance. The principle was "but if not..."

Both racial prejudice and professional jealousy might have played a part in the betrayal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. The very "wise men" whose lives they had helped preserve (Daniel 2) conspired to accuse them of insurrection. Perhaps because of his foolish pride over being the "head of gold" (v. 38), Nebuchadnezzar decreed that all must worship a gargantuan idol of recent construction. This worship was to ensue when announced by music from a royal band (3:7). Predictably, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego did not bow to the idol. Daniel was not also accused perhaps because of his higher rank in the kingdom. The three Hebrews were indicted before an enraged King Nebuchadnezzar. He was probably shocked to find his clear order openly disobeyed, especially considering the draconian penalty. Possibly because of their being government officials, the three were given one more chance. If upon hearing the next fanfare they worshiped the idol, they would be spared. If not, it was the fiery furnace.

In their moment of truth, the three men had no specific promise of deliverance; they assumed that they might pay for their faith with their lives. By contrast, the king's command was immediate and the consequences visible. He himself played on this theme

as he asked "And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?" (Daniel 3:15b). Their-commitment was most impractical but was to be honored no matter what. And its essence is captured in "but if not...."

In his commencement speech to the Thiel College class of 2002, George F. Wills told a story of courage. "In June 1940, a British officer in the desperate circumstances of Dunkirk beach flashed to London a three-word message: 'But if not.' What meaning, if any, would we find in such a - to us -opaque message?

"'But if not.' Far from seeming opaque in 1940, it was instantly recognized, as its sender assumed it would be, as a Biblical quotation. It is from the Book of Daniel, from the passage in which Nebuchadnezzar commands Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to either worship the golden image or be thrust into the fiery furnace. The three threatened men respond defiantly:

"... our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image ..."

"This is, at least to me, an astonishing and deeply stirring episode. Here we have an officer, with his back to the English Channel and his face to the Wehrmacht. In this extreme situation, he expresses his heroic defiance with breathtaking elegance and economy: I especially stress, and envy, the economy. He distilled his situation and moral stance into three words - three syllables, actually. In the cacophony of war, in the deadly confusion of an evacuation under attack, he deftly plucked from the then-common culture—mind you, this was just 62 years ago—an almost universally familiar fragment of a passage from a book. With the fragment he connected himself, and his interlocutors, with a resonant story from the Western canon."

The "but if not" attitude was unequivocally expressed by Job as he stated "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15a). Just beneath the world's largest relief carving on Stone Mountain Georgia, I remember an artist's elegant expression of that same loyal spirit. There stands a statue of a Confederate soldier, emaciated and tattered, armed with only a broken sword. But he holds it aloft defiantly. Even if his loyalty was misguided, his unbreakable will is beautiful, even to his foes. The inscription reads: " 'Men who saw night coming down about them could somehow act as if they stood at the edge of dawn,' a confederate

soldier shortly before his death."

Those who refuse to give up are sometimes rewarded with victory. But what if they lose miserably anyway? Is it wasted effort? It depends on the cause for which they fight. "But if not" might be the ultimate expression of the God-given human spirit. It refuses to quit the race, if only to finish last. It is a boxer staggering to his feet that he might absorb more punishment. It was a British army prepared to do their duty at Dunkirk even if help was not forthcoming. It set the face of every martyr who confessed his faith rather than preserving his life. It is in the heart of a mistreated wife who lovingly struggles on for her children.

You can almost hear the three Hebrews as you read their words. Though sick with dread, they defied the most powerful man on earth. The loyalty of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego was more than stubborn loyalty - it was the cause that defined them. And faithfulness is more than defiance attitude or even confidence; it is rooted in trust. Perhaps we ourselves don't have to be great people in order to stand with them. Perhaps all we need is to embrace the character of our God.

In a blind fury, Nebuchadnezzar behaved like a man corrupted by absolute power, ordering the kiln heated seven times hotter than normal. It was a heat so intense that those charged with the execution were themselves killed. But as Nebuchadnezzar looked into the furnace (perhaps through a draft vent), what he saw defied explanation. Instead of three dead or dying men, he saw four alive. And they were unbound and unharmed (Daniel 3:24-25).

Who was this mysterious fourth figure? Can we trust the description of a pagan king who presumably knew nothing of the Messiah, yet said "the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (Daniel 3:25)? It might have been Jehovah Himself in human form, or the king could have mistaken an angel for a god. But lacking any contrary evidence, why not allow his words to stand as he uttered them? Jesus came to assist Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego.

God could have protected them from afar, so there was a reason for this personal divine contact. God is always nearby, even when we are unaware of it. " 'Am I a God near at hand,' says the Lord, 'And not a God afar off?'" (Jeremiah 23:23). Our Lord was Immanuel, "God with us" (Matthew 1:23b). To Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, the Lord's presence was a comfort and assurance. As they had hoped, God was watching over them and caring for them. What did the Lord say to them there in the flames?

Perhaps he said, "You have done well," or "I am proud of you." Perhaps a squeeze of the shoulder said all that was needed.

They emerged from the fire unhurt, with hair and clothing un-singed; they did not even smell of smoke. A thoroughly impressed Nebuchadnezzar decreed (on pain of death, etc.) that no one should speak against Jehovah (Daniel 3:29).

Were they afraid? Only if they were madmen were they not. After all, a fiery furnace is still a fiery furnace. But there they met our Lord. Their voices call out to us from beyond whatever king or fire disputes our faith in God. They stood for God that day because standing was right. With their encouraging hands on our shoulders, we too can stand. Ours is not a blind leap of faith, but one of trust. From the pages of our Bibles and through the portals of eternity, unhurt Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego call unto us saying, "It's all right. Jesus is here and He will catch you."

## ***Christians Sing***

**RICHARD NORMAN**

Christianity was born with a song on its lips. When Mary learned of God's favoring her with a child of the Holy Spirit, she sang praises to God. Her song is recorded in Luke 1:46-55. The night Jesus was born, the very heavens were filled with the sound of angels singing "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). The birth of God's Son was not announced with trumpet sound nor with the plucking of harp strings, but with singing.

Singing is peculiar to Christianity. Christians sing "spiritual songs." Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Christians do not sing the songs of those who do not know God. Christians sing the spiritual songs that are intended to draw us closer to God.

Christians sing songs that teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16). Christians sing songs that express gospel truth and songs that are in harmony with God's Word.

Christians sing with the sweetest melody of which the human heart is capable. We are to "sing with the spirit" (1 Corinthians



14:15) which means that our songs must first come from a source much deeper than our vocal chords. And the Scriptures say, "making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19), indicating that one person's heart may be far more "in tune" with God and His Word than another person's whose voice may be well trained and beautiful to the human ear but whose heart is "out of tune" with God and His Word. God does not care how beautifully you sing with your voice. God listens to the beauty of the heart.

We are also to "sing with the understanding" (1 Corinthians 14:15) of what we are singing - that is, the words - the meaning of the songs we sing. We are not singing for the entertainment of other people but for the praise and honor of God and for the "teaching and admonishing" - the edification - of one another.

The Scriptures command Christians to sing, in general! all Christians - not just a select few. The nine passages that mention music in worship to God say, "sing" - every one. Not one passage in all the New Testament regarding Christian worship to God on this earth even mentions instruments of music - not one. Furthermore, every passage that says "sing" is in the form of a command - not a suggestion. Christians are commanded to "sing."

Singing is defined as "sustained speaking." Therefore, singing is not humming or whistling, though all are done using vocal chords. Singing is sustained speaking so that Paul said, "speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). All nine passages in the New Testament regarding singing seem to apply to all Christians without regard to whether they can "carry a tune." The melody is in the heart.

Singing is much more than a mere Christian "duty"; it must be our very nature as a Christian to sing. The New Testament teaches us that the word of Christ is to dwell richly within Christians, in our hearts, to overflow in song. The New Testament teaches us that the word of God fills every Christian with the Holy Spirit of God so that singing is the very overflowing of our hearts.

The Christian has a heavenly Father and a Savior who is heaven's love-gift who died for our sins. The Christian has the hope of heaven to make our hearts burst open into songs of praise and thanksgiving and teaching and admonishing others.

No wonder Christians sing!

# Commandment Keeping

KEVIN CAULEY

There are those in the religious world today who ridicule the idea of keeping commandments. They claim that keeping God's commandments have nothing to do with our salvation today. If someone objects and says that we must keep God's commandments to be saved, the charge of legal-ism is leveled against him. Is it true that keeping God's commandments has nothing to do with salvation? Are we legalists because we demand that those who follow Christ keep his commandments? Let's examine these questions in light of the New Testament Scriptures.

Often, Jesus Himself is cited as one who criticized the Pharisees for being commandment keepers. However, such was not the case. We should note well that Jesus never condemned anyone for keeping **God's** commandments. Jesus, however, did condemn the Pharisees for placing their own commandments above God's! This is an entirely different situation. Matthew 15:1-9 is one such instance. Jesus confronted the Pharisees in regard to transgressing God's command to keep their own tradition (15:3). He said that they had made God's commandment of none effect by their tradition (15:6). Then He says that they in fact have taught for doctrine their own commandments, the commandments of men (15:9). Keeping such commandments should not be placed into the same category as keeping God's commandments. To equate the desire to keep God's commandments with the desire to keep man's commandments in place of God's commandments is to pervert the words of Jesus and entirely miss the point. Jesus expected others to keep God's commandments. It is because these Pharisees had set aside God's commandments, that Jesus' anger was kindled against them.

In contrast to ridiculing commandment keeping, Jesus Himself preached it! In Matthew 19:17, Jesus told one asking about obtaining eternal life to keep God's commandments if he would enter into life. The man asked what he lacked and Jesus added another commandment, namely, to go sell all that he had to the poor and follow Jesus (19:21). In John 14:15 Jesus said to the apostles, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Loving Jesus is dependent upon keeping His commandments. To say that we love Jesus, yet fail to keep his commandments is hypocrisy at best and outright lying at worst. Jesus reiterates in John 15:10 "If ye

keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." Note two things about this Scripture. First, Jesus equates keeping commandments with abiding in His love. When you note John 14:15 (that you can't love without keeping the commandments) along with John 15:10 (that you can't keep the commandments without abiding in love), one gains a very firm conclusion: we can love Jesus if and only if we keep his commandments. But second, what is even more remarkable about John 15:10 is that Jesus himself is a commandment keeper. He abides in the love of the Father through keeping the Father's commandments. Here is a one-two-knockout for those who claim that commandment keeping has nothing to do with salvation.

The apostle John explains further in his first epistle just exactly what the relationship between commandment keeping and salvation is. In 1 John 2:3, 4 we read, "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." The simple conclusion is that one cannot come to know God without keeping the commandments. If you don't know God, you can't be saved (2 Thess.1:8). The apostle John comments further in 1 John 5:2, 3 "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 grievous." We cannot even love God without keeping God's commandments. In fact, John defines love for God in exactly these terms. He says, "This is the love of God." Lest we forget, love for God is the first and greatest commandment. Loving our neighbor is like this commandment, but ultimately comes second (Matthew 22:37-39). My relationship with God always takes precedence over my relationship with other people. This means that I must be concerned about keeping God's commandments.

The bottom line is ultimately this. Those who ridicule commandment keeping, ridicule Jesus himself, for He was a commandment keeper (John 15:10). Those who ridicule commandment keepers, ridicule the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit was only promised to those who kept Jesus' commandments (John 14:15-17). And those who ridicule commandment keepers, ridicule God the Father because we can neither know Him or love Him without doing such (1 John 2:3; 5:2). Such has nothing to do with being a legalist; and has everything to do with our being

saved. So let's keep those commandments and show God that we truly do love Him!

## **Contrasting Characters**

GARY C. HAMPTON

About a week before His death, Jesus was sitting at the table in the house of Simon the leper (Mark 14:3). Three distinct types of character were displayed there.

First, there was the **contributor**. Mary began to anoint Jesus' head and feet with nard, a fragrant, expensive perfume from an east Indian plant that she poured from an alabaster flask. Judas noted that it could have been sold for 300 denarii, or at least a week's wages (John 12:5). Mary wiped the feet of Jesus with her hair, thereby honoring the Lord, who had raised her brother from the dead.

Second, there was the **critic**. Judas may have intended to embarrass the worshiper, but he had no real concern for the poor. He was a selfish embezzler. Unfortunately, others joined him in his criticism. After being rebuked, Judas sold the Lord for 30 pieces of silver (Mark 14:10,11).

Third, there was the **Christ**. He complimented Mary for the good work she did and said they would have other opportunities to help the poor. Clearly, Jesus thought worship was as important as benevolence. He honored her for her work by saying, *"She has done what she could..."* That honor continues to this day.

Like Mary, we should honor Jesus who gave up so much to save us (Romans 5:6-8; 1 Timothy 1:15). Paul wrote, *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:9). Remember, our works can continue to produce good fruit in others even after we die (Revelation 14:13; Hebrews 11:4).

We must avoid being the critic, or joining in criticism with others. Our Lord wants us to use our freedom as an opportunity to serve others, not destroy them and the church to which they belong (Galatians 5:13-15).

We should all desire to follow the footsteps of Jesus and be one who encourages others in love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). Our goal should be to be like Philemon, who, Paul said, refreshed the hearts of the saints (Philemon 7).



# ***Did Jesus Ever Condemn Homosexuality?***

MIKE BENSON

**Question:** *"Is there any place in the New Testament where Jesus actually condemned homosexuality? If so, I have not been able to find it. It seems to me that if the Savior didn't say it was wrong, then neither should we."*

**Answer:** While it is true that there is no New Testament record of where Jesus explicitly stated that homosexuality is wrong, He did in fact condemn the behavior. A careful study of the Bible will bear this out. Please read the following Bible passages and then consider the questions that follow:

1. *"And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?'"* (Matthew 19:4,5).

**Question:** What did Jesus say about God's creative work? Did He make Adam and Joseph? Did He create male and male, or did He create male and female? According to this passage, what has been God's plan for sexual union (one flesh) since the beginning of time? Was His plan for a male partner to be joined to another male partner, or was it for a husband to be united to his wife? According to this passage, is a man to cleave to his male partner, or to his spouse?

**Consider:** Since Jesus approved of His Father's plan (i.e., one man, one woman, one flesh), could we correctly say that Jesus condemned homosexuality?

2. *"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"* (John 5:46,47).

**Question:** Under what law was Jesus born? Under what law did He live? **Answer:** The Law of Moses (cf. Galatians 4:4). Did Jesus endorse and follow the Law of Moses? What did the Law of Moses say about homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Deuteronomy 23:17)?

**Consider:** Since Jesus was born and lived under the Law of Moses, and since He endorsed the Law of Moses, and since the Law of Moses explicitly condemned homosexuality, then

could we correctly say that Jesus also condemned it?

3. *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for he will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you"* (John 16:12-15).

**Questions:** What did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would do for the apostles? **Answer:** Guide them into all truth (verse 13). As the Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all truth, would He speak on His own authority? **Answer:** No. He would speak on the authority of Christ (verse 14). What did Jesus say the Holy Spirit would do in verse 14? **Answer:** "He [i.e., the Holy Spirit] will take of what is Mine [i.e., Christ's] and declare it to you" (i.e., the apostles).

**Consider:** Since (1) the apostles would be guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit, and since (2) the Holy Spirit would not speak on His own authority, but instead would speak on the authority of Christ, and since (3) the Holy Spirit would take of what was Christ's and declare it to the apostles, then by whose authority would the apostles speak/write/teach when the Holy Spirit guided them into all truth? **Answer:** Christ's.

**Question:** What did the apostle Paul (by Christ's authority) say about the practice of homosexuality? **Answer:** Read Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10. The lifestyle is clearly identified and just as clearly condemned.

Yes, Jesus did condemn homosexuality in His Word. The good news is that there is hope for the homosexual; he/she has reason to believe there is hope for a brighter future. Paul states that some at Corinth had engaged in homosexual acts, but they had been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The same can happen today. As with anyone who repents of a sin, the homosexual can be forgiven. He/she can experience the same freedom and joy that any other sinner knows when he/she becomes a Christian. The Bible condemns homosexual sex, but it clearly states that non-practicing homosexuals can be saved, just as all other penitent and obedient sinners can be saved, if they remain faithful to God's law of grace and pardon.



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