

THE BIBLE TEACHER

Pleading for the Restoration of Pure New Testament Christianity

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What Does the Bible Teach?

*"This Is The Day The Lord Has Made
We Will Rejoice And Be Glad In It"*

TIME IS ONE OF OUR most valuable possessions. Some often say that we do not have time to do this or that, but we have all the time God ever gave us. An English proverb says, "Take time while time is, for time will away." We hear often someone say, "I just don't know what went with the time." But the time went just where it has always gone. Days are the same as they were hundreds of years ago. It still takes 24 hours to make one day; 60 seconds to make a minute. We have as much time as we ever had. It is just a matter of how we are using it. Those things that God expects from us to do, we should do now. "The fool makes up his mind," another English proverb says, "after the market wagon has passed." Often, by the time our minds have made our opportunity is gone. In the Book of God great emphasis is laid upon "today." We are told to "Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth." (Proverbs 27:1). In another place it says, "Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." (James 4: 13-14). None of us can live two days at a time. You may have a thousand more days, or many thousands, but you will have them day by day. So if you have something that you need to do, do it today. Don't put it off. For today may be your last day to live!

Today is the day to say those kind words you have been intending to say to someone; may be to your wife or husband or to your friend or a neighbor. Today is the day to help someone you have been thinking to help. Today is the day to speak a word of appreciation to a companion or a neighbor. Today is the day to forgive someone who may have wronged you in some way. Today is the day to ask for forgiveness from God and from those you have wronged in word or deed. Today is the day to thatch our spiritual roof if we have not done so. "Today if you hear His voice," the Scripture says, "harden not your heart." (Hebrews 3:7). Remember the sweet message of the Bible is: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). The Son of God, Jesus Christ, after His propitiatory death on the cross for the sins of humanity, by the will of God, and His subsequent resurrection from the dead, before returning back to heaven, asked His disciples to go into all the world and preach His gospel to all people of earth and He added these souls saving words: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but He who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15 & 16). People who have never obeyed the command of Christ to be saved from sins would do well to awaken to the fact that they have no perpetual lease on this life. The day will come when nothing else will matter and our thoughts will be either upon anticipated happiness with the Lord and His redeemed or the horrors of the long and endless night of eternal punishment.

Friends, don't think about turning over a new leaf tomorrow, let me encourage you to turn it over today. The psalmist, in Psalm 118:24 grants us a renewed interest in and an appreciation for today when he wrote: "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

THE LORD'S SUPPER

J.C. CHOATE

CHRIST KNEW THAT he would soon be dying on the cross, and that after his burial, resurrection, and brief appearance, that he would be returning to his Father in heaven. Therefore, he wanted to leave something with his disciples that would help them to remember him. With this in mind, shortly before his death he instituted what

we call the Lord's Supper. The record says, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28).

After the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection, and after his return to heaven, he established the church and then Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians to remind them of the importance of this supper. He said, "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you. That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped saying. This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." (1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

In this supper the bread represents the body of Jesus Christ and the cup represents his blood. The bread is unleavened and the cup is the fruit of the vine. Neither is literally the body or blood of Christ, but are to be partaken of in *remembrance* of his body and blood. With respect to the cup in particular, the emphasis is on the contents and not on the container. When he talks about partaking of the cup, and drinking all of it, that is the thought in mind.

How often should one partake of the Lord's Supper? Some say once a month, others say once a year. Again, on what day should one partake of this supper? We have an example that should answer these questions. Paul met with the Christians in Troas, and the record says, "And upon *the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread*, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow ; and continued his speech until midnight." (Acts 20:7). When we study the context we find that Paul spent several extra days in Troas in order that he might be able to meet with the disciples on the first day of the week for the purpose of breaking bread or to partake of the Lord's Supper.

In 1 Corinthians 11:26 Paul says, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup." But how often is often? Since Christians meet *each* first day of the week for worship, this statement would suggest that is how often they are to partake of the supper. If not, where is the authority from Christ to omit this part of worship on any first day? Furthermore, inasmuch as we have an example of Paul and the Christians at Troas meeting on the first day of the week to break bread then this is beyond question the day on which it is to be done. Certainly there is no verse in God's word that contains a command or an example to the contrary. The Lord knew that man is very forgetful and so he instituted this supper so that we would remember him, and he specified that this memorial be observed on the Lord's Day so that he might be remembered often, and we are to partake of it *each* first day of the week so that we might be regular in our remembrance.

In partaking of the Lord's Supper one is not only to look backward to the Lord's death, but we also proclaim our faith in His return, and declare the same to the world. This is a very serious matter and therefore should be done in all sincerity. To partake of it lightly makes one guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, as though he were crucifying Christ afresh.

No one has a right to say who can and who cannot observe this supper. Each individual is to examine himself to see whether or not he should take part. Of course it is meant only for the Christian, but only the Lord can look on the heart to pass final judgement. That is why no man has the right to tell another that he cannot partake of it.

Do you partake of the Lord's supper? Why? When? How often? Please give careful consideration to these matters in the light of God's word. Only the Lord's way is the right way.

"A Royal Priesthood"

MATTHEW MORINE

IF YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN, do you think of yourself as a priest? It is possible that we have not given due consideration to the role of Christians as priests.

The word priest has been stolen from its original biblical meaning. Many in the religious world have hijacked the term and replaced

the scriptural definition with a term that connotes a hierarchical priestly system. But instead of the few religiously elite being called priests, Peter declares that all Christians form the priesthood. "But you are **A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD'S OWN POSSESSION**, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9 NASB.) The blessings of belonging to the priesthood are immense. The Holy Spirit uses Old Testament terminology to describe the privileges of membership in the priesthood. In the Old Testament only the Levites could be priests while under the New Testament all Christians have this role. Therefore, individual Christians do not have another man between them and Christ. Every Christian has direct access to Christ and ultimately to the throne of God. (Hebrews 4:16; 1 Timothy 2:5.) Also through the priesthood, Christians are not separated pilgrims on a spiritual journey but are a unified family. Peter uses the term race, which is translated "family" in Acts 7:13; 13:26. Another blessing that is received from the priesthood of believers is an introduction to the kingdom of God. Revelation 1:6 states "and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father." Since Christians dwell in the kingdom, they are joint heirs with Christ. (Romans 8:17.)

Christians are blessed to belong to the priesthood of believers, but this gift also calls us to service. Being identified as a priest inspires believers to a higher sense of duty and a new level of moral conduct. The priests are the possession of God, are holy to God, offer sacrifices to God and are representatives of God.

1. The Priest Is The Possession Of God. First Peter 2:9 declares the priests were for "God's own possession." Christ bought Christians with His own blood. (Acts 20:28.) Christ has redeemed us, which literally means, "to buy back." Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood." Since we Christians are priests, our money, talents, and lives are in Christ's ownership. The way Christians view work, marriage, spare time, and families must be filtered through the knowledge that Christ has dominion in his or her life.

2. The Priest Is Holy To God. God demanded holiness from His people but especially from His priests. The priests had to sprinkle blood on their bodies before entering into the presence of God. These rituals connoted purity before the Lord. The task of a priest is a labor of keeping oneself from sin. Christians are to be "perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:40.) The saved are

to morally conduct themselves in a fashion suitable for the role of a priest. In the Old Testament the priests were examples of holiness and today Christians must be examples of moral living.

3. The Priest Offered Sacrifices To God. In the Hebrew nation, the priest's role was to make sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. (Leviticus 2:8-9.) Christians today have a similar responsibility to offer their bodies as a living sacrifice. (Romans 12:1.) This sacrifice requires Christians to present their entire life before the Lord for His use. "And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:16.) Christians who are God's priesthood must submit their dreams; goals, desires, and lifestyle to the Lord. The Christian makes the ultimate sacrifice when he or she follows the teachings of the New Testament for the priesthood of believers.

4. The Priest Is A Representative Of God. The Bible says the priesthood must "proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9.) Now the priesthood in the Christian dispensation does not mediate activity between man and God, rather the Christian represents the nature of God to those who are without the Lord. Matthew 5:16 admonishes, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Many people judge the validity of Christianity by Christians they see in society. As Paul says, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us. (2 Corinthians 5:20.) Every member in the priesthood must be aware of his or her conduct in the community because if a member behaves in a shameful manner that message is a disgrace to the priesthood and ultimately to God.

The role of priest to the Christian provides a special set of blessings. Through the priesthood, Christians have direct access to Christ, belong to a community of fellow believers, and become joint heirs with Christ. In addition to the reaping of blessings, a tremendous responsibility is given to those in the priesthood. A Christian must embrace his or her duty and become a worthy priest.

The Church as God Would Have It

BOB SPURLIN

JESUS PROMISED TO build His church: "And I say also unto thee,

That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). The church is a divine institution: the Lord planned it, He built it, He bought it, He heads it, and He saves it. The church was established on that first Day of Pentecost after Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 2). Jesus' promise to build and it was fulfilled. Jesus either built the church like He said or else it was a fabrication. If He made this up, then He was an unfaithful witness and false prophet. To conclude that Jesus was either of those is blasphemous. Friends, the Christ did build the church as He promised He would. From Acts 2:47 onward the church is spoken of as being in existence. Jesus bought the church with His blood (Acts 20:28). This fact shows that the church is important in the sight of the Godhead. Jesus is the Savior of the body, the church (Ephesians 5:23; 1:22,23). He will one day deliver His kingdom or church to God the Father (1 Cor. 15:24). But what about the church before that time? What about the church right now?

1. The church as God would have it recognizes the headship of Christ as absolute authority. To refuse His authority is to place us on the level of every other religious group! Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). We are to teach what He commands because that is what He charged us to do! (Matt. 28:18,20). That being the case, we serve Jesus, not the Law of Moses. All authority is given to the risen Christ (Matt. 28:18), Who was proven to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). Our duty is clear: God wants us to hear His Son Jesus (Matt. 17:5). While God spoke to the fathers by the prophets in the Old Testament era, He now speaks to us through His Son (Heb. 1:1,2). We do not need to wait for any new prophet, because Jesus is God's last spokesman to mankind! He is the one foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:11). Jesus is the church's only head, and thus in all things He is to have the preeminence or "first rank" (Col. 1:18). If Jesus' word is not our supreme authority, then we have no authority!

2. The church as God would have it recognizes that Jesus demands evangelism. Every child of God, to the best of his ability, must try to teach others the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15). The "great commission" applies to every Christian. It is said that there is one group in Europe called "Glassites" that makes no effort to convert anyone to their cause. The reality is that a living organism must reproduce, or else it will die. What about the church? It is a

living organism. If we do not win souls, we will die both spiritually and numerically.

Brethren, evangelism is necessary because if one is not saved, he is lost. Every person of accountable age is in one of two classes: one is either saved or lost. Remember these four Bible truths: (1) All have sinned (Rom. 3:23); (2) The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23); (3) Those who do not obey the gospel will be lost (2 Thess. 1:7-9); (4) Those without Christ have no hope (Eph. 2:12). God's only Begotten Son was a preacher, a "missionary," and the Giver of the great commission. He is "for" the preaching of the gospel to every person in the world (Mark 16:15). Are you and I also "for" it? Do our actions support our answer?! The New Testament of the Christ demands that people hear His words of life (John 6:68; Acts 5:20).

3. The church of the living God recognizes the complete authority of the New Testament and the all-sufficiency of the New Testament church. God's word furnishes us unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Everything relevant to our spiritual life and godliness comes through the knowledge of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3). There is only one faith (Eph. 4:5). It is "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). Paul worked diligently to destroy the church before his conversion, and then vigorously preached "the faith" he once destroyed (Gal. 1:23). Friends, all we need is the Bible and the Bible only without addition or subtraction (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19). The Bible equips the church with all that it needs to be and do. The church is the fullness of the Christ: "And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:22,23).

WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

G. SCOTT GLEAVES

AHAZ, THE KING OF JUDAH, had a choice to make. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, were pressuring him to rebel against Assyrian domination. They gave him two options. Ahaz could join the alliance or be overthrown. When Ahaz hesitated, Rezin and Pekah waged war against him in Jerusalem (Isaiah 7:1). God sent Isaiah the prophet to encourage Ahaz to trust in Him because He

would protect him from Rezin and Pekah. Ahaz, haunted by fear, would not listen and chose to ask Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, for assistance. God, therefore, told Ahaz that because of his faithlessness He would send the Assyrians not to help him but to fight against him (8:7-8).

Ahaz Was a Disappointment

Instead of standing firm in faith, Ahaz surrendered to his fears. Instead of trusting in God, he cowered before men. When given the opportunity to inspire his people with spiritual leadership, he chose to follow the path of least resistance. All was not lost, however. "The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.... For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us" (Isaiah 9:2, 6 NASB).

Isaiah saw a new king in Judah's future. The references to a "child" being born and a "son" given are figures of speech referring to the ascension of a new king. God's new king would stand as the polar opposite to the failed leadership of Ahaz. The new king would reign with justice and righteousness (Isaiah 9:7), restoring joy and hope among God's people (vv. 1-3).

Therefore, God would bestow upon the new king an appropriate throne name, characterizing the quality of his leadership: "And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (v. 6).

The messianic allusion of Isaiah's vision is striking. Psalm 2:6-7 speaks of God's anointed in similar fashion. "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.... He [God] said to Me [the King], 'Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee [crowned Him as King].'"

The book of Hebrews applies that Psalm to the ascension of Jesus as king: "For to which of the angels did He ever say, 'Thou art My Son. Today I have begotten Thee'? And again, 'I will be a Father to Him, And He shall be a Son to Me?... And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.... Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee' " (1:5, 8-9).

Jesus is God's perfect and most wonderful King. "Wonderful Counselor," God called Him. The term "counselor" often referred to those who led God's people (Isaiah 1:26; 3:3). Ideally, a counselor was one who spoke words of wisdom, offering guidance concerning the will of God.

Although some counselors speak words of deceit (Proverbs

12:5), we can always trust the counsel of Jesus our King because He speaks with wonderful words of truth, comfort and life.

Wonderful Words of Truth

Jesus said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). The most effective counselors of God's people have always been those who spoke the truth concerning the way of God. Jesus asserted that His words were God's words and those same words would be the standard of judgment at the end of time (12:48-50).

Paul's first missionary adventure took him to the island of Cyprus, the home of his partner, Barnabas (Acts 4:36). As soon as they arrived at the port town of Salamis, they began to preach God's Word. They continued their preaching tour across the island unopposed until they reached Paphos. A government leader named Sergius Paulus was curious about what Paul was preaching and summoned him and Barnabas to share more of their message. However, a Jewish magician named Barjesus, also called Elymas, opposed them doggedly, "seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith" (Acts 13:4-5, 8).

The word "magician" translates the Greek word "*magos*." This word referred to individuals who claimed to possess special wisdom about world events by interpreting the positions of stars. Wealthy families often hired their own household astrologer to offer them counsel and guidance in everyday life. Curiously, this magician was a Jew, and his quest for material gain had seared his conscience. He ignored God's warning against such practices (Deuteronomy 18:14-22; Isaiah 47:12-15).

Paul's opponent was formidable. His description of Elymas revealed just how corrupt and callused toward God he had become. "But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy spirit, fixed his gaze upon him, and said, 'You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?'" (Acts 13:9-10).

The devil has many false counselors, attempting to divert our minds from the truth. Jesus misleads no one because He speaks wonderful words of truth.

Wonderful Words of Comfort

The TV series, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, introduced viewers to a new alien in the universe. In the pilot episode, this alien placed the human race on trial. His name was "Q." His alien

race was also called “Q” and lived in what they called the Q Continuum. In the TV series, Q and all like him are omnipotent beings. Q, like the mythological Greek gods, thinks of the human race as a toy for his own amusement. He enjoys mocking Captain Picard, the captain of the starship *Enterprise*. He refers to humans as beings who take from the universe but give nothing to it. Humans are a sorry excuse for a life form. And so the TV series has numerous episodes where Q appears, taunting and teasing the crew of the *Enterprise*. Is God aloof and indifferent toward humans as was Q in *Star Trek*? Are we simply pawns in the hands of the omnipotent God of the universe? Does God really care about us?

Jesus, God’s perfect and most wonderful King, urges us to lean on Him whenever we battle temptation and are burdened with troubles. Our King is not unapproachable. He is very near and well acquainted with the challenges we encounter in life. “For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.... Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 2:18; 4:16). God does care about us. His King, our Wonderful Counselor, provides words of comfort, filling us with hope and optimism.

Wonderful Words of Life

Jesus told a story about how a father’s younger son once made a terrible choice. After receiving his inheritance, the younger son went to a distant country and wasted everything he had. He finally ended up eating food fit only for pigs. When the younger son decided to return home, he received a royal welcome from his father. The father viewed his son’s return as if he had come back to life. “For this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.... For this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found” (Luke 15:24, 32).

Jesus once said to the Jews who were attempting to harm Him: “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life” (John 5:39).

It is clear from the life and teachings of Jesus that our perfect and most wonderful King seeks to enhance the quality of our lives by leading us to God (John 10:10).

The words of Jesus reveal the way of the abundant life. Jesus’ counsel is sure and steadfast because His words are truthful. His

comforting words will renew our spirit. Jesus, in every way, is God's "Wonderful Counselor."

MIGHTY GOD

DAVID TARBET

IT IS BEYOND OUR human comprehension that the Child born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger was God become flesh. Yet, such was the affirmation of the ancient prophet Isaiah, Heaven's Victor was none other than the "Mighty God" (Isaiah 9:6 NIV). Every attempt to discredit this divine appellation, to evade the impact of its significance, collapses before this clear and unequivocal statement of fact. The inspired man of God said the coming Messiah would embody Deity in His very person.

This affirmation is not unique to Isaiah's pen. The book of Psalms declared of Him, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom" (Psalm 45:6). And again, "Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of my days; your years go on through all generations. In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end" (Psalm 102:24-27). These last words were quoted by the writer of Hebrews as being fulfilled in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:8, 10-12).

Those who take the phrase "Mighty God" to indicate something less than full Deity would do well to note that this is the prophet's description of the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 10:20-21).

We may well reason that Old Testament prophets did not fully comprehend the ramifications of such a majestic name. They did not need to. Like New Testament apostles, Old Testament prophets spoke by inspiration. The Spirit who inspired them understood perfectly every implication, every significance, of the term "Mighty God."

The word of God would be progressively revealed until the fulfillment of the ages, when the Messiah made Himself known to mankind. Then it would be clear that He was truly "Mighty God" for "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9).

New Testament writers referred to Him as “our God and Savior” (2 Peter 1:1), “God over all, forever praised” (Romans 9:5), our “great God and Savior” who gave Himself for us (Titus 2:13).

Is it any wonder that those who witnessed His power believed they saw God Himself at work and fell down to worship Him (Matthew 14:31)? That Thomas praised Him as “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28)? That Stephen prayed directly to Him as Lord (Acts 7:59)? Even now, heavenly beings and angels proclaim Him worthy to receive “power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Revelation 5:12). Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them now sings: “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!” (v. 13). The four living creatures add their approbation, “Amen!” (v. 14) and fall down to worship Him.

In the 21st century, we continue to praise Jesus as “Mighty God” through preaching, singing and prayer. He is worthy of our praise as we come into His presence with worship and adoration. In the words of James G. Deck from the hymn “Jesus, Thy Name I Love”:

“Thou, blessed Son of God,
Hast bought me with Thy blood,
Jesus my Lord!
How mighty is Thy love,
All other loves above,
Love that I daily prove,
Jesus my Lord!”

CONSIDER THE CLAIMS FOR JESUS

CLEM THURMAN

IF YOU WERE TO TRY TO NAME the problem that most bothers people, what would it be? Money, failure, loneliness, friends, health, old age, approval of others? Numerous surveys indicate that to find “the meaning of life” is problem number one for most folk. We all need purpose for our existence, or else everything we accomplish and acquire becomes meaningless. For this reason many lose themselves in social work, in medical services or in some other

endeavor that seeks to serve others. Some others turn inward, isolating themselves in a monastery or otherwise striving for private meditation or self-contemplation. The common thread through all of these is the desire to find real meaning and purpose in life.

God has made man in His own image (Gen. 1:26-27), and thus He has the answers which man seeks. We read in Heb. 1:1-2, *"God...hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son."* The theme of the gospel is that God sent His Son into the world (Jno. 3:16): born of Mary in Bethlehem (Lk. 2:4-7), crucified on a cruel cross as a sacrifice for us sinners (Rom. 5:6-8) and through Whom He reveals Himself to man. Jesus said, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father... I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly"* (Jno. 10:10). Jesus came to reveal God to us, and in doing that He reveals the meaning and purpose of life. Jesus has the answer, gives the answer, is the answer to life's problems.

Jesus said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (Jno. 14:6). The apostles said later of Jesus, *"In none other is there salvation, neither is there any other name under heaven, given among men, wherein we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). The apostle Paul wrote that the life and death of Jesus was *"according to the eternal purpose"* of God (Eph. 3:11). These are all lofty claims, but what is the evidence for them? Let us consider the claims of Jesus.

Consider Jesus as the Fulfillment of Prophecy

When man first sinned, God told Satan that He would send a Savior: *"I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"* (Gen. 3:15). From that time there were hundreds of prophecies given of that promised Savior. He was to be *"the seed of Abraham... Isaac... Jacob"* (Gen. 22:18; 28:14), of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10), *"the seed of David"* (Jer. 23:5), born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). He was to be a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:18), high priest like Melchizedek (Psa. 110:4), a king like David (Psa. 89:3-4; Jer. 23:5-6). He was to preach to the poor, help the weak, heal the sick, comfort the broken-hearted, free those in bondage (Isa. 61:1-2). That Jesus, and only Jesus, fulfilled all the prophecies is evident.

Jesus was born of a virgin (Matt. 1:23) in the city of Bethlehem (Lk. 2:5). He was of the lineage of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and David (Matt. 1:2-6). Jesus was preached as the *"prophet like Moses"* (Jno. 12:49; Acts 3:23) and the priest like Melchizedek

(Heb. 6:20-7:3). When He read prophecy in the synagogue at Nazareth, He said plainly, *"Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears"* (Lk. 4:21). And Peter declared later, *"Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days"* (Acts 2:24). The 22nd Psalm reveals the scene of the cross in great detail several centuries before it happened. Isa. 53 tells of His manner of life, His character, His death, His burial and His purpose on earth. The life of Jesus, with His purposes for living and dying, was predicted with absolute accuracy hundreds of years before He walked this earth. The accurate fulfillment of prophecy establishes the claims of Jesus.

Consider the Life and Ministry of Jesus

There are three passages that graphically depict the life of Jesus. *"The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Matt. 20:28). Jesus was a Servant. He served the Father, and He served mankind. He *"went about doing good"* (Acts 10:38). When John's disciples came and asked if He were the Christ, He replied, *"Go and tell John the things which ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them"* (Matt. 11:4-5). The unselfish life He lived substantiates His claims.

The second passage shows why Jesus was such a servant of His fellow-man: *"And he came forth and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things"* (Mk. 6:34). Jesus cared. The loneliness, the pain, the despair of those about Him touched Jesus: and, *"He careth for you"* (1 Pet. 5:7). He forcefully drove the money-changers out of the temple, but then he wept over their hardness of heart (Jno. 2:13-17; Matt. 23:37). He rebuked the disciples, *"O ye of little faith"* (Matt. 6:26), then cried with them at the tomb of their friend, Lazarus (Jno. 11:35). Jesus cared about people, and they knew it.

The third passage is Lk. 19:10, *"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."* Jesus never came to establish an earthly utopia, His mission was not to transform society. His purpose was personal and individual: He came to save people from their sins. He put things in perspective with these words, *"What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* (Matt. 16:26). He

did not come to remove trouble and sorrow and sin from the world. He came to—remove those in trouble from this world of sorrow and sin. And His words were not designed to revolutionize society, but to change the heart, and thereby change the life. For only through a changed life can one come to Him (Lk. 13:3) and fulfill one's purpose in this life.

Consider the Miracles of Jesus

On one occasion, questioned by the Jews about His authority, Jesus said, *"The works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me"* (Jno. 5:36). He healed the sick (Mk. 1:32-34), even including the lepers (Mk. 1:40-45), and all the people knew it. He stilled the storm, prompting even the apostles to say, *"What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?"* (Matt. 8:27). He restored sight to the blind, made the lame to walk and the deaf to hear. He even raised the dead, with plenty of witness to testify to those events (Lk. 7:11-17; 8:49-56; Jno. 11:17-46). On one occasion, the Jews used a crippled man to try to discredit or condemn Jesus: *"They watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him"* (Mk. 3:2). The amazing thing to me is that they never questioned whether Jesus had the POWER to heal the man: they knew He did!

A ruler of the Jews came to Jesus with the conclusion they all should have had: *"We know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him"* (Jno. 3:2). That was the real purpose of His miracles, as with the miracles His apostles did later: *"Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God"* (Jno. 20:30-31). When the apostles later did miracles, by the power which Jesus gave them, it was to prove they were also from God, and thus verify their message (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4). One such miracle led the Jewish council to try to discredit the apostles, but they plainly stated, *"That indeed a notable miracle hath been wrought through them, is manifest to all that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it"* (Acts 4:16). The miracles of Jesus and His apostles certainly substantiate His claims.

Jesus Christ provides the answer to your problems. He gives direction and purpose to your life. He offers you forgiveness and peace in this life. And He offers you eternal salvation. No one else

can do it. Man's purpose is stated thus: *"Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man"* (Eccle. 12:13). Only in Jesus can that purpose be fulfilled, as He said: *"No man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (Jno. 14:6). Consider the claims for Jesus, then put your trust in Him.

THE HAPPY MAN

JOHNNY RAMSEY

THE BOOK OF PSALMS tells us a lot about genuine happiness. In the first stanza of that noble section of the Old Testament we learn that the happy man is the one who *"delights in the law of the Lord day and night"* (Psa. 1:1). In Psa. 32:1 we find this illustration of joy: *"Blessed [happy] is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."* It is abundantly clear that peace and contentment belong to the one who is cleansed from iniquity (Isa. 1:18). Nothing brings greater tranquility than being right with our Maker. Psa. 144:15 reminds us of this indelible truth: *"Happy are the people whose God is Jehovah."* When we put our loyal trust in our Creator we know that He can even turn a curse into blessing (Neh. 13:2). Joseph made it clear in Gen. 45:5 and 50:20 that God took something Jacob's sons did with evil intent and *"made it for good!"*

Sometimes evil people have claimed that the Lord appeared to them and told them to commit a crime, even to the extent of killing other human beings. But the Bible rebukes such heresy. Recently, in Florida, four people bombed three abortion clinics. Notice the press clipping that reported the incident: *"They said God spoke to them and they responded to his revelation."* The truth of the matter is that the New Testament teaches us to love our enemies and never to retaliate (Matt. 5; Rom. 12). If anyone spoke to them, it was Satan, whom Jesus called the *"the father of lies"* (Jno. 8:44). We should stand in awe of the Mighty One (Psa. 33:8) and always trust in the goodness of the Lord (Psa. 34:8) as we praise him all day long (Psa. 35:28).

Humble submission to the will of heaven will always achieve more than an arrogant spirit. Someone has well stated it: *"The Christian on his knees sees more than the philosopher on tiptoe."* In Psa. 36:7 we learn again this principle, *"Therefore, the children of men, put their trust under the shadow of thy wings."* The power

of a truly meek and quiet spirit can be magnified by reading Psa. 37—one of the magnificent sections of the Bible. Who will inherit the blessings this earth affords? In verse 25 we are reminded that the righteous will not be forsaken! Never forget the old saying that has proved to be a blessing: “Help me to understand that nothing will come my way that God and I together cannot handle.” Sometimes our happiness is hindered by our own poor decisions. In Psa. 38:5 the writer admits, *“My wounds are repulsive and corrupt because of my foolishness.”*

Many heartaches come our way because we step out of the light (Jno. 8:12) and fall into the miry clay of the world (Psa. 40:2). Were it not for the glorious grace of our Redeemer, we would be overwhelmed by the quicksand of sin. A grand old song reminds us:

*In loving-kindness Jesus came
My soul in mercy to reclaim.
And from the depths of sin and shame
Through grace he lifted me.*

When earthly friends forsake us (Psa. 41:9) we should doubly rejoice that we have a Friend *“who sticketh closer than a brother”* (Prov. 18:24). He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5-6).

The happy man is the one who longs for God even as the wild animal pants after the fresh water of the brook (Psa. 42:1). If we are not happy—even in the midst of a frenetic and debauched world—we need to get back to God for the joy of His salvation!

The smile that is worth the praises of earth—is the smile that shines through the tears. Even in the midst of difficulties, the happy man praises God for whatever life provides (Job 13:15).

LIVING WATER

RICHARD MANSEL

MAN HAS AN INSATIABLE desire for answers to the profound questions of life. Queries that rage in our minds in the wicked hours of temptation and the pristine moments of joy. Queries that have reverberated throughout history in the halls of academia and theology. What is the meaning of life? How can man ascertain truth? Where will death take us and how much longer can men stave off

that inevitable movement? While these thoughts have raged in debate for centuries Jesus answered them with finality in the pages of Scripture. The problem was that His contemporaries, for whatever reason, often missed His answers to the questions of life and their thirst continued to rage within their souls. The repositories of this wisdom are found within the gospel. In John 4 we find Jesus breaking with the taboos of the day to travel through Samaria and speak, alone, to a Samaritan woman near Jacob's well. Instantly she wonders aloud as to why He, a Jew, was even speaking to her. Ignoring her question he moved on to the aching pain buried deeply within her soul. He said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." (4:10.) Taking His spiritual message as physical she noted that He had nothing with which to draw from the well. Undeterred, Jesus tells her that the water from Jacob's well provides only temporary relief. The water He offers will forever satisfy her thirst.

To the first-century Palestinian mind, "living water" meant water that flowed as opposed to the still, stagnant water that was infested with a multiplicity of diseases. Rather, "living water" flowed healthy and strong as it moved briskly toward its resultant tributary or into the thirsty mouths of children or animals. Water is the life force in a land bereft of rain.

In a spiritual sense Jesus' image is very powerful. The blessings provided by it will fill the Christians' life with joy, peace and the realization of a pervasive satisfaction of knowing that life does possess a purpose. It is this latter need that the soul yearns for and when it is satisfied, life gains a new perspective and depth. In like manner, Jesus says that "whoever drinks of the water will never thirst." (4:14.) The word "drinks" here denotes continuous action in that, whoever drinks has "drunk once for all." When we drink of the richness of salvation the presence of God and the reassurance of Scripture provides us with the antidote for our spiritual yearnings.

In 4:14 Jesus continues by saying that the water He provides will "become in (us) a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." This profoundly beautiful statement perpetuates the joy that should fill the Christian. The term "spring up" is the one used of the lame man in Acts 3:8 who when healed leaped up to enter the temple. The life that Jesus gives is no tame and stagnant thing. Rather it is like a vigorous and restless animal. It swells our souls, brightens our smiles and permeates every room it enters. Flowing

water that is unleashed into a room does not stay in one place; tucked away in a corner. No. It flows into the room filling every nook and crevice until it takes over the room with its power. By taking on Christ in our lives we should feel the tangible presence and power of God in all that we do.

With the understanding of the power of “living water” God’s people can reinvigorate the evangelistic process. The fountain mentioned in 4:14 is such that it will well up in us with such force that it will spread to all those around us. The joy of Christianity will cause us to speak the word of God without hesitancy. We will be as the prophet Jeremiah who said that he sought to constrain the Word of God within his heart but found that it was a raging fire that he could not extinguish. (Jeremiah 20:7-9.) With such a palpable presence in our lives we will be a force for God in a lost and dying world.

Is Interpretation Of Scriptures The Reason For Not Seeing The Bible Alike?

BOB DANKLEFSEN

MANY HAVE WONDERED WHY PEOPLE who supposedly belong to God are divided in their religious beliefs. Often the statement is made that the reason behind the division is interpretation of the scriptures.

Upon investigation of the Bible we actually find that the Bible interprets itself. Even those who were the writers did not voice their own opinions, 2 Peter 1:20,21. Here it states, “Knowing this first, that NO prophecy of scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” This certainly confirms that the Lord gave us in written form exactly what He wants us to know. Further, He states, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work,” 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. Since God’s Word is written as He wants it and is designed to correct those not following it properly, would it not be understandable that all will come to a single united conclusion especially in the area of salvation?

We also must realize that God cannot lie, Titus 1:2. When He says that He is not the author of confusion, 1 Corinthians 14:33 and that He has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness, 2 Peter 1:3, we must accept His Word without reservation.

WHY DO SOME INSIST THAT THE PROBLEM IS INTERPRETATION?

Some believe that God is incapable of expressing Himself in the Bible so that all would come to understand His will. As one looks at the subject of salvation, however, God has stated very clearly that He does not want man to miss it, 1 Timothy 2:4. Paul writes, "who desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." The key seems to be in the word "truth." Jesus said, "Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth," John 17:17. "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," 8:32. The scriptures tell us that those who would come to Him must not only know the truth but must love and believe it, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-14, and obey it, 1 Peter 1:22,23. Thus in order to be free from sin, one must obey the truth. This is so clear in scriptures that no one should say that they interpret this to mean that one can disobey the commands of God when referring to scriptures on salvation.

INTERPRETING GOD'S GOSPEL

The best way to clarify Bible interpretation is to give examples from scripture and how some claim to interpret plain passages. Let us start with creation itself.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," Genesis 1:1. Is the stand taken by atheists that the universe began through a mindless, chance accident of particles in space an interpretation of this verse or a rejection of it? One can very easily see that it is a rejection of the Creator. A preconceived doctrine of men has caused men to refuse to believe that there is a God who created the cosmos.

Some of those who believe in a Supreme Being have come to different conclusions as to the characteristics of God's nature. For example, Jesus' own statement, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth," John 4:24. This verse coupled with "God is not a man, that He should lie," Numbers 23:19 and Psalm 90:2 showing the eternal nature of God should cause one to conclude that the Lord is an eternal Spirit Being totally different than His creation, man. Yet there is a group that makes the following claim about God, "God himself was once as we are now and is an exalted man..." (*The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* by Joseph Fielding Smith), page 345. Also, *Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22 says, "The Father has a body of flesh and bone as tangible as man's . . ." Once again, this teaching does not originate with the author of the Bible; rather it contradicts it.

The descriptive characteristics of Jesus have varied in the writings of man. One group claims Jesus did not preexist the virgin birth, another

Jesus should not be called God, and another that He never resurrected bodily. Note the following scriptures to see if the conclusions are interpretations. John 17:5; Hebrews 1:8,9; John 2:19-21.

The Lord's true gospel consists of the good news that Jesus left heaven to become a man, 1 Timothy 3:16; that He died for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 2:2; and He resurrected the third day, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. He then ascended back to heaven where He now intercedes for Christians, Hebrews 7:25. Someday He will return just as He went into heaven, Acts 1:9-11.

OTHER GOSPELS WOULD BE TAUGHT

Paul stated that other gospels would be taught, Galatians 1:6 and to follow them would bring a retaliation from God, verse 8. In 2 Corinthians 11:4 Paul states, "For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit, which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it." He says a few verses later that these are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ, verse 13.

One might ask, "Since they use the same Bible and use scriptures to prove their conclusions, why is there so much division?" I just concluded reading a tract expressing that Jesus did not preexist the virgin birth. Their whole case was built upon the fact that God the Father annointed the Son and therefore He could not be a part of the Godhead, because this would make Him equal with God. *Did Jesus Pre-Exist His Birth*, page 2 by Z. B. Duncan. It is interesting that this author looked up many scriptures teaching Jesus was God's Son, yet intentionally avoided all references to His Deity. Note the following scriptures which were avoided by the author: Colossians 1:15, 16; 2:9; Philippians 2:5-10; John 20:28; Isaiah 9:6. There has been in every discussion I have experienced an avoidance of certain scriptures and an appeal to other scriptures to cancel the teachings of those with which they disagree. In addition to this each group doing this puts out either tracts or a manual to help their followers wrongly divide the word, Matthew 15:9.

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

Since the Lord wants no one to perish and all to find salvation, certainly He will make it clear in his word. What was taught to those who were lost? Jesus said to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, Mark 16:15. Peter did that very thing on the first day the church came into existance, Acts 2:22-24. He accused those present of killing the Christ and then assured them it was God's plan all along for him to die for the sins of the people, 1 Peter 2:21-24.

After hearing of Jesus' resurrection, the people asked what they must do, Acts 2:37. This same question was asked by the Philippian jailer, Acts 16:30. Paul replied to the jailer in verse 31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household." What did the jailer have to believe about Jesus? Paul said that he was not ashamed of the gospel because it was the power of God to salvation, Romans 1:16. Therefore, the gospel had to be taught to both the jailer and his family, Acts 16:32. Thus, hearing and believing the gospel is essential to salvation, 1 Corinthians 15:1,2.

Look at the following statement and see if you believe that it is an interpretation of the above verses. "A person may say that he believes in salvation by grace, but if he sets forth any act of man's will, such as repentance, faith, baptism, or hearing the gospel, as a condition for obtaining it, then this position must be put on the works side. Primitive Baptists believe that salvation is of the Lord, that it is by His grace, and that nothing needs to be added to it," (*What Do Primitive Baptists Believe*, page 5) by Elder Lasserre Bradley, Jr. In this tract the author avoids all "faith" references. This denomination appeals to Ephesians 2:5 and avoids verse 8. They will state, "If God had intended for faith to be necessary for salvation, it would be clearly stated here in verse 5. But it is not and, therefore, God did not intend for faith to be a part of the plan of salvation". Having eternal life and being with God is such a serious thing; I don't know why people will "toy" with His will in such a frivolous manner. The statement by this group comes about by totally rejecting the whole counsel of God, Acts 20:27.

There is a group who believe that faith is necessary for salvation. They quote John 3:16, Acts 16:31, and Ephesians 2:8 to show that they believe faith is necessary for salvation; however, their actions indicate that there is no need for repentance. For example, one time I visited their services and found out that some of the couples in their group were involved in fornication. When confronted with this they stated that they had been saved by their faith as Abraham was and once in this relationship with the Lord, that the Lord would not hold them accountable for sin as stated in Romans 4:3-8. When repentance was brought to their attention, they were quick to point out that John 3:16 said nothing about repentance. It is true the word "repentance" is not found in that location; can we therefore conclude that a person does not have to turn from sin if he appeals to John 3:16 as his sole source of salvation? Both repentance and faith are mentioned in Acts 20:21. I think that the reader is beginning to see that it is not a matter of interpretation of verses that cause some to accept some teachings at the expense of other plain scriptures.

Another topic where there is again a divergence of beliefs is in the

area of baptism. In fact, if you were to visit three churches, one each Sunday and they spoke on this subject, you might hear the first week that baptism is a sprinkling of water and it has nothing to do with forgiveness of sins. The next week, you could hear baptism is a burial in water and is not for forgiveness of sins. The third Sunday, you might hear that baptism is a burial in water and is the point at which one receives forgiveness of sins. Could they all be correct? Of course not; they are opposites. Again, since the word of God is designed to correct us, let us see what it says. We have already seen that the scriptures teach that after hearing the gospel one is to believe to be saved, Acts 16:31, that one must repent, Acts 17:30,31, and we will find that before one can be saved they must confess Christ as Lord, Romans 10:9,10. Now realizing we are dealing with a life and death subject, let us see what God has to say about one's response in baptism.

The gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. God has asked us to demonstrate our faith in His death, burial, and resurrection by reenacting it in water, Romans 6:3,4. First of all, does Paul use the word sprinkling or burial—what do we do with dead people? We bury them! Now the question is, “At what point is a person forgiven, when he believes the gospel or when he obeys the gospel?” Let's let the Bible interpret itself. Paul telling about Jesus' return said that the Lord will return “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,” 2 Thessalonians 1:8. Is this consistent with the conversions in the book of Acts? Look at Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16 and let the Bible interpret itself. The latter is so clear, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Please interpret this verse with a non prejudiced mind.

As you have been reading this, I hope you have come to realize that the religious division today is not caused by interpretation of scriptures but rather a rejection of some to accept others. We cannot cancel sections we don't want to conform to by appealing to others with whom we agree. During a Bible study conducted over a three months period, I rejected the scriptures teaching one must be immersed for the forgiveness of sins. My claim—“your interpretation.” The man teaching me was so patient. He said, “You interpret Acts 2:38.” I finally did and became a member of the Church of Christ. I now know I can give an answer from God's word that gives me an assurance that I know that I have eternal life. I never make the statement, “That's your interpretation,” because I now know the Bible interprets itself.

