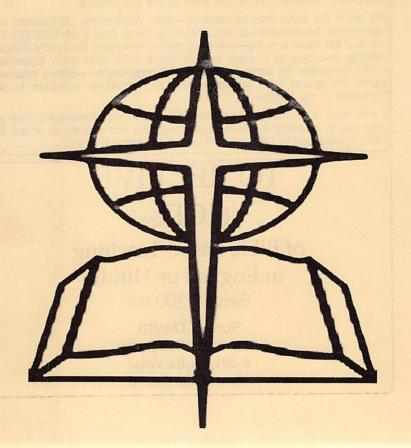
# THE BIBLE TEACHER



#### BACK TO BASICS

Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:118). His promise was fulfilled when His church came into existence on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Peter commanded the multitude assembled on that day: "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38). Those who gladly received his word were baptized (Acts 2:41), as a result three thousand were added to the church on that day by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47). That was the beginning of Christ's

Of what denomination did those three thousand become members? Our contention is that they joined no denomination. Indeed, denominationalism such as we know in today's world did not even exist then. They had simply obeyed the Gospel and were added by the Lord to His church. They wore no sectarian name, adopted no denominational creed, and belonged to no ecclesiastical hierarchy. They were simply children of God, members of the church, were called Christians (Acts 11:26).

church.

Churches of Christ today everywhere plead for a return to that same church with that same simplicity. We do not claim to be a denomination. Our goal is to be that church—nothing more, nothing less—just basic New Testament Christians as people were in the first century.

We teach the same plan of salvation—faith, repentance, confession, and baptism for the remission of sins. (Mark 16-15-16; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39). We practice the same worship—teaching, giving, observing the Lord's Supper, praying, and singing praises to God. (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; Ephesians 5:19). We follow the same congregational organization—elders, deacons, saints (Philippians 1:1), without offices and positions unknown to the Christians in the beginning.

If you want to be just what people were in the New Testament, then we urge you to investigate churches of Christ. We strive to speak where the Bible speaks and to remain silent where the Bible is silent.

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### THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

Vol. 43 March 2013 No. 11



#### What Does the Bible Teach?

### If Any Man Speaks, Let Him Speak As The Oracles Of God

Oracles is a word denoting that which is spoken. For one to speak as one who utters oracles of God means that he speaks as one who transmits that which God has revealed, with the realization of his great responsibility. He is not to speak his own ideas, nor is he to speak with levity or carelessness. At least three times in the Bible, at Deuteronomy 4:2, Proverbs 14:12 and Revelation 22:18,19, we are reminded not to add anything in God's word or take away anything from it or change the meaning of God's word, as He has given to man in His inspired book.

Sad to say, however, men everywhere in all ages has been making the same mistake by adding and taking away from God's word and by making changes in His revealed will. Both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, we read of many people who had made the same mistake, and therefore were punished by God. "These things," said the apostle Paul, at 1 Corinthians 10:11, "happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition..." We read about Nadab and Abihu, in Leviticus 10:1,2, who had offered a profane offering to God, which He had not commanded, and the Bible says, "Fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." Then we read about Saul, whom God had made king over His people Israel. God had commanded Saul to got to Amalek and to utterly destroy all that was there, sparing nothing. But we read Saul did not do all that

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God had told him to do. Instead, Saul brought some things from Amalek to offer to God. Samuel, the prophet through whom God was dealing with Saul, had told Saul: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from being king." (1 Samuel 15:22, 23).

According to God's plan of salvation for man, God requires every individual to believe in His Son Christ, who had died for man's sins, and repent of all wrongs, and then be baptized (immersed in water, in the name of, or by the authority of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit), for the forgiveness of sins, as we read in the Bible in following passages: Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Peter 3:21.

When an individual obeys these commands of God as given in the Bible, Christ saves that person from sin and adds that person to His church, which is His spiritual body of the saved ones. (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 1:22, 23).

But men through centuries have changed God's simple and original plan of man's salvation, as they have changed many other simple truths of God. Some began to teach that salvation from sin can be obtained by faith alone, that is, by only believing in Christ. Others taught man is saved by the grace of Gcd alone and man has nothing to do to be saved from his sins. Since most people did not possess a copy of the Bible during that time, they were led to believe such man-made teachings, which through the years has become "God's truth."

But God's word is unchangeable. There is no expiry date of the Bible. The Bible still teaches the same as it taught in the beginning. Mark 16:16 says, "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved."

Acts 2:38 teaches, "Repent everyone of you and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins..." Galatians 3:27 reads, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Is there salvation from sin outside of Christ?? In Romans 6:3&4 we read, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Should one believe man or God?

#### Putting Off The Old Man Of Sin

## LESSON 7 DRINKING

#### J.C. CHOATE

We know that the drinking of toddies, wines, beers, and whiskies of all brands are commonly accepted in the world today. The higher one rises in economic circles then it seems that the greater one's tastes becomes for the more expensive alcoholic beverges. As a matter of fact, the ability to offer one's friends drinks, especially the imported types, seems to be the level that one aims for to prove to kimself and to others that he is successful.

If you have ever made a trip by air, you have no doubt noted that a lot of people seem to fly just to get the free drinks. Around restaurants where beer is served, have you noticed that those who drink beer, drink one bottle after another?

Drinking goes on among successful business people, in government circles, in the military, among cinema people, and any person or persons who can afford it. It also goes on among the masses who cannot afford it. They may buy the cheaper brands, local made, and even home made, but still they are hooked on it. All endanger their lives and the lives of others. They stand a good possibility of becoming alchoholics, that is, where they think that they must have it to survive. Then there is brain damage, heart trouble, cancer, emotional disturbances, waste of money, and all other kinds of things that the drinker has to contend with as a result of his drinking. If he drives, he can very well kill himself or kill one or more innocent people. Indeed, it is a heavy price to pay.

How is drinking going to benefit one? There is no food value to it. Neither is there any other benefit to it that I know about. There are many problems, sorrows, and heartaches that come to those who drink. There is often disgrace, loss of job, loss of family, loss of health, and loss of soul because of strong drink.

There are those who try to justify it by saying that it is good for one's health or that Paul encouraged Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach's sake. (1 Timothy 5:23). But who drinks medicine by the bottle? There is nothing wrong with alcohol if it is used properly, such as in a medicine. You will note that Paul advised Timothy to take a little wine, and that it was for his stomach. That

is far different to the way people use wine, beer, or whiskey today.

There are those who advocate that there is nothing wrong with social drinking or as long as it is used in moderation. But who is going to say how far you can go? Furthermore, why must anyone serve drinks to be sociable? When you know what alcoholic beverages lead to then it would be much more logical to simply stay away from it. Then think of the many who are dead today because they bought up a supply of home-made alcoholic drinks for a wedding and instead of being a time for rejoicing it was turned into a time of sorrow when many who drank it died from it. Yet, it is hard to understand why people will go on doing that. Evidently they are reasoning that it will happen to someone else but that it would never happen to them. But that is foolish thinking.

Let's go to the Bible now and see what God has said on this subject. The wise man said, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise." (Proverbs 20:1). As already mentioned, some think it is smart to drink, but according to Solomon it is just the opposite. There is nothing any more pathetic than to see a grown human being unable to control himself because he is under the influence of strong drink. And some people call that having a good time. What is good about it?

Hear the Apostle Paul now, as he says, "know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind. Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). Please note all of the bad and corrupt people listed there. Paul said that people like this cannot enter the Lord's kingdom or go to heaven. Naturally even these people can repent and obey God and be saved, but they cannot continue to do these things and enter the Lord's church or go to heaven when they die. Also note that he included drunkards. Now who in the world would a drunkard be? If you know who gets drunk then you know who drunkards are. I think you know, but if you don't then I'll tell you. The drunkard is a drinker and a drinker usually drinks too much, or he does at times, and when he does that then he gets drunk. Now when he gets drunk then he is no longer in control of himself. He can die in that condition or he can get in a fight and someone could kill him. Or being drunk he could go out on the street and get run over. If he has a car, he can get in it and begin to drive home and run over someone. A drunkard

then is bad off whether he will admit it or not. My friend if you are a drinker then you are a potential drunkard. Now, how do you keep from becoming a drunkard? You quit drinking, of course, or you never take that first drink.

Next, turn with me to Galatians 5:19-21. Here Paul says, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in the past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Here the inspired man of God listed a number of works and practices, and he calls them the works of the flesh. What are the works of the flesh? They are all bad things, things that hurt, that destroy, that hurt others. Also notice that right in the middle of all of those bad things he mentions drunkeness. What is that? That is something that is brought on by drinking alcoholic beverages. Now do you want to be engaged in doing the works of the flesh? If you are drinking, then you are already involved.

Going on, we read, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." (Ephesians 5:18). There are also many other principles stated in the scriptures that would discourage drinking. Paul wrote, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." (1 Thessalonians 5:22). He said we should present our bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." (Romans 12:1). In 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17 and I Corinthians 6:19-20 he says that our bodies are the temples of God and therefore we should not defile them with sin or put anything in them that would destroy those temples.

Have you ever noticed those who drink, the kind of people they are, and where they go to drink? Most all bad people drink. The murderer, the liar, the thief, those who are immoral, etc. But you might say that you are not in that category. If you are not now, how long will it take before you'll be there? Go to the bar, to the night club, and many other places where bad things are going on, and there will always be strong drink there, either lawfully or unlawfully.

Those who advertise strong drink always try to picture it as being used by the intellectual type, the wealthy, the cinema people, well known sports figures, and so on. They are trying to convince you that if you are important, or if you want to be like them, that you will also drink. But they don't show you pictures of all the drunks,

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of those who have wasted their lives, their health, lost their families, and everything they have because of strong drink. No, they don't show all of that, but surely you have seen what happens when one begins to drink,

If you are smart, my friend, you will completely abstain from strong drink. Do not take the first drink. Don't allow it to enter your home. Do not set a bad example before your family. Don't allow it to destroy you. Don't allow your friends to tempt you to drink with them. If they drink then they want you to drink so you cannot find fault with them.

Remember that a drunkard cannot be saved in this world and in the world to come. Of course the one who drinks can repent of his drinking, or turn away from it, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins, and the Lord willsave him, but it is only when he turns away from such bad things as strong drink and obeys God that he can be saved. Remember, too, regardless of what you have heard, that true and faithful Christians do not drink at all. Surely you don't want to be called a drunkard. Therefore, don't drink, or if you drink, be determined to quit this dirty, expensive, and destructive habit. It is not smart to drink, but it is smart not to drink.

## Can Salvation Be A Gift And Still Be Conditional?

#### OWEN COSGROVE

If any sinner ever goes to Heaven, it will be by the grace of God. None of us deserves to go to Heaven. None can earn or merit his salvation. Without Christ and God's mercy through Him, we are hopelessly and utterly lost.

I have never known a member of the Church of Christ who claimed that he deserved to go to heaven because he had obeyed the Gospel. I have never known of a gospel preacher who taught that we are saved by our own works. In forty years of extensive reading in Restoration Movement literature, I have never read where any of our brethren taught that one can earn his own salvation.

I have heard our people sing through the years "The Old Rugged Cross", "Amazing Grace", "His Grace Reaches Me", "Without Him I Could Do Nothing", and dozens of other songs about the matchless

grace of Jesus, and the necessity of that grace in our salvation.

So when some sectarian teacher accuses us of not believing in salvation by grace, he is fighting a straw man and jousting at windmills. Are we saved by grace? Answer yes or no! Emphatically the answer is "Yes!" Are we saved by our own works? Answer yes or no! Emphatically the answer is "No."

One more question needs to be addressed. Although God has given His grace to us through Jesus Christ, is anything expected of us? Can salvation be a gift and still have conditions?

God gave Canaan to Israel (Joshua 1:2,3,11). Did they have any responsibility to appropriate it?

· Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11; 1 Timothy 6:17). Does this remove all responsibility for us to work (2 Thessalonians 3:8)?

God has given us His Word (Acts 7:38; 2 Peter 1:3). Do we therefore not need to study, because He has given it to us?

Christ gives us His peace (John 14:27). Do we have any obligation to be at peace and to be peacemakers?

#### CAN SALVATION BE A GIFT AND STILL HAVE CONDITIONS?

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1,2).

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts. we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world..."

(Titus 2:11-12).

#### RUTH, THE WOMAN AND THE BOOK

#### HANS J. DEDERSCHECK

The book of Ruth takes its name from the young Moabitess, the widow of an Israelite, who made the people of Israel her people and Israel's God her God. She married and became an ancestress of the Messiah, Jesus Christ,

The book called "Ruth" is connected with the book of Judges. In fact, several of the Fathers of Israel combined the two into one book. The first verse of chapter one tells us "in the days when the judges ruled..." So we know when the story took place. Date and

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author are not known. Some say that Samuel was the writer; others place the book at a much later date. At the end of Ruth there is a genealogy (Ruth 4:18-22) of David. This signifies that, at least this part of the writing was written after David's house was established. It is, however, believed that the book was written at the end of the period of Judges, and the part of the genealogy was added. There was never any doubt about the canonical authority of Ruth. Ruth is mentioned in the genealogy of Christ in Matthew 1:16.

The story of Ruth contrasts a time of violence and bloodshed with the picture of devotion, unselfish greatness, ideal family life, love and a simple trust in the Lord of heaven. This shows us that godly people are able to live a good and inspiring life even in times of trouble and depressive moments without an end.

Ruth is an outstanding young widow from Moab. Her affection for her mother-in-law is so great that she insists upon sharing her lot, supporting her in her widowhood by showing love and companionship. She was willing to leave her native land and her own blood relatives to live in a foreign country among strangers. Her interest is focused on helping her mother-in-law, sharing her loneliness and bringing into her life the solace of her devotion and loyal support.

Boaz brings her loyalty to a highlight, saying: "The Lord recompense thy work and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" (Ruth 2:12). And the Lord recompensed her life. In Bethlehem she found the God of Israel with deeper insight, she met Boaz as husband and gained a great inheritance.

Ruth was not a Hebrew, the nation of people out of which would come the Christ. Her origin was in Moab where the descendants of Lot lived and so we see how she came from the same Semitic stock as did Abraham.

How much can be learned from this beautiful story! Even in times of troubles and tremendous hardships human beings can stay together and serve each other in love with hope. While violence and godlessness reigned during the years of the Judges, Ruth provides a picture of sacrifice, loyalty and legitimate faith in God. Ruth, Naomi and Boaz are examples of human beauty. Indeed, their conduct stands as a forerunner of Christian principles of life and deed. Paul wrote: "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing steadfastly in prayer" (Romans 12:12). "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

#### THE CELL PROOF OF DESIGN

#### REX BANKS

Unlike the materialistic philosophers of classical times whose naturalistic philosophy he shared, Charles Darwin was able to peer through the microscope at a Lilliputian world possessing a complexity and order which would have astounded such nature philosophers as Anaximander (550 BC) and Empedocles (450 BC).

Darwin in turn, living in the days before the invention of the electron microscope and the development of such techniques as X-ray crystallography was simply unaware of the complexities of the cellular world—and it showed. For example, when he speculated that the first living thing may have arisen spontaneously in a "little pond of chemicals" he simply had no idea that every cellular process is controlled by molecular machines of staggering complexity.

Similarly, when the 19th century scientist, Ernst Haechel, fierce defender of Darwinism expressed the view that the cell was "a simple little lump" he did not anticipate that a century later the DNA molecule would reveal itself to be the repository of all the genetic information necessary to "spell out" the characteristics of a living organism.

If another nail was needed in the coffin of evolutionary theory, modern biochemistry has well and truly provided it by revealing that the nature of the cell is such that it simply cannot have been formed from non-living materials by the "numerous successive slight modifications" proposed by Darwinists and neo-Darwinists.

Quite simply the cell is an example of a system which is, in the words of biochemist Michael Behe, "irreducibly complex", (Darwin's Black Box, page 39). By this Behe means mat the cell is a system "... composed of several well-matched, interacting parts that contribute to the basic function, wherein the removal of any of the parts causes the system to effectively cease functioning."

The problem for evolutionists is obvious: "Since natural selection can only choose systems that are already working, then if a biological system cannot be produced gradually it would have to arise as an integrated unit in one fell swoop, for natural selection to have anything to act on." In other words, nothing less sophisticated than a living cell can have functioned as a precursor to that cell, and therefore we must account for the fact that this biological system exists as a fully functional unit without having

passed through a multitude of different stages. The theory of evolution simply cannot explain this fact.

Darwin himself acknowledged; "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous successive slight modifications my theory would absolutely break down" (Origin Of Species, page 154). If Darwin was alive today would he perhaps renounce Darwinism?

Moreover, had Darwin known about DNA, the essential molecular component of every form of life, he may not have been so ready to embrace a naturalistic explanation for the origin of life. Creationists Walter L. Bradley and Charles B. Thraxton have written: "The discovery that DNA conveys a genetic message gives the argument for design a new twist. Since life is at its core a chemical message system, the origin of life is the origin of information" (The Creation Hypothesis, page 206). They add, "If we want to speculate on how the first informational molecules came into being, the most reasonable speculation is there was some form of intelligence around at the time. We cannot identify that source any further from a scientific analysis alone. Science cannot supply a name for that intelligent cause" (page 209).

But what science cannot supply revelation can and does supply. His name is Jehovah!

#### EFFECTS OF ABANDONING GOD

#### **BILL NICKS**

"For this cause God gave them up unto vile passions: for their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature; and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working unseemliness, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error [perversion] which was due"(Romans 1:26,27). "Wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts unto uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves "(Romans 1:24).

This passage describes the effects of man abandoning God. God abandons man by withholding His providence from them. Three times in this chapter it is said, "God gave them up" (1:24,26,28). The reason God had abandoned man is that man had first abandoned God.

Man, with the image of God stamped upon him, was made for fellowship with God (1 John 1:3) and to depend on the Spirit of God. Man destroyed the balance of life when he rebelled against his Creator and sought independence from Him. Seeking freedom, man projected himself into the most abject slavery. The crux of sin is pride, and this pride led man to his fall, utter servitude to self and Satan.

Originally, "passions" (pathos) referred to all our feelings, good or bad. In the New Testament, the only uses are bad, passions of dishonor, vile passions (1 Thessalonians 4:5; Colossians 3:5). The resultant burning in their lust one toward another of men toward men and women toward women describes the homosexuality of the pagan world. Strangely, some moderns of the world defend this practice as a "valid lifestyle". Were it not for the threat of AIDS, precipitated in part by the sordid practice of homosexuality, this reversion to an ancient sin might have become a leading class of respectable people in a modern perverted and morally defunct society.

How can anyone defend this practice in the light of Romans 1? God created them "male and female" for the natural, heterosexual use, as stated in Genesis I:27f. Lesbianism is a perversion of God's natural and original order. It is dishonoring the body, which is a "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19f). In burning in their lust one toward another, males worked "unseemliness," an old word meaning "deformed". This word is translated "shame" in Revelation 16:15, describing the one who is naked, who does not keep his garments, "lest they see his shame". To all children of God, the practice is shameful! To God, such deeds are "deserving of death." (Romans 1:32).

### "As Long As They Believe In Jesus' Sonship"

#### JERRI MANASCO

Is belief in Jesus' Son ship the ONLY criterion for determining fellowship in the church? Is it the only test to be applied? According to some in the church, that is indeed the only legitimate test that can be applied. The only difficulty with that view is that it tends to relegate "other things" to a opinion status. According to the ultimate

interpretation of such a view, anything else and everything else must be looked upon as dogmatic impositions to be avoided. There are problems that such a view would necessarily create.

For one thing the scripture objection to the doctrine of "faith only" is ignored! If acknowledgement of Jesus' Sonship is the ONLY VALID CRITERION of establishing fellowship, then what more could we demand of any person? We could not expect of ourselves or anyone else what even the Lord expects! We could make little sense of certain Bible passages if we accept the "Sonship only" test of fellowship.

One familiar passage is John 12:42, 43: "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him; lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." John specifically, clearly, and unmistakably asserts that these men BELIEVED ON JESUS. If any Christian discovered this fact, then he would have to proclaim these men as being in the church's fellowship. Who can accept a mockery of God's scheme?

Consider another passage: "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye night believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:30, 31). The chief rulers in John 12:42. 43 met these terms! Will they have life because they believed on Jesus? Let it not be objected that the chief rules were hypocrites and on that ground are unacceptable; those mentioned in John 12:42,43 are said to have believed on Jesus! The demons would surely be in a position to be saved if all that is required is to believe in and acknowledge Jesus! The devils believe and tremble (James 2:19). Have they ever confessed Jesus? Most certainly they have (Luke 4:33, 34; Mark 5:7). They went a step further than the chief rulers did! Are demons saved?

A second consideration in this matter is the scripture teaching concerning discipline of erring members of the church. In I Corinthians 5 Paul gives instructions relative to this very significant action. The church is admonished to be separated from that wicked person (verse 13). That individual was delivered to Satan (verse 5). Not only this, but others are specified as subject to withdrawal (verses 9-11). These had not denied Christ's Sonship, yet they were not considered as suitable for fellowship! Similar instruction is provided in II Thessalonians 3:6-15. The disciplined one was to

be treated as a brother, but he was still disciplined (verse 15). The issue in these cases was not whether they believed in Jesus or even their acknowledgement of the fact. The issue was their failure to live up to the teaching of Jesus. Similarly, the problem in Romans 16:17, 18 is not faith in Jesus' Sonship, but are they teaching doctrine that is consistent with that faith?

A third problem with the idea that belief in Jesus' Sonship is the only test of fellowship is the Bible emphasis upon the necessary conduct of the Christian. Should moral conduct be relegated to secondary status or to the status of a matter of opinion as long as we accept the Sonship of Jesus? That is exactly what we must do IF FAITH IN JESUS' SONSHIP IS THE ONLY VALID CRITERION FOR FELLOWSHIP! It would be virtually impossible to "impose" on anyone with any moral teaching or any restraints! This would fall into the same category of those who would remove Christians from any law of obedience; it would turn the grace of God into lasciviousness (cf. Romans 6:1-2); it would rob the faith of its moral ingenuity! As long as a person believes in and acknowledges Jesus' Sonship, then what can he or she do with such passages as Ephesians 4:20 24; I Thessalonians 4:1-8; and many others like them? The fact is, these are teachings that are definitely mandatory for the Christian!

A fourth objection to the "Sonship of Jesus Only Test of Fellowship" is the importance of adhering to the word of Christ, i.e., his teaching. "IF ye CONTINUE IN MY WORD, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:30). "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Has this statement become obsolete? NO, it is still valid!

What about I John 4:1-6 and I John 5:1-6, passages that teach the importance of the confession of Christ, the acknowledgement of Christ, etc.? Do these passages suggest that simple confession of Jesus' deity is the only test of one's being "of God"? Clearly, what John is teaching here is that if a person denies the Father and the Son, he is automatically to be rejected as a false teacher! However, is THAT THE ONLY CRITERION FOR ESTABLISHING FELLOW SHIP? Doesn't this same John teach us to LOVE ONE ANOTHER (I John 3:15)? Isn't this the same John who shows that faith only is not adequate (John 12:42, 43)? Isn't this the same John who recorded Jesus' words regarding the truth (John 8:32)? Isn't this the same John who puts emphasis on walking in the truth (II John 1, 2, 4)? If a person teaches things contrary to the revealed

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New Testament doctrine, isn't he in error? What about Mark 16:16? What about I Corinthians 11:18ff? Does it matter whether believers take the Lord's supper or not? Does it matter what their attitude when they take it? What about Ephesians 4:1-6 and I Corinthians 1:10-13? It is not the deity of the Sonship of Jesus under consideration in these passages! It is the life consistent with that faith that is under consideration!

Reader, it is of the utmost importance that we believe in, that we acknowledge, that we confess the Sonship of Jesus! Peter did this very thing when he said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16; John 6:69). "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God" (I John 4:15). But doesn't this confession imply everything consistent with it? Doesn't it imply one's acknowledgement of the Lord's authority? Doesn't it suggest commitment to Christ's revealed teaching? If not, why not!

## HOW DOES GOD SPEAK TO US TODAY?

#### CHARLES E. BURCH

Did you ever hear anyone say, "Well, God talked to me in a dream", or another say, "I had a vision", or someone declare, "Well, God talked to me while I was driving my car down the highway", or maybe someone vows that God spoke to him and forgave his sins while he laid his hand on the radio or TV? When you hear someone making such claims, you may be sure they are mistaken.

Did you know that God tells us plainly, in His Word, how He speaks to us today? Would you really like to know how God communicates with man? If we do not know how He speaks today, we will not know when He speaks.

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1,2). In this inspired text, the writer declares that God had spoken. The question is, how does He speak to us today?

Yes, there was a time when God spoke to man directly from heaven, and chosen men heard the voice of God. God talked with Adam in the Garden of Eden. In the centuries following, He communicated to the faithful fathers, heads of households, who conveyed God's message to their children. Later, He revealed His Word to the **prophets**, who, in turn, spoke to the people. God told Moses that the time would come when He would no longer speak through the prophets, but that He (God) would raise up *one* prophet, referring to His Son, Jesus, Who would speak the words which God would place in His mouth. This important prophetic teaching is found in Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

While Christ was on earth He taught the Word of God. Actually, God put the words in His mouth. But, before Christ ascended to His Father in heaven, He chose His apostles. Jesus made them this promise: "Howbeit when, He the spirit, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: And He will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: For He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you "(John 16:13,14).

God revealed His Word unto the apostles by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guided the writers of the New Testament as they revealed **in writing** God's message to us. God speaks to us today through His Holy Word. We do not need Him to talk directly to us. Paul declared that God's Word was inspired and **complete**. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be **perfect**, **thoroughly furnished** unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

How do we know that the claims of special, personal messages from God today are spurious? In these ways:

- (1) The message or direction given in the "personal" contact always contradicts the directions given in Scripture. In Galatians 1:6-9, Paul warned that the Gospel message had been given, once and for all, and that even if an angel from heaven spoke something different, it should not be believed or followed.
- (2) When people today say that they have had a special revelation, they are claiming that God is showing partiality to them, or that they are on par with the inspired writers of Scripture in the first century. When their message contradicts Scripture, when they are members of churches not found in Scripture, when they are teaching "gospels" contrary to the message of the Apostles, when their worship, call to salvation, and doctrine of life conflict with Scripture, none of their "revelation"

can have originated with God. They are preaching their own gospel but trying to give it **validity** by claiming to have had a dream, vision, or revelation. All of this is contrary to Scripture.

What we need today is to allow God's Word to speak to us and to obey what it says. Too many are looking for something mystical, unusual, and exciting instead of sitting down with God's Word and hearing what He says there.

#### SABBATH FAILURES

#### TIMOTHY D. HALL

Aesop's fable of the goose that laid golden eggs teaches a needed lesson. The man who owned the goose enjoyed finding a golden egg each day until his greed clouded his judgment. When he cut open his goose hoping to collect the store of eggs inside, he eliminated the source of his riches. It would have been better for him to be patient and continue his daily visits to the nest. Israel demonstrated the same need for patience and faith in God's will. In their case, God offered to provide generously for their needs if they submitted to His laws. In time, however, their greed and faithlessness overshadowed His promises. The loss of God's providence could be blamed only on themselves.

#### ISRAEL'S FAILURE TO KEEP GOD'S SABBATH YEARS

Some think that "Sabbath" refers only to a day in the week. Literally the word means "to cease" and can refer to other ideas. In Leviticus 25, God applied the concept to an entire year. "When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to the Lord" (v. 2 NKJV). How can land keep a Sabbath? God went on to command: "You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land" (vv. 4-5). Every seventh year was to be a Sabbath year in Israel.

Such a command would be hard for people of a farming culture to accept. Most depended on the produce of the land. If a year passed without planting and harvesting, what would they eat? God anticipated their fears and made this promise: "And if you say, 'What shall we eat in the seventh year, since we shall not sow nor

gather in our produce?' Then I will command My blessing on you in the sixth year, and it will bring forth produce enough for three years" (Leviticus 25:20-21). In essence, God was saying, "I've got you covered. I'll take care of you if you obey Me."

Hundreds of years later, Judah experienced a devastating invasion by the Babylonians. Their kinsmen to the north, Israel, had already been defeated by the Assyrians. Even the temple of God was looted and destroyed. Why had this happened? The writer of 2 Chronicles 36:21 gives the reason: "to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years."

There were many reasons why God allowed Babylon to carry His people into exile. Judah had turned from God to idols and had violated many of the terms of their covenant. But why keep the people in exile for 70 years? As the writer explained, it was to make up for all the years Israel had not kept the Sabbath years. Although God had offered to provide for them during their year off from farming, their greed (wanting to continue reaping the blessings of the field) and their faithlessness (refusing to believe God would provide if they did not farm) killed the goose that laid their golden eggs!

#### **LEARNING FROM ISRAEL'S MISTAKES**

Those events happened long ago. We do not live under a covenant that demands Sabbath-keeping. But the mistakes committed then by God's people can also be committed today by His people. Are we perceptive enough to learn from their example?

In Luke 14:16-20, Jesus pointed to a common error. The people in His story had been invited to "a great supper," a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. But those invited "began to make excuses": one needed to inspect recently purchased land; another wanted to test oxen he had bought; another had just married. None of these were inherently sinful activities. But in each case, the people gave greater priority to taking care of worldly pursuits than to the opportunity graciously extended to them.

Jesus Himself had been confronted by the same temptation. When Satan urged Jesus to turn the stones into bread, he knew that the Lord was very hungry from a 40-day fast. Satan was essentially saying, "Use Your God-given abilities to take care of Your earthly desires." That's why Jesus responded, "It is written,

'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). In most situations, nothing is wrong with eating bread. If it takes precedence over doing God's will, eating bread becomes sinful.

God has not commanded Christians to observe Sabbath years - to take a year off from work. But has He not challenged us to trust Him to provide for all our needs? Jesus' words in Matthew 6:31-33 still need to be heard: "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' [an echo of Leviticus 25:20?] or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

What keeps many Christians from seeking God's kingdom first? Is it not our obsession with providing for ourselves through hard work? Hard work is a virtue, but not when it stands between us and God. At some point, we exceed the biblical standard of industriousness and move into the area of faithlessness. As Jesus observed, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:24). It is not the riches that block our path to the kingdom but our trust in those riches.

Bernard of Clairvaux, a French abbot who lived from 1090-1153, once stated, "Theirs is an endless road, a hopeless maze, who seek for goods before they seek for God." Do we seek for goods before we seek our Father? Like the Jews who had little faith, do we ignore God's promise of providence as we labor away, laying up treasures on earth instead of in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21)?

#### THE SINNER'S PRAYER

#### JERRY L. ROBERTSON

I was asked to handle the funeral when a great-uncle died. It was a disturbing task because he had not been a Christian. Despite this, the funeral went all right, but later a relative asked, "Jerry, did you get Uncle Leon to say the sinner's prayer?" Of course I had not. After pondering the situation, I believe I understand where my denominational relative was coming from.

The sinner's prayer has evolved in Protestant circles to become a spiritual quick-fix for those in danger of being lost. In a terminal

situation, it is similar to the Catholic practice of performing last rites over the dying. It also affords evangelists fast results; whoever recites this formula word-for-word is an automatic conversion. The method is as simple as "Repeat after me ... Heavenly Father, I am a sinner. Please forgive me. I believe Jesus died on the cross for me and now accept Him as my personal Lord and Savior. Come into my heart Lord Jesus. Amen." (See: patriot.net/ nbmcgin/ pearlsinners.html or www.tcjj. com/sin-pray.html)

Of course, the problem with the sinner's prayer is that it cannot be found in the Bible. Look in a concordance, Bible dictionary or word study and you will come up empty handed. From a scriptural standpoint, how do religious people justify using the sinner's prayer in conversion? Three passages are misconstrued to support the sinner's prayer:

First is a parable Jesus taught involving the prayers of a publican and a Pharisee. The publican merely said, "God be merciful to me a sinner," yet Jesus pronounced, "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other" (Luke 18:13-14 NKJV). Is Jesus telling us how to be saved here? The Bible remind us that in other settings Jesus emphasized faith (John 3:16), confession (Matthew 10:32-33), repentance (Luke 13:3), and baptism (Mark 16:16) as prerequisites of salvation.

Luke reveals that the parable was directed "to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9). Jesus was simply illustrating the principle found in Proverbs 3:34 and later in James 4:6: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Jesus is not listing stipulations for becoming a child of God nor instructing followers to repeat these words. We must recognize the publican and Pharisee were under the Mosaic system; Jesus had not been resurrected nor had praying "in Jesus' name" been instituted at this point (John 14:13). This is not the sinner's prayer.

Second, in Acts 8:26-40, Philip makes a disciple of the Ethiopian eunuch. This New Testament conversion may seem like the prompting of a sinner's prayer at first glance. But upon closer observation we see Philip's statement "If you believe with all your heart, you may" is actually in response to the eunuch's request to be baptized. The result is the Ethiopian's confession: "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (v. 37). At this point, we neither hear Philip saying, "Then repeat this prayer after me," nor do we hear him saying, "Based upon your faith, you are already saved;

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you need not be baptized at this time." The honest student will acknowledge that upon hearing the gospel the eunuch was ready to be baptized; Philip was checking to see" if his heart was in the right place. This is not an example of the sinner's prayer.

A third passage, in Romans 10:9-10, 13, says, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation ... For 'whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." This passage is not dealing with prayer, but rather with faith and confession. It is true we confess things in our prayers, yet the two are not synonymous (James 5:16: "Confess your faults... and pray" кJV).

Likewise, no mention of prayer or recitation of prayer is made in Romans 10. One Baptist preacher who uses this passage to teach faith-only salvation has spoken out against many of his own denomination, contending that the sinner's prayer is just another work contrived by man (see "The Sinner's Prayer" by Michael D. O'Neal, http://people.delphi.com/mdoneal/sinner.html). This passage does not support the sinner's prayer.

In conclusion, I sympathize with those who want what a sinner's prayer would offer - more people saved. But, as a student, I realize it is not found in God's Word nor is it a part of God's plan. Romans 10:13 mentions "calling on the name of the Lord", and the sinner's prayer is certainly an attempt to do just that.

If anyone in the New Testament qualified as calling on the Lord, certainly Saul of Tarsus did. After being blinded by God, he spent three days fasting. The Lord was aware of Saul's contrition and even said, "Behold, he is praying" (Acts 9:11). However, was a sinner's prayer enough? Why didn't Ananias go and tell Saul, "Your prayers have been answered; your sins have been washed away; you have been saved"? That was not God's plan. He knew "the Way," therefore he said, "Why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Prayer and penitence were not enough. "Calling on the name of the Lord" requires action.

Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." It is my prayer that advocates of the sinner's prayer will open their eyes and realize this is an unbiblical practice which is unable to save anyone.

#### THE KEY WITNESS

#### OWEN D. OLBRICHT

In a country and a world filled with religious conflict expressing itself in varying shades and colors of Christianity, denominational loyalty may seem the norm for followers of Jesus. Surely no one desires intolerance and castigation because of his religious beliefs; however, can exclusive grouping into denominations be justified as a consequential result of Jesus' teaching?

Jesus desired unity among His followers. He prayed for the oneness of people who believe in Him (John 17:20-22) and taught that there would be one flock and one Shepherd (10:16). From these statements we can conclude that Jesus wanted His followers to be united and not divided into opposing groups with conflicting doctrines.

Paul urged Christians to be united. He told the Roman Christians to avoid people who cause dissensions (Romans 16:17), the Corinthians not to be divided but to seek unity (1 Corinthians 1:10), the Galatians that teachers of another gospel are accursed (Galatians 1:8-9), and the Ephesians to endeavor to be united (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Paul also encouraged the. Philippians to be of one spirit and one mind (Philippians 1:27; 2:2), the Colossians to have their hearts knit together in love (Colossians 2:2), the Thessalonians to live in peace with one another (1 Thessalonians 5:13), Timothy that other doctrines are not to be taught (1 Timothy 1:3; 6:3-4), and Titus to reject factious men (Titus 3:10).

Paul described the church, the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18), as being one (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 20; Ephesians 2:14-16; 4:4; Colossians 3:15). Because the body is one, separation into schisms and parties is not acceptable.

Regardless of the background of the people in Galatia, baptism made all of them one (Galatians 3:27-28). The 3,000 who were baptized on the Day of Pentecost were not divided into denominational groups but were all together (Acts 2:44). There were no denominations because Jesus and the apostles did not begin any denominations.

In the same way they were all in the same body of Christ (1

Corinthians 12:20, 27), we can be the same today. The New Testament does not leave us instruction or pattern for the development of denominations. Following only its teaching will unite us and not divide us into denominations.

Denominationalism is wrong for these reasons:

- It is contrary to the spirit of Jesus' prayer and teaching. The whole tenor of Jesus' instruction during His personal ministry and through later inspired writings was that all His followers should be united. Jesus said that divisions and persecution would divide His followers because of opposition from other people (Matthew 10:34-37); He did not say adherence to His Word would divide His followers.
- It violates the structure of the body of Christ. The structure Jesus planned for the body of His followers was a unified church patterned after the unity between Him and the Father (John 17:22).
- 3. It weakens mission efforts and needlessly drains the energies and resources of the church. Jesus indicated that oneness among His followers would send a convincing message to the world that the Father had sent Him (John 17:21, 23). Paul portrayed the destructive nature of divisions by writing, "But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another" (Galatians 5:15). If all the efforts and energy that have been expended in denominational squabbling had been directed toward teaching the lost and helping the needy, the world could have become aware of the greatness of Jesus and His teaching. Denominationalism has impeded the work of Jesus.
- 4. It misdirects allegiances. Denominationalism may seem to be good because it brings unity within its own ranks; however, unity should not be based on allegiance to men or human institutions but on conformity to the Head (Ephesians 4:14-16). We are to be united because we have been drawn to Jesus (John 12:32) not because we agree with systems of human origin.
- 5. It destroys the goals of Christian maturity. Christians are not to fashion their lives after the world (Romans 12:1-2) but rather are to seek to grow up to become like Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Ephesians 4:13).

- Denominationalism seeks to develop conformity to its own standards instead of conformity to the nature and spirit of Jesus. To the degree we all become Christlike we can become united but only to the degree we become like Him.
- 6. It loses sight of Jesus' mission. Jesus came to bring all of us Jews and Gentiles (John 11:52; Ephesians 2:14-15) together into "one body to God through the Cross, by it having put to death the enmity" (Ephesians 4:16). Denominationalism works contrary to the unifying effects of the Cross (John 12:32).
- 7. It is built on a wrong emphasis. Our emphasis should be submission to the lordship and authority of Jesus (Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36; Ephesians 5:24; Philippians 2:8-11). Denominationalism submits to the spirit of its own movement and expects conformity to its own creeds and teaching. We are to have no other Lord, Shepherd (John 10:16; Ephesians 4:5) or Law Giver than Jesus (James 4:12).

Denominationalism is contrary to the teaching of Jesus and the subsequent writings of the New Testament. Divisions, schisms, party spirit and dissensions are denounced because they are the result of allegiance to men and the rejection of the supreme lordship of Jesus.

Paul deals with divisiveness based on allegiance to men by his teaching in 1 Corinthians 3:3-28:

- 1. Allegiance to men that causes strife is a sign of carnality (v. 3).
- 2. The only true foundation is not men but Jesus Christ (v. 11).
- 3. People who build on allegiance to men will be punished because they are destroying the temple of God (v. 17).
- 4. Christians should take pride in Jesus and not in men because Christians belong to Him (v. 23).

The goal of every Christian should be Christlikeness, dedication to Jesus as Lord, and faithfulness to His Word. This approach Will bring us into conformity with the nature of Jesus (Ephesians 4:13), resulting in unity, not in denominationalism, within the one body of Jesus (v. 4).

#### YOU AND WORSHIP

Henry Ward Beecher, the famous pulpit orator, once had to be absent and his brother was invited to speak for him. The church house was crowded, but when it became evident the eloquent Henry Beecher was not going to appear, many started to leave. Beecher's brother was not disturbed. He stood up before the murmuring crowd, called for silence and said, "All who came this morning to worship Henry W. Beecher may now leave. The rest will remain and worship God."

What are we doing in our assemblies? Some, like the Athenians, come only to hear the preacher say "something" (Acts 17:20-21). "Is it relevant?" "Is it positive?" Are mental guidelines used in judging sermons? Some attend to judge the singing, the 'prayers, or the friendliness of the congregation. These go away with a host of criticisms, perhaps, or even pride... but worship has been forgotten.

Why do we gather for worship? Some are here to "get it over with for a week"; to get their tickets validated once more. But those who are here because they need strength in carrying their crosses know the value of true worship.

Worship has nothing to do with the song leader or the talent of the preacher. It has to do with you and your God. Let people do what they will to please themselves. "The rest will remain and worship God."

#### Form IV (See Rule 3)

1. Place of publication

**Church of Christ** 

B-350, C.R. Park, New Delhi-110019

2. Periodicity of its publication

Monthly

3. Printer's name

Sunny David

B-201, Sarita Vihar New Delhi-110076

4. Publisher's name

Sunny David

B-201, Sarita Vihar New Delhi-110076

5. Editor's name

Sunny David

B-201, Sarita Vihar New Delhi-110076

6. Name and address of

**Church of Christ** 

Individuals who owns The newspaper

B-350, C.R. Park, New Delhi-19

I Sunny David, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dated: March 2013

Sunny David

#### 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).

Printed and Published by Sunny David for Church of Christ, Chitranjan Park, New Delhi-110019 and Printed at: Print India, A-38/2, Mayapuri Phase-I, New Delhi-110064. Editor: Sunny David (Cell: 09810896789, E-mail: theinspiredbook@gmail.com).

Reqd. No. 26921/71

Postal Regn. No. DL(S)-17/3154/2012-2014 Licence to Post without Prepayment No. U/SE/25/2012-2014 Posted at Lodi Road HO on 10-11 March 2013

Total No. of pages 24+cover

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