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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

Jesus Christ Will Never Come Back Again On This Earth

THERE ARE SOME WHO BELIEVE that Christ will come back on this earth and literally establish His kingdom on earth and sit upon His throne and reign as a king for one thousand years. But what does the Bible teach? The Bible very clearly teaches that Christ will never set His foot on this earth again, He will not come back on this earth, but will appear up in the air in the clouds, where His followers will meet the Lord in the air and thus they shall always be with the Lord in heaven. (1 Thessalonians 4:17).



The Bible teaches that the kingdom of God and Christ (Ephesians 5:5) already exists now, and that Christ is not coming back to establish His kingdom but to receive His kingdom which exists now and that kingdom He will deliver or hand over to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24). Christ as King is ruling now over His spiritual kingdom, which is His church (Matthew 16:18-19; Acts 2:47; Colossians 1:13). Christ's kingdom is spiritual in nature and not physical or of this world, as He Himself stated. (John 18:36). Moreover, the Bible teaches that when Christ will come back it will be the end of everything on earth and the earth itself. In reference to the coming back of Christ it says, "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 the works that are in it will be burned up.” (2 Peter 3:10). Notice, it says, both the earth and all the works that are in it will be burned up when Christ comes back. How could he establish the kingdom on an earth which will be burned up at His coming? When Christ comes back there won’t be any earth left for Him to set His foot upon. His second coming will not be the beginning of a one thousand years reign on earth, as some assume, but it will be the end of this earth.

According to 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-17, the apostle Paul wrote Christians, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep (*Christians who had died, SD*), lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the 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 clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” This passage says nothing about Christ coming back to the earth again. In fact, the opposite is clearly indicated. As it says, when Jesus will come back those on the earth will leave the earth together with the resurrected faithful followers of the Lord and they will meet Christ in the clouds—not on the earth, but in the air, and thus His people will always be with the Lord. Not ever with Him on earth, either then or later. Also, we observe that when Christ was taken up into heaven after being with His disciples on the earth for forty days, after he was raised from the dead, the angels had told the disciples, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:11). This does not mean, however, that He will come back to earth. It only suggests the manner or method of His returning to heaven, that as He was taken up and a cloud received Him, so shall He come back in the clouds, where His resurrected and transformed followers will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. This is the ultimate bliss for which the Christian hopes. (John 14:1-3). And it is reserved for those who will be faithful to Him until death. (Revelation 2:10).

WHY CHRIST DIED

J. C. CHOATE



CHRIST DIED. This is a fact supported by both the Bible and secular history. With this in mind we want to make a number of observations.

1. Christ's death was no ordinary death. Many people have lived and many have died. The sacred writer says that all men must die. (Hebrews 9:27). What is so special, then about the death of Christ? Did he not live and die like many others have? Yes, but his life was different and the purpose for which he died was different. He lived a sinless life and he died to save man from his sins. (2 Corinthians 5:21).

2. Christ's death was spoken of in prophecy. The prophet Isaiah said, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows : yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:4-6).

3. Christ spoke of his own death. "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 10:10). He goes on to show that he was speaking of the temple of his body and of his death and resurrection.

4. Christ was sent of God to die. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16).

5. Christ was obedient unto death. It was the will of his Father that he should die. "And being found in the fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Philippians 2:8).

6. Christ died without sin. Speaking of Christ, "And ye knew that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin." (1 John 3:5).

7. Christ died for sinners. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8). "Here is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10).

8. Christ died that we might live. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." (1 John 4:9).

9. Christ died on the cross. This was the most cruel death possible. Apart from the physical pain that accompanied it, it was made even more painful for Christ in that he was placed between two thieves as though he were no more than a criminal himself. Read Matthew 27. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith: who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Hebrews 12:2).

10. Christ died to take away the old law. "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." (Colossians 2:14).

11. Christ died to give a new law or testament. (Matthew 26:28). "In that he said, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away." (Hebrews 8:13).

12. Christ died for the church. "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." (Ephesians 5:23).

13. Christ died that we might have hope. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:3).

14. Christ died, but after his burial, he was resurrected and then ascended to his Father in Heaven. (Matthew 28:6; Acts 1:10). Therefore Christ assured all mankind of a resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15). Truly there is victory in Christ. (1 John 5:4, 5).

These are some of the reasons why Christ died. As you can see, he did not die just to be dying. Rather he died for a purpose. He died for you and for me. He died for all mankind. He died that we might not be lost but that we might be saved. He died that we might have a better way of life. He died, above all, that we might be eternally saved.

The Lord has shown his love for you by giving himself for you that you might live. It is up to you now to return his love and obey his will. Christ said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15).

NOT UNDER BONDAGE

GLENN COLLEY

ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY DISCUSSED passages concerning the marriage, divorce, and remarriage question, is I Corinthians 7. Great emphasis has been placed on verse 15 where Paul writes, "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God hath called us to peace."

I have never been able to believe that "Not under bondage" meant that the believing mate, now abandoned by the unbelieving mate, could divorce and remarry. Unless we broadly assume that the unbelieving mate *has taken* another and committed adultery, we are left with an apparent contradiction to what Jesus taught in Matthew 19:9; "Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery. And whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." Is Paul adding to or changing what Jesus said? I don't believe so.

When verse 15 is considered in light of the verse which follows, an interesting point emerges. Consider that there are two common schools of thought regarding "not under bondage." They are:

1. "Not under bondage" means the abandoned, believing mate is free to divorce and remarry.

2. "Not under bondage" means that if the unbelieving mate refuses to live with his believing mate, and demands that she choose between living the Christian life OR living with him, and threatens to depart from her if she chooses Christ, the believer is not obligated to obey his wishes in order to keep him. She remains unmarried and committed to Christ.

Now look at verse 16: "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?" Whatever is true about "Not under bondage" (vs. 15), must fit with verse 16! Our explanation MUST harmonize with the believing mate, left behind, proceeding with the idea of *saving* the unbeliever. With that in mind, look again at the aforementioned two possibilities:

1. In this scenario, the abandoned believer completely severs the ties to the unbeliever by divorcing and remarrying another. This seems to me an unlikely possibility, since the believer's objective (verse 16) is to SAVE the unbelieving husband or wife. What

connection could this action possibly have with saving the unbeliever?

2. In this scenario, the believer says to the unbeliever, “You may threaten to leave me if I do not agree to forsake my Christianity, but Christ means too much to me. I hope we can remain together, but if we can’t, I must be faithful to my Lord.”

Doesn’t this harmonize better with verse 16? As Peter teaches in I Peter 3:1-6, when a believing wife is married to an unbelieving husband who won’t listen to the preaching of the word, he may STILL be won by watching the godly, committed life of that Christian wife.

This interpretation also harmonizes with verses 12-14: “...If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath a husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him ...” No doubt one reason the believers in these verses are to remain with their mates is from verse 16 also: “For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?”

She will not have a chance of saving him after becoming the wife of another man. She has severed her ties. However, if she remains married to him, devoted wholly and firmly to Christ, desiring reconciliation with her husband, she will demonstrate to her husband the consecrated life of a true disciple; and that’s a strong influence.

HOW DID THEY KNOW?

MIKE BENSON

“HOW DO YOU SUPPOSE CAIN AND ABEL knew what kind of sacrifice they were to offer to God? I have been searching for the place in Genesis where God specifically commanded animal sacrifices and cannot find it. Could you please answer this in your column?”

This is an excellent question. I hope the following scriptures and comments will be helpful to you. Note:

1. God required specific sacrifice from both of the brothers.

This is evident from the text. Notice, “... Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock

and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted...” (Genesis 4:2b-7a).

2. Abel offered his sacrifice by obedient faith. The Hebrew writer wrote, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks” (Hebrews 11:4). On another occasion Paul wrote, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). When these passages are considered together, it is apparent that God communicated with the two brothers as to specifically what kind of sacrifice He required.

3. God demands no less of His children today. Today many in the denominational community teach that almost any kind of worship (sacrifice) is acceptable to God just as long as a person is religiously sincere. Cain was religious. Was his offering/ sacrifice acceptable ...? We would all do well to learn from his example. Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

God’s Picture Of A Preacher

WADE LEE WEBSTER

AS ONE CAREFULLY STUDIES THE BOOK OF JUDE, he is introduced to a great gospel preacher—Jude. Although Jude is not as well known as other New Testament preachers, he is, nevertheless, a picture of the preacher that God wants all preachers to be.

First, Jude realized his position as a preacher (Jude 1). He understood that he was a servant of Jesus Christ. He counted it a great honor to be a servant of “the King of kings and the Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15). He wanted to be like His Savior who came to earth “not to be ministered unto, but to minister” (Matthew 20:28).

Second, Jude preached the needed truth. Jude had planned to write a letter about “the common salvation” that they enjoyed as Christians (Jude 3). However, through inspiration, he learned that false teachers had “crept in unawares” (Jude 4). Therefore, Jude wrote to exhort the brethren “to earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude

3). Jude was the type of preacher that Paul told Timothy to be. We read, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (II Timothy 4:2). Jude realized that a man could preach the truth all of his life and still be lost, if he did not preach the needed truth.

Third, Jude stood up against the false doctrines of his day. False teachers were “turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). His attitude was that of the apostle Paul when he wrote concerning the false teachers, “To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Galatians 2:4-5).

Fourth, Jude put the brethren in remembrance of some things they had always known (Jude 5). Jude realized that preaching requires much repetition. He understood that brethren often forget “the first principles of the oracles of God” (Hebrews 5:12). According to what Paul told Timothy, Jude was a “good minister of Jesus Christ.” He wrote, “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained (I Timothy 4:6).

Fifth, Jude preached in plain and simple words. Jude described the false teachers in words that all could comprehend (Jude 8-16). He realized that in preaching you have to get your message down to where the people can understand and apply it. Jesus did this as he taught the people. Mark records concerning Jesus that “the common people heard him gladly” (Mark 12:37). It is reported that brother N.B. Hardeman in training young preachers told them to “put it down where the calves could get it.”

Sixth, Jude used Bible examples to illustrate his points. Notice that in warning of the possibility of apostasy he used the examples of the Israelites, the angels that left their first estate, and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 5-7). Also, in describing the false teachers he used the examples of Cain, Balaam, and Core (Jude 11). He pointed men to the word of God throughout his sermon.

Seventh, Jude applied the message to those to whom he preached. He told them to “remember the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 17). He encouraged them to build themselves up “in the most holy faith” (Jude 20), and to keep themselves “in the love of God” (Jude 21). Jude realized that many listeners will not get the point unless you apply it.

Eighth, Jude gave God the glory. Jude concluded this inspired letter by writing, "To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jude 25). Jude realized that the power was not in him but, rather, in the gospel (Romans 1:16).

In the book of Jude we see God's picture of a preacher. If every preacher today was like Jude, there would be no end to the good that we could accomplish in the service of our Lord.

Saved By Grace Through Faith

CLEM THURMAN

"FOR BY GRACE HAVE YE BEEN saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory" (Eph. 2:8-9). It has always been interesting to me that so many people use this text to contend that we are "saved by grace only" and then use it again to contend that we are "saved by faith only." If we are saved by grace only, then faith has nothing to do with salvation. If we are saved by faith only, then grace is not involved. The truth is clearly stated, though, in the text itself: We are saved *"by grace through faith."* It takes both to accomplish our salvation.

WE ARE SAVED BY THE GRACE OF GOD

The apostle Paul wrote, *"For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world"* (Titus 2:11-12). Even a casual look at ourselves shows the necessity of God's grace. We cannot save ourselves, and there is no way we can be good enough or work enough to deserve to be saved. Thus, salvation must be *"the gift of God"* (Rom. 6:23). That is really what grace is all about - God doing for us what we need and cannot do for ourselves.

As the apostles stated, *"But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they"* (Acts 15:11). Again, the apostle Paul wrote, *"But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared, not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us"* (Titus 3:4-5). God's grace was necessary to provide salvation, for we just could not do it for ourselves. But, *"God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Rom. 5:8).

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE GRACE OF GOD?

When we speak of the grace of God, we must realize that God's grace is embodied in the things which He does for us. And His grace includes those things He gives us, and which we could never deserve. So, what is included in *"the grace of God"* for us?

The Death of Jesus. *"But we behold him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God he should taste of death for every man"* (Heb. 2:9). It was by the grace of God that Jesus went to the cross and gave His life for us. His death was necessary to reconcile us to God, bring us back into fellowship with Him: *"If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life"* (Rom. 5:10).

The Blood of Jesus. *"To the praise of the glory of his grace, which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved: in whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace"* (Eph. 1:6-7). God's justice has always demanded a sacrifice for sin. Because *"the wages of sin is death"* (Rom. 6:23), and *"the life is in the blood"* (Gen. 9:4), God requires a sacrifice of blood to forgive sin. *"All things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission"* (Heb. 9:22). But the Scriptures clearly show that the sacrifice of animals could never cleanse us from sin. Only the blood of God's only begotten Son could do that. And, by God's grace, Jesus shed His blood to save us.

The Gospel of Christ. The angel of the Lord told Cornelius to send for the apostle Peter, *"Who shall speak unto thee words, whereby thou shalt be saved"* (Acts 11:14). The apostle Paul echoed the power of the gospel in Rom. 1:16, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth"* (Rom. 1:16). But notice the source of the gospel: *"The ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God"* (Acts 20:24). It is only by the grace of God that we have the gospel of Christ, which is *"the power of God unto salvation."*

Salvation in Christ. Everything necessary for our salvation has been given by the grace of God. The apostles met in Jerusalem to settle the matter of the way Gentiles could be saved in Christ. Their answer: *"But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they"* (Acts 15:11). As the apostle

Paul stated, *"The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men"* (Titus 2:11). Without the grace of God, there could be no salvation for any of us.

Hope in Christ. *"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself... gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace"* (2 Thes. 2:16). We are creatures of hope — hope that things will work well for us in this life, and hope that reaches beyond the grave. As Paul wrote, *"We have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand; and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God"* (Rom. 5:2). And Peter declares that, *"Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (1 Pet. 1:3). God provides us hope, by His grace.

All Blessings Are by Grace. *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights"* (James 1:17). If God gave us what we deserved, we all must die (Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 6:23). So, really, every blessing we have is by the grace of God. That is true with material things, and it is also true with spiritual blessings. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ... to the praise of the glory of his grace"* (Eph. 1:3-6). There is no way we can obey perfectly enough or work hard enough to deserve God's blessings. But God gives those blessings to us, in Christ, by grace.

WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH

Jesus said to the Jews, about the Christ, the Messiah, *"Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins"* (John 8:24). As Paul put it in Rom. 5:1, *"Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* It is only by faith that we can come to the Lord, for, *"Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him"* (Heb. 11:6). Notice again that the gospel is *"the power of God unto salvation unto all them that believe"* (Rom. 1:16).

When the jailor asked Paul and Silas, *"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"* their reply was simple: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus"* (Acts 16:30-31). Because *"faith cometh by hearing ... the word of God"* (Rom. 10:17), the Lord sent the apostles into all the world to preach: *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation ... he that believeth not shall be condemned"* (Mark 16:15-16). Failure to believe is failure to be saved. We are saved by *"grace through faith."*

WHAT IS INCLUDED IN FAITH?

As “*grace*” includes all that God does for us, so “*faith*” includes all we do in response to His grace. Note that we are “*saved by grace through faith*.” Not by grace only, not by faith only. But God’s grace reaches down to those who, by faith, “*seek after him*” (Heb. 11:6). What, then, does faith lead one to do? What does faith accomplish?

Access to God’s Grace. The Scriptures say, “*Being therefore justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand*” (Rom. 5:1-2). Note that faith gives us “*access*” to the grace of God! In other words, our faith opens the door for God’s grace to come into our lives. The Scriptures tell us that God “*would have all men to be saved*” (1 Tim. 2:4). His grace brings salvation to all men (Titus 2:11). But not all will be saved, because God leaves something for us to do, “*by faith*,” in order to be saved.

Obedience of Faith. Jesus showed constantly that faith must obey to be effective. “*Not everyone who saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven*” (Matt. 7:21). Faith must lead us to do the will of God, or we cannot be saved by His grace. A dead faith will not avail (James 2:14-26). That is why Paul wrote of the “*obedience of faith*” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) as the means of being right with God. All of those great “*heroes of faith*” in Heb. 11 heard God’s will, believed God, and then did what He told them. It is still that simple today.

Repentance by Faith. On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the apostle Peter preached Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God (v. 36). “*Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins*” (vs. 37-38). Because godly sorrow works repentance (2 Cor. 7:10), those people who believed then repented. That hasn’t changed.

Confession of Jesus as Lord. Faith leads us to confess Christ. When Philip preached to the Ethiopian, the man asked, “*Here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?*” The answer was: “*If thou believest, thou mayest.*” The Ethiopian replied, “*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*” (Acts 8:36-37). That is natural when

one believes. As Paul wrote: *“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”* (Rom. 10:10).

Baptism Into Christ. The Lord promised in Mark 16:16, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned.”* When people believe the Lord, they will do what He says! That happened when Peter told folk to *“repent and be baptized”* (Acts 2:38). The response? *“They then that received his word were baptized”* (v. 41). If one today receives the same word, the response will be the same. The apostle Paul wrote, *“Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”* (Rom. 6:3).

Baptism is part of our response of faith: *“Not by works of righteousness which we did ourselves, but according to his own mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit”* (Titus 3:5). The washing of regeneration was always part of the *“obedience of faith”* of those who became Christians nearly 2000 years ago (Acts 2:38,41; 8:12; 8:36-38; 10:48; 16:30-34; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-6,16-18; Col.2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21). When one is led by faith to be *“baptized into Christ,”* he is *“saved by grace through faith.”*

Salvation through Faith. *“For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace ... through faith, in his blood”* (Rom. 3:23-25). Our salvation absolutely depends upon faith. We *“live by faith”* (Rom. 1:17) and *“walk by faith”* (2 Cor. 5:7). But this is not a faith that rebels against what God says: *“Faith without works is dead”* (James 2:26). Faith that saves is a faith that is obedient. As Paul put it, *“Faith working through love”* (Gal. 5:6). No other kind of faith can save.

Yes, *“by grace are you saved through faith.”* But always remember what God includes in His grace. And remember what the Lord expects to be included in our faith which responds to His marvelous grace.

Who Is Righteous?

CECIL MAY

Who is righteous?

“THERE IS NO ONE RIGHTEOUS, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). All have sinned, and **sinner** is the opposite of **righteous** one. To

claim to be righteous is to ignore what we know of ourselves, as well as to deny the Word of God.

This answer is found in a context in which the discussion centers around how a person may be “declared righteous” by God. Theoretically, any who **are** righteous, that is, who have never sinned, are justified. But sinners are condemned, not justified. To be justified on the basis of one’s own deeds, therefore, one would have to have never sinned. Since *“all have sinned”* (Romans 3:23), no one is justified that way. In that sense, *“There is no one righteous.”*

If we think we keep God’s law well enough to justify ourselves by it, we blind ourselves to our faults, or boil the law down just to outward rites we can scrupulously keep. According to Jesus, some Pharisees did both (Matthew 23). Paul also spoke of those who *“set out to establish their own righteousness”* and did not humbly seek by faith the righteousness that comes only to those who know they need it as sinners (Romans 10:3).

If we trust in ourselves that we are righteous, we miss the only means of justification for sinners (Luke 18:9-14), trusting God for justification by faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 1-3).

Who is righteous? *“Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous... Whoever does not do righteousness is not of God”* (1 John 3:7,10). Whoever claims to be born of the righteous One is righteous or else belies the claim. If we are unrighteous in our daily conduct, we do not know the righteous God.

This answer is found in a context in which certain antichrists are declared to be false in their claim that our relationship to God is a matter of spirit only, and it does not matter how we live in the flesh. John reminds us that to know and be born of God is to keep His commandments (1 John 3:24), walk as He walked (1 John 2:6), and be righteous as He is righteous (1 John 2:29).

To convince ourselves that the choice between righteous and unrighteous living makes no difference at all in our relationship to God, we must ignore most of the Bible, particularly the teachings of Jesus. *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven”* (Matthew 7:21). *“If you love me, keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). *“This do, and you shall live”* (Luke 10:28).

If we walk in sin and iniquity we are lost, whatever we may profess of faith or doctrine.

Who is righteous? These two answers approach the question from different standpoints. Both truths are essential to know and to live by. If we say we know God but there is no significant difference in our lives, we may deceive ourselves, but we do not deceive God (Galatians 6:7). If we think the difference in our lives is so great and so much of our own doing that we are thereby righteous, we exalt ourselves and will be humbled by God (Matthew 23:12).

Who Are Those Christians, And Why Do They Study The Bible?

KEITH SISMAN

THIS QUESTION IS surprisingly easy to answer. The term Christian is first used three times in the Bible by Luke and Peter, and therefore dates back nearly two thousand years (Acts 11:26, 26:28 and 1 Peter 4: 16).

We soon realize from the Bible that the term Christian is used of somebody who is *in Christ*, and therefore *of Christ*. That person is somebody that through faith has obeyed Christ in baptism and continues in faith and action to live life as a Christian. This term, therefore, belongs to the Bible, being used by writers inspired of God. It is not a term created by man.

The term 'Christian' cannot be Scripturally used by somebody who merely wishes to be called a Christian but who has not obeyed God. In the world today, as in the past, many people call themselves Christians who have no right to do so. Usually by choice they have not studied the Scriptures. In not obeying the Gospel, they have rejected the call of God and salvation (Acts 2:38).

Today there are thousands of different so-called Christian denominations who propagate many totally different views on biblical questions. But there is only one doctrine, one true way, one true church to whom any Christ-centered Christian will be added by God *after baptism* (Acts 2:47).

The Bible speaks of Christians being a spiritual people (1 Peter 2:4-12), those who are in Christ and therefore in His church, having rejected the ways of the world. Denominations or divisions are spoken against in the Scriptures and are not of God but are of the world (1 Corinthians 1:10, 11).

Christians are sometimes accused of worshipping the Bible. This

particular charge is often aimed at those people who wish to share their joy of being in Christ with those who have not yet found the truth and who will live in eternity without God if they die in that condition (Mark 16:15,16). Christians worship the true God, (Matthew 28:19) not the Bible.

It has been nearly two thousand years since the deaths of those who were able to live with Jesus and to touch Him. The nearest we can get to Christ is to listen to His inspired Apostles through their writings, in the Bible. When Christians earnestly search the Scriptures it is to find Christ and his teachings. By knowing His teachings we can know Christ, we can obey Him, putting our faith in Him. We can be 'in Christ' where there is salvation. We do not worship the Bible but we worship Almighty God Himself and Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son (Romans 10: 14-17, Titus 2:13, Matthew 4:10).

A CALL TO HOLINESS

TONY W. BOYD

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS many things to many people. One aspect of true Christianity stands out from all the rest. That is the attribute of holiness. Holiness is not a natural part of our lives. We do not inherit it from our parents, nor do we gain it by some form of "osmosis" by simply being around those whom we respect as holy.

The life of holiness is begun by being obedient children. "*As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance*" (1 Peter 1:14). This obedience is manifested as much by the things we do not do as by the things we do. Notice Peter's negative statement in the verse above. The holy person does not base his life on worldly desire or ignorance of God's will, but as Paul says it: "*And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*" (Romans 12:2).

As children of God, we are called to live a life of holiness. "*But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy*" (1 Peter 1:15,16). True holiness comes from being in the proper relationship with God. The closer we are to Him, the more holiness we can develop in our own lives.

This holiness is given strength and motivation by our knowledge

and assurance that we have been purchased (redeemed) by the precious, incorruptible blood of Jesus, God's requirement of death for our sin (Romans 6:23; 1 Peter 1:18,19; 1 John 2:1,2).

Our personal holiness is encouraged even more by our awareness that this life is only temporary, and that the life which really counts is the one that we live for God. *"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness..."* (2 Peter 3:11).

To summarize, we find that the Christian's life is to be lived separated from the world. God is holy and has called us out of the world, into a life worthy of the sacrifice given to make it possible for us to be with Him in heaven. Let us live today as God's holy ones so that we can live eternally with Him.

DO THE FATHER'S WILL

DON L. NORWOOD

JESUS MADE IT VERY CLEAR IN Matthew 7:21-23 that it will do no one any good to call himself a Christian and then fail to learn and actually **do the Father's will**. We must remember that the Father's will is the teaching (all of it) that Christ did Himself and the teaching of the Apostles, who were inspired of the Holy Spirit to reveal and record His will (Hebrews 1:1,2; John 14:26; John 16:13; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 1 Peter 1:10-12). The New Testament Scriptures contain the complete revealed will of God for mankind today (2 Peter 1:3,4; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Romans 1:16,17).

It is not enough for us just to believe in Christ as Savior, and to be baptized into Him; we must also be desirous of learning, and then be willing to obey, everything He teaches us to do in the Scriptures (Hebrews 5:8,9; James 2:14-24; Luke 14:33; Matthew 10:34-39; Mark 10:28-30).

King David of Israel was a man who had the purpose of heart to always do the Lord's will (1 Kings 14:8; 1 Kings 15:5). It is true that David stumbled along the way and committed some terrible sins; yet God forgave him when he repented, because David did sincerely desire above all else to be pleasing to God.

As Christians, you and I will be very much like David in that we will sin and stumble sometimes. This is because of the struggle between the fleshly desires and the instructions of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures (study Romans 7:14-25; 8:1,14; Galatians 5:13-18).

Like David, we must acquire and maintain the desire to know and do God's will above all other considerations (Colossians 3:1-4).

Even a thousand years after David's death the Scriptures said of him: David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22).

To put into practical terms in daily application of what has been said here, let us consider some of the things that God has taught Christians to do. From the beginning of the Lord's church (Acts 2) Christians were taught to assemble as a congregation on the first day of the week to worship God and to remember the death and suffering of Christ upon the cross (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 11:23-30; 1 Corinthians 10:16,17). These assemblies are so important to all Christians that if they willfully miss them, they willfully sin against the Lord and endanger their souls (read carefully Hebrews 10:23-30). Notice that to willfully sin causes one to be separated from the blood of Christ that keeps one clean from sin (Hebrews 10:26; 1 John 1:5-7).

Since knowledge of the Lord's Word is the source of one's faith (Romans 10:17), and without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6), it follows that if we do not make ourselves available to the teaching on a regular basis, then we will keep ourselves weak spiritually and in danger of being led astray by false teaching (1 John 4:1,6). Missing the worship assemblies and regular Bible study causes us to disobey at least two of God's commandments (Hebrews 10:24,25; Ephesians 5:15-17; 2 Peter 3:14-18). Remember, you deceive yourself if you do not do the Lord's will (James 1:18-21; Matthew 7:21).

When one fails to take communion (Lord's Supper) on the first day of the week and also fails to feed upon the Lord's Word, he or she fails to "*eat the flesh of the Son of man and to drink His blood*" (John 6:48-58).

Remember that Esau sold his birthright for a morsel of food; we must not lose our birthright (eternal life in heaven with God) by being negligent in our obedience to God (Hebrews 2:1-4; 12:11-17). Take time to read these Scriptures as you read this article!

Forgiveness and the Kingdom

GARY C. HAMPTON

IN THE NORMAL COURSE OF human relations one brother will sin against another. Jesus prescribed that the offended brother

should go to the one who sinned against him in an effort to restore his brother. Edersheim tells us this was in stark contrast to the teaching of the Jewish rabbis. They said the offended party must make an effort to correct the problem in the presence of witnesses. Sometimes, they even required such to be repeated three times. Obviously, their concern was not for the condition of the offender. Instead they practiced a form of humiliation. Of course, if the offending party was aware of the offense, he too was obligated to correct the problem (Matthew 5:23,24).

Even if the brother was not restored in the first approach, Jesus directed His followers to take one or two others with him. They could help deal with the matter in an effort to restore the brother. The loving way to handle the matter focused on gaining the lost brother. It was only after taking the matter to the church, without success, that the brother was to be treated as one who refused the knowledge of God.

“How Often Shall My Brother Sin Against Me, And I Forgive Him?” (Matthew 18:15-35)

Peter’s response to the Lord’s instruction makes it clear he did not understand the heart of love. The rabbis taught “forgiveness should not be extended more than three times,” according to Edersheim. So, Peter probably thought he was being generous when he asked if he should forgive his brother up to seven times. However, Jesus’ answer shows He was more concerned with His disciples having the type of loving heart that could truly forgive. Then, numbering offenses would be out of the question.

Actually, the bounds of a Christian’s forgiveness should be the same as the bounds to God’s forgiveness. After all, those who would be children of God must strive to exhibit the love of their Father (Matthew 5:43-48). Such thinking is apparently behind the parable Jesus went on to tell.

The Marvelous Grace of God!

The King in this parable stands for God. He called in his servants to settle accounts. One was brought before him who owed 10,000 talents. A talent weighed approximately one hundred thirty-one pounds in gold or one hundred seventeen pounds in silver. In other words, the debt owed by the servant was 1.17 million pounds of silver, minimum! The total debt is a tremendous amount!

Edersheim well said, “We are debtors to our heavenly King, Who has entrusted to us the administration of what is His, and which we

have purloined or misused, incurring an unspeakable debt, which we can never discharge.” He went on to say, “But, if in humble repentance we cast ourselves at His feet, He is ready, in infinite compassion, not only to release us from meet punishment, but—“O blessed revelation of the Gospel—to forgive us the debt.”

God’s wonderful love for mankind can be seen in the king’s willingness to forgive such a great debt. The singer of Israel proclaimed, *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”* Thus, he proclaimed, *“O Israel, hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption”* (Psalm 103:12; 130:7). God is willing to take the deep stain of sin and remove it if we will but obey. To those who are willing to repent and be changed by baptism into a new man, He has promised a complete blotting out of sin. To those in Christ who confess, He promised faithfully to forgive (Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9).

The Unmerciful Servant

The servant did not appreciate fully what the king had done for him. Such can be seen in his finding a fellow servant who owed him only a small amount and demanding payment. His fellow servant made the same appeal he had made to the king. Yet, he would not even give him time to come up with the money, but cast him into debtors’ prison.

His fellow servants’ shock at his actions is seen in their reporting the incident to the king. Here was a man who truly could not recognize the beam just removed from a his own eye by the mercy of the king. He has now gone forth to remove the speck in his fellow servant’s eye (Matthew 7:1-5). Instead of condemning, he should have been forgiving. After all, those who would be forgiven by God must be forgiving (Matthew 6:12,14,15). Paul told the Ephesian brethren, *“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you”* (Ephesians 4:32).

God’s Response To The Unforgiving Heart

When the King heard what had happened, he was angry. He expected his servant to imitate his forgiveness. Because he had not, the master restored his original debt and delivered him to the torturers until he had repaid the whole debt. Imagine the unending goal of repaying such a debt from within prison walls! It would be an eternal process filled with suffering.

Jesus stated, *“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each*

of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” After all, each of us has sinned in the sight of God. Our sins are worthy of eternal death (Romans 3:10,23; 6:23). Yet, God gave the indescribable gift of His own Son's death on Calvary to set us free (2 Corinthians 9:15; John 3:16-17)! *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Isaiah 53:6). Surely, out of simple gratitude for the release from such a great debt, we should forgive those who sin against us.

The Importance Of The Church

WILLIAM WOODSON

THE INTEREST AND INVOLVEMENT SHOWN by an individual in a particular activity are usually directly proportional to the sense of importance attached to that activity. The involvement and interest in school work, marriage, even family, will reflect this sense of importance or lack of importance. This is particularly true of the church. No worldly power compels attendance and involvement; there is no financial incentive. Interest and involvement in the church reflect the importance one attaches to it.

How is one to determine the importance of the church to his life and service? Please note the importance the church was/is assigned in Scripture.

1. **The church was important to God.** He purposed it from all eternity *“according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Ephesians 3:11). The purpose was steadily revealed with greater fullness in the prophets and in the ministry of Jesus. The church belongs to God as one who planned and purposed it. Its importance to Him is evident.
2. **The church was important to Jesus.** He died that the church might come into existence. The church was purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25,26). He serves as head of the church (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22). He is the mediator between God and man who makes reconciliation possible (1 Timothy 2:5; Ephesians 2:16). He will rule over the church until the end of all things in this world (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The church is of utmost importance to Jesus our Lord.
3. The church is important to God's people. They are reconciled

to God (Ephesians 2:16). They serve the living and true God and await His Son from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:9,10). In the church the abiding hope in Christ is present (1 Peter 1:3). In the church is found the opportunity and provision for maturing and developing in the image of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). In view of the importance the church holds in the thoughts and actions of God and Christ, and in view of its importance in our own lives, it is worthy of our continuing interest and involvement.

The Power of Christian Unity

REUBEN EMPERADO

THE IDEA OF UNITY IS not new. It is not a human idea. It is a topic closest to the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. If there is one prayer that Jesus prayed with earnestness it is the prayer for the unity of His followers. Unity is the language of the Bible. It is the cry of the New Testament writers and it was the message of the early Christians (Ephesians 1:9,10; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 1:27).

The world is full of tension, war and disunity. There is a constant battle between the powers of light and the powers of darkness. There is a disharmony and disunity and separation between God and man. Every man is a walking civil war, there is a constant fight between the flesh and the spirit; man is constantly torn between the desire to do right and the desire to satisfy his sinful urge. The world and humanity are broken, lost, divided and disunited without Christ. Only Christ can bring wholeness to the world again. In the beginning God created the universe as a cosmos, not a chaos. There were beauty, unity and harmony in it. But when sin entered into the world, the beauty and harmony in the universe were destroyed. After sin follows death, separation and corruption. The entire creation groans under the unbearable burden of sin. Christ came to restore wholeness, order, unity and harmony in the world. It is now the responsibility of His church to proclaim it, demonstrate it, promote it and perpetuate it.

The 17th chapter of John is one of the greatest chapters in the entire New Testament. This chapter contains the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ the night before he faced death on the cross.

In this chapter he prayed for several things: He prayed for his glorification (verse 1). He prayed for **the keeping of his eleven**

disciples (verses 11,12). He prayed for the **unity** of the eleven disciples (verse 11). He prayed for the **sanctification** of his disciples (verse 17). He prayed for the **joy** of the disciples (verse 13). Finally, he prayed for **the unity of the future disciples** (verses 20-23).

Our discussion will be focused on the last point, the unity of Christ's **future** disciples (V. 20-26).

In verse 20 Jesus began to pray for both the present and future believers. He said: *"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you"* (verses 20,21).

If you are a Christian, a believer in Christ, **your name** is included in John 17. You are included in the words **them** and **those** "who believe through the word of the apostles." Jesus was praying **for us**. He was praying for **our unity**.

Who is the **centre** for this unity? Jesus. The Lordship of our Lord Jesus Christ is the only means by which true unity can be achieved. Christ not only started it and prayed for it, he is the only means of realizing Christian unity. Any unity achieved without Christ is rebellion to His authority!

Our **faith** in Christ brought us together back to God and Christ. When we were baptized, we were added by Christ into his body the church (Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:13). Faith brings the heavenly unity that God desires on earth!

Unity in Christ involves **abiding** in the word of God. *"Any one who goes ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God; the one who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son"* (2 John 9). The phrase *"teaching of Christ,"* could mean teaching **about** Christ, or teaching **from** Christ. I believe both meanings are implied in that statement. For believing the **person** of Christ demands believing the **words** of Christ (Luke 6:46).

God's word unites but man's teaching divides. When men exalt and follow their own views and dogmas, they make barriers between believers. Only when we unite under the word of God and allow His word to guide us can we find the unity for which Jesus prayed.

There is tremendous power and strength in unity (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). *"Two are better than one, because they have good return for their work; If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered two can defend*

themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."

Please note the benefits Christians can derive when they are united. The wise king told us that two are better than one. Unity gives us better return to our labor.

The 17th chapter of Exodus shows a perfect example of the power of unity and cooperation among God's people. The Amalekites came to attack the Israelites. Moses told Joshua to choose men to fight against the enemies. The next day Moses stood up on top of the hill with the staff of God interceding for Joshua and his men, while Joshua was fighting their enemies. As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. Aaron and Hur supported the hands of Moses the rest of the day, and Joshua won the battle. Each person had different jobs to do, and each one did his part. All of them contributed to the great victory on that day (Exodus 17:8-12).

In Matthew 18:19 Jesus tells us that unity gives strength to our prayers. Our Lord said: *"Again, I say to you, that if two of you **agree** on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven."*

When God's people are united in heart and mind, God promised to hear them and grant their request. What a wonderful promise! What a tremendous power in unity!

Unity also promotes growth in the body of Christ. A united brotherhood is a fertile ground that will encourage spiritual and numerical progress. This truth is demonstrated in the book of Acts. We are told in the second chapter that the early disciples had a daily fellowship in prayer and in Bible study. They were together and shared in their material things. Because of this they enjoyed favor from both God and men (Acts 2:42-47). And there was a daily addition of the saved to the body of Christ. Unity glorifies God and attracts people to Christ (John 17:21). Unity among us helps to validate the message of the gospel and confirms the claims of Christ. So you see—**unity** is evangelism.

The church is given the task of proclaiming the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). The gospel is God's power to bring every warring individual into unity. It is the only power that can bring a sinner back to God.

Let us make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).