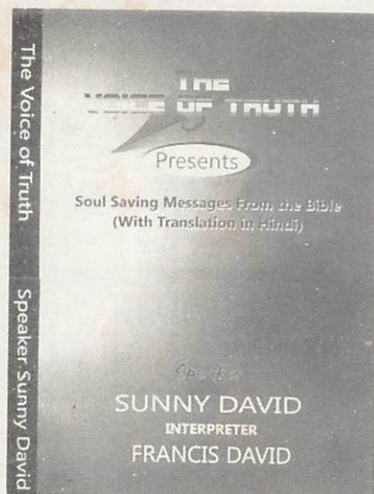


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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

The word of God endures forever

In many ways our world has changed, and continue to change. Changes have occurred from time to time even in our own life-time. We have observed through the years how technology has brought frequent changes everywhere. People's life-style, food habits, and even cultures are changing. Of course, some changes may be good, but some may be bad. But things have changed and are changing. There was a time when people prided themselves in their possession of a gramophone or a radio or a tape-recorder, a walk-man or a still camera. But those things have now become old-fashioned and out-dated. Instead, Videos, Computers, iPods, DVD-CD and cell phones, etcetera, have taken their place. These days it is hard even to find someone to repair an old type-writer or radio or a recorder. Times have changed.

Yet, in this fast changing world, where most everything is susceptible to change, we can be rest assured that there is one thing that has never changed and will never change—and that is the word of God, which is now available for us in the Bible, God's inspired word. As one of the forty inspired writers of the Bible wrote: "***All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away. But the word of the Lord endures forever.***" (1 Peter 1:24, 25). Years come and years pass by, but the word of the Lord, things written in the Bible by God's inspiration, remain as it is, as

they were written by the inspired men of God centuries ago. (2 Peter 1:20, 21).

Men of earthly learning may cry out loud and try to convince others to believe that our world has come to exist by an accidental chance through a Big-Bang that may have occurred millions of years ago. But the Bible still reads the same as it did centuries ago and says, "***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.***" (Genesis 1:1). There are those who accept the highly imaginative theory of evolution and think, man has evolved from monkey, and monkey from some other lower form of life, which consequently had evolved from a one-celled amoeba, that they think had existed millions of years ago, but don't know from where that tiny one-cell amoeba came from! But God's word in the Bible still says, as it did in the beginning, "***Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness: let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.***" (Genesis 1:26, 27).

Isn't it wonderful to know that we have been created by God Himself in His own image and in His own likeness, and that we have not evolved from an animal, monkey or from another lower forms of life. How wonderful it is to know that we have a spiritual Father, our Creator God, Who has not only created the world for us, and has not left us, after creating us, to fend for ourselves in the darkness. But our Creator God, our spiritual Father, has given us the Bible, through which He speaks to us all. In the Bible our heavenly Father has told us what He has done for us to save us from sin and its consequences (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21). He has also revealed in His book, what every person must do to receive the forgiveness of sins and salvation from sinful life through Christ (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). In the Bible God has taught us how we should live in this world to be acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:21; Philippians 2:5; Matthew 5:13-16), and how to worship Him acceptably. (John 4:24). God has never left man, though man has often left God to become wayward. In this new year, whose directions are we going to follow? World, or God?

Evangelism is the Answer!

J.C. CHOATE

Evangelism requires preaching the Gospel, converting souls from sin, and spreading the Good News of salvation. This is how Christ lived, what He taught, and what His followers practiced in the beginning. The full message of the Gospel was preached for the first time in approximately A.D. 33, and within less than 30 years it had been taken to all the world. What a story!

Jesus was always on the move during His personal ministry. He went to the villages and to the cities. He spoke to the multitudes and to individuals. He used physical things to teach spiritual lessons. No man ever spoke with greater authority or showed the power of God more clearly in His mighty works. Truly, He was the Son of God.

Calling twelve men, known as apostles, Jesus taught them and trained them to carry on His work after His death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven. Some of His final words were,

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19,20).

Just before returning to the Father, He said to the apostles, *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth"* (Acts 1:8).

Turning to Acts 2, we read of Jews coming from all over the world to celebrate Pentecost, a Jewish feast day. This was not by accident. The Lord planned it this way. With the apostles receiving the power of the Holy Spirit to guide them into all the Truth, from this very first day the good news began to be taken to peoples of many nations of the world. Some 3,000 who heard the message, believed it, repented of their sins, were gladly baptized, and the Lord added those to His church.

However, this was just the beginning. The Gospel was preached again and again in Jerusalem and throughout Judaea,

then in Samaria, and on to other surrounding nations. As a result, within less than 30 years the Gospel had been taken into all the world (Colossians 1:23).

There were fewer people back then, but there were many obstacles too. They had the Gospel, but *they did not have the written Word*. They did not have the methods of transportation and communication we take for granted in our age. Travel was slow and dangerous, over land or by sea, yet they went. Communication was primarily by word of mouth, yet Paul commended the church in Rome with these words, "... *your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world*" (Romans 1:8). In spite of every limitation, early Christians did the work God gave them to do, and *the world was forever changed*.

Morals and values came to be set by a higher standard because of the influence of God's Word. A study of what was acceptable among "civilized" people in the first century compared to the early twentieth century would reveal just how much impact Christianity has had in reshaping the world. Sadly, in the last fifty years tremendous ground has been lost because we have allowed atheistic humanism to forge ahead in its acceptance. Abortion, rampant divorce, homosexual acceptance, immorality, indecency, violence, disrespect of parents and authority, foul language and other types of shameless behavior have mushroomed as the influence of Christianity has diminished **and** humanism has filled the void.

Yet, today we have the same Gospel to take to the world. We have the same command of Christ. What does that commission mean to you and me? Do we take it personally? Do we intend to obey it?

So far, most individual Christians and most congregations of the church have done very little about our Lord's command. The direct result is that we are faced with many problems, both outside and inside the church. How can we expect to please God when we fail to do what He has asked us to do?

Will we never learn? Do we feel comfortable with the world today with all of its evil, ungodliness, materialism, and outright unbelief? As conditions grow worse through the influence of sin, will Christians not also suffer grave consequences? Even many of the problems in our personal lives and in the church itself are the result of our failure to give ourselves to the Lord and to do

the work He has asked us to do.

How can we turn this tragedy around? By simply repenting and becoming serious about world evangelism. *Evangelism* is the answer. **Today! Right now!**

AN OBJECTION TO BAPTISM

A.L. FRANKS

Argument: Jesus, according to Mark's account of the "Great Commission", commanded His disciples, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:15,16). Some argue, "Since Jesus said, '*He that believeth not shall be damned*', and didn't add, 'he that is not baptized', shows that baptism is not really essential. Faith is all that really matters."

Response: What does the lost sinner want? Salvation or damnation? To whom did Jesus promise salvation? Jesus clearly stated, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."* Who shall be saved? *"He that believeth and is baptized."* Jesus joined the two together: faith **and** baptism. What right do I have to separate that which is **joined** by Jesus?

Now, it is true that "to be damned", one need only to "believe not". Jesus clearly stated, *"He that believeth not shall be damned."* To say that baptism is not required for salvation demonstrates unbelief. Remember, also, that it is *unbelief* that condemns. The believer accepts the words of Jesus who said that salvation comes to those who believe and are baptized; the unbeliever says, "Salvation is for those who believe only".

As a young boy, I recall hearing an illustration given by Thomas B. Warren, a Gospel preacher. Explaining the Lord's promise of salvation and damnation recorded in Mark 16:16, he cited a parallel statement. Brother Warren said, "He that eateth and digesteth shall live; he that digested not shall die." He observed, "If one desires to live he must eat and digest." He added, "If one eats not, he shall die." He then said, "It is not necessary to say, 'He that eats not and digests not'... You cannot digest if you do not eat."

The obvious conclusion is that one cannot be properly or

Scripturally baptized who does not believe. Do you believe? Have you been baptized? You should be. You must. Faith requires it!

WORSHIP

CHARLES E. COBB

Men are worshipful creatures. They will worship something. Jesus indicated that there would be *"true worshippers"* (John 4:23,24). It follows, therefore, that there would also be false worshippers. Jesus pointed out the distinction and made it clear how true and false worshippers could be distinguished from one another. True worshippers worship the Father *"in spirit and in truth"*. False worshippers may worship the Father or some created "god", but their worship will not be according to the truth. The truth is the Word of God. One is a false worshiper; therefore, if he does not worship according to the directions given in the Word of God. Jesus said, *"In vain they do worship Me..."* (Matthew 15:9). These people worshiped. They even worshiped the Lord. But, their worship, Jesus said, was vain because they were teaching the doctrines of men.

Though Christians are expected by God to worship Him in spirit and truth, yet there are those today who do not seem to know the "what" or the "how". Worship, as a result, has become a "catch-all" for whatever things men want to add to it. Emotionalism has become so rampant among some religious groups that the people of God are becoming tainted with it. Shouting, clapping, waving hands, (even tongue-speaking with some) are having an impact upon the church. When this emotional outpouring is not taking place, some decide that the worship is lacking in spirit (excitement, which they deem essential). The worship, they say, is dry, dull, boring, and needs a resurrection.

Worship is bowing down before God (literally and figuratively), a recognition of God's awesome power and majesty. Worship is a giving of oneself to God—an offering made by a priest of God, a Christian. Worship is the observance and action of required elements—singing, praying, teaching, communion (the Lord's Supper) and the offering (sacrificially giving) of our means. One

may do some of these things, or even all of them, without having his spirit involved and he will **fail** to worship acceptably. Every Christian needs to be aware of this.

Worship is not just making a lot of noise! Those who become so involved in loud, unbecoming revelry are led to think by their leaders that they are really "having a great meeting". Their departures from the truth about worship as set forth in God's revelation show the absurdity of what they do. Wildly "speaking in tongues," mass confusion, hysterics (such as that which seems to accompany rock bands) and the like, distracts, detracts, and destroys the very spirit of worship. It violates the instruction of the Lord, "*Let all things be done decently and in order*" (1 Corinthians 14:40).

From the many Scriptures found in the Bible about worship, it can be clearly seen that worship is to be directed toward God; it is to be devout; it is to be reverent; it is to be according to the truth; it is to be offered from the depths of one's being (spirit), motivated by faith and love, and unmixed with the false ideas or mysticism of men. Worship is for the praise of God, not for the entertainment of the worshipper.

Preaching The Love Of God

CECIL MAY

We preach the love of God when we preach God's commandments. God does not forbid us anything that would be good for us. He gave us His Son. What would He withhold that we should want? He commands us to do nothing except what is best for us to do. He forbids nothing except what would harm us. His law is a law of love. His revelation of the law or the Gospel to us is a manifestation of His love.

We preach the love of God when we preach the cross. God so loved that He gave the only gift that could really cost Him anything. In the outstretched arms of Jesus, we see the breadth of God's love. In the Son's nail-pierced hands and feet, we see the pain the Father willingly suffered for us. The cross proclaims the horror of sin, the depth of God's wrath against iniquity, and the depravity to which man can sink. But above all else, it trumpets

the love of God. *"God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).

We preach the love of God when we preach His mercy and forbearance. His gift of love was given so we could be saved from our sins. *"He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities"* (Psalm 103:10). He is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. Unrepentant sinners need to hear about the wrath of God, lest they suppose that God can be mocked and they can reap some crop other than the corruption they have sown. But terrified sinners, despairing sinners, men and women who have reached the end of their rope, need to hear of the mercy of God, lest they continue in sin because they have no hope of redemption or of the possibility of change. God does not want anyone to perish. That is the good news that makes the Gospel what it is.

We preach the love of God when we preach God's nature and attributes. "God made the world and everything." "God is great, God is good." The smallest child learns these things, and also early learns, "God is love". If we do not believe in God's love, it is not God in whom we believe. If our understanding of God does not cause us to love, it is not God we understand. If we say we know God, whom we have not seen, yet have no love for people, whom we have seen, we lie (1 John 4:20). It is not God we know.

We preach the love of God when we do good to those in need. God chose our hands to be His hands to minister His love to others, just as He chose our mouths to be His mouth to tell His love to others. **We are the light of the world.** When our holiness is sullied by open sin, the name of God is blasphemed among the pagans because of us. **We are to be merciful as God is merciful.** If the world does not see His mercy in us, in whom may they see it? **We are to love as God loves.** When we do, people see our good works and glorify God. When they cry to God for help, and we help them because of God, they learn that God is love.

Let us not neglect any means of preaching the love of God.

Truth

JACK W. CARTER

Without appealing to Scripture to make my point, I want to say that, with all of my heart, I believe that our entire relationship with God, including our hope of heaven, depends primarily upon our attitude toward the truth of God's Word.

I feel compelled to mention this as often as possible because it is becoming more and more evident that more and more of us are trifling with truth.

I have come to believe that one of the reasons why this is true is that many of us have not made up our minds about the Bible.

Is it really a reliable book? Is it really the inspired Word of God? Does it mean exactly what it says, or can we disregard some of it? Is it outdated?

Inasmuch as this is the book that tells us about heaven and our eternal destiny, it would seem that we should give our Bibles serious thought and seek to answer all of these questions. But often we do not!

Why?

Modern Man vs. God's Word

RICK CUNNINGHAM

Every generation breeds a crop of "modern men". Modern men are those who think they know more than every generation before them. They hold the past in contempt. They believe themselves to be wise. If only *they* could be in control, everything would be perfect.

Modern men are intrigued by the novel. New ideas, new methods, new approaches are all so appealing. Modern thinkers seem to take into consideration up-to-the-minute wisdom. To them, old ways failed because information was unavailable, undeveloped, outmoded, outdated, or obsolete.

Modernists have given us modern art (contrasted with the works of Michelangelo), modern music (compared with the music of Beethoven), and modern literature (in contrast to the writings

of Shakespeare). But worst of all, modernists have sought to replace the Word of God with man's own pale philosophical ideas.

God's Word is old; it does not change with the times. It does not consider the modern trends. It stands as a rock against man's fickle ways. And thank God it does! God's Word is our only true source of wisdom in a world infatuated with its ever-changing "modern ways".

Remember Proverbs 30:5,6: *"Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar."*

God and His Word never changes. There we will find stability in an ever-changing world.

NOAH'S FLOOD

OWEN D. OIBRIGHT

The flood that is mentioned in the Bible is sometimes called "Noah's flood" because it took place in the days of Noah (Genesis 6-8). Jesus spoke concerning it (Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26, 27) and others wrote about Noah (Isaiah 54:9; Ezekiel 14:14, 20; Hebrews 11:7; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5). According to the Bible, Noah was a real person who built an ark to save himself and his family from the flood which God brought upon the earth because of the rampant sins of humanity.

Recent Discovery: An article by Randolph E Schmid of the associated press appeared in the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, "Evidence of great flood found in sea off Turkey," September 13, 2000, p. 3A. The article begins, "Artifacts found at the bottom of the Black Sea provide new evidence that humans faced a great flood, perhaps that of the biblical Noah, thousands years ago."

Most of the news media overlooked this discovery, a discovery that adds evidence to the records of many Middle Eastern cultures and the Bible that the flood was an historic event.

Undersea explorer Robert Ballard reported concerning this recent discovery, "Remnants of human habitation were found in more than 300 feet of water about 12 miles off the coast of Turkey.

"Fredrik Hiebert of the University of Pennsylvania, chief archaeologist from the Black Sea project, said, from the ship, 'This find represents the first concrete evidence for the occupation of

the Black Sea coast prior to the flood.”

Ballard had studied freshwater shells along the Black Sea coast that dated 7,000 years and older, and saltwater shells that dated 6,500 years ago. He concluded that there was a “sudden and dramatic change from a freshwater lake to a salt water sea about 7,000 years ago,” which would have been brought about because of a great flood.

“And we know that as a result of that flood a vast amount of land went under water.” Collapsed human structures were found in a valley under the sea that were of the type built 7,000 years ago, evidence of a culture in that area before the flood.

Ancient Reports

Many of the cultures around the world have records of a great flood. Traditions regarding a disastrous flood that occurred long ago are handed down by many people. Isolated tribes in all parts of the world have been found to have such traditions.

The Hebrews, Assyrians, and Babylonians who lived within the area of the Tigris-Euphrates basin, all had traditions of a great flood. These narratives stated the purpose of the Flood to be punishment because the world was full of violence, but the Hebrew account remained simple and credible, whereas the other accounts became complex and fanciful.

Conclusion

The recent discovery in the Black Sea by the Pennsylvania archaeological team adds to the mountain of evidence that a great flood at one time occurred. New discoveries continue to support the accuracy of Biblical accounts.

Is Salvation Forever?

BILL NICKS

In one sense, salvation is forever and cannot be cancelled. *“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified”* (Hebrews 10:14).

However, if a person, though a member of the church, backslides, like the Israelites, he will miss heaven as surely as the Israelites missed the promised land. God was *“angry with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness”*, and swore *“that*

they would not enter his rest", for they did not obey (Hebrews 3-17f). "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12).

The Israelites' example of backsliding is given in 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 as a warning to us. "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:11,12).

There are some 2500 warnings in the Bible against God's children falling away from Him. Consider one example from the Old Testament: "**When a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die ... in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered...**" (Ezekiel 3:20).

Look at this example from the New Testament: "**Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled**" (Hebrews 12:14,15). Another example: "**For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning ... But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: 'A dog returns to his own vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire'**" (2 Peter 2:20-22). The remedy for backsliding is found in Peter's final words of encouragement: "**But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**" (2 Peter 3:18).

Questions About The Soul

FELIX O. ANIAMALU

To ask what a soul is, is as good as asking what a man is for we cannot talk of the soul without talking of the man; neither can we talk of man without talking of the soul.

On that beautiful day when God stepped down on the ground and became a Potter, fashioning what we know today as man, we learn that God did congratulate Himself for the job well done

in the things created. He then sought a crown, a leader, an overseer over all the perfect things He had created. This desire resulted in the making of man.

However, as with all works of pottery made from clay, man remained like a log of wood — lifeless, immobile, and, of course, useless. At this point in time, God came to the motionless figure, breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul!

Quite unlike ordinary animal creations, this new being was described as “made in the likeness of God”, sharing His divine nature. He was a composite of the physical body and the immortal soul. As God is Spirit, man’s resemblance of Him is in his soul, which is also spirit. Without the soul — the immortal element — the body is dead and is destined to return to the dust from which it was made.

Socrates, a great Athenian philosopher, was reputed to have said, “All men’s souls are immortal but the righteous souls are both immortal and divine.” Hence, Albert Magnus advised, “... let thy chief care be to remain inwardly united to God in the intellectual part of the soul.”

In the words of Isaac Bashevis Singes (a Nobel Laureate), “The soul never dies and the body is never really alive.” “The soul comes from without into the human body as into a temporary abode, and goes out of it anew ... for the soul is immortal,” stated Ralph Waldo Emerson. The belief of some in reincarnation, though wrong, attest to their belief that the soul never dies.

While the quotes given are not inspired, the Scriptures make it clear that the soul does not die physically, though it may die spiritually. Because of the imprint of divine nature in man, the soul is always longing for fellowship with its Creator. The Psalmist said it all when he sang, “*As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?*” (Psalm 42:1,2).

Other passages of Scripture clearly attest to this fact. Man has been told of the futility of directing his steps, which only God can successfully do. We long for liberation from the consequences of sin and the inevitable judgment that faces us. God, being merciful and not willing that any person should perish (suffer eternal damnation; John 3:16,17), made provision to buy man back from the slave market of sin where he had been sold by Satan.

How Valuable Is a Soul?

The value of a soul is inestimable. No mathematician, statistician, or accountant can put a price tag on its value. Christ made us to understand that the value of a single soul is far greater than the riches of the world. He said: *"For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matthew 16:26) In fact; the soul is so valuable that it cost the Son of God His life to salvage it from the enslaving power of sin.

Why Does the Soul Need to Be Won?

To ensure that man once more has fellowship with the Father of spirits, the soul needs to be won back from its lost and condemned condition. It needs to be won to show its gratitude for the goodness and wonderful works of the Creator. Finally, the soul needs to be won so that it can enjoy the spiritual blessings that are only in Christ Jesus.

Hear Him: *"There is no man that hath left houses or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time ... and in the world to come eternal life"* (Mark 10:29,30). What an astounding promise for an obedient soul!

How Is a Soul Won?

Now we address the question, "How is a soul won?" What is the short answer? Through the preaching of the Gospel.

Up to the time Christ was arrested, He walked the roads of Israel, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom. At the appointment of the twelve apostles, He gave them a limited commission, *"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"* (Matthew 10:6).

When Jesus was dying on the cross, before His last breath, His last words were "It is finished." Included in those three words would have been, "Walking the streets of Jerusalem is finished; My limited commission to preach only to the lost sheep of Israel is finished; My work physically on earth is finished; My work of saving man, atoning for his sin, is finished."

"You, now, will be my legs to walk the streets of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth. You are

to be my mouth, preaching *'repentance and remission of sins in my name among all nations'* (Luke 24:47). From the beginning, I have used **angels** in giving My message to My servants, but **the Gospel is yours to preach to the world**. If you develop cold feet towards this mission, the Gospel will be hindered, but be assured that My word must endure, though heaven and earth pass away. I count on you as My ambassadors and would use you in reaching the lost. I look to you to obey My words. I have no other plans for bringing the message and hope of salvation to the lost. Go."

Jesus is counting on you and me. There is no boundary to our catchment area, even though our initial target would be those within our vicinity. From there, we are to spread our outreach to embrace anyone, anywhere in the world. Little wonder the apostle Paul talked of the Gospel in earthen vessels and of the beauty of the feet of those that preach the Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:15; Romans 10:15).

Jesus, Himself, laid down the requirements for the salvation of the soul: *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:16). The Gospel that we obey is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Have you obeyed Him, for the salvation of your soul?

I came into you
through God's breath;
Without me you're a mere dust.
I'll live in you
and keep your body alive;
Your action will determine
my destiny in eternity.
While your body without me is dead,
I am different,
I could live without the body;
Like the one who gave me to you,
I never die.
I'll live in eternity
for good or for bad.
My name is Soul
and I cannot be seen.

Dangers of Drifting from God

DILLARD THURMAN

"Take heed, 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" (Heb. 3:12-13). The inspired writer of Hebrews knew full well that it was possible to depart from God, and here he warns of its probability. The "impossibility of apostasy" idea had not then gained circulation. He not only warned against it, but cited instances where it had happened. These words were written to Hebrew Christians who then faced great trials for their faith in Jesus, and many were tempted to turn back to the law of Moses, which had been done away in Christ.

The Hebrew writer shows that Jesus Christ is our high priest, *"after the order of Melchizedek"* (Heb. 5:6). Knowing that this was a different priesthood than that of Aaron's, under the law given through Moses, he adds: *"The priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law"* (Heb. 7:12). He goes on to show that the old law was *"disannulled"* (Heb. 7:18) because of its weaknesses, and we today are living under a *"better covenant, which was established upon better promises"* (Heb. 8:6). Christ, by His death on the cross, became *"the mediator of the new testament"* (Heb. 9:15) and said, *"Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all"* (Heb. 10:9-10). There was great danger for those who tried to go back to the old law, for: *"Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace"* (Gal. 5:4).

The Deceptiveness of Drifting

Though many people do not deliberately turn against God, there are many who *"drift away."* And even though the process of drifting is very slow, and hard to detect, still the end result is just as complete and fatal as rebelliously turning away. Since stationary relationship with God cannot be sustained, we must either draw closer to God each day, or we slip further away. We are better or worse, higher or lower, at the close of each day. If we are not progressing in righteousness, then retrogression eats

as a cancer within. *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them . . . How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?"* (Heb. 2:1-3). One does not have to openly rebel against God, or rise in denial of Him, to be lost. This end is more easily attained merely by neglecting Him and His will for our lives.

Drifting Is a Gradual Process

Notice that the Bible says, *"Lest haply we drift away."* Deterioration is seldom noted as a sudden process. A dilapidated farm house often changes so gradually that the tenant is unaware of change until the building is beyond the point of justifiable repair. Soil erosion may be so gradual that the farmer is unconscious of any threat to his field until the worth of his land has been permanently destroyed. In like manner, spiritual erosion and deterioration within may be so gradual that we neglect a remedy until disaster confronts us.

The surface of a placid lake betrays no sign of movement or current. Yet the next morning may find a floating log on a distant shore. Drifting will not attract attention as will a sudden lurch, but the end result may be even greater. And in our spiritual affairs, no current may be detected on the surface, but an undertow can cause a drift that will take us away from God. Subtle influences and the pressure of temporal affairs may cause us to depart from the course of sound gospel preaching and practice.

Some Examples of Drifting

The antediluvian people did not suddenly renounce their allegiance to Jehovah. Rather, it was by small departures that they drifted away, until finally a breach was widened that brought on a flood to destroy them (Gen. 6 - 9). Israel allowed small influences and social pressures to separate them gradually from God, until He allowed them to be taken away into captivity because of their departure. When King Jereboam turned the people of Israel from God, he did so by the use of cunningly devised innovations which at first appeared to be small and harmless. Yet twenty-three times, Jereboam is branded as the one *"who made Israel to sin"* (1 Kgs. 12).

If "eternal vigilance is the price of freedom" in political affairs, then spiritual freedom is no less exacting. Thus, it is no wonder that God often warns us to *"take heed"* (Psa. 119:9; Eccle. 12:9;

Acts 8:6; Heb. 2:1; etc.). Similar warnings are penned in God's word by the apostle Paul, *"Let a man examine himself. . . Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves"* (1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5).

Love of the World Causes Drifting

Possibly one of the most potent factors that promotes drifting from God is a desire to conform to this present world. Our innate desire to be accepted by our fellows easily leads us to the brink of compromise. We would like to be accepted by our religious neighbors, and therefore are tempted to "soft pedal" when straightforward Bible teaching would offend. We desire to appear honorable in the sight of the world, and are tempted to lay aside the simple story of the cross and man's need for salvation, in order to present a social gospel that will win friends but may fall far short of the pungent words of inspired men. We want the favor of neighbors and friends, and find it better to dodge an issue than to be faced with a situation as John faced, when he told Herod, *"It is not lawful for you to have her"* (Matt. 14:4). That cost him his head! It is convenient to salve our conscience with the idea that "times have changed," and make no outcry against the lewd pictures depicted in daily papers and magazines, semi-nudity on the streets, pornography, sexual immorality and filthy language in movies and on television.

But friends, God still challenges us with, *"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins"* (Isa. 58:1). He still demands of us, *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you"* (2 Cor. 6:17). God's people must forever remain *"a peculiar people, zealous of good works"* (Titus 2:14). Saints must still be taught, *"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God"* (Rom. 12:2). It is easy to drift with the world, but many times more difficult to brave the cruel chidings to take a stand for principles of truth and right! So, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (1 John 2:15). If you have a high regard for what the world thinks and says, then there is a grave possibility that

you are even now drifting away from God.

Spiritual Irritability Is a Sign of Drifting

A symptom of drifting from God is found in spiritual irritability. When one becomes peevish and persists in bickering and strife to attain selfish whims and desires, it is likely he is drifting away from God. When plans and programs are championed to the hurt and neglect of others, or the whole work of the church is ridiculed or denounced, it is likely that the critic is growing more and more distant from God. This religious irritability becomes apparent in gossiping and in fault-finding. Such a one not only drifts away from God, but is constantly nudging others along the same road to destruction. If you find that Christians "rub you the wrong way," you are drifting in the wrong direction!

Lack of Spiritual Appetite Denotes Drifting

When one displays a lack of spiritual appetite, in that there is no longer a hungering and thirsting for righteousness, it means another person is drifting away from God. Such a diseased person may go for days without spiritual food, and will absent himself from divine appointments with little remorse. If he attends, one hour of service a week seems sufficient. The rest of the time his Bible lies unopened on the shelf. He becomes one of a number (whose name is legion), who do not allow spiritual things to interfere with "living a Christian life." Such folk have become insensible to the danger of *"departing from the living God."*

Religious Idleness Portrays Drifting

Religious idleness is probably the most common and noticeable of all the symptoms of drifting away from God. Anything lifeless will drift with the tide, and the restless tide of life will surely not move one closer to God! It takes vitality and activity to stand against this influence. As a dead fish drifts with the current and the live fish swims against it, so the dying Christian drifts with the world in idleness, and the live saint will fight against the pressures. Those afflicted by religious idleness will never display zeal and energy, but will be lulled to sleep by impersonally criticizing any who strive to do the work of the Lord.

How Can We Prevent Drifting?

The remedy for this situation lies in awaking to the need to correct the situation. We must become aware of the disastrous

plight of drifting away from God. *"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil"* (Eph. 5:14-16). The remedy for drifting from God is found in our being alerted to the condition and apprised of its dangers. We must then take corrective steps. If we have drifted away from God, we must realize that we can never drift back to him! It will only be by diligent action that we may be able to return to the Lord. *"He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Heb. 11:6).

Gospel is Good News

JOHNNY RAMESY

Most evening news programs on our televisions contain most of the bad news of the world. A small percentage of news reports may contain relatively good reports, but they are rare, indeed. However, there is a wonderful and beautiful message of hope and joy in the precious proclamation of the life and death of our Lord. Verily, the gospel is great news of a risen Savior who has gone to heaven to prepare a place for us (John 14:1-3). This powerful story of love and peace is truly glad tidings to warm our hearts and give us reason for life in the here and now (Mark 10:30). This, alone, should block out the dreary gloom so rampant about us.

We have a wonderful Savior who cared enough to leave the bliss of glory (1 John 4:14) to die at Calvary so that we could be redeemed. He shed His blood on the cross to make it possible for us to escape the penalty sin brings (Rom. 6:23; 1 Pet. 2:24). That is the best news the world could ever hear! The gospel also provides us with our dearest friend (John 15:13) to brighten our day and defeat any pessimism that would cloud the sunshine of our existence. In deepest sorrow, heartache and loneliness, our Master cares: *"Casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you"* (1 Pet. 5:7). What glorious news!

*There's not a friend
Like the lowly Jesus.
No, not one!*

Children of God also rejoice in our relationship with Jesus as the Master Teacher. He knows what is in man (John 2:25), and, as a result, He can guide us into the verdant path of holiness and integrity with the wonderful words of life (John 6:68). Nicodemus declared, *"Master, we know that thou art a teacher come from God"* (John 3:2). And when officers were sent to arrest Jesus, they came back empty-handed, saying, *"Never man so spake"* (John 7:46). Jesus was truly "A man sent from God with teaching beyond compare." The gospel is the good news because it brings comfort to soothe broken hearts and to wipe away our tears. In Isa. 38:5, Jehovah told a very sad king, *"I have heard your prayers. I have seen your tears."*

"The God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3) will sustain us in grief and loss. Till the end of time, He will be with us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). There really is a lot of good news available. Why not turn off the gloom and doom of television reports and open up the Bible and find the power of God to lead you and calm your troubled soul? There is true satisfaction when we surrender our very being to the glad tidings of truth. When we learn to serve the Lord in the beauty of godliness, new vistas of radiant sunshine flood our lives with positive thinking and joyous service. What a friend we have in Jesus! May we never overlook our tremendous blessings in Christ.

What The Lord Told Saul

OWEN COSGROVE

The story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus is one of the most exciting accounts in the New Testament, and certainly it speaks of one of the greatest events in the history of Christianity.

Saul's life (soon after he is called Paul, the Greek or Gentile form of the great Jewish name Saul) had a storied background. He was a *"Hebrew of Hebrews"*, a thoroughbred, one who could trace his lineage all of the way back to Abraham. His hometown of Tarsus was an important Roman city. He grew up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the foremost teachers of the Law of Moses.

Paul was a Roman citizen by birth. This rare privilege could be gained either by some great act of heroism, by paying a very

large sum of money, or by being born to parentage who had Roman citizenship. Paul was one of the foremost young Jews at the time of Christ's death. He led in persecuting the early church. He was in charge of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Years later he told King Agrippa, "*I thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*" (Acts 26:9).

When Paul got authority from the high priest at Jerusalem to go to Damascus and persecute Christians, the Lord appeared to him on the way (1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8; Acts 9:17). Saul knew that he needed to do something to straighten up his life, and he asked what Christ would have him to do. The Lord told him to go to the city and there it would be told him what he must do.

It is well to note that God did not directly tell people what to do to be converted. In the case of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, Peter went to Caesarea to teach him the Gospel. In the case of Saul, God sent a disciple named Ananias. In every case of conversion in the book of Acts, faith came by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, through a human messenger (Romans 10:10-17).

Ananias taught Paul the Gospel and commanded him to arise and be baptized, and wash away his sins, calling on the name of the Lord (Acts 22:16). During the three days that Paul waited for Ananias' appearance, he fasted and prayed and was told by the Lord that he must suffer many things for the sake of the Gospel (Acts 9:15,16).

The rest of Paul's life story is a glorious expression of devotion to God and of unthinkable suffering for the faith that he preached and lived by. The Lord did not promise Paul a "rose garden" in this life. He took on the religion of Jesus knowing that it would cost him dearly and bring much suffering into his life.

So many times people look at Christianity, thinking only of what they can get out of it. Paul approached it knowing that it would cost him dearly, and he poured his life into it. He was willing to pay the price, and his example should inspire every Christian to bear the cross of Jesus joyfully, knowing what He has done for us. The Lord told Paul that he would suffer, and he was willing to lose all earthly things that he might gain Christ. Everything else was of secondary importance. That's what the Lord told Saul, and this is what He tells all of us (Matthew 6:33).

Traditions: Good or Bad?

JIMMY JIVIDEN

To some religious traditions stimulate warm secure feelings. They are cherished, time-honored customs and a part of religious heritage. He can sing with reverence: "Faith of our fathers, holy faith! We will be true to thee till death!"

To another person traditions bind religious beliefs and practices no longer relevant in our time. They are despised and should be discarded.

How should we regard traditions? Can we separate the good from the bad? The Scriptures speak of both kinds.

The religious traditions of men are bad. They do not come from God and must not be bound upon men. Jesus said that such traditions *"invalidate the word of God"* (Matthew 15:6).

Anything bound as religious law, or anything practiced as religious ritual that does not come from the authority of Christ in the Scriptures should be regarded as a tradition of men. Christ does not sanction it, and His church must not bind it as law. These traditions of convenience or opinion would include whether or not to have church buildings, whether to use song books or to sing from hymns projected to a screen, whether to stand during prayer or to sit or kneel, and other such practices that can change with the times and circumstances.

On the other hand, religious traditions coming from apostolic authority are good. They come from God and are binding on men. These traditions are revealed in Scripture and exemplified by the apostles (2 Thessalonians 3:6,7). Paul encouraged Christians to... *"stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us"* (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

It is by these apostolic traditions that we know how to obey, worship, and serve God. We in the 21st century who desire to follow Jesus should examine our traditions to see if they are from God or man.

REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION

FRANK CHESSE

Repentance is incorporated as an integral part of the *"law of faith"* (Romans 3:27). Christ's Command is *"repent or perish"* (Luke 13:3). Repentance is *"for the remission of sins"* (Acts 2:38). Repentance literally means a *"change of mind"* (Matthew 21:28,29), and it always leads to a change of life. John said, *"Bring forth fruit meet for repentance"* (Matthew 3:8). Jesus said the Ninevites *"repented at the preaching of Jonah"* (Luke 11:32). Their penitence bore fruit, for *"they turned from their evil way"* (Jonah 3:10).

Confessing Jesus as God's Son is an essential act of Gospel obedience. Paul said, *"with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"* (Romans 10:10). Prior to his baptism, the eunuch confessed, *"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God"* (Acts 8:37). Regarding Jesus, the *"chief rulers also believed on him,"* however, their faith was not an obedient faith because *"they did not confess him"* (John 12:42).

Obviously, repentance and confession involve human effort. In these actions of faith man is *doing something*. He is *working*. James said, *"I will show thee my faith by my works"* (James 2:18). The Ninevites expressed their faith in works of penitence, thus God *"saw their works"* (Jonah 3:10).

Clearly, repentance and confession are works, but what *kind* of works? Are they *works of merit* that nullify grace and make God a debtor (Romans 4:4)? Do they belong to the *"law of works"* (Romans 3:27) that substitutes *self* for *God* as the object of trust and leads to boasting (Ephesians 2:9) and self-righteousness (Luke 18:9-12)? God forbid! They are **works of faith** that belong to the *"law of faith"* (Romans 3:27), *in cooperation with divine grace*. Repentance and confession constitute *faith at work*, faith appealing to God for salvation through grace and blood.

Repentance and confession are inherent actions in the *"obedience of faith."* The trust of this obedient faith is not in these specific actions of faith. The sole object of trust is God and God alone. In the obedience of faith, man appropriates the provisions of grace to his undeserving soul.



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