

Monthly

May, 2012

Price: Rs. 2/-

# THE BIBLE TEACHER





## OUR PLEA LET THE TRUTH PREVAIL

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

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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**Vol. 43**

**May 2012**

**No. 1**

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## *EDITORIAL*

### **What Does the Bible Teach?**

#### ***There Is Only One Gospel of Salvation***

In the whole world there is only one Taj Mahal. People from all over the world come to India to see Taj Mahal. How would you react if someone told you that he has been to Japan where he had gone to see Taj Mahal?

The apostle Paul had the same reaction concerning the Gospel, when he wrote to people in Galatia, he said, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is not another, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than that we have preached to you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:6-8).

Paul's marveling was real and genuine, because there is only one gospel of Jesus Christ; there is only one way to be saved. But, there, the Galatians were turning to a "different gospel." Jesus Christ, the author of the gospel, in the beginning, had sent his disciples into all the world to preach the gospel—not **gospels**, (**plural**) as some erroneously refer to the first four books of the New Testament, saying, "the Gospels" (**Plural**). The first four books of the New Testament, namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John contain the message of the gospel of Christ, in which are four accounts of the same one gospel—but there is only one gospel, not four gospels.

The gospel of Christ consists of three important ingredients which are: 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 15:1-4). By the preaching, and believing and obeying of this gospel the people at Corinth were saved from their sins.

The gospel of Christ, and not musical concerts or so called healing services, is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes. (Romans 1:16). Also, nowhere in the Bible do we read, where people were told to pray the "sinners' prayer" or to "accept the Lord Jesus as their personal Saviour to be saved from sins." Everywhere, in every instance, according to the teaching of the Bible, when people had believed in Christ, upon hearing of His gospel, they were baptized to be saved, after they had repented or changed their hearts.( read Acts 2:37, 38; Acts 8:12, 35-39; 16:31-33; 22:16).

Only by obedience to the gospel one becomes a Christian, not by physical birth, or by faith alone, but by the spiritual birth, of water and the Spirit. (John 3:5). Let me illustrate the point: There may be those who are called Indians in America, but the "native American Indians" are actually not real Indians, because they do not belong to the country of India by birth. They are not native or inhabitants of the subcontinent of India. By just calling ourselves something does not make it true. Many in the world call themselves "Christian" or some type of Christian, even though they have never obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ, which makes people Christian.

Christ, according to His promise, as we read in Matthew 16: 18, built His church, which is the body of the saved group of people. Those who are saved by His gospel, He adds them to His church (Acts 2:47). All members of the church of Christ are called Christians (Acts 11:26; 1Peter 4:16). All Christians therefore are in the church that belongs to Christ. This also means that there are no Christians outside of the Christ's Church, because Christ never fails to add to His church or His spiritual family those who are born into it. (John 3:3-5).

### **New Testament Worship**

## *Lesson Ten* **SINGING**

**J.C. CHOATE**

The Christian religion is a singing religion. Singing is another

one of the acts of worship recorded in the New Testament. In this brief study, we want to take a close look at this very important part of worship.

First of all, we want to notice the various verses of scripture that deal with this subject:

1. "And when they had sung an hymn: they went out into the mount of Olives." (Matthew 26:30).
2. "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." (Acts 16:25).
3. "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written. For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." (Romans 15:9).
4. "... I will sing with the Spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." (1 Corinthians 14: 15).
5. "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." (Ephesians 5: 19).
6. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." (Colossians 3: 16).
7. "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." (Hebrews 2: 12).
8. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." (James 5: 13).
9. "And they sung a new song ..." (Revelation 5: 9).
10. "And they sung as it were a new song before the throne ..." (Revelation 14: 3).
11. "And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb..." (Revelation 15:3).

Now in all of the pages of the New Testament, these are the only verses that deal with the subject of singing. It would appear then that it is quite clear as to what the Lord wants in this respect. Anything more or less would not be in keeping with his word.

To most religious people singing suggests music and music suggests mechanical music. Therefore, the majority of the religious groups have mechanical music to accompany their singing. But while all can agree that the New Testament teaches that we should have singing in our worship services, all cannot agree that mechanical music should also be included. But what does the Bible say? Does it teach singing only or that mechanical music is also

to be used in worship? Is it possible to worship without mechanical music? Is it possible to worship with it? Is it possible to do either? Let us see.

We will notice first of all that there are two kinds of music known to man: vocal and mechanical. Vocal music is produced by the vocal cords of a human being. It therefore comes from within the individual. It is alive. It comes from God's own creation. Therefore it has been said that the most beautiful music in all the world comes from the blending of the sounds that comes from human voices. Mechanical music is just the opposite. It is mechanical. The instrument has been made by man. It is cold, lifeless, spiritless, and heartless. And the only reason that it makes sounds is because someone beats on it, plucks its strings, or blows into it, depending on the type of instrument it is. God did not make it as such, but rather it is an invention of man. It is a substitute. Now which would God prefer? The Hebrew writer says, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." (Hebrews 13: 15).

Well known religious leaders through the years have not advocated mechanical music in worship, but singing as the Bible teaches. Let us observe some of their statements:

1. John Wesley: "I have no objection to instruments of music, in our chapels, provided they are neither heard or seen." Clark's Commentary, Vol. IV, p. 686.
2. John Calvin: "Musical instrument in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papist, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews." John Calvin's Commentary, Thirty-third Psalm.
3. Martin Luther: He called it "the organ an ensign of Baal." McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia, Music, Vol. VI, p. 762.
4. Adam Clarke: "Music as a science, I esteem and admire: but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity." Clark's Commentary, Vol. IV, p. 686.

There are many other Bible scholars who have likewise spoken out against mechanical instruments of music in worship. But where did it all begin? With the Catholic Church, and inasmuch as the denominations have come out of the Catholic Church then the

majority have brought their mechanical music with them.

Many of the denominational people try to justify mechanical music as follows:

1. They say that David used it. That may be true but we must remember that David lived under one law and we live under another. We cannot do what David did just because he did it. If so we will have to go back to Jerusalem once a year to offer animal sacrifices, etc. Remember those that go back to David for mechanical music only return to him for that, and perhaps a few other things, but they don't want all that David had. But read John 1:17; 2 Corinthians 3; Hebrews 10:9, etc.
2. They say that it doesn't say not to have them. But it doesn't say not to have a lot of things in worship. It does say though what to have, and it does say to sing. (Ephesians 5: 19). That eliminates the other.
3. They say that there is nothing wrong with it. There may not be anything wrong with having mechanical music in the home, in weddings, for entertainment, etc., but for worship it is different. It would be wrong to add it to the worship when the Lord did not command it. (Revelation 22: 18, 19).
4. They say that it aids our worship. Then why didn't the Lord command it? But I suggest to you that it is not an aid but it actually becomes a part of the worship when used. This is not in keeping with the scriptures.
5. They say that there will be music in heaven. The scriptures do not teach mechanical music in heaven. Even if it did, that wouldn't justify using it. There will be many things in heaven we cannot have in worship now.
6. They say that they like it. Well, I like cake and soft drink, but does that mean that I can have it in worship? The question is not, do we like it, but does the Lord want it?

So when we gather on the Lord's day for worship we are to praise the Lord through our singing. This is to be done in spirit and in truth. Therefore, we must sing with understanding and in all sincerity. We are also to sing according to the scriptures, and that means praising the Lord through vocal music. Not only so, but the songs themselves are to be scriptural and spiritual in content.

The Bible teaches congregational singing. That is, we are all to blend our voices in the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Through these songs we praise God, teach one another, and edify and encourage one another to be faithful to the Lord.

How wonderful it is to sing such songs, unfettered by the noises and disturbances of mechanical instruments, but with reverence, peace, and serenity of our souls to lift our voices in common praise to the God of heaven. What could be more fitting? What could be more inspirational? This is what God wants.

## *FREE FROM THE BLOOD*

T. PIERCE BROWN

In Acts 20:26,27, Paul says, as recorded in the King James Version; *"I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."* In the Bible belt I have heard it read like this, "I have not shunned to declare unto **y'all** the counsel of God." He is not saying, "I have not shunned to declare to **all of you** the counsel of God," But *"I have not shunned to declare to you **the whole counsel** of God."*

Note carefully that the reason Paul gives for being pure from the blood of all men was that he had purposed to declare the whole counsel of God. He did not look at his audience, and seeing some elders' wives who were gossips, decided that it would not be politically wise to talk about gossiping and tale bearing. He did not find some influential members who were covetous and stingy and tone down his language on the necessity of being willing to sacrifice for Christ. He did not discover that one of his best friends among the deacons was getting a divorce to marry his secretary, and decide to give a "Pauline exception" to the words of Christ in Matthew 19:9, *"And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and he that marrieth her that is put away committeth adultery."*

The awareness of the advisability of preaching the whole counsel of God made me determine at the start of my preaching career to preach primarily expository sermons and cover the whole New Testament in a systematic fashion. In every place where I have been located as a preacher, I have made an effort to preach topical sermons on whatever subject needed attention at that time, but at least one time each week to teach an expository lesson, starting with Matthew and going through Revelation, emphasizing whatever lessons I found in the chapter. Of course this does not guarantee that I preached the whole counsel of God, but it at least



made the doing of it more probable. I know this: **I would be ashamed to be afraid, and afraid to be ashamed, to teach what God teaches on any subject, regardless of who was in the audience.**

When I was just a young man, my father who smoked was in the audience. My custom was in meetings to have a question box so the audience could ask whatever Bible questions they had, which I would try to answer during the sermon. One asked, "Do you think a person will go to hell for smoking?"

My answer then was about the same as it is now, "I hope not, although I think smoking tobacco is contrary to the will of God, and would be sinful for me. Since God does not specifically mention it, it is possible that one who did not understand its harmful nature could do it and God would forgive a sin done in ignorance that the person would not do if he understood it to be against God's will. However, I see no hope offered in the Bible for a person who says, 'I know it is bad for me, and God does not want me to do it, but I am going to do it anyway.'"

My point here is that I had no right to soften God's word just because my father was in the audience. It may be worth mentioning, however, that those of us who preach *hard and sometimes vicious sermons* should consider *how* we would teach the *same truths* if our mother, father, son or daughter were in the audience, guilty of the things we condemn. We should make sure we preach the truth *in love* so that **we may, in fact, be pure from the blood of all men.**

## *THERE IS ONE BAPTISM*

DAVID THURMAN

In my opinion, there is no religious topic with more differences of opinion than the rite of Christian baptism. Some churches practice a "baptism" that is sprinkling a little water on a newborn baby. Others pour water on the heads of those they say they are baptizing. Some practice immersion, but only after they say the individual is already saved. Some practice immersion for salvation.

Still others have what they call a "dry baptism," that is, a baptism of the Holy Spirit that has no water involved at all. So, what does the Bible say about baptism? *"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). Whatever you might think about baptism, when Paul writes to the church at Ephesus, he says there is one baptism. As the apostle is trying to stress the unity we are to have, he stresses that our unity comes from the fact there is one baptism. So, we begin by looking at what Jesus said about baptism.

### **FAITH AND BAPTISM SAVES YOU**

This might surprise some people. Most people don't realize what Jesus actually said about baptism. *"And He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned'"* (Mark 16:15-16). The Lord says it simply and plainly. The individual who believes and is baptized will be saved. Far too many think salvation is merely the result of faith. All you have to do, we are told, is to put your faith in Jesus to be saved. But, Jesus said it differently. As He sends the apostles out into the world to spread the good news, He tells them what to teach and what to do. When people put their faith in Jesus, they should be baptized to be saved.

This also tells us a little bit about who is to be baptized. Infants, babies and underage children can't have faith in Jesus. They are not of an age to put their faith in anyone. So, baptism is for people who already have faith and want to be saved.

### **NO FAITH AND YOU ARE LOST**

Jesus makes His doctrine simple for us to grasp. People who come to faith will be baptized to be saved. People who reject faith will be lost. They will not do any of the things Jesus commands (including baptism) because they have already rejected Him. Lack of faith will bring condemnation. The presence of genuine faith will bring baptism and salvation. What do the apostles say about baptism?

### **WE DIE TO SIN**

*"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also*

*be in the likeness of His resurrection"* (Rom. 6:3-5). The apostle Paul is reminding the Roman Christians of what happened when they were baptized. Paul knows that all people needed to be baptized to be saved, Jesus said so. Now he reminds them what baptism does.

When we are baptized, we die to sin and are buried. Is it important to die to sin? Only if you want to know God and salvation. When do we die to sin? According to Paul, we die to sin in baptism.

### **WE JOIN JESUS**

In baptism we not only die to sin, but we are buried with Christ in baptism. We join Jesus in death. We take advantage of His blood, shed for us. Just as it was important for Jesus to die, so it is important that we join Him in death. We do that when we are baptized. If someone tells you baptism is optional or just a symbol of what has already taken place in your heart, compare that with what Paul says. He says we join Jesus when we are baptized.

### **WE START A NEW LIFE**

When we come up out of the water of baptism we start a new life. Is it important to you to be forgiven and start over? Is it important not only that you die to sin, but that you start a new life with new values and standards? Then you need to be baptized. And, notice that baptism is a burial. It is not a sprinkling. I have attended and conducted many funerals. I have never seen anyone buried by having dirt sprinkled on them. They are always immersed in the soil. So baptism is a burial. But, what happens if you were "baptized" as an infant? What if you have not done this the way the Bible teaches?

### **SOME HAVE HAD THE WRONG BAPTISM**

*"It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' And they said to him, 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.' And he said, 'Into what then were you baptized?' And they said, 'Into John's baptism.' Paul said, 'John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus.' When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:1-5).* It should not surprise us today that some people have experienced the wrong baptism. It happened in the first century too.

So, if you were baptized in the wrong way or for the wrong reasons, don't give up. These men did that as well, and God found a way to get the truth to them. If you will just forget the "baptism" you had and obey what Jesus and Paul command, you can get it all straight.

### **SOME NEED TEACHING ON BAPTISM**

What I like about this event is how calm Paul is with these men. They claim to be followers of Jesus, but have little understanding of Jesus. They know nothing of the Holy Spirit and in fact, have had the wrong baptism. But, Paul doesn't rant and rave. He doesn't condemn them. He gently teaches them about the role that John played in the ministry of Jesus. He tells them that the baptism they had was inadequate. And he tells them what they need to do.

This is an important lesson for those of us in the kingdom. We should not be alarmed when we come across those who say they follow Jesus but have the wrong baptism. Our task with them is to do what I am attempting in this article. Our job is to teach them some more concerning Jesus. Instead of ranting and raving and condemning others, we should simply teach them the truth.

### **SOME WILL DO IT RIGHT**

I love how these men react. They don't argue. They don't complain that their mom or dad didn't do it that way. They didn't raise objections and call Paul names. They simply did what he said and were baptized in the right name for the right reason. If you are wondering what you should do if you were sprinkled or poured on, do what these men did. Don't argue, don't fuss, just obey the Lord and you will be right with Him. So, what does this process of baptism look like in practical terms? Lets look at the baptism of Saul himself for our answer.

### **BE WHAT GOD PLANNED FOR YOU TO BE**

Paul is telling the story of his conversion many year later. Notice what he said happened. *"And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name'"* (Acts 22:14-16). The first thing Ananias tells Saul is that God has great plans for his life. Whatever sins he has

committed, whatever mistakes, whatever missteps, he can start over and become all that God planned for him to be.

This was not just true with Saul. It is true with you and me. God never intended for us to spend our lives in sin and waste. He wants to redeem us and make us everything He always planned for us to be. God has a plan for your life just as He did for Saul's.

### **BE BAPTIZED**

Consider some of the details of this story. Saul had seen Jesus three days earlier. He was blinded. In those three days he had come to faith in Christ, probably immediately. He must have spent time in repentance, regretting all the evil he had brought on the church. But, when Ananias comes to Saul, three days later, he is still in his sin. That is why Ananias commands that Saul be immersed. If baptism was not important, then why mention it here? If you can be saved without it, why was Saul still in his sin three days after coming to know Jesus?

You see, you need to do what Saul did and what all first century believers did. You need to be baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38). And, when you do, you will die to your sin as Saul did on this occasion.

### **BE CLEAN**

Ananias promises Saul just what he must have wanted to hear. He can have his sins washed away. This is not done in some prayer of faith, inviting Jesus into your heart. It is done by surrendering to the Lord in baptism. If you have bathed after a hot, sweaty chore, then you know how good it feels to be clean. Do you want to be clean before the Lord? Do you want that newness of life Paul himself taught? Then *you* need to do what he did, what the men in Ephesus did and what all Christians have done. Put your faith in Christ, turn from your former life and be baptized into the name of Jesus Christ. Come to Him today!

## ***Do You Want Heaven The Easy Way?***

**JERRY BATES**

Do you want Heaven the easy way? Most of us would readily answer "YES" to that question. We do want to reach Heaven one day, and we do not want to sacrifice much for it either. It is like the



story of a brash, energetic young man eager to reach the top in the business world. He went to a well-known millionaire businessman and asked him the first reason for his success. Without hesitation the businessman answered, "Hard work." After a lengthy pause the young man asked, "What is the second reason?"

Satan tried to lure Jesus with success the easy way. In Matthew 4, we read of the three temptations of Jesus. Those three temptations might be summarized by saying that Satan was offering Jesus instant success, instant glamour, and instant gratification at no cost. Jesus would not have to go to the cross to receive the praise and honor of men.

The disciples were also looking for the easy way. In Matthew 16:13, Jesus asked His disciples, *"Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?"* Peter enthusiastically answered in verse 16, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Then Jesus changed the subject. In verse 21, we find that He began to tell His disciples that He must suffer many things and eventually be killed. Peter did not like that at all. He took Jesus to the side and rebuked Him. Imagine that! After boldly confessing that Jesus was the Son of God (which also meant that Jesus was Deity), Peter now thinks he can give God advice. He said, *"Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"* Jesus responded with some of the harshest words that we find Him ever speaking. *"Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to me, for you are not mindful of things of God, but the things of men."*

Jesus made it clear that the path to Heaven is not easy. Yes, Jesus paved the way; however, He never said that following that way would be easy. In fact, He plainly declared that the opposite is true. He promised His apostles that the world would hate them (John 15:18-20). He assures us that as His followers we must expect to encounter opposition, just as the world has always opposed God's prophets. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, *"If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."* Self-denial is not easy, and certainly taking up one's cross is not easy.

Yet, many churches are trying to give you Heaven the easy way. A friend of mine, David French, who is now a missionary in Zambia, asked me one day several months ago, "Is the church a cruise ship or is it a battleship?" Obviously, there is a big difference between the two. A cruise ship is designed for the pleasure of its passengers. It offers them beautiful surroundings, never-ending

food and entertainment options, and makes few demands upon its customers. The passenger is certainly never required to sacrifice. The battleship is quite different. The battleship is made of hard, steel armor. The comfort and enjoyment of its crew are not high on the list of priorities. Sacrifice is often required and expected if its mission of destroying the enemy is to be achieved.

Many churches are trying to be like a cruise ship. They offer beautiful buildings filled with all the comforts one could ever want. Little sacrifice and commitment are required. The worship services are designed to make you feel good about yourself, your life, and your relationship with God. The sermons are always very positive, with little or no mention of sin and self-denial. Condemnation of anyone's lifestyle or beliefs will certainly never be found. Love is the operative word.

We are in a spiritual battle with spiritual foes of darkness. We know that nations will never win a physical war with a navy composed of cruise ships, and the same is true spiritually. We will never be able to win our spiritual warfare in a cruise ship church. After suffering much in his life, Paul assured the young man Timothy, *"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ"* (2 Timothy 2:3). As much as we would like to believe it, there is no easy way to Heaven. We must be willing to suffer and sacrifice just as Christ has sacrificed even more for us. It may not be easy, but it will certainly be worth the effort. Paul by inspiration assures us of that fact (1 Corinthians 2:9; Romans 8:18). Do you believe it?

## *Separated From God!*

LOY MITCHELL

*"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear"* (Isaiah 59:1,2).

The children of Israel had returned from exile, but they were experiencing affliction and calamity. What was the problem? Why were they being given no help?

**1. The Problem Was Not an Impotent God.**—Yes, some indicated that God was the problem. Has the Lord's hand become so short that it can no longer save us? Has God become deaf?

Can He no longer hear us? Where has God gone? Why is He so far away? Perhaps a good question to ask is this: If God seems far away, who moved?

**2. The Problem Was Sin.**—Israel had allowed iniquity to enter. They were living lawless lives. They were breaking God's commands. Their hands were filled with blood (verse 3). They were conceiving evil and bringing forth iniquity. Thus God could have no fellowship with such people. God had hidden His face from them. This was His way to show His disapproval. His arm could have saved them. He could have heard their cries, but **sin** had made a separation.

**3. Sin Remains the Problem Today.**—What are the sins we see today which separate men from God? The same ones that kept Israel from receiving blessings from God. Paul calls these sins "works of the flesh". *"The works of the flesh are well known, which are fornication, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, hostilities, strife, jealousy, wraths, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, envies, instances of drunkenness, revelries, and such like; of which things I tell you beforehand, even as I told you previously, that those who practice such things shall not inherit God's kingdom"* (Galatians 5:19-21).

Dear reader, look into your own life. Are you separated from God? You are if sin is in your life. I beg you to repent! Turn from sin today. If you have never obeyed the Gospel, then believe in Jesus Christ, leave every sin, confess His name before men, and be baptized into Christ. Only Christ can reconcile you to God (Colossians 1:22).

If you have become a Christian, but have fallen back into sin, repent. Confess your wrong doings and pray to God (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:8-10). He can and will forgive those who obey Him.

## ATTITUDE

DEMAR ELAM

Attitude is a vital factor that controls how we serve the Master. Many people need attitude adjustments. If attitudes were fine-tuned, the work of the Lord would be increased, and the joy of Christian living would come to the forefront.

Attitudes determine levels of service for Christ. What is your

attitude toward Him, toward the church, toward fellow Christians, toward the lost, and toward life in general?

All too often, the attitudes of individuals rock back and forth between positive, negative, and rotten. When people view life from such perspectives, precious little brings happiness, people rob themselves of the abundant life in Christ (John 10:10).

Concerning attitudes, Charles R. Woods has said, "The important and decisive factor in life is not what happens to us, but *the attitude we take toward what happens*. The surest revelation of one's character is the way one bears suffering.

Circumstances and situations may color life, but by the grace of God, we have been given the power to choose what color that shall be. The effect that misfortune, handicap, sickness, and sorrow have upon life is determined by the way in which we meet them."

Life can, and often does, throw us a curve. The way we handle these surprises molds and shapes us into the people we are. I like what Willa Cather said about trees: "I like trees because they seem more resigned to the way they have to live than other things do." Paul thought similarly when he said, "*Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*" (Philippians 4:11,12).

Surely Christians ought to possess upbeat, victorious attitudes! Again, Paul said, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*" (Philippians 4:13).

When attitudes are being tested and tried under the stresses and strains of the many pressures of life, when it seems we've lost the battle and defeat looms before us, remember the words of Michel de Montaigne, "There are some defeats more triumphant than victories."

The Lord said to Paul, "*...My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

## SEASONED WITH SALT

MICHAEL E. BROOKS

*"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt,*

*that you may know how you ought to answer each one"* (Colossians 4:6).

Languages are difficult and frustrating to me. I don't learn other languages easily, and since I travel and work in a number of different countries, I find that I am often where I don't speak the language. I am dependant upon translators, "non-verbal communication", the other person's limited knowledge of English, or the few words or phrases I may have picked up. Communication is difficult at best. I have often wished for the Apostles' gift of speaking in tongues (Acts 2:1-13), but that was for another age, and I must struggle as best I can.

More important, however, than knowing how to speak the language of another people is the ability to *speak with grace*. Part of the skill of "*walk(ing) in wisdom toward those who are outside*" (Colossians 4:5), learning to speak with grace, is specifically enjoined to Christians that we might properly represent Christ and His Gospel to an unbelieving world. It is not so much knowing *what to say* as it is having *the ability to say it so that it will be received well*.

Grace is often defined as "unmerited favor", meaning God's treatment of sinful mankind, not giving us what we deserve, but what we need.

There is another way the word is used, however. That is as a quality or characteristic of *loveliness* and *charm*. We describe a good hostess as "gracious" or we say of someone, "She has a graceful walk." It is in this latter sense that Paul calls for graceful speech. Our words, and our manner while speaking them, should have a loveliness about them. They should attract others positively, and lead to a welcome reception.

So often we do just the opposite when we speak. We say things harshly, angrily, and thoughtlessly. We threaten, warn, and antagonize. Others are repelled, not attracted, by what they hear from our lips. When we speak unkindly, it scarcely matters whether what we say is true. Even if it is, it will still cause others to turn away from us rather than draw them nearer. How much better to speak kindly, considerately, with beauty in both tone and content of our message.

Along with grace, our speech is to be "seasoned with salt." This is an interesting phrase in this connection. Though there are a number of ways it might be understood, I believe one implication is that there should be substance to our speech. In Ephesians 5:4



Paul forbids the use of "foolish talking" and "coarse jesting" as "not fitting" for Christians. We are to take life seriously and to be concerned with those things that are of eternal significance. As we speak with non-believers, our spirituality should be manifest. God should be glorified and his Kingdom exalted. Salt is a preserver and a seasoning. Its presence in food makes the food taste better, provides certain necessary nutrition, and helps preserve the food against contamination. Our speech should have within it that provides protection from corruption, gives flavor to life, and meets the needs of the spirit.

Foreign language is a challenge. However if I can speak of God's love in Christ Jesus, and if I can encourage faithful obedience to His will, I can communicate the eternal message of salvation. Nothing is more important than that.

## *DO YOU LOVE JESUS?*

**WAYNE BARRIER**

Hundreds of millions of people from across the world believe that Jesus is the Son of God. These people also will answer quickly that they love Jesus, if asked the question as Jesus asked Peter in John 21:15-17. It would seem to be the only reasonable feeling toward Jesus. He loves us and died on the cross to provide a way for us to be forgiven of our sins, making us acceptable for entrance into His heavenly kingdom. Notice how the question is asked in John 21:15-17, "... *'Jesus said to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?' He said to Him, 'yes, Lord, you know that I love you.'* He said to him, *'Feed my lambs.'* He said to him again a second time, *'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?'* He said to Him, *'Yes Lord; you know that I love you.'* He said to him, *'Tend my sheep.'* He said to him the third time, *'Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?'* Peter was grieved because he said to him a third time, *'Do you love Me?'* And he said to Him, *'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'* Jesus said to him, *'Feed my sheep.'*"

Today, Christians should be asking themselves the same question. Jesus loves us and we should love Him. Do you love Jesus? Jesus says in John 14:15, *"If you love me, keep my commandments."* We love Jesus if we know His will and His

commandments and obey them. Jesus specifies the way we should live, worship, and serve in His kingdom. Do we obey his teaching in all these areas?

We love Jesus if we love one another. Notice what Jesus says in John 15:12-14, *"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you."*

We love Jesus if we walk as he walked, and walk with Him. Consider Ephesians 5:1-2; *"Therefore be imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma."*

Love for Jesus is expressed as we love our wife or husband, children or parents. Those who love Jesus love His word, His kingdom, and the souls of all men. Following Jesus in love involves work, worship, helping to teach and save others, and even love for our enemies.

Jesus says one cannot divide his loyalty and love (Matthew 6:24), between God and the treasure and physical things of this world.

Do you love Jesus?

## ***A More Excellent Sacrifice***

**J. ROBERT SWAIN**

### **HEBREWS 11:4 AND GENESIS 4:3-4**

The story of Cain and Abel found in Genesis 4:3,4 is intriguing for many reasons. It is the account of the first murder — the killing of one quarter of the population by another quarter of the population, no less. It is a story of brother killing brother. It is also the first written account of man worshipping God.

We are not given insight into the instruction that God gave His first worshippers. Both brothers evidently knew what would be acceptable to God. Although Genesis does not mention that God desired a blood sacrifice, through His acceptance of Abel's gift and His rejection of Cain's we can assume that they knew what sacrifice to offer. The sacrifices recorded during the Patriarchal Age were animal sacrifices, but under the Mosaical Age both blood

and grain sacrifices were commanded by God. I believe that these two brothers had direction from God to offer an animal sacrifice. Otherwise, it would be hard to condemn Cain for something that he did not know to do. Abel chose to follow those directions and Cain did not.

God has always viewed worship of Himself as important and to be taken seriously. In Leviticus 10:1-7, priests used a "strange fire" that God had not authorized for sacrifice on His altar. This resulted in dire consequences for the priests who assumed that God would not mind. We are commanded to worship God *"in spirit and in truth."* We should not assume that God will accept our sacrifice of worship if it is done properly but in the wrong spirit, or if it is done in the right spirit but not done according to direction through His holy word.

Many times I have wondered why Cain made the sacrifice that he did. It has been suggested to me that perhaps Cain did not give his best. Scripture does not tell us that. Hebrews 11:4 states that *"Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice"* (NKJV). It does not say that one was good and the other was not. It implies that both were good but only one was acceptable.

I do know that Cain's response of anger and revenge was not acceptable to God. Perhaps this selfish attitude was the root of the entire problem. He could have responded differently to God's disappointment with his sacrifice. He might have shown sorrow and repentance, learned from his mistake and corrected the problem. Instead, he resented God's rejection of his efforts and then lashed out in jealousy at his brother who had obeyed God.

When we worship God today, we must make sure that it is done in the way that God directs ... in spirit and in truth. If our worship contains practices that were not a part of the first-century church's worship, as recorded in the scriptures, then we must correct our practices. *"In vain they do worship me, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men"* (Matthew 15:9). If we sit in the assembly and bow our heads to worship in submission, but our hearts and minds are not in submission, we must make a change.

When we search the scriptures and discover that we **do** need to make a change, let's make sure that we take God's correction and instruction with humility. Let's not compound the problem with a prideful or resentful attitude.

When we worship, we must make the effort to give God our

very best and not hold anything back. Only then will our sacrifice be acceptable to God and be considered a more excellent sacrifice!

## ***IF I Knew The Future***

GLENN COLLEY

As I study the Bible through the years, I am more and more amazed at the power and majesty of God. In fact, there are times when I re-read a passage and see it in a new light, and thereby find another "peak" of God's awesome greatness.

At one time or another we have all imagined what it would be like to know the future. When entertaining the thought for a moment, we think of benefits such as picking the stocks that will do well, knowing who will win political offices, and which cars of today will be classics tomorrow.

But that kind of thinking is quickly replaced by the fact that we would also know the actual length of our lives, the length of loved ones' lives, when terrible catastrophes would occur, etc., and then we sober up and decide that we do not want to know these things. We are clearly happier taking a day at a time. As Jesus said, *"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof"* (Matthew 6:34).

Now, consider that God does know the future.

In the opening scenes of the book of Joshua, we see exhortations to Israel's leader, Joshua, to lay before the people of God blessing and cursing. If they obey God, He will bless them richly. If they do not obey Him, He will abandon them and they will be destroyed by their enemies. Here's a sample: *"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest"* (Joshua 1:7)

This becomes really interesting when one considers that God, only a few weeks before, told Moses what the Israelites were going to do in the future.

*"And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have*

*made with them. Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods" (Deuteronomy 31:16-18).*

God clearly knew what the people would do, and yet He still kept urging their faithfulness.

Bear in mind that God does not *make* people sin and be lost eternally, He *allows* us that decision (2 Peter 3:9) and He *desires* that all will repent of sins. Yet He knows how this is going to turn out. We must assume that He has always known.

This is an example of God's magnitude that boggles our minds if we think on it too long, and the object of this article is not to do that. It is rather to observe something hidden back in Isaiah 55:9 that we would do well to remember always:

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8,9).*

What is too much for me is a natural course with God. Always live to serve Him better and more. There is none other like Him.

## **Lord, Change Our Hearts And Use Our Hands**

**RANDALL CASELMAN**

The question to Jesus was Who is my neighbor? He proceeded to tell of the Good Samaritan. No doubt His choice of heroes startled His Jewish audience.

Not only did Jesus' teaching startle His hearers, so did His behavior. Mark records three incidents in quick succession that must have startled both Jesus' disciples and His accusers. Jesus rid the demoniac of his demons in the cemetery and then commissioned him as a witness of what He had done for him. Next, Jesus was touched by, and healed, an unclean woman. Then, He took the hand of a dead girl and restored her life. These people



were all considered unclean, and Jesus' touching them would have made Him unclean also, but Jesus knew He was God's hands to serve others.

John records Jesus' outlandish behavior with two women. At Jacob's well in Sychar, Jesus strikes up a conversation with an immoral Samaritan outcast. His behavior resulted in many believing in Him. Everyone is familiar with the story of the woman taken in adultery. Instead of condemning her, Jesus forgave, commanding that she give up her life of sin.

You see, Jesus ministered to those possessed by the devil and sin, to the unclean, to the dead and dying, to those imprisoned by bigotry and sin. Jesus was God's hands, God's source of help and holiness. Jesus saw the suffering of others as potential reservoirs of God's mercy, so He extended mercy and grace. He became God's instrument of righteousness. Paul, speaking in Romans 6 to those who had experienced New Testament baptism and had been raised to walk a new life, says we, too, are to be such instruments of God, instruments of righteousness.

It took the early church some time to adjust to this new concept of becoming God's instrument in serving others. Seemingly, the Jerusalem church had to be jolted by severe persecution before it would take the Good News to Samaria. Phillip had to be approached by an angel to go preach to an Ethiopian in Gaza. Peter needed a rooftop vision before he would enter the house of Gentile Cornelius with the Gospel. It took a supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit for the church at Antioch to separate Barnabas and Saul for the first mission journey.

Perhaps the question is this: What must God do to get the message across to us? When will we become His hands, His feet? When will we become His instruments of righteousness, mercy, and grace? **Only, only when we allow Him to change our hearts.** Paul tells us in Philippians to let the heart, the mind, the attitude that was in Christ be in us. What kind of heart did Jesus have? One of humility and submission. Jesus had an attitude of servanthood. Jesus was willing to place our interests before His own interests. He was moldable clay in the hands of the potter, God. We must become like Him. The question is: Are we willing?

God's challenge to this writer and to you, the reader, is to become His instruments of righteousness, living sacrifices; to become His hands by having our minds transformed into the image

of His Son. When this happens, we, too, will be:

- Casting out Satan and evil by teaching and exemplifying the Word in our daily walk.
- We will be touching the unclean, the AIDS patient, and those in our society no one else is willing to serve and save.
- We will have a forgiving heart rather than just pointing our finger at the sins of others.

Who can read their Bibles without being aware that God placed us here to serve and glorify Him by serving and saving others? Let us begin today to be more Godlike in all we do, by having a heart filled with an unconditional love for people.

### **Consider these Scriptures**

- *"A new commandment I give you, love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another"* (John 13:34,35).
- *"Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet"* (John 13:14).
- *"If a man is trapped in some sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burden and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:1,2).
- *"As often as you did it unto the least of these my brothers, you did it to Me"* (Matthew 25:40).
- *"For if God so loved us then we ought to love one another"* (1 John 4:11).

Why not startle your world by conforming to the image of Jesus, by loving and serving others... all others!

## ***GOD'S PEOPLE, LOVED AND LOVING***

**RON BRYANT**

Most of us understand that our individual interests and our individually-perceived needs vary greatly, not only from age group to age group, but from person to person. Yet, we also recognize that there are a number of areas where we are essentially the same. We have come to the understanding that we each share in common the desires for acceptance, for respect, for understanding, and the need to both give and receive love. We understand that

we are happiest in an environment where these prevail.

I confess that the happiest moments of my life have been spent with my loved ones; my family and my friends. These times have been filled and ruled by a spirit of goodwill, of acceptance, of appreciation, and of affection. I cherish each of those moments. And, I believe that we all share in common the desire to know the embrace of relationships where love and acceptance are the response. In fact, I believe that we each need to readily admit that each of us needs such an environment.

The church, by God's design, is a family. It is His family on earth. In it we are privileged to be brothers and sisters. We are privileged to belong to God and to one another. We are privileged to know God as our Father, and by Him we are directed to "*let brotherly love continue*," to "*love one another*" (see Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22). These directives translate into the practical day-to-day character of our relationship in Christ. These directives are pointed, personal, and practical in their application, and in their benefits.

Yet, they are not just for our benefit. Jesus gave a new commandment, that "*we love one another*," even as He loved us, so that "*by this all men will know that you are my disciples*" (John 13:34,35). The healthiest congregations are made up of people who love the Lord and one another. In these relationships they are cheerful, accepting of and open to one another. They communicate acceptance, appreciation, and affection. They respect and have good will toward one another, and they seek ways to edify one another. In brief, they are a people, a family of believers, who love the Lord, love one another, and love those about them.

Great congregations are loyal to the Lord and to His will, and in all things they seek to hold fast to "sound doctrine." Yet, great congregations are more than doctrinally correct! They are a people that are committed to the language of genuine acceptance and affection. They live in an atmosphere of love—God's love working in them and through them. This is the character not only of their fellowship, but also of their ministry, and especially of their efforts to reach others with the Gospel of Christ. They are a people that have heard the call of God, have come to know His love, and they are seeking to live it.



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**Printed and Published by Sunny David for Church of Christ, B-350, Chitranjan Park, New Delhi and Printed at: Print India, A-38/2, Mayapuri Phase-I, New Delhi-110064. Editor: Sunny David (Cell: 09810896789, E-mail: sunny\_davidin@yahoo.co.in).**

Regd. No. 26921/71

Postal Regn. No.

DL(S)-17/3154/2009-2011

Licence to Post without Prepayment

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Posted at Lodi Road HO

Total No. of pages 24+cover

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