

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

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What Does the Bible Teach?

"A Living Dog Is Better Than A Dead Lion"

AMONGST EVERY other blessings of God that man enjoys on earth each day, life itself is the most precious and important blessing for every individual. Life, in fact, is the only blessing that man has received directly from God. When God had created Adam, in the beginning, the Bible says, he was created in the image and in the likeness of God. After creating man's body from the dust of the ground, God had breathed into the nostrils of man the breath of life. (Genesis 1:26, 27; 2:7). That man was created in the image and in the likeness of God, is evident from the fact that man alone, like God, is an intelligent being in all of God's creation. He has an inborn desire to worship God. Man is creative and inventive. God is Spirit (John 4:24), man, therefore, is a spiritual being. Unlike animals, who have only earthly bodies, man has his body from the earth, but he has his soul from God. Man's life did not originate from a fish or a bird or a monkey, and neither did it originate from some dead earthly matter. But God Himself gave life to man, His own life, when He had breathed into man the breath of His life. This then means that there is a divine part of God living inside every individual. You and I, and every human being on earth are much more important and valuable than any other thing of this world or the world itself. We are custodian of our lives. In fact, on earth, life is the only thing that man can claim to be his.

But what happens to an individual when a person dies? According to the Bible, when an individual dies, the dust returns

to earth as it was and the spirit or the soul returns to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7). In another place the Bible says, at death, man goes to his eternal home (Ecclesiastes 12:5). Man on earth is temporary, this is not where he will dwell forever. Neither does he go out of existence at any point of time, having been made in the likeness of eternal God. There is an eternal home, God has designed, where man goes to live forever.

The point is, in what condition or state will I return to God? Certainly I can't hope to return to God in one way and live my life on earth in another way. Christ taught, on the day of judgment, there will be only two kinds of people, either righteous or unrighteous. The unrighteous will go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous will enter into eternal life. (Matthew 25:46). On earth, I am either righteous or unrighteous, and it will be the same when I depart from this earth to return to God; I will return to Him either righteous or unrighteous.

Jesus Christ had come into the world to make every man and every woman righteous in Him, is the message of the Bible. The Bible declares: "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21). God, by His grace, allowed Christ, His Son, to taste death for every person on earth. (Hebrews 2:9). Therefore, by being in Him one becomes righteous in the eyes of God. "Therefore," says 2 Corinthians 5:17, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away ; behold, all things have become new." Again, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...." (Romans 8:1). Since Christ, by the plan and will of God, was allowed to die on the cross for the sins of humanity, therefore no one needs to be condemned for his or her own sins, provided one is in Christ to become righteous. (Romans 5:6-8).

Nothing, therefore, in this world should be of any more importance for an individual than to know where one is spiritually in this life—in Christ or out of Christ. Thanks be to God for He continues to give us more time, year after year, and opportunities each day to choose Christ in this life and make sure that we are in Him before we depart from this earth to live in our eternal home. The wise man, in the book of Ecclesiastes 9: 4 wrote : "But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion." However mighty or rich or wise one may have been on earth, but if he didn't choose to become righteous in Christ

before his return, he lost his God given opportunity forever. Hope is the privilege of the living, while there is life there is hope. If an individual's condition be, upon any account, bad, there is hope it will be amended. But after the person go to the dead, it is too late then. Those who are joined to the living in whatever condition they may be, there is hope for them. The meanest beggar alive on earth has that comfort of this world and does that service to it which the greatest prince, when he is dead, is utterly incapable of. The most important question, therefore, before each one of us is: How do I fare in my relationship with my Creator to whom I will finally return? Thanks be to God for the New Year, and may we learn to pray as Moses of old: "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." (Psalm 90:12).

Putting Off The Old Man Of Sin

Lesson 17

GAMBLING

J. C. CHOATE

JOIN ME NOW as we make a study of *GAMBLING*. What is gambling? It is taking a chance. It usually involves some type of game where the one who plays invests money but very seldom gets anything in return. It is so set up that the one who operates the game is the one who does most of the winning. It appeals to the masses because so many are always hoping that they can make a lot of money without having to put up a large investment. Governments of the world, national and state, like to operate lotteries, which is nothing but a game of chance, because it pays tremendous dividends. Many countries, however, will not allow widescale gambling because it is such a drain on the citizens while making only a few rich.

In an attempt to justify gambling, there are those who say that life itself is a gamble, going on a trip is taking a chance, getting a job and keeping it is likewise a risk, and so on with everything else. But in all of these cases, you are investing, and in return you receive something. In the case of gambling, you invest, even though it may be small, and you expect to receive something, but in most cases you receive nothing. There is therefore a big difference.

There are many types of gambings going on in the world. People

bet on all kinds of ball games, horse racing, whether this can be done, whether that can be done, the outcome of elections, etc., and so on. There are all kinds of card games and other types of games that are played with money going to the winner. Individuals do it, clubs and organizations get involved, even religious groups play games of chance to raise money, and again the state governments sponsor lotteries.

The rich can afford it but are usually smart enough to know how far to go with it. In many cases they are collecting, not investing. But the poor people of the country are the big losers. They dream of winning huge sums of money and then they day dream as to how they would use it. Even if they won it, it would probably be their downfall. They would not be able to handle it and so someone would either cheat them and end up in getting it all or else they would go out and squander it. But what about the hundreds and thousands who invested their hard earned money but didn't receive anything? They were all expecting to win, but they lost. Think of the disappointment. Don't you imagine too that they could have used that money on food, for clothes, or at least to save? Had they done so they would have been far better off. Even if they could win they would be the loser. And most all of those who gamble and win still lose. How is that? They keep gambling, thinking that they will win again. Therefore, they will eventually gamble away any that they have already won. In the end, all gamblers lose.

My friends, people gamble because they are carnal, earthly, and worldly. Paul said to the new Christians at Corinth, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). I am referring you to this passage since Paul classifies things as envying, strife, and divisions as being carnal or things of the world. Surely when we are constantly longing for money and the material things of this world, risking the loss of our hard earned money to obtain such, then we are indeed carnal.

Do we not trust the Lord? Christ said, "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls

of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his statute? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." (Matthew 6:25-34).

Can't we see then by the foregoing statement that the Lord is going to take care of us, that he is going to provide for our physical needs? Paul said, "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness." (1 Timothy 6:6-11).

James says that friendship with the world is enmity with God. (James 4:4). John tells us that we should not love this world. Hear him: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." (1 John 2:15-17).

Now what is being said in all of this? We are trying to show you that when you gamble then that means that you are wanting something for nothing, that you are not willing to work for what you get. You are carnal, of the world, longing for the material things of

the world and the pleasure they will bring. You would be willing to take the money of all of the others and enjoy the pleasures thereof and let them do without. Gambling causes people to be covetous, envious, and jealous. It causes people to resort to lying; cheating, and then to allow their winnings to corrupt them.

Those who gamble become so addicted to it that they continue to engage in it until they lose everything. They deny their families food, clothing, and other necessities of life in order to try once again to win the big prize. But more often than not they lose again.

Most gambling is rigged in favor of the one who is running the game. It also attracts all of the bad characters of the area along with all of their bad habits. Gambling dens then are dens of thieves. That is the way it is always pictured in the cinema, books, etc. because that is the way it is.

The Lord attempts to warn the wise. Stay away from such things. Work for your money and then you will know how it came. Be thankful for what you have. Be honest in all that you do. Take care of your family.

Do not allow the world to lure you from your path. Remember that if you will look to the Lord then he will provide for your needs. Furthermore, he will help you to overcome your temptations so that you will always be able to do that which is right.

Let me ask you that gamble: If you counted up all that you gambled away against what you have earned, then have you spent more or won more? I would say that you have lost more than you have gained. Doesn't that tell you something? When are you going to wake up to what is going on?

Who Is At The Controls?

ALLEN WEBSTER

If life is a flight through time who is in the cockpit?

If life is a joyride, who is behind the steering wheel?

If life is a voyage, who is at the helm?

Decisions determine direction (Joshua 24:15). Direction determines destiny (Matthew 7:13-14). Will we ascend or descend at the judgment? It all depends on who makes our decisions.

Bible examples abound of those who had self on life's throne. Note the personal pronouns of a certain rich man: "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he

said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater... there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou has much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry" (Luke 12:17-19). God called him a "fool" (Luke 12:20). Another rich man had the "me" philosophy and awoke in torments (Luke 16:23). Self-will took Nebuchadnezzar from his throne (Daniel 4:30-37) and kept Moses from Canaan (Numbers 20:8-12). Felix trembled at the thought of giving control to Christ (Acts 24:25); Agrippa came close to handing over the reins, but not close enough (Acts 26:28). The prodigal is not the only young man who has let such thinking take him to the far country and into the pigpen of sin (cf. Luke 15).

We will never be able by our own bootstraps to rise out of the mire into which our sins have sunk us. The man who says he is in control of his life is mistaken. The devil allows him to think so, but serving self is sacrificing at Satan's altar. There are no free men in sin's death camp (Romans 6:17, 23).

When we were young, our fathers may have allowed us to "drive" while sitting in their laps. We felt we were in control, but when the car veered from the road, Dad quickly took over. Many are sitting in Satan's lap, "steering" their lives to a lake of fire. "Me" is not a safe guide for life (Proverbs 14:12; Jeremiah 10:23).

"MEN"

Others allow public opinion to make their decisions. How many should make Saul's confession? "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (1 Samuel 15:24). Adam gave in to Eve and let forbidden fruit get him into a jam (Genesis 3:6); Abraham feared Abimelech enough to tell "a little white lie" (Genesis 20:11); and Aaron made a golden calf at public demand (Exodus 32:21-24).

In the New Testament, Pilate wanted to set Jesus free, but he was too much of a people-pleasing politician to stand by his decision (Matthew 27:2-26). Many rulers believed on Jesus but would not confess Him, "for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42-43; cf. 5:44). Even Barnabas once gave in to peer pressure and disassociated himself from Gentiles (Galatians 2:13).

We must strongly resist the pressure to conform to the world's mold (Romans 12:1-2). Evil companions are bad for good morals

(1 Corinthians 15:33), so we should stay away from them as much as possible (1 Thessalonians 5:22). Pitching tents toward Sodom has left behind the smoking ruins of many families (Genesis 13:12; 14:12; 19:16, 24, 26, 31-36). Any who love the opinions of father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters more than Christ, cannot be His disciple (Luke 14:26; cf. 18:29-30). Men are not a safe guideline for crossing the chasm that divides earth and eternity (Matthew 7:13-14).

“MESSIAH”

A third choice is to allow Christ to rule our lives. He stands today knocking at the door of every heart (Revelation 3:20), but He will never force His way in (cf. Luke 24:28-29). He has no draft for His army, no subpoenas for His mediatorship (Matthew 22:37; 2 Corinthians 5:14). One who comes to Jesus must renounce all (cf. Revelation 12:11), take up his cross, and follow as closely as he can in the Master's steps (Luke 14:26-27; 1 Peter 2:21-22).

The choice is difficult, but it is never regretted (2 Corinthians 7:10). His truth sets us free (John 8:32); His life is abundant (John 10:10); His rule is not grievous (1 John 5:3). Joshua gave God his life (Joshua 24:15) and was never disappointed. Paul gave Christ his heart and never looked back (Acts 9; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; cf. Luke 9:62).

The truth is, “No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Luke 16:13).

Who is at your controls?

Are There Degrees of Sin?

BOB PRICHARD

THERE ARE different types of sin, and sins have varying earthly consequences, but there are no degrees of sin. We sometimes think of “little white lies,” which we think are not as bad as other “big lies,” but the Bible simply says “all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). The eternal consequences for sin are the same for all sins, even if they are sins we think of as only “minor sins.”

John wrote that “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John

3:4). To transgress the law of the land is to commit a crime. To transgress the law of God is to commit sin. The literal meaning of the word sin is “to miss the mark.” When we sin, we have missed the mark of following God’s will.

While there are no degrees of sin, sins may still be classified in certain ways. Some sins are moral sins, such as adultery and drunkenness, specifically condemned by the Bible. Other moral sins, such as gambling, are condemned in principle by the Bible. John sums up these works of the flesh, saying, “All unrighteousness is sin” (1 John 5:17).

Sins of commission are sins of disobedience to God’s will. When Lot and his family escaped from the wicked city of Sodom, God warned that they were not to look back. When Lot’s wife looked back, she became a pillar of salt. Her sin was not a moral sin, but it was disobedience to God’s command (Genesis 19:26).

Another type of sin is that of not doing right—sins of omission. It is not good enough just to refrain from doing those things God has condemned. We must also do what God has commanded. James wrote, “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

The Bible warns, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23); and “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The foremost problem in the world today is a sin problem. Man is a sinner, and the consequences for sin must be paid. The wonderful news, however, is that even though man sins against the infinite God, He has provided a means of escape. Paul wrote, “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). By obeying the commands of the gospel of Christ, we can have that eternal life through Jesus Christ.

WORLD’S BEST BOOK

HOWELL FERGUSON

THE PROPHECIES of the Bible are amazing. Eight hundred years before Jesus’ birth, the prophet Micah said He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). And then Caesar sent out a decree, as recorded in Luke 2:1, that all the world should be registered. So Mary left Nazareth and went to Bethlehem and gave birth to Jesus,

because her husband Joseph, a descendant of David, had to return to his birthplace for the census. Pretty amazing!

You can turn to Psalm 22, which was written hundreds of years before the crucifixion of Christ, and find there thirty detailed descriptions of death by crucifixion. This was written before crucifixion was even known as a form of execution in Palestine. The Jews did not crucify; they stoned. Yet in Psalm 22 you read these words, "They pierced my hands and my feet" (22:16). It was prophesied that the soldiers would cast lots for His garment, hundreds of years before the actual event (Psalm 22:18). The Bible even prophesied in Zechariah 12:10, "And they shall look upon me whom they have pierced." Amazing isn't it? The Old Testament is written as though a man were standing at the foot of the cross!

A Reed Shaken by the Wind

CLEM THURMAN

IN DISCUSSING with the Jewish multitude the preaching of John, Jesus asked, "*What went ye out in the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?*" (Matt. 11:7). John preached the truth plainly. Evidently there were some who didn't like that kind of preaching. He offended some folk by his straightforward preaching, but at least they knew where he stood! He one time called a group "*a generation of vipers*" and warned them to "*bring forth fruits worthy of repentance*" (Matt. 3:7-8). The hearers may have liked what they heard, but they knew what he meant. John warned Herod that his marriage was sinful, "*It is not lawful for thee to have her*" (Matt. 14:4). How we need preachers who will preach that today! It takes the courage of conviction. For preaching it, John was put to death. But there was nothing wishy-washy about John. He took a stand, and he stood there firmly, regardless of what it cost him to do so.

Jeremiah was called the "*weeping prophet*" because he lamented the departure of the Jews from the will of God. He preached the truth, unpopular as it was and as unpopular as that preaching made him. He said of the Jews in his day, "*The prophets prophesy falsely. . . and my people love to have it so*" (Jer. 5:30). There was a need for a man of God who would "tell it like it is," and Jeremiah was that man. There is always a need for preachers and teachers who will speak the truth, firmly and without compromise,

to those who need to hear it. The need is as great today as it ever has been.

With regard to this gospel age, the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, *"The time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap unto themselves teachers after their own lusts"* (2 Tim. 4:3). Paul *"spoke out boldly"* in his preaching (Acts 13:46), and he encourages us to do the same thing. No one is interested in *"a reed shaken by the wind."* The church and the world both want to hear from people of faith, those who believe and know why they believe it! As one fellow said, "Don't tell me about your doubts, I got enough of those of my own. Tell me what you believe in!" And we need to do just that. There was need for boldness in Paul's preaching, and there is need for the same boldness in preaching the same gospel today. But we are not just talking about preachers in the pulpit, we are talking about every member of the body of Christ. We, like John and others, need to stand up for some things — and let others know that we stand there.

STAND UP FOR THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

When some would have bound parts of the old law on Christians, Paul wrote, *"To whom we gave place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour"* (Gal. 2:5). He plainly stated that the law God gave through Moses was *"nailed to the cross"* (Col. 2:14) and was removed when Christ died (Eph. 2:14-17; Heb. 7:12). Jesus, by His death, is *"mediator of the new testament"* (Heb. 9:15) which God designed and foretold by the prophets (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:7-13) would replace the old testament. God plainly stated the principle for those today who would try to justify their practices by the old law: *"Ye are severed from Christ, ye who attempt to be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace"* (Gal. 5:4). With regard to instrumental music in worship, the keeping of the sabbath, the burning of candles, "clergy-laity" distinction, and dozens of other such things which people justify by the old law, let's "stand up" for the gospel, the New Testament which is ratified by the blood of Jesus and by which we are to live today.

The purpose that Jesus had in leaving heaven and living on earth was clearly stated, *"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost"* (Lk. 19:10). Jesus told the apostles, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He*

that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:15-16). The apostle Paul wrote, *"I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth"* (Rom. 1:16). In a time when the religious world in general emphasizes the social aspect of the gospel, we must never lose sight of the real purpose of the gospel: the salvation of souls. Christians must be concerned about the physical and emotional needs of people (Lk. 10:30-37), but the words of Jesus must burn our hearts with His purpose: *"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Matt. 16:26). To take care of the physical needs only may not be a waste of time, but it is certainly a waste of eternity! Let's stand up for the purpose of the gospel: to save souls.

STAND UP FOR "GRACE THROUGH FAITH"

Because some of our religious neighbors have emphasized the grace of God so much, it seems that we are sometimes afraid to study and teach what the Bible says about it. The truth is that we are *"saved by grace through faith"* (Eph. 2:8-9), or we are not saved at all. If God gave us what we deserved, we all would perish (Rom. 3:23; 6:23). We are obligated to keep all of His commandments, and we deserve nothing from God if we live a perfect life of obedience (Lk. 17:7-10). But God grants us *"all spiritual blessings in Christ"* (Eph. 1:3), which includes salvation (2 Tim. 2:10). When we were under penalty of death for our sins (Rom. 5:8; 6:23), Jesus died for us: *"That by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man"* (Heb. 2:9). Everything that God does for us, through Christ, is *"by grace."*

We are saved *"by grace through faith"* (Eph. 2:8), and that shows a response to God's grace on the part of man. What we receive from God is *"by grace."* What we do in response to God, to receive His gift in Christ, is *"by faith."* And just as all that God does is a matter of grace, all that we do is a matter of faith. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and others heard what God wanted them to do, and *"by faith"* they did what He said (Heb. 11:4-8). That is what it means to *"walk by faith"* (2 Cor. 5:7) and *"live by faith"* (Rom. 1:17). God, by grace, makes possible our salvation in Jesus Christ. We, by faith, follow His directions to receive that salvation. Let us ever be willing to stand up for the teaching that we are *"saved by grace through faith."*

STAND UP FOR THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

The denominational world has long opposed the necessity of baptism, most contending that we are saved by "faith only." But look at what Jesus taught: *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"* (Mk. 16:16). Peter commanded, *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, unto the remission of your sins"* (Acts 2:38). Christ, by the mouth of Ananias, commanded Paul, *"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:16). And Peter wrote later that *"baptism doth also now save us"* (1 Pet. 3:21). If people really believe the Bible, that settles it for them.

When the purpose of baptism is studied in the Scriptures, its necessity becomes clear. We are baptized in order to have remission of sins (Acts 2:38), in order to be saved (Mk. 16:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). Baptism is *"into Jesus Christ"* (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27) where we have *"all promises"* (2 Cor. 1:20) and *"all spiritual blessings"* (Eph. 1:3). Until, by faith, we are baptized into Christ we are not *"children of God"* (Gal. 3:26-27) nor are we *"heirs of God"* (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 3:26-29). Just as the Red Sea was the point of deliverance for Israel, so baptism is the point of deliverance today (1 Cor. 10:1-4). A few years ago members of the body of Christ—all of them—were both vocal and firm about the necessity of baptism. And we were the fastest growing religious group. Many people didn't agree with us, but they knew where we stood! No one wants to listen to a *"reed shaken by the wind."* Let's have the courage to stand up for the necessity of being baptized into Jesus Christ.

STAND UP FOR THE CHURCH WHICH JESUS BUILT

In the confusion of denominationalism of today, many question whether we can be sure "which church is right." But it isn't difficult, if we will forget "my church" and "your church." Jesus promised, *"I will build my church"* (Matt. 16:18). He did that. Paul later said, *"Feed the church of the Lord, which he purchased with his own blood"* (Acts 20:28). That church is called *"the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 16:19; Col. 1:13), *"the body of Christ"* (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18), the *"bride of Christ"* (Eph. 5:22-32). That person who is *"baptized into Christ"* (Rom. 6:3) is by that *"one baptism"* (Eph. 4:5) also baptized into the *"one body"* (1 Cor. 12:13) which is the church (Col. 1:18). There is much in the Scriptures to help us to identify that church by its worship (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-

28; Eph. 5:19), its organization (Acts 14:23; Phil. 1:1; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:5-12), etc.

Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers (Jno. 17:20-21), the same kind of unity He and the Father have. He said through Paul, *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all"* (Eph. 4:4-6). Again through Paul, the Lord commands, *"That ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you"* (1 Cor. 1:10). There was division at Corinth which was almost exactly like denominationalism today (1 Cor. 1:10), and the question is asked, *"Is Christ divided?"* (1 Cor. 1:13). This passage, and many others, point out clearly that **denominationalism is sin**. Let's quit beating around the bush about it. Murder is sin, adultery is sin, lying is sin and religious division is sin. The Lord intends that all are to be reconciled to God *"in one body"* (Eph. 2:16), which is His church (Eph. 1:22-23). That does not mean the church of my choice, nor the church of your choice. It means the church of HIS choice.

When the apostles first began to preach the gospel after the death of Jesus (Acts 2), people heard and believed and asked what to do. The Lord's answer was (and is), *"Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins. . . Then they that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. . . And the Lord added to the church daily those that were being saved"* (Acts 2:38,41,47). If it was that simple then, why should it be complicated today? People heard the gospel, they believed, they repented, they were baptized, the Lord saved them and added them to His church. They never became part of any denomination, but they were members of the body (church) of Christ.

There are pressures of all kinds on us from every direction to compromise, to conform. The pressure comes from the world with regard to morality. It comes from denominations with regard to gospel teaching and practice. And it even comes from within the church, from those who don't want the pressures directed at them. But Jesus still asks, *"What went you out to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"* May we ever have the courage, regardless of the cost, to stand up for the Lord, His teaching and His church. There is no other way to convince the world, there is no other way to please Christ.

THE FIGHT WE FACE

JOHNNY RAMSEY

IN REV. 12:11 WE find a description of the man that even Satan cannot whip: *"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death."* Such valiant characters will always give the devil trouble. When the hosts of evil run into folk like the ones mentioned there, it will always be tough sledding.

*The fight is on, but be not weary,
Be strong and in His might hold fast.
If God be for us — His banner o'er us —
We'll sing the victor's song at last.*

Even though the devil is *"a roaring lion"* we have the power to withstand him through faith (1 Pet. 5:8-9). The three ingredients of victory that make the ardent Christian an unbeatable foe are these:

1. Trusting in the blood of Jesus.
2. Relying on the word of God.
3. Being willing to die for heaven's cause! When Satan comes up against that combination, the demons in hell tremble once more (Jas. 2:19). We are always *"led in triumph in Christ"* (2 Cor. 2:14) when we live by faith in Him. How true are the words of 1 Jno. 3:8; 4:4 and 5:4. Those verses show us that the Son of God is more powerful than the Serpent and by genuine faith in Him we can wear the laurel wreath of victory.

After describing the cunning power of the enemy of our souls in Rev. 12:9, the apostle informs us in verse 11 of the three-fold power Christianity possesses to overwhelm the strength of spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:10-12). When one truly knows the Holy Scriptures, trusts absolutely in the shed blood of the Lamb of God and is willing to lay down his life for the glorious message of the Cross, there is no way Hell can win the battle for that man's eternal destiny. While others are out in the warfare against sin, we dare not be idle (Num. 32:6). Yes, *"Woe to him who keeps back his sword from blood"* (Jer. 48:10). And when God is for us, *"We are more than conquerors"* (Rom. 8:37)!

With our gaze permanently fixed upon Christ (Heb. 12:2), let us press on (Phil. 3:14) to the certain victory (1 Cor. 15:57). It is

no wonder many church historians said, "The blood of the martyrs was the seed of Christianity." Truth, crushed to earth, did rise again. What an unbeatable foe!

The last book of the Bible is full of rich memories, vibrant passages and powerful points that remind us of the persecution of early saints, the horror of the Roman rulers and the ultimate victory of Truth. The golden threads that weave together the canvas of life make us grateful for Christianity and more aware of the tyranny of wicked men. Truly, as Paul wrote in Rom. 8:18, *"The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed."* Charles Gabriel, in a great gospel song, tells the story:

Though the hills be steep and the valleys deep,
 With no flowers my way adorning.
Though the night be lone and my rest a stone,
 Joy awaits me in the morning.

HOW TO HONOR CHRIST

ROY BEASLEY

"FOR THE Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him." (Jno. 5: 22-23).

Three things are taught in this passage. Two things are plainly stated! (1) "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father"; (2) "He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father..."

One thing is inferred: To honor the Son is to honor the Father. We should therefore, be interested in learning how we can honor the Son. Let us notice some distinct ways of honoring Christ as are indicated in the scriptures.

We honor Christ by making the good confession. This is the confession that Timothy made before many witnesses (I Tim. 6: 12-13). It is the confession Peter made on the coasts of Caesarea Phillipi when he acknowledged that "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Matt. 16: 16). This is the confession that the Eunuch made when he said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:37). In Romans 10: 10 we are told that "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

There is a great significance in the good confession. Jesus is his name reminding us of his humanity. "Christ" is his title, meaning "the anointed one." He is the "Son of God" suggesting his divinity.

We honor Christ in baptism. The importance of baptism can be seen in the fact that Jesus himself was baptized "to fulfill all righteousness." (Matt. 3: 14-15). He also commanded baptism. He said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost..." (Matt. 28:19). "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved..." (Mk. 16:16). Baptism is mentioned in every case of conversion recorded in the book of Acts. When we are baptized, Christ is honored. When we refuse to be baptized, he is dishonored.

We honor Christ in taking the Lord's supper. Jesus himself instituted the Lord's supper just before his death on the cross. "And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you! this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you." (Lk. 22: 19-20). After the beginning of the church the disciples continued steadfastly in "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2: 42). Later the church at Troas continued this observance on the first day of the week. (Acts 20: 7).

We honor Christ in wearing the name "Christian". You cannot pronounce the name Christian without pronouncing the name of "Christ". In Acts 11:26 The Bible says, "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." In Acts 26:28 Agrippa said to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." In I Pet. 4: 15-16, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed: but let him glorify God on this behalf." The name Christian literally means "belonging to Christ." To wear this name is to honor Christ; not to do so is a dishonor to him.

THE ACID OF ANGER

CLARENCE DeLOACH

"...Be angry and sin not..." (Ephesians 4:26)

ANGER IS one letter short of danger, and is like an acid that eats through whatever it touches. It is a problem built within the fabric

of human nature. It is one of the most dangerous weapons in Satan's arsenal of destruction. If uncontrolled, it can damage and destroy people emotionally and spiritually.

However, not all anger is bad. Once when Jesus healed a man, the Pharisees reacted against the miracle, and Jesus was "*moved with anger*" (Mark 3:5). When our Lord saw others abused, misused, or neglected, He was moved with anger.

There are some things that should move us to anger—the pornography racket, child abuse, the drug traffic, the slumlords! The way to be angry and sin not is to be angry only at sin. Love the sinner, but hate the sin! Sometimes, anger is the best expression of love.

Yet, there is an uncontrolled, ungodly anger. How can you determine if your anger is a sinful anger? Analyze it and determine if there is sufficient or insufficient cause for the way you feel. Jesus spoke of one being angry with his brother *without cause*. If anger is not provoked by a righteous reason, it is sinful. If it is against the *person* rather than the *offense*, it is sinful. If your anger calls for revenge, it is sinful. If it is harbored and you are unforgiving, it is unrighteous.

Solomon said, "*Anger rests in the bosom of fools*" (Ecclesiastes 7:9), and, "*He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down without walls*" (Proverbs 25:28). One man said, "I'm at the mercy of anyone who can make me mad."

There's a lot of rage in people. Often the slightest thing can set off an explosion. When we are angry, we open ourselves to the devil's invasion. Immediately after Paul said, "*Be angry and sin not*" he added, "*Don't give place to the devil*" (Ephesians 4:26,27). We are an easy prey to Satan when we are angry!

Remember, harbored anger is like an acid that destroys its container. We are weak, and we must learn to lean on Jesus to overcome this problem.

The Vacant House Parable

OWEN COSGROVE

IN MATTHEW 12:43-45, Jesus told a parable about a vacant house. The owner apparently evicted a bad tenant and cleaned the place up, but he left it vacant.

There is nothing more vulnerable to mischief than a vacant house. That is why it is difficult to obtain insurance for one. Property can run down in a hurry if it is not occupied. In Jesus' parable, the evil spirit

slipped back into the house and brought seven of his friends, and they trashed it.

There is a powerful lesson in this seldom-noticed parable. Nature abhors a vacuum, and life cannot be lived successfully in a spiritual vacuum. It is not enough just to take sin out of our lives; we must put something better back. It is not enough just to quit our meanness; our conduct must then be filled with positive goodness.

Negative morality prides itself in what it does not do, but *what we do not do does not make us anything!* A telephone pole does not drink or curse or smoke. It does not steal or covet or hate. These negatives do not make it moral. A field can be left unplanted and unworked and it will grow up in weeds. It is not enough just to clear the land. All of the weeds can be removed, but the field will be unproductive if the good things are not cultivated and nurtured there.

In that marvelous contrast of spirituality and carnality in Galatians 5:16 and 6:10, Paul begins by saying, *"Walk by the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."* That's the way to keep sin out of our lives. Fill the soul with the good things and there will not be any room left for the bad.

But a house that is "full" of empty space that ought to have been filled with knowledge and faith and prayer and hope and Christian fellowship is a vacuum for evil to conquer. The parable of the sower shows how the seed of the Gospel cannot grow productively in a heart encumbered with the weeds of the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Neither do the weeds of carnality grow well in a heart that is full of truth and faith and discipline.

Christ does not just take away evil; He puts something better back. That is how Christianity offers positive solutions to life's problems. When we live prayerfully and well for the Lord, we will not have to worry about Satan breaking in and vandalizing the place. Walk after the spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

DAN EUBANKS

THERE IS a great need in the heart and mind of every Christian to understand the difference in justification and sanctification. These

two terms are sometimes used interchangeably as in 1 Corinthians 6:11: "but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (κν). This refers to the one-time, completed act of God of washing us in the blood of Christ - justification - and setting us apart from the world and into His kingdom—sanctification.

More often than not, justification and sanctification are used to mean two different things. Justification refers to an instantaneous, one-time, fully completed act of God based on His grace, the blood of Jesus, and our obedient faith whereby He moves us from being totally and helplessly lost to being totally and completely saved. We are blameless, acquitted and perfect in the eyes of God. It is as if we had never sinned. The righteousness of Christ is granted to us as our spiritual garment. We have "put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Having been justified, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). This act of God is neither unconditional nor irrevocable.

Sanctification, on the other hand, usually refers to a process of growth over the lifetime of a Christian whereby we move from where we are to where we ought to be spiritually. This process of growth takes time. It is sometimes fast and sometimes slow. There are ups and downs, successes and failures in growing into the "image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). But, the important thing is direction more than distance, and persistence more than perfection.

This sanctification is brought about by the renewing or changing of our minds about sin (Romans 12:2). It is brought about by a careful, regular study of the truths of God's Word (John 17:17). It is brought about by a constant "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord." By that we "are changed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Corinthians 3:18). It is brought about by our daily effort to put off the old and put on the new along with genuine repentance when we fail. It is brought about by a serious and sincere effort to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). To the Thessalonians Christians already justified in Christ Paul said, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). And he prayed that "the very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (5:23).

But as we succeed, progress and grow in our sanctification, we do not become more saved or closer to justification. That was fully and completely granted on the basis of God's grace, Christ's blood, and our obedient faith, exemplified in baptism. This state remains consistent and secure while our sanctification is in progress.

On the other hand, we do not lose our salvation and justification on those days when our sanctification is diminished or when we have an actual failure to resist some temptation. If repentance comes as it should, our justification remains secure as the blood of Christ constantly cleanses us from sin (1 John 1:7). Our salvation is not lost and regained by the ups and downs of our sanctification. We remain justified while we are in the process of being sanctified.

We can, however, lose our justification if we totally and willfully give up on and turn from the process of sanctification. This doesn't mean when we have an "off day" in our efforts to grow as a Christian. But if we turn again to the world, no longer have any desire or intention to resist or repent of sin, become again entangled in the pollutions of the world and are overcome, we have lost the status of justification and the "latter end is worse ... than the beginning" (2 Peter 2:20).

Understanding the difference in justification and sanctification has, in my judgment, some wonderful consequences. We do not see our salvation taken away every time we stumble and then restored when we have repented and asked forgiveness. We see it much more secure and have more genuine expectation of entering heaven. We no longer fear the Lord will return at one of those times between our stumbling and our repentance when our name has temporarily been removed from the Lamb's Book of Life. We will be far more patient with and forgiving of ourselves and others as we understand that God gives us time to grow and expects occasional failures. We will not expect more of ourselves and others than God expects based on whatever point when we are along the road to being sanctified wholly. We will have more joy and less fear in our salvation and more expectation of heaven at last.

Thanks be to God that we can be fully justified while we are going toward being wholly sanctified.

The Rule That's Still Golden

TOMMY SOUTH

I DON'T know who first called Matthew 7:12 the "Golden Rule," but the name has certainly stuck. One source said that it has been called the Golden Rule since the 18th century, and that it was so called because the Roman emperor Alexander Severus had it engraved in gold on his palace wall. I don't know if that's true, but it probably

doesn't explain the name. I grew up hearing it paraphrased this way: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In that era, it was regarded as the guiding principle of all human relationships, even by those who weren't particularly serious about their Christianity.

Most likely Matthew 7:12 came to be called the Golden Rule because it is so universally applicable, because there is no human relationship to which it doesn't apply, and because if it were practiced by all, it would completely transform any society. Even if we practice it alone, it will transform us. After all these centuries, the rule is still golden.

THE RULE IN CONTEXT

It is important to understand how the Golden Rule functions in the Sermon on the Mount and its role in Jesus' teachings generally. First, it is the grand conclusion of Jesus' ethical teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. The Revised Standard and New International versions make it the conclusion of a paragraph about prayer (Matthew 7:7-11). But it's difficult to see how it fits into this context. The first word in verse 12 is "So" or "Therefore". What Jesus is about to say in verse 12 points back to something—but to what?

It points back not just to the preceding paragraph but to everything that Jesus has said since Matthew 5:17 when He began to talk about the ethical behavior expected of those who live in God's kingdom. It sums up everything that Jesus has said about how we are to treat other people in regard to not being angry, not committing adultery, not swearing falsely, not taking revenge, loving our enemies, not being a religious showoff, and not judging harshly or unfairly. Everything is summed up by the Rule: Do to others what you want them to do to you—in every relationship, in every situation.

The Golden Rule is part of that greater righteousness that Jesus talked about in Matthew 5:20: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (ESV). How could anyone be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees, the most scrupulous keepers of the Jewish law? The Rule, along with Jesus' other teachings, shows us that He isn't talking about just keeping the letter of the law, because they were pretty good at that, but about actively doing good to other people. That is more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees. The Golden Rule is simply another way of saying what Jesus says in Matthew 22:39: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

A MISUNDERSTOOD RULE

As simple and straightforward as the Golden Rule is, it is still often misunderstood.

First, the Golden Rule is active and not passive. Jesus was not the first religious or philosophical teacher to state this principle. William Barclay, in *The Gospel of Matthew*, discusses the Golden Rule as "The Everest of Ethics." One of the ancient rabbis put it this way: "What is hateful to yourself, do to no other; that is the whole Law, and the rest is commentary. Go and learn." In the apocryphal Book of Tobit, Tobias teaches his son, "Do that to no man which thou hatest." Confucius said, "What you do not want done to yourself, do not to others." Epictetus wrote, "What you avoid suffering yourselves, seek not to inflict upon others." Similarly, various Stoic philosophers often said, "What you do not wish to be done to you, do not do to anyone else" (272-277).

All of these may sound very much like what Jesus said, but they are all stated in the negative: "Don't do to others anything you wouldn't want them to do to you." What is unique about Jesus' statement in Matthew 7:12 is that He stated this same principle positively. Is there really any difference? Actually, a great deal. These negative statements of the Golden Rule (sometimes referred to as the "Silver Rule") place us in the position of being passive about our ethical treatment of others: Just don't do anything to harm anybody. Obviously, this is much easier than doing what Jesus said. He teaches us to seek actively to do to others what we would want others to do to/for us. The difference is enormous.

Also, the Silver Rule is somewhat self-centered and may be nothing more than an exercise in self-preservation: "I won't hurt you, so you won't hurt me." This is not a particularly Christian—or even religious—motive. It bears very little resemblance to what Jesus said. His words harken back to the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peacemakers"—i.e., blessed are those who seek to bring peace into the lives of others. Blessed are those who go out of their way to make life better for others. See the difference?

Second, the Golden Rule is not, as sometimes interpreted, a promise that if we live by this rule, others will do likewise toward us. Jesus didn't say, "If you do unto others what you want them to do to you, they will treat you in the same way." Sometimes this happens, but certainly not always. There are always evil people who are more than willing to take advantage of the good will and good nature of others.

To interpret the Golden Rule in this way would be as self-focused as the Silver Rule. Then our motivation for doing good to others would be to have them to do good to us. That isn't entirely a bad thing, but Jesus is calling us to something higher and nobler. He is calling us to live as He Himself lived, in self-sacrificing love, not self-

serving pragmatism. Actively seeking the good of others is one way of doing what Jesus said we should do in Matthew 5:48: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Jesus isn't talking about moral perfection (which is beyond our capabilities), but about having a universal love for all, even our enemies (vv. 43-47). We are to do this because it is Godlike. Actively seeking good for others is Godlike, and this God whom we are to be like is the God of the law and the prophets. The more we are like Him, the more nearly we fulfill His will.

BEING TRANSFORMED

You see, God isn't just out to save us from our sins. He wants to do that, but He wants to do much more. He wants to transform us into His own likeness and that of His Son. And whenever we seek to do to others what we would have them do to us, we are taking an important step in that transformation process.

For this transformation to be effected in us, the Golden Rule has to be remembered and put into practice daily, not just every now and then. Think about the difference in your own life if you were to live consistently by the Golden Rule in regard to your husband or wife, your children, the people with whom you work or attend school, your neighbors, people who don't know the Lord—even toward other Christians with whom you associate in church.

When you aren't certain what you should do in regard to someone else, just ask yourself: "What would I want done for me?" Then you'll know what to do, and your life will be a blessing to those around you. It's an old rule—but it's still golden!



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