

Monthly

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The Bible Teacher



OUR PLEA

LET THE TRUTH PREVAIL

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

THE BIBLE TEACHER

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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

Jesus Was Raised By God On The First Day Of The Week

The last chapters of each of the four books of the gospel account penned by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell the powerful story of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. **He is risen!** Was the message proclaimed to all who had come to visit the tomb of Jesus three days after His death. The tomb was empty. Jesus' body which was placed in it three days earlier was not in the tomb. That tomb was no ordinary tomb. The grave in which Christ's body was buried was made secured by sealing the large stone that was placed on the mouth of the tomb, and Roman guards were placed around it by the order of the governor, because His enemies, who had crucified Him, did not want to take a chance, as they remembered that while Christ was still alive He had made the claim, "After three days I will rise." (Matthew 28:62-66).

Christianity and the church of Christ, which He had promised to build after His death (Matthew 16:18), exist today all over the world, because Christ indeed was resurrected, as He had said. On the other hand, if He had not, as he had said that he would, there will be no trace of Christianity or Christ's church anywhere in the world today. The existence of Christianity and the church of Christ on earth is the greatest proof of the resurrection of Christ after His death. Because His enemies, backed by the powerful force of the Romans, had every opportunity to produce

the body of Christ if it had gone missing from the grave, even after the sealed tomb was surrounded by the Roman soldiers. But they simply could not. Because the body was not there. He had risen!

The Bible says, it was the first day of the week (Sunday) when Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God. But was it Easter? Did the resurrection of Christ take place on Easter? Where did Easter originate? Man says, "it began with the resurrection of Christ and it is taught in the Bible." Is it? Really? Where?

The word Easter is of Pagan origin and is derived from Eostre, meaning the "Spring Festival," which was observed in honor of the Teutonic goddess of light and spring. Christians had nothing to do with any of the Pagans festivals. In the Authorized King James version of the Bible it occurs once in Acts 12:4, but is a mistranslation of the original word Pascha, the Greek word for Passover. Pascha or Passover was instituted in Egypt to commemorate the culminating event in the redemption of the Israelites. (Exodus 12:1, 14, 42; 23:15; Deuteronomy 16:1-3).

In the entire New Testament of the Bible nowhere do we read about the observance of Easter to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. It is entirely and wholly of human origin. Its highest source of authority is human tradition, being an observance created by man without divine instruction or authorization. It is because of such man-made practices Jesus said, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men." (Matthew 15:8, 9).

True Christians, the church that Jesus established, in the beginning, never celebrated any man-made festivals, such as Christmas and Easter, etc., and neither do they today. There is no command and there is no example in the Bible. As Christians in the beginning celebrated the death of Christ by coming together on every first day of the week by partaking in the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26), churches of Christ all over the world continue to do the same even today. The Lord's way is the only right way. (Hosea 14:9; Proverbs 16:25).

New Testament Worship

Lesson Eight **BIBLE STUDY**

J.C. CHOATE

One of the five acts of worship recorded in the New Testament is Bible Study. We have it not only commanded but also have examples of where the early Christians met for study in connection with their worship to the Lord.

Bible Study may be engaged in at any time by one individual or more, but just here we are thinking of it in the sense that it is to specifically be engaged in on *the* first day of the week as a part of the worship service. In so doing, the Lord speaks to us through his word.

This part of worship may be entered into through reading and studying the scriptures themselves or by hearing someone preach from God's word. In Acts 20:7 we have Paul preaching to his brethren in Troas on the occasion of their coming together for worship. In Acts 17: 10-12, we read, "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night into Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few." Christ taught, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5: 39).

Paul exhorted the young preacher Timothy, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2: 15). Christ said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6). Again he said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4: 4).

It is very important that we not only study but that we study the right thing. The same goes for the preaching or teaching that we hear. The Apostle Paul says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10: 17). That means then that if we hear error that we will believe error, and especially

so if we do not investigate it. But if we hear truth then we will naturally come to believe the truth.

God has spoken today and he has spoken to us through his Son Jesus Christ. (Hebrews 1:1,2). On the mount of transfiguration, God himself said, concerning Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." (Matthew 17: 5). Christ, however, spoke the word of God. "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man loves me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." (John 14:23,24). Then this was recorded: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." (John 20:30,31). Furthermore, all scriptures are given by the inspiration of God and completely furnish man unto every good work, being the perfect law of liberty. (2 Timothy 3: 16, 17; James 1:25).

Seeing the foregoing is true, then there are many reasons why we should assemble on the Lord's Day to study God's word:

1. We should do it because it is God's word. (Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 1:23; Ephesians 6:17). How wonderful it is that the Lord has not left us in darkness but revealed his will to us.

2. We should want to know God's will more perfectly. (Acts 13:7). Therefore it is up to us to study to learn. The Lord has given us intelligent minds and we can all read and study to know the will of the Lord for ourselves.

3. We should want to study lest we be deceived. (Ephesians 4:14; Ephesians 5:6; James 1:22). There is so much being taught in the name of Christianity. How may we know whether it is the truth or not? By comparing that which we hear with the word of God. John exhorted that we should try the spirits or preachers to see if they are of God or not. (1 John 4: 1). There is no need for anyone to be deceived provided he will continue to investigate God's word.

4. We should want to study so we can learn God's will to the extent that we can teach others. Paul said, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." (1 Timothy 4: 16). Concerning the early Christians, the record says, "Therefore they

that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word." (Acts 8: 4).

In continuing with our study, I would like for us to go back now to 2 Timothy 2: 15 where Paul says that we should study to rightly divide the word of truth. Now in our studies we should learn to do just that. That is, we will find that the Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. We will also learn that the Old Testament contains the Patriarchal and Mosaical laws, both of which are no longer binding, and the New Testament contains the law of Christ. Another way of putting it, the Old Testament section deals with people before the death of Christ. That is why then one is old and one is new. But where are we? Quite naturally, since we live on this side of the cross, then we live under the law of Christ as recorded in the New Testament. (Hebrews 9: 16, 17; Hebrews 10:9).

Then the question comes if we should believe the Old Testament to be the word of God. The answer would be definitely yes. However, as a law it is no longer binding on us or anyone else. Then why study the Old Testament? For several reasons:

1. To learn of the creation and the beginning of things.
2. To learn of the history of man and how God dealt with him.
3. Because Paul says that it was written for our example. (1 Corinthians 10:6). As a matter of fact, it contains many examples.
4. Inasmuch as there are many principles in it that are as true today as they were when they were given, but they have nothing to do with a law.
5. That we might see that we live under a better law and have greater hope. (John 1: 17).

Now to help us study God's word more effectively, and to properly divide the word, then here are some rules for our Bible Study:

1. Read the text several times.
2. Read also the context.
3. Who is the speaker?
4. To whom is he speaking?
5. When was it spoken?
6. It is figurative or literal language?
7. It is a command?
8. Does it pertain to our salvation?

Also, these tools may help you with your Bible Study: Different translations, a Bible dictionary, a Bible concordance, commentaries,

etc. But above all, read and study the Bible itself with prayer. Many people know a great deal about the Bible but very little of its contents.

When you and I do as the Lord has asked us to do and we assemble with the saints each first day of the week to study, then we are going to gain a Bible knowledge that will help us to grow and to develop as Christians. If all would do this then the church would be stronger and perhaps we could convince our religious friends that it is God's word that saves us and unites us.

What About The Thief On The Cross?

STEVE VICE

"What about the thief on the cross?" This is a common question asked by sincere people, and it is a question that can be answered very simply and clearly.

Many times this question is answered with an explanation of the separation of the Old and New Covenants. Since it is a fact that the thief on the cross did not live under the New Covenant, it follows that he was not subject to baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

However, another (and I believe, simpler) explanation is this. To whom did Jesus speak those words? An essential rule of hermeneutics is the question, "To whom is the person speaking?"

In Matthew 9:1-8, a paralyzed man was lowered through a hole in the roof, desiring that Jesus would heal him. Jesus said to that man, "*Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.*" Were the sins of all the people who heard Jesus speak those words forgiven of their sins? A few moments later Jesus said to this man, "*Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.*" Did all who heard Jesus take up their beds and walk? Did all paralyzed people in Jerusalem take their beds and go to their homes? Of course not! Why? Because Jesus spoke those words to only that one man.

When Jesus went to eat with Simon the Pharisee, a sinful woman stood behind Him, weeping, and washing His feet with her tears. Jesus said to this woman, "*Your sins are forgiven*" (Luke 7:48). Did He speak those words to all who were in the house?

Can we be forgiven today like this sinful woman, by weeping and washing Jesus' feet with our tears? No. Those words of forgiveness were spoken only to that one woman.

When Jesus said, *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise"* (Luke 23:43), to whom was He speaking? Was He speaking to both thieves? Did both thieves go to be with Jesus in paradise? No. Was he speaking to John and His mother, Mary, who were standing within hearing distance? No. He spoke those words only to that one man who was hanging beside Him, and that one man was with Jesus in Paradise that day.

Nowhere else in the New Testament can we find anyone who was saved like this thief. When Peter and the apostles were asked what had to be done to be saved, they did not answer, "Nothing, but today you will be with Jesus in Paradise." However, they did answer, *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."* (Acts 2:38).

Which words has Jesus spoken to you? *"Today you will be with Me in Paradise"* (Luke 23:43), or, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved. He who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:15,16). The answer is clear.

People today are not saved as the thief on the cross was saved. In Acts 2:37-41, believers repented of their sins and were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. In Acts 8:1-12, the Gospel of Christ was preached, people believed it, and were baptized into Jesus Christ for salvation. When Phillip preached to the man from Ethiopia in Acts 8:26-39, the man confessed his belief that Jesus was the Son of God. Then both he and Philip went down into the water, where Philip baptized him. This man of Ethiopia came rejoicing in the salvation of Jesus Christ.

Have you ever wondered why people do not hold up Zacchaeus the tax collector as an example of salvation for us today? Jesus said to him, *"Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham"* (Luke 19:9). As far as we know, Zacchaeus was never baptized. Could it be the fact that he was willing to give half of his goods to the poor, and to repay anyone he had wronged, that people do not uphold his salvation as a pattern for us today? The fact is, Jesus did not speak those words to us today.

What is God's will for you today? For the answer see Mark 16:15,16.

Who Was He?

ROGER RUSH

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, *"Who do people say the Son of Man is?"* They replied, *"Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."* *"But what about you?"* He asked. *"Who do you say I am?"* Simon Peter answered, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

Jesus replied, *"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:13-19).

Peter offered the definitive answer. Jesus Christ was the Son of God. He had not learned this from some other man, but from God Himself. Exactly how this revelation may have been given to Peter is not stated, but the truth of our Lord's identity was not a matter of doubt for him, nor should it be for us.

Everything we know about Jesus validates that confession. In addition to Peter's statement, and the Lord's own acknowledgment that He was the Son of God, we have the testimony of John the Baptist. Further, on at least three occasions the voice of God was heard from heaven proclaiming Christ as His Son. Jesus fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the Messiah. And, what He did and said gave proof of who He was (John 5:30-39).

How important is His divinity? It was on the basis of Jesus' divinity that He would build His church. The church rests on the bedrock foundation that He was the Son of God. There is no other foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11). The church was not built by or upon Peter. He was given the keys to the kingdom or church, which he used to open the gates to all (Acts 2,10), but he was not the first head of the church. The church has but one Head, Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18). There are many sincere people who still do not understand these fundamental truths.

Make no mistake; Jesus was and is the Son of God. Believe and obey Him and enjoy endless bliss. Reject Him and there is no hope.

"Am I Only a God Nearby?"

JACK W. CARTER

In a religious world that has largely forgotten how serious it is to teach and preach error, we can only conclude that this is another penalty for our not studying our Bibles on a consistent basis. That, perhaps coupled with the reality that we too often do not take God seriously when He speaks to us through His Word, leads to the thought that God is only a God nearby.

One Old Testament passage provides insight that we would do well to carefully regard. It was directed to the people of Jerusalem just before the city's fall, and it indicted the false prophets of that day and those who found false hope in their false teachings. Notice:

This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They keep saying to those who despise me, 'The Lord says: You will have peace. 'And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm will come to you.' But which of them has stood in the council of the Lord to see or to hear his word? Who has listened and heard his word...? I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds. 'Am I only a God nearby,' declares the Lord, 'and not a God far away? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?' declares the Lord. 'Do not I fill heaven and earth?' declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:16-24).

God indeed disapproves of anyone misrepresenting His will. This is true of every generation. He also disapproves of people falling for such misrepresentation. Can any of us really entertain the notion that we can accept perversions of God's Word and yet escape His wrath? Teaching error in the name of God is, and always has been, a very serious offence for both the false teacher and for those who follow false teachings. We may go a long way trying to do so, but *is He only a God nearby?*

Great Reasons for Faith

CLEM THURMAN

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). What a response to the preaching of the gospel! Jesus had been crucified seven weeks before. And undoubtedly the events of the final week of His life before the cross was the main topic of conversation of all those in Jerusalem.

Some had thought he would deliver Israel from Roman rule and set up an earthly kingdom. And others considered Him a blasphemer and false prophet. But probably very few were neutral. Then, within a twelve hour period, Jesus was betrayed by Judas, deserted by His apostles, arrested and tried by the Jewish council, then scourged and crucified by the Romans.

For the next seven weeks the apostles are silent, so far as public preaching goes. Then the day of Pentecost arrives. A feast day of the Jews that brought them to Jerusalem from many different parts of the world. The apostles waited for the "power" which Jesus had promised (Acts 1:8). Then the promise was fulfilled: *"When the day of Pentecost was fully come they were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1).* The day's events close with the words with which we began the article. What happened? Why did 3,000 people become Christians in one day? The events that led to this day had prepared them, and the apostles' preaching on this day gave great reasons for their faith.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

Very near the beginning of his sermon to the Jews, Peter speaks of Jesus: *"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know" (Acts 2:22).* What Jesus had done throughout His ministry was no secret. As Paul stated later, *"This thing was not done in a corner" (Acts 26:26).* And this is the point which Peter made here: *"As ye yourselves know."* When disciples of John came asking Jesus whether He was the Christ, He replied: *"Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up" (Matt. 11:4-5).* Peter could have made

reference to the healing of his mother-in-law by Jesus, and the multitudes then brought their sick to be healed (Mk. 1:30-34). And they were healed. The apostles were with Him when He stilled the storm on Galilee (Matt. 8), when He raised the dead (Lk. 7:11-15; 8:49-56).

Many knew of His raising of Lazarus, which took place just outside of Jerusalem. Peter could have asked, "Does anyone here know Lazarus? Were you present that day?" Why did Jesus do miracles, anyway? Part of the answer is found in Jno. 3:2, when one of the rulers of the Jews came to Him and said, "*We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can. do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*"

The Jews on Pentecost must have felt the force of this logic, for they could not deny the power Jesus manifested. They one time watched to see if He would heal a man on the Sabbath, so that they could accuse Him of violating the law (Mk. 3:1-5). But note the point: they did not doubt that He had power to do the miracle! For this reason He told them, "*Though ye believe not me, believe the works... Believe me for the very works' sake*" (Jno. 10:38; 14:11).

John gives the reason for recording so many of the miracles: "*Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God*" (Jno. 20:30-31). That is the point made in Acts 2:22, and one reason why so many put their trust in Him that day.

FULFILLMENT OF THE MANY PROPHECIES

The Jews had long looked for the Messiah, or Christ. So Peter uses the prophecies to show that Jesus is the Christ. He begins with Joel's prophecy about the day when salvation would begin to be preached (Joel 2:28-32), and Peter states, "*This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, It shall come to pass in the last days ...*" (Acts 2:16-17). He goes on later (Acts 2:25-28) to a prophecy in Psa. 16:8-10 to demonstrate that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. And if He fulfilled the prophecies (and He did), then He must be the One who was foretold in them.

How many prophecies Peter could have used in this sermon! The Christ (Messiah) was to be born in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) and the Jews knew this (Matt. 2:1-6). He was to be of the seed of David (Psa. 89:2-3; Lk. 2:4). He was to be a King (Psa. 89:4; Jno. 18:37) and a Savior (Jer. 23:5-6; Matt. 1:21). His manner of life was well foretold in Isa. 53:3-4, "*He was despised, and rejected*

of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised; and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." Later in that chapter, we read, *"He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death"* (v. 9).

His betrayal by Judas is foretold, and even the price given: *"So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. . . And I took the thirty pieces of silver and: cast them, to the potter in the house of the Lord... And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in, thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends"* (Zech. 11:12-13; 13:6). Peter could have used Psa. 22, *"My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? ... All they that see me laugh me to scorn. . . I may tell all my bones. . . They pierced my hands and my feet. . . They part my garments among them, and cast lots for my vesture."*

The Jews looked for the Christ to come, and they anticipated a kingdom in which they would not only have freedom from Roman rule, but in which they would rule the world. They looked to Dan. 2:44, *"The God of heaven shall set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed. . . And it shall stand forever."* As the prophet Daniel shows (Dan. 6 & 7), this kingdom was to come during the time of the Roman kings. But notice Dan. 7:13, *"I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him, near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom."* Another prophet had written of that time, *"It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains: . . . for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem"* (Isa. 2:2-3). But now, on this day of Pentecost, Peter is preaching the fulfillment of these prophecies!

These are *"the last days"* (Acts 2:17), and Jesus was raised up to be King on David's throne (Acts 2:29-35) where He now sits at the right hand of God. This is the message which the Jews had long anticipated, and now it is being preached as a reality. It is no wonder that so many of them believed.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

The psalmist had written prophetically, *"I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. . . For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou*

suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psa. 16:8-10). Peter used this prophecy, then said, *"David is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he, seeing this before, spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hades, neither his flesh did see corruption"* (Acts 2:29-31). Even the Jews knew that Jesus foretold His resurrection, and asked Pilate to place a special guard over the tomb (Matt. 27:62-63). Pilate told them, *"Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can"* (Matt. 27:65). And they did.

Peter stood before them all with the bold claim, *"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses"* (Acts 2:32). There were many other witnesses, though, besides apostles. As Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 15:4-6, *"He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then to the twelve: after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once."* Peter could have asked some very pointed questions: "You put a guard on the tomb; if Jesus was not raised from the dead, where is the body?" Or he could have asked, "Hundreds saw Jesus after He came forth from the tomb. Will some of you speak up and tell this crowd you saw Him?" That Jesus rose from the dead is basic to the gospel. But with this kind of evidence, why didn't even more than 3,000 believe?

THE MESSAGE OF THE PROMISE

When man sinned in Eden, a promise was made of a Savior. Speaking to Satan, God said, *"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; he shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel"* (Gen. 3:15). God later elaborated on this promise when He said to Abraham, *"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"* (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). The Jews long had looked for the fulfillment of what they called simply, *"The Promise."* Now Peter preaches that the promise is fulfilled. When they asked, "What shall we do?" Peter replied, *"Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that afar off, even, as many as the Lord our God shall call"* (Acts 2:38-39).

In the context of Peter's sermon, and the many prophecies of the Christ already used, speaking of *"the promise"* would convey

to the minds of all Jews that promise made to Abraham: the promise of the Messiah. Paul writes of that promise in Gal. 3:8,16: God *"preached the gospel before unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. . . Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And, to thy seed, which is Christ"* When Paul preached to Jews in Antioch, this same theme was used (Acts 13:22-23).

The Jews had always been told that the Messiah (Christ) would come. Prophecy of the Christ was used constantly by Jewish teachers. "The promise" was a continual subject of their study and meditation. And now it all comes together for them. Peter gives the strongest of reasons for faith, then declares: *"Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified"* (Acts 2:36). When, after asking what to do, they were told to be baptized (v. 38), *"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls"* (v. 41).

But that wasn't the end. Others received the word, and were baptized and were added. *"The Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved"* (v. 47). When people today hear that same story, thrill to the same promises and become convinced by the same reasons for faith, they respond in exactly the same way. And I thrill anew as I observe another *"baptized into Christ,"* just as those three thousand were in Jerusalem. For the gospel is as fresh, and powerful, for us now as it was for those Jews in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago.

Another Look at Faith Only

JERRY BATES

A common refrain in the "Christian" world is that we are saved by faith alone. Many verses are set forth in an effort to scripturally prove this proposition, one of which is the golden text of the Bible, John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* Since faith is the only thing mentioned in that verse, the conclusion is often reached that faith is the only thing that is essential to salvation. Proponents of such a doctrine will often hasten to add that "while Christians should and most will

go on to live good lives of obedience to God, those things are not absolutely essential, and one is saved before he or she does even one action in service to God. All one must do is believe in Jesus as your Savior and invite Him to enter your heart as your Lord and Savior. One is saved at that point before anything is done."

No one would deny that faith is essential, for without faith nothing else would accomplish anything. However, one is saved **not** at the point of faith, but at the point at which faith is put into practice. Those, like myself, who insist that more is required assert that in Scripture, the part is often used in reference to the whole. In the case of John 3:16, belief would include the whole plan of salvation that is necessary for man to be saved. This would incorporate repentance, confession and baptism. Repentance is not mentioned either, yet for some reason, few people would deny that repentance, or a complete change of mind and life, is essential. However, many refuse to admit that baptism is essential as well. The first action required, other than repentance, is baptism. In baptism, we are born again of water and the Spirit (John 3:3). We are buried in the watery grave and rise to begin to live a new life, just as Christ was buried and rose again on the third day (Romans 6:3-5).

I believe there is one other verse that needs to be mentioned in this connection. This is the last verse of John 3 (v. 36). *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does **not obey** (emphasis mine) the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him"* (NASB). Notice that the first phrase clearly affirms that faith is essential for one to be saved, and no one would deny that. However, now observe the second phrase. This phrase says the exact opposite of the first phrase, except that different words are used. One might think that John would simply use the negative form for the word belief, but he does not do that. Instead, he uses the word for unbelief that includes the idea of disobedience. As the noted commentator, F. F. Bruce states, "'Disobey' is used here as the antithesis to *pisteuo* (believe)." If *pisteuo* did not include obedience, and if Biblical belief and obedience were not virtually synonymous, John could not have made that comparison. This same word is sometimes translated as disobedience in other verses as well. For example, notice Romans 2:8, *"but to those who are selfishly ambitious and **do not obey** the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation."* Notice another example: Romans 10:21: *"But as for Israel. He says, 'All the day long I have stretched out My hands to **disobedient** and obstinate people.'"*

By comparing these verses, we can see that belief means the same as obey, and if we refuse to obey, it is the same as unbelief. Thus, by inspiration, John tells us that biblical belief includes obedience. This clearly illustrates that in Scripture the faith that saves is a faith that obeys. Therefore, we are not saved by faith alone, but by a faith that exhibits itself in action. Until it is put into practice it is nothing more than a dead faith (James 2:20). This is not teaching a *works* salvation. The basis of our salvation continues to be our faith in Christ Jesus and His sacrificial death on the cross, but that faith includes living a life in service to Him. The idea that a person might somehow be saved without that life of service is just as foreign to Scripture as asserting that one can be saved without **faith** itself. One cannot do one without the other. Do not be misled into thinking that obedience is somehow optional.

REPENTANCE DEMANDS RESTITUTION

T. PIERCE BROWN

Reading the various letters on the Internet from people who are reputed to be gospel preachers is enlightening and sometimes shocking. If a person is humble and open-minded, he may be able to learn a new truth or a new aspect to an old truth. However, I was shocked to read this statement from a person who claims to have been a gospel preacher for many years: "A thief who repents does not need to make restitution."

We have heard various persons defend the idea that a divorced person who had no scriptural right to divorce did not need to leave the wife that he sinned by marrying. In most cases, this question is not answered, "If a person takes something that does not belong to him and repents of it, does he need to give it back?"

The preacher on the Internet, however, was at least honest or bold enough to say, "No." He verbally chastises people who have taught that repentance involves restitution as much as it is possible, and uses Paul's statement in Ephesians 4:28 as part of his proof: "Let him that stole steal no more" (ASV). He does not say, "Let him who stole return that which he stole." Supposedly, this is to prove that a person can keep what he stole, decide not to do it again, and be approved by God.

We understand that the basic meaning of *metanoeo* and

metamelomai is a change of mind. I am not trying in this article to show the difference between them, which is suggested in 2 Corinthians 7:8-10, where Paul says, "For though I made you sorry with my epistle, I do not regret [*metamelomai*] it: though I did regret it (for I see that that epistle made you sorry, though but for a season), I now rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye were made sorry unto repentance [*metanoian*]; for ye were made sorry after a godly sort, that ye might suffer loss by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance [*metanoian*] unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret [*ametameleton*]: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." The King James Version uses the word "repent" instead of "regret," but we can see in either case that being sorrowful for a situation leads to a change of mind. That change of mind may cause a person to repent, *metamelomia*, like Judas and go hang himself or repent as Peter told the Jews to do in Acts 2:38, *metanoesate*, and be baptized for the remission of sins.

The repentance referred to here is *metanoia*, which means "a change of mind but involves or leads to a reformation of life." A godly sorrow for sin leads to repentance and is the cause of it. Reformation of life follows repentance and is the result of repentance. The question that we are specifically dealing with is, "Does this reformation of life involve or necessitate restitution?" Anyone, even without any Bible knowledge, knows there are some things that a person can repent of that he cannot restore. The Jews who crucified Christ could repent but could not restore Jesus' life. But from the Law of Moses on down, it should be noted that when a person unjustly deprived another of something, either the object or something of equal value was restored to please God.

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus points out that if we have wronged our brother, we must try to make restitution with the brother before God will accept our gift. This is true whether we have wronged him by stealing his good name, his wallet, his car or his wife. How a person, who believes that we should practice the Golden Rule, could assume that if I steal your car, I do not need to give it back, is amazing.

Surely Moses did not intend that in Exodus 22:1 when he said a person who steals an ox and sold it must pay five oxen for it. Even if he borrows something and it dies, the person was to make restitution for it (Exodus 22:14). In Leviticus 6:5, a person is to make restitution in full and add one-fifth to it and give it to the

person to whom it belongs on the day he presents his guilt offering. It would take convoluted reasoning to conclude that repentance does not involve restitution, when possible, and the offering of equivalent value if restitution is not possible.

Surely, Judas had an idea that when he repented, he could not properly keep the 30 pieces of silver. Surely, Zaccheus thought that repentance involved more than merely saying, "I am sorry and will not do it again" because he wanted to make a fourfold restitution. Surely no thoughtful person can imagine Jesus saying to him, "Think no more of it. No person should think that in order to follow me you need to try to make right any wrong you have done insofar as possible and do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Do not try to be more righteous than God." We must ask this question: If a person stole your car and brought it back and said, "I am sorry," would you or do you know of anyone else who would say, "Don't bother. Keep it; Christ wanted me to give you my truck also, according to Matthew 5:40?"

When Paul says the person who stole is to steal no more, he knew that his Jewish readers understood, as almost all men have always understood, that a person who is really sorry for his ungodly actions, whatever they are, will try to undo the effects of these actions. Moses knew it, and even pagan people knew it. It did not take a Socrates, Aristotle or Plato to recognize that, although they would have logically come to this conclusion. Any person would also understand Paul's meaning unless he had something to prove that demands torturing logic and perverting the Scripture.

ALCOHOL, IS A SMALL AMOUNT TOO MUCH?

BARRY BAGGOTT

Does a Christian have a right to drink alcohol? Is it a sin to drink moderately from time to time or to have a little wine with a meal if a person does not drink excessively? Doesn't the Bible condemn drunkenness and not the alcoholic drink?

Obviously, we should never go beyond what the Bible says and teach what the Bible does not affirm. Many Christians, seeing numerous spiritual dangers in drinking alcohol, choose not to drink at all. Consider some of the reasons for such a position.

To get drunk is a sin. This sin can exclude us from heaven. In

Galatians 5:19-21, Paul lists the "deeds of the flesh". Among these deeds are sexual sin, sorcery and drunkenness. The apostle adds: "I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (v. 21).

In Romans 13:12-13, Paul calls drunkenness a deed of darkness. "The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in ... drunkenness." In 1 Corinthians 5:11, Paul says that the church must not tolerate in its midst people who are guilty of drunkenness. "But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler - not even to eat with such a one."

In the next chapter, he wrote, "nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:10). Drunkenness is a sin, and being under the influence of alcohol opens the door to many other sins. It impairs the drinker's judgment. We would not want the pilot of the airplane in which we are flying or the doctor who is to do surgery on us to drink, even a little, before doing his job. These men must be sober, vigilant and alert because our lives are in their hands. They must be aware of dangers and react correctly and promptly.

A person who has been drinking is also less sensitive to spiritual dangers. In this condition, he is more likely to commit sexual sins, speak insultingly, become quarrelsome or violent, waste money that God has given him to manage, be negligent in his work, and so on. Thus, we are told, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

Drunkenness is dangerous because people commit it without realizing it. The traveler on a mountainous road can easily wander from the road in the least degree, plunge over a cliff, and perish after a fall of hundreds of feet. If a person travels at night, precautions are taken because the edge of the abyss cannot be seen in the dark. Therefore, a person will stay as far from the edge as possible.

The person who drinks alcohol is like the person who travels such a road at night. He does not recognize the line between sobriety and drunkenness before he crosses over it. He cannot know at exactly what point he will go from being sober to being drunk.

Many drinkers loudly claim, "I know my limit," when other people

see that they have already passed their limits. Many road accidents are caused by drivers who believed that one or two drinks could not have an influence on them. If a person drinks a little alcohol, a person will be a little drunk. The more a person drinks, the drunker a person becomes. Just a little alcohol is enough to change a person's behavior, reflexes and thinking. It is perhaps for this reason that Paul says simply, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation" (Ephesians 5:18). He does not say not to get too drunk or not to get drunk too often. He says, "Do not get drunk."

Drunkenness is a sin that is apt to make a slave of the person who commits it. The idea is not that drunkenness is a worse sin than any other in the eyes of God, but that it is more seductive and enslaving than many other sins. Proverbs 23:31-35 warns us: "Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly; at the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will utter perverse things.... And you will be like one who lies down on the top of a mast. They struck me, but I did not become ill; They beat me, but I did not know it. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink."

Alcohol enslaves, and it enslaves more often than a person would think. In fact, one person out of nine who begins drinking ends up being mastered in one way or another by alcohol. In France, where wine has been familiar for many centuries and where people are supposed to know the value of wine without abusing it, there are more than one and a half million alcoholics.

No person begins drinking with the idea of becoming like the drunkard in the street. No person begins drinking with the intention of ruining his marriage, his job or his life. Everyone thinks: "That will never happen to me. I will be able to stop in time." We often have too much confidence in ourselves. The Bible says: "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Drunkenness is a sin that a person never commits if he abstains from alcoholic drinks. If one airplane out of nine crashed and killed all of its passengers, most of us would find another way to get where we wanted to go. We would not risk our lives in such a way. Why risk a person's soul by drinking alcohol when he could drink so many other beverages? There is a way to avoid falling into the abyss of drunkenness that is 100 percent sure - do not drink alcohol. This is the best way to eliminate all risk of falling into this sin, which will keep the guilty from going to heaven. If I drink alcohol, my

example might lead my brother to drink. Perhaps being weaker in regard to the power of alcohol, he might lose his soul.

Someone might say, "But I have already tried. I drink only a little, usually with a meal. I stop in time, and I have never embarrassed myself or other people with drunken behavior. I am able to control myself."

That is fine, but all people do not have this same gift. Other people are easily enslaved by alcohol. Whether you will or not, you may by your example encourage your brother to start down a road that will be slippery for him. Seeing you drink, he may say to himself, "John is a good Christian, and I have seen him drink. There must be nothing wrong with it, and I can do the same." You may have even offered him a drink. Being weaker in this respect, your brother falls into drunkenness and loses his soul.

This is why the Bible exhorts us to be careful about our examples "in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of [or to] those who believe" (1 Timothy 4:12). "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes" (Matthew 18:6-7).

In Romans 14, Paul speaks about certain things that are not wrong in themselves but can become stumbling blocks. For example, if a person believes that a food is impure before God and you cause him to violate his conscience by eating it, he commits a sin, although the food is not forbidden by God. He has sinned because he has violated his conscience. You have not acted out of love because you have influenced him to sin. "But rather determine this - not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.... For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.... It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles" (Romans 14:13,15,21).

The sight of a Christian drinking can harm the reputation of the church. In many places, a general idea that religious or spiritual people do not drink alcohol exists. Whether it be fair or not, Christians often have been accused of hypocrisy when they have been seen with alcoholic beverages. People do not always take

the time to find out if the Christian was getting drunk; they believe and tell that he drinks. That may not be fair, but there is a simple way to avoid it and to preserve the good reputation of the church: do not drink at all.

"Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us" (Titus 2:6-8).

Alcohol causes or aggravates several illnesses. The Christian should not consciously do that which will contribute to the destruction of his body because his body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Among the harmful effects of alcohol on the human body, doctors have noted the following: it is linked to cancer of the gums, tongue and esophagus; it weakens the respiratory system; it increases the risk of tuberculosis; it contributes to heart disease; it damages the stomach and contributes to ulcers; it leads to cirrhosis of the liver, a sickness that is eight times more common in alcoholics than in non-alcoholics; it weakens the kidneys; it kills brain cells, and all damage to the brain is permanent; it is also dangerous for pregnant women and the children they bear.

If you are a Christian, Paul asks, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body." Because our bodies belong to God and He lives in them through His Spirit, we must respect our bodies. We must not use them to commit sin, and we must not do for our pleasure that which will harm them. "If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are" (1 Corinthians 3:17).

Experience shows that alcohol contributes to many social ills. It is a tree that bears bad fruit. Even if the Bible did not contain warnings about the dangers of alcohol, common sense should make us beware. A person can easily observe the fruits of drinking. "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit" (Matthew 7:16-17). Whether it be homes broken by divorce, abused or neglected children, lost jobs, illness, crime, quarreling, adultery or poverty, alcohol is too often associated with the problem and, in many cases,

is the primary cause of the problem. Why would a person want to taste, even just from time to time, from the fruit of such a deadly tree?

Two Bible passages are often quoted to justify the drinking of alcohol by the Christian. Do these passages cancel out the principles we have just studied?

Jesus changed water to wine (John 2:1-11). In the course of a wedding feast at Cana of Galilee, Jesus performed the miracle of changing water into wine. Does this prove that Jesus gave His approval to our alcoholic beverages?

It cannot be affirmed that what Jesus made was alcoholic wine, just as it cannot be affirmed that He made unfermented grape juice. The Greek word, *oinos*, which is translated "wine" here is a general word that includes all that comes from the vine, whether fermented or not. For some people, because the master of the feast said that this wine was the best indicates necessarily that it was fermented wine. For other people, the fact that Jesus knew that scriptures such as Proverbs 20:1 say, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler," proves that Jesus did not make an alcoholic drink. According to them, Jesus would not have given men that which could harm them. This miracle does not provide a firm basis for approving or condemning the use of alcohol because there is no way to determine with certainty whether it was a question of alcohol.

Even people who are convinced that it was fermented wine are obliged to recognize other historical facts concerning the use of wine in the first century. Numerous sources confirm that the almost universal practice, including in Palestine, was to dilute wine with much water. Only drunkards or barbarians drank undiluted wine. The recommendations varied between three and 20 parts water for one part wine. Pliny, the Latin writer who lived in the first century, referred to wine as being made up of eight parts water to one part wine. Although it is possible to become intoxicated on diluted wine, this wine does not correspond to our modern wines and beers, much less to whisky, gin and other liquors.

Paul told Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach's sake because of his frequent ailments (1 Timothy 5:23). Drinking contaminated water often causes diarrhea and stomachaches. Some people, like Timothy, are particularly susceptible to this kind of problem, especially when they travel. In our time, the problem is easily solved by drinking bottled water, soft drinks or other safe liquids that are available almost everywhere. We also have the

possibility of filtering drinking water. In the first century, water was sterilized by adding a little wine to it. The alcohol in the wine killed the germs. Here, Paul is not recommending drinking in moderation but rather not making oneself sick by drinking untreated water.

Actually, this verse might be used by people who recommend total abstinence because it shows us a first-century Christian who drank only water despite his stomach problems. Timothy, as a Christian, had apparently chosen not to drink at all, even to the point of not putting a little wine in his water to avoid contamination.

Does the Christian have a right to drink? Perhaps this is not the only question that should be asked. Paul recommends that we ask ourselves if an action is lawful, if it is profitable, if it might master us in the end, if it edifies other people, and if it glorifies God (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23, 31). May God help us to choose the course of action that will help us to be saved and to save other people.



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(See Rule 3)

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