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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

Sin Is Committed Not Inherited

ONE OF THE most believed and preached errors in the religious world of today is the teaching of the inherited sin. According to this belief: sin of Adam brought man under the control of Satan and cost mankind the divine likeness, therefore when a baby is born in the world he or she is born with the sin inherited from Adam.

The question is, if that baby dies in infancy or before reaching the age of accountability or penitence then what happens to his soul? God has appointed all humans to die once and then stand before Him to be judged (Hebrews 9: 27; 2 Corinthians 5:10). So if the baby or the little child dies with the inherited sin of Adam then naturally he/she will be lost in hell forever for the sin that Adam had committed thousands of years ago in the beginning. Since the baby or the little girl or boy did not have time or opportunity to grow to become accountable for his or her own sin and to believe in Christ and obey His commands to be saved (Mark 16:16). People have been foolishly following the doctrine of original sin which was invented by some men a few hundred years ago.

The Bible, however, teaches that sin is personally committed by each and every individual. Notice, the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel said, "The word of the Lord came to me again, saying, "What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? "As I live," says the Lord God, "you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel. "Behold all

souls are mine: the soul of the father, as well as the soul of the son is Mine; The soul who sins shall die". (Ezekiel 18:1-4). To reiterate, in verse 20 it says again, "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." The Bible teaches, no individual can sin for another. Sin is something that is committed by each person individually.

Little children, Christ taught, are pure and sinless and are therefore worthy of entrance into heaven. He said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 19:14). To His disciples, on another occasion, Christ taught, "Assuredly I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:4). Now, if little children had sin in them inherited from Adam then Christ wouldn't have said that. Or was He ignorant of the fact that children were guilty of the original sin of Adam?

The fact of the matter is, that an individual becomes a sinner in God's account when he or she chooses to sin, when one becomes old enough to be accountable for his or her own action in God's judgment. Just like Adam and Eve, in the beginning, had sinned by their own personal choice. Sin, according to the Bible, means transgression of the law of God. "Whoever commits sin," we read at 1 John 3:4, "also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness." When an individual becomes old enough to choose right or wrong, God, from that point of time, holds that person responsible for his/her actions. In Genesis 8:21 it says, "... although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." (**not from birth**). Likewise, in Jeremiah 3:25 it says, "... For we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, **from our youth** even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God." The human spirit is not inherited from one's parents, rather it is given by God (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Hebrews 12:9), hence at birth it must be as pure as the source from whence it comes.

But what about Psalm 51:5? There King David said, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." David there was not saying that he was born in this world with the original sin of Adam in him. Rather he was making the point about his mother being in sin when he was born. He was saying, his mother brought him forth in iniquity when she was in sin. It is

almost like saying, "In drunkenness one's father beat him." Now who was drunk? Evidently the father, not the son. David there was making the point that sin was already there when he was born and that his mother had conceived him while in sin and had brought him forth in iniquity. When David was born, he was not born with the inherited sin of Adam in him. But like any other infant he was born without sin, innocent and pure. Because sin is not inherited but is committed, as we read from James 1:14,15, where it says, "each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed, then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, brings forth death." The same is true of Romans 3:23 where it says, "All have sinned." It is not saying, all are born with sin, but **all have sinned**, notice the active verb. Nowhere does the Bible teach the doctrine of original inherited sin, it is a man-made teaching.

Putting Off The Old Man Of Sin

Lesson 13

SMOKING

J. C. CHOATE

I HOPE you enjoy studying the Bible as much as I do. I am specially happy that I can be sharing with you some information that will help you to see the value of putting off the old man of sin in order that you might put on the new man of righteousness in Christ Jesus.

The lesson I have chosen for us at this time has to do with **SMOKING** or the use of tobacco.

There was a time, and not too long ago, that not much was said in opposition to smoking, and the few who did find fault with it were criticized. But during the past few years, I am happy to say, that there is a great movement, against it. These include not only religious people but also health organizations, numerous doctors and physicians, and even many governments of the world have **gone** so far as to require on each package of cigarettes this statements: CIGARETTE SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH. Now isn't that something? It doesn't say that it might be injurious, but that it is injurious to one's health. Now when one knows that, then what right thinking person is going to want to smoke cigarettes?

Yet, in spite of that, as you well know, many go right on buying and smoking cigarettes. It is not being done by illiterates either. It is being done by a cross cut of society. That is sad isn't it? For after all, all of these people who go on and smoke, in spite of this warning, will in all probability have to eventually pay a heavy price for this bad habit.

People reason about the hazards of smoking much as they reason about having a car accident. They are always thinking that it will be the other fellow, but that it will never happen to them. But contrary to such reasoning, it does happen to most of them sooner or later. There are many diseases associated with smoking, and some of them are: heart trouble, lung cancer, infizema, breathing problems, and so on. Now do you want to end up dying prematurely with one of these diseases? Do you want to suffer the last years of your life with one or more of these ailments because you were determined to go on with your smoking regardless of the warnings against it? If you do go on smoking, and you end up like that, then you will have no one to blame but yourself, and I am sure at that time you will wish a thousand times that you had listened.

But someone might want to know where in the Bible can you read where it says that one should not smoke. Naturally the Bible doesn't mention smoking, or tobacco as such, since there were no cigarettes being smoked in the days in which God's word was being written down. As far as I know, there was not any kind of smoking in those days. Still, there are any number of principles set forth in God's word that definitely condemn smoking, or the use of tobacco, in the form of cigarettes, cigars, pipes, chewing, or snuff. For instance, when Paul listed the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21 he ended up by saying, "and such like." This meant then that he was not attempting to mention all of them, and surety men in time would invent unto themselves even new works of the flesh, and of course they have done this.

Another sin that is condemned in the scriptures is murder or self murder, and this would also include suicide. Murder is listed in Galatians 5:19-21 as being one of those works of the flesh. In Romans 13:9 Paul spoke of the command, "Thou shalt not kill." Surely if one is not to kill others, then he should not kill himself. But what does this have to do with smoking? Everything, since a smoker is deliberately killing himself. It may be a slow process but it does the job anyway. Then John said that those who commit

such sins will one day "have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Revelation 21:8).

Then Paul informs us that we are God's temple and therefore we must do everything in our power to keep it clean and pure, since the Spirit of God dwells in it. Hear what the Apostle Paul has to say about this, being inspired of God to write this: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." (1 Corinthians 3:16,17). Again he says, "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). That being true, then can you imagine filling the body with smoke and nicotine, that which will damage, harm, and eventually destroy the body, and then expect the Holy Spirit, along with God and Christ, the Son of God, to dwell in there with all of that? How could we treat our bodies in such a shameful way? How could we expect the Lord to be with us if we are going to show that kind of disrespect for him and his Spirit?

Going on, the scriptures have much to say about keeping our bodies pure as well as our spirits. Paul said, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure." (1 Timothy 5:22). James says that we must keep ourselves unspotted from the world. (James 1:27). John wrote, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:2, 3). Now let me ask you, do you think for a minute that Christ our Lord would be guilty of using tobacco in any form? If not, do you think he is going to be pleased with us if we are partakers of such a filthy and destructive habit? You answer that.

Continuing, hear again the words of the apostle Paul when he said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." (Romans 12:1). Please note that he says that we are to present our bodies to the Lord as a living sacrifice, one that is acceptable unto God. Now can you imagine the Lord being pleased with you if you present to him a

body that is full of smoke, nicotine, that stinks with the scent of tobacco, that is stained with nicotine, that is coughing, shaking with infazima, and is fiddled with other diseases; with no hope of living much longer? You would have to be kidding yourself to say that the Lord would be pleased with such a sacrifice. He wants a living sacrifice, not a dead, diseased one. Hear Peter, as he says, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." (1 Peter 2:11).

Then the Bible teaches that we are to set a good example. Christ said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16). Paul told Timothy to be an example of the believers. (1 Timothy 4:12). But now let me ask you this question: Do you want your children to follow your example in smoking? Who can you commend smoking to? Doesn't that tell you something? If it is not good for others, then how can it be good for you?

Smoking and other bad habits related to tobacco is very expensive. Do you have any idea how much money you are spending every day on your tobacco? Can't you use that money in a better way? Smoking is not helping your health. It has no food value. It doesn't help you pay the bills. Surely you could use that money to better feed or cloth your family. If you save that money over the years, no telling what you might be able to do. But there are many people who are almost on starvation, some of them are even out begging, yet they have money for their cigarettes and other bad habits. Isn't that sad?

But someone might argue that if people didn't smoke then those who grow tobacco would not be able to sell it and earn a living. They further argue that the tobacco companies would have to go out of business, and then all of those working in them would lose their jobs, the government would lose the tax money, etc. That is true, but the question remains: which is more important, a few people making a living or millions and millions of people having their lives spared by not smoking? If you can't see the difference then you simply don't want to see the difference.

Tobacco users think of their habit as being so innocent, but it is very deceptive. Actually, it is very dangerous, If not then why would the health people, government, etc.. be warning you against it? We are not talking about Christians being responsible for putting warning on each cigarette package and ad, but we are talking about the Government forcing the tobacco people to do that. Of course

Christians are glad to see that because we are opposed to the use of tobacco for the reasons already given. But why, you might ask, does the government not ban the use of tobacco altogether? That is a good question, but I guess the government is saying that they are not going to force people to quit the habit if they are determined to use it and kill themselves, but at least they are warning everyone about its dangerous effect and it might just be that there would be some wise enough to accept the warning and quit the habit.

But you might reason, "I just can't quit, and besides it brings a lot of pleasure to me." Of course you can quit if you want to. Millions have. But how can you have pleasure in something when you know that there is a good possibility that it will kill you? My friends, every day that you smoke you are taking days off your life. Think about it and quit while you can.

I want to close this study by encouraging you to become a Christian, and I might add, that if you are a smoker, that in becoming a Christian you would surely repent, and in so doing you would give up your tobacco habits. Believe in God, and Christ, and repent of your sins, confess Christ as God's Son, and be baptized in water to wash away your sins, and the Lord will save you and make you a member of his family, the church. How wonderful it would be if you would do that. How happy you would be if you did so.

Grace Alone? Yes!

EARLE H. WEST

MANY ARTICLES and sermons are appearing that focus on the issue of whether one is saved by grace alone. In response to those who insist that salvation is by grace alone, the typical procedure offers a concordance-type list of biblical terms that are connected to salvation. Thus it is said we are not saved by grace alone because the Bible teaches we are saved by faith, by baptism, by obedience, by the Word, by the gospel, by the blood, and many other items. This confusing, superficial response makes it appear that achieving salvation is like adding together all the required numerals to get a sum.

It is essential in this type of discussion to distinguish between the meritorious ground of salvation and the conditions that God requires people to meet in order to enjoy His grace. The idea of

the meritorious ground of salvation refers to that which is sufficiently efficacious to pay the price of sin. Peter told us that we were redeemed not with silver and gold but with the precious blood of Jesus (1 Peter 1:18-19).

The writer of Hebrews said that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin but that only the blood of Jesus is sufficiently effective (Hebrews 10:4). His blood is so powerful and meritorious that it can forgive all the sins of the entire world, looking backward to those who lived before the cross and forward to all who will live afterward (9:15). Salvation by grace, then, refers to the gracious acts of God whereby He gave His only begotten Son to die on the cross. This death was once for all people. It is fully effective to cleanse from sin, and no additional acts of merit are needed to make up any shortage (7:25-27).

With respect to the meritorious ground of salvation, it is grace and grace alone! Nothing any human being can do will add merit to the cross of Christ. As regards merit, we are all unprofitable servants. Neither thousands of prayers, millions of dollars or rupees in alms, nor a lifetime of hospital visits can accumulate sufficient inherent merit to remove one sin. It is an insult to God to think for a moment that Jesus' death on the cross lacks sufficient merit even to a microscopic degree to forgive sins. Nothing we can do creates enough merit that God is obligated to forgive sins. Thus, when speaking of the meritorious basis for salvation, it is grace alone. This message must be preached to a self-confident world to bring about trust in Jesus. This message must also be preached to the church so that we may be reminded that we stand by grace, not by our own merit.

Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, yet the entire world will not be saved (Matthew 7:21-23). Thus there are clearly other issues besides the inherent merit of the cross. God has seen fit to attach conditions to this grace. If there were no conditions, then all would be saved. If there are conditions, then only those will be saved who meet the divinely stated conditions.

When announcing the biblical conditions of access into this grace, we must make clear that by fulfilling these conditions one does not merit salvation or obligate God (except in the sense of calling upon God to fulfill His promises). Regardless of the number or difficulty of the conditions, no single condition or any set of conditions can create merit toward salvation. This is true whether

we are speaking of the conditions for initial forgiveness of sins or the conditions for forgiveness of sins as an erring child of God.

The distinction between meritorious grounds for a gift and conditions for receiving the gift is common in our everyday experience. For example, a national company offers to give someone ₹5 million. In addition to having one's name chosen from a list, the individual may be required to send in an official entry form on which various stickers must be placed in appropriate positions. Over the life of the contest, the winner may have spent many hours finding and affixing the various stickers, yet he cannot claim to have earned ₹5 million. The money is clearly a gift, yet failure to satisfy all conditions makes one ineligible. The meritorious ground for the money is the generosity (grace) of the donor company; nothing anyone can do will earn the funds. Persons may only carefully read and meticulously follow the conditions for eligibility. Determining the conditions is entirely the prerogative of the donor. The only appropriate response for the recipient is humbly to learn the conditions and obey them.

It is very helpful to make explicit the distinction between the meritorious ground of salvation and the conditions for receiving God's grace. It should resolve the current controversy stirred by a brother's remark that "we do not contribute one whit to our salvation." Presumably he was speaking of the meritorious ground of salvation because this is the only sense in which it is true to Scripture. Others, responding to that brother, list various acts of obedience as if they were a part of the meritorious ground of salvation instead of being non-meritorious conditions for receiving God's grace.

The distinction may help us as Christians to mitigate the self-righteousness that can creep into our hearts when we conscientiously try to meet the conditions for God's grace. It is easy to slide into the thinking of the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-12) who reviewed his good features and decided that he, unlike others, had little need of God's grace.

This distinction is helpful in evangelism. In the past, evangelism mainly reached those who already knew that we are saved by God's grace as the meritorious ground of salvation, but who had been misled about the conditions. That preaching properly focused on clarifying the conditions. Today we encounter many who have come to trust in themselves. These do not need to hear about the

conditions for reaching God's grace until they are convicted of sin and understand their total inability to save themselves by their own wisdom and righteousness.

Where Do Mistakes Go When You Rub Them Out?

RAYMOND ELLIOTT

THE TITLE of this article was the caption under a picture in a comic strip. The scene depicts a young girl sitting at her desk with a pencil in her hand. She had made a mistake in spelling a word and had erased it. At this point she asked her teacher, "Where do mistakes go when you rub them out?" That is a very good question to be considered.

As I read the cartoon, my thoughts immediately turned to the mistakes we all make in life. Some mistakes are not sinful, but all our sins are mistakes. Sin is a transgression of God's law; sin is unrighteousness; sin is a failure to comply with the commands of God (1 John 3:4; 5:17; James 4:17). Sin is universal in scope: "There is none righteous, no, not one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 23 NKJV). When a person complies with the terms of pardon presented by Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sins can be obtained. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

When sin appears as a debt, an unfilled obligation, then pardon is described as a cancellation. "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins" (Isaiah 43:25). "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). Jesus cancelled our debt of sin on Calvary when He shed His atoning blood for us. The first stanza and chorus of the hymn, "He Paid a Debt He Did Not Owe," greatly emphasizes this truth: "He paid a debt He did not owe, / I owed a debt I could not pay. / I needed someone to wash my sins away. / And now I sing a brand new song: Amazing Grace. / Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay."

When sin appears as an estrangement from God, then forgiveness is represented as reconciliation. Man's sins separated

him from God (Isaiah 59:1-2). But God has made it possible for fallen man to be reconciled to Him through His son Jesus Christ (John 14:6). This message of reconciliation was proclaimed by the inspired preachers in the first century. "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). In the body of Jesus, both Jew and Gentile can enjoy friendship and fellowship with the heavenly Father (Ephesians 2:11-16).

When sin appears as an indictment, forgiveness is spoken of as a justification. Paul expressed it in this manner: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). To be justified is to be declared guiltless, to be absolved of a wrongdoing, to be acquitted, to make or to be declared right. The whole world has been indicted by the court of heaven as being under sin (v. 19). To be set free from the guilt and bondage of sin, justification must be sought in Jesus Christ.

When sin appears as a disease, forgiveness is represented as a healing. In reference to the coming Messiah, Isaiah wrote, "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). In the New Testament, we learn of the work of the Great Physician "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24). There is a balm in Gilead; there is a physician there. Jesus Christ is the healer of the malady of sin (Jeremiah 8:22; Matthew 9:12-13).

Where do our sins go when they are forgiven? That is a most difficult question. However, the Word of God offers us some understanding on this subject. Take for instance the passage found in Micah 7:19: "He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea." Sin in this verse is regarded as a personal enemy that will be entirely subdued by God's sovereign grace.

As God destroyed Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, so He will cast our sins into the depths of the sea of forgiveness and forgetfulness (Exodus 15:4, 10). If you will observe, the Lord will cast our sins into the depths of the sea and not near the shore where they can be washed back again.

In Psalm 103:12, we learn, "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us." In reference

to the new covenant that God would make with Israel and Judah, the promise was made, "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17). God who has infinite intelligence possesses the attribute of forgetting sins that are forgiven. To some degree, we understand how this is possible. Loving parents have often forgotten as well as forgiven mistakes and sins committed by their children. In perfection, our Heavenly Father forgives and forgets the sins of His penitent children (1 John 1:7, 9).

God will forgive and forget all sins committed by alien sinners who come to believe that Jesus Christ, His son, died for the sins of mankind on Calvary and arose from the dead for our justification (Romans 4:25). This is the good news that Paul and all the faithful gospel preachers proclaimed to a world lost in sin (Mark 16:15; Romans 1:14-16; 1 Corinthians 15:1-3). A living, vibrant faith will motivate the sinner to repent and be baptized in obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ and His apostles (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). The precious promises of the Lord will be granted to the obedient believer, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 3:19).

GLORY IN THE THINGS OF GOD

MICHAEL PRICE

SOME PEOPLE love to glory in their shame. They love to tell us about all their accomplishments (the shame of self-righteousness), and others are proud to tell us of the sin they have overcome (the shame of self-centeredness). Both groups think a great deal of themselves. They try to impress the rest of us with their special enlightenment concerning spirituality and their unique relationship with God.

Sadly, Gnosticism (the philosophy of "enlightened ones") has not died. It is alive and well today in the church. It was Paul, along with John and others, who found such men offensive, self-serving, arrogant and outside of God's will. Paul had to deal with both types of arrogance in his letter to the Philippians.

"Only let us hold true to what we have attained. Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often

told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things" (Philippians 3:17-19 ESV).

Paul believed the power to save, which brings healing through the abundant life, was found in the gospel (Romans 1:16). He also wrote: "For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Galatians 2:18-21).

How can any person who has been crucified with Christ (in baptism by faith) rebuild what God's grace has torn down? We cannot justify ourselves! So why would one, in his pride, count his sinful past as though it was something that gives him a special place in the church to reach and to relate to sinners?

In light of what God's grace has torn down (our self-righteousness), no one should have the attitude that he is important because of what he has accomplished or overcome. In comparison to Jesus, we have not accomplished much, and what we have accomplished was because of God.

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

Prideful talk about our past accomplishments and the sin that we have overcome is not what needs to come out of the mouth of a Christian. Paul said, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29).

The word for corrupting is "*sapros*" (to make corrupt, to destroy) and carries the meaning of "rotteness" and "worthlessness." It conveys the idea of an old piece of clothing that is rotten and smells; it is therefore worthless and unserviceable. It is not to be worn, but rather cast aside. This idea is consistent with Paul's command "to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt" (Ephesians 4:22). The word here for "corrupt" is "*phtheiromenon*" meaning to destroy by means of corrupting, and so bringing into a worse state.

No Christian, much less those in roles of influence, should ever

engage in glorying in his past. The Word of God teaches us to run the race. In the Greek foot-races to which Paul refers in Scripture, men competing for the prize did not stop at different points during the race and look back with pride and accomplishment on that part of the course they had just run. If so, they would have lost the race and the prize!

"Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it" (1 Corinthians 9:24). "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

A person struggling with certain temptations and sins such as adultery, pornography or gossip could be defeated by the glorying of men who have overcome these sins. He could say, "What is the use? I could never be what he is" and give up. Still others may be tempted once again by rehearsing the dynamics involved with such addictive sins.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea" (Mark 9:42). "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!" (Matthew 18:7).

We have memories, but how does God teach us to deal with our memories? Every experience, every act goes into the very substance of our being, and we are the sum of our experiences. We will never be, after our experiences, what we were before. We cannot undo our deeds or altogether escape the consequences that have followed them. The past remains unchanged, and memories remain imprinted upon our lives. Jesus and His good news teach us to displace our bad memories with other ones that are stronger. I must concentrate on my life in Christ and not the old life of the flesh until the old life is weakened and neutralized and fades out like a lantern that has run out of fuel. It is like pulling the weeds out of our garden and planting beautiful flowers in their place.

The truth is that the past is soiled, but the future is unsoiled in Christ. In this sense we forget the things that are behind and reach on to the things that are before. As a Christian, I must continue looking to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of my faith.

Remembrance and moral forgetfulness can exist side by side in the same memory and heart. God has made it possible, through repentance and His forgiveness, for my sins, while remembered, to be forgotten. Based upon God's grace we can forget discarded thoughts, mean ambitions, false standards and low ideals as we move forward in our lives with Jesus Christ.

Paul said, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). What words would you as a Christian want your brethren and those who are lost to hear coming from your lips -the power of God which is the good news or your past sins and experiences of how you overcame?

Do we need to tell others how we were sinners and what we did and how we overcame those sins so as to relate to them? I think not! I don't have to tell my past sins for you to know that I am a sinner. Nor do you have to tell your past sins for me to know you are a sinner (Romans 3:10, 23). Nor do we have to rejoice in our past. On the contrary, we are commanded to rejoice in our present state of reconciliation. As a Christian, I know what Paul would have me think and that is what should come out of my heart and into the ears of those who hear me.

In using himself as an example by direction of the Holy Spirit, Paul said concerning his past, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). When you think of Paul and what he gloried in, he says it all. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2).

To Be Ashamed Or Not To Be

DENNIS LOYD

MARK TWAIN once said, "Man is the only animal that blushes. Or needs to." Among the reactions of Adam and Eve to their sin was first fear and then shame. The Genesis record makes very clear the lack of shame before the sin. "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Genesis 2:25 NASB). But that

condition quickly changed. After their sin, "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings" (3:7).

Shame has a valid place in our lives because it serves as a stark reminder that we have said too much or gone too far in our conduct. It reminds us we have boundaries or limits to our behavior. The failure to know shame indicates we have gone beyond what is acceptable. Jeremiah characterized sinful Israel as a people who no longer knew how to blush (Jeremiah 6:15; 8:12). He said of them, "They were not even ashamed at all" (Jeremiah 6:15). That statement declares a shocking reality—standards are gone, and I have chosen my own course of conduct.

Even Judas was ashamed of his betrayal and tried to return the blood money he earlier had valued. Unable to buy back the freedom of his Lord, Judas in humiliation and disgrace hanged himself. Peter was ashamed of his callous denials of Jesus. When the foretold rooster crowed, Peter went out and wept bitterly (Matthew 26:75). Tears are often a clear indicator of shame and disgrace.

Although we must never become a people so set in our conduct that we cannot know shame for our disobedience, circumstances exist for which we should never be ashamed. We may need to feel disgraced about our failures, doubts and sins, but we must never be ashamed of what has been done for us, what is expected of us, or what has been prepared for us. In other words, we can be ashamed of our actions, but we must never be ashamed of God's actions toward us or preparations for us.

Paul asserts, "I am not ashamed of the gospel" of Christ (Romans 1:16). He goes on to explain why shame would be inappropriate: "For it is the power of God for salvation." While some see the gospel of Jesus as limiting and demanding, what it offers us in direction for our lives and hope for our souls is far too important for us to set aside or to ignore.

Some people feel compelled to apologize for God's requirements; they certainly sound ashamed that God's people do not talk in certain ways or act with certain conduct or go to certain places. As Jesus faced His tempter, He did not act ashamed but quoted scriptures with vigor and gratitude for having clear explanations for His positions and His rejection of Satan's offers.

Other people are ashamed of attitudes expressed toward them by non-Christians, or they separate themselves from those pointed out as being "peculiar" in their faith. Paul praised Onesiphorus

who sought him in his Roman dungeon: "He was not ashamed of my chains" (2 Timothy 1:16). Paul had already said in that letter to Timothy about himself, "I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed" (v. 12). We should not be disgraced if affliction arises because of our own faithfulness.

Peter acknowledges that trials will come, but he warns we are not to respond with shame. "If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God" (1 Peter 4:16). If Jesus suffered the humiliation and mockery of fake trials and public execution with two criminals and used that occasion to show concern for the two thieves, for His mother, and even for His executioners, why should we feel ashamed over ridicule, ostracism or antagonism?

Paul also urges that we are not to be ashamed of the work we are called to do. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

God does not call us to work we are not equipped to do. We should accept His assignments without the excuses and reluctance Moses or Gideon showed when God summoned each of them. We are to be about our Father's business with energy as good workmen who take pride in performance and results. Paul showed that sense of satisfaction as he summed up his ministry: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). No shame or humiliation is heard in those words.

What about the work we have before us? Do we feel ashamed as parents, husbands or wives, elders, teachers, deacons, preachers, caregivers or servants? Jesus said that what we do for others we really do for Him. Is that not a good enough reason not to be ashamed?

Paul offers one other challenge in his final letter to Timothy. Writing from a prison and knowing he is facing imminent death, Paul urges the younger man to emulate the old apostle's attitude toward the Lord Jesus. "Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God" (2 Timothy 1:8). As he had earlier told the Romans he was not ashamed of the gospel, now he urges Timothy to join him in boldly declaring the testimony or gospel of Jesus knowing no shame. We need not apologize for His gospel; it is God's power just as Paul declares

in Romans 1:16. As Timothy was told not to be ashamed of Paul as a prisoner, we must not be ashamed of those who stand in risk of losing their positions or even their lives because of the work done for the Lord. No disgrace is found in losing one's life for Jesus.

We must not be ashamed of the gospel nor of whatever persecution may come to those who believe and honor that gospel. We must never feel humiliation over our work as Christians nor the work of others who have committed their lives to the Lord.

We must learn when to be ashamed and when not to be. Mark Twain was only partially right. Times do exist when man needs to be ashamed, but times also exist when man has no reason to be ashamed but rather should not be ashamed. The difference in those times takes on eternal significance.

Making Marriage Better

JOHNNY RAMSEY

FAR TOO many homes are shattered by divorce today. Thousands of children are bereft of parental love and guidance. Husbands are forsaking their wives for other women. Mothers are too busy with secular matters to fulfill their duties in the home. Disobedient and unruly boys and girls cause disruption of peace, joy and love within the domain called "family." It is beyond sad to honestly survey the scene in many marriages and countless homes across our nation and world.

God, who ordained this precious institution of marriage, did not intend the chaos and sadness that prevails today. More and more we find that members of the Lord's church have also failed to manifest the peace that marriage was intended to provide. God's admonition should guide us: "*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you*" (Eph. 4:32). It does take time, dedication and patience to make our homes a vestibule of heaven and a foretaste of glory divine. But the effort is well worth it.

"WHAT IS HOME?"

A London magazine asked the question of its readers, "What is Home?" Seven of the answers, which the editor called "gems" were selected and published, and they were:

1. A world of strife shut out, a world of love shut in.
2. Where the small are great, and the great are small.
3. The father's kingdom, the mother's world and the child's paradise.
4. Where we grumble the most and are treated the best.
5. The center of our affection, around which our heart's best wish twines.
6. Where our stomachs get three square meals a day and our heart a thousand.
7. Where the faults and failings of humanity are hidden under the sweet mantle of love.

One of the major obstacles today is the lack of purity, integrity and loyalty of mates and their influence upon the children. Pornography in magazines television and the Internet contribute to the divorce rate and broken hearts of countless children. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*" (Matt. 5:8). Husbands and wives who promise to remain faithful and true to one another should constantly recall Psa. 51:10, "*Create in me a clean heart, O God; And renew a right spirit within me*" (Psa. 51:10). How can the offspring have high moral standards when they see the fickle flirtations of mother and father?

THE HEART OF A CHILD

*Whatever you write on the heart of a child
 No water can wash away.
 The sand may be shifted when billows are wild,
 And the efforts of time may decay.
 Some stories may perish, some be forgot,
 But this "graved record, time changes not."
 Whatever you write on the heart of a child,
 A story of gladness or care,
 That heaven has blessed or earth has defiled,
 Will linger unchangeable there.*

Each one of us must inculcate the mind of Christ within our very own lives in order to impress the next generation to seek the kingdom of God absolutely first (Matt. 6:33). Men who treat their mates in a brutal way convey to their sons a pattern to be perpetuated, and wives who are caustic and selfish will raise daughters who will follow their example.

Recently, I found three poignant quips that have a tinge of humor, but also graphic reminders of truths we need to ponder:

"Whether a man winds up with a nest egg or a goose egg depends on the chick he married."

"The woman's work that's never done is most likely what she asked her husband to do."

"Wife: 'Do you love me still?' "

"Husband: 'Yes, better than any other way.'"

After fifty wonderful years of marriage to a godly woman, these words from God's word seem an appropriate prayer for my admiration for her: "*The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace*" (Num. 6:24-26). We could all make our marriages better if we really wanted to.

Foundation For Marriage

DAVID TARBET

IN THE GARDEN of Eden God established the foundation for all society — the home. Only because of disobedience did mankind fall from that original design and intent for the home and, in the fall, both men and women suffered loss of happiness. It is vital that we go back beyond the cultural standards of our modern society, back beyond the traditions of our forefathers, and even back beyond later changes imposed upon God's original intent by the hardness of human hearts (Deuteronomy 24), to the original plans of God as described in Genesis chapters one and two.

In Genesis one, we are informed that God created both male and female "in His image" — giving them a part of His very nature, that is, "authority" over the created world — over birds of the air, fish of the sea, cattle, and every thing that creeps on the earth. Adam and Eve were placed in the beautiful garden with a mutual responsibility to "keep it". The original home was an economic unity in which male and female worked together to use nature's resources for their mutual benefit and blessing. In the first marriage, both Adam and Eve felt a responsibility to bring out the best in all the created world around them. They shared a sense of divine accountability.

The first couple had a common dream: to multiply and fill the earth. They did not live a self-centered life, but anticipated the birth of children and were thankful when they received their sons

and daughters as gifts from God. Children were considered a blessing, not a burden.

In marriage, Adam and Eve found the answer to loneliness. It was "not good" to be alone, but in family love, both discovered wonderful fulfillment and the answers to their heart-hungers. They were "one"—in ambition, in heart, in body, in spirit.

There was no question in Adam's mind but that when he was given his wife, he was given God's ultimate blessing, and he treated her with respect. He was so excited when he discovered her! "At last!" he may have shouted. Marriage began with a commitment to make it last. There was to be no "third party", and both Adam and Eve understood this clearly. Marriage was not a "We'll try it, and if it doesn't work out, we'll call it quits" experiment. It was for keeps. And they were very glad to have it that way. In that kind of commitment they found security and completion.

The basic reason so many people are unfulfilled in marriage today is that they have lost the vision of the Garden of Eden. Sexual license, divorce, boredom, violence, and abuse inevitably follow a loss of appreciation for God's plan as expressed at the beginning of time.

GOD'S POWER—THE CROSS

RONALD D. BRYANT

THE PURPOSE of the cross does not lie in some complex, abstract, celestial transaction, but rather in a literal subduing of the rebellious heart of man. God's desire and design has ever been one of winning—of changing—the heart of rebel man. It would have been easier to suppress the rebel heart, but God seeks to subdue man's pride that He might enjoy man's fellowship.

What occurs when force is exerted? It can win the day and produce some quick surrenders, but it cannot win the heart. Force exerted can produce respect based on fear, but it cannot produce true fellowship. God could have exerted force, and could have driven man away from rebellion, away from hell. God could have made man do what is right, and stay away from the downward path to hell. However, God's ultimate goal has never been that of saving us from hell. He sent Jesus to save us from ourselves—from our sins. His purpose in the whole of the redemptive work of

Jesus has been to the end of calling us into a relationship with Himself, based on love and faith.

The cross of Jesus thus understood stands as an imposing barrier to the person contemplating sin. The loving gaze of the suffering Savior seeks to move each of us away from selfish conduct and self-gratification. To come to the foot of the cross is to live. All that one can hold to, and at the same time wholeheartedly cling to the cross, is permitted. The person that persists in sin must do so by stubbornly ignoring the cross as a barrier to further transgression, and he must reject the sacrifice of Jesus. Perhaps in the passing of time, the death of an innocent lamb might fade from mind and be forgotten. Yet, neither heaven nor earth can forget the day that God in Christ, went to the cross and died for man.

We Will Follow and Serve the Lord

PETER MOSTERT

PERHAPS THE strongest motivation for me to become a Christian was a fear of being lost eternally. Though I was raised in a Christian environment—by this I mean that my parents had me christened as an infant, my mother taught me to say the Lord's Prayer, and I attended various churches—I felt incomplete.

I was nineteen when I was baptized into Christ. Members of the church of Christ from the USA who were missionaries in New Zealand persuaded my brother, and two years later my father, mother, and me, to be obedient to the truth in accordance with Acts 2:38 — to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins and to receive the Holy Spirit.

Believing in Jesus has never been a problem for me — I have always, from my earliest recollections, done so!

Obedying Jesus in baptism was not a problem for me — once I believed the truth, I was willingly baptized.

Conversion for me was truly a life-changing occurrence. I quit my "worldly" friends, gathered with the church for every service, and spent my weekends teaching the Gospel from house to house. I remain committed to Christ and endeavor to raise my children as Christians, send them to a Christian university, encourage them to

happy Christians, enter the mission field, and become leaders in Christ's church.

Throughout my whole Christian experience, however, there remain things that I continue to wrestle with and have a hard time understanding and believing. I find it difficult to believe that God permits so much pain and suffering in this world; difficult to believe that God allows a hell for those who do not obey Him; difficult to believe that God uses weak people like me to preach His Gospel; difficult to believe that only those who are baptized will be saved; difficult to believe that Jesus had to die for my sin; difficult to believe that if I do not use my talents God will not welcome me; difficult to believe that countless millions who have not heard the Gospel will perish; and on and on....

But God says, *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts'"* (Isaiah 55:8,9). The created is not in position to judge the Creator, nor is it our option to re-write the rules of God that seem difficult to us or to discount what we may not understand. Our God is *The Almighty*. What He does is right. Our part is to wait. One day we will understand what seems so difficult today.

But as a human, not understanding these hard things is a burden for me. Yet I refuse to give up, or go back. I will not be persuaded, or tricked by Satan and his messengers to forsake God who has done much for me. I am determined! If even the whole world turns against God, I am not prepared to leave Him. With all my mental, emotional, and spiritual power, I will remain faithful. As for me and my household, we will follow and serve the Lord!

Victory in Jesus

BOBBY DOCKERY

MANY DIFFERENT metaphors are used in the New Testament to describe the Christian life. Jesus compared it to carrying a cross (Matthew 16:24). The book of Hebrews describes it as a race that must be patiently run (Hebrews 12:1). Peter compared it to the process of growth and maturation by which an infant becomes an adult (1 Peter 2:2).

One of the vivid and descriptive metaphors associated with the Christian life, however, is the New Testament picture of Christianity as a battle that must be fought and won. Paul commanded Timothy to *"Fight the good fight of faith"* (1 Timothy 6:12), and he reminds us that *"we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"* (Ephesians 6:12). This is the great "Armageddon" described in the Book of Revelation (16:16).

Fortunately, this is a battle whose outcome has already been assured. *"In all these things we are more than conquerors..."* (Romans 8:37). Note the following ways in which a Christian can have the assurance of "Victory in Jesus":

1. Victory in Life. For the Christian, successful living is not a matter of wealth accumulated, or status attained, or personal triumphs earned. Rather it is the result of having *"Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27). As soldiers for the Lord, we have been equipped with the weapons that are *"mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds"* (2 Corinthians 10:4). On the daily battle ground of temptation, Satan can be routed and put to flight with the sword of the Spirit, *"which is the word of God"* (Ephesians 6:17).

2. Victory in Death. Jesus promised that even the gates of Hades (i.e., death) could not withstand the power of the church (Matthew 16:18). By His resurrection, Jesus crushed the head of Satan and broke the power of death. So complete and irrevocable was His rout of death that the Bible says that He *"hath abolished death and hath brought light and immortality to light through the Gospel"* (2 Timothy 1:10)! The reality of Christ's resurrection assures His followers that for them, too, death will one day *"be swallowed up in victory"* (1 Corinthians 15:54).

3. Victory in Eternity. Victory in Christ extends beyond the grave to ultimate triumph in eternity. The Bible says, *"When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men"* (Ephesians 4:8). One of the gifts that the triumphant Jesus offers to His faithful followers is eternal life (Romans 6:23). In eternity, the legions of Christ will stack their armor and receive the crown of final victory from their Commander (2 Timothy 4:8). *"Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

