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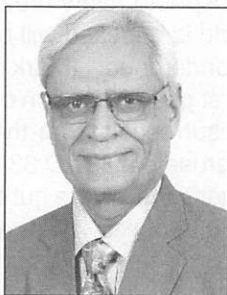
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Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach?

God Does Not Hear Sinners

WHEN THE MAN, in John 9:31, said "God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him." His observation was absolutely right. If one is not willing to do what God says, one should not expect God to hear his prayer. Proverbs 15:29 declares: "The Lord is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayers of the righteous." And Proverbs 28:9 says, "One who turns away his ears from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." God speaks to us today through the New Testament of His Son, just as He spoke to the people under the Old Testament law through Moses and the prophets. (Hebrews 1:1, 2). He expects that we should hear Him and heed Him. We speak to Him by prayer. Prayer is a privilege given to God's children (1 John 5:14-15). However, if God's word be not regarded by us, our prayers shall not only be accepted of God, but they shall be an abomination to Him.



Amongst many errors preached in the name of the Bible, one that is preached most by denominational preachers is, telling people to pray the sinners' prayer, and God will save you. In many cases the preacher tells his listeners to "repeat after me" this or something similar, "Lord, I am a sinner, and I repent of my sins, please come into my heart and save me." Then the preacher says, "if you prayed this prayer you are now saved and a Christian." Friends, there is nothing in the New Testament of the Bible that even resembles the

foregoing as the way to be saved and to become a Christian. In fact, those who are made to believe that they are saved and became Christian in this way are deceived, and continue to live with that deception until they obey the command of Jesus to be saved (Hebrews 5:8,9). The Bible does not teach one is saved by prayer. Prayer is a privilege given to God's children (1 John 5:14-15). One must first, therefore, become a child of God by obeying His commandments to receive the assurance that his prayers will be heard. To be saved from sin and to become a Christian, a child of God and a follower of Christ, the Bible teaches one must believe in Christ, repent of sins, confess Christ to be the Son of God and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, as the following examples from the Bible show.

First, the Savior, Jesus Christ, when He was going back to heaven, told His followers to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." And then he added, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:15-16). When His followers preached the first gospel sermon of His death for the sinners, and His burial and resurrection from the dead, (1Corinthians 15:1-4), in the city of Jerusalem, in AD 33; the Scriptures says, people after hearing the message, "were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.... Then those who gladly received His word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." (Acts 2:37, 38, 41). Notice, Peter didn't say to them to repeat after me the sinners' prayer to be saved. But he said to them, repent, that is turn away from all your former beliefs and be baptized for the remission or forgiveness of sins. And when they gladly did it, that is, after they were baptized, immersed in water by the authority of Christ (Matthew 28:19), they were added by the Lord to them, to the number of the followers of Christ, that is the church of Christ. (Acts 2:47; Matthew 16:18).

Thereafter, we read of Philip, another preacher of the gospel, who came to the city of Samaria, a few miles away from Jerusalem, there he preached Christ to them, and the Bible says, when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. (Acts 8: 5, 12). Of course, in preaching Christ to them, he

told them what Christ has commanded one must do to be saved, so after hearing the gospel message they believed and were baptized, both men and women. Not little children. Because baptism is a command of Christ for those who believe in Him—older people, who understand that they have sinned and need salvation from sin. Little children are safe (Matthew 19:14). Then in the same chapter 8 of the book of Acts we read of Philip meeting with eunuch on the road going from Jerusalem to Gaza, and Philip preached Jesus to Him. Beginning with verse number 36 it says, “Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him.” (Acts 8:36-38). Again, no sinners’ prayer is mentioned here!

In fact, nowhere in the Bible do we read anyone was ever told to pray to be saved. But in every case people were saved when they believed in Christ and were baptized after they had repented from their sins. Even Saul, who later became apostle Paul, a great Christian, had to do the same (Acts 9: 17-18; 22:16). Also the jailer and his household at Philippi did the same. (Acts 16:30-33). The inference is, one must first become a child of God by believing in Christ and by being baptized into Christ to put on Christ (Galatians 3:26-27) to be assured that God will hear his prayer, because God does not hear sinners.

WE FOLLOW CHRIST

J.C. CHOATE

TODAY'S RELIGIOUS WORLD is more confused than ever. There are not only all kinds of religions, churches, and cults, but added to this is fanaticism, liberalism, and materialism. To many who consider only the surface, it seems impossible to sift through the doctrines and to determine which is true and which is false. No wonder so many give up and become unbelievers.

Most overlook the fact that we can bypass all of this confusion by going directly to the Bible to learn the real and genuine truth of



God. Why listen to man, and blindly read his writings, when we can hear the Lord Himself speak through his word?

In the Scriptures God has revealed His will for one and all. It is a pattern, a set of blue prints, instructing us in all things pertaining to life and godliness. The Bible is so simple and to the point that any person can understand and follow its teachings, if he is only seeking to do God's will.

Those who go to that inspired Book will learn the beautiful truths of creation and how God has dealt with man through history. The story continues with the virgin birth of Christ who lived among men, died on the cross for the sins of the world, and arose from the grave as a resurrected Lord. The careful reader will learn of the gospel of Christ, the good news of salvation, the church that Jesus built, the kind of worship the Lord wants, the life the Christian must live, and the reward of eternal life in heaven for those who are faithful.

Why wade through all the filth, rubbish, false teachings, philosophies, and propaganda of yesterday and today when it is possible to bypass that in favor of God's word, the truth, and the one and only way that leads to heaven?

But don't all religions claim to be 'truth'? Perhaps they would make that claim, but their teachings are not supported by God's word. There is only ONE book of God, ONE truth, ONE Lord, ONE faith, ONE church, ONE gospel, ONE name, ONE worship, and ONE way. These did not originate with me, or you, or any man. It is the one and only divine way, given by God for all to follow. Whether we travel *that* way will depend on *who* we decide to follow.

As Christians we accept Christ without reservation as the Son of God, the resurrected Lord, as our Lord and Master, our Saviour who reigns in heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords, having all power and authority in heaven and earth. Because we accept Him as such, we believe in Him, in His words and His promises. We believe that one day He will return to receive us unto Himself so that where He is we will be and will abide with Him forever.

Christians choose not to reverence any man or school, or to succumb to any movement, but to follow Christ only. We are pledged not to accept any book but the Bible, not to be a member of any church but the one which belongs to the Lord, not to wear any name but the name of Christ, not to bow in worship to anyone else or anything else but the Lord, and not to live any life but the faithful Christian life.

How can anyone improve on that choice? What would be better or more rewarding?

But is this idealism possible? Certainly it is. The Christian life, as taught in the New Testament, is simple and to the point. Why? Because the Lord wants us to be saved, not burdened down with misunderstanding and confusion, wondering what His will really is.

This is our plea to all people around the world. By accepting and following the Lord only, we will be united since the Lord Himself prayed, *"that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."* (John 17:21).

Matthew 19:9 and Divine Holiness

Frank Chesser

GOD IS INDEPENDENTLY, infinitely, and immutably holy. He sits upon the *"throne of his holiness"* (Psalm 47:8). He is of *"purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity"* (Habakkuk 1:13). Isaiah pictures the seraphim as flying about the throne of God crying, *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts"* (Isaiah 6:3). God is absolute holiness, untouched by even the shadow of sin.

Divine revelation and divine holiness are indubitably consistent. Any doctrine that is contradictory to the holiness of God is a false doctrine. Such is the case with regard to the limitation of God's law to marital relationships in which both partners are Christians. The earth's population is about seven billion. Of this number, a very small portion are Christians. Smaller still is the number of marriages in which both partners share in the faith of the Gospel.

Is it conceivable that our holy God would leave the teeming masses of humanity in pagan darkness, void of any law to govern and restrain their sexual relationships? Are we to conclude that by divine design, the non-covenant world is allowed to wallow in the pit of sexual indulgence with as many partners as they wish until they find themselves within the confines of the church? By His permissive will in the absence of law, would not God be encouraging animalistic sexual behavior among His own offspring?

This humanly devised doctrine is an offensive affront to the holiness of God. It is as incompatible with the nature of God and as easily discernible as such as is the Calvinistic view of predestination and election, or the impossibility of apostasy. It nullifies holiness and promotes sin.

This matter could not be more serious. This is not an ivory tower theological debate on some abstract principle. It is an eternal destiny-determining matter involving the souls of men and the unity of the church. The principle of God's holiness is overwhelming evidence for the fallacious nature of this doctrine and those in kinship therewith and for the universal application and obvious import of Matthew 19:9 and kindred passages.

OBEY Them Which Have The Rule Over You

Glenn Colley

THERE IS AN ONGOING debate these days about the authority of the group of men holding the office of elder (or bishop) in the church. Some believe that the elders have no authority, and that their leadership applies only in the sense of maintaining a good example, and no more. Others believe that elders have authority to make judgments relative to the spiritual well-being of the members in the flock they oversee, and that the members have an obligation to follow their leadership unless it conflicts with God's Word.

There are several interesting passages awaiting your consideration on this subject: 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

We would also do well to consider Hebrews 13:17 which reads, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you." Anyone can see from this verse that we are commanded to obey someone. If this passage teaches obedience to the elders of the church, then in honest hearts the confusion over the authority of elders will be forever settled.

The word "obey" here is from the Greek word "peitho." According to Thayer, it comes from a root word meaning "to bind." Specifically in this passage it means, "To listen to, obey, yield to, comply with."

But who are we to obey according to this passage? Who is it who has the "rule over you," and watches "for your souls"? We find two other references in this chapter to the ones who have the rule over us: (verse 7)—"*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*" (verse 24—"Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints")

In Acts 20:28, where Paul is instructing the **elders of the church** from Ephesus, we read, *“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.”* The elders can be correctly described as “overseers,” from a Greek word meaning “a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly.” That describes elders in the New Testament church.

While it is true that elders lead by example (1 Peter 5:3), it is also true that elders lead as overseers, and we, as members of the flock which they are among, must obey them. The exception to this teaching would of course be the case of elders requiring that which contradicts the Word of God. (Acts 5:29)—*“We ought to obey God rather than men.”*

Hebrews 13:17 clearly has reference to the overseers of the flock, the elders of the church.

We should thank God for godly elders. May we be humble Christians who *“remember them which have the rule”* over us (Hebrews 13:7). May we obey them, and submit ourselves (verse 17). Their responsibility is to *“watch for”* our souls (verse 17). One day, after the trumpet sounds its unmistakable blast, those elders will give account for the way they have overseen and cared for the flock which Christ, the Chief Shepherd, left in their care (1 Peter 5:4). May we hold up their hands so they may do their work *“with joy, and not with grief.”*

WHEN YOU PRAY

Bill McFarland

A DISCIPLE SAID, *“Lord, teach us to pray”* (Luke 11:1). This man knew he needed to pray, and he wanted to do so. Yet, he felt that his attempts were inadequate and that he needed to learn to do better.

Many of us can identify with that disciple. We have struggled with the pressing distractions and the dull routines which discourage genuine prayer. What can we do?

1. Be specific. Don't just drift through a list of generalities. Jesus taught the man who questioned Him to pray with purpose and to call things by name (see Luke 11:2-4).

2. Be yourself. Real prayer is simple and it deals with daily

concerns. One does not need to use a different voice, nor words and phrases which he would not ordinarily use.

3. Be unselfish. A person is asking amiss if his focus is his own pleasure (James 4:3). Balance your petitions with praise, thanksgiving, and intercession. In this way, prayer will bring you closer to the Father's will.

4. Be fervent Sincerely pour your heart out to God. Deal with things which are urgently important to you. Ask, seek, and knock (Luke 11:9,10).

5. Be confident. Ask in faith, nothing doubting (James 1:6). Rest assured that your heavenly Father will answer your prayer in the way that is best. He hears, cares, and acts in our best interest (1 John 5:14,15).

Our Lord was a man of prayer, and we must be people of prayer. Perhaps these principles can help us "... always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

OUR NEED FOR JESUS

John Thiesen

ONE OF THE HARDEST TASKS, and at the same time the most important in the world, is to get across to people their great need for Jesus. If they understood their need for Him and what He offers them, more would be coming to Him.

We Need Forgiveness

All of us, without exception, need Christ. For instance, we all need the forgiveness of sins which He brings. No one has passed through this world without sinning. Everyone at some time in his life has either lied, cursed, envied, coveted, cheated, stolen, hated, gotten drunk, been irreverent, or done something immoral. "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23).

God has taught us in His Word that doing these things will separate us from Him and cause us to be lost. "*For the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). Since we all have sinned, if we don't get forgiveness from the Lord, we will be lost in the judgment day. But this is exactly where Jesus enters the picture. He is God's way of removing our sins. Christ suffered a terrible substitute punishment for our sins on the cross.

Christ's Salvation Available Now—Not Later

However, this mercy of God is only available to us now while we are still alive. It is not offered after death. Many are thinking to take their chances on Judgment Day, hoping that somehow the good about them will outweigh their sins in God's eyes when they stand before the throne of judgment. They are in for a shock. God's mercy will not be extended on Judgment Day, but right now, while we are on the earth drawing our breath in the flesh. The mercy is found by all who in this present life turn to Christ. Then, in the judgment, those sins will not be there to condemn us, because they were taken away in life.

It is to the living, not the dead, that Jesus sent the message that *"repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem"* (Luke 24:47), and *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"* (Mark 16:15,16).

If we could only get across to people this vital message that their only chance of salvation is now, not later, and that Jesus Christ is the only way, then maybe their urgent need to turn to Him would be impressed on their minds and we would be seeing many more coming to the Lord.

Did The Witch of En-dor Make Samuel Appear?

Max Patterson

IN 1 SAMUEL 28 THERE is a story concerning King Saul and the witch of En-dor. Saul is in the depths of despair. He seeks help from a source which he formerly would have regarded with great contempt—the witch of En-dor. He had no doubt put to death others who practiced witchcraft and similar deceptive matters. But now, in despair, he remembers Samuel, whose wisdom he had disregarded in life, but whom he hopes to reach for advice through the witch.

The woman (the witch) does her usual incantations (ones common in such seances). What happens next is a real surprise. Samuel appears. The appearance of Samuel is real. But this was not accomplished by the witch's treachery. Actually she was wholly unprepared for what occurred. She had not expected Samuel to

actually appear, and she was surprised. It seems Saul had more faith in the witch than the witch did.

The appearance of Samuel was neither by the power of the woman nor by the agency of the devil. It was not an illusion. The design of what happened is to rebuke both the witch and Saul. What happened is clearly a miracle. The proof of the genuineness of the miracle is to be seen in Samuel's message delivered to Saul: Verse 19, "... *God will deliver Israel also with you (Saul) into the hand of the Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me....*"

Samuel predicted that the Philistines would triumph in battle over Israel, and that Saul and his sons would die on the morrow following this exchange. These details could not have been known by the woman, Satan, or any of his agents. So, they must have been delivered by inspiration.

Therefore, Samuel did appear before King Saul, not by witchery, but by divine interposition. The purpose of what happened was to rebuke both the woman and Saul. So, this story lends no credence to sorcery. What happened was not a trick, nor was it the witch actually calling up Samuel by her supposed powers.

What Is The New Testament Church?

Arthur Pigman

The New Testament church is the church that Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18 to build: "*And I say 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.*"

Many have the mistaken idea that the church is a structure made of brick, block, mortar, steel, and wood. In Acts 20:28 we read that Jesus purchased the church with His own blood. But neither here nor any other place in the New Testament is the word "church" used to describe a building.

The Greek word "ekklesia" is the term translated "church" in the New Testament. That word meant "assembly," and the type of assembly was determined by how it was used. The addition of such words as "of God," or "of the Lord," or "of Christ" tells us more about the type of assembly. In Acts 20:28 it has the phrase "which he purchased." This makes it clear that the assembly belongs to Christ, because He bought it with His own blood.

The New Testament tells us all about the church. It reveals the plan of salvation, the organization of the church, the worship of the church, and the work of the church. Let us all strive to learn what the "Book" teaches, and then follow it. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God..."

A SMILE

Demar Elam

OH, HOW GREAT IS THE value of a smile on the face of a Christian! If we could only grasp the value of a smile, we would smile a lot more often.

I looked into the face of a teenager this past week, and my heart ached. That face had no smile. Rather, rebellion and resentment and hate seemed to be etched in that young face. A smile on a face says volumes about what is in the heart. It has been said about a smile: "A smile costs nothing but gives much. It enriches those who receive without making poorer those who give. It takes but a moment, but the memory of it sometimes lasts forever. None is so rich or mighty that he can get along without it, and none is so poor but that he can be made rich by it. A smile creates happiness in the home, fosters good will in business, and is the countersign of the discouraged, sunshine to the sad, and it is nature's best antidote for trouble. Yet it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is of no value to anyone until it is given away. Some people are too tired to give you a smile. Give them one of yours, as none needs a smile as much as he who has not more to give."

The wise man wrote, "*A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken*" (Proverbs 15:13). Don't we realize the truthfulness of this from our everyday experience of life? A cheerful countenance, manifested by a warm, friendly smile, is indicative of a happy heart.

Solomon also said, "*...he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast*" (Proverbs 15:15). Joy and happiness are being searched and longed for by the human race, but in most cases they are never attained. People continue looking for them in the wrong places.

In Christ we are instructed to "*Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, rejoice*" (Philippians 4:4). Rejoicing is what God intended for those who accept His Son and live a life on a higher plain. Traveling

the upper road will produce the peace of God in the heart of man; *"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:7). The peace of God in our hearts will produce smiles on our faces!

Paul said to the Philippians in Philippians 4:8, *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."* Surely, when our minds dwell on these things, we cannot help but wear a smile on our face.

Finding "Heart-Felt" Religion

Ancil Jenkins

"Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 18:31).

Dr. Christian Barnard revolutionized surgery by performing the first successful heart transplant and continued to pioneer this field for many years. On one occasion, one of his heart transplant patients asked to see the removed organ. Dr. Barnard brought him a large bottle that contained the old heart. As the man looked at the scarred organ that had once pumped life through his body, the doctor realized that this was the first time in human experience that a person had ever seen his own heart. This historic occasion became even more significant by the comment of the transplant recipient. Realizing that this old heart was worn out and that without the transplant he would be dead, the patient said, "I'm glad I don't have that old heart anymore."

The Bible speaks of man's heart as the center of his actions. (The Bible "heart", of course, is not man's blood pump, but his intellect, will, and emotions.) The outward expressions of man, his words and actions, come from within him, from his "heart." Jesus said, *"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'..."* (Matthew 15:19,20).

What a difference a new heart can make! Only this operation can adequately and completely change man and his life. Man's need is not a little rest or a little reformation. Man, without Christ,

needs a new heart. This alone can change him. This change is not optional. Unless we get a new heart, we die (Ezekiel 36:26)!

How about your life? Do you lack the ingredients that make it full, joyous, and free? Do you have an overload of guilt, fear, resentment, and regret? Do you feel right about all the wrong things and wrong about all the right things? The solution is simply—you need a heart transplant. Jesus can take your old, calloused heart and give you one that is brand new. Then purpose with your heart, obey from the heart, cleave to Him with your heart, and love from your heart (2 Corinthians 9:7; Romans 6:17; Acts 11:23; 1 Peter 1:23). With a new heart and heart-motivated actions, you will have a real heartfelt religion.

THE SEED AND THE SOIL NECESSARY TO SALVATION

W. Douglass Harris

NOTE THE WORD “necessary” in the caption of this article. It would be a waste of time, talent, and effort to discuss something not essential to salvation. Our title suggests two basic essentials to scriptural conversion—the right seed and the right soil. Without the God-ordained seed and the proper soil, there can be no salvation from sin.

The Seed Necessary To Salvation

“The seed of the kingdom is the word of God” (Matthew 13:19; Luke 8:11). God established His immutable law at creation that each seed produces after its kind (Genesis 1:11,24). Had the pure, unadulterated Word of God been sown from the beginning (that is, from Pentecost in Acts 2) until now, there would be only one church in existence now. This seed produced only one church in the first century, and it would have done the same thing in subsequent centuries if it were unmixed with doctrines and commandments of men.

Let us note some essentials of the seed to reproduce. (1) It must be alive, or the germ of life must be in it. Inspiration affirms that it is “living and active” as God gave it (Hebrews 4:12), and that it is God’s power unto salvation (Romans 1:16) and imperishable (1 Peter 1:23). (2) Seed must be planted. Peter and the other apostles were promised that they would do the first sowing (Matthew

16:19; 18:18). They were also promised another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, that would reveal to them the seed (John 14:26; 16:13). This was a promise of inspiration and infallibility. (3) There must a place to begin the development of the seed.

In fulfillment of the promise to His apostles, the Holy Spirit descended on them in baptismal measure on the first Pentecost day after Christ's ascension into heaven to guide them into all the truth (Acts 1:4-8; 2). Peter and the other apostles were the sowers, the place was in Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit miraculously supplied the seed. Luke said this is where it would begin (Luke 24:44-49), and Peter referred to it as "the beginning" (Acts 11:15). Any seed that originated with any source other than the infallible (in teaching and writing) apostles of Christ is false seed. We now have the seed in the completed and final revelation in the New Testament (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

The Soil Necessary To Salvation

In the same parable where the seed is identified, the proper soil is also described—"honest and good hearts" (Luke 8:15). All the soils in the parable of the sower represent different kinds of hearts, but only the good soil—honest and good hearts—produced properly. And the order of "*honest and good*" is significant, which is the order in the Greek text. No heart is a good heart until it is first an honest heart. Note particularly the three requirements to produce fruit to perfection—a sower, good seed (pure Gospel), and honest and good hearts. It was the same seed that was sown in all the soils by the same sower; the great difference was how all heard the Word (see Luke 8:18).

Note the process at work in Acts 2. Peter's sermon (verses 22-36) prepared the soil for the seed. The audience asked, "*What shall we do?*" This implied that they believed the word preached by Peter and were convicted of their sins. Peter then bound on them what had already been bound in heaven as conditions of pardon (Acts 2:38; Matthew 16:19; 18:18). Luke records the results: "*They that gladly received his word (the seed) were baptized*" (Acts 2:41). Note the indispensable elements of preaching the Gospel (sowing the seed) and the reception into "*honest and good*" hearts. This same process is evident in every case of conversion recorded in the book of Acts, the book of conversions.

What fruit was produced? They were simply saints (later called Christians) and members of the Lord's church (Acts 2:47). The same seed, unmixed with the doctrines and commandments of men,

planted today in the same kind of soil will produce now exactly what it did then. **If not, why not?**

What Jesus Said About The Way Of Salvation

Billy R. Smith

YOU CANNOT DROP THIS ISSUE, leaving it unresolved. It is the most crucial matter we face, the eternal destiny of the soul. What Jesus says on any subject is the first and final word. Not only did He speak "as one having authority" (Matthew 7:29), He was the authority as the Word in flesh (John 1:14) who came to declare nothing but the will of His Father" (5:30). Because He fulfilled that will perfectly (17:4), He forever is our authority in all things pertaining to life and eternity (Matthew 28:18).

I Am the Way

To say Jesus is the only way to God and to heaven is regarded, even ridiculed, by critics as being narrow-minded. This is nothing new. The same was true when He made the claim for Himself (Matthew 26:64), leading Him to the cross. Who are those accusing us of being narrow-minded when we speak not from ourselves but by the authority of Jesus? In whom do the broad-minded believe? By whose authority do they speak? Upon whom does their hope rest? We believe Jesus. Let us listen to Him and only Him for the way of salvation.

This is what He said: "No one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). "Enter through the narrow gate ... for the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Luke 13:24). "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep ... if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved" (John 10:7, 9).

The Lord never claimed to be *a way*, as one among many, the thesis of our pluralistic culture. No, He is *the One* and *only way*; not one person can enter the Father's house without Him. In this declaration Jesus revealed the love of God rather than His condemnation. That is, the whole world can enjoy the hope of eternal life through the same simple way: Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, the *Way*. Because He is the way, we should not be surprised

to find Luke in the book of Acts describing His church as “the Way” (9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

I Am the Truth

This, too, is a bold claim for which there is abundant proof. Because it is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18), Jesus as *the way* to God is also *the truth* of God: “My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me ... He who sent Me is true; and the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world ... you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free ... I speak truth ... Your word is truth ... for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth” (John 7:16; 8:26, 32, 46; 17:17; 18:37). Let us hear what the Lord of truth said about salvation.

Listen to Me. “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24). “He who has ears, let him hear ... blessed are your ... ears because they hear” (13:9, 16). “Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me” (John 6:45); “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!” (Matthew 17:5).

Believe Me. “He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life” (John 5:24); “Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (8:24); “He who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die” (11:25-26); “Believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light” (12:36); “Believe in God, believe also in Me” (14:1).

Turn to Me. “The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15); “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32); “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (13:3, 5); “That repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations” (24:47).

Confess Me. “Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33); “‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (16:15-16).

Be buried with Me. Not only did Jesus submit to water baptism as an example for us to follow (Matthew 3:15), and practiced baptism during His ministry (John 3:22, 26), He also commanded baptism

for the world: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19); "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Paul would later write that in this obedient burial we are united with the Lord in His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3-5), walking in newness of life.

Follow Me. "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23); "It is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved" (Matthew 10:22); "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15); "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

This is but a portion of the overwhelming testimony Jesus gave as the truth of God, testimony that was guaranteed not only by His sacrificial death on the cross, but by His triumphant resurrection from the grave and His exaltation to the right hand of God.

I Am the Life

If Jesus is *the way* to God and *the truth* of God, He is certainly the giver of *life* in God: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly ... and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:10, 28). What assurance for our sojourn on earth! This life, as blessed of the Father as it may be, is not the end but the beginning: "I go to prepare a place for you ... I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (14:2-3).

What difference does this promise make for the living of our days? Of all the provisions granted us through salvation in Christ, there is first "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension" (Philippians 4:7). It is one thing to know that peace with God exists; it is another thing to experience it every day. The blood of Jesus has removed the guilt of our sins so that we may enjoy fellowship with the Father and those of like precious faith (1 John 1:7). That life is filled with abundant blessings.

Second, in Christ we possess the *power* to live faithfully for God: "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). We have the beautiful opportunity of developing the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), growing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and maturing in the Christian graces (2 Peter 1:5-7). The Lord promises to help us fight temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), endure

the thorns of the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-10), and overcome the forces that seek to destroy us (Romans 8:35-39).

Third, in Christ we have *purpose* for living: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). No one can live with a higher, nobler purpose than this. We lose ourselves in the will of God, seeking to do His work while it is yet day. This means we have an intense interest in others – teaching them, serving them and sharing with them the beauty and simplicity of our radiant Lord. We live and die looking and longing for that city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10) with a sure and steadfast hope that anchors the soul (6:19).

What a Savior—the *way*, the *truth* and the *life*! He has not left us to grope in a world of darkness. Rather, He is the Light that leads us to the land of endless day. How we love Him for all that He has done, for all that He is doing, and for all that He promises yet to do. If I could scale the highest mountain and shout to the entire world, I would lovingly but firmly declare Jesus the Christ is the world's only Savior, the only truth, the only life, the only way from earth to heaven. Listen to Him, love Him, obey Him and follow Him for the salvation of your soul.

What JESUS Said About the Trinity

Mark Blackwelder

THE OTHER-WORLDLY NATURE OF spiritual realities, along with our finite capacity to understand, makes some biblical concepts difficult to fully comprehend. Such is the case with the doctrine of the Godhead. This is perhaps made even more difficult by the fact that New Testament writers did not set out to methodically present this doctrine to us. The building blocks are present, but the construction requires a bit of work on our part. In this article we will examine a subset of the biblical teachings on the subject, those that come from the mouth of the Lord Jesus Himself.

The term "trinity" is not in the Bible, much less in the words of Jesus. The term, which can be translated "Godhead," does appear three times in Scripture (Acts 17:29; Romans 1:20; Colossians 2:9), but it is not used precisely to signify the tri-unity of God. Further, Jesus did not use this expression either. How then can we speak of what Jesus said about the Trinity? The answer is that although the Lord did not use these specific terms nor present a systematic

argument for the Trinity, He did address the nature, identity and Work of the Godhead on a variety of occasions.

To affirm the biblical doctrine of the triune Godhead (the Trinity) is to affirm the following three realities: There is only one God. God exists in three distinct persons. Each of these persons partakes fully of the divine essence.

As we will see, Jesus affirmed these three realities, both in His actions and in His words. Taken together, these constitute a robust argument for the Trinitarian view of the Godhead.

The Oneness of God

In Mark 12, the gospel records the interaction between Jesus and one of the scribes. The scribe asked, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" (Mark 12:28 ESV). Jesus prefaced His response with a reference to the Shema: "Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). This statement is consistent with a strong monotheistic emphasis that pervades Jesus' expression of the nature of God.

In His farewell discourse recorded in John's gospel, Jesus affirmed, "this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God" (John 17:3). The disciples of Jesus continued this emphasis in their own teaching (1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 3:30). Interestingly James, the Lord's half brother, suggested that this fact is so well established that even the demons acknowledge it (James 2:19).

The Three Persons of the Godhead

Although the previously discussed assertion is seldom questioned, the second proposition has been hotly debated for centuries and remains a point of contention today. Yet Jesus spoke plainly about the three persons of the Godhead. Ironically, the Scriptures that record His strongest statements about the oneness of God often also contain explicit references to the distinct persons of the Godhead.

He affirmed the personhood of the members of the Godhead in His description of Them. At the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus asserted His own mission. As He did so, He also indicated the roles of the other members of the Godhead. In the synagogue He unrolled the scroll handed to Him and read the words of Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ... to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor." He then declared, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). The Father, the Spirit and the Son—three separate persons—come together to accomplish their singular mission.

We have already referenced the pronouncement of God's oneness in the high priestly prayer recorded in John 17. After praying that His followers will come to know the one true God, the Lord added, "and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). In so doing He immediately and plainly made Himself distinct from the Father in terms of personhood. The descriptions of the work of the Spirit Jesus promised to send to His disciples portray a person with a special role distinct from the other members of the Godhead (cf. John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7).

He affirmed the personhood of the members of the Godhead by His interaction with Them. From the beginning to the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus acknowledged the roles of three specific and clearly identifiable persons. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of the three persons of the Godhead is found in Matthew 3. At the baptism of Jesus by John, each person is simultaneously manifested in an obvious and distinct way: Jesus in the water, the Father in heaven as His voice announced His favor, and the Holy Spirit pictured in the form of a dove suspended between heaven and earth.

Likewise, the Great Commission includes a Trinitarian emphasis. Jesus sent His disciples out to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). It is difficult to conceive of a way to blur the lines of identity between these separate persons as they are named here.

Plainly (though perhaps somewhat awkwardly stated), Jesus demonstrated that He is neither the Father nor the Spirit; the Father is neither the Son nor the Spirit; the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son. Jesus described and interacted with each member of the Godhead (including Himself) as a distinct person.

The Godhood of Each of the Three Persons

Not only did Jesus speak of three separate persons in the Godhead, He clearly spoke of all three as God.

The Father is God. Most of us probably think of the person of the Father when we hear the term "God." Indeed, "God the Father" is a commonly declared reality in Scripture (John 6:27; cf. Philippians 2:11). In fact, the Father is the person of the Godhead who is most active in the Old Testament (at least after creation, cf. Genesis 1:2, 26; cf. John 1:1-3). Further, Jesus naturally referred to the Father most often in His life and teachings because His own role as Son is so relationally tied to Him.

The Son is God. Jesus claimed to possess attributes of God and demonstrated His ability to back up those claims. He said, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58), and inspired writers confirmed that assertion (1:1-3). There are multiple claims by Jesus that God is His Father (e.g. 5:17-18).

This implicit claim by the incarnate Son that He is of the same essence as the Father is both a declaration of oneness with God and distinctiveness from the Father. He Himself pressed the point by claiming, "I and the Father are one" (10:30) and "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9). His bold pronouncement in Revelation 22:13, though long after He was no longer physically present on earth, is a clear statement of His own deity: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

The Holy Spirit is God. The greatest challenge to the Trinity may well be found in the allegations by some that the Holy Spirit is not on the same tier as the Father and the Son. However, as Jesus assured His disciples that they would not be left alone when He went to the Father, He told them that He would send "another Helper" (John 14:16) who would be with them forever: the Spirit of God Himself (v. 26). It is difficult to conceive that anyone but God could sustain that tenure.

Later, as recorded in Matthew 28:19, Jesus stated that the authority by which baptism should be administered was connected with "the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," indicating that the Spirit is indeed classified on an equal level with the other two members of the Godhead. It is again inconceivable that a being of a different order than the Father and the Son would be included in that list of names.

Though it may be impossible for mortal man to fully comprehend the nature of the immortal God, the words of Jesus call us to recognize God in three distinct persons who share in one divine essence. The teaching of Christ is not intended to prove the trinity (it assumes it), but it does affirm the components of the Trinitarian view. Any historical or current teaching that opposes the biblical doctrine of the triune Godhead stands in opposition to at least one of the aforementioned propositions affirmed by Christ (and supported by other inspired writers, the statements of which this article does not include) and therefore cannot be sustained in view of Scripture.

IS YOUR GOD ON WELFARE?

W.T. Allison

GOD, WHO OWNS the cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10), does not need to be considered an object of charity. He does not want to be pitied. He does not need to be pampered or humored. He is well able to sustain His plans and maintain His purposes without earth-lings offering Him little deeds of benevolence.

What does God want and what does He deserve? It is the complete commitment of each of His children. He needs our fullest love, deepest affection, and most sincere dedication. He wants us to live for Him twenty-four hours a day for all the days of our lives. But as for occasional donations to flatter His pride, or some gift to appease His wrath, He can get along fine without them.

Yet, it is surprising how many people think that God needs charity, or that He seeks the "left-overs" and the "hand-me-downs," or that He should be satisfied with a token of our time, money, love, and energy—just the "souvenirs" of our lives.

Some feel that after they have made their contribution on Sunday, or visited some sick person, or taught a Bible class that they have "done their good deed for the week." They have given to a "needy one" and now the conscience may be at rest until the next divine emergency arises.

In the meantime, everything belongs to us. Time is ours to use as we might see fit. Money is ours to spend as we desire. The body belongs to us and we can use it as we please.

How different is the "GOD ON RELIEF" from the God of the heart! To the real Christian pure religion does not consist of almsgiving, but of complete, total, and full commitment to Him. The true believer seeks Him with the whole heart. The life he lives in Christ has slain selfishness and his life is "... *hid with Christ in God*" (Colossians 3:3). He loves the Lord with "... *all the heart, soul, mind, and strength*" (Mark 12:30). His whole life is spent in preparing himself and performing greater service to Christ.

What kind of God do you serve? Is your God on "welfare", or does He reign in your heart? Does He get a mere token obedience, or a full commitment? Is He an object of charity, or the Master of your life?

DEMAS, The Forsaker

Maxie B. Boren

THE APOSTLE PAUL, having appealed unto Caesar (Acts 25:11,12), was transported to Rome on a perilous and hazardous voyage (Acts 27:1-28:16). Once there, he was placed under what we might call "house arrest," being permitted to abide in his own "hired dwelling" during the two years he was there (Acts 28:30,31). During that time, which most scholars believe to have been about A.D. 61-62, Paul wrote four letters, which are known to us as the books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

In two of these letters, Paul made mention of a Christian man named Demas. One such occasion was in the epistle to the Colossians, chapter 4, in the context of verses 10-14. There Demas is listed, along with a few others, in favorable light. Again, in Paul's writing to Philemon, Demas is named along with Mark, Aristarchus, and Luke, as "*my fellow-workers*" (verse 24).

But some five or six years later (about A.D. 67 or 68), when Paul was taken back to Rome the second time, resulting in his martyrdom, things had changed as far as Demas was concerned. When the great apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17-18; Romans 11:13; 15:15,16; Ephesians 3:1,8; etc.) wrote to Timothy shortly before his demise, he urged him to come to him in Rome as quickly as he could, and then wrote, "*for Demas forsook me, having loved this present world, and went to Thessalonica...*" (2 Timothy 4: 9,10).

What did Paul mean in reference to Demas? Did he mean that Demas had become enamored with drinking, dancing, carousing, reveling, and such like, as some have assumed, the sort of thing the Scriptures warn against in such passages as 1 John 2:15-17 and Galatians 5:19-21? No, I do not believe that is what Paul meant by his expression concerning Demas. Rather, it was that Demas' attachment to the continuation of his existence on this earth was greater than his willingness to forfeit his life for Christ while remaining in company with Paul. Undoubtedly, Demas perceived that if he chose to stay with Paul, the Romans might well kill him along with the apostle. Wherefore, he forsook Paul, and fled to Thessalonica. He was not committed to Christ to the same extent the apostle was, as voiced in Paul's declaration, "*I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die ... for the name of the Lord Jesus*" (Acts 21:13). Demas had not imbibed in full-measure what Jesus later

said through John to the church in Smyrna: *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life"* (Revelation 2:10b). Notice that Jesus said "unto" death ... not "until" death. Certainly "unto" would include "until," but the idea is that a Christian should be willing to actually give his life in order to be faithful to the Lord. This measure of devotion was absent in Demas.

Demas failed "to endure to the end" (Matthew 24:13). Life on earth was more important to him than eternal life in heaven, the promise of which is only to those who "overcome" (read Revelation 2: 7, 11, 17, 26ff; 3:5; 12:21). Friends, in view of all this, let us resolve to be faithful come what may, and NEVER, NEVER, FORSAKE OUR LORD!

LIVING THE WAY I PRAY

I knelt to pray when day was done.
And prayed: "O God bless every one;
Lift from each saddened heart the pain,
And the sick be well again."
And carelessly went on my way.
The whole day long I did not try
To wipe the tear from any eye;
I did not try to share the load
Of any brother on the road;
I did not even go to see
The sick man just next door to me.
Yet again when day was done
I prayed, "O Lord, bless everyone;"
But as I prayed, into my ear
There came a voice that whispered clear,
"Pause, hypocrite, before you pray,
Who have you tried to bless today?
God's sweetest blessings always go
By hands that serve Him here below."
And then I hid my face and cried,
"Forgive me, God, for I have lied,
Let me but live another day
And I will live the way I pray. Amen."

— Anonymous