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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

The One True God is Three Persons

In Hebrew language, the language in which the Old Testament of the Bible was originally written, God is called Elohim, a name which is plural of the Majesty. Thus Genesis 1:1, in Hebrew Bible, would read: "In the beginning Gods created the heavens and the earth," And Ecclesiastes 12:1 would read "Remember now your Creators in the days of your youth." In Genesis 1:26, where we read the account of creation of the first man and the first woman on earth, therefore, we read: "Then God said, **Let Us** make man in **Our** image, according to **Our** likeness...." And, then, notice, in the very next verse number 27, it says, "So **God** created man in **His** own image; in the image of **God He** created him; male and female **He** created them."

In fact, throughout the Old Testament the idea of a Plural God has been conveyed. But only when one begin reading the New Testament from the Bible one understands that there are really three Persons, distinct from one another, in the Godhead or the Divine Nature (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9), namely, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. True, the Bible plainly teaches that there is but only one God, as is stated in Deuteronomy 6:4 and 1 Corinthians 8:6. The one True God of the Bible, however, is not one Person, but is three distinct Persons, with absolute unity. In the New Testament, therefore we read about the Father, who is called God in numerous passages, such as, Matthew 11:25; John 6:27 and Romans 15:6, etc. Also, the Son, Christ, is called God in

John 1:1, 18; John 20:28; Acts 20:28; Philippians 2:6 and Hebrews 1:8. Likewise the Holy Spirit is also called God. (Acts 5:3, 4; 1 Corinthians 2:10, 11; Ephesians 2:22). As observed, the three Divine Persons in the Godhead, The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit are personally distinct from one another, distinguished by personal pronouns, able to send and to be sent by one another, and to love and honor each other, and the like. (See John 3:16; John 14:25, 26; John 15:26; John 16:13, 14).

In this mysterious nature of the Godhead, in which there coexist a true distinction of Persons with absolute unity of essence are rooted the elements of the plan of salvation from sin for the whole of humanity. As such, the Godhead, each Person in the Trinity of the Divine Nature, The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, is involved in accomplishing God's salvation plan for all. We observe, the Father sent the Son from heaven to earth, who became a man and died for the sins of every individual, and thus became the propitiation for the sins of the world. The Son, before returning back to heaven and to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, told the apostles, His disciples, that He would send to them the Holy Spirit from heaven to apply His redemption to men. He, The Holy Spirit, was going to help, and teach, and remind them all things that the Son had taught them while He was with them on earth. Further, He was going to guide them into all truth (John 16: 12,13).

As a matter of fact, there are several passages in the New Testament wherein the three Persons of the Godhead are brought together in a manner which exhibits at once their unity and distinction, the one, however, that could be cited here is the passage from Matthew 3:13-17, where we read the account of Christ's baptism by John the Baptizer. Reading from verse 16, it says, "When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." Then as Jesus Christ was returning back to heaven, He once again confirmed the Trinity of the Godhead to His disciples, as He said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;

and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20). Each time therefore, when an individual, after hearing of Jesus Christ and His gospel, believes in Him and is baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the fact is reiterated that our God is truly three Persons.

Preaching Other Gospels

J.C. CHOATE

While the New Testament emphasizes the importance of preaching the one gospel of Jesus Christ, nevertheless it speaks of other gospels. Paul warned, *"For if he who comes preaching another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted — you may well put up with it!"* (2 Corinthians 11:4). He continues, by saying, *"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works"* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Paul wrote the Galatians, *"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed"* (Galatians 1:6-9). What is the apostle saying here? Let us notice the following:

1. The Galatians had received the pure gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. Paul was amazed that they had so soon turned to another gospel. However, he quickly explains that it is not another gospel in the sense of being a pure gospel.
3. There were some among them that would pervert or change the gospel of Christ which would render it worthless.
4. Paul includes himself when he says that though he, and others, or even an angel from heaven, should preach

another gospel unto them, other than that which had already been preached, they would be accursed of God. This means that the pure gospel had already been preached and anything that might be preached that would contradict that could not be the pure gospel. Furthermore, regardless of who the person might be, of earth or of heaven, he could not expect to preach something new and have the Lord's blessing resting upon him, but would have to suffer the consequences.

5. Paul repeats himself to place emphasis on the warning. Now it seems from the foregoing that there is just no room in the Lord's plan for another gospel, not to mention a multiplicity of gospels. Furthermore, it would likewise appear that it is a very dangerous position to get involved in that of preaching contrary to the gospel we read of in God's word, because the curse of God is pronounced upon those who do so. Why? Because the Lord has not given to man the right or authority to preach another gospel. To preach something else means that the pure gospel of Christ has been discarded.

In spite of the foregoing, we all know that there are many gospels being preached today. That is, many plans of salvation, conflicting doctrines, etc., are being preached. Which one is the pure gospel? How may we know that we have the right one? Please consider these suggestions:

1. Return to the Bible for the truth concerning the gospel. God's book is the source for all truth pertaining to the good news of Christ. In its pages you may read of the facts of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), and the commands of the gospel (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38). All of your doubts, misunderstandings, and questions can be cleared up by simply letting God speak to you through His word.
2. Reject any teaching on the gospel plan of salvation that conflicts with the teaching of the scriptures. Man has not been given the authority to present his own opinions and ideas on this subject, and certainly no right thinking person will accept them.
3. Those gospels proclaimed by denominational preachers cannot be the one pure gospel of the Bible. Obedience to the gospel of Christ will not put you into a denomination and

will not lead you to wear a man-made name or title. Please keep that in mind. Rather, the results of obeying the gospel of Christ will be salvation for you and that of being added to the Lord's church, thus making you a Christian only. Read Acts 2:38,47; Acts 11:26.

4. Be on guard against those who teach "faith only", that one can be saved without baptism, etc. These are favorite doctrines taught by those who preach other gospels than the one we read about in the Bible. This warning is given because the Bible teaches that in order for one to be saved that he must not only believe but he must be baptized as well (Mark 16:16).
5. Keep in mind that the majority are on the broad way that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13,14). Sometimes those who preach other gospels appeal to their listeners on the basis that the majority believe in these things. Just remember that the majority is not necessarily correct.
6. These new and modern "gospels" that are being preached today represent division. They promote division. They openly preach division. On the other hand, the gospel of Jesus Christ promotes unity, oneness, and peace. Read 1 Corinthians 1 and also 1 Corinthians 12. Then read in John 17 how the Lord prayed that the apostles might be one, and that all who would believe their teaching might be one.
7. Finally, remember that these other "gospels" do not save. Rather, they cause both those who preach them and those who accept them to be lost. Only the pure gospel of Christ has the power to save (Romans 1:16,17).

It is through the preaching and teaching of error that division is brought about. Therefore, Paul warns, *'Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple'* (Romans 16:17,18). According to this we should be marking such preachers and they should be avoided. John wrote, *"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house*

nor greet him, for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 John 9-11). Then Christ warned, "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book and this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18,19).

Now many of those who preach other "gospels" are honest and sincere in what they teach. They have simply been deceived, but that does not remove the fact that they are teaching error and therefore they will still have to answer to God for it. Others, though, are not honest and sincere. Especially is this true of the hireling. He is not interested in souls, but is preaching only as a means of making a living. It doesn't matter what he preaches just so long as he continues to draw a salary. In either case, be not deceived by them.

Denominational groups today are talking a great deal about unity. In spite of that, they are dividing more and more. But if they really want unity, then they should all return to the Bible for the one gospel of the Bible, and preach that only, and unity will be the result. It is that simple.

Anointing With Oil

RICHARD NORMAN

My best count is that some variation of the word, "anoint," appears 163 times in the Bible. I counted 143 times in the Old Testament and 20 in the New Testament. Of the 143 times the word appears in the Old Testament, 10 have to do with personal hygiene, cleanliness or grooming: 2 Samuel 12:20; 14:2; 2 Chronicles 28:15; Psalm 23:5; 92:10; Ezekiel 16:9; Daniel 10:3; Amos 6:6; Micah 6:15.

In the New Testament, all but nine of the 20 passages have to do with personal hygiene, cleanliness or grooming (Matthew 6:17; Mark 14:8; Mark 16:1; Luke 7:38, 46; John 9:6,11; 11:2; 12:3; Hebrews 1:9; Revelation 3:18). When you read these passages, it is clear they have nothing to do with sacred ordinations or with healing. The majority (11 passages) are about personal hygiene, cleanliness or grooming.

One other New Testament passage uses the word "anointed": "And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them" (Mark 6:13 NKJV). This passage has nothing to do with religious or ceremonial anointing but is often used by some to prove that anointing the sick with oil had a part in healing the sick. The passage does not say that, however. Actually it separates anointing the sick with oil from healing. Three different things are mentioned in the passage—casting out demons, anointing with oil, and healing the sick. If the sick were not anointed for sacred or ceremonial appointment, what then was the purpose of their anointing? Many have assumed that anointing with oil and healing were the same operation of the Holy Spirit, but the passage does not really say that.

The only unmistakable connection of oil to healing is in the parable Jesus told of the good Samaritan. In this parable, however, the word "anoint" does not appear in any of its forms at all. It is said that the Samaritan "bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine" (Luke 10:34). Surely open and bleeding wounds would be cleansed and sanitized by the alcohol in the wine and soothed by the oil. There is no indication in the story that the oil had any miraculous healing power but was indeed medicinal. Ointments are still used to treat some open wounds.

James 5:14-15 says, "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church [not the preacher, by the way], and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." This passage is often cited as a required religious duty to heal the sick as though healing or miraculous properties were in the oil. This, however, is not what the passage says. Verse 15 says it is "the prayer of faith" that will save the sick, not the oil. It is only an assumption that the oil was used in healing the sick.

Because the passage in James has nothing to do with sacred or ceremonial appointment, why anoint the sick with oil? Nothing is said about open wounds as in the case of the parable of the good Samaritan, so there is no reason to assume it was medicinal.

Those who are sick, however, do need to be cleaned up, have their faces washed, and their hair combed. When I was a young boy, it was customary to use hair oil for grooming. In the Middle East, as well as in some other parts of the world, oil is still used on the hair for grooming. According to the Bible, using oil in grooming has always been the custom in that part of the world.

Anointing appears 10 times in the Old Testament and 11 times in the New Testament as having to do only with grooming. Is it not most likely that James was referring to grooming the sick one, washing his face or bathing him, pouring oil on his head to comb his hair and make the sick feel clean and refreshed? The sick always feel better when cleaned up and groomed. It is a part of "visiting the sick in their affliction." Jesus instructs those fasting to groom themselves so as not to appear to be fasting and suggested they anoint their head with oil (Matthew 6:17). Jesus also referred to "anointing His feet" for cleansing (Luke 7:46).

God sanctified items and people to be held as sacred 139 of the 163 times the word "anoint" appears in the Old and New Testaments. The remaining 24 appearances of the word refer to personal grooming, cleansing or personal hygiene. To believe otherwise is merely an assumption.

Whom or What Do You Glory In

MICHAEL PRICE

There are people who glory in their shame—some who love to tell us all the things they have accomplished (self-righteousness), and some who are proud to tell us of the sin they have overcome (self-centeredness). Both groups think a great deal of themselves. They try to impress the rest of us with their special enlightenment concerning spiritual things and their unique relationship with God. Sadly, Gnosticism (the philosophy of "enlightened ones") has not died. It is alive and well today in the church. Paul, along with John and others, found such men offensive, self-serving, arrogant and outside of God's will. Paul had to deal with both types of arrogance in his letter to the Philippians.

"Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things" (Philippians 3:16-19).

Paul believed the power to save, which brings healing through the abundant life, was found in the gospel (Romans 1:16). He also wrote: "For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Galatians 2:18-21).

How can any person who has been crucified, with Christ (in baptism by faith) rebuild what God's grace has torn down? We cannot justify ourselves! So why would we, in our pride, count the past as though it is something that gives us a special place in the church to reach and to relate to sinners? How did Jesus then, who was without sin, effectively reach the sinful? He had no past experience in lawlessness, yet was effective in healing and reaching the lost.

In light of what God's grace has torn down (our self-righteousness), no one should have the attitude that he is important because of what he has accomplished or overcome. In comparison to Jesus, we have not accomplished much, and what we have accomplished was because of God.

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Prideful talk about past accomplishments and the sin that one has overcome is not what needs to come out of the mouth of a Christian. Paul said, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29). The word for corrupting is *Sarpōs* (to make corrupt, to destroy) and carries the meaning of "rotteness" and "worthlessness." It conveys the idea of an old piece of clothing that is rotten and smelly and therefore, worthless and unserviceable; it is not to be worn, but rather cast aside. This is consistent with what Paul said in Ephesians 4:22-24: "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt

through deceitful desires, and ... be renewed in the spirit of your minds ... put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

The word here for "corrupt" is *Phtheiromenon*, meaning to destroy by means of corrupting and so bringing into a worse state.

No Christian, much less one in a role of influence, should ever engage in glorying in his or her past. The Word of God teaches us to run the race. In those Greek races Paul refers to in Scripture, men competing for the prize would not stop at different points during the race and look back with pride and accomplishment on that part of the course they had just run. If so, they would have lost the race and the prize. "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it" (1 Corinthians 9:24). "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1). Some listen and are influenced by conversation about our past in some very negative ways, especially those still struggling with certain temptations and sins such as, adultery, pornography or gossip. These people could be defeated by the glorying of men who have overcome these sins. Those still struggling with these types of sins fighting hard and long without attaining victory, could say, "What is the use, I could never be what he is," and give up. Still others may be moved by such stories and find themselves tempted once again. "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea" (Mark 9:42). "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!" (Matthew 18:7).

Every experience and every act we perform goes into the very substance of our being; we are the sum of our experiences. We will never be, after our experiences, what we were before we experienced them. We cannot undo our deeds or altogether escape the consequences that follow them. The past is there, and the memories remain imprinted upon our lives. Jesus and His good news teach us to displace our bad memories with other ones that are stronger. "It is not I that live, but Christ that lives in me." It requires concentrating on my life in Christ and not the old life

of the flesh until the old life is weakened and neutralized and fades out like a lantern that has run out of fuel. It is like pulling the weeds out of our garden and planting beautiful flowers in their place.

The truth of the matter is that the past is soiled, but the future is un-soiled in Christ. In this sense we forget the things that are behind and reach on to the things that are before. As a Christian I am "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of my faith." Remembrance and moral forgetfulness can exist side by side in the same memory and heart. God has made it possible, through repentance and His forgiveness, for my sins, while remembered, to be morally forgotten. Based upon God's grace, we can forget discarded thoughts, mean ambitions, false standards, and low ideals.

Paul said, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). What words would you as a Christian want the lost and your brethren to hear coming from your lips: The power of God which is the good news? Or your past sins and experiences of how you overcame? Do we need to tell others how we were sinners and what we did and how we overcame those sins so as to relate to them? I think not! I do not have to tell you my past sins for you to know that I am a sinner. Nor do you have to tell me about your past sins for me to know that you are a sinner (Romans 3:10, 23). Nor do we have to rejoice in our past. On the contrary we are commanded to rejoice in our present state of reconciliation. As a Christian, I know what Paul would have me think and that is what should come out of my heart and into the ears of those who hear me: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:4-9).

In using himself as an example by direction of the Holy Spirit,

Paul said concerning his past, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). When you think of Paul and what he gloried in, it says it all: "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2).

They Were Astonished At Jesus

CLEM THURMAN

The most influential and incomparable speech ever made on this earth was that which is commonly called, "The Sermon on the Mount." In this great lesson, which is recorded in Matt. 5, 6 and 7, Jesus gave the greatest moral code the world has ever known, and at the same time gave teaching that sets His religion, apart from all others. He contrasted the Old Law with His teaching repeatedly, saying, "*Ye have heard that it was said . . . but I say unto you*" (Matt. 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43). Rather than just laying down rules, Jesus shows in this sermon that we must guard the heart and keep it right with God for our lives to glorify Him. And He elevated the moral aspirations for all when He said, "*All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them*" (Matt. 7:12).

Not once in this "sermon on the mount" did Jesus say, "I think this is right." He never said, "Maybe this is best." He set forth positive teaching, and He was positive in the way He set it forth. It is little wonder, then, that when He finished speaking, "*The multitudes were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes*" (Matt. 7:28-29). It wasn't only what He said, but the way He said it! On another occasion, when the Pharisees sent men to arrest Jesus, they returned empty-handed. When they were asked why, they replied, "*Never man so spake*" (John 7:46). Even those seeking to kill Him were astonished at His teaching!

Jesus taught "*as one having authority,*" and He did! He said, "*I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the*

will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). Of His message, Jesus said His words would be the basis of the Judgment (John 12:48). Because He had the authority, He spoke with authority. As those people heard Him teach, they were astonished. I really believe that when people honestly examine His teaching today, they will be astonished. For what He taught is not at all what a lot of religious folk think He taught.

They Were Astonished at His Claims

Make no mistake about it, Jesus constantly claimed to be *"the only begotten Son of God"* (John 3:16). According to prophecy, He was *"born of a virgin"* (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23) with God as His Father. After a discourse to the Jews on how God provided bread to Israel, He said, *"I am the bread of life"* (John 6:48). Over and over Jesus claimed, *"the Father hath sent me"* (John 4:34; 5:23-24; 6:38; etc.). In claiming to be *"the good shepherd"* (John 10:11), Jesus referred often to His close relationship with the Father: *"I and the Father are one"* (John 10:30). The leaders of the Jews objected. They were ready to stone Him for such "outrageous" claims (v. 31), but Jesus never backed down.

Jesus also made special claims for His teaching. He said, *"The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life"* (John 6:63). The teachings Jesus gave are not only to live by, but to die by: *"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day"* (John 12:48). No one, before or since, has ever made such claims for what he taught.

The Jews succeeded in having the Romans crucify Jesus, but God raised Him from the dead the third day. He then gathered the apostles together and told them, *"All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth"* (Matt. 28:18). But He had proved His power repeatedly throughout His ministry on earth. After He had healed a blind man, the man told the Jews, *"If this man were not from God, he could do nothing"* (John 9:33). His reputation was such that Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, said to Jesus, *"We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him"* (John 3:2). In referring to all the miracles which Jesus **did**, John wrote, *"Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"* (John 20:30-

31). He proved His authority by what He did.

Astonished at the Simplicity of the Gospel

People today often speak of "the historical Jesus" or "the theology" of the gospels. Jesus never did. He never complicated. He never spent hours analyzing. He just told people what God wanted them to know. Simple. The apostle Paul wrote to Christians later, *"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve in his craftiness, your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ"* (2 Cor. 11:3). Many people were astonished at how simple the teaching of Jesus really was. There were many who didn't like what Jesus taught, but there were none who misunderstood it!

While many of the "doctors of the law" among the Jews resented what Jesus taught, *"the common people heard him gladly"* (Mark 12:37). Jesus taught so that people could understand what He meant. He knew how important that was: *"They shall all be taught of God. Everyone that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me"* (John 6:45). Unless people can understand, they cannot come to God through Jesus Christ. He knew that, and so He made His message simple enough that all could understand. The so-called educated people might reject it, but the simple people would understand and accept it. Jesus prayed about this, *"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes"* (Luke 10:21). The God who created us wants us to understand His will. Don't you think He is capable of delivering His word so that we **CAN** understand it?! But people are still astonished at how simple it is.

Astonished at the Church He Built

While gathered with the apostles, Jesus told them, *"I will build my church"* (Matt. 16:18). This is a simple declaration, and easily understood. This church is later described as the kingdom of God (Matt. 16:18-19; Heb. 12:23,28), the body of Christ (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23), the household (or family) of God (Eph. 2:19-22), the temple (or house) of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 1 Tim. 3:15), the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22-33). Those descriptions of that church which Jesus built still astonish many people today, but every one of them is right there in the teachings of Jesus Christ!

Many people are astonished that Jesus built only one church,

but that is what He did. He is the *"head of the body, the church"* (Col. 1:18), not head of many bodies! Jesus is married to one bride, not many! People were not told, "Join the church of your choice," for Jesus never gave a choice! And people are still astonished that only one church exists by the authority of Jesus Christ. People are astonished at the price Jesus paid for His church. The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders, *"Feed the church of the Lord, which he purchased with his own blood"* (Acts 20:28). The sad thing is that people will join churches which were begun by men, were purchased with nothing and exist only by man's authority.

Jesus never asked people to "join the church." Instead, when He saved a person, He added that person to the church: *"The Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved"* (Acts 2:47). The same Lord that built the church (Matt. 16:18) saves people from their sins (1 Tim. 1:15) and adds them to His church (Acts 2:47). That, by the definition of Scripture, is the church—the SAVED. That still astonishes many people: those who are saved are in the church which Jesus built, because He put them there! The Lord never put one into a denomination, but He adds the saved to His church.

Astonished at the Salvation He Offered

Jesus made it simple, so simple that people have been trying to twist it and complicate it ever since. Jesus told the apostles, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned"* (Mark 16:15-16). That is simple. Even a ten-year-old can understand it. But many people with PhD's deny it! Because Jesus told Nicodemus, *"Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"* (John 3:5), many astonished folk cry out-, "But that is water salvation!" But it isn't; it is the Lord's salvation.

The book of Acts records the result of the apostles' preaching. In Jerusalem they preached that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 2:36) and people asked, *"What shall we do?"* Their answer was, *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins"* (v. 38). And, *"As many as received his word were baptized and there were added to them in that day about three thousand souls . . . The Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved"* (v. 41,47). Simple. As the gospel

was preached later, the same result followed: *"When they believed. . . they were baptized"* (Acts 8:12), *"Here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?... and he baptized him"* (Acts 8:36,38), *"And he commanded them to be baptized"* (Acts 10:48), *"And he took them the same hour of the night. . . and was baptized"* (Acts 16:33), *"Now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins"* (Acts 22:16).

People are still astonished at what the Lord taught about what baptism is and what it does. Let the apostle Paul explain. *"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). Baptism in water (Acts 8:36; 10:47) is a burial (see also Acts 8:38). As the apostle writes, *"Buried with him in baptism"* (Col. 2:12). Nothing else is baptism. Many who have been sprinkled, thinking it was baptism, are astonished when they find they have not been baptized! And the purpose of baptism is clearly stated, also. Baptism puts us *"into Christ"* and *"into his death."* And after being *"buried in baptism,"* we then begin *"newness of life"* because we are now *"in Christ."*

Many are still astonished at Jesus and His teaching. Don't be. Just accept Him and His word. Trust Him, be baptized into Him and He will save you and add you to His church. For many people, that sounds too simple. But the plan of Jesus IS simple. Jesus said so. Just accept what He says and receive His salvation.

The Joy Of Giving

MAXIE B. BOREN

Happiness is obtained in making other people happy. A sense of deep satisfaction results from doing something beneficial for another. There is joy in giving—the giving of one's time, energy, and resources. Living for others, doing for others, bringing cheer and sunshine into the lives of others will be rewarded in one's own life, tenfold! When doing good for others, a person is doing good for the Lord. That being true, we need to understand that the greatest joy of all comes to the Christian in knowing that he or she is giving generously (financially) to the ongoing of the cause of

Christ. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-10. *"God loves a cheerful giver"* (verse 7).

Too many of us give far less than we should because of a lack of motivation to give sacrificially. This reminds me of the story of the old country preacher who told the congregation, "Brethren, we need for this congregation to walk tall for the Lord." Numerous "amen's" were verbalized. The preacher, encouraged by that, elevated his voice and declared, "Brethren, we need for this congregation to run speedily for the Lord!" Again, "amen's" resounded with fervor. Excited by this response, the preacher proclaimed loudly, "Brethren, we need to cause this church to fly high in the sky for the Lord!" "Amens" were many and given adamantly. Then the preacher paused, lowered his voice, and said, "Now, brethren, we all surely know that it's gonna take a lot of money for this church to fly high!" There was dead silence for a moment, until one brother ventured to speak out and say, "Maybe we should just let 'er walk, brother; yes sir, let's just let 'er walk."

The question is, "Are we willing to generously support the work of the Lord?" Let's examine our giving and resolve to do better!

Sin's Disappearance

DALTON KEY

Some years back, Carl Menninger wrote a book with the intriguing title, **Whatever Became of Sin?** The book's third chapter was entitled, "The Disappearance of Sin: An Eyewitness Account".

In the minds of many, sin has lost its meaning as anything other than a weak punchline to an even weaker joke.

A drunkard is no longer a drunkard, but an alcoholic suffering with a devastating disease.

A thief is no longer a thief. The poor unfortunate is more likely afflicted with kleptomania. If he steals items from the shelf, he's a shoplifter. If he takes cash from the register, he has committed petty larceny. If he drains the company bank account and heads for Bermuda, he has either misappropriated funds or is guilty of accounting irregularities.

When was the last time you heard someone accused of lying? Nowadays folks may "stretch the truth", they may "spin the facts",

they may even “wage massive campaigns of disinformation”, but lying is out of the question. What of sodomy and homosexuality, once vilified as perverse, yet now glorified as “gay”?

The words of Scripture seem completely out of touch with our culture now spinning — and sinning — out of control: *“Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death”* (James 1:14,15).

Make no mistake: **Sin is serious business!**

WERE YOU THERE?

OWEN D. OLBRICHT

Some conclude that they cannot accept the resurrection of Jesus because they were not there to see it happen. This might sound like good logic, but the question must be asked of those who make such an argument, “Do you believe only those things you have personally consciously witnessed?”

If so, you cannot believe you were born, who your parents are, or that you have great, great grandparents. Much that we believe to be true is accepted, not because we were present to witness it, but because of the testimony of others who are reliable witnesses.

The Witnesses

Our faith in the resurrection of Jesus is based on the testimony of those who saw Him alive after He was raised. We today can accept the testimony of the witnesses who wrote (Matthew, John, Paul, and Peter), as true because of:

- **The character of the witnesses.** All available evidence concerning the witnesses is that they were men of good character.
- **The number of the witnesses.** The Old Testament considered the testimony of two or three witnesses adequate proof. Eleven apostles saw Jesus, plus two on the road to Emmaus, as did the women, Matthias, Joseph Barsabas, Justice, and over 500 others at one time.
- **Consistency of the witnesses.** In all their writings, they are consistent in their testimony.
- **Agreement of the witnesses.** Even though some suggest

disagreement in some of the details in the Gospel accounts, with careful consideration, they can be harmonized.

- **Eye witness of the witnesses.** Those who wrote had a first-hand experience with Jesus after He came from the grave.
- **Faithfulness of the witnesses.** In the face of persecution and death, they never denied the truth of the resurrection.

Conclusion

"This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted at the right hand of God..." (Acts 2:32,33a). "When He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:20,21).

LET YOUR ENEMIES BE SCATTERED!

LOY MITCHELL

"So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said; 'Rise up O Lord! Let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you'" (Numbers 10:35).

Why could Moses speak such words? Did he lead a well-trained army? Did they have the latest in military hardware? No, not at all. Moses knew there would be victory because of the faithfulness of God! God had already delivered them from slavery in Egypt, and Moses was confident Israel would defeat its enemies. They would be scattered and would flee. Canaan would be given to Israel because God would be with them.

Down through biblical history, we read time and again of the victory of the righteous and of the defeat of the enemies of God's people. Why? Winning over the foe depends on God and our faithfulness to Him. Listen to the words of David in Psalm 68:1, *"Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let those who hate Him flee before Him."* The righteous can rejoice because this wonderful God is the *"Father of the fatherless, a Defender of widows"* (Psalm 68:5a). This should cause us to sing praises and to rejoice exceedingly.

This God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the all-powerful God. He has defeated the greatest armies. What are His people

to do? *"Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth; sing praises to the Lord"* (Psalm 68:32). *"Ascribe strength to God; His excellence is over Israel, and His strength is in the clouds. O God, You are more awesome than Your holy places. The God of Israel is He who gives strength and power to His people"* (Psalm 68:34,35).

Today, we need not fear that we are out-numbered, that Christians are few compared to the population of the world. When we place our trust in God and submit to His will, our foes will be scattered. Yes, there will be difficult times and problems, but our God will enable us to win! Let us submit to Him daily and praise His name at every opportunity.

This Book Called The Bible

CHARLES BOX

Solomon said, *"...of many books there is no end"* (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Yet, one book stands out as far different from all others. This book has been protected and preserved by the providence of God. *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away"* (Matthew 24:35).

This protected and preserved book is the Bible. It is God's inspired Word. Therefore, the obligation rests upon us to study that Book, to handle it correctly, and to believe and obey its teachings.

Can the Bible be understood? Yes! It *can* be understood. Knowing some simple things can help. The Bible is made up of the Old Testament and the New Testament — actually, sixty-six (66) books, which together tell one story. The message is, "Someone is coming, Someone has come, and Someone is coming again." Thirty-nine (39) books are in the Old Testament. Twenty-seven (27) are in the New Testament.

Can the Old Testament be understood? Yes! The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament can be divided into four categories. The divisions are: (1) five books of law — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; (2) twelve books of history — Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther; (3) five books of poetry — Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon; (4) Seventeen books of prophecy — Isaiah, Jeremiah,

Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. This inspired historical record is true and dependable.

Can the New Testament be understood? Yes! The twenty-seven books of the New Testament can be divided as follows: (1) the Gospel records — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — tell of the life of Christ and His personal ministry; (2) Acts tells of the establishment of the church and forgiveness of sins, (3) twenty-one books tell how to live the Christian life — Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, and Jude; and (4) Revelation tells of the eternal victory for God's people.

Take time to learn God's Word, live by its teaching, die by it, and go to heaven when life is over. The Bible is true! You can depend on its teaching. Your soul is safe as you follow its precepts.

The Bereans and the Thessalonians

ROYCE FREDERICK

When Paul and Silas preached the Gospel of Christ in Berea, they found that the Jews there *"...were more fair-minded [noble] than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so"* (Acts 17:11).

Does this mean that no one at Thessalonica was willing to hear the Gospel and carefully consider it? In Berea, more of the Jews were willing to listen and examine the Old Testament prophecies about Christ. They were able to see that those prophecies were fulfilled in the life of Jesus, and that He is truly the Christ. In that city, Paul and Silas also preached to Gentiles ("Greeks" or non-Jews). "Many" Jews and "not a few" Gentiles "believed" (17:12). They became "brethren" because of the Gospel (17:14)!

In Thessalonica, the opposite had occurred. "Some" of the Jews and "a great multitude" of the Gentiles had obeyed the Gospel there. When the Gentiles compared Christ and His Gospel to the empty religious practices they had been following, they *"...received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit"*

(1 Thessalonians 1:6). Their obedience and faithfulness through persecution became examples to other believers, and the Word of the Lord *"sounded forth"* powerfully from them (1:7,8)! People throughout the region talked about how the Thessalonians *"turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come"* (1:9,10).

So, there were some Jews and many Gentiles at Thessalonica who carefully considered the Gospel. They showed great courage and faith by obeying the Gospel and becoming one in Christ! (See Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 2:11-18). However, they still needed a reminder to study all teachings carefully. In his first letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul urged them to *"Test all things; hold fast [hold firmly] what is good"* (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

Today, it is a great joy to see multitudes from many nations turning to Christ and becoming one in Him! However we, too, must always be watchful. We must test all teaching by searching God's Word to see if it is true. We must never allow the teachings of men to lead us away from Christ and eternal life (1 Corinthians 10:12; 9:27; Hebrews 2:1-4; 3:12-14).

O Mighty Man of Valor

DANNY BOGGS

"The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord gave them into the hand of Midian seven years" (Judges 6:1). Evil had become the norm among the people God had chosen as His special possession. Knowing the one true God and being promised His blessings was not enough to keep them on the straight and narrow. God let them suffer the consequences.

Yet, God wasn't done with His people. *"Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, 'The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor'"* (Judges 6:11,12).

God had a plan, and Gideon was central to it. Having heard the first of it, Gideon responded, *"Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am*

the least in my father's house" (Judges 6:15).

I'm like Gideon. If the angel of the Lord appeared to me and said, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor," I would be more surprised at being called a mighty man of valor than at seeing the angel of the Lord!

The valiant warrior was in a winepress, keeping as low a profile as possible and wondering where the Lord had gone. Even after his interchange with the heavenly being, Gideon asked for additional proof that God really intended to use him mightily.

Gideon stayed nervous, but used his nervous energy to obey. Following the first of God's instructions, he tore down idols to a false god and a false goddess. Previously, in times of widespread faithfulness, one who worshipped Baal and Asherah in Israel would have feared for his life (Deuteronomy 13:6-10). However, the tables had turned. Now, Gideon had to defeat the disloyal spirit of his own people before he could lead them against intruding enemies.

Reluctant as he was, Gideon persisted in obedience. He was awarded the name Jerubaal, "Contender with Baal". God did what He said He could do through Gideon. The valiant warrior kept a finger in the dike for forty years, holding back the aggressive Midianites and limiting Israel's apostasy.

The truth is, all of us have our weaknesses and limitations. However, God has always used ordinary people in extraordinary ways. We have no valid excuses for holding back the work the Lord would do through us. He can make us mighty men and women of valor. *"Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world"* (1 John 4:4).

Why Do The Righteous Suffer?

TIM D. SHOEMAKER

We all suffer in life. None can escape it, and when it happens men are most prone to ask or at least wonder, "Why me?" That's not an easy question to answer, for not all people will suffer for the same reason. Job suffered greatly, and he was unable to understand why. His friends were convinced that they had the answer: "You are suffering because you have sinned." Yet that was not the correct answer, and Job knew that. He pled with God that He might answer him. God did speak, but He did not explain why Job was suffering as he was. In our lives, we do not know the "why"

of suffering many times, but we do know some of the reasons why God allows it.

Sometimes God allows us to suffer in order that we might turn to Him. When man is able to answer his questions, and handle his problems, he feels no need for God and may turn away from Him. However, let some problem enter his life that he cannot handle and he often will turn to God. King David certainly seemed to understand that aspect of suffering. In Psalm 119, in verse 67 and again in verse 71, he acknowledged the value of suffering in his life. He declared, *"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word."* *"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."* Just as the goodness of God is meant to lead us to repentance (Romans 2:4), so also "the purpose of all human sorrow is that it might turn men unto God."

It was the suffering that David endured that led him to learn and to keep God's law. Such suffering was not punitive, but it was corrective. It was meant to lead David back to God, and it had its desired effect. God's great desire for mankind in general, and for you as an individual, is not your punishment, but your salvation. God will punish if we refuse to obey, but His desire is to bless. Hell was not created for man, but for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). The kingdom was prepared for us (Matthew 25:35). Yet, to prepare us for the kingdom it may be necessary that we endure afflictions here. Just recently I read a story by author, James H. Brookes. He told of visiting a friend's house and hearing the music of a bird singing. It was not the ordinary sound of chirping; instead it resembled the strains of a lovely melody. At first Brookes didn't know from where it was coming; but when he glanced around the room, he saw a beautiful bullfinch in a birdcage. The lady of the house explained that it had been taught to sing that way at night. The teacher would repeat the notes time and again until the bird was able to mimic them. This was possible only because it was dark and the bird's attention would not be diverted. He then concluded, "How often we learn our sweetest songs when the blackness of trial closes in around us."

At the time of such suffering it may be difficult, if not impossible, to understand and certainly to appreciate what is happening, but hopefully we will do so later. Paul declared, *"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby"* (Hebrews 12:11).



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