

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

***There Is A Way Which Is Absolutely Right
For All To Follow***

MAN'S WAYS are many. Man believes whichever way one opt to follow to go to heaven, if followed sincerely, will lead one to God in heaven. The Bible, on the other hand, teaches, "It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." (Jeremiah 10:23). Proverbs 16:25 says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

It is logical to believe that God who has created man has also revealed His will and way to man. But it is unthinkable, impossible to imagine or accept that almighty; and loving and intelligent God after creating man would leave man to fend for himself to come back to Him. The Bible teaches that there is only one true God, Who has revealed Himself and His perfect will for all men everywhere in the pages of His book, the Bible. He is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), that is, He has not authorized different ways for man to follow. To give to man one uniformed message God had chosen forty different men in different locations of the world, over a period of 1500 years, and had inspired them to write His will or message for all men everywhere. The Bible claims to be the book of inspired word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20- 21).

In the pages of the Bible God has revealed to man His way. God's book says, All have sinned and sin has separated man from the fellowship of God. (Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59: 1-2). If that

fellowship is not restored in this life, man goes to live eternally separated from God in eternity. "The wages of sin is death," we read, "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23). Again, the Bible says, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus " (1 Timothy 2:5). The apostle Peter boldly declared before an audience of unbelievers : "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). Christ Himself had said to His followers, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6).

The sweet message of the entire Bible is that the loving and merciful God Himself had come down on earth in the Person of Jesus Christ to save man from the wages of sin and thereby provided man the opportunity to come back to God in His fellowship. The apostle Paul put it in this way, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." (1 Timothy 1:15). But the way of man's salvation from sin didn't come cheap. By the grace of God Jesus Christ was made to taste death for everyone, because all have sinned. (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom God had allowed to die on the cross as a substitute for man's sins, in God's account, is the propitiation for sins of the whole world. (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 2:2). The Bible declared Christ to be "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." (John 1:29).

God has not revealed another way for man to be saved from his sins. God's only way to heaven is Jesus Christ, Who after His death on the cross for the sinners and His subsequent burial and resurrection had commanded His disciples to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." And to those words He added, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15, 16). One must therefore believe in Christ and be baptized, after repenting from all sins, to be saved from sins (Acts 2:38) and to be on God's way to heaven.

If man want to honor the true and the living God in his life on earth then he must listen to God and do what He has said. Not only the true God of the Bible has revealed to man His way of salvation from sin, but has also revealed the way of true worship (John 4:24), and the righteous living acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:21). After all that, those who will not be able to enter heaven will

have to blame only themselves on the day of judgment. God, the Bible says, is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9). On the day of judgment people will not be able to hide themselves under the cover of ignorance, because God has revealed His plan of man's salvation to all. (Acts 17:30, 31). Man therefore is without excuse.

Putting Off The Old Man Of Sin

Lesson 14

ABORTION

J. C. CHOATE

WE WILL now continue our series of lessons by discussing the subject of *Abortion*. But what is abortion? In this modern day world, surely you already know what I am talking about. Abortion means to abort, to terminate to kill or destroy something prematurely. To further explain, we are talking about the millions who become pregnant, but rather than to go on and have their babies, they decide that they will have an abortion. That means then that they literally choose to kill their babies. The law may approve at it, government may even encourage it to keep the population down, but in doing this these expectant mothers are giving consent for doctors and nurses to murder their unborn child. Of course, people who do such heinous things do not like to hear the words that I am saying, but it is true nevertheless. They need to hear these things again and again, and especially those who have not yet had an abortion, so that they will decide to go on and have their baby.

My friends, did you realize that more is being done to save the tiger, and other animals, than is being done to save the lives of unborn human babies. You can get in trouble with the law, perhaps have to pay a heavy fine, or even go to jail, for killing some rare animal, or most any animal in the various game parks, but you can go out and have an abortion with no problem at all. There are societies around the world that call attention to dogs and cats and all kind of animal; and run campaigns to encourage people not to mistreat them, and do everything they can to provide care for them, but where are these people when it comes to all of the human babies that are dying? It seems that they respect animal life over human life.

There are a wide range of arguments as to why these babies should be aborted. There are those who argue that many of these would be born out of wedlock, from the result of rape, or the doctor has indicated that they will be invalids or not normal in some way. But if there are those who are concerned about the morals of the people then they should be working on that before pregnancies take place. Or those who are immoral should be thinking about the possibility of a pregnancy resulting from their sinful acts, and to avoid that then they should stay out of those kind of situations. But it is sad when they add murder to their immoral acts in an attempt to cover up their sins. As for rapes, there are very few who ever become pregnant as a result of such. Furthermore, doctors have predicted that babies would be born deformed or mentally incompetent only to be proven wrong. But regardless of the excuses offered, the fact is, we have not been given the permission by God to destroy human life.

But you might want to know why I am speaking on such a subject. You might question if this is any of my business. I will hasten to say that killing is condemned in the Bible, and therefore this makes it my business. It is my business too since I am a human being and I respect life too much to sit quietly by while millions of human lives are being destroyed around the world. We protest the idea of war. We cry out to the governments around the world not to torture human beings. Yet, in our own hospitals and clinics across our countries, our own doctors and nurses are performing abortions. You talk about torture: Recently a process has been perfected so that an abortion can actually be filmed, showing the fetus, a new baby, a human life form there in the mother's womb, and then it show that how that tiny helpless baby tries to pull away from that instrument that is approaching it to tear it apart, to dismember it, and to remove it from its mother's womb. As this is going on the pain can be seen as it is registered on the face. Sometimes when it is removed there is still life within its tiny form, but it is dumped in a garbage pail to be removed and eventually hauled away to a refuse dump or to be burned in a disposal unit. Other babies are killed through the use of suction. They are literally sucked out, limb by limb, from their mother's womb. Then there are the salty, acid solutions that are injected in to other babies to produce death. Can you imagine all of that? Yet, my friends, it is going on right here in your country, may be in your own city or village where abortion clinics have been set up. Will no one speak up for these babies?

They cannot speak for themselves, and even their mothers, doctors, nurses, etc., do not respect them enough to save them. My friends, I am here to tell you that this is a shame and a disgrace to the human race. Surely when man and woman get this far along in their sins, then what is left for us and the future?

We think about Hitler, and others before and after him, and we remember their cruelty, but are we not doing the same as they? We read in the scriptures where wicked Herod sent his soldiers to kill all male babies under two years of age in an attempt to destroy Christ at the time of his birth, and we think how cruel that was. But that was nothing in comparison to what the world is doing today to its unborn.

If our parents had been doing what the world is doing today, then we might have never been born because we might have been aborted. Think about all the great people that might have come out of all of those already aborted. Think of all the talented people that will never live because of all of the abortions that are taking place, or that will take place, that will prevent them from entering this world and making a contribution to humanity. My friends, it is so sickening, and I beg of you not to be guilty of such a terrible practice, and at the same time I would encourage you to speak up for the unborn and to speak out against all of those who would commit such crimes against the human race.

In the long ago Solomon said that God hates the one who sheds innocent blood. (Proverbs 6:16, 17). We read in both the Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible that it is wrong to kill. (Exodus 20:13; Romans 13:9). The scriptures speak of murder again and again. Paul said that the murderer cannot enter the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10), he called it a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:9-21), and John said that "ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3:15). Again John wrote, "but the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:8) If one is not a murderer for killing her baby, then how could one commit murder? If doctors and nurses who perform abortions are not committing murder, then who could be classified as a murderer? My friends, when people get so hardened that they will kill babies, their own babies, then what can we expect next? When our society is more concerned about wild life, than they are about the lives of

human beings, then is there any hope left for man?

I could go on and give you many more Bible principles concerning the fact that man has been created in the image of God, that each human being has a soul, that one soul is worth more than all the world, and so on, but what will it mean to murderers? Perhaps nothing, but even a murderer, a child murderer, can be saved if that person will repent and obey God. Many need to do this.

My main concern is for you. Perhaps you are a young woman who has gotten into trouble, you are pregnant and you think the only way out is to have an abortion, let me ask you, will it help to add murder to what you have done? May be you are a mother of several children and you don't want to have another child. How can you love your other children, have respect for your self and have any type of life ahead of you, if you kill that unborn child? Listen, for the young and the older, there is a way to keep from having to kill your child if you first of all want to find a way. It might not be easy, but that still will be a lot easier than living with yourself, knowing that you have intentionally killed your unborn.

To you of the general public, let me encourage you to see what you can do to campaign against abortion in your area. Surely there will be others that will want to join you in this effort. Speak out against this crime. Seek to inform others as to what is going on. Offer to help those who are in need. Seek the help of others in these efforts.

You might say that you are just one, but we are all one, and all of us ones together will make a lot of ones and a lot of ones will be a large number. We can be heard. We can do something. We must, for the unborn, for others, for ourselves, for the world, and for the sake of life itself.

Where do you stand on these matters? I hope that you stand for life, for every living human being whether born or unborn.

HOW TO DESTROY AN ENEMY

DAVID THURMAN

HAVE YOU ever had someone who was out to get you? Have you ever wished you could get rid of a person so they never bothered you again? Most of us have enemies, or at least those people with

whom we find it hard to get along. There is a way to destroy an enemy.

The book of Acts tells us of a man who was out to rid the world of Christians. *"But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house; and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison"* (Acts 8:3). Saul was the enemy of the church of Christ. He wanted it gone and wanted to do all he could to get rid of it. So, God initiated a plan. God teaches us, through the life of Saul, how to destroy an enemy.

Saul had decided to expand his efforts to track down Christians. *"Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do.' And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias.' And he said, 'Behold, here am I, Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might, regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake.' And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent*

me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized; and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' (Acts 9:1-20). Saul wanted to go to Damascus, find Christians there, arrest them and drag them back to Jerusalem. But God is acting in this process, and God's plan to destroy His enemy will unfold. Notice what we learn about God from the events that follow.

GOD CHOOSES THE MOST UNEXPECTED

If you had taken a poll of Christians in the area around Jerusalem, asking them to list the most likely individuals to become Christians, Saul would not have shown up on anyone's list! In fact, if you had polled the Jews, they, too, would have thought Saul the least likely person to come to Christ. But, God doesn't think, act or choose as we would. God decided that the best way to rid Himself of this enemy, was to make Saul His friend.

This is such an important principle. We look at people and decide the gospel would not touch them. We think some people are beyond the reach of the truth of God's grace. Because these people have never been to church, or because they have lifestyles out of step with God's will, we write them off as lost causes. People of the first century would have done the same with Saul. But God wanted to destroy His enemy, and He knew the best way was to make him a friend.

GOD USES THE MOST RELUCTANT

Saul had seen Jesus and was waiting in Damascus for someone to come to him. So, God spoke to a good man, Ananias, telling him to go to Saul. Ananias knew Saul's reputation. He probably thought Saul was playing possum, hoping to fool some Christians into exposing themselves for arrest. So, Ananias tries to get out of going to teach Saul.

This is such good news for those of us who are uncertain of our gifts. While we think we cannot do something, God keeps gently prodding us to obey. While we argue with God, revealing our hesitancy, God just keeps asking us to serve, even when we are not sure we can do it. God not only chooses the most unlikely people for salvation, He uses reluctant people to pull it off.

GOD REFUSES TO BE NEGLECTED

Saul had refused to listen to the good news about Jesus. He had heard Stephen preach in Acts 7. He had probably heard many Christians confess their faith in Jesus before they were tried or sentenced. Yet, Saul had stubbornly resisted and rejected God's message.

Ananias didn't want to go to Saul. He tried to explain to God (as if God didn't know already) that Saul was not a good guy and couldn't be trusted. Saul had rejected God's message. Ananias wanted to think God was mistaken in sending him to Saul.

But our God will not be neglected. Whether you are His enemy or His servant, God will be noticed and will be heard. And, eventually, God will be honored by everyone, even those who refuse to honor Him now. Both Saul and Ananias thought they could close their eyes and God would go away. But God will not be ignored or neglected. We learn from Saul and Ananias what man is like.

MAN ASSUMES HE KNOWS GOD

How could Saul persecute men and women? How could he be so cruel to break up families and sentence people to prison, merely for believing in Jesus? Saul did this because he thought he knew God. He thought he understood God. He thought God would want him to do these things.

But Saul was wrong. He did not know God as well as he thought. Today in our world there are countless thousands and millions who think they know God. They commit acts of terror in God's name. They abuse and hurt others, thinking God will be happy. As Saul was wrong about God, so people today are wrong about God. Like Saul, the world today needs to be introduced to the true God, to His true nature, to His ways. Then, like Saul, they can stop opposing God and begin serving Him.

The only way to come to know God better is to read from His Word and listen to what He says. *"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"* (Heb. 4:12). God tells us that His word will reveal our hearts. The Bible can expose our misconceptions. It can clear up our confusions. Before you think you know God, go to His word and see what it says.

MAN PRESUMES HE KNOWS MORE THAN GOD

When God told Ananias to go teach Saul, this good man argued with God. He seemed to think God did not realize what He was asking. It is as if Ananias presumed he knew some things about Saul of Tarsus that God didn't know! So, Ananias argues with God, and goes only after God insists.

Again, today there are people who think they know more than God. They think any standard of morality is okay, and that God should endorse whatever lifestyle they choose. They think an unborn child is just tissue, and God should honor the decision to abort such tissue. They think any religion is as good as another, and think that all roads lead to the same God. Just as Ananias presumed to know more than God, so people today think they know more than God and can tell Him how things should be.

Again, the solution to this problem is found in turning to God's Word. The Bible tells us what God wants. The Bible leaves out what God does not want. If you want to know God's will accurately, go to the Word. To be sure you speak as God speaks, learn God's Word. *"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 Tim. 2:15). If you handle God's Word accurately, you can know that you are speaking God's will, and not your own presumptions.

MAN SUBMITS HIS WILL TO GOD'S

Finally, Ananias quits arguing and goes to find Saul. There, he teaches God's enemy how to be saved by the same Jesus he had rejected for so long. Saul, too, surrenders. He stops finding ways to debate with Christians, and accepts the truth about Jesus. When the story ends, everyone willingly submits to the will of God. So, immediately Saul is immersed in the name of Jesus. Following that, this former enemy began preaching about the very Jesus he had attacked.

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:24-25). The only solution to the world's problems is found in this principle. When men and women, all around the world, surrender to God's will, then our world will change. Submission to God is the only way to know God and be known by God.

SO, DON'T WRITE ANYONE OFF!

If you are a child of God, never make the mistake of thinking some people are beyond God's reach. That biker with all the tattoos may become a great evangelist. That street person who has not bathed in weeks may one day be a deacon or preacher. That person whose life is ruined by drugs or alcohol may one day be a wife and mother. God sees the potential in every person. As His children, let us never be blind to the fact that God wants every soul to be saved, even the ones who don't look like they are worth saving.

SO, DON'T PUT BAPTISM OFF!

The first thing Saul did after hearing about Jesus was to be baptized. This was not some church ritual intended to make Saul a part of a particular sect. It was the process by which God saved Him. Saul was baptized into the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of his sins. He did not put this off for a better, more convenient time. He did it immediately. This is what you should do as well. You should be baptized today. Don't wait. Don't argue. Don't think you know more than God. Just submit to His will and be baptized today. Later in life, Saul (now the apostle Paul) would recall his conversion and describe what Ananias said to him on that day. *"And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name"* (Acts 22:16). This is what Saul did. This is what you need to do. Don't put it off, be baptized today.

God Blesses the Obedient Heart

JOHNNY RAMSEY

ALL THE way through the Bible we find the dominant theme of God's approval of obedient behavior. The Bible says of Noah, *"So did Noah, according to all that God commanded him"* (Gen. 6:22). In the New Testament, we can see the reward of heaven for Noah, *"a preacher of righteousness"* (2 Pet. 2:5) of whom God said: *"By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house, through which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith"* (Heb. 11:7). The Bible calls Abraham *"the friend of God"* (Gen. 22:18; 26:5; James

2:23). The reason is clear: *"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed"* (Heb. 11:8); he kept God's statutes and charges, commands and laws! At the end of Exodus we can see the same attitude in Moses, praised by the Creator for doing His will.

*Trust and obey,
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey.*

At a very tender age, Samuel, one of the Bible's great heroes, declared, *"Speak, for thy servant heareth"* (1 Sam. 3:10). The brilliant and humble expression literally meant, "Command and I will obey!" There is no substitute for obedience, for just doing what God says. Notice these emphatic statements from Scripture. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous"* (1 John 5:3). *"Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"* (Luke 6:46). *"Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you"* (John 15:14). These verses forever show that our Maker expects us to back up our words with obedient action. The Pharisees *"say and do not"* (Matt. 23:3), but Jesus began *"both to do and to teach"* (Acts 1:1).

THE EXAMPLE OF JOSHUA

Joshua is a classic example of those who determined to obey God absolutely. He walked hand in hand with the Father down the road of truth (Josh. 1:7). Notice the clarity of Josh. 22:5 as a landmark case on our subject: *"But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul."* When one studies the, sojourn of this brilliant servant of Jehovah, it is easy to see how well he lived up to the challenge of obedience! In fact, at the age of 110, that valiant leader of God's people made it very clear that he would always choose to serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15).

After Joshua died, in the period of the Judges, utter chaos resulted when, *"Every man did that which was right in his own eyes"* (Judg. 21:25). Disobedience proves that we do not love God, as Jesus said, *"He that loveth me not keepeth not my words"* (John 14:24). Outrageous behavior produces mockery of the Creator

where men's hearts turn away from desiring the word of God (Judg. 2:11-19).

"NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE, BE DONE"

Man, left to himself cannot please God, for *"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"* (Jer. 10:23). The apostle Paul admitted that in order to become a Christian, he had to give up his old ways and surrender all to Christ (Phil. 3:4-11). Obedience is not easy, but it is necessary for salvation. When we surrender to God, we actually win!

*All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I humbly bow;
Worldly pleasures all forsaken,
Take me, Jesus, take me now.*

Our Lord was the perfect example of total obedience. *"I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me"* (John 6:38). He truly accomplished that goal! Notice the prayer of Jesus, *"I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do"* (John 17:4). In the Garden of Gethsemane, our Redeemer showed a contrite spirit of submission to God's will as He uttered these immortal words: *"Not my will, but thine, be done"* (Luke 22:42). Many people go through life demanding, with clenched fist, that their will comes first. In vivid contrast, we see a nail-pierced hand crying out to sinful man: "God's will must be done!"

SALVATION IS TO THEM THAT OBEY

Christ *"learned obedience"* and thus became *"to all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation"* (Heb. 5:8-9). In fact, the very example of Jesus is the fundamental illustration of total surrender to God's word and will and way. Only through our obedience to the will of God is salvation possible. As God said, *"Ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth... Ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness"* (1 Pet. 1:22; Rom. 6:17-18).

The Lord convinced John to baptize Him so that Jesus could *"fulfill all righteousness"* (Matt. 3:15). Baptism was, and is, a command from heaven. If Jesus failed to obey, He would no longer be sinless. The Bible declares all of God's commandments are righteousness (Psa. 119:172), and, *"To him therefore that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin"* (James 4:17). In His

baptism at the hands of John, our Lord demonstrated a proper attitude not found in those evil men who *"rejected the counsel of God against themselves"* by refusing to be baptized (Luke 7:29-30). On the day of Pentecost, only those who *"gladly received his word were baptized"* (Acts 2:41).

In the book of Acts, we have several cases of conversion to Christianity, and we have others who refused to change their ways. What if everyone who heard the gospel had obeyed?! What a wonderful story it would be if Felix, Festus and Agrippa had humbled themselves before God as Cornelius, Saul and the Ethiopian had (Acts 8,9,10). But only those who bend their will to the will of God (John 7:17) will come to repentance and salvation. All are invited by Jesus (Matt. 11:28-30), but many reject the counsel of God (Acts 13:46). Too many, similar to religious leaders of Rome, as depicted in Acts 28:27-28, shut their eyes, close their ears and harden their hearts. Therefore, obedience fades into rebellion, and they remain lost.

OBEDIENCE BEGINS IN THE HEART

The apostle wrote, *"Ye became obedient from the heart"* (Rom. 6:17). This subject boils down to proper priorities versus misplaced emphasis. So many folk are their own worst enemy. Most people, rather than making a life-time commitment to spiritual excellence, decide day-by-day on things that pertain to the soul. This haphazard arrangement can lead to disaster. Obedience is basically an attitude of constancy that pervades our very being forever, and not clothing for the spirit that changes with every whim and fancy. Whatever God wants must be our daily desire as we subdue our own interests and flippant concepts and develop the attitude of the prophet of old, *"Here am I; send me"* (Isa. 6:8).

Some young people, reared in our spoiled society, are so self-centered that they are consumed with their own comfort and ease, rather than being dedicated to cause of godliness and heavenly emphasis. Much like the sons of Aaron (Lev. 10:1-3), if they offer anything at all to God, it will be only what pleases them as true obedience eludes them. Others will outwardly obey, if it is convenient, but partial obedience is never acceptable to the Master (Matt. 7:21). When we do what is commanded us, we admit that it was our duty in the first place (Luke 17:10). God reveals to us, *"Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his*

commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (1 John 3:22). Our Savior made it clear in John 8:29 that the Father was pleased with the Son because Jesus always obeyed the will of heaven.

There is a vital and vivid contrast revealed in Rom. 10:1-3 and Phil. 3:4-9. In the first reference, we find the Jewish leaders being zealous, but not submissive. In the latter reference, Paul was willing to sacrifice his role of supremacy to empty himself of all honor, in order to bow before Christ as king of his life. Genuine obedience naturally flows out of a contrite heart that is bent on doing the will of the Almighty.

DISOBEDIENCE RESULTS FROM IMPURE HEART

Some of the greatest examples of disobedience reflect a spirit of anarchy, rebellion and indifference. In Gen. 4, we read of Cain, who slew his brother, *"Because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous"* (1 John 3:12). We are then warned against *"the way of Cain"* (Jude 11), a way of envy, jealousy, disobedience and murder. The tower of Babel incident forever proves that trying to make a name for ourselves can make us our own worst enemy (Gen. 11).

We dare not allow other people to determine what we shall do. In Ex. 32, we find that trying to please men can result in disobedience, as we read of Aaron and the people who made the golden calf. When we strive to please men, we make ourselves the enemy of God (Gal. 1:10; James 4:4). King Saul lamented that his rejection of God's plan was due to fearing the people and obeying their voice (1 Sam. 15:24). His plea didn't help, for God still rejected him! Peer pressure did not begin with young people today. It started in the Garden of Eden with the devil's clever argumentation.

If we heartily seek the Lord (Jer. 29:13), Satan will lose in his plan to seduce us (Luke 22:31). When we put God's word deep inside us, obedience will defeat the charms of error: *"Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee"* (Psa. 119:11). As we abstain from evil, purity will propel us toward heaven (1 Thes. 5:22). Thinking pure thoughts will derail Satan's plots to deter us from glory (Matt. 5:8). Since sin separates us from God (Isa. 59:1-2), we dare not allow our lives to be filled with thoughts contrary to truth and right.

The Bible shows a vivid contrast between Naaman and Joshua.

Naaman argued with God's commandments and remained a leper until he repented and did what God told him (2 Kings 5). On the other hand, Joshua and all the people of Israel, became victorious by bowing to the will of God (Heb. 11:30). No clearer message can be found on our subject than the words of Mary, in John 2:5, in regard to Christ's authority: *"Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."*

Becoming More Like Christ

JANE MCWHORTER

AS CHRISTIANS, most of us want to develop Christ-like traits. We pray that God will help us become more knowledgeable of His Word, more compassionate, more joyful, forgiving, and meek. The problem is that we ask, and then we expect the gifts to be handed to us as beautifully-wrapped presents. We are so busy looking for elaborately-decorated packages that we frequently walk right by a tattered package wrapped in plain brown paper and tied with a string. If only we would bother to look, we could discover that the plain box by the roadside is the answer to our prayers. Upon turning the package over, we find that in tiny letters in one corner is the word "opportunity". We ask for a gift and God gives us the opportunity to develop that trait.

- We ask for more Bible knowledge and evidently think such wisdom should descend miraculously from on high. The only way to know more about God's Word is to take the time to study. The Father gives us a Bible and a clock and expects us to use them wisely.
- We want to be more compassionate, more loving, and gentle. However, we often walk past the gift because we find it in a nursing home, wrapped in a tattered bathrobe without family and friends as the elderly person cries to go home and see about a little dog. If we have never experienced that same desire to return home, it may be difficult to step into another person's shoes and show compassion. God may give us the gifts of affliction, heartache, the loss of a loved one, or the loss of material possessions to help us understand and be able to identify with the problems of others.
- Forgiveness is a necessary Christian trait, but it has to be

developed. We may ask for a forgiving nature, and God may send it in the form of a critical brother or sister. Learning to understand such people is the opportunity sent our way.

- We ask to be meek, but pride interferes. Far too often meekness is wrapped in a brown package with the opportunity called "degradation" written on the back. How often we must be broken before we can handle achievements, for it is only then that we realize we are nothing but the shells of human vessels through which God works.

Christ begged for a special gift: the salvation of mankind. Long before He ever set foot on this earth, He knew how that gift would be wrapped—in thorns and nails. This was the gift looming ahead as He prayed in Gethsemane. Although the divine nature of Christ accepted the inevitable, it was His human side that cried out in agony, "*Let this cup pass*" (Matthew 26:39). If He could accept the gift of our salvation wrapped in thorns and nails, dare we grumble and complain about the wrappings of some precious gifts sent from God?

7 SCRIPTURAL REASONS FOR OPPOSING ABORTION

BOBBY DOCKERY

THE WORD "abortion" is not specifically used in the Bible. However, there are many biblical principles which apply to the subject and which clearly preclude the acceptance of abortion as a moral act. Consider:

1. Life is a gift from God. *"He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things"* (Acts 17:25). Human life is constructed in the image of God (Genesis 1.26). Because of its origin, human life is sacred.

2. God forbids the willful taking of human life. Romans 13.9 enjoins, *"You shall not murder."* Mankind has always been forbidden to wantonly kill a fellow human because of the special character of human life. According to Genesis 9.6, the penalty for taking an innocent life was death.

3. The Gospel emphasizes human worth and dignity.

Christianity was born into a world where human life was cheap. In the Roman Empire, 60 million people lived in degrading slavery; thousands flocked to the gladiatorial games to cheer the senseless butchery in the arena; it was the accepted thing to abandon or drown unwanted or sickly infants. Ninety-nine out of 100 families made it a practice to abandon ill female babies after the first; abortion was widespread. In such a world, the teaching of Jesus emphasized a radically different attitude toward life. He stressed the worth of the individual, insisting He had come to *"taste death for every man"* (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus taught that little children were precious (Matthew 19:14). Society was literally revolutionized! The influence of Christianity led to the end of slavery, gladiatorial contests, the murder of infants, and abortion!

4. The Bible teaches that human life begins in the womb.

No distinction is made in Scripture between unborn and newly born babies. The same Greek word (*brephos*) is used in the Bible to refer to both (Luke 1:41; 2:12; 1 Peter 2:2). Thayer says that the Greek word refers equally to "an unborn child, embryo, fetus, newborn child, infant." The unborn possess all the qualities of personality. Each life is unique. God said to Jeremiah: *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you"* (Jeremiah 1:5).

5. God condemns selfishness (Philippians 2:4, etc.). Except in cases of dire medical necessity, where the actual life of the mother is at stake, abortion is always a selfish act!

6. Those without natural affection are detestable to God.

Among the sins of the Gentiles which subjected them to the wrath of God was the charge that they were *"without natural affection"* (Romans 1:31). The Greek word (*astorgos*) refers to a lack of love on the part of parents for offspring. Surely the mother who chooses, merely for her own convenience, to destroy the innocent life in her womb is lacking in natural affection.

7. Abortion violates the "Golden Rule". *"In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you"* (Matthew 7:12). Application of this principle would close every abortion clinic in the world. What "pro-choice" advocate would wish to have his or her body dissected, as in a partial-birth abortion ... or savagely ripped apart, as in a suction abortion ... or immersed in corrosive liquid, as in a saline injection abortion? How can those

who reject such treatment for themselves justify it for others?

The basic question reduces to this: How can any people claim to honor God's will while refusing to reverence all life created in His image?

A Real Nobody

DAVID DEFFENBAUGH

WE HAVE all suffered through periods of low self-worth, times when we have felt of little value. We may have been rejected by those from whom we desired acceptance, or failed in some endeavor and disappointed those who were counting on us. We felt like a real nobody.

But that doesn't come close to the case of "Mr. Nobody". That is the title ascribed to a young Englishman who was mugged in Toronto, Canada in late 1999. As a result of the mugging, he lost not only his memory, but also all his legal documentation. He has no idea who he is or where he is from. His distinctive British accent is a clue, but extensive publicity in England by the media has produced no hint of the man's origin. What is more, he is unable to leave Canada without a passport, and cannot obtain a passport without a birth certificate, and cannot obtain a birth certificate without knowing his name or place of birth. This unfortunate young man is about as close to a real nobody as anyone can be. Imagine the relief and elation when and if his identity is ever discovered.

Consider the identity God gives those who are His. No matter who or what we may have been before, when we become a Christian we obtain a new identity. That identity includes a new name. Isaiah prophesied concerning God's people, *"You will be called by a new name which the mouth of the LORD will designate"* (Isaiah 62:2). To the persecuted Christians of Pergamum who overcame, the promise was given of *"a new name written on the stone"* (Revelation 17).

That new identity also includes a new family, the family of God. He allows us to call Him Father. *"Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"* (Galatians 4:6). We are able to be known as His children. *"See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are"* (1 John 3:1). What is more, we are *"of God's household"* (Ephesians 2:19).

Our new identity also provides a place where we belong. *"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints"* (Ephesians 2:19). . .

You see, in Christ, no one is a nobody.

Our Amazing Blood and Its Pump

DR. GLOVER SHIPP

BLOOD IS a marvelous substance. Its color is produced by an immense number of red blood cells—30 million in each drop, and floating in a pure liquid, plasma. Blood runs throughout the entire body, passing through a network of mini-tubes—60,000 thousand miles of them—but the cycle through the entire body, leaving the heart and returning to it, is completed in only 18 seconds! There are millions of valves that control pressure and circulation. However, the entire system can be influenced by a single thought, emotion, or exercise.

The average adult human body contains about 10 pints of blood. All of the blood passes through the heart, a marvel of engineering that beats more than 100,000 times a day, resting between each beat. Blood is a perishable fluid, but the heart acts as a perfect pump, with valves that open and close so gently that they don't harm the blood globules.

Blood carries to each cell of the body all of the chemicals and enzymes that control the various bodily processes and, along with these, a vast number of antibodies (guards) that protect the body against infection, hemorrhage, and other dangers. It also maintains a reserve of fuel to the cells, for use during the night, between meals, and during moments of stress or exercise.

But the most marvelous fact about all of this is the chemical process that occurs continually. The body needs at least 16 quarts of oxygen per hour during periods of rest and up to 300 quarts per hour during intense activity, such as running or playing basketball. However, all of this oxygen cannot be carried in the blood stream in the form of a gas. It must be combined chemically with hemoglobin to form an extremely complex molecule:

C3032 H4812 N580 Fe4 O880 S12 — 3032 atoms of carbon, 4812 atoms of hydrogen, 580 atoms of nitrogen, four atoms of iron, 880 atoms of oxygen and 12 atoms of sulfur.

There are 9520 atoms in just one blood cell and these must be maintained at this level constantly. Without iron or oxygen, what would happen to the blood? I tend toward being anemic, which means that my body doesn't absorb, without some help, the level of iron content that it needs. If not treated, the result is extreme tiredness. I take iron supplements to help maintain the necessary level of iron in my system.

The blood obtains a steady supply of oxygen from the lungs, carrying it to all parts of the body and bringing back to the lungs the end product of this oxygen combustion — a poison, carbon dioxide. Although separating the carbon dioxide from other substances is difficult, this is done in the lungs in a third of a second, freeing the poison to be exhaled and picking up a new supply of oxygen. To do this, the body produces 2 million red blood cells per second, each identical and perfect!

Until something goes wrong with it, our heart — the “engine” that keeps the blood flowing — is pretty much ignored. We're vaguely aware of it, but give it little thought, assuming that it will continue pumping forever. “The heart weighs between 7 and 12 ounces (200 to 425 grams) and is a little larger than the size of your fist. By the end of a long life, a person's heart may have beat (expanded and contracted) more than 3.5 billion times. In fact, each day, the average heart beats 100,000 times, pumping about 2,000 gallons (7,571 liters) of blood” (Texas Heart Institute).

Isn't this an amazing machine, one which provides the entire body with life, through a vast system of arteries and capillaries and veins? Is there design to all of this, or has it come about just by chance?

The Way That Seems RIGHT to Man Is Often WRONG

SYLVESTER A. IMOGOH

MAN IS a biophysical being with biological, psychological and social characteristics. This threefold nature of man elevates him far above all of God's other creatures. Man is also a Homosapien—a free thinker, with the freedom and ability to reason. Man in his ingenuity often craves absolute freedom from direction, control and reproach. Often he does not stop to consider the fact that though created to

be superior to all animals, he is far inferior to God in thought, wisdom and intellect. For as David said, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him" (Psalm 8:4 KJV).

However, whether man recognizes and accepts this fact does not alter it. The prophet Isaiah wrote, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). Therefore, in things divine, man must seek and accept God's guidance and direction.

Many years ago Jeremiah recognized this need and wrote, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgment" (Jeremiah 10:23-24). Also, there is some warning in the wise man's statement, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

There are countless examples of man's most sincere thoughts and judgments that are far below divine judgments, and God regards such as deviations or disobedience.

Samuel and David

In 1 Samuel 16, Samuel was instructed by God to anoint one of Jesse's sons to succeed the disobedient King Saul. Although Samuel was a prophet and seer, he was human and thought and reasoned like a man. As soon as he saw Eliab, Jesse's firstborn son, he voiced his thought and judgment, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him" (v. 6). However, God said, "I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as a man seeth" (v. 7).

Jesse then made all of his other sons except David pass before Samuel. Obviously, even Jesse himself did not consider David a candidate for king, for not until Samuel asked him, "Are here all thy children?" (v. 11) did he call David from tending the sheep. Contrary to everyone's thoughts and judgments, David was the Lord's anointed.

Nadab and Abihu

When man thinks for himself he is often wrong. Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron, cared little about what God thought in the discharge of their priestly duties. They offered strange, unholy and unauthorized fire upon God's altar (Leviticus 10:1-3). They must have reasoned that "fire is fire" and presumed to know better than God what they should do.

So it is today when many people think that church is church, not minding the foundation, biblical commands or name. Others say "baptism is baptism," whether sprinkling, pouring or immersing. They do not care what the Scripture means when baptism is described as a burial (Romans 6:3-4) and a going into and coming up out of the water (Acts 8:38-39). Let us be warned, for we read that Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord when they offered strange fire before Him.

Uzzah

It is sad that man never stops thinking and acting presumptuously. We read in 2 Samuel 6:1-8 how Uzzah met his untimely death while trying to restore the balance of the ark of the covenant. Maybe he thought, "The oxen have stumbled, I must keep the ark from falling over! Surely the Lord would not fault me for that." However, God had said, "They [non-Levites] shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die" (Numbers 4:15).

Man's thinking and judgment are lopsided, seeking to please God but forgetting that God is better pleased by obedience than by service. "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah and God smote him" (2 Samuel 6:7). Being a Jew Uzzah knew that it was a sacrilege for a non-Levite to touch the ark of God. He was killed not because of his service but because of his deviation and disobedience.

It has always intrigued me that after the Lord's judgment on Uzzah the Bible says, "And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah" (2 Samuel 6:8). In verse 9 we read, "And David was afraid of the Lord that day." We must therefore be warned that there will be disappointment at the Judgment. Jesus has given us a foreknowledge of it, that many will perform religious services that they thought were right and yet be rejected (Matthew 7:21-22). Disobedience to God's laws and disregarding His commands have always produced fear (25:25).

The offered-up worship in many religious services today is closely akin to the unwholesome and unsolicited service Uzzah rendered to God. God commands and accepts singing for worship in the New Testament (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), but some religious people seem to think they are wiser and believe that instrumental music is more melodious and pleasing to God because it seems to be more pleasing to man. They also reason that the mechanical instruments would serve to attract more people into

the church. In this, their reasoning is no different from that of Nadab and Abihu.

Although Paul ordered a collection upon the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), some people believe that various forms of assessment and tithes would do more than that. Again, let us be warned because some supposed services to God are abominable sacrilege (Proverbs 14:12).

Ananias and Sapphira

During the early days of the Jerusalem congregation, the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira caused them both to lie. Most men would think that this was not enough of an offense to warrant a death sentence; after all, it was their property. Left for mortals to judge, one would reason that it was a negligible sin. That is where we all miss the mark. In allowing Satan to fill their hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead (Acts 5:1-11).

The Nobility of Obedience

There are people who think like Samuel and who accept and judge religious matters at face value. Such people sometimes think that the commands to believe, repent and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38) are too simple to be obeyed. They would rather look beyond these simple steps into salvation and dwell on feelings and emotional experiences. But is man ever as wise as God?

Many by their presumptions are like Nadab, Abihu and Uzzah. Where God placed salvation in the one body or church (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18, 24), they say, "You can be saved in the church of your choice." Where God commands that worship must be "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24), some people add the traditions of men not authorized by God (Matthew 15:9).

It is disheartening and frightening, to say the least, to find once respected members of the Lord's body drifting in the direction of presumption and "will worship." We must all apply the brakes! No doubt there are many people today with the desire and zeal to worship God. That is noble, yet it would be far more noble (Acts 17:11) for all these people to think less and obey more. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: "Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

