

# THE BIBLE TEACHER

*Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity*

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

### *Will There Be A Rapture?*

ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE, Christ has made the promise to His followers: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-3). When will Jesus come back? No one knows. (Matt. 24:36). Not only does the Bible teach that Christ will come back one day again to receive His followers, but it further teaches where He will come, how He will come, what will Christ do when He comes, and what events will take place at the second coming of Christ, all simultaneously. The day of Christ's second coming is called "the last day," or "the day of the Lord." (John 12:48). In 2 Peter 3:10 we read, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and works that are in it will be burned up." Since the earth will be burned up when Christ comes again, we therefore know that He will not come back on this earth again. Where will He come then? Speaking to the followers of Christ the apostle Paul said, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the cloud to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we

shall always be with the Lord.” (1 Thess.4:16, 17). Christ will come again up in the air, in the clouds, not on earth. In Rev. 1:7 we are told when Christ will come again “every eye will see Him.” The day of the second coming of Christ will be the day of resurrection of all the dead, both righteous and unrighteous. Christ said, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice, and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (John 5:28, 29). Thus the Bible teaches: when Christ will come back that will be the last day of this world; both good and evil will be resurrected at the same time or hour and will be judged and rewarded according to their deeds; all will see Him, that is, His coming will be visible to all; He will not come upon this earth, but will appear up in the air where all the righteous will be caught up, both the resurrected and the living, to meet the Lord in the air and thus they will always be with the Lord.

The word Rapture nowhere appears in the Bible. It is clearly a system of speculations, errors, and fanciful conclusions, without any biblical foundation. Ordinarily, the word rapture means a feeling of extreme pleasure and happiness; a state or experience of being carried away by overwhelming emotion; an expression or manifestation of ecstasy or passion. The doctrine of rapture is supposed to refer to a time when Christ will come back and secretly take away with Him His church, the resurrected and living saints, who will rise from the earth to meet the Lord who has secretly appeared in the air. They will stay with Him up in the air for seven years. The people who remain on earth will not know where all these have gone. They will not be able to account for their disappearance. While the highly select group is with the Lord during the period of the Rapture, on earth there will be a period of unparalleled tribulation. This tribulation period is to last seven years. After seven years, Christ will come back again, this time with all those saints who have been with Him during the Rapture of seven years. There will be another resurrection of the righteous who were converted to the Lord during the period of tribulation of seven years. They will be raised to reign over the earth with Jesus and their fellow saints in a millennial kingdom which is to be set up when Christ returns to earth. A final judgment is to come at the close of one thousand years of reign of Christ on earth with His saints, when all the unrighteous will be raised. The idea of “the Rapture”

is based on many suppositions: That Christ is to return in the air secretly; that a kingdom age on earth is to follow the church age on earth; that the church will be caught away secretly to join the Lord in the air; that the saints will be somewhere in the air for seven years during which there is tribulation on earth; that Christ and the saints will return to earth to gain victory and set up a millennial kingdom.

The doctrine of a Rapture is built on a misunderstanding and misapplication of several passages of scriptures, including 1 Thess.4:13-17 and 1 Cor.15:51-57. These passages are discussing the one and only second coming of Christ. They neither say nor imply anything about a secret or invisible coming of Christ to "Rapture" away His church either before, during or after an alleged time of tribulation. Some think that since Paul, in 1 Thess.4:16, says, "the dead in Christ shall rise first," he also means that the dead not in Christ shall rise last. This is not what the apostle is saying. The contrast is not between the resurrection of the righteous dead and the resurrection of the unrighteous dead, but between the resurrection of the righteous dead and the catching up of the righteous who are alive at the coming of Christ. The reason the wicked are not mentioned in this passage as well as in 1 Cor.15: 51-57 is that the wicked are not under consideration here. These passages were addressed to Christians to give them hope and to encourage them to live faithful lives, knowing that their eternal reward would be for such. The fact that the state of the wicked is not addressed in these particular passages does not mean that the unrighteous are not included in and affected by the single second coming of Christ and one resurrection of all the dead.

In the system of "the Rapture" doctrine there are at least three resurrections. One, when the dead in Christ will be resurrected at the time of Jesus' coming in the Rapture; second, some will be converted during the tribulation, who will die during the seven years, these "tribulation saints" will be resurrected when Christ comes at the end of the seven years to set up a kingdom on earth; and third, the wicked and the unrighteous dead will be raised at the end of the one thousand years of reign of Christ with His saints on earth. Yet, Christ, in John 5:28,29 taught that the resurrection of all the dead will be at the same hour. The good and bad will be resurrected at the same time. Since the resurrection of the righteous and the unrighteous will be at the same hour, there cannot be a resurrection

of the righteous preceding a thousand years period and another resurrection of the unrighteous following that period. At least four times in John 6 Jesus said He would raise the believer at the last day. According to John 12:48 those who reject Christ and receive not His word will be judged at the last day. Both the resurrection of all the dead, good and bad, and judgment of all will be on the last day. Since the resurrection of the righteous will be at the last day, it cannot occur a thousand years before the last day.

There is no doubt, that Christ will come back again and the saints, both the resurrected and the living, will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air to be with Him. That it will be a secreting away of the saints is not what the Bible teaches. There is nothing to be secret about Christ's coming for His saints. (2Thess.1:7-10; Rev. 1:7). When Jesus comes again the world will be destroyed. (2 Peter 3:10). There can be, therefore, no tribulation and millennial reign on an earth that no longer exists. There is to be only one resurrection of all on the day of judgment. (John 5:28,29; 12:48; Acts 24:15). When Christ comes again it will be to judge the living and the dead. (2 Tim. 4:1; Matt.25:31, 32). The Rapture theory places Jesus' coming again and the final judgment more than a thousand years apart. According to Christ's parable in Matt.13:36-43, there will be no separation of good and evil until the end of the world. The righteous and the wicked will continue to live on earth until the time the wicked are punished and the righteous are rewarded. (Acts 17:30,31; 2 Cor.5:10; 1Thess. 5:1-4). The righteous are not to be raised up until the last day, unlike the rapture doctrine that has them raised secretly long before the last day. **It is nothing but a false doctrine and should be rejected utterly.**

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## THE CHURCH OF THE BIBLE

J.C. CHOATE

*Lesson Eleven*

### Creed Of The Church

The word creed comes from a Latin word, Credo, and is defined to be, "A belief, authoritative formula of religious belief; any formula or confession of religious faith; a summary of principles or opinions professed or adhered to." When one thinks of a creed he usually

thinks of “the Apostles’ Creed” and “the Nicene Creed.” However, neither one is found in the Bible. Furthermore, every man-made church has its own man-made creed in the form of manuals, disciplines, confessions of faith, etc., all of which are additions to God’s word.

May it be suggested that any creed book that contains more than the Bible, contains too much. Any creed book that contains less than the Bible, contains too little. And any creed book that contains nothing but the Bible is useless because we already have the Bible. Revelation 22:18,19 and Galatians 1:6-9 stress the fact that we are not to add to God’s word, we are not to subtract from it, and we are not to substitute for it. In other words, the scriptures are complete (2 Timothy 3:16,17), they are perfect (James 1:25), and we are to speak only as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). There is therefore no need for an additional book or books as authorization.

The religious world is divided today not because the people have followed God’s word, but because they have accepted the creeds of men. It is argued that every church must have its own set of rules, etc. This within itself is an admission that the Bible has been forsaken. How tragic. Thus our plea is for one and all to lay down their man-made books and return to the Bible, which is the word of God. It will not divide us but will unite us in Christ Jesus.

What is the creed of the Lord’s church? We have no saviour but Christ and no creed but the Bible. Our opinions and ideas in religion are worthless. We have no private interpretation of the Bible. All we have is the Bible. We have obeyed its teaching and we point others to it. Our plea is for one and all to read and study it (John 5:39; 2 Timothy 2:15), and we ask people everywhere to do what it teaches.

We have no additional book or books that we follow. We do not believe that there is a man living who can write a book of rules and regulations that would equal the Bible. We do not believe that the Lord has given anyone the right to write such a book. We do not believe that the Holy Spirit has inspired anyone to write such a book.

It is the word of God and the word of God only that has come from God, that has been inspired of God, and that can save us. Furthermore, it is the word of God that will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). You can’t find the truth unless you go to the source of the truth. Therefore to believe the truth, you must hear the truth

(Romans 10:17). It is no wonder that the majority of the people are deceived in religious matters. It is no wonder that there is so much division and confusion in the religious world. Man has gone to man for help instead of the Lord. Man has turned to the teachings of men instead of the writings of the Bible. Surely, then, man must return to the Bible if he is to be saved.

We would encourage man to go to the Bible to learn the truth about the church. There are many counterfeit churches in the world. Which one is right? Should one make a separate study of each one? No, one should go to the book that tells the truth about the church. Once he learns the truth about the Lord's church, he will have no trouble locating the one that follows the Bible teaching.

We would encourage man to go to the Bible to learn the truth about what one must do to be saved. There are many ways to be saved, according to the teaching of men, but when one goes to God's book he finds that it is simply stated one must hear the truth, believe it, repent of his sins, confess Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38). What difference does it make what man says? The Lord is the one who saves, and so one must hear and obey him to be saved.

We should encourage man to go to the Bible to learn how to worship God. Contrary to what man says, there are not many ways of worship. The Bible teaches that there is just one way and the Lord so specified how in his word (John 4:24).

Not only on these points, but on all points that pertain to salvation and life and godliness, we would urge one and all to go to the Bible for the truth about it. While man leaves the impression that the Bible cannot be understood, and definitely not understood alike, this is not true. The Devil would have man to stay away from the Bible in order that he might be lost. But to be saved he must come to it, believe it, and let it be his one and only guide in religious matters. Only then can he be saved, because only then will he be right.

What is our creed? Jesus Christ and his word. Beside him there is no other. We believe that Christ is the Son of God and that his word is final. We accept it and follow it alone. We urge all others to do the same. The creeds of man can lead you to but one place—Hell. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6).

*(To be Continued)*

# CLERICAL TITLES AND THE BIBLE

EDDIE WHITTEN

**“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Matthew 23:12)**

Judging the hearts of men is risky business. In fact, it is strictly prohibited in the Bible (Matthew 7:1-4). To say that people are not sincere in their religious beliefs would be totally out of order. It is possible, even required that judgments be made concerning doctrines that men believe and follow. If judgments cannot be made it would be impossible to tell the difference between what is right and what is wrong. If there were not a standard by which right and wrong can be determined, it would be impossible to make a judgment in that regard. The standard by which right and wrong can be discerned must be the Bible, otherwise there cannot be consistency in judgement. With this foundation, let us consider some of the titles men have conferred upon other men.

**1. Pope.** There is no such word in the Bible. This is a title men have chosen. We know it is applied to the head of the Catholic Church and means “Papa.” He is supposedly the Holy Father on earth. He is the Vicar of Christ. Sadly, he is nothing more than a man who has been voted on by his peers to be their leader. He has no spiritual authority by which he can save men from sin, or anything else. He is human to the core. He will die just as all other “Popes” have. Every man who exalts himself (or allows himself to be exalted) will be abased.

**2. Father.** There are several steps between “Father” and “Pope” that are being skipped in this short article for reason of space, such as “Monsignor,” and “Cardinal,” none of which are found in the Bible. “Father” is designated to those who have been ordained in the Catholic Church at the lowest level of the hierarchy. It is ironic that the very men who have been declared “Father” cannot be a father by declaration of their councils. The Bible condemns the spiritual use of “Father” except as it is directed toward God (Matthew 23:9).

**3. Reverend.** Most denominational churches employ this title to their preacher. Is this a viable title to confer upon man? It may come as a surprise to many that the Bible does not give this title to human beings. It is used only one time in the Bible and then it

is applied to God. The psalmist said, in reference to God, **“He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name”** (Psalm 111:9). It is very true that all men must be reverent toward God, but to assume the title of “Reverend” is placing upon man a designation reserved for the Holy Father. It is just as erroneous to refer to a man as “Holy” as it is to refer to him as “Reverend.”

**4. Bishop.** This is a Bible word. It is the title given to one who is qualified and has been chosen to serve in the capacity delegated to this office. It is proper to refer to a man as “Bishop” if he has been duly appointed to this service. The word, “Bishop,” applies to one who is an overseer, or presbyter, or shepherd of a single congregation of the Lord’s church along with other men of like qualification. He is also known as “Elder” or “Shepherd” of the congregation in which he serves. The three words designating this office are synonymous with regard to authority, but which signify various functions within that authority. There is not the elevation of one man over another inherent in this term, nor can one serve alone in this capacity. There must be a plurality of bishops, or elders, or shepherds to serve in the responsible office of oversight in a congregation.

**5. Minister.** Another Biblical term being misapplied to certain individuals, as a title is that of “Minister.” In the application of this term, all Christians should be ministers. It is a term of description meaning merely one who serves as a representative of God to all people. Jesus said **“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45). Men have chosen to exalt the preacher above the other members of the congregation by bestowing this designation upon them. In so doing, two errors are committed: (a) The preacher is given a title that is not exclusively his, and (b) the other members of the congregation can be deprived of the responsibility that is theirs as ministers.

**6. Brother.** All members of God’s family (the church of Christ) are brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus asked, **“Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?”** His answer, **“For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother”** (Matthew 12:48,50). Many in the religious world have chosen to exalt the preacher as “Brother so-and-so,” using the term as a title.



Many of the preachers love to have it so. Paul said he was an “apostle” of Christ, and he was because he had met the qualifications needed to be an apostle. There are those in the world today who claim to be apostles. This title is impossible for men to claim today because two of the qualifications of an apostle were that they had to see and hear the Christ. No man living today can make that claim.

It would be wonderful if men could just be satisfied with the standard God gave for our conduct. There would be no charges of “judging” since we would understand the source of our authority. There would be no exaltation of one man, or men, above the level of God’s designation for men. There would be no hierarchy of authority above that Paul gave in I Corinthians 11:3 which says, **“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.”**

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## ***Preach the Word, Not Self***

E. CLAUDE GARDNER

FIFTY OR MORE YEARS AGO, it was generally understood that preachers should not include comments about themselves in their sermons. Neither should a preacher discuss his wife, children or mother-in-law. Therefore, a preacher, when relating a personal experience, would announce it first: “Pardon me for giving this personal story....” Similarly, writers from an earlier generation find it difficult to write in the first person for gospel papers.

It is not that preachers and Bible teachers should never involve themselves in a sermon or Bible class because today’s audiences may expect that kind of casual and personalized teaching. But this can be carried too far. Preachers should not constantly say: “I believe,” “This is my opinion,” or “I had this experience.” They would be wiser to study what Peter and Paul preached.

### **Avoid the Personal**

Preachers and teachers should be students of the Bible without practicing personal involvement. It may be out of date to think it only essential to “preach the Word,” but Paul charged, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke,

exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2 nkjv). When one follows this directive, listeners can easily know what of the lesson is right.

How did the writers of the New Testament deal with “preaching self”? Peter could have told about his cowardice in denying Christ or how his mother-in-law was healed, but he did not in the two recorded sermons in Acts.

Paul could have told about his temporary blindness, or he could have recited incidents from his sea voyages. But in the sermons in Acts, he only preached the Word. He explained, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

When two prominent preachers were compared, a Christian said: “When one preaches we remember his beautiful oratory, but after hearing the other one, we remember the message of the Bible.”

### **Preach Christ**

Peter’s sermons in Acts are recorded in chapters 2 and 10. On Pentecost he preached Christ, not self, which resulted in the conversion of about 3,000 souls.

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Peter continued, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them” (vv. 38, 41).

When Peter preached to the Gentiles he did not need to mention himself. Rather, he stated God’s plan of salvation (Acts 10:43, 48).

Peter and Paul as preachers are proper examples today. They preached the Word. They preached Christ crucified and risen. They did not diminish gospel preaching with personal experiences, emotional fluff and stale jokes. Nor did they think of preaching as fun and games.

All gospel teachers must subscribe to Paul’s strong declaration: “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16).

# *My Tears in God's Bottle*

DENNIS LOYD

THE BIBLE MIGHT WELL BE CALLED A BOOK OF TEARS. From the first reference to weeping - in the story of Hagar and Ishmael (Genesis 21:16) - to the great consolation of Revelation 21:4 that in the new heaven God will wipe away every tear, the sacred text makes it evident that tears are a part of our very being.

In Psalm 56:8-11, the psalmist says that God is so aware, so knowledgeable of us that as He sees our journeys and records all our doings in His book of remembrance, we can trust Him to take charge of our tears as well. He will keep them in His bottle. He will not ignore, mock or criticize our tears. We find further consolation in the prayer in Psalm 39:12: "Hear my prayer, O Lord, And give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears" (nkjv).

The New Testament records several occasions when tears were shed for a variety of reasons. Even Jesus wept at times that could be comparable to our own experiences.

## **Tears of Loss**

Soon after creation, God first mentioned the concept of death in His warning to Adam and Eve not to eat of the forbidden fruit. The consequences of that disobedience would be death. Although their own deaths lay ahead after they sinned, the first death they experienced was that of Abel, their son. The Bible never tells us that Adam and Eve wept over the death of Abel, but we would assume that they surely did.

Tears are natural at such a time and should never be discouraged. One writer tells of trying to console her weeping 4-year-old. She said, "In trying to comfort her, I brushed the tears from her cheeks. Her sobs immediately converted into an angered outcry: 'Give me back my tears.' " We all know of times when tears are our only outlet.

One of those times when the Bible speaks of the tears of Jesus came in Bethany at the tomb of Lazarus where Jesus stood with the sisters and friends. John records in the most succinct fashion: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Those words reveal another side to the complex Son of God. On that day, He was not the preacher or the inflamed cleanser of the temple. He was not the king triumphantly entering Jerusalem or the condemned man trudging to Calvary.

He was a man whose dear friend had died and whose death had brought separation and pain to many, including Jesus Himself. We need feel no shame when we shed such tears of loss. They are no testimony to a weakened or an absent faith. They reveal our humanity.

### **Tears of Remorse**

What happens in those times when we feel so strong, so on top of life's circumstances that we take a bold stand, assert our strength, and then crumble? We are overwhelmed with remorse, and we weep tears of regret that we did not keep our word or our promise to God and to others.

Peter is a prime example of such. How boldly he declared his faithfulness. If others should stumble because of Jesus, Peter said, "I will never be made to stumble" (Matthew 26:33). As if that statement was not assertive enough, he punctuated it with "even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You" (v. 35).

Several verses later we read of his capitulation. Peter succumbed to the pressures around him and denied his Lord not once but three times. Then the remorse set in. "Peter remembered the word of Jesus.... Then he went out and wept bitterly" (Matthew 26:75).

The word "bitterly" grabs our attention. Tears of remorse hurt; their taste must have lingered long in Peter's mouth as they do in ours. They could have been avoided. We can empathize with Peter, for we have also made promises we did not keep. We have weakened and fallen. Then our tears of remorse flow. We are consoled only by the promise that God will wipe those tears away also. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

### **Tears of Disappointment**

Not only are we often remorseful over our own failures, but we also find ourselves disappointed over the failures of others. We don't know how to change those who refuse to be changed or how to help those who refuse to be helped.

These circumstances led to another occasion for Jesus' tears. "Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it" (Luke 19:41). Jerusalem was the city of God; the temple of God stood within its borders. But the city had rejected God and now His Son. Jesus wept because the people of the city could not or would not see their needs or their opportunities. Rushing headlong toward

destruction, they seemed oblivious. Jesus cared and expressed that care with His tears.

Paul had similar feelings for those who would not heed the message of Jesus as presented in Paul's sermons and letters. "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ" (Philippians 3:18).

We have coped with the disappointments arising from the indifference or the rebellion of those we love. And talking with them, we have fought back our tears. Paul must have had such tears in his heart when he spoke of his co-worker: "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10). Jesus offered Himself, but Jerusalem said, "No." When others reject the Lord, we must not grow insensitive. Rather our tears still attest to our love and care for those away from the kingdom.

### **Tears of Effort**

Often tears bear testimony to great effort, great energy expended in the pursuit of some goal. The last Olympics gave numerous examples of those who expended every ounce of strength and energy to achieve their victory. As the medal was placed around the neck of the victor or victors, we saw the tears flow. Those tears signified much more than relief. They spoke of desire, determination, diligence and fulfillment.

When Paul met with the Ephesian elders, he reminded them that his work had been far more than an intellectual or social one. He cared for their souls. And they did for his. He said to them, "Remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears" (Acts 20:31). Why tears? Why night and day? Paul was engaged in serious business. Souls were in jeopardy. He wrote similarly to the Corinthians: "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you" (2 Corinthians 2:4). Paul cared so deeply for the people he taught; he never questioned the effort he put forth, and they learned to care for him. The Ephesian elders "all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him" (Acts 20:37).

Robert Frost said, "No tears in the writer; no tears in the reader." We must feel the urgency of the message we deliver if we expect the hearer to experience that same urgency.

## Tears of Worship

Often we have allowed our worship to become so formal that all emotional impact has been removed from it. It has become stilted, repetitious, routine and even dull.

Once Jesus was invited to a dinner at the home of a Pharisee. In the midst of what was probably a rather formal meal, a woman entered. The host was offended by her presence but kept his silence. He probably reasoned that this incident proved Jesus was not divine, for no divine person would allow such a common sinner near him. The woman wept; she washed Jesus' feet with her tears; she dried His feet with her hair; she kissed His feet; she anointed His feet with the precious ointment she brought with her. What a quantity of tears she had to shed to have sufficient moisture to wash His feet. We probably would have said something about her lack of self-control and her lack of decorum.

But she was worshiping. If worship is truly a humbling of myself before my God and my Savior, it becomes an emotional experience. When was the last time you were moved to tears by reading from the Bible, by a prayer, by a song, by the Lord's Supper, or by the message? Are we too stoic? Are there not tears kept in God's bottle as a result of our worship of the Father?

It is no disgrace to weep in adoration, in praise, in devotion. We should not play with the emotions, but when we are deeply moved, we should feel confident in our expression of our feelings. Paul spoke of being filled with the Spirit and of expressing that overflow of feelings in song.

In an emotionally charged setting, Marc Antony used these words in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "If you have tears, prepare to shed them now." Then Marc Antony pulled back the cloak to reveal the mutilated body of the slain emperor. You and I see the mutilated body of our Savior on an unwarranted cross. And we hear a resurrected Lord promise, "He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25). If we have tears, we should prepare to shed them in our worship of Him.

We must live with the realization that our tears need never be idle or wasted or even regretted. God keeps our tears in His bottle until that day when He receives us to Himself, and then He will "wipe away every tear" from our eyes (Revelation 7:17).

# *Can One Learn About God From Nature?*

BRAD T. BROMLING

“MAN CAN LEARN ABSOLUTELY nothing about God from an examination of nature.” This statement has often been made, but is such a position valid?

It is true that there is much that man cannot learn about God without written revelation. Man will be unable to deduce from the natural realm what he should call the Creator, the price the Creator paid to secure man’s salvation from sin, or what He requires of man to obtain that salvation. Likewise, man will fail to learn how to worship God, or how to prepare for death. These are but a few of the things which man may learn only by searching the Scriptures.

However, acknowledging the limitations of a thing does not thereby dismiss its value. For instance, the Bible teaches nothing of how to remove cataracts, but this limitation does not repudiate the ability of the Scriptures to cure spiritual blindness. Although there is much that the creation cannot tell of the Creator, the Bible itself teaches that man may know something of God from nature. For example, David boldly exclaimed: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). Such declarations are sufficient for the purpose intended: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). The available information leaves man without excuse. Some assert that this passage only refers to men who had been exposed to the written Word. However, nature’s testimony of God is not withheld from those who have never heard the Gospel—it speaks from every atom to every man, everywhere! This proclamation is as universal as the weather. Jesus said: “God makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 6:45). Herein is a powerful witness to God’s existence. This point was made by Paul: “God in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own way. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons...” (Acts 14:16, 17). Thus, inspiration claims that nature does teach man about God.

What, then, may one learn of God from the natural realm? The main arguments for God's existence yield different information about the Almighty.

### **The Cosmological Argument**

This is perhaps the strongest argument for the existence of God. It affirms that every effect must have an adequate cause. Hebrews 3:4 contains a simplified form of the argument: "For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God." No sane person assumes that a house created itself or that it has always existed. Likewise, we are right in questioning the sanity of one who looks at the vast universe with all of its intricacies and exclaims: "There is no God!" Little wonder that David called the atheist a "fool" (Psalm 14:1). Scientific inquiry leads us to conclude that since the universe is made up of matter, and matter is neither eternal nor capable of bringing itself into existence, it must have been created. If the universe was created, a Creator **must** exist. With this argument, man may reason that God is infinite in His power. He must be all-powerful, in order to be superior to all He has created (the thing created is never greater than its creator). Since life, intelligence, and love exist, we may properly conclude that God possesses these characteristics as well.

Two criticisms of his argument have been raised. First, if everything has a cause, then God must have a cause. This misses the point of the argument, which says: "every **effect** has a sufficient cause." God is not an effect, He is a cause ~ the first Cause. Second, since evil exists, and must have a cause, is not God evil? While it is true that evil is an effect, it does not follow that God is evil. God created man with the ability to choose right from wrong. In so doing, He allowed man the option of introducing evil into his world. Had man never sinned, evil would not now plague him. Man has himself to blame (Romans 5:12). One might complain, "God is **still** responsible since He created man with the ability to choose wrong!" This complaint fails to recognize the importance of free-will. Is there a man who would wish to give up his free-will? Finally, the problem of evil was resolved on Christ's cross, anyway. Freedom from the tyranny of evil is available to all who accept the salvation offered by God.

### **The Teleological Argument**

This argument is closely related to the cosmological argument in that it also argues from effect to cause. The difference is that



the teleological argument begins with a design and argues for the existence of a Designer. The most popular example of this argument was formulated by William Paley in 1802. Paley reasoned that if he were to stumble upon a rock in a field he might conclude that it had always been there. But if he were to come upon a watch, such a conclusion would be absurd. The truth is, a watch bears every mark of being crafted by an intelligent watchmaker. Likewise, the universe bears every mark of intelligent design and, therefore, points to the existence of an intelligent Designer. The order and elaborate design of our grand Universe tell us that God is orderly and intelligent.

### **The Moral Argument**

Once again arguing from effect to cause, this argument suggests that if there is a moral law in man, a moral Lawgiver must exist. It is a matter beyond dispute that wherever man is found, regardless of how advanced or primitive his culture may be, he operates according to the concept of right and wrong. While cultures often differ over what things are prohibited or allowed, no culture exists which fails to recognize a distinction between the two. Whence came this moral sense? Moral capacity is an effect which has God as its adequate Cause. This truth of nature tells us that God is a moral Being desirous that His creatures do right.

### **Conclusion**

While man's knowledge of the Almighty is severely limited without the written Word, it is clear from sober reasoning that the creation testifies, unmistakably, of the supreme, intelligent Creator we call God.

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## *Four Views Of Death*

DAVID WADE

DEATH IS AN EVER-PRESENT reality. We may deny our mortality and we may "run" from death. However, eventually, every person must face his appointment with death. "And it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

People view death in different ways. For some, death is their greatest fear. To others, death is the doorway to their greatest hope. How do you view death? Let us be impressed with four views of

death we find in the Scriptures.

First, consider God's feelings toward the death of his saints. David said, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15). The death of his saints is precious to God, because it is costly. It cost the blood of Jesus on the cross for our sins. Christians are redeemed by the "precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:19).

Notice also that the precious death of the saint is "in the sight of the Lord." Speaking of the "valley of the shadow of death," David exclaimed, "thou art with me" (Psalm 23:4). When Lazarus died, his spirit was "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22). When a faithful Christian dies, he does so in the attentive presence of our loving God. The death of a saint is precious in God's sight.

Consider the view of death held by the faithful departed Christian. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13). They are blessed or happy. "Blessed" is the same word Jesus used to introduce the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12). Jesus said of Lazarus that "he is comforted" (Luke 16:25). The faithful Christian is able to enjoy an eternal rest from all labor, pain, sickness and death (Revelation 21:14).

In addition, the influence of the faithful Christian lives beyond his earthly pilgrimage to influence others for good. The faithful example of righteous Abel speaks eloquently to us even to this day (Hebrews 1:4).

Consider the view of death Paul urges for every faithful saint this side of eternity. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). Our lives must be centered in Christ, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). Further,

Paul said, "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you" (Philippians 1:23-24). The faithful Christian enjoys all spiritual blessings in Christ now (Ephesians 1:3). One can look forward to the "gain" that is "far better" when this earthly life is over.

Consider the view of death held by the unredeemed when they suddenly discover they have squandered their last opportunity to serve God. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:3). When that day comes the falling rocks and

mountains cannot hide the unredeemed from the wrath of the Lamb (Revelation 6:16). They will hear the fateful words, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

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## TO LOVE GOD

BOBBY KEY

A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH SAYS, "since other denominations love God, surely they will be saved." This brother speaks of "other denominations" indicating that the church of Christ is a denomination. I deny this! If the church were a denomination we had just as well be a member of other denominations. I had as soon belong to one human organization as another. The truth of the matter is that all denominations are sinful. I read of the one body, which is the Lord's church in the Bible (Colossians 1:24); however, search as I may, I am unable to find a single denomination on the pages of the sacred text. The Word of God knows of no denominations and makes no promise to them.

It is not my place to offer hope of salvation to any person who has failed to obey the gospel of Christ (II Thessalonians 1:7-9). Now to the thought on love — the only love for God that will do a man any good is that love which leads him to obey God. "If a man love Me, he will keep My words," said Jesus (John 14:23). Again we read: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he is it that loveth me . . . He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings" (John 14:21, 24). These passages show plainly that God loves and recognizes only those who love him so far as to keep his commandments. One of the Lord's commandments is to be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Most denominations do not believe that baptism has one thing to do with remission of sins or eternal salvation. Is it possible for one to love the Lord while ignoring this simple command? In fact, if everybody loved the Lord according to the above passage there would be no denominations on the face of the earth.

We need to study again the undenominational nature of the church found in the New Testament. The church is the body of Christ, and every Christian is a member of it. There are two kingdoms on earth - the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

All who obey God are added to the church - the kingdom of God (Acts 2:47). Christ is the head of his church and the Saviour of his body. For this reason there is no promise of salvation outside of the Lord's church. Why should anyone belong to anything else?

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## GOD'S WORD

GREGORY ALAN TIDWELL

PIVOTAL TO OUR BROTHERHOOD'S continued identity is this central question: Are the Scriptures a human attempt to reach up to God or a divine effort to reach down to humanity? On this point hinges our reason for existence as a religious fellowship.

Many religious groups are determined sociologically or hierarchically. For example, to be authentically Roman Catholic means that a person stays in harmony with the Catholic hierarchy. Until the Second Vatican Council, the Pope and his bishops taught that Mass was to be celebrated in Latin; faithful Catholics heard Mass in Latin. After the council, the Pope and his bishops taught that Mass should be observed in the common language of each country; faithful Catholics no longer listened to Latin Mass. The Catholic hierarchy determines what it means to be a Catholic.

The churches of Christ, however, are bound together by a common view of Scripture. Without this common view, we would cease to exist as a distinct people. The touchstone of our faith is God graciously revealing Himself in Scripture. Unless the Bible is the written Word of God, there is no foundation for the Christian faith or practice.

Look to Jesus; unquestionably He regarded the Old Testament as a divine revelation, and as such, He used it as His final authority. The Scriptures formed the basis of His rejection of the temptations offered by the devil in the wilderness. Each temptation was countered by Christ with the formula "it is written" (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13 NKJV).

The emphasis of Scripture continued throughout Jesus' preaching and in dialogues with His Jewish adversaries. On one occasion, Christ reminded the Jews that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35), and on another occasion, He described religious error as springing from ignorance of the sacred text

(Matthew 22:29). In the period after the Resurrection and before the Ascension, Jesus taught His disciples on the Emmaus road to regard “all the Scriptures” as an authoritative source for doctrine (Luke 24:27).

The apostles followed their Lord in reverence for the Old Testament. Indicative of this view are the words of Peter: “But know this first of all. that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21 NASB). Here, God is described as the source of Scripture, initiating the content and guiding the writers. Paul completely agreed with Peter at this point, as he wrote to Timothy: “You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Thus, the sources of divine instruction are found in Scripture, which is God-breathed and, therefore, sufficient in every way.

In addition to reverence for the Old Testament, Christ and the apostles viewed their teachings as binding and authoritative. “Heaven and earth will pass away,” Christ warned, “but My words will not pass away” (Luke 21:33). Likewise, Paul commended his readers for accepting his message “not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

The early church based its faith and practice on the revealed word of God, consisting of the Jewish scriptures and the further, perfect revelation given by Christ and His chosen spokesmen, the apostles.

If we wish to teach and practice authentically the religion established by Jesus and His apostles, then we must accept the Bible as the Word of God - true and authoritative in all it says.

This point of view provides appropriate reverence and humility in assessing the biblical text. Rather than acting as critics who pass judgment on the sacred writings, we place ourselves under the Bible’s authority, as creatures before our Creator. Claiming the Bible as an authoritative message from God, we should devote

ourselves to learning the message of Scripture and bringing our lives into harmony with the precepts it presents.

Wanting a revitalized faith, empowered for every good work by the Holy Spirit, we accept the Spirit's sovereign direction through the written word. Without submission to God's revealed will, we cannot be guided by the Spirit of God.

The world is wrong in underestimating the power of God's Word. Christians must never embrace the world's error.

Renewal cannot be achieved by compromising the basic elements of our faith. Dilution brings weakness, not strength. Rather, renewal will come with a reaffirmation of our basic commitments. We must wholeheartedly submit ourselves to the authority of Christ as revealed in the pages of the Bible.

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## *What Is God Like?*

*BRANDON RENFROE*

THE SIMPLEST QUESTIONS, they say, are often the hardest ones to answer. More than one school teacher has been caught flat-footed by the childhood classics: "Why is grass green?" and "Why is the sky blue?" (The most popular, although not necessarily the most thoughtful, response is "Look it up.")

No questions, however, stir the soul or stretch the imagination as do those with eternal implications. Among them, one of the most frequently discussed is the age-old question "What is God like?" Answers range from the simple to the sublime, from the profane to the profound.

### **Inaccurate Notions of God**

How may we begin to extol the inexhaustible virtues of "the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity" (Isaiah 57:15 NKJV)? A simple mealtime prayer affirms that God is "great" and "good" - scriptural designations, to be certain (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 34:8). However, as they mature, many people develop notions concerning God that are inaccurate -and the consequences can be serious.

C.S. Lewis once described a popular conception of God: that of an overly indulgent relative. "We want, in fact, not so much a Father in heaven as a grandfather in heaven—a senile benevolence

who, as they say, liked to see young people enjoying themselves' and whose plan for the universe was simply that it might be truly said at the end of each day, 'a good time was had by all'."

Others are caustic, if not blasphemous. Samuel Clemens, through the pen of Mark Twain, was an outspoken critic of God. His anger was especially directed against what he perceived as the "vindictive" God of the Hebrew Scriptures. "I have met his superior a hundred times," he wrote. "In fact, I amount to that myself" ("Letter").' Again: "God, so atrocious in the Old Testament, so attractive in the New -the Jekyll and Hyde of sacred romance" ("Mark"). In passing, it bears noting that those who share his sentiments fail to appreciate two foundational points: (1) the sovereignty of the Creator over His creatures (Romans 9:20-21), and (2) the horrible magnitude of sin (6:23; James 1:15).

### **Divine Characteristics**

Even within the Old Testament, the irreverent notion of an implacable God is soundly refuted. Faced with the daunting task of leading the children of Israel, Moses sought divine reassurance. "Please show me thy glory," he petitioned God (Exodus 33:18 ESV). While he waited "in a cleft of the rock" (v. 22), Moses' request was graciously granted.

"And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Exodus 34:6-7 KJV).

In his commentary on Exodus, Burton Coffman enumerated six divine characteristics revealed to Moses in this encounter. Some see even more - although their method of counting is somewhat specious. In fact, as Coffman noted, those of Jewish persuasion believe that 13 different aspects of God were conveyed in the divine manifestation atop Mount Sinai. Of these traits, the initial four – in varying orders and phraseology -become a recurring refrain throughout the remainder of the Old Testament. On seven occasions these four characteristics are found within the same verse (Exodus 34:6; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2), and echoes of them are heard in many other

passages (Numbers 14:18; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Psalm 111:4; 112:4; Nehemiah 9:31). When the principal verses are viewed in parallel (KJV), the following traits come to the forefront: God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness.

No doubt Hebrew children were taught this fourfold characterization from their earliest days (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). To that end, it is worth noting that the various writers who enumerated these divine qualities span a period of a thousand years. Some five centuries after Moses, the psalmist thrice recounted them (Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8); another half millennium would see the prophet Nehemiah rehearse them (Nehemiah 9:17). Thus, when James would later write that “the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11 NKJV), his readers knew whereof he spoke.

### **“We Beheld His Glory”**

Some 1,500 years after Moses’ bold request, an apostle of Christ voiced a similar plea. On the fateful evening in which the Lord was betrayed, Philip petitioned: “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us” (John 14:8). The answer furnished to the eager disciple settles forever what God is like: “He who has seen me,” Jesus declared, “has seen the Father” (v. 9).

What Moses longed to glimpse was brought to light in the person and work of the Son of God. “Show me thy glory,” Moses had said (Exodus 33:18). “The Word was made flesh ... and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,” is John’s reply (John 1:14 KJV). If, like Philip, we desire to see God, we need to look no further than His Son. As Paul wrote, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

If the Son was gracious, merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness - and who can deny that He was—what does that say to the attentive soul concerning the Father who sent Him? As Jesus said Himself, “The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise” (John 5:19 ESV). In Jesus, we see God in action.

William Barclay believed that “there is a sense in which every word must become flesh”—that is, that “every idea must be actualized in a person”. A careful study of the various characteristics of God is instructive; nothing, however, will substitute for a personal relationship with the Savior. He was, and remains, “God with us.”

