

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

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## Editorial

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

#### ***The Person Who Does Anything Presumptuously Despises The Word Of The Lord***

KING DAVID, in Psalm 19:13, prayed to God, saying, "Keep back your servant also from Presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me...." To sins presumptuously means to defy or refuse to obey God and thus to show disrespect to God's authority. The sin of presumption is one of the most deadliest sins. Those who were found sinning presumptuously against God, in the Old Testament time, were certainly and promptly punished (Numbers 15:30, 31), as the following examples show:

In the book of 1 Samuel chapter 15, we read about Saul, the first king of Israel. God, through His prophet Samuel had commanded Saul to go to Amalek and utterly destroy all and everything of the Amalekites, because of their hostility to Israel when they were coming out of Egypt. Saul gathered his army and went to Amalek to do what God had commanded him to do. When he was coming back from Amalek, Samuel met him on the way, on seeing Samuel, Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord." But Samuel said to him, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" To that Saul replied, "They (that is, the people who had accompanied him) have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." Saul's reasoning was, since he had

brought with him all those things, which should have been destroyed along with all other things, to offer to God, therefore he should be commended and not rebuked. Notice too, that he blamed the people for doing that! However, Samuel 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." Saul had despised the word of the Lord. He didn't do exactly what he was asked to do. He had, therefore, presumptuously sinned against God.

Another example is of Nadab and Abihu, two sons of Aaron, who were priests in God's temple, according to the Old Testament order. The record says, "Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." (Leviticus 10:1, 2). According to Leviticus 16:12, the fire that was to be offered must have been from the altar. Evidently, both Nadab and Abihu had offered a fire from another source, and not the one from the altar that was specified. As priests of God in His temple both Nadab and Abihu knew from where the fire was to be taken. But in this instance they didn't take God seriously. They reasoned, a fire is a fire, no matter from where it was taken. But it did matter to God. To Him it was a profane fire, because He had not commanded that. Like Saul, Nadab and Abihu too had sinned presumptuously.

Yet again, we read about another man, named Uzzah, in the book of 2 Samuel, who had on impulse presumptuously sinned, and was also punished with death. Uzzah, with another man, in this instance, was driving a cart on which the holy ark of God was set, the record says, "And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him for his error; and he died there by the ark of God." (2 Samuel 6 6,7). What was Uzzah's error? In Numbers 4:15, we read, God had earlier commanded: "They shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die." Since the oxen stumbled, Uzzah thought the ark would fall, and he tried to save the ark from falling, but as soon as he had touched the ark, God punished him

with death. From human reasoning Uzzah was right, you or I *would have done the same thing, if we were in his place. But* God does not think as man does. He requires from man exactly the same what He has asked him to do.

Man often tries to make changes in what God has said. Man thinks making a little change here or there in what God has said, if it seems good and reasonable, would make no difference, in fact, man thinks that that would improve on what God has said. This is exactly how many think about using the musical instruments with spiritual songs in the worship of God, even though the Scripture says, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:19). To sing is God’s command. The melody or music should be made in the heart and not with an instrument of music that man has made. But man doesn’t seem to learn that God means exactly the same what He has said. Man thinks the playing of musical instruments while singing spiritual songs makes singing sound better and lovely, so there is nothing wrong in using them. The point is not what man thinks, feels or likes, but the point is has God commanded it? When man offers his worship to God in the manner He has not specified, he does that presumptuously, against the will of God.

Many more examples from the Bible could be given in this article to show the destructive nature of the most prevalent sin of presumption, however, one more, that of king Uzaiiah, may be cited, and it will adequately suffice to illustrate the point. Uzaiiah was the king of Judah. The Bible says that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and as long as he walked with the Lord, God made him prosper in various ways, and as a result he became very powerful. “But when he was strong,” we read, “his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense. So Azariah the priest went after him, and with him were eighty priests of the Lord—valiant men. And they withstood king Uzaiiah, and said to him, “it is not for you, Uzaiiah, to burn incense to the Lord, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from Lord God.” Then Uzaiiah became furious, and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the Lord,

beside the incense altar. And Azariah, the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the Lord had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death." All along Uzziah knew that it was the task of the priests alone to burn incense in the temple on the altar of incense. But pride had lifted up his heart and he became haughty and arrogant even to the point where he would not care what the Lord had said. More than eighty priests were not able to convince him that he was doing wrong, because he had made up his mind to do what he wanted to do. "Convince a man against his will," as the saying goes, "he is of the same opinion still." No matter how many times one may be told of what the Scriptures says, it will have no effect on him because he has already made up his mind to do and practice what he thinks is right. For example, Christ said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." (Mark 16:16). But millions who claim to believe in Christ, refuse to be baptized to be saved, because they are convinced that one is saved by faith alone.

From all of these cited narratives from the Bible we need to learn that God means what He says, and says what He means. Man cannot improve on God's commandments. Romans 15:4, says, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning..." Today God is not punishing people instantly, as He did in the Old Testament time when He dealt with people directly and personally, but He has revealed His will for us today in the written form in His New Testament, which says, God has appointed a day on which He will judge all people through Christ.(Acts 17:31).

### **Putting Off The Old Man Of Sin**

Lesson 18

## **REVENGE**

J.C. CHOATE

IT IS GOOD to be with you again for a period of Bible Study. Please join with me as we discuss the matter of putting off the old man of sin in order that we might put on the new man of righteousness in Christ Jesus. I believe that as we study these matters together that you will see the wisdom of making the change in your life.

I am sure that you are familiar with the term REVENGE, and that you are aware of the fact that a great deal of this goes on. I am having reference to the practice of getting even, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth type of thing.

Do we have a right to take revenge, to harm or hurt someone who has done us wrong? If so, does the law of the land allow this? How far can this be taken? You know as well as I do that the law will not allow you to do things like that. True, someone may have tried to hurt you, cheat you, or may have said bad things about you, but that still does not give you permission to go and do likewise to them. Those who do this type of thing will lose in the end. Think of all of the mental stress, being filled with hatred, not being able to think about his family and their needs, or to keep his mind on his job so that he might do a good job, but he is constantly thinking and plotting to get someone. That is a tremendous burden to have to bear. But even if he gets the revenge that he is seeking, then what if that person or his family strikes back? And on and on it can go.

There are families who have running feuds with other families. They hate one another. They are constantly seeking revenge against each other. As a result many are killed on both sides over the years. Now who has really benefitted from this type of thing? No one. Both families have lost. They have paid a great price because of their hatred and their unwillingness to forgive each other and to live at peace with themselves.

In Old Testament times there was the practice of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. In other words, the one who was hurt sought to retaliate by rendering the same hurt to the one who had hurt him. It was so bad that they had cities of refuge where one could go to for safety. In the sermon on the mount Jesus dealt with this problem. He said, "Ye have heard that it hath been said. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute

you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:38-48).

Christ recognized the fact that revenge was not the solution. He reasoned that if one was going to follow him then he should do the very opposite of what would be expected of him. Instead of striking back, he should be meek, forgiving, and even willing to take more abuse. Although this might be difficult to do, and even though this might seem to be cowardly, actually this would do more to solve the problem than anything else that one might do. Paul explained it like this: "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good". (Romans 12:17-21). Now, can you see the reasoning here? If someone hurts you especially if it is purposely done, then he will be expecting you to try to do him some harm. But instead of striking back at him, you do some good deed in return then that will surprise him, and it will also hurt his conscience that he hurt you. That will do more to solve the problem than any thing you might do. To seek revenge only aggravates the situation. Like Paul said in quoting from Deuteronomy 32:35, vengeance belongs to the Lord.

Christ said, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you. and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." (Matthew 5:9-12). Our Lord himself is the best example of this. He was willing to go to the cross and go through all of the pain, anguish, and death itself, but he did not strike back. He could have had his

angels to come down from heaven to destroy all of the wicked, but he did not. He bore the cross for the wicked, that they might be saved. Turn with me to 1 Peter 2 and let us begin at the 20th verse. Peter said, "For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even here unto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Peter 2:20-24).

Continuing, the Apostle Paul said, "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." (1 Corinthians 4:11-13). Again Paul wrote, "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth." (Colossians 6:8). He goes on to say, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." (Colossians 3:12, 13). And then, he concluded, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." (Colossians 3:23-25).

The Bible teaches that God is the one who will take vengeance on the wicked. It also teaches that he may work through governments and laws to do this, and he certainly does. We read, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? to that which is good, and thou

shalt have praise of the same; For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid: for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." (Romans 13:1-4).

Also, we read where the Lord will come back one day to take vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the gospel. We read, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

My friends, we can easily see that God has authorised no man, except through the law of the land, to seek vengeance. Christ taught against it and the Bible condemns it. The Lord's solution was to do good to those who have done you wrong, to love your enemies, and to pray for those who would curse you. It is the Lord who will deal with the wrongdoer. He knows their heart, their motives, and he knows what they have done. Therefore, he will judge them righteously and will properly punish them. Thank God, then, that we can turn such matters over to him, knowing that he will take care of the matter in the way it should be handled.

## Wise Old Man!

DEMAR ELAM

*"Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end" (Proverbs 19:20).*

ONE OF man's greatest challenges is the ability to listen to counsel and receive instruction. However, Solomon says that if you want to be wise in your latter days you must listen to counsel and receive instruction.

Isn't it amazing how difficult it is for man, first to listen to counsel, and secondly, to receive instruction? Many people receive only the counsel and instruction that agree with the way they want to do a thing or the way they want to believe a particular thing.

Youth is consumed by the speeding robber called age. Years bring old age, and man reflects on the life and the understanding



those years have produced in him. Sadness fills the minds of those who reflect and realize that they refused to listen to counsel and receive instruction.

Do you want to be a wise old man? Then listen to the mighty Word of God regarding this matter. Hear the Lord and receive His instruction. *"Love the Lord your God, with all your heart and all of your soul and strength"* (Deuteronomy 6:5). *"Love your neighbors as yourself"* (Galatians 5:14). *"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God"* (Matthew 6:33). *"Lay up treasures in heaven"* (Matthew 6:19-21). *"Go the second mile"* (Matthew 5:38-42). *"Love your enemies"* (Matthew 5:43-48). Develop the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25). Assist others and help them bear their burdens (Galatians 6:2). *"Husbands love your wives"* (Ephesians 5:25). *"Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruits of all your increases"* (Proverbs 3:9).

When your arms and legs are feeble due to the passing of the years, will you be viewed by those who know you as a "wise old man", or a foolish old man who never listened to God or man?

*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother; for they will be a graceful ornament on your head, and chains about your neck"* (Proverbs 1:7-9).

## HEAVEN

MARK T. TONKERY

**ARE YOU GOING TO HEAVEN?** There is a growing tendency to believe that all "good" people, whether or not they consider Jesus Christ to be their Savior, will live in that eternal home after they die on earth. In 2005 a Barna survey found that 54% agree, 39% disagree that if a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during his life, he will earn, or be rewarded with, a mansion in Heaven.

Heaven, as described in the Bible, is certainly a wonderful place. It is not surprising that people want to go there. In Isaiah 66:1, the Bible describes that world as the eternal dwelling place of God, *"Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne...."* When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He said that they should address God

the Father, ***"which art in heaven"*** (Matthew 6:9), a statement that confirms that God dwells in Heaven. The Bible describes many wonderful characteristics of this Paradise.

Heaven is a place of eternal peace and happiness. Revelation 21:4 tells us, ***"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."***

Hebrews 4:9-11 and Revelation 14:13 also describe Heaven as a place of glorious rest. This is a major contrast with Hell. Jesus points out that Hell is a place of continual pain and suffering where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30), torment (Luke 16:23), and eternal fire (Matthew 25:41). Unlike Hell, Heaven is a place of eternal rest for the Christian's weary soul.

The Bible also states that Heaven is a better dwelling place, a better country, far better—than any place or country on this earth, because in that world there will be no more sin, no more death, no more sorrow, no more evil, and no more of the things that break our hearts. Hebrews 11:16 states that the faithful long for a better country. The idea, as described in this passage, is that Heaven is far superior to anything we can ever hope for or imagine on this earth.

Heaven will also be a place of fellowship. First, as we have already noted, Revelation 21:2 describes how the apostle John saw New Jerusalem—the church—come down *as a bride adorned for her husband, Christ*. The text also says that ***"the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God."*** 1 Thessalonians 4:17 states, ***"...so shall we ever be with the Lord."*** What joy it will be to dwell with God!

Heaven will be a place of fellowship with the righteous of ages past and with the saints who have been found faithful in Christ. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says,

***"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus."***

***"For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will***

*descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*

*"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*

*"Therefore comfort one another with these words."*

But the question remains: Are you going to Heaven? Will all "good" people go there, even if they were never believers in Christ and even if they were never washed in His blood? Since no human has the authority to give an answer to this question, we must let Jesus legislate concerning who will pass that final judgment, and on what basis a soul will be accepted into Heaven: ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"*** (Matthew 7:21-23).

## God Accepts The Imperfect

RON BRYANT

THE ONLY kind of people who inhabit this earth are imperfect people. We are each painfully aware that even though we may desire to be all that we ought to be, we are not. To be sure, there are occasions when we are more nearly perfect than others, yet we must confess that even our desire to be all that we ought to be is not always what it ought to be. We are imperfect.

Imperfect people do not possess perfect faith, perfect love, or perfect salvation. It is man's lack of perfectness that called the perfect one, Jesus, into the world. He came to seek and save the imperfect. He came to give imperfect people a standing and a relationship with God, through the perfect redemption that He alone could provide.

At our best, our faith and love are going to be less than perfect. Faith and love, at times, vary in the best of us. Our love and its application reaches toward the sublime, and, while it exists because

of the perfect love of God, our love is not sublime.

The perfect will of God calls for our obedience, and our love for Him moves us to yield and to obey from the heart, but we are not perfect in our obedience. Yet, the good news is this—it is God's good will to accept us in Christ. God looks on our hearts. He looks at the genuineness of our love, not its flawlessness. God weighs the unfeigned nature of our faith, not its perfection. He regards the sincerity that produces our efforts to obey Him, not the excellence of our efforts.

God looks at the desire of our hearts, not the perfection of our actions. He wants us to humble ourselves before Him, and asks that we cease our rebellion and yield ourselves to Him. God longs to write upon our hearts the fact that our hearts belong to Him alone. He has chosen to give Himself to those who, though imperfect, are seeking to know and honor Him. Man's imperfection is no excuse or barrier to seeking to give oneself to God.

## ***THERE IS ONLY ONE CREED***

GARY C. HAMPTON

THE WORD "creed" comes from the Latin word "credo," which means, "I believe." Webster's Dictionary defines it as, "A statement of religious belief; a confession of faith."

Obviously, everyone who has a set of religious beliefs has a creed. That creed may come from the statements of belief of an individual or a council. It may be plainly called a creed, manual, catechism, prayer book, discipline, or some other name. We would suggest that the only acceptable creed is the Bible itself, since God is its author (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

Jesus is God's spokesman for today (Hebrews 1:1,2). Moses and Elijah appeared on the mount of transfiguration with Christ. Moses stood for the law, while Elijah represented the prophets, and Christ is the testator of His new will. On that momentous occasion, Peter wanted to build three tabernacles, one to honor each man. However, God caused a bright cloud to overshadow the disciples, and He spoke from that cloud, saying, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him*" (Matthew 17:1-5).

Jesus acted in accord with the Father's will and spoke the words God gave Him to speak (John 12:44-50). He promised His disciples that when He returned to heaven, He would send the Holy Ghost to remind them of His words. The Spirit would guide them in all the things Jesus would have them to teach (John 16:7-14). Thus, it can be said that the apostles spoke in accordance with God's will, and God confirmed their message by the miracles He worked through them (Hebrews 2:3,4).

Included in the promise to the disciples in John 16 was Jesus' assurance that the Spirit would guide them into all truth (verse 13). This He did. Jude wrote to the early Christians, encouraging them to *"contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints"* (Jude 3). Peter said God had given them *"all things that pertain unto life and godliness"* (2 Peter 3:1).

Paul urged Timothy to continue in the teachings his mother and grandmother had started him in. He assured Timothy that the Scriptures were the God-breathed Word, and that the man of God can be perfected by them in every good work (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Paul told the Philippians to *"walk by the same rule"* (Philippians 3:16). He told the Galatians brethren that it was this rule that had made them new creatures before God (Galatians 6:15,16). So, the rule we are to follow is the law of Christ, which produces that new creature (Ephesians 2:13-15; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:1,2).

In 1 Peter 4:16 Peter said, *"If any man speak; let him speak as the oracles of God."* Peter's exhortation should be heeded by all. Paul made that clear when he said **the man—or angel—who preached another gospel would be accursed by God** (Galatians 1:6-9).

Human creeds, thus, become unnecessary, and even dangerous.

- If they add to God's Word, they contain more than God said.
- If they take away from God's Word, they are less than God said.

Either way, they become another gospel and are dangerous to the soul who supports them. If one argues that his man-made creed contains only what God said and all of what God said, then it is the Bible and should not be considered man-made. **Search the scriptures** to learn what God wants us to believe from the only true creed man has.

## ***“Allergic To Church?”***

NEAL POLLARD

SOLOMON WROTE, “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). There is nothing new, but there are definitely interesting twists on the old.

A Christian lady asked her neighbor to attend a gospel meeting with her. The neighbor said neither “yes” nor “no”. He said that he and his wife could not attend church because of her allergies! Apparently, the perfumes of those attending so bothered her that she could not go to a house of worship. He conceded the awfulness of her situation; but was confident God would overlook their lack of attendance.

The same sister, who knows and loves this couple, had bumped into her sneezy neighbor countless times in the grocery and department stores. The couple celebrated their fiftieth anniversary with a party they hosted in their home. Many guests attended, most of whom also “attended church” somewhere. The sister attended, too, and sorrowfully reported that almost every guest wore perfume. Fortunately, the neighbor survived the party.

Few excuses will outdo getting sick *from* church. Yet, some of the excuses Christians give are more trite, but equally flimsy. Truly, God will judge each individual for only He knows the heart and the circumstances (cf. Romans 8:33-34; Hebrews 4:12). As that is so, often is He snubbed and insulted by Christians who *willfully* intend to miss the assemblies (cf. Hebrews 10:25)? What does He think of the chronic excuser, who attempts to justify skipping worship assemblies with horribly poor rationale?

True Christians truly seek the Kingdom of God first (Matthew 6:33)! Spiritually living Christians hunger for each opportunity to worship God and fellowship with other Christians (cf. Psalm 95:6; Matthew 5:6; Acts 12:12; etc.). Cross-centered saints do not look for “reasons” to miss worship and Bible study with other saints! It is incongruous to think of a spiritual-minded person (cf. 1 Peter 2:5) battling with the decision (?) of whether or not to attend. May every child of God develop the yearning of David and say, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD” (Psalm 122:1).

## *Pearls From Acts 8*

IT IS A SAD mistake for preachers to stop preaching from some chapters because they feel the passages have in the past been overworked and are now too familiar. The danger in that lies in the youth who may miss valuable underpinning in his faith because he wasn't old enough to understand the preaching of the passage when it was done.

One such familiar passage is Acts eight. Let's revisit this wonderful and important text from verses 26 thru 39, and find some pearls for consideration.

The work of the Holy Spirit is interesting in the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch. After preaching to the people of Samaria and viewing their baptisms, Philip returned to Jerusalem. There the angel told Philip to go South toward Gaza, and he quickly complied, "Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot (vs. 29)."

I Timothy 4:1 says, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly..." In the case of the Ethiopian, that is clearly demonstrated.

Now consider this: After the Spirit directed Philip to the Ethiopian, He backed off. There was no more intervention. His work involved getting the preacher of God's word to the student. After that, the power of God in the conversion process rested solely in the Gospel and the human teacher of that Gospel.

"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth..." (Romans 1:16).

I Corinthians 1:21 says, "...It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

I am impressed with Philip. Selected as one of the seven deacons in Acts 6, Philip was always eager to do more in service to his Lord. After the death of Stephen, and the increasing power and fury of Saul, the Christians in Jerusalem were scattered (Acts 8:4). The penman of Luke focuses his sights on Philip and notes, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them (Acts 8:5)." This chapter is Philip's crowning tribute. His name is used fourteen times. After the conversion of the Ethiopian, we only read of Philip once more, in Acts 21:8; "...and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. The same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophecy." His work began with serving tables. In Philip we see a fine example of a man willing to work in any capacity

presented to him. Whatever the job, he wanted to serve Jesus! Philip preached Jesus. That is simple, all-encompassing description. He preached Jesus. Let all the world learn from this deacon a mammoth truth: To preach includes preaching obedience to the Gospel! When we preach Jesus and leave out the necessity of baptism, we have broken ranks with men like Philip. Jesus taught, "...go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo I am with you always..." (Matthew 28:19),

Now consider the Ethiopian. Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, had placed this man in charge of her treasure. She trusted him. When men set their hearts on pleasing God, it has always made them more honest with their fellow man. (The converse is also true). The trip from Ethiopia to Jerusalem, where this man wanted to worship, was between 1000 and 1200 miles. A man who would make sacrifices like that to worship the true God, and study His will, would make the perfect treasurer.

Because he was a Eunuch, he faced restrictions from God. Deuteronomy 23:1 says plainly, he "shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord." However, from Acts 8 we learn that the eunuchs could be proselytes, or converts to the Jewish law.

When Philip joined the Ethiopian's chariot, he heard him reading from Isaiah 53 about the suffering Christ. From this passage he "preached unto him Jesus" (Acts 8:35). But have you considered that only three chapters later, in Isaiah 56, we read these words, "Neither let the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep My sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant; Even unto them will I give in Mine house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.'"

Had the Ethiopian read this? Was he combing through Isaiah to learn more about this closer relationship to His God? We are not told. What we do know, however; is that this good man from Ethiopia heard the Gospel of Christ that day, and was baptized into his Lord. When the Ethiopian said good-bye to his beloved teacher, "he went on his way rejoicing." For now, you see, he is privileged to wear that everlasting name. Now he has a place in the house of the Most High! He wears the name of Christ. He is a Christian.



May the word of God be planted in the hearts of people like the Ethiopian until the Lord comes again! May conversions like the one from Acts 8:38 happen over and over again. And may we who wear Christ's name remember that conversions come when we like Philip, open our mouth, begin with the scriptures, and preach Jesus.

# King Jesus' Kingdom

ALLEN WEBSTER

KINGDOM IS found in the Bible 342 times (158 in the New Testament; 127 in the Accounts of the Gospel, 31 in Acts through Revelation).

The kingdom was a popular topic for sermons among New Testament preachers. John, Jesus' announcer, preached the kingdom (Matthew 3:2). John, Jesus' apostle, preached the kingdom (Revelation 1:9). Jesus preached the kingdom (Matthew 4:17). The twelve apostles preached the kingdom (Matthew 10:7). The seventy preached it (Luke 10:9). Philip preached it (Acts 8:12). Barnabas preached it (Acts 14:20-22). Paul preached it (Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). James preached it (James 2:5). Peter preached it (2 Peter 1:11). So at least 90 of the early preachers preached the same subject. It must be an important subject for us to preach today.

## I. WHAT IS THE KINGDOM?

Kingdom (*basileia*) in the New Testament means "reign" or "rule." The term "kingdom of God" is used synonymously by the New Testament writers with "kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:23-24; 4:17; Mark 1:14). In fact, in the Scriptures kingdom refers to the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven. These phrases do not refer to three different kingdoms, but to the same institution.

- It is God's kingdom because He planned and promised it (Daniel 2:44).
- It is the Sons because the Father gave it to Him (Daniel 7:13-14; John 16:15; Philippians 2:9-11; Ephesians 1:20-22).
- It is the kingdom of heaven because it originated there, Christ now reigns over it from there (Acts 2:30-36), and ultimately all the citizens of the kingdom will be united there (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:24).

Both “kingdom of God” and “kingdom of heaven” can refer to either the church of Christ on earth or to heaven; the meaning must be determined by the context (Matthew 16:18-19; Hebrews 12:22-28; Luke 22:16-18, 29-30; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:20).

## **II. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM?**

There are two types of kingdoms—physical and spiritual. The kingdom of Christ is spiritual. It is not of this world (John 18:36). It “cometh not with observation” (Luke 17:20). It “is within you” (Luke 17:21); that is, it rules in men’s hearts.

Since Christ’s kingdom is a spiritual one, a birth different from what is normally required for citizenship is necessary to enter it. Nicodemus was informed that he would have to be born “again” to see or enter the new kingdom (John 3:3, 5). The spiritual kingdom has a physical manifestation. That is, we can see the kingdom in the sense that we can see the people who are members of it, although the world may not recognize them.

God sent Christ to establish a new kingdom and a new covenant (Matthew 3:7-9; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:8-12). There are four essential elements to any kingdom:

- **A King**—We have Jesus (1 Timothy 6:14-15).
- **A Law**—We have the gospel (James 1:25).
- **Territory**—We have the whole world (Mark 16:15-16).
- **Subjects**—We are Christians (Colossians 1:13-14).

## **III. WHEN WAS THE KINGDOM ESTABLISHED?**

The kingdom is now in existence upon the earth, and has been since the time of the apostles. Paul wrote, “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14). John was “in the kingdom” before AD 100. (Revelation 1:6-9).

To help pinpoint the exact date of its beginning, let’s back up to the lifetime of Christ. We know that it was not established during Jesus’ personal ministry, for it was then spoken of as being “at hand” or “nigh” (Matthew 3:12; 4:17; 10:5-7; Luke 10:9).

Four verses pinpoint the exact time of establishment:

- Mark 9:1: Some listening to Jesus would not die until the kingdom came with power.
- Luke 24:49: Jesus’ disciples were to wait in Jerusalem for the power.

- Acts 1:8: They would receive power when the Holy Spirit come.
- Acts 2:1-4: The Holy Spirit came on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection.

Thus the kingdom was established in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day in the year A.D. 33, as recorded in Acts 2.

This chart helps to establish the exact day the kingdom was set up on earth:

#### **BEFORE PENTECOST:**

Mark 1:15: Not existing

Mark 9:1: Not existing

Luke 22:29: Not existing

Matthew 16:18: Will build

Luke 22:30: Table in kingdom

Luke 22:30: Disciples to eat in

Daniel 2:44: Stand forever

#### **AFTER PENTECOST:**

Colossians 1:13: Existed

Hebrews 12:28: Existed

Revelation 1:9: Existed

Acts 2:47: Added to

1 Corinthians 10:21: Table

1 Corinthians 11:20: Ate

Hebrews 12:28-29: Cannot be moved

Christ invites you to become a member of the greatest institution on earth, His kingdom (Matthew 11:28-30). As Jesus told Nicodemus, you must be born again, of water and the Spirit (John 3:1-5). This refers to being baptized in water according to the Spirit's teachings in the New Testament (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Spirit says one is qualified for baptism when he is a penitent believer who is willing to confess Christ's deity (Acts 8:40-45; cf. Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 22:16).

Jesus is offering citizenship in His kingdom right now. Wont you take Him up on it?

## ***CHRISTIANITY UNCLUTTERED***

DONALD FAX

MY WIFE AND I were looking for a tool the other day. We knew (or we thought we knew) exactly where it was. As we climbed over the clutter in our storage shed, we both came to the same conclusion—we've got to get rid of this clutter!

Although we never found what we were looking for, my mind started to dwell on how Christianity through the centuries had become cluttered with men's doctrines. We need to remove the man-made clutter from churches so that men can follow the simple teaching of the New Testament of Jesus Christ.

The Bible gives the answer to, "From whence came the clutter?" Paul warned the elders of the church in Ephesus: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves, shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28-30).

The Bible teaches that man has no right to add to the Word. Paul wondered why many had swerved from the Gospel: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-8).

The Bible teaches that the Word is complete. No further additions are needed since "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).

Our Lord rebukes those that would add to his Word. Shall we heed Jesus' wishes? "Howbeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For, laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men" (Mark 7:7-8)

To tamper with the Word of God is a fearful thing (Revelation 22:18-19). Why would anyone desire to add to or subtract from the perfect will of God?

## ***HOLINESS AS USED IN SCRIPTURE***

JEFF DARBY

"MY GOD wouldn't send anyone to hell." It is unfortunate that statements such as this are now heard with great regularity. At first brush, this reveals a concept of God that is somehow determined by the beliefs of the speaker - God molded, shaped and fashioned to the whims of His own creation. Troubling as this is, a deeper truth waits to be unearthed. God's nature - His inherent holiness

—not only makes room for hell, but it also demands one exist. Holiness is not simply a lack of evil—it necessitates that evil be punished. A better statement would be, “My God is too holy for there not to be a hell.”

The Bible uses the word “holiness” in various ways. Sometimes it refers to places set apart for God, such as the tabernacle and later the temple. Often it means that which invokes awe, veneration and fear. Holiness can refer to someone set apart for God as were the priests and, later, all who would come to Him through Christ. Ultimately, however, holiness is an identification of God’s righteous perfection and purity.

Holiness is a unique possession of God. John records this shout of praise from the heavenly hosts, “Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy.” (Revelation 15:4 NKJV). Absolute holiness is His and His only. No one else can be holy in the same way that God is holy. As Jesus reminded the rich young man in responding to his greeting of “Good teacher,” “No one is good - except God alone” (Mark 10:17 NIV). Jesus was making two assertions. First, that God alone is “good” or morally pure. This was to force the man to grapple with who he believed Jesus to be, man or God. Secondly, it put to rest any consideration that a man could aspire to a state of holiness. This young man thought himself holy through his law keeping. He needed to be taught that no man is holy - that label is reserved for only One.

### **THE HOLINESS OF GOD AFFIRMED BY GOD’S SERVANTS**

The praise recorded by John is not the only praise given by the angels in heaven. Isaiah recalls a similar crescendo uttered by those who attended God. “Holy, holy, holy” is the refrain they repeated as they surrounded His throne (Isaiah 6:3). It is no surprise that this unique feature is chosen as the central theme of their veneration.

The angels are not alone in identifying God’s holiness as His most clearly visible attribute. When faced with the prospect of meeting God, this holiness is often the overwhelming realization with which one is forced to grapple. Moses, in his initial meeting with God, is confronted with His holiness. The appearance of God was significant enough that even the physical scene was sanctified or set apart requiring Moses to treat it as “holy ground” (Exodus 3:5). Isaiah, in the same vision in which he heard the praise of “Holy, holy, holy” is made to see his own lack of holiness in stark

contrast with the Holy One. His response to the scene of greatness unfolding before him was a realization of his own faults (Isaiah 6:5).

The voices of men and angels confirm for us the holiness of God, but we see the greatest display of His holiness in the way God addresses the sinfulness of the human race.

### **THE HOLINESS OF GOD AS SHOWN BY SINFUL MAN**

We most often define holiness as a lack of sin. Perfection in every facet of morality is the cornerstone of this concept. In contrast, sin typifies the human experience. Sin is falling short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Were it not for God and His holiness, we could have no standard against which to measure sin. The fact that we can even understand the concept of sin is an acknowledgement of God's holiness.

Not only does holiness identify sin, but it also makes it necessary for God to punish sin. The cost of sin is death. God told Adam of the tree from which he was not to eat, "when you eat of it [thus sinning] you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17). The cost of sin saw no appreciable decrease over time. Paul in Romans reminds his readers that the "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The use of the word "wages" refers to something that we rightly earn. Jesus Himself taught the need for people to receive what was rightly deserved (Luke 10:7). The clear picture is one of "just punishment" as described by the writer in Hebrews 2:2.

The very fact that sin requires punishment is a direct reflection of the holiness of God.

God is holy. Because human beings are not like God, they find themselves at odds with Him. Without God's holiness as a standard, we have no way to judge sin and no rationale for sin requiring punishment.

### **GOD'S HOLINESS AS SHOWN IN THE ATONEMENT**

God can neither accept nor ignore sin. It insults His holiness to say that God would acknowledge man's sin and simply accept it or turn to it a blind eye. Furthermore, the idea that God will accept sin gives no opportunity for God to display His holiness in contrast to human sin.

The truth is, however, that man is lost and needs a Savior. Again, the holiness of God is central to the way of salvation. God, as holy, wishes to be served by those who are likewise holy.

Numerous references are made to those who follow God as His holy people. Ephesians 1:4 tells us, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." How then can man become holy? Only by having the cost of the sin paid.

The cost of sin is already clear - it is death. In referring to the sacrificial system instituted by God, the Hebrew writer states, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (9:22). This system of substitution paid for sin through death. The blood of bulls and goats offered yearly gave symbolic reprieve from the debt of sin. However, it could not ultimately forgive sins (Hebrews 10:4).

To provide real forgiveness of sin, God exhibited His holiness in its grandest presentation. The plan, which would forever sanctify God within His people (Ezekiel 20:41) and His set-apart people to His service, was based in this unique and singular possession of God Himself - holiness.

So true is the holiness of God that He spared not even His own Son (Romans 8:32) in providing the necessary blood-debt for sins: "Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, "Here I am - it is written about me in the scroll - I have come to do your will, O God."' First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, 'Here I am, I have come to do your will.' He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:5-10).

The holiness of God as expressed in this event clarifies the depth, breadth and width of a spiritual purity that refuses to accept or ignore sin, choosing instead to pay its debt and forgive its wrong.

### **THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF GOD'S HOLINESS**

The work of God's holiness does not end in the atonement of His saints. It continues to have its work in their improvement. The process of being made over in the image of God is one that strives to duplicate His holiness in His people. This begins with a change of mind. The writer of Proverbs explains that fear of the Lord brings wisdom which provides us insight into the Holy One (9:10). From

this comes then a change of heart that sanctifies Jesus within His own (1 Peter 1:15-16). Out of this transformed heart flows forth the worship the psalmist describes in Psalm 29: "Ascribe to the Lord glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness" (v. 2).

It is not only an issue of praise that flows from this newly sanctified heart, but it also demonstrates a changed life. Paul defines this as our "new self when he writes to the Ephesians saying, "Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:24 *ESV*). God's own holiness makes the changes within His children possible. The cycle comes full circle starting and ending with a fear of God rooted in an understanding of His holy nature. Paul returns to this starting point when sharing these inspired words: "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

Permitting these truths to guide our faith, we stand in awe of the Lord's holiness displayed in His Word, in His dealing with sinful man, in His way of salvation in Christ and His continued growth of His saints. As we look to the splendor of God, let us say with the host of heavenly beings described in Isaiah 6:3: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (*NIV*).



## **OUR ADDRESS HAS CHANGED**

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