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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

"The Lord's Prayer" Is A Model Prayer

What is most commonly called "the Lord's prayer" as found in Matthew chapter 6 and Luke chapter 11, is, in fact, a prayer of example, or a model prayer, as the publishers of some English versions have rightly entitled it. Jesus there was teaching His disciples, how to pray, as the disciples had asked Him, "Lord teach us to pray." So the Lord gave them a design or a pattern of prayer. He didn't mean that His followers should memorize and repeat those words every time they come together for a religious service. In fact, right there in Matthew 6:7 Jesus taught, "And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions." Evidently then, the Lord didn't ask the disciples to learn that prayer of example and memorize to recite. Also, it was not the Lord's own prayer, or a prayer that He Himself had offered. To learn about the Lord's prayer we have to go to other places in the New Testament where we find Him praying His own prayer. For example, in John chapter 17 we read how Christ prayed there first for Himself, and then for his disciples, and also for all His followers that they all may be one in Him, and not as divided as they are today. (John 17:20, 21).

Now, what was Jesus teaching the disciples in the model prayer? Christ taught that when we pray, our prayer should be directed to God who is our heavenly Father. We are His creation, His off-spring, and He is our spiritual Father, who provides for all our needs and necessities, both physical and spiritual. In essence, Jesus was teaching the disciples to remember that God alone is our spiritual Father to whom all our prayers should be directed.

In Matthew 23:9, Jesus therefore emphatically taught, "Do not call anyone on earth your father : for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." Heaven is God's residence. Christ called it "My Father's house." (John 14:2). "Hallowed be Your name" That is God's name is holy and sacred. Psalm 111:9 says God's name is holy and awesome (reverend, KJV). Man, therefore, should not take God's name in vain. (Exodus 20:7). When people use or take the name of God in vain they make God's name common or ordinary. How often do we hear people use the phrase "praise the Lord," while greeting one another? If this is not taking God's name in vain, then what it is? Christ taught to remember to hallow God's name or to set apart for holy use only.

Then Christ taught the disciples in the model prayer to pray for God's kingdom. Both John the baptizer and Christ were preaching at that time that God's kingdom was very near and was going to come. (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:15). Christ also told the disciples that it was going to come in their own life time. (Mark 9:1; Matthew 16:28). Since the kingdom had not yet come then when Christ was teaching the disciples to pray, He, therefore, asked them to pray to God "Your kingdom come." But today we know that God's kingdom since then has already come. At that time, when Christ had taught the model prayer the kingdom was in future, it had not yet come then, but was going to come. However, when Christ promised the disciples that He would build His church, He called His church His kingdom. (Matthew 16:18, 19). Christ's church was established, according to His promise, in Jerusalem some fifty days after the Lord's resurrection. When the church was established, Acts 2:47 says "And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." Later, when Paul wrote to the members of the church at Colosse, he said to them, "He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." (Colossians 1:13). When the church was established, the kingdom had come, since both of them are same. Therefore, today we need not to pray for the coming of the kingdom, but we should rather pray for the increase and spread of the kingdom of God into the entire world.

Then, Christ taught, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In heaven God's angels are always ready to do His will. God's will is done on earth when people hear what God says through His written words of the Bible and do. (Matthew 7:21-27).

Christ taught that we should trust God and depend on Him for our daily needs. He therefore said, "Give us this day our daily

bread." Not just once a week or once a year, but each day we need to remember God and pray to Him for our daily needs.

Another important principle Christ taught through the model prayer is that if we want God to forgive us our wrongs and shortcomings, then we should first be willing to forgive those who have wronged us in any way. (Matthew 7:12; 18:21-35). "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." In other words, Christ is saying, we have no right to pray to God for His forgiveness, if we have not forgiven others.

Next, in the prayer of example, Christ included these words, "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Since God does not tempt anyone in the manner which leads to sin (James 1:13), Christ, in fact, taught there, to pray to God that He may not allow us to be led into temptation. (1 Corinthians 10:13). God gave Christ to be our example to escape from sin. (Hebrews 4:15; Matt. 4:4; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 2:21-23). Christ was tempted, but He never sinned.

Finally, Jesus ended teaching the model prayer with these words, "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen." He taught to acknowledge the sovereignty and the power and the glory of God, the Father in heaven. When every earthly power will be destroyed at the coming of Christ to judge the whole world, only God's kingdom and power and glory will abide forever. (2 Peter 3:10-13). "Amen." So let it be.

Today when we Christians pray to God, we pray to Him through Christ or in the name of Christ. Because Christ is our Mediator "between God and men." (1 Timothy 2:5) He is our Mediator in the sense that He is the only one who paid our debt to God the Father in heaven, reconciling us to God. Through Christ we have access to the Father. (Ephesians 3:11-14; 5:20). He is the only way to the Father in heaven. (John 14:6). That is why today we pray to the Father in His name.

New Testament Worship

Lesson Three

THE OBJECT OF OUR WORSHIP

J.C. CHOATE

Since the creation, man has worshipped everything under the sun, and even the sun itself. There are millions of gods and

goddesses around the world. Fabulous temples have been built by their devotees, and yet the majority of men seem unhappy with their religion. Why? What is wrong?

The thing that is wrong is that the masses of the people have not yet come to believe in the one and true living God. Christ points to Him, when he says, "God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." (John 4: 24). God then is to be the object of man's worship. Only when he learns this and directs his worship to Him can he find the peace and comfort of soul that he has so long searched for.

In this short lesson we want to find out who God is and why we should worship him.

1. God is the Creator of all things

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1: 1). It might be argued that the Bible is saying this, but what proof is there otherwise? Just look around and see what God has created. The earth and all things therein serves as ample proof for God's existence. Something cannot come from nothing, therefore someone had to create it. David said, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handiwork." (Psalm 19:1). Who can dispute that? Who will dispute it?

God created man and woman in his own image. "And God said, Let us make man, in our image, after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him: male and female created He them." (Genesis 1:26,27). "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Genesis 2: 7).

2. God sent His Son Jesus to save man from his sins

Concerning the purpose of the Lord's coming, we read, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16, 17). Paul wrote, "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). Again he says, "For this is good and acceptable

in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:3,4). As to our salvation, he writes, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2: 8, 9).

3. God has Blessed us with all Blessings, Physically & Spiritually

James writes, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1: 17). Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3).

4. There is One True and Living God

In speaking of the oneness of God, Paul declared, "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4: 6). He continues, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2: 5).

5. God is Spirit

We have already read in John 4:24 where it is plainly stated that God is Spirit. In other words, God is not flesh and blood. He is not physical. He is not material. When we therefore learn that He is Spirit then we can understand Him better inasmuch as we will think of Him as being on another plane and not on the level of man.

6. God is Love

John declares, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

(1 John 4: 8-11). He says therefore that if we do not have any love then we cannot know God for God has revealed Himself through love.

7. God is Living Today

Peter confessed Christ as the Son of the living God. (Matthew 16: 16). Paul talks about the church of the living God. (1 Timothy 3: 15). Again, he speaks of those who turned away from their idols

to obey and serve the true and living God. (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Some have declared God dead, but they are the ones who are dead, spiritually. God lives. Christ taught, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matthew 22: 32).

8. With God all Things are Possible

When Jesus talked to the people about who could be saved, He said, "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26).

9. There is None Good but God

"And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God." (Mark 10: 18).

10. No Man Hath Seen God

John wrote, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." (John 1:18).

We could go on and notice that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10: 34, 35), that He knows all works from the beginning of the world (Acts 15: 18), that He will eventually judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ (Romans 2: 16), that He can give eternal life (1 John 5: 11), etc.

The God we speak of knows all, sees all, hears all, is everywhere at the same time, is all powerful and without beginning or end. There is no one to be compared to Him. He is the creator of all else. He is the one that is to be worshipped, praised, honoured, and glorified both now and forever more.

God wants our worship but He would never force us to pay homage to Him. Those who choose to do so though will be blessed accordingly.

However, He will not accept just any kind of worship. If we are going to worship Him then it must be on His terms and not ours. He has revealed the type of worship He wants in His word and we are going to see this in the lessons that follow.

What Is Your Best Place?

JIMMY W. COX

What is the best place for your *spiritual* being? There are only two spiritual realms: "in Christ" or in the world. You cannot be in

both realms at the same time. Jesus said: *"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad"* (Matthew 12:30).

"In Christ" is a place of personal choice. You are not automatically "in Christ" by physical birth. God does not automatically put you "in Christ" unless you make that choice.

We cannot be "in Christ" unless we hear His Gospel (Romans 1:16). The basic facts of the Gospel are: *"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures"* (1 Corinthians 15:3,4). Yet, facts alone will not put us "in Christ". Hebrews 5:8,9 says Christ is the *"author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him."*

Jesus taught His apostles for a little over three years. Just before He was to return to heaven, He said: *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:15,16).

Fifty days after the resurrection of Christ, His church had its beginning (recorded in Acts 2:36,37): *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?'"*

Peter gave this answer to these penitent believers: *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38). During His time on earth, Jesus told the people, *"Unless you repent you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:3). In Matthew 10:32,33, Jesus said that we must publicly confess Him.

To be "in Christ" we must hear the Gospel, believe the Gospel, repent of sins, confess our faith, and be baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3-5). *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things have become new"* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

A Moment of Lust

FRANK CHESSE

He was alone and idle, fertile soil for sin. Upon viewing the unclad form of Bathsheba, he could not help the stirrings within, a manifestation of desire divinely implanted. However, he looked too long and lost. His lust "conceived" and gave birth to sin (James 1:15). Adultery was the fruition of David's unrestrained desire, followed by deception and murder (2 Samuel 12).

Sometime later, Amnon, David's firstborn son, raped Tamar, his half-sister. David's own sin rendered him impotent in dealing with the sin of his son. For two years, Absalom plotted revenge for his sister's shame. His moment came at a sheep-shearing festival, and he stained his servant's sword with the blood of his half-brother.

Five long years passed before Joab effected reconciliation between David and Absalom. Those years enabled the seed of bitterness to sprout and grow within the heart of David's son. Thus, Absalom schemed to extort the kingdom from his own father. By means of subtlety and flattery, he "*stole the hearts of the men of Israel*" (2 Samuel 15:6).

When David learned of Absalom's rebellion, he fled Jerusalem with his family and loyal followers. Barefooted, head covered, bathing the earth in tears, he ascended the Mount of Olives, his heart pierced with arrows of grief (2 Samuel 15:30). Ahithophel, David's counselor, turned traitor and urged immediate pursuit of David and his followers. Inconceivably, Ahithophel's call for David's death "*pleased Absalom well*" (2 Samuel 15:4). However, the advice of Hushai, David's friend, counteracted that of David's former counselor, as the providence of God worked to assure Absalom's defeat.

The battle lines were drawn. It was father against son. The child he once held in his arms now coveted his life. A sword had supplanted a warm embrace. The battle was joined and Absalom died. As David ascended the steps to his chamber he cried, "*O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom; would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son*" (2 Samuel 18:33). Oh, the sin that was spawned in a moment of lust.

Want to Be Saved? Let's Study The Bible

AUBREY SMITH

The only way we can be certain that we are saved is to be sure that we are doing what God wants us to do. And, the only way we can know what God wants us to do is to study the Bible. Let me assure you that I'm not selling Bibles or religion. I do not endorse any religious denomination. I believe that anyone can pick up a Bible, study it, and know exactly what is required to please God. With daily Bible study, you can know how to be saved, how to worship God with the proper spirit, and how to live your life in a way that is pleasing to Him.

At this point, let me say that some versions of the Bible have been tainted. By that, I mean people have rewritten the Bible in such a way as to give false meaning to God's word. Some versions are perverted to the point that by studying them you will be led astray. My advice is to stick with the tried and true. The Old and New King James versions, the American Standard, and the New American Standard are all good study Bibles. Most of the newer versions are paraphrased writings that are commentaries and do not make good study Bibles.

Can we know for sure that we're saved? Does God really have a plan of salvation? Does He expect us to follow a certain pattern of worship? And, if I don't know or don't do what He wants me to do, will I really go to hell? The answers to all four of these questions is yes.

Can we know for sure that we are saved? Study your Bible. I'll use the New King James, you use whatever Bible you have and read 1 John 5:13. *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God."*

Does God really have a plan of salvation? Again, study your Bible. The Bible tells us that the only way to God is through Jesus. Read John 12:48-50 and John 14:6. The Bible tells us that you must know God's word. Read John 8:31,32: *"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are*

My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Now, read Romans 10:17 and John 6:45. The Bible also tells us that we must believe. Please read Hebrews 11:6. *"But 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 diligently seek Him."* Also read John 8:24.

God wants us to repent. In other words, turn away from our sins and follow Him. Study your Bible. Read Acts 2:38 and Luke 13:3. What did your Bible say? The Bible says we must also confess Jesus as Lord. What does your Bible say in Romans 10:9,10 and Romans 6:3-5? You see, God does have a plan for our salvation. Look at Mark 16:15,16, then read Romans 6:3-5 and 1 Peter 3:21. Is baptism necessary for salvation? The Bible says it is. In fact, the Bible says you are not saved until you are baptized. Study your Bible. Don't be misled. Your salvation is too important to leave to chance. Study your Bible. If you haven't followed God's plan of salvation step by step, then do it now. Is it important? Jesus thought so. He thought it was so important He died for you.

After you're a Christian, is that all? Not really. Study your Bible. God wants faithful, obedient followers. Read John 14:23, Matthew 28:20 and 1 John 5:3. Also read Hebrews 10:23-26 and Galatians 5:16-26. You see; God really has revealed what He wants us to do and how He expects us to live. Whether or not you follow His plan and the pattern He has given you is strictly up to you. For me and my family, we've decided to follow Jesus. How about you? My prayer for you can be found by reading 1 Peter 1:2-5.

The Salt Of The Earth

JIM POLAND

Matthew 5:13 says, *"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men."* (Mark 9:49,50; Luke 14:34,35).

Salt does many things. It is necessary for the body to function and to be healthy. It is necessary to live, but when the sodium level is too low or too high, it is harmful to life and health.

Salt is a preservative. It is used to cure meats and vegetables.

Salt is a flavoring and savoring agent. It has long been used to flavor food. Under the Law of Moses, it was required in certain offerings (Leviticus 2:13; Ezekiel 43:24). Yet, salted land becomes unfruitful; captured cities were salted, doomed to destruction (Judges 9:45). It has been used as a symbolic healer (2 Kings 2).

Salt was also a symbol of a covenant. Persons who partook of salt in a meal of hospitality were considered to have entered into a covenant together. It was used to symbolize an enduring covenant with Jehovah (Numbers 18:19; 2 Chronicles 13:5).

Salt is used as a spiritual symbol. It describes Jesus "disciples", learners, and followers (Matthew 5:1,13). Hearers of Jesus, citizens of His kingdom, those with the attitudes of the beatitudes, Christians are the "*salt of the earth*" (Luke 14:34).

Spiritual salt does that which is vital. It is the saving influence that is *in* the world, not *of* the world. Faithful Christians are to the world or human race what salt is to food, health, and life. This influence preserves from the corruption of sin, doctrinally and morally. It gives savor and flavor to make the world a better place in which to live. It prepares souls for a glorious home eternally. All with whom Christians come in contact are benefited.

How does this spiritual salt work? It proves what truth from God can do. This is shown as Christians live by the Word of Christ (Colossians 3:16,17). What we teach affects the lives of those who hear (Ephesians 4:15), spreading the truth of the Gospel to every nation, showing the way to covenant with the Lord (Matthew 28:19,20). Spiritual salt produces the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25). It purifies from the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:16).

It is the responsibility of the church to point the way to salvation. It was not left to governments, social services, social planners, judges, courts, etc. to do this work. The command is **ours** to spread the Gospel (Romans 1:16). The salt must get out of the shaker.

When salt, Christians, lose their influence, nothing else will do what we have been given to do. We, then, become good for nothing. The Lord will cast us out because we are killing the growth of the kingdom. Influence is lost through lack of dedication to attendance of assemblies, through not growing spiritually in the faith (Romans 10:17), through being distracted to worldly things, through not trying to win friends and relatives to Christ.

TRUTH

CHARLES R. ROSE

Truth is the most precious commodity on the market. The wise man Solomon admonished his readers to *"Buy the truth and sell it not"* (Proverbs 23:23). All truth comes from God, who cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18), while all falsehoods come from Satan, *"who is a liar with no truth in him"* (John 8:44).

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, told the people of His day, *"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"* (John 8:32). Truth is more precious than gold. Honest men have searched for it, fought for it, and died for it. Truth has nothing to fear and nothing to hide. Truth will bear any honest investigation. Truth is that which we must believe and obey. Truth is that body of information by which we must live. The truth spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ is that by which mankind must someday be judged. It is as He stated, *"...the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day"* (John 12:48).

Some, like Pilate, still ask, *"What is truth"* (John 18:38). Jesus still answers, *"Sanctify them through Thy word, Thy word is truth"* (John 17:17). We know that God would *"... have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Timothy 2:4). We also know that *"... grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"* (John 1:17), who is *"...the way, the truth and the life"* (John 14:6).

In our search for that body of truth that has the power to save our eternal soul and to free us from Satan's snare, we need go no further than the Bible. When an honest man or woman hears the truth found in the Bible, one of two things will happen: that person will either obey the truth or cease to be honest. It does little good to know God's Holy Word unless one is willing to obey it and defend it.

When Peter preached the first Gospel sermon on the first Pentecost following the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:14-36), those who heard and believed the message asked, *"... what shall we do?"* (Acts 2:37). Peter, speaking *"... as the Spirit gave (him) utterance"* (Acts 2:4) answered, *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38). About three thousand people

who heard that sermon were honest within themselves. Of these people, God's Word says, "*And they that gladly received his word were baptized; and there were added unto them that day about three thousand souls*" (Acts 2:41). The rest of that great multitude who heard the Gospel message preached that day ceased to be honest. They received not the Word of God and sealed their eternal fate (John 12:48), as long as they continued to reject the Gospel.

Reflecting on your own habits of acceptance of the teachings contained in the Holy Bible, would you consider yourself to be just as honest as the three thousand on Pentecost, or are you more inclined to follow the example of the rest of that crowd? "... *be thou faithful until death, and I will give thee a crown of life*" (Jesus, Revelation 2:10).

Eli - A Good Man But a Bad Father

RAYMOND ELLIOTT

One unique aspect of the Bible is that the inspired writers pointed out both the weak and strong characteristics in various individuals. Peter, a pillar of the early church, denied the Lord (Matthew 26:69-75). David, a man after God's own heart, committed adultery and had a man killed (2 Samuel 11:1-5, 14-21). Even the great man of faith, Abraham, lied about his wife, Sarah (Genesis 12:13). Thus it is not strange that Scripture reveals both the faults and the good points of Eli, a high priest of God.

In considering Eli's strengths, we know that he was a descendant of Aaron through Ithamar, the youngest of Aaron's sons (Leviticus 10:1-12; 1 Kings 2:27; 2 Samuel 8:17; 1 Chronicles 24:3). He was the first of the line of Ithamar, who held the office of high priest. Eli was also a judge for 40 years.

He took a genuine interest in the training of the young boy Samuel. In fact, he told Hannah that her petition for a male child had been granted by the Lord God (1 Samuel 1:17). His submissive attitude toward the judgment of God against him must also be noted. When Samuel heard God's voice, Eli simply stated, "It is the Lord. Let Him do what seems good to Him" (1 Samuel 3:18 NKJV). Eli was a very good man; however, he was a failure as a father.

The sins of Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's sons, brought shame and ruin to their father and sin to a degenerate priesthood. They did not know the Lord (1 Samuel 2:12). Legally, they had the right to take a portion of meat from the people but they went beyond this and even extracted meat that was to be offered as a sacrifice to God (see Leviticus 7:31-35; 8:31; 2 Chronicles 35:13). Their legal due as priests was the right shoulder and the wave breast consecrated to God by the burning of fat upon the altar (Leviticus 3:5; 7:31, 34).

Eli's sons distressed the people. Their sin was flagrant and vile, calculated to awaken the intense disgust and abhorrence of every pure and reverent mind. They were the basest of sinners in that, as priests, they committed adultery with the women who served in the house of God (1 Samuel 2:22). They encouraged others to share in their sinful ways (v. 24).

A Father's Place

Eli was a failure as a father. Rearing children in the way of the Lord takes place in the home. Actually, Paul places the responsibility on the shoulders of the father to be the head of the home (Ephesians 6:4). Unfortunately, many fathers do not fulfill this obligation. Children often associate with evil companions who influence them in a worldly and sinful manner (1 Corinthians 15:33). Eli's sons were not strong enough to counteract the evil tendencies of the age, and their father erred in not taking precautions adequate to the occasion.

Many children of good men sometimes become godless because of their parents' absorption in public affairs and business. Children learn more about Christianity from what they observe from their parents than from any other source — good and bad. There is no greater encouragement for a child to despise Christianity than the discovery of insincerity and hypocrisy in the lives of his parents.

Eli's outstanding weakness was shown in not restraining his sons when he knew their sins (1 Samuel 3:13). A man may possess many amiable qualities and be on the whole a good man and yet be mocked by some defect that mars his character, prevents his usefulness, and makes him the unintentional cause of much mischief.

A Father's Discipline

Eli's reproof was not administered in proper time. Early childhood is the time to teach and to train. A little plant may be easily rooted up, but when it has grown into a tree it can be removed only by extraordinary efforts. Eli was weak, gentle and easygoing. He should have disciplined his sons before it became impossible to do so. It was said of Adonijah, the son of Haggith, that "his father had not rebuked him at any time by saying, 'Why have you done so?' "(1 Kings 1:6).

The reproof Eli gave his sons was not given with sufficient earnestness. After learning of their terrible sins, he said to them, "Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the Lord's people transgress" (1 Samuel 2:23-24). His reproof was neither pointed nor specific enough. It was too general and in indefinite terms—just the things he had heard that his sons had done. He seemed to have no really sufficient determination to correct the evil ways of Hophni and Phinehas.

Another observation of the reproof given by Eli was that it was not followed by adequate chastisement. It was specifically stated that his sons "did not heed the voice of their father" (1 Samuel 2:25). The Law of Moses in the case of disobedient children was very severe (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Eli seemingly made no effort to prevent the continuance of their evil ways. As a father, high priest and judge, Eli was guilty of disobedience (1 Samuel 3:13). Hophni and Phinehas were hardened in heart and rebellious in spirit. Solomon wrote, "Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, and he who hates correction will die" (Proverbs 15:10).

A Sad Ending

The ultimate end for Eli and his sons is recorded in 1 Samuel 4:10-18. Hophni and Phinehas were killed in battle. Being an old man, Eli fell and broke his neck when he heard about their deaths. The ark of God was taken by the Philistines. Shame, degradation and ruin overwhelmed all. Eventually, the priesthood was taken away from the house of Eli (1 Samuel 2:27-31; 1 Kings 2:27).

Parents can save themselves from heartache and sorrows by following God's instruction to bring up their children in the way of the Lord. May God abundantly and richly bless all those parents who are endeavoring to do this very thing in this crooked and perverse generation.

THE PERILS OF YOUTH

RICHARD ENGLAND

Most of us, and especially young people, do not like to be told "no". We want to be unlimited, uninhibited and free to do our own thing. But inspired warnings are given to avoid the pitfalls often characteristic of youth. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (Ecclesiastes 12:1) is a special word of encouragement because of the unique circumstance and vulnerability of the early years of life.

Consider also 2 Timothy 2:22: "Flee also youthful lusts." The term "lusts" in this text refers to a yearning or longing for evil and, in this case, that which is especially attractive to someone in the early developmental period of life. There has always been an attraction to "forbidden fruit." That very expression originated as a result of Eve's succumbing to the temptation to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil though God had said, "Thou shalt not eat of it" (Genesis 2:17).

Current culture makes the burden of youth today great. Too many of today's young people have very limited responsibilities at home. In years gone by, the whole family had to milk cows, plow, harvest crops and chop firewood. Many young people are rarely given regular tasks or chores to do, and when they are, the chores are more busy work than productive activity.

Although it is not a quotation from Scripture, it is certainly true that "an idle mind is the devil's workshop." Children can be taught to keep their rooms clean, make their own beds, put away their clothes, mow the yard, take care of their pets, study their lessons for Bible classes, help prepare for company (especially if it is their personal friends), take out the garbage, encourage and comfort the elderly (who so often delight in attention from young people), and do other productive things that must be done.

As children get older, the pressure to obtain an advanced education, possess more of the world's goods, and spend more time in recreation often crowd out time for Bible study, prayer and habitual attendance of worship services. Success is too often measured in money rather than spiritual growth and power. It is not a bad thing to have a good education. It is not sin in and of itself to be prosperous in this world's goods. Yet, to let any of these things keep one from serving God faithfully results in rejection by God. Luke 14:16-24 is a parable of men making excuses for not

attending a friend's feast and is directly applicable to our attending the things of God. What are used as excuses are not sins in and of themselves when done properly. But to let these things hinder one from being a Christian is sin!

A time existed when parents could limit the places their children could go. Now the problem is not only where they go but also what is brought home. Radio, television and computers have funneled just about every sin known to man into almost every house. Young people are desensitized to sin so that casual conversation includes subject matter and words that used to be whispered, if mentioned at all. Video games are in-home studies in violence, robbery, vandalism, rebellion, gambling, sexual misconduct, profanity and materialism. How many times have young people been arrested for crimes they say they learned from some electronic medium?

Jesus shows the way to true success. He says one cannot be devoted to God and the things of this world at the same time (Matthew 6:24). He continues to explain that if God feeds the birds and clothes the beautiful flowers, He will see to it that while we faithfully serve Him we have the necessities to sustain life (vv. 25-32). "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (v. 33).

One cannot sow wild oats and reap red roses. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7-8).

Few young people will read this article. They are busy here and there and have little or no time to devote to reading religious periodicals. The solution is for parents to get the family together, read the article out loud and discuss it, adding such practical observations and applications as come to mind. Especially encourage the children to participate in the conversation. Doing this or some similar family activity aimed at teaching children as they mature is incumbent on the parents as a part of bringing up the children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

In thinking of the immediacy of the need, one is reminded of the old story of the man who heard the clock strike 13. He reached over, shook his wife and said, "Wake up! Wake up! It is later than it ever has been!" Parents, your children are in danger. Paul's words to the church at Rome might well be adapted to today's urgency. "It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness,

and let us put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11-12). And every item of armor requires Bible study accompanied by prayer (see Ephesians 6:10-18).

The Ascension of Jesus

DENNIS LOYD

The four accounts of the gospel give ample, if not complete, coverage to most of the major events in Jesus' life. Matthew and Luke give sufficient details of His birth. All four writers carefully describe His crucifixion and resurrection. But only Mark and Luke describe the ascension. Luke elaborates a bit more in Acts 1. Rather ironically, the two present at the ascension do not mention it—Matthew and John—while the two who mention it were not eyewitnesses—Mark and Luke. Each had to rely on someone else for the physical description in addition to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

These four major events in Jesus' physical existence bore miraculous marks as confirmation of His divinity. Miracles were evident in the narratives of His birth, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Angelic affirmations bore witness to His birth, resurrection and ascension. The absence of angels at His death was further testimony that no divine intervention would stop the sacrifice in the way an angel stopped Abraham's planned sacrifice of Isaac. Each event led to and anticipated the next event. Birth led to death, death to resurrection, resurrection to ascension, and ascension to return.

Why don't we pay more attention to the ascension in our study, our teaching and our preaching? Is it because we feel such joy at His resurrection that we want the accounts to end there?

Four approaches are made in the New Testament to the ascension of Jesus, and each one warrants an examination.

Its Anticipation

At no point in His ministry did Jesus seemingly give a detailed explanation of when or how He would leave the physical realm and return to heaven. But all along He made mention of its inevitability. Interestingly, John recorded most of those references. For example, he reports that Jesus knew that the Father had given Him all things and that He had come from God and was going back to God (John 13:3).

In John 16:16, Jesus told the disciples, "I go to the Father", and in John 17:3, Jesus prayed, "But now I come to You." The disciples did not anticipate this ultimate departure, but Jesus surely did. When Mary saw Him in the garden after His resurrection, He warned her: "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father and to My God and your God' " (20:17).

Its Realization

Mark covers the ascension in the space of one verse (Mark 16:19). Luke tells a bit more, saying that Jesus led the disciples "as far as Bethany," and while He blessed them, He was received out of their sight (Luke 24:50-51). Not until Luke provided more coverage in Acts 1:9-11 are the angels mentioned. No earlier reference was made to them. The language in Acts stresses the careful observation of the disciples. Luke denotes how carefully they watched four times: "while they watched"; "received Him out of their sight"; "while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up"; and "why do you stand gazing up into heaven?" Human comprehension must surely have been strained on that occasion.

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared and disappeared with some regularity, but on this occasion, He seemed to be making a final departure. The angels added a sense of finality too, at least for the time being. However they also offered an assurance: He will come again. That message of hope allowed the apostles to return to Jerusalem to do what Jesus had told them. They waited; they met with others including Mary and Jesus' brothers; they prayed. They were told to be witnesses of Jesus first in Jerusalem and then in Judea, Samaria and the end of the earth. They were able to fulfill that assignment when Pentecost came and the Holy Spirit was given to them.

Its Remembrance

Later references in the New Testament attest to the fact that the return to the Father became a vital part of the gospel message. In the selection of a replacement for Judas among the apostles, one of the requirements for candidates was that they be a part of the followers of Jesus "beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us" (Acts 1:22). One of the most dramatic remembrances of this event occurs in Acts 7:55-56 when

Stephen is stoned and he "gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."

Later writers, such as Paul, Peter and the author of Hebrews, make reference to this event in such a way to let us know that the ascension was a vital part of the teachings of the early church. In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul cites what some have thought might have been an early hymn. He enumerates great moments in the life of Jesus: "manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory." The story of Jesus is incomplete without that grand conclusion to His earthly existence.

The writer of Hebrews asserts, "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24). Peter says that Jesus "has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him" (1 Peter 3:22).

The story of Jesus' earthly ministry must include the vividness of the ascension, for it attests to His heavenly presence and to His intercessory mission.

Its Influence

The angels told the 11 apostles witnessing the ascension that "this same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). They were affirming what Jesus had already told His apostles: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2b-3).

The return of Jesus to heaven was surely as miraculous as the events surrounding His birth — the angelic message and the star. But its greatest message was not that He went away. It was that He is coming again. We live with the factual reality that Jesus walked on earth, performed miracles, taught the saving gospel message, died, was raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven. But the fact that He will return stirs our hope and our anticipation.

Some of the first-century Christians, especially those at Thessalonica, must have been troubled about how and when the return would occur and what its impact would be for those already dead. Paul addressed that subject in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17. He told his readers that because he did not want them to be

ignorant about these matters he would explain what he could. The order Paul described was that "the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God" (v. 16). The dead in Christ will rise first, followed by the living Christians. All will "meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord" (v. 17). The definiteness of this report is most assuring, especially that last statement: "We shall always be with the Lord."

We can only speculate how the apostles dealt with this event when they returned to Jerusalem. Surely they talked a great deal about what they had witnessed. From the first time some of them had seen Jesus years before, they could not keep quiet about Him. Andrew went to find Peter to tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (John 1:41). While they waited in Jerusalem, they must have detailed over and over what they saw and what they heard. Ultimately, they put into practice what Jesus had taught them — they began to preach. The ascension must hold a meaningful place in our understanding of the Son of God. It must challenge us to live for Him here and to look forward to the time of His return.

Convenient Christianity

STAN MITCHELL

When Jeroboam built his idols in Dan and Bethel, he explained his new idea this way: "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28).

Jeroboam's religious philosophy appears to have been that our religion should not ask too much of us. I think of a conversation when one man said, "I want to go to a church that accepts me as I am." A woman listening chimed in, "And I want to go to a church that does not judge."

It's not hard to see what Jeroboam was attempting to do. He understood that as long as the Israelites continued to go down to Jerusalem to worship, they would see Solomon's temple, and the connection with the southern kingdom of Judah would remain. He feared that they would still feel some loyalty to David's dynasty. He therefore appealed to convenience — the trek all the way to Jerusalem was onerous, and Jeroboam offered two shrines conveniently located, one at the far north of Israel (Dan) and the other in the south (Bethel).

Is Christianity Intended to Be Convenient!

Of course the saying "convenient Christianity" is an oxymoron. Is Christianity intended to be convenient? In Scripture Christianity is described as spiritual warfare and its adherents as soldiers who need to take on the "full armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13).

Elsewhere Christianity is described as a race, where the athletes prepare rigorously and run with perseverance. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1). Once you become a child of God, Satan will do what he can to throw you off track. Persecution and opposition, criticism and discouragement will come your way. God, too, will provide hardships that will help you mature and reevaluate your priorities. Biblical terms such as "repentance," "obedience," "growth" and "discipleship" do not sound to me as if the Christian life is one of convenience.

How Little Can I Get Away With and Still Be Saved!

The "how little can I get away with" mentality is unfortunately fostered with the complicity of leadership in many churches. Rather like the days of Jeremiah, our modern prophets "prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and the people love it this way" (Jeremiah 5:31). Ezekiel had a similar complaint: "Her priests do violence to my law and profane my holy things; they do not distinguish between the holy and the common; they teach that there is no difference between the unclean and the clean; and they shut their eyes to the keeping of my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them" (Ezekiel 22:26).

In contrast, the apostle Paul was not an accessory to the crime of encouraging convenient Christianity. He described his brand of preaching as one where he had "not hesitated to proclaim ... the whole will of God" (Acts 20:27).

Why would a gospel preacher hesitate to preach the whole will of God? It might come from a failure to study. How could he teach the whole will of God if he did not know it himself? Or it might stem from a fear of ridicule or disapproval if he touches on certain subjects. On the other end of the scale, a desire for approval and praise might make him speak on subjects that affirm and make people feel good but not subjects that challenge, exhort or especially rebuke.

Telltale Signs

Beware of a preacher and a church that do not stand for anything. Paul told Timothy to preach "in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:1-3). The great preacher Marshall Keeble used to say, "That means you preach when they want to hear it, and when they don't want to hear it." Truly, those who stand for nothing will fall for everything. You don't want a preacher who is codependent, who gives his listeners permission to do things that God forbids or who releases them from God's commands. No man has the right to do that.

Christ calls us to commitment, not convenience. "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure in Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come!" (Amos 6:1).

"I don't feel comfortable with a church that calls us to repent, or to be committed," one person says. Someone astutely referred to this attitude as "Burger King Christianity"—have it your way. But it's not about what makes us feel comfortable. It's about what pleases God.

Is your congregation a self-serving church or a Savior-serving church? Isaiah knew such churches: "Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me'" (Isaiah 47:8).

"I am, and there is none besides me"? Is this a child of God speaking? One who is charged with serving the Lord, upholding the church and serving others?

When we build our church buildings, we may as well have a roof to keep the rain and snow off. It probably should be clean and neat, and a little technology is nice — air conditioning, electricity and so on, but there is a point where we pass good taste and become ostentatious and proud of our building rather than our Lord. I personally know of instances where missionaries have lost their support in favor of a parking lot or a building addition. Beloved, this should never happen.

I am all for helping our young people grow and learn. I understand that a youth minister is an excellent tool (but not essential—how did we who are older manage to have faith?). I think teens should study and serve and have fun together—in that order. But I know churches that become so self-indulgent, so committed to fun and games, trips to the mountains and trips to Disneyland, that they forget what the Lord wants them to be doing.

Beware of a Christianity that does not interrupt the flow of everyday life. Jesus spoke of some who heard the Lord's invitation but "paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business" (Matthew 22:5). The people of Amos' day apparently did make it to church, but they longed for church to be over so they could return to the "real" business of life: "Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?'" (Amos 8:4-5a).

It is a real pity when religion interferes with everyday life! "Preacher," someone explains, "don't you understand that there are two parts to life, the religious and the making money?"

Inconvenient Christianity

Come with me to worship service in Zimbabwe. It could be anywhere. It is desperately hot and this year the country was hit by a devastating drought. The children are hungry. Many haven't had a meal in two days. Everyone walks to church, some as far as 15 miles. The lucky church members have an extra change of clothes to wear just for Sunday. Children pad in bare feet along the highway, its tarmac blistering hot.

The church meets outside a school building, under the questionable shade of a baobab tree (which for 10 months a year is bare). The heat rises to well over 100 degrees. The people sit on rocks and sing from memory. Only the song leader has a hymn book, tattered and dog-eared. Often he sings a phrase, and the members repeat it in responsive fashion. Only three Bibles are found in this crowd of close to 100 people. They sit in the heat, listening to a sermon that will last up to an hour after the man at the Lord's Supper has already spoken for 45 minutes.

After services, the people gather around a fire and a blackened cast iron pot. They are cooking *sadza*, a corn-meal mush, and will add *covo*, a green, spinach-like relish to help the taste. Several weeks ago someone actually brought a scrawny chicken to supplement the meal. Children watch as the elderly eat first. If there is anything left in the plates, they will clean the plates themselves (and I don't mean with dish detergent). A fellowship meal? Not exactly. For many, this is the only meal they will eat for another two days.

How convenient is your Christianity?

