

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).

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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

*"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands
of the living God"*

There was a time when God personally dealt with man, as was in the case of Adam and Eve and others. Then after some time God began to deal with people through prophets, who spoke to people in behalf of God, as is obvious by reading the Old Testament of the Bible. Then God sent His Son Jesus Christ, through whom God revealed His will to man. Christ, before going back to heaven, after accomplishing the work of salvation of man, chose his apostles, upon whom He later sent from heaven the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth, as His spokesperson. (Hebrews 1:1, 2; John 14:25, 26; John 16:12-14). Today we have all the truth of God, His revealed will for man, in the Bible.

God has given man the Bible so that man may know God's will for him and do and live accordingly. The Bible is God's will for all people everywhere. The Bible is not a book for a certain religious group of people, but it is God's will for all. Through the Bible God has revealed to man that He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever are in them (Genesis 1). The Bible not only tells us that God in the beginning created man, but also tells us that God had created man in the beginning after His own likeness and in His own image. (Genesis 1:26,27; 2:7). Man, therefore, like God, is a spiritual being, and like God man will exist forever.

In the beginning, man was in fellowship with God, in the garden that God had planted for man to live in. (Gen.2:8-25). But when

man disobeyed God, as we read in Genesis 3 chapter, the fellowship of man with God was broken. Man became a sinner. Separated from God because of sin, man died spiritually. (Gen. 2:17). And consequently physical death for man was introduced (Genesis 3:17:19).

Today, all die physically, even little children, because of the consequences of man's sin. (Romans 5:12-14) But spiritual death is produced for every individual when each person sins, as Adam and Eve did in the beginning, by personal choice (James 1:14;15). Sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). This separation is called spiritual death. (Ephesians 2:1). The Bible declares that all have sinned (Romans 3:23). Although no one is born with sin, but every person becomes a sinner in the eyes of God when a person grows and become accountable for sin before God. (Ezekiel 18:20). This is sad news.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom God sent from heaven, brought the good news for man, because He said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16,17). God's message of salvation is for the whole world. Because all have sinned, and are, therefore, destined to live separated and away from God, because of sin. All people of the world, everywhere, need salvation from sin. "For the wages of sin is death," says the Bible at Romans 6:23, "But the gift of God is — eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This is the message, the good news of the Bible, for the whole mankind. There is a true and living God, who has created man, and He has communicated to man His will. He has told man, from where he has come and where or in what realm he exists, and what will become of man. Man can choose in this life to inherit the eternal life of heaven through Jesus Christ whom God appointed the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10; 2 Cor. 5:21), or he will perish in hell. (Matt. 25:46). Almost two millennium ago when the apostle Paul was preaching to people at Athens, after telling people of God's will for man, he concluded his message by saying, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of

this to all by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30, 31). Truly, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31).

Confession of Christ

J.C. CHOATE

Another command of the gospel is that of confessing Christ as the Son of God. The word "confess" means to make known, to declare, to acknowledge, to express faith in another. This is what the Lord expects of each one who obeys Him. One must be willing to go on record that he believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. If he is unwilling to make such a confession then it means that he is not ready to obey the Lord, and neither can he obey the Lord under such circumstances.

Christ taught the importance of this confession when He said, *"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 10:32,33). Let us notice a few things just here:

1. All are invited to confess Christ. It doesn't matter who they are or where they are, this truth still stands.

2. The confession must be made of Christ, not of one's sins. The Lord first of all wants one's allegiance, then He will deal with that person's sins.

3. This confession must be made before men. There are to be witnesses of this. If one truly believes in Christ he should want one and all to know of the faith that he has in Him.

4. It is that individual who is willing to so confess Christ that the Lord has promised to confess before the Father in heaven. Just think of the blessing, or the honor, of having the Son of God to confess him before His Father in heaven. And what does the Lord ask? Simply that He be confessed before men.

5. Those who refuse to confess Him before men will be denied before the Father which is in heaven. But it is not just that they refuse to confess Him, but they deny Him, and so He will deal with them accordingly. The same applies regardless of who they are or where they are from.

So in these two brief verses of scriptures so much is said. The Lord shows both sides, the blessings and the consequences, for

those who would deny Him. At the same time, He leaves it to each individual to decide for himself.

What about those who will not confess Christ? The Apostle John said, *"For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an anti-christ"* (2 John 7). As to who should confess the Lord, Paul writes, *"And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2:11).

Next, we observe that this confession is not only to be made with the mouth, but it is made unto salvation. Please note: *"that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Romans 10:9,10). Some have wrongly concluded that in order to be saved all one has to do is to confess one's sins and acknowledge the Lord and that is the end of it. But what about faith? But one would vow that the confession is based on faith. Then what about repentance? Nothing is said about repentance here. So those who are seeking to find the easy way out often overlook many things. But the very next verse shows how faith and the confession of Christ fits into the plan of salvation. First, he shows how that one must believe in his heart, but that it is unto righteousness or unto salvation. That is, one is not saved, but is looking toward salvation or forward to salvation. Second, he points out that with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. The confession here is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and again it is *unto* salvation, not *into* salvation, and there is a big difference. In other words, faith in Christ, and the confession that Christ is the Son of God, is not enough to bring salvation. One certainly cannot be saved without faith and such a confession, but there is yet more to do.

Finally, we have an example of where a man was required to make this confession in order to make him a fit subject for baptism. Let us read the story itself: *"Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, 'Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza'. This is desert. So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah*

the prophet. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near and overtake this chariot'. So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' And he said, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. The place in the Scripture which he read was this: He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth. So the eunuch answered Philip and said, I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?' Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may'. And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God'. So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:26-39). Now it seems rather clear as to what happened here. Philip taught this man concerning Christ and what he had to do to obey Him. Then upon learning of the Lord, he wanted to comply with His will. But please note, before baptizing him he wanted to know if he believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. The eunuch answered in the affirmative, but it was only after this that Philip was willing to baptize him.

It is on the basis of this example, and in compliance with the other verses of Scripture that deal with confessing Christ, that before we baptize anyone we ask if he believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Once he says yes, then we are ready to proceed with the baptizing.

This confession is often referred to as the good confession, and truly, if any confession could be called a good confession, it would be this one.

So what do we have? For one to be saved one must hear the gospel, believe it, repent of his sins, confess Christ as the Son of God, and finally be baptized for the remission of sins. The confession of Christ in this case is only part of the over-all plan of salvation or just one of the commands of the gospel. It alone

cannot save anyone, but without it neither can anyone be saved. It becomes vital and powerful only when left in the position the Lord put it in.

Qualities Of True Religion

CLEM THURMAN

Being religious is just as natural for mankind as being social, being hungry or being thirsty. It is a natural appetite, but a spiritual one. There is abundant evidence that, left to himself, man will worship. If he doesn't know the true God, he will invent one. But he will worship. Some people accept polytheism, or belief in many gods – worshipping the basic powers of nature such as the sun, storms, lightning, etc. Jacobs and Stern, in their book, "An Outline of General Anthropology," said: "Magic and religion of one kind or other are undoubtedly present among all communities on primitive levels.... All people conduct, more or less, magico-religious rites at intervals during the year." Why does man worship? Unbelievers will answer, "Superstition." But that is no answer at all, for it brings the next question, "Why is man superstitious?" World Book Encyclopedia says about religion, "Every religion includes ethics, or codes of conduct. But religion is more than ethics. Ethics asks, 'How should we behave toward other people?' Religion asks, 'How should we relate ourselves to the greatest power in the universe?' Religion has been one of the most powerful forces in history. Millions of persons have died for their religious beliefs. Nations have gone to war to spread or defend their faiths. But there has never been a people that did not have some form of religion."

I am convinced that the reason man worships is because he is created in the image of God, and God has "programmed" man to strive to "seek after God" (Gen. 1:26; Acts 17:27; Heb. 11:6). But, as Paul shows in his sermon on Mar's Hill in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), not all religions are valid. Real religion, true religion, has certain requirements. Let us see what some of them are.

Real Religion Requires Revelation

A simple truth, verified by man's history, is stated thus by the prophet of old: "The way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Religion forces man

to look beyond himself for guidance. As the apostle Paul said it, "That they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us: for in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:27-28). Obedience to the admonition to "know the Lord" (Heb. 8:11) is made possible because God reveals Himself to us. Jesus said, "They shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me" (John 6:45). Jesus came to this earth to reveal God to us, "I and the Father are one.... He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 10:30; 14:9).

The apostle Peter wrote of how God reveals Himself to man: "We have the word of prophecy made more sure ... for no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:19-21). It is little wonder, then, that Paul wrote, "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

But what does "inspired of God" mean? The apostle answers with an illustration and a conclusion: "Who among men knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knoweth, save the Spirit of God. ... Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth" (1 Cor. 2:11-13). God reveals Himself to us "in words" which are called "Scriptures." Without such revelation from God, none of us could know the character and will of God. Real religion requires revelation.

Real Religion Requires a Redeemer

Man's basic need is not to improve himself, to be a better person. Yes, religion will accomplish that. But the primary purpose of religion is found in man's deepest need: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. ... The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). As John wrote on the same subject, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). That means we all sin. And that means we all must be under the penalty of death. "All we like sheep have gone astray. ... Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear" (Isa. 53:6; 59:2). Because we have all sinned, and because sin has separated us from God, we all must perish without God:

That is a bleak picture, if the story ended there. But it doesn't end there: *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

Why did Jesus leave heaven and come into this world? *"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Luke 19:10). Because man could not be redeemed without Christ, He voluntarily went to the cross: *"Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ"* (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Because He died for us, we are *"justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. ... In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace"* (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7). Only Jesus Christ can redeem, for only He paid the price! And He said, *"No one cometh unto the Father, but by Me"* (John 14:6). The apostles preached the same thing, *"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). Christ is our Redeemer, and there can be no other. Real religion requires a redeemer.

Real Religion Requires Repentance

Because we have all sinned, a change in the way we live is required. The determination to change, to live differently than we have, is called "repentance." Jesus said it clearly, *"Except ye repent, ye shall all in like manner perish"* (Luke 13:3). He told the apostles that *"Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:47). In that city of Jerusalem, the apostles began the proclamation of the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:1-36). When people asked what to do, the apostles replied, *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you"* (Acts 2:38). That is precisely what He had told them to preach (Mark 16:16; Luke 24:47). Jesus did not come to save people in their sins; He came to save them **FROM** their sins. Unless people are willing to repent, and thus determine to leave sin, they can never be saved.

The apostle Paul contemplated the cross, and wrote: *"The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and he died for all that they that live*

should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him who for their sakes died and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). He died to save us from the guilt of sin, and His death motivates us to leave sin and "live for him." A new life results when one comes to Christ, and repentance is the turning point that brings that about. "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?" (Rom. 6:1-2). We are saved by God's grace. But, "The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:11-12). Real religion requires repentance.

Real Religion Requires Regeneration

The apostle Paul wrote of our salvation, our redemption, in these words: "Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his own mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). To "regenerate" simply means to give new life or to give life again. That is precisely what valid religion requires. That those who were "dead in sin" (Eph. 2:1-5; Col. 2:13) are now "made alive in Christ" (1 Cor. 15:22) is the heart of the gospel and is regeneration. Jesus explained it to Nicodemus, "Except one be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:3,5).

The process of that "new birth" is explained by the apostle Paul in Rom. 6:3-4, "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 into 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. 6:3-4). When does the "newness of life" begin? The Lord answers, "Born of water and the Spirit." That is the beginning of the new life. That is regeneration, as Paul writes (Titus 3:5).

Note carefully the process of regeneration. The word, given by the Spirit, is preached, people receive it (Acts 2:41) and are baptized in water (Acts 8:36; 10:47). Because of that "washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5), they are now "in Christ" (Rom. 6:3). And note the result of that: "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold, they are become

new" (2 Cor. 5:17). Now, the "born again" person has *"put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him"* (Col. 3:9-10). Only the Lord Jesus Christ can give new life, and only by *"faith working through love"* (Gal. 5:6) is it possible for us to be *"born again, of water and Spirit."* Real religion requires regeneration.

Real Religion Requires Righteousness

Many try to belittle the need for living right, claiming that such means we are trying to earn salvation. But the truth is simple: Unless religion makes us righteous in our lives, it is vain and worthless. Paul wrote that the *"gospel is the power of God unto salvation,"* then added, *"Therein is revealed a righteousness of God, from faith unto faith, for it is written, But the righteous shall live by faith"* (Rom. 1:16-17). Are we righteous, then? No! Not within, or by, ourselves. But, because we have *"died unto sin, and live unto righteousness"* (1 Pet. 2:24), we *"become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Cor. 5:21). While our own righteousness is as *"filthy rags"* (Isa. 64:6), our work in the service of our Creator is *"the righteousness of God"* (Acts 10:35; Rom. 1:17; 6:13; James 1:20; 1 John 3:7).

God expects us to be righteous, to work His righteousness in our daily living. The apostle Paul shows the result of our being born again by being baptized into Christ — into His death, burial and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-6). He then states, *"Thanks be to God, that whereas ye were the servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness"* (Rom. 6:17-18).

Because we have *"died to sin"* and been raised to *"newness of life"* (Rom. 6:3-4), we must live differently. No longer do we live for self or sin; we live for God - we work His righteousness. John put it simply, *"If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him"* (1 John 2:29). And again, *"He that doeth righteousness is righteous"* (1 John 3:7). Note that! It isn't that somehow righteousness is just conferred upon us. We are righteous because we *"do righteousness."* True religion means that, by faith, we do what God says. Real religion requires righteousness.

We must study the word of the Lord in order to become like

Him: *"We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory. ... Renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him"* (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). Real religion reveals God, redeems us from sin, requires repentance and regeneration that leads to our working the righteousness of God. Does your religion do that?

Sin Is Surely Deceptive

MILES PEEPLES

In the first century, many Hebrew Christians were struggling with whether to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. Under hardships, and at times even severe persecution, they considered abandoning the Lord Jesus and returning to the practices of the Old Testament. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews gave them both an exhortation and a warning in Hebrews 3:12-13. He said, *"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."*

With respect to the warning, the writer uses the terms "hardened" and "deceitfulness of sin." The term "hardened" means to be obstinate and stubborn, possessing an unwillingness to listen to instruction. The term "deceitfulness" signifies "that which gives a false impression, whether by appearance, statement, or influence." The writer of Hebrews is warning the struggling Hebrew Christians of the danger of becoming unwilling to listen to God because of the false impressions of sin. In what ways can sin be deceitful?

Sin gives the false impression it is a servant. Many times individuals take up the habit of drinking alcoholic beverages or of taking drugs believing they can make such habits their servants to bring them genuine happiness. Instead of becoming servants, their habits actually become their **masters**. Sin does not fill the role of a servant. Sin always becomes the master. Romans 6:17 says, *"But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered."* Prior to their obeying the gospel, the Roman brethren were servants of sin. Sin is really a cruel master while giving the false impression of being a servant.

Sin gives the false impression it is advantageous. Sin always promises much more than it can ever deliver. In the end, it can only deliver heartache and hardship in this life and eternal damnation in the world to come. Yet, it gives the false impression of providing real advantages and no disadvantages. Genesis 3:6 says, *"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."* The serpent earlier told Eve no negative consequences would come to her. He pointed out the so-called advantages of eating the forbidden fruit. When Eve considers the false advantages of eating the fruit, she takes some and eats. The consequences have been enormously destructive even until this present time. Sin is deceptive in that it offers the hope of a marvelous advantage but actually delivers terrible and tragic results.

Sin gives the false impression it is the right thing to do. In Proverbs 16:25, the Bible says, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."* While giving the false impression of being right, sin says the following: "Come and live this way: Study God's word very little. Apply little of what you do read to yourself. Be little concerned (if at all) for the soul of your neighbor. Tell a few lewd jokes. Curse a little. Drink a little. Gamble a little. Engage in immorality a little. And all the while, believe you are on the way to heaven." Such a message may seem right, but it is a falsehood which will damn your soul in hell. Sin gives the false impression of being right.

Sin gives the false impression you will not reap what you sow. Sin makes the following false promise: You will reap a wonderful harvest of happiness, joy, and peace from sowing to the flesh. However Galatians 6:7-8 says, *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life."* One can no more reap a harvest of genuine and lasting happiness by sowing to the flesh than he can reap a harvest of corn by sowing bean seeds. God's law of sowing and reaping is as true in the spiritual realm as in the physical realm. Sowing to the flesh leads to misery and unhappiness now and everlasting separation from God in the world to come. **SIN IS SURELY DECEPTIVE!!!**

The Living God

CECIL MAY JR.

As a result of Paul's preaching, some Thessalonians turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

References to God as "the living God" are frequent throughout both Testaments, often in a context contrasting God with idols. Jeremiah says of idol worshipers, "Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good" (Jeremiah 10:5).

In contrast he says of God, "But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King" (Jeremiah 10:10a). Paul and Jeremiah thus agree: only the living God is the true God.

Isaiah taunts the idol worshipers of his day because their idols have to be carried on beasts of burden when there is a need to move them. When enemies come, their gods are carried away, captive by their enemies. The Lord, on the other hand, carries His people and defeats their enemies (Isaiah 46). "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself (Exodus 19:4).

Because He is a living God, He acts in ways that can be seen. He parted seas, enabling His people to walk through on dry ground, to show Himself to be the living God (Joshua 3:10-13). The living God shut the lions' mouths to deliver Daniel (Daniel 6:20-22). We look to the future with joyous expectation "because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:10).

He is the living God, and therefore our prayers are heard and answered. He is not deaf like Baal. He sends fire from heaven to consume sacrifices at the request of His prophet Elijah (1 Kings 18:20-40). "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16) because the living God is listening and responds.

We are invited, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give

him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" (Matthew 7:7-11).

We may or may not receive exactly what we ask for. Paul didn't. (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). Jesus didn't. (Matthew 26:39). But because we are God's children and because He lives, we will be blessed when we pray.

He is the living God, and therefore the Evil One is kept on a leash. Satan could do nothing to Job except what God would let him do (Job 1 and 2). In casting out demons during His personal ministry, Jesus demonstrated that He had bound the strong man (Matthew 12:29). One result is that, though Satan can tempt and entice, he cannot coerce. "The devil made me do it" will not work as an excuse.

God has faithfully promised, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

He is the living God, and therefore we are under His providential care. "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). He is ultimately in control of the universe. As an act of His sovereign will, He chose to allow mankind freedom to choose either good or evil. Adam and Eve made the wrong choice and sinned, and death entered the world. Death is still a part of this world because the rest of us have sinned as well (Romans 5:12). Disease and discomfort, thistles and weeds, sorrow and loss are in the world because of sin. Calamity, premature death, disease, divorce, desertion and other catastrophes come because of the way God has ordered the world because of sin and not necessarily because God specifically wills them. Time and chance happen to all men (Ecclesiastes 9:11). Whatever happens, however, and for whatever reason, God will somehow bring good from it for the child of God. The most intense suffering sometimes proves to be a blessing in disguise. Adversity frequently results in finding deeper meaning in life and offers opportunities to ourselves and others of service and self-giving. "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness"

(James 1:2-3).

He is the living God, and therefore we face death with joyous anticipation. When Jesus rose from the dead, He defeated the devil and "deliver[ed] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Hebrews 2:14-15). The heart of the gospel is Christ's resurrection from the dead, and an assurance from that fact is that we will be raised too. "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thessalonians 4:14).

After death and the resurrection, I will still be me, and you will still be you. We will "recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Matthew 8:11). Our bodies, however, will be transformed. No longer perishable and mortal, we will be imperishable and immortal. No longer dishonorable and weak we will be glorious and powerful (1 Corinthians 15:42-43).

We have come, not to Sinai, but "to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:22-24).

Heaven is pictured in Revelation as having a golden street and gates of pearls and other precious stones, figures surely expressing beauty and glory beyond human description. The greatest joys of heaven, however, will be found in eternal fellowship with God, Jesus Christ and the company of the redeemed of all the ages.

A cartoonist drew a picture of a sign that had written on it in large letters, "God Is Dead." In the final panel a large wildflower had grown up and covered the left side of the sign. The only words visible were, "God Is."

The Loving God

BILLY HILYER

The most popular text in the Bible introduces the most wonderful truth in the Bible. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him

should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The love of God is the greatest and most powerful thing in the world. It is the center and core of the Bible's message and makes Christianity unique among the religions of the world. The very essence of God's being, His personality, His very nature, is love. Love for mankind was the motivation for God's sending Jesus into the world.

God manifested His love toward mankind from the very beginning of time. His love can be seen in the work of creation. Scientists have noted that the universe seems to be designed specifically for man, a fact the Bible affirms (Genesis 1). It was "built" to precision (Isaiah 40:12) and adapted to man's needs in every way. Man himself was created in the very image of God - unique among all of God's creation.

The love of God for man is beyond human comprehension. It is a love "that surpasses all knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19). I know that we are His creation, His children, and that love is the very essence of His being, but it is still a mystery to me how and why. God continues to love us even when we fail Him, break the promises we make to Him, and continue to be disobedient to Him. His love is beyond our understanding.

God's love is unconditional, and this, perhaps, is the greatest thing that can be said about His love. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). His salvation is not unconditional (it cannot be earned, but it is not unconditional), but His love is unconditional. It is not based on our possessions, our achievements, our behavior, our birth or our status in society. God loves us when we have been good, and He loves us when we have been bad. He loves us when we work for Him, and He loves us when we do not work for Him. God loves us because of who He is, not because of who we are. We are worthy of His love solely because He desires to love us. Nothing we can do will get God to love us more than He does this very second. His love for us yesterday was the same as it is today, and it will be the same tomorrow.

God's love is eternal; He will never cease loving us. His love is unchanging and unalterable; it will never "run out." There is no way that we can use up, exhaust or consume the love of God. He will never give up on us. Even those who turn to Him through faith and obedience in the "eleventh hour" have the promise of salvation as much as the one who has loved and faithfully served

Christ for 50 years.

God's love reaches across every boundary or obstacle man can create. Race, nationality, station in life, wealth or poverty, education or the lack thereof does not matter; God's love extends to all. Many in our society feel that they are alone, unwanted and unloved. They live in despair and without hope. If they could only come to know the love of God, what a difference it would make in their lives.

Yet another attribute of God's love is remarkable. God's love is personal. God loves each and every one of us; He loves you and He loves me. He desires a personal relationship with us, that is, a relationship with each one of us individually. Paul had such a relationship with God and spoke of it on many occasions (e.g. Galatians 2:20). I like the phrase in Philippians 4:19 where Paul refers to God as "my God." God longs for the times (if one can characterize God's personal feelings) when we think of Him, want to talk to Him and ask for His guidance (in prayer) and want to share our love for Him with others. He is concerned about every single aspect of our lives.

Of course, the clearest demonstration of God's love for us was shown when He sent His Son to earth to suffer and die for us so that our sins could be forgiven, and we could have eternal life. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). God became flesh in the person of Jesus, lived among men, and died on the cross, all for the privilege of someday welcoming you and me into His eternal fellowship. The cross is where God tells each of us that He loves us.

God is a real being. He is not merely a theoretical concept or principle; He has sensibilities and personality. He is an all-wise, good and benevolent being who loves His creatures and always seeks their best interest for time and eternity. If He were an unjust and hateful God, always seeking our downfall and eternal ruin, we would tremble and quake at the thought of Him and would not want to hear His name spoken in sermon or song. But God loves us. While He hates sin, He loves sinners. He loves the "world" and wants to see it saved. With Paul, we are compelled to say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

God want us to know many things about Himself. This is why He gave us the inspired Scriptures. But most of all He wants us to know the tremendous and awesome love He has for us. It is

difficult for us to understand or comprehend the reality of God's love in our lives. But without knowing that God loves us, we cannot possibly have hope.

Why did God create the universe and design it specifically for man's habitation? Why are we here? Jesus answered that question with these simple words: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself (Matthew 22:37-39). We were created by God and in the image of God, which implies that we have the capacity to understand (to a degree) and respond to His love and to share or reflect that love in our relationships with others. We were created by God to love and to be loved.

Redemption is not the bottom line of our proclamation; salvation is not the end of the story. Fellowship with God is the end of the story. Redemption is a necessary step in that direction, but ultimately God wants to have eternity with spiritual beings of free will who love Him. The one "who does not love, does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

If we can just grasp the enormity of God's love for us, our faith will grow exceedingly. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was that they might come to realize more and more the love of God and Christ and that Christ might be at the center of their lives. He said, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19). In other words, if we are to possess and enjoy all the things God has provided for us through Christ, we must comprehend, accept and respond to the love of God.

The Giving God

CARL W. CHEATHAM

One of the most familiar examples of the theme of God's character as a giving God comes from the epistle of James: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17).

James' pronouncement comes in the context of his argument that God is not responsible for temptation and sin as introduced in verse 13: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." To the contrary, only good comes from God. God is capable of giving only good gifts.

James uses two words for gift, the first referring to the act of giving and the second to the result of the giving, the gift itself. "Good" probably means "beneficial" or "useful" while "perfect" refers to "that which has achieved its purpose or end." So James says that every useful act of giving and all complete and perfect benefits come from the hand of God. God is the ultimate giver of such gifts, and He gives only gifts that can be described that way. This may mean that some things, because of the limitations of human understanding, may appear to be bad and still come from God. But James denies that positive evil, such as enticement to sin, can be attributed to God.

God created heaven and earth and thus became the Father of all heavenly bodies - the sun, moon and stars. The phrase, "Father of lights," may carry a double meaning. These lights symbolize spiritual light, for example, in John 1:4, 5; 8:12ff, 9:5. God is the Creator of all light, both physical and spiritual, and that fact serves as a reminder that the giving God gives gifts both temporal and spiritual.

God's temporal or physical gifts begin with creation. "The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:24-25). "Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it" (Isaiah 42:5). "To him who by understanding made the heavens, ... to him who spread out the earth above the waters, ... to him who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures forever" (Psalm 136:5-7).

God's physical gifts continue through His preservation or maintenance of His creation. He constantly and actively sustains His creation. Nehemiah proclaimed, "You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you"

(Nehemiah 9:6). Paul declares, "And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). The work of preservation must have been a part of Jesus' meaning when He said, "My Father is working until now, and I am working" (John 5:17). The writer of Hebrews declares that He "upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3).

The whole of Psalm 104 appears to be a hymn of God's preservation. "These all look to you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground" (Psalm 104:27-30).

God preserves His creatures with His gifts of food and apparel. "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works" (Psalm 145:15-17). Paul encouraged the Corinthians by reminding them of the God who provided for human needs. "As it is written, 'He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness" (2 Corinthians 9:9-10).

God is not only the Father of lights but also the Father of Light, the giver of gifts of a spiritual nature. Peter acknowledged all God's gifts of this kind when he reminded his readers that God by "His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire" (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Returning to James 1, James in verse 18 - "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" - concludes the thought he had begun in 1:12. God is the source of the greatest gift of all, our salvation. Participation in the new birth and the privilege of being children of God are examples of God's gracious gifts, here set in vivid contrast to the idea that God could be the source of temptation to sin and

death. "Of his own will" emphasizes that our salvation results from the deliberate purpose of God. It is a gracious gift from Him.

This wonderful gift of salvation is expressed in various ways. It is expressed in terms of eternal life - "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). It is also expressed in the gift of Christ, our savior - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:32-33).

This supreme gift of God is ultimately expressed in Christ's atoning death. "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Paul expresses God's loving gift in this way: "but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

Writing to the Ephesians, he expanded on the thought, noting that previously they "were dead in the trespasses and sins" in which they once walked, "following the prince of the power of the air" (2:1-2). "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved - and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (vv. 4-8).

In the magnificent portion of Romans 8 where Paul assures us of God's everlasting love and providential care, he reminds us that the God who did not spare His own Son would most certainly see that we get every good gift that we need - "how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32). Yes, our God is truly a giving God!

The Forgiving God

GERALD B. JONES JR.

Our God is a forgiving God. God actually, genuinely, truly, sincerely, absolutely wants to forgive sinners like you and me.

Understanding this reality will encourage us to seek forgiveness and help us truly to accept His forgiveness. Experiencing God's forgiveness then becomes the base for our loving God in return (see Luke 7:36-50). Coming to grips with God's forgiveness is crucial to our being able to accept others God has forgiven (Ephesians 4:32; Luke 15:25-32) and to forgive those who have personally wronged us (Matthew 18:21-35).

Have you ever faced someone you had hurt so badly that he or she didn't even want to forgive you but you desperately needed - even craved - their forgiveness just the same? Is that not an awful, desolate place to be? Oddly enough, sometimes our grief and guilt in such cases are so strong that they can turn to anger and bitterness at those unwilling to forgive us; we do not seek their forgiveness because we know it won't be forthcoming, and we feel bitter and resentful at them for not being willing to forgive us. We don't have to worry about that when it comes to God's forgiving us.

Have you ever been allegedly forgiven by someone who was only going through the motions. He or she made the appropriate noises and mimed the right gestures but still somehow unmistakably conveyed how unforgiving of you they actually were? Does that not give you such a hollow, helpless feeling? You know what little relationship you do have is just one more offense away from disaster. God isn't like that when it comes to forgiving us.

The plaintive cries of God for His lost people echo through the pages of Scripture. "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways; and live? ... Cast away from you all your transgressions ... and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God: wherefore turn yourselves and live ye" (Ezekiel 18: 23, 31-32). "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away" (Hosea 6:4). "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? ... mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together" (Hosea 11:8).

God has had His writers employ all kinds of metaphors to get across how tenderly He truly feels toward us. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the

Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I fed them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them" (Hosea 11:1-4).

In his own marriage, Hosea himself dramatically illustrated God's forgiving love; his wife was an adulteress who left him and became so debauched so as to end up enslaved. "The Lord said to me, 'Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods, ... So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley" (3:1-2). Despite the betrayal, the anger, the hurt and the humiliation, God was willing not only to take his unfaithful wife back, but He also was willing to buy her back! And the price God paid far exceeded mere silver and barley. That's how the God of heaven feels about us! Is it not the best news you have ever heard?

Jesus used three successive figures of speech to impress on us His Father's willingness to forgive sinners. In Luke 15, the Lord pictured His Father as a shepherd who braved the wilderness to find a lost sheep, as a householder who turned her house upside down to find a lost coin, and most poignantly of all, as a father who gladly welcomed home a formerly rebellious, wasteful son. In each vignette, God's elation at finding the lost is manifest. The shepherd rejoiced when he found the lamb. The shepherd and the householder called all their friends and neighbors to share their good news, and the father held a feast to celebrate his son's return. The Lord specifically noted that heaven rejoices when even a single sinner repents.

A number of small details offer great insights into God's heart. The shepherd lays the lamb on his shoulders and carries it home. He doesn't drag it nor does he drive it with a stick. The father sees his son "a great way off because he was undoubtedly keeping watch out for him. The father runs to meet his son; I once heard Jim McGuiggan observe something to the effect that "old men don't run - it isn't dignified" but that God will unabashedly run to greet His returning children. The father publicly and un-stintingly restores the son; he wanted no one to doubt - not the servants, the neighbors and especially the returning son - the place his son held and the regard in which he was held.

Robert Frost has well said that "home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in" but how much easier

is that journey when you are confident your return will be welcomed and celebrated instead of knowing you will have to slink in under the cover of darkness! That last point is especially important - the Christian experiences both atonement and reconciliation.

I recently humorously described Romans 5 as that passage in which Paul says, "I have good news and better news." The "good" news is that because we have been justified, forgiven, we have peace with God through Christ Jesus. The "better" news is that "much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:9-10).

My Great-Uncle Edward, his fox hounds and fox hunting in rural Alabama in the not too distant past can illustrate God's forgiveness. Uncle Edward's kind of fox hunting didn't involve landed gentry on horseback fancily dressed and crying "Tally ho!" as they chased foxes. Instead it entailed going to the woods at night, building a campfire, and turning the dogs loose. You sat around the camp-fire, ate chicken stew, and listened to the various sounds the dogs made all night as they searched for the fox, found the fox, chased the fox, lost the fox and sometimes - but not always - finally cornered the fox in a den or cave or something like that. The foxes weren't actually caught or killed; they were spared and chased another night.

By the night's end, the hounds returned to camp and everyone loaded up and went home. Sometimes a hound got separated from the pack and didn't make it back. The fox hunters would pack up and go home, but Uncle Edward would leave his coat on the ground for the missing dog to find. The dog would eventually find his way back to the area, locate the coat and lie down on it or near it and await Uncle Edward's return. Uncle Edward would check back every couple of days or so until he finally found the dog. One time it took as long as a week and a half for the dog to find the coat but find it he did, and so Uncle Edward found him and took him back home.

What I'm trying to say is this: if you have somehow gotten lost and confused and turned around, God has left His coat lying in the woods for you. You may not know how to get back home, and you may not be able to make the trip alone, but all you need to do is go back to that coat. Just curl up on it, and He'll be back for you directly.



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