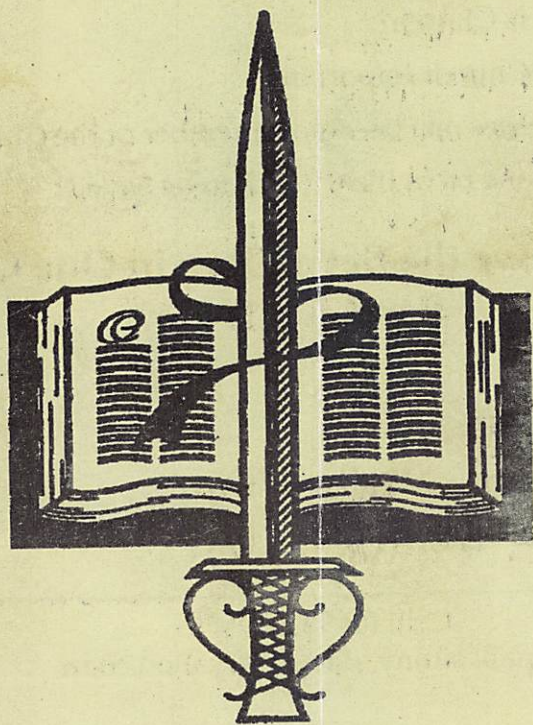


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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

There are Things God has Joined Together

The Old Testament of the Bible was written in Hebrew language, and the New Testament was written in Greek language. The word 'God' in the Hebrew language in the Old Testament has both singular and plural forms. The singular word 'El' appears almost five hundred times, and the plural word 'Elohim' appears more than three thousand times. The plural form of God 'Elohim' carries with it the actual meaning of the Godhead, that is to say, that there are more than one Persons in the Godhead. In studying the New Testament of the Bible one learns of God that He is the Father, and He is the Son, and He is the Holy Spirit. Thus, God is three Persons. (John 1:1, 14; John 10:30; Matthew 28:19; Acts 5:3, 4). The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one God. And the Bible teaches, "what God has joined together, let not man separate." (Matthew 19:6).

I now invite you to join with me in search of things God has joined together. The Bible speaks of salvation which is in Christ through His blood in His church, thus they are joined together. Notice: Christ said in Matthew 16:18, "I will build My church." Then in Ephesians 1:22 and 23 we read that the church is the body of Christ, and Colossians 1:18 teaches that Christ is the head of the church. According to Acts 20:28, He has purchased the church with His own blood. From Matthew 26:28 and 1 Peter 1:18-20 we learn that the blood of Christ was shed for the remission of sins. The church, (not a building built with bricks and mortar, but people

who have been saved by the blood of Christ), is the spiritual house of God (1 Timothy 3:15). Christ and his blood and His church and salvation, therefore, are joined together. That is to say, if we belong to Christ, then we have been saved by His blood, and if we have been saved by His blood then we are in His church. Those whose sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ are saved from sins, and the Bible teaches that Christ Himself adds to His church those who are saved. (Acts 2:38 & 47). So what have we learned? We have learned that there are no Christians or the saved ones outside of the church of Christ. Salvation is in Christ through His blood and all the saved ones are in His church.

Likewise, God, in the Bible, has joined together belief in Christ and repentance from sin and confession of Christ and baptism and salvation. To be saved in Christ the Bible teaches one must believe in Christ and repent of sins and confess Christ to be the Son of God and then be baptized for the remission of sins. Therefore, none of these things can be separated from one another, since God has put them together. Mark 16:16 teaches that one must both believe and be baptized to be saved. Likewise Acts 2:38 teaches that to receive the forgiveness of sins one must repent and be baptized. When eunuch, in Acts chapter 8, wanted to be baptized, after He had believed in Jesus, Philip asked eunuch if he really believe in Christ with all his heart? Philip baptized him only after the eunuch had made the sweet confession saying, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:35-39). To be saved from sins, therefore, after hearing the gospel of Christ, one must believe in Christ, repent of sins, confess the name of Christ, and be baptized or immersed in water, by the authority of Christ, for the forgiveness of sins.

Also, the Bible teaches, joined together by God are death and resurrection and judgment and eternity. According to Hebrews 9:27, God has appointed for all men to die once, and then face His judgment. God will judge all one day through Christ. (Acts 17:30, 31). Jesus Christ has said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day." (John 12:48). The last day, which is the day of judgment, is also the day of resurrection of all, when all the dead will be made alive by the power of God. According to Christ: "Do not marvel at this: for the hour is coming in which all who are in the grave will hear His voice

and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (John 5:28, 29). He also spoke concerning the evil or the wicked ones, “And those will go away into everlasting punishment”, but the saved ones or the righteous, Christ said, will “enter into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46). Notice: both the punishment of sinners in hell, and the salvation of the saved ones in heaven are everlasting and eternal. For all death is certain, and so are the resurrection of all from the dead and their appearing before God in the judgment after resurrection, after which all, both the saved and the unsaved, will live or exist forever and eternally, either in heaven or in hell.

All of us have only this life to make the decision for ourselves where we want to live in eternity. God is not sending and will not send any person to hell. He is love. (John 3:16). He want all to be saved from sins and to live with Him all eternity in heaven. He has also not left man in darkness to fend for himself. He has spoken. The Bible is the written record of His will for all men forever. God has made man with a free will to choose for himself. But God desires for all people to choose Christ and through Him the eternal life in heaven.

GOD AND HIS CREATION

Genesis 1 and 2

J.C. CHOATE

The Bible begins, “*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1). Neither here, nor anywhere in the Bible, is the attempt made to prove that God exists or that He created all things. This is assumed to be an already accepted fact. Should this be so strange since man is supposed to be an intelligent being with the knowledge that for each thing that exists there had to be some higher power behind it? That Power is God.

Genesis gives an account of how things came into existence and the order in which they were created. In reality, it was not necessary for us to be told details concerning the creation of the earth, or animal life and human life, in order for us to know that there is a God. In fact, there are many things that we do not have to know about the creation to be convinced that it was all the

Lord's doing. Read Genesis 1 and 2 for the full story. This is the only true record that we have, telling what really happened.

There are many reasons why one should believe in God. In the first place, nature itself is a testimony to the fact that there is a God. Just look around you. You see that which God brought into existence and that which is perpetuated by the law of nature which God set in order.

Perhaps you will reason that since you cannot see God with the naked eye, you will not believe He exists. You can see His work, though. I cannot see your brain but I believe you have a brain by that which you do. When I look at my watch I can't see its maker but I believe it had one. As surely as things exist, it is that sure that *someone* had to make them, whether you ever see that person or not.

God is the brain and the life behind the entire universe's existence. Look at the beautiful flowers, the heavens, a newborn baby. With so much evidence and testimony, how can you help but believe in an eternal, all-powerful Being? David said, "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork*" (Psalm 19:1).

There is a God because the Bible teaches that He is. It tells us that He is Spirit, that He is powerful, that He is all-seeing, all knowing, and that He is from everlasting to everlasting.

God is because that is the only logical conclusion one can reach. To say that there is no God is but to say that an impossible thing has happened: that everything came into existence from nothing, without any cause, and without a Creator. That would be as foolish as pointing to a house and saying that it was not built but suddenly one day it just appeared, without building materials or a builder; it just happened.

How can one point to evolution as being the answer when all living things have been the same for hundreds and thousands of years? Not long ago I visited the Cairo Museum and saw on display some mummified monkeys, dogs, etc. When they lived 5000 years ago they were just monkeys and dogs, even as there are monkeys and dogs now. According to the theory espoused by many, some monkeys should *all along* be evolving into man, or there should be no such thing as monkeys today since all should have already evolved to a higher plane. Then what about man? Has he reached the most perfected state or is he eventually

to evolve into something greater and better? But this is foolishness.

As you can see, the wise thing is to accept the facts of the case and quit relying on theories whose sole purpose is to deny God. David proclaimed that only a fool would say there is no God (Psalm 14:1).

The God of heaven is the same God that James describes as the giver of all blessings (James 1:17); John said that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). So every way you turn there is the Lord, His work, His blessings, and His mercy being bestowed upon men. Truly, He lives.

THE GREATNESS OF KNOWING CHRIST

DAN EUBANKS

One of Paul's most severe and often recurring problems was from what we commonly call Judaizing teachers—Jewish brethren who tried to bind Old Testament laws and Jewish customs on the Gentiles as a necessary part of their salvation.

Paul remembered what had happened in the Galatian congregations and was determined that it would not happen in Philippi. So he specifically warns them in Philippians 3:2: "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation" (NKJV). This is Paul's description of Judaizing teachers.

Paul's writing here is much like that in the book of Hebrews. He labours to show the excellency, the greatness, the surpassing value of knowing Christ as opposed to seeking salvation by the works of the law or the accomplishments of the flesh. That great and important lesson is for us as well.

Paul begins Philippians 3 with the exhortation to "rejoice in the Lord." This seems not to be just a general exhortation to rejoice but a specific exhortation to rejoice in the Lord in contrast to rejoicing in the works or accomplishments of the flesh. This fact is made clear in verse 3 where he says we "rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

We still need this exhortation and warning today. The danger and inclination to revert back to confidence in ourselves and the accomplishments of the flesh are always there along with the danger of reverting back to a legal system such as found under

the Old Testament. Unfortunately, we might think that because we have not selected the rules and regulations we use to create a legal system from the Old Testament, we have not done what the Judaizing teachers did. But it really doesn't matter where we get the laws to create a legal system—from the Old Testament, New Testament or personal preferences. The problem is not with the laws; it is with the use we make of them. We have made our success in obeying a list of rules and regulations as the basis of our salvation rather than the sacrifice and blood of Christ.

Paul makes it very clear in Romans 3:20 that "by the deeds of the law [actually the old law or any legal system] no flesh will be justified in His sight." In Romans 8:3 he says what the law could not do Christ has done. What was true of the old law is true of all legal systems whether created by the Judaizing teachers or by us today. The law merely makes us aware of our sins and the need for a new system of salvation. And that is exactly what the gospel is. That is exactly what Christ provided, and we should rejoice in Him rather than having any confidence in the flesh.

Paul then uses himself as an illustration of the greatness or the superior value of knowing, gaining and being in Christ. If salvation could have been accomplished through obedience to a legal system and the piling up of the accomplishments of the flesh, Paul would have done it. He gives us evidence of that in Philippians 3:5-6. Paul had a superior Jewish resume. Actually, Paul was a perfect illustration of the inferiority and failure of a legal system to bring about salvation. Under a legal system nothing short of perfection will do, and even Paul fell short of that.

As valuable, as impressive and as important as all these things were, when Paul came to know Christ and to see what He had done and the plan of salvation He had to offer, he quickly trashed all that had gone before. He counted them but loss, dung, garbage because he clearly saw the greatness, the excellency, the superior plan of salvation in and through Christ. The point here is not just that this plan is great but that it is greater than the old system. It is so much greater that Paul, like the man who found the treasure in a field and the man who found the pearl of great price, would gladly give up all to have the newfound treasure.

In Philippians 3:9, Paul is a bit more specific as to exactly what he means by the excellency or superior value of knowing and being in Christ. It is not having a righteousness of his own which

is of the law. That is what he was trying to do before he became a Christian. Unfortunately, it is what some of us are still trying to do. This was and is a tremendous burden and actually won't work. What we seek is a righteousness that is of or from God and on the basis of faith as opposed to the works of the flesh. The two key elements here are that the righteousness is from God and not our own, and it is on the basis of faith and not works of merit.

What does it really mean to know Christ, to win Christ, to be in Him? Obviously, it means more than merely knowing about Him. It means a personal and intimate knowledge of Him and great confidence in what He has done and can do. When someone says, "I know a wonderful doctor," he probably means, "I have personally experienced his medical expertise and trust him completely." That is how Paul felt about Christ and how we should feel. The word "know" is even used of the intimacy of husband and wife. "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain" (Genesis 4:1). Knowing, in the biblical sense, means intimacy and trust.

To what and in what way is knowing Christ superior? First of all, it does not require the production of sufficient righteousness on our own to lay claim to salvation. The old law did. Every legal system has such a requirement whether it was the one created by the Judaizing teachers of New Testament times or by any today who make the gospel into a legal system. We can do exactly what the Jews did if we are not careful. They went about "to establish their own righteousness" and did not submit themselves "to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3). This is a terrible burden that neither Paul nor his forefathers could bear or succeed by. It is the same for us if we seek to establish our own righteousness. Does this mean that righteousness and holiness on our part are unimportant and unnecessary? By no means! Their purpose is not to serve as the basis and foundation of our salvation. Christ is that foundation, and other foundation can no man lay.

Second, knowing Christ is superior because the righteousness we have is of or from God. It is the righteousness of Christ, perfect and complete, credited or imputed to us as a gift. In Romans 4:6 and 11, Paul speaks of righteousness being imputed to us. In Romans 5:17, he speaks of the "gift of righteousness." When we are baptized into Christ we have "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). His righteousness is now our spiritual garment. When Jesus told

His disciples that unless their righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees they would not enter the kingdom of heaven, He did not have in mind that ours must exceed theirs in quantity but in quality. And, that is not accomplished by us, but by being granted the righteousness of Christ in response to our obedience of faith. That is why Paul gave up what he did.

Third, the righteousness of Christ is granted on the basis of faith as opposed to works of merit, works of the law, or the accomplishments of the flesh. James makes it clear that it must be the kind of faith that acts, but the action or the obedience is not to deserve or make a payment, but to demonstrate the reality of our faith. Like Abraham in Romans 4, our faith is counted for or credited to us as righteousness.

Fourth, the gospel, salvation in and through Christ, gives us a greater confidence and expectation of heaven. Under a legal system depending primarily on what I do, how good I am, or how successful I am in obedience always leaves a measure of doubt. "Have I done enough? Am I good enough? Am I really going to heaven?" We are like the rich young ruler who had kept all the commandments yet was still asking, "What lack I yet?"

Finally, in Philippians 3:10, Paul points out that in Christ we know, trust and have confidence in Him. We experience the level of power and results of His resurrection. We are made conformable to His death. He died for sin, and we die to sin. By this means, salvation in Christ, we attain to a spiritual resurrection. We walk in newness of life and have life more abundantly.

Knowing Christ is truly superior and of surpassing value! It is superior to trying to live up to a legal system or trying to produce a righteousness of our own. It is superior because the righteousness we possess in Him is the perfect righteousness of Christ granted to us on the basis of faith. As a result we can do what Paul exhorted the Philippians to do—rejoice! "Rejoice in the Lord!"

THE GOD OF JUSTICE

CHARLES HODGE

Recently, a person said to me, "I like to hear this grace stuff." Too many think they can get away with sin, but don't bet on it! In

our culture, when people hear the word "God," they think, "unconditional love." When they hear the word "Christ," they think, "non-judgmental." Their knowledge is just enough to be dangerous and wrong. Unconditional love with adults is conditional. A gift must have both a giver and receiver. A gift is not a gift until received. All of God's promises are conditional. Jesus was narrow, rigid, exclusive and judgmental, even in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:13-21).

Mercy, grace and justice are inseparable in God's nature. Justice is as much the work of the church as love. Without justice, grace is unnecessary. How can you save a man who is not lost? Without justice, the cross is insane. Freedom demands justice. The central theme of all Scripture is the justice of God. The Old Testament reveals one thing—justice. Most people think Romans is a book about grace. It is. But underneath grace, Romans is a book about justice. First Peter is a book about grace. "How can a loving God send a sinner to hell?" Wrong question! "How can a just and holy God *not* send a sinner to hell?" Our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).

God

As always, the issue is God. Only when you get God right do you get all other things right. God is love, but we must not make love God. God defines love; love does not define God. Charles Finney said it best, "Away with preaching a love of God that is not angry with sin. Away with preaching a Christ not crucified for sin." Men shout, "Love, love, love!" The Bible shouts, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). Concerning law, God is just. Concerning morality, God is pure. Concerning theology, God is holy. Concerning ethics, God is righteous. Let God be God! To lessen God is to destroy God—immutable, sovereign, eternal, transcendent God! Throw away any stupid heresy that strips God of sovereignty! God is the same in both the Old and New Testaments.

Sin

Never confuse love with permissiveness! No sinner has the right or reason to stand in the presence of a holy (just) God! Man cannot save himself. Therefore, he must be saved by someone else. That someone is Jesus. This is why we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:4-10). Man in sin is damned to hell.

The punishment of sin is death (Genesis 2:17; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:1, 5). Tragically, preaching sin, lostness, wrath, judgment and hell is outlawed today.

GRACE

Now the glory of grace! Grace provided the Lamb of God. Grace without justice is weak, indecisive, manipulative and irrelevant. God was both the just and the justifi-er (Romans 3:21-28). We are saved by this grace (Titus 3:7; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 1:7-10). This is why the cross is the greatest demonstration of justice in history. Universalism says, "God is too good to send you to hell; you are too good to go to hell." This is not only blasphemy but also sappy! To be just, God provided the cross. Salvation means justified—not overlooked! Thanks be to God for this unspeakable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15). Providing justice is the glory of grace! Every sin will be punished—either at the cross or in hell. God is the only one where justice and vengeance are the same.

JUSTICE

Justice is one of the cardinal virtues, a weightier matter (Micah 6:8; Habakkuk 2:4; Matthew 23:23; Philippians 4:8). Jesus was declared just by both Pontius Pilate and his wife (Matthew 27:19, 24). Justice is the cornerstone of Christianity because it is the foundation of reality. We must study, teach, preach, live justice. It still is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).

THERE IS ONE FAITH

DAVID THURMAN

Any honest person can see that there are many voices calling out to us. In our society we have the aging baby boomer generation and also the younger generations. In politics we have different political parties. And, in religion, we can't count the number of groups with differing doctrines and teachings. All these voices are challenging us to come over to them. But, when it come to the way of God, what does the Bible say?

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one

God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6). The apostle Paul has been encouraging the Christians in Ephesus to be united. He lists seven reasons we should be one. The fifth of these is simple and straight forward. Be united because there is one faith. In spite of the many religious voices that call, there is only one faith according to the Bible. What is this faith?

It is **THE** Faith

"Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 3-4). Jude tells us three things we need to know about this faith.

The first is that it is **THE** faith, once delivered to the saints. There is no room in the New Testament for conflicting faiths. When we look around at all the religious division and the different doctrines, we know it is not what God wanted. God revealed one faith, one time, for the one church He established. In spite of those who contend that many denominations are a good thing, the Bible says there is one faith, not many.

It Has Been Entirely Revealed

The second point Jude makes is that faith has been revealed in its entirety. We cannot expect more revelations to reveal more facts and insights into the will of God. The faith has been once delivered. We have all we need to know about what God wants us to do.

This flies in the face of those today who contend that they have been given new revelations. The people of the first century had the faith revealed to them. They had the whole message and could be saved and serve God with what they knew. Some one who claims to be given additional information in later years is making a false claim. If new revelations were needed, then even the apostles and first century Christians were not saved. If they were saved and in harmony with God, then new revelations are unnecessary.

It Will Be Corrupted by Some

The last point Jude makes is sobering. He says some will corrupt this one faith. That is, some will adjust its teachings in order to meet their own whims. In Jude's example it is people who corrupt the message of grace by turning it into a license to sin. In the book of Galatians it is people who want to add a bunch of rules to make Christianity work better. Listen carefully. The many voices that call out to us may not be the real thing. Some people will change the simple message of the good news into something entirely different. We must seek out the one faith revealed by God to His people.

This means that whatever you hear from a religious group or teacher, you must go to the once for all revealed faith in the Bible, to find out what is true, and what is not. After all, there is only one faith. The rest are corrupted versions. What is the heart of the message of this faith?

It Is Our Access to the Father

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:14-16). The first thing we learn is that we are to hold fast to our confession. When we hang on to that one faith, three great things happen.

The first is we have access to the Father, that is, to God Himself. We can draw near to the throne of grace. In spite of our shortcomings, in spite of our guilt and sin, in Christ we can approach God knowing that Jesus has opened the door, pulled back the curtain and allows us into God's presence.

It Is Our Access to Compassion

Jesus understands what we go through. He lived among us and was like us. And, like us, He was tempted, yet He managed to avoid sin itself. But, because He was like us, He understands us. He has compassion and empathy for us. That lets Jesus explain to the Father about our failings. That lets us come to the Father, knowing Jesus understands our needs. We don't have to shy away from God or avoid God. We can come boldly into His

presence, because Jesus has compassion for us. The great thing about this one faith is that it is not harsh or unyielding. Instead, it is full of the compassion we all hunger for.

It Is Our Access to Grace

We come into God's presence to receive mercy and grace. Who needs mercy and grace? Sinners need mercy and grace. The point of this is that we come to God, not to show off our goodness, but to offer our apologies and receive the forgiveness we need. The one faith is special. It allows unworthy people (you and me) to come before God's throne and find the grace we need.

These points remind us how important it is to cling to that one faith. If we corrupt that one faith or listen to a corrupt version, we risk losing our access to God, to the compassion of Jesus, to the grace everyone of us needs. When you look at all the competing doctrines, be careful that the one you believe is the one revealed in the New Testament. What does this faith do for me?

It Allows Me to Fight the Good Fight

"For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Paul, at the end of his life tells us he kept the faith (not the faiths). This keeping of the faith meant that Paul had fought the good fight.

One of the reasons so many of us are weak in the battle with sin, is that we have not held onto that one faith very well. We have not used our access to the Father to get the mercy and grace we need. Our prayer life is weak, our understanding of that revealed faith is limited. Paul kept the faith, which allowed him to fight the good fight. You can fight all you want, but the good fight can only be done by clinging to the one faith.

It Allows Me to Win the Good Fight

Paul is nearing his death. But, he sees that he has won the victory he so desired. The battle was long and hard. And, facing death, it seems that Satan has won. But Paul knows there is a reward awaiting him. He looks forward to gaining the crown he didn't deserve and being with the Lord forever.

This is why holding to the one faith is so paramount. It allows us to win the battles with Satan, especially the biggest foe, death. Paul could look at death without fear or dread, knowing what was waiting for him.

It Allows Me To Enjoy the Reward

Paul was looking ahead to a great time. He, like us, probably was not too thrilled at the idea of being executed. Dying is not a fun thing to contemplate. But, the apostle was able to look beyond the pain of death to see the crown that was awaiting him.

Notice, this crown is given, not earned. The one faith that has been revealed tells us clearly that we cannot earn our salvation, it is a gift. But Paul kept the faith, and in so doing put his trust in God to keep His promises. So, Paul could look beyond death to see the great reward that would be his when he entered into God's presence for eternity. What does this faith look like?

It Is a Living Faith

"Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' You believe that God is one; You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?" (James 2:17-20). James reminds us that this one faith is much more than words on a page. It is much more than just believing in God, even demons do that. This faith must be alive, a living, active, obedient faith.

It is true you cannot earn your way to heaven. But, it is also true that you cannot sit your way to heaven. Your faith in God must be seen. Your life must reflect your faith. When Paul says he had kept the faith, he meant he had lived in such a way that his life had been changed, shaped, and molded to look like the Christ he served. If we are to hold to the one faith, we must be active.

It Is a Useful Faith

If we truly hold to the one faith, then we will find ourselves being useful in the service of God. A faith without works is useless. A faith with works then, is useful. Notice again that a living faith will produce activity. A living faith, a saving faith will have works that help the kingdom and society. We will love our neighbors, our friends and even our enemies. And, our love will be more than words, it will be actions.

So: Accept this Faith

"And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). God has gone to great lengths to save you. He offered His only begotten Son as a sacrifice in your place. He reached out to you. Now, He asks you to respond in faith. Without clinging to the one faith, you cannot please God. This is why it is vital that you do what the Bereans did. "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Don't take my word for anything. Look at the once for all revealed word of God. You must accept this faith personally, and you do that by going to the Scriptures to see what they say about the faith.

And Be Baptized

Everyone in the book of Acts who accepted the faith was baptized. The people on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian eunuch. That is what you need to do. Declare your faith in Christ by being baptized into him. Then you will be part of that one faith.

JESUS CHRIST AS A SERVANT

TOM KELTON

Jesus was a self-confessed servant. In Mark 10:45 He said, *"The Son of Man has come, not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many."*

These words are so familiar to us that we often miss the punch line. In Jesus' days, the phrase "Son of Man" was frequently discussed. It was a Messianic title. The Jews were expecting the Son of Man to come at any moment. There was considerable speculation about the details, but on one thing everyone agreed—the Son of Man was coming to receive homage from the nations, particularly, of course, the Romans, whom the Jews loathed. Had not Daniel, in 7:14, prophesied that to the Son of Man was to be given *"dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him"*?

But Jesus changed the whole thing around and caused consternation! "No," Jesus said, in effect, "You're looking in the wrong direction. The Son of Man has come to serve, not to be served."

On another occasion, Jesus did something just as bold. He linked the phrase "*Son of Man*" with suffering and rejection (Mark 8:31). The "*Son of Man*" represents the highest conceivable declaration of exaltation in Judaism; the servant of the Lord is the expression of the deepest humiliation. His uniting these two apparently contradictory tasks was unheard of. Yet, He expressed that union in His life and teaching.

Jesus had no time for status seekers. He publicly condemned those who *"love the place of honor at feasts, and the best seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men"* (Matthew 23:6,7). He forbade the pursuit of titles and honors. *"You are not to be called Rabbi,"* He said, *"for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your Father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called Masters for you have one Master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant"* (verses 8-11).

Had Jesus wished to rely on status and titles, He had the greatest. But to Him, service was more important than honors and rewards. Would to God that every Christian would follow His example today!

EVIDENCES OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

TOM DOCKERY

Many today deny that Jesus rose from the dead. But, if we reject the resurrection of Jesus, we may as well reject the whole of Christianity (1 Corinthians 15:17). If Christ rose from the dead, He is certainly the Messiah; if not, He is an imposter.

The witness of the Bible. The Bible clearly states that Jesus was raised. His resurrection was predicted by Old Testament prophecy (Psalm 16:8-11; Acts 2:29-31; Psalm 2:7-12). In the New Testament, all four Gospel writers describe the resurrection

(Matthew 12:40; 27:63; 16:21.) If we accept the Bible as God's Word, then we must also accept the resurrection.

The testimony of eyewitnesses (1 Corinthians 15:5-9). These eyewitnesses were many. Certain women saw Him as they returned from the sepulcher (Matthew 28:1-10), and He was seen by the apostle Peter later the same day (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5). He walked and talked with Cleophas and another disciple on the way to Emmaus. (Mark 16:12,13; Luke 24:13-35). Jesus appeared to the eleven apostles, and to over five hundred brethren at once, in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20; 1 Corinthians 15:7). Lastly, He was seen by Paul (1 Corinthians 15:8). These witnesses were sober men who had no reason to perpetrate a hoax.

The changes wrought in the disciples. Before the resurrection, the apostles were weak and fearful, slow to understand and believe. But afterward, they were strong in faith and able to stand before crowds and kings.

The change the resurrection has caused in the lives of others. Thousands have been convinced of the resurrection and lived changed lives. Two prominent skeptics of a past generation, Lord Lyttleton and Gilbert West, agreed to investigate the resurrection in an attempt to disprove Christianity. When they met again after several months to compare notes, each rejoiced to find that the other had been converted as a result of his study.

The resurrection proves conclusively that Jesus is the Son of God. Without it, Christianity would be vain!

MAKING PLANS

ANCIL JENKINS

"Now listen, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year, carry on business and make money. Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15).

James vividly reminds us of this great truth: it is foolish for a Christian to plan without considering God. Note that man's plans

in the above verses differ from God's.

Man plans, thinking he can control his location: "... *today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city ...*" He thinks he controls his time, "... *spend a year there ...*" Some even think they control profit and loss: "*carry on business and make money ...*" The Christian controls none of these. Instead, all plans must be made with the following commitment, "... *If it is the Lord's will...*"

As Christians, we have a unique, intimate relationship with our heavenly Father. He knows us far better than we know ourselves. "*And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered*" (Matthew 10:30). God loves the whole world, yet His love for His children is even more (John 3:16; 14:21).

"*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*" (Romans 8:28). Being His child does not mean we will never hurt, suffer, or be sad. It does mean that no matter what happens, God will work for our good if we love Him and are following His call. We may propose our plans, but God proposes the final result. When our plans are changed by His work, we must learn to say, "*The Lord's will be done*" (Acts 21:14).

The key to living within God's will is our submission to Him. Not only does He work for our good, He also keeps us from any trial and temptation that might be more than we can overcome. "*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it*" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Our confidence is in God's faithfulness. We believe He is willing and able to keep His promises.

How do these truths affect our planning? We must always remember that, in planning, it is possible for our will to conflict with God's will. When this happens, we must trust the Faithful One to know what is best for us.

We also can make big plans. Our Father wants the best for us and will let only what is best come our way, if we make submission to Him our top priority. If our plans are God's plans, He will honor and bless us. If not, He will send our way what is for our good. Make great plans, for our God is great.

Accepting The Supreme Power

MICHAEL L. KING

Man does not struggle with the fact that God has power over inanimate things or non-living things as rocks, atoms, seasons, rain, or even the hairs on our head. The real challenge is believing that God also controls our actions with our uncommon likeness to the inanimate. The term "sovereign" is used in reference to God. The expression has to do with God enjoying full autonomy (right to self-rule), allowing no rival. God is not *one* of the sovereign, but He is the *only* Sovereign. One of a kind is our God in that there is no other who has limitless, unchangable, eternal, and complete power over creation. We may find this concept complex and difficult, our intellect railing against it, but our salvation is dependent upon it.

The term "sovereign" does not appear in the Scripture, but is implied by expressions of likeness, particularly in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. Daniel, in speaking to Nebuchadnezzar, said, "*... till you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to—whomever He chooses*" (Daniel 4:25). We are to know and observe that "*... the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation*" (Jeremiah 10:10). More contemporary to the incarnation of Christ and the establishment of the church, Paul exalted God to Timothy as he wrote, "*To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever*" (1 Timothy 1:17).

There is a kinship with the sovereignty of God and His "omnipotence". This big word simply means "all potent" or "all powerful". We carelessly use words that make "all-ness statements", implying that there are no exclusions. We do so with exaggeration to stress something that is extreme. We use expressions like, "Every time I fix a nice hot meal you are late getting home from work!" The perturbed housewife is simply employing this expression to say that there are "many" times that this occurs. When we speak of God with the use of the terms "all" and "every", there are *no exceptions*. When we say that God knows everything (omniscience), there is not a thing hidden or

unknown to God. If we were to say that God is everywhere (omnipresent), there is not a place but where God's presence is realized. Acknowledging the fact that God is all powerful (omnipotent) is to declare that He is limitless in His ability. God's sovereignty is not limited by time in that He is everlasting; He has no time restrictions, making Him eternal, for He commands the forces of nature, of which time is one (Matthew 5:45; 6:30). God remains the same, and unchangeable.

Man is a free agent, but remains subject to God's will in terms of actions, thinking, and behavior. Jeremiah spoke of the fallacy of man's efforts compared to God's: "*O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*" (Jeremiah 10:23). David contrasted the choice of man to that of God when speaking of selecting paths in life: "*There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death*" (Proverbs 14:12). The reason for this was explained in the prophecy of Isaiah: "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord*" (Isaiah 55:8).

The Word of God is the ultimate, final, and complete expression of God to man. Dare any of us to tamper with it (Galatians 1:6-9)? Jesus declared Himself to be the sovereign manifestation of God to man. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men*" (John 1:1-4). God had every intention for man to hear His Son, to learn of His sovereignty, for on the mount when Jesus was transfigured, God said, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!*" (Matthew 17:5). The greatest demonstration of our love for our sovereign God is to hear His Son. It is so critical that we hear, respect, and obey the sovereign message that was once delivered (Jude 3), for it shall judge us in the last day (John 12:48). Those who trample God and His Word are to beware, for "*The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed*" (2 Peter 2:9,10a). Our greatest motivation should be to show our sovereign Lord that we truly love Him (John 14:15). Keep in mind

that *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Timothy 3:16,17). That is sovereignty at its best!

DON'T ARGUE WITH GOD

CLEM THURMAN

When the leper, Naaman, sought a cure for his dreaded disease, he was told by the prophet of God to go dip seven times in the River Jordan (2 Kings 5). But Naaman was evidently a proud man, a man of some importance in his own nation of Syria, and he displayed a spirit not unlike that of many today. He said, *Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?*" (2 Kings 5:12). And Scripture adds, *"He went away in a rage."* He had thought that his cure would come through some spectacular means (v. 11), and when the simple terms of dipping seven times in the Jordan were given, Naaman felt insulted. He didn't like God's plan!

It is the "spirit of Naaman" that causes one to question God's requirement of baptism today. In Acts 2:38, 22:16, Rom. 6:3-4 and many other passages, God shows that baptism is for the remission of sins, to reach the death of Christ and be cleansed by His blood. The Scriptures are plain, God has spoken. But too often man doesn't like the simple terms, *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mark 16:16). So man looks for the spectacular (which was not given to Naaman): the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or some "inner voice" telling him he is saved. And like Naaman, such begin to argue with God because they don't like the requirements He gave. They may retreat to "faith only" or "predestination," but they question God's plan for them.

Others display "the spirit of Naaman" in regard to the church. We all know that the Scriptures teach that Jesus built only one church, that it is His bride. His body, and the saved are added to it daily (Matt. 16:18, Eph. 5:31, Col. 1:18, Acts 2:47). But some

are not satisfied with that church; they want "mother's church" or "the church of your choice." So they argue with God. They may argue that there are "churches just as good," even as Naaman argued about the rivers. But they forget God. It wasn't the Jordan that was to cleanse the leprosy of Naaman; it was God! And it isn't man in the church that saves; it is the Lord. But He saves His church (Eph. 5:23). And it isn't up to man to choose the church—that is the Lord's business.

Naaman, though, saw his folly. "When his servant reminded him that he would have been willing to have done something great to be cured, then why not the simple thing God said? Naaman responded by obeying God. He went to the Jordan and dipped seven times; and he was cured of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:14, Luke 4:27). It wasn't the water that cured, it was God—when Naaman obeyed. So it is with baptism: it isn't water that saves, it is God—when man obeys. And it isn't the church that saves, it is the Lord—when we have faith to accept God's plan and thus become a member of the church of Jesus Christ.

Man's purpose on earth is to "*Fear God and keep his commandments*" (Eccle. 12:13). And that doesn't include trying to improve on God's plan nor questioning His requirements. Let us learn to "*walk by faith*" (2 Cor. 5:7) and "*live by faith*" (Rom. 1:17)—by hearing what God said, accepting what He said and then doing it without arguing.

The Civilization Explosion

REX BANKS

It is clear from scripture that the people of the pre-Flood period had attained a very high degree of development. For example, in Genesis 4:22, Tubal-cain is described as "the forger of all implements of bronze and iron", indicating that the pre-Flood civilization had mastered the technology and chemistry required by the smelting process. Moreover, Noah had been instructed by the Lord to construct an ark "three hundred cubits (in length) ... fifty cubits (wide) and ... thirty cubits (in height)" (Genesis 6:15). The huge, seaworthy, box-like structure was about 224 metres long, 46 metres wide, and 27 metres high, and was capable of

carrying about 125,000 sheep. Its construction was a prodigious achievement and proof of advanced engineering skills in the pre-Flood civilization. The existence of such expertise in that era may help explain an interesting historical fact.

In his illuminating little book entitled **The Puzzle of Ancient Man**, Donald E. Chittick states:

"With the possible exception of the amazing developments of the past 100 years, the further we go in the past, the higher the level of science and technology as reflected by human artifacts."

Chittick points out that a recurring theme emerges as ancient cultures around the world are examined: "Cultures appear to emerge in a high state of development and then decline after a period of time," says Chittick, and what's more, "cultures around the world appear to have originated at about the same period of time of roughly 5,000 years ago (3000 B.C.)." They appear with an already developed high level of technical development and the puzzle is that "there is little if any evidence to support the idea that these ancient cultures experimented with engineering designs." Instead, "each culture appears full-blown right from its beginning. Erich Von Daniken, (of **Was God an Astronaut** fame) points out that "ancient Egypt appears suddenly and without transition with a fantastic ready-made civilization." He explains:

"Great cities and enormous temples, colossal statues with tremendous expressive power, splendid streets flanked by magnificent sculptures, perfect drainage systems, luxurious tombs carved out of the rock, pyramids of overwhelming size — these and many other wonderful things shot out of the ground, so to speak. Genuine miracles of a country that is suddenly capable of such achievements without recognisable prehistory" (**Chariots of the Gods**).

A similar observation by evolutionist researcher Graham Hancock (**Fingerprints of the Gods**) is recorded by Steve Carno in an article entitled "*The Mystery of Ancient*" which appeared in *Creation ex nihilo* magazine, March-May 1998:

"The archaeological evidence suggested that rather than developing slowly and painfully, as is normal with human societies, the civilization of Ancient Egypt, like that of the Olmecs, emerged all at once and fully formed. Indeed, the

period of transition from primitive to advanced society appears to have been so short that it makes no kind of historical sense. Technological skills that should have taken hundreds or even thousands of years to evolve were brought into use almost overnight and with no apparent antecedents whatever."

The preservation of this knowledge by certain descendants of Noah in the post-Flood period would explain the early pyramids of Egypt, the "stone calendars" of the Mayans, the ability of the builders of the ancient city of Sacsahuaman to maneuver rocks that weighed an estimated 20,000 tonnes and many other "anomalies". Clearly such handiwork requires an advanced technology, the fruit of many generations of trial and error, and the abrupt appearance of such expertise at the dawn of recorded history is consistent with the development of an advanced civilization that vanished abruptly from the face of the earth.

The early descendants of Noah, leaving the ark, migrated to the area that came to be known as the plain of Shinar ... *"and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth'."*

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, 'Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.'

So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel..." (Genesis 11:2-9).

Obviously, people who would undertake to build such a city, and such a tower were not "cave men" with no knowledge of construction. Some of the most ancient remains of cities show well-planned streets, indoor water, under-ground sewerage, and "advanced" construction methods that we cannot repeat even today!



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